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Introduction

In last year's inaugural *Atrium* issue, one of the selection committee's biggest obstacles was coming up with a name for the collection. College Writing Instructor Gretchen Vanwormer suggested "Atrium," and explained her reasoning: "In Battelle, the atrium seems to be a space to share conversations and art. In general, I think of an atrium as an open, sunny room where things grow." Putting together this year's collection, I am struck by how appropriate the title is: just like the Battelle atrium, these essays provide opportunities for discussions about writing and ideas. And, like "an open, sunny room where things grow," this year's essays showcase our student's growth as writers and scholars.

I am pleased to introduce the second edition of *Atrium: Student Writing from American University's College Writing Program, 2015*. The collection continues to celebrate student writing and serve as a model for future students; it demonstrates the variety, depth, and strengths of our College Writing Program students. You'll see the pieces range from academic discussions to identity explorations to analysis, highlighting both the diversity and insight of our students.

This issue also features a cover by American University student Ben Profaci, winner of the *Atrium* Cover Design Contest. His cover exemplifies *Atrium's* student-centered spirit.

I would like to thank my co-editors Amanda Choutka, John Hyman, Kate Wilson, and Cindy Bair Van Dam. Their work reading, selecting, and editing the submissions make this anthology possible. It is a truly monumental job; their thoughtful discussions and their attention to detail are invaluable. In addition, I'd like to thank faculty for submitting essays; it is truly a pleasure to read them. I'd also like to thank our students for taking risks, engaging with assignments, and inspiring classmates.

Stina Kasik Oakes
Editor-in-Chief

Synthesizing Sources &

Annotated Bibliography

Hannah Engle

Note: This Annotated Bibliography presents sources for the following essay, "An Increasingly Liberal Youth?: Political Ideologies in Young Adult Dystopian Literature." Here Engle synthesizes the research to consider how sources relate to each other and proposes ways she might enter this particular "academic conversation." In the essay, she creates an argument based on her research that demonstrates the meaning or significance of a particular pop-culture phenomenon.

Source 1

Ames, M. (2013). Engaging "apolitical" adolescents: Analyzing the popularity and educational potential of dystopian literature post-9/11. *The High School Journal*, 97(1), 3-20. Retrieved from <http://soe.unc.edu/hsj/>

In her article "Engaging 'Apolitical' Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11," Melissa Ames argues that teenagers today are becoming increasingly political as evidenced by their fascination with young adult dystopian novels which reflect the fear-based climate of post-9/11 society. While many have argued that young adults are becoming less engaged in the political process, Ames believes that the rising popularity of young adult dystopian novels is a result of teenagers becoming more interested with the social issues underlying the political process. Ames begins her article by describing levels of political engagement of young adults both in the past and present, as well as providing historical examples of young adult novels and what themes they convey. Ames then gives a substantive analysis of the political and social issues examined in some of the prominent young adult novels of the post-9/11 era, such as *The Hunger Games* and *Little Brother*. Although the novels all provide critical commentary on different social and political problems, such as technological advancements and oppressive governments, Ames creates continuity among the novels by pointing out how they all illustrate prominent post-9/11 fears. Although Ames cites prominent political and historical researchers published in academic journals, such as Sander and Putnum, one of the most compelling parts of Ames's piece is her use of direct quotations from the young adult novels she analyzes. These direct quotations provide credibility to her argument because the reader is able to reference passages from the novels and make his or her own decision about the passage's message before reading Ames's opinion on the piece. This article could be extremely useful to both provide a framework of the argument that young adults gravitate to books that reflect the fear-based nature of the post-9/11 world and to get an idea of which books to analyze in my own research. Although this article provides exceptional analysis of political and social themes found in current young adult novels, it does not provide the same level of in-depth analysis of historical young adult novels. Ames only provides a list of historical young adult novels and recounts some of the history of these novels

without providing an analysis of their political and social themes. However, this limitation of the article could provide me with a way to insert myself into the conversation by giving my own analysis of the themes in historical young adult literature that reflect the political climate of the era.

Source 2

Clemente, B. (2012). Panem in America. In M. P. Pharr & L. A. Clark (Eds.), *Of bread blood and The Hunger Games* (pp. 20-29). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

In the introduction of the anthology *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games*, the editors of the anthology, Pharr and Clark argue that the novel *The Hunger Games* is an important piece of young adult literature that provides a platform for both adolescents and adults to think critically about issues facing American culture, such as political and economic changes, gender relations, and government surveillance. In the introduction to the anthology, Pharr and Clark make a compelling argument justifying why *The Hunger Games* should be inserted into the realm of conversation on literary criticism. In the first chapter of the anthology, "Panem in America," the author, Clemente, comments on the political parallels between the fictional society of Panem in the novels and contemporary American society. Clements argues that Panem reflects American society in many ways: there is disparity and inequality between the upper and lower classes, a conflict reflecting the struggle between democracy and Communism, and leaders that are bordering on exercising too much control over surveillance and media. Since there is not a wealth of prior research on the political climate of the fictional society of Panem, Clemente relies heavily upon "outside the box sources," such as political economist Matt Tabbi to make claims about Panem. Clements extends Tabbi's observations about American economy and applies them to the economic and political situation in Panem in order to reveal the parallels between contemporary America and Panem. Clemente's chapter is useful in outlining major parallels between American society and Panem. I could expand upon these parallels in my research paper and comment on what political ideology these parallels convey to children. The limits of Clements's chapter are that it only applies to *The Hunger Games* and would not apply to other young adult novels that I analyze. However, this limitation would provide me with an opportunity to enter the conversation and perform my own original analysis of the major political and economic themes found in other young adult dystopia novels.

Source 3

Condon, M., & Holleque, M. (2013). Entering politics: General self-efficacy and voting behavior among young people. *Political Psychology*, 34(2), 167-181. doi: 10.1111/pops.12019

In their article “Entering Politics: General Self-efficacy and Voting Behavior Among Young People,” Condon and Holleque respond to past research indicating that general self-efficacy, or one’s belief that they will be successful, influences voting behaviors. Condon and Holleque argue that the traditional political science indicators of voting behavior, internal and external efficacy, are ineffective; instead, general self-efficacy should be considered a major factor influencing voting habits. The authors extend this past research by conducting a study of voting habits of young adults, which determines that general self-efficacy increases the likelihood of a young adult voting by 12% and that the effect is largest among those from a low socioeconomic background. Condon and Holleque base their argument and research off of Lane, a prominent political scientist who developed the general self-efficacy theory as a predictor of voter turnout as an addition to the traditional predictors of internal and external efficacy. Condon and Holleque base their argument off of statistical analysis of American National Election Study and Pearlin Mastery Index data. The conclusion of this study is that young people with a higher belief that they are a success (a higher level of general self-efficacy) are more likely to vote in their first election. I can use this research in my research paper by claiming that characters in young adult fiction influence children’s levels of general self-efficacy, and thus, political behaviors. Since the heroines of these novels are characters with strong morals and political activity, they may influence higher levels of general self-efficacy in teenagers, in turn increasing political activity among teens. The limits of this article are that it only provides an explanation for one factor (socioeconomic status) that affects general self-efficacy. It would be useful if I knew how pop culture and the media influences general self-efficacy in teenagers.

Source 4

Farmer, B. P. (2006). *American Political Ideologies*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

In his book *American Political Ideologies*, Brian Farmer recognizes the absence of chapters devoted to political ideologies in political science textbooks and the importance of ideologies to the political process and decides to outline the main schools of thought for the dominant political ideologies in contemporary American society. In his chapter on traditional conservatism, Farmer argues that the main ideological beliefs that contemporary conservatives have are a negative view of human nature and those in power, a wish to return to a better time in history, and a skepticism of human nature resulting in a need for

government surveillance. In his chapter on contemporary liberalism, Farmer argues that the main beliefs that characterize a liberal ideology are viewing government as a solution to inequality produced by the free market, characterizing each person as equal to one another, and protection of the good of the entire community rather than the individual. To characterize each political ideology, Farmer relies heavily upon historical examples of ideology influencing politics such as the New Deal and the Cold War. In each chapter, Farmer uses both contemporary political scientists and historical political scientists such as Plato. This book is useful for my research paper because it provides me with a concrete definition of liberal and conservative that I can use to judge the ideologies conveyed by young adult novels. One limit of this book is that Farmer does not conduct research of his own to determine which specific age groups are more likely to belong to which ideology. It would be useful for me to know if young adults are more likely to be influenced by a certain ideology so that I could determine if young adult novels reflect this dominant ideology.

Source 5

Lempke, C. (2012). *Adding more "diss" to dystopia: The new manifestation of dystopia and dystopian (anti)heroes in postmodern graphic novels and adolescent literature*. Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations and Theses. (1531237)

In the introduction to her thesis, Celsete Lempke introduces the reoccurring theme of historical dystopian novels that the *topoi*, or world in which the story occurs, is the focus of the story and often is more important than characterization. Lempke notices a reversal in current dystopian novels where characterization often trumps world building and argues that critics should not condemn, but embrace this new trend. In the first chapter of her thesis, Lempke uses the novel *1984* by George Orwell to illustrate how the political and social structure of the world far outweighs characterization. Lempke references specific instances in the text where the description of the setting or governmental structure overpowers the characterization of both the protagonist, Winston, and of secondary characters, and of instances where the setting ultimately leads to the demise of these characters. In chapter three of her thesis, Lempke uses the novels *Pygmy*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Watchmen* to analyze the shift from a focus on *topoi* to a focus on character development, especially by making characters antiheroes. Lempke also comments on the interesting phenomenon where instead of the conventional conclusion—a grim ending of past dystopian novels where characters are conquered by the overwhelming might of their society—protagonists of these current dystopian novels overpower and fight back against the oppressive government depicted in the society. Along with referencing three dystopian novels, Lempke also references prominent scholar Foucault and extends his principle of creating a “heterotopic” or individual identity from the government to young adult dystopia novels. I could use this source in my paper

to provide context to the changing trends in young adult dystopian literature and also as a means of assessing the characters in the three novels I analyze for their antihero tendencies and whether they are relatable to young teenagers. One limit of this source is that while it examines three current dystopian novels, it only examines one historical novel, which makes me question whether the focus on *topoi* was actually so prevalent in past dystopian literature or only in a select few novels such as *1984*.

Source 6

Wolk, S. (2009). Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(8), 664-673. doi: 0.1598/JAAL.52.8.2

In this article, Steven Wolk argues that literature is an essential and underappreciated tool that aids in fostering ideas of social responsibility in young adults. Wolk found that young adults are becoming increasingly disillusioned with politics and learning in general and believes that teaching young adult novels in the classroom will aid in increasing interest in the political and learning processes. After introducing the importance of young adult novels in creating a stimulating and engaging learning environment, Wolk presents some of the ways young adult literature can promote ideas of social responsibility in young adults. These novels convey important themes of social responsibility such as ideas about the government, environment, social justice, war, and multiculturalism. Teaching these thought provoking novels in the classroom will allow adolescents to think more critically and generate possible solutions to important issues facing contemporary American society. In addition to referencing ethnographic studies on young adults and reading habits conducted by researchers such as Smith and Wilhelm, Wolk also provides references to young adult novels that exemplify certain aspects of social responsibility such as multiculturalism or environmentalism. I can use this article in my research paper to extend Condon and Holleque's ideas on the effects of general self-efficacy on young adults to young adults novels. Specifically, I would argue that young adult dystopian novels instill ideas of social responsibility in teens, in turn increasing general self-efficacy and teen political activity. A limit of this source would be that it does not conduct empirical research to determine the effectiveness teaching social responsibility through young adult novels in the classroom. Wolk does not prove quantitatively that there is an association between teaching young adult novels in the classroom and increased social responsibility behaviors such as interest in politics or global affairs.

Proposal and Synthesis

My research for my second annotated bibliography assignment focuses mainly on two possible themes conveyed to teenagers through young adult literature: political ideologies and political behavior. Along with focusing on the political implications of young adult dystopian literature, my research also focuses on specific texts within the genre and how they reflect and portray political ideologies and behaviors to teenagers. Specifically, my research focuses on defining political ideologies and their roles in young adult literature, determining to how young adult literature influences political behavior in children, and chronicling the changes from past to present young adult novels.

To start, one aspect of my research focuses on political ideologies and how they are reflected in young adult dystopia literature. Farmer's book *American Political Ideologies* sets the basis for the definitions of the "liberal" and "conservative" ideologies that are portrayed in young adult novels. The chapter "Panem in America," by Clemente in *Of Bread, Blood, and The Hunger Games*, amplifies Farmer's definition of political ideologies by applying them to the novel *The Hunger Games*. Clemente argues that *The Hunger Games* represents liberal ideologies because the protagonist leads a rebellion of the poor against the rich in order to achieve a more equal society. Clements and Farmer's thinking converge because Farmer argues that achieving equality is a major aspect of the liberal ideology, and Clemente recognizes this quality in the rebellion in *The Hunger Games* and argues that it reflects a liberal ideology. Another source that amplifies Farmer's definition of ideologies to young adult novels and converges with Farmer's definition is the article "Engaging Apolitical Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11" by Melissa Ames. Ames amplifies and converges with Farmer's definition of liberal ideologies by commenting that post-9/11 dystopian literature reflects the fears of those with a liberal ideology. For example, Ames provides examples of young adult dystopia literature that reflect society's fear of government surveillance, which Farmer argues is a core principle of contemporary liberalism. Along with focusing on the specific ideologies conveyed by young adult novels, my outside of the box research also focused on political behavior in youths and how young adult novels can amplify greater political behavior in youths.

Furthermore, my research focused on how young adult dystopia novels can cause adolescents to be more politically active. In her article, Ames argues that young adult dystopia novels reflect teenager's growing interest in both the political process and in major social issues. Social issues such as environmental degradation are prevalent in popular young adult novels, indicating that teenagers are becoming more interested in these topics and the politics surrounding them. Condon and Holleque argue in their article "Entering Politics: General Self-efficacy and Voting Behavior Among Young People" that it is not ideology but an adolescent's psychological feelings of self-worth and success, also called general self-efficacy, that influence whether or not an adolescent will vote or

participate in the political process. The authors present their findings that as general self-efficacy increases, a teenager's likelihood of voting also increases by 12%. Moreover, in Wolk's article "Reading for a Better World: Teaching for Social Responsibility with Young Adult Literature," the author argues that teaching young adult novels in the classroom can foster political activism and social responsibility in young adults since these novels reflect important themes such as environmentalism, multiculturalism, and issues of war and surveillance. Finally, in Lempke's dissertation comparing characteristics of historical and present day dystopian novels, Lempke argues that the trend in current young adult dystopian literature towards heavier characterization instead of world building has led characters to be more developed and morally ambiguous. This "anti-hero" characterization is often more relatable to teenagers because teens often face dilemmas where the correct answer is not clear and they are sometimes forced to make poor decisions. Adolescent readers' ability to identify with these characters increases their general self-efficacy levels since they have someone to relate to who experiences the same problems they go through. Condon and Holleque would argue that this rise in general-self efficacy would, in turn, lead young adults to become more politically active.

The final aspect of my research focuses on the evolution of young adult dystopian novels from the past to the present. Ames and Lempke's articles both comment on the differences between historical and current young adult dystopian novels, but have different perspectives on the core differences. Ames argues that young adult novels have evolved from two different fear-based landscapes. These novels used to reflect the fears attributed to the Cold War through themes of stalemates and the destructive nature of nuclear weapons. Now, Ames argues the young adult dystopian novels reflect the new fears associated with 9/11, including increased surveillance and government infringement on personal privacy. While Ames focuses on important historical events causing the shift between past and present young adult novels, Lempke focuses on the literary devices used to illustrate the shift between literature during the two time periods. Lempke argues that in the past, young adult dystopian novels had a heightened focus on the setting and less of a focus on characterization of characters. Now there is a trend in these novels to focus on characterization to make the characters more relatable to the young audience's struggle to make decisions and adjust to the new challenges associated with high school.

Given the research I have conducted thus far, I think that I can enter the conversation on young adult dystopian novels by analyzing the political ideologies reflected in these novels and how they may increase teenagers' level of activity in the political process. There has been extensive research done on young adult novels and what moral and social messages they convey to teenagers, but I see an opportunity in the conversation to comment on whether these novels endorse political action and a liberal or conservative ideology to children. I will

go about determining whether young adult dystopia novels convey a specific political ideology to children by analyzing three popular novels: *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The 5th Wave*. I chose these three novels because they have distinctive political and social undertones reflected both in the fictional society and by the protagonist. I also chose them because they all come from different years (2008, 2011, and 2013 respectively) and will therefore allow me to assess whether the ideologies portrayed by these novels have changed over time. I will use Farmer's definition of conservative and liberal ideologies to assess whether these novels convey a specific ideology as being desirable over the other.

While my research on young adult dystopian novels has enhanced my knowledge of common underlying political and social themes associated with these novels, I still have many questions concerning the young adults who read them. To start, I still need to do further research on how young adults are affected by the print media. Farmer claims that the media is an agent of political socialization, but I still wonder how much influence the media has on young adult's socialization. Since young adults live in a more digitally connected world heavily influenced by the media, has the media become a larger agent of political socialization than it was for young adults in the past? Is the media now a larger agent of socialization than family members or peers? To answer these questions, I will have to research the effects of media on adolescent behavior and socialization. I will focus specifically on the effects of fictional print media on socialization and try to find quantitative rather than qualitative data. Moreover, I still have questions on what the political and voting behaviors of young adults are. While my research thus far has proven that young adults are becoming more increasingly involved in the political process, I do not have any of the concrete data from the government on voting behaviors of young adults. I will need to research the voting rates of young adults (aged 18-26, the target audience for young adult novels). I also still wonder if young adults are more likely to identify with a certain political ideology. If they do, it would be interesting to examine whether young adult dystopian novels reflect or contradict this dominant ideology. I will conduct more research on the political party young adults are more likely to identify with and then incorporate this research into my examination of the three young adult novels I have chosen to analyze.

In my research paper, I will first forward Farmer's research on political ideologies by borrowing Farmer's definition of liberal and conservative as my basis for judging whether a novel conveys liberal or conservative ideas. I will also extend Condon and Holleque's research on general self-efficacy of adolescents being influenced by socioeconomic status and claim that young adult dystopia novels also influence self-efficacy levels in young adults. I will argue that young adult dystopian novels portray strong protagonists who have high self-efficacy, which therefore influences young adults to follow in their footsteps and develop high self-efficacy. Since higher self-efficacy levels in adolescents makes them more likely to vote, I will argue that by influencing self-efficacy, young adult

novels influence adolescents to participate in the political process. Furthermore, I will forward Clemente's research on the political themes present in *The Hunger Games* by illustrating some of his ideas in the section of my paper focusing on the political ideology conveyed by *The Hunger Games*. I will also illustrate Wolk's research on the benefits of teaching social responsibility through young adult literature in the section of my paper devoted to how young adult literature causes teenagers to question the society they live in and how to make it a better place. Finally, in the literature review section of my paper where I provide historical context into the development of young adult novels over time, I will illustrate Lempke's observations that young adult dystopian novels have become increasingly concerned with characterization instead of setting.

Moving forward in this assignment, I will conduct further research to answer my questions posed earlier on the political behavior exhibited by young adults. I will also closely examine the three novels I have chosen to analyze in my research paper for instances where the author appears to directly support or denounce a certain political ideology. I will also look for instances in these novels where the protagonist encourages moral development in teenagers through behavior that is relatable to teens. These instances will show me whether young adult dystopian novels encourage higher levels of general self-efficacy in children, consequently increasing political behavior. In my research paper, I hope to answer the questions: "What political ideology do young adult dystopia novels endorse?" and "Have these ideologies changed over time?" In answering these questions, I hope to add to the conversation of young adult dystopian novels and expand past the current research, which equates these novels with moral development, by commenting on the relationship between these novels and political development.

An Increasingly Liberal Youth?: "
Political Ideologies in "
Young Adult Dystopian Literature "
Hannah Engle

Abstract

Past research on young adult dystopian literature has focused on the political themes conveyed by these novels but has not attached a specific ideology to the ideas presented in the novels. In this paper, I rectify this situation by using Brian Farmer's definition of "liberal" and "conservative" to analyze three contemporary young adult dystopian novels to determine whether they convey a liberal or conservative ideology to teenagers. I find that the novels all convey liberal principles and beliefs to teenagers when the protagonists rebel against the established conservative governments in order to advance their liberal ideology. I then borrow Condon and Holleque's principle of general self-efficacy to present possible future implications for my research: that these novels may cause young adults to become more involved in the political process and identify with the Democratic party.

Introduction

Twilight is out and *The Hunger Games* is in. Recently, there has been a shift in young adult literature from a focus on paranormal romance novels to dystopia novels. Although you are still likely to see numerous paranormal romances on the shelves of the young adult section of Barnes and Noble, dystopian novels that depict an apocalyptic version of the world we live in are becoming more and more common and popular among teenagers. The recent slate of theatrical adaptations of these young adult dystopian novels and their relative success is a testament to the rising popularity of these novels among teenagers. The theatrical adaptation of *The Hunger Games* made \$408 million at the box office and the novels sold 23.5 million copies in the US alone, spending over 160 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestsellers list (IMDB, 2014; Schutte, 2010).

The new genre of young adult dystopian novels provides an interesting opportunity for scholars to analyze core American values and beliefs. Most of these novels depict a failing government or characters with politically active

minds who rebel against their government in order to get justice for the people. While on the surface these novels may seem pure entertainment, scholars such as Melissa Ames have realized that they actually convey deeper meanings after further analysis. Ames (2013) argues that dystopian novels actually reflect the fear-based nature of the American people following the 9/11 tragedy (p. 4).

Other scholars have gone further to claim that young adult dystopian novels may actually endorse certain political ideologies in teenagers. For instance, Michelle Abate claims that children's literature (aimed at pre-teens) conveys overwhelmingly conservative ideologies to children. Although Abate (2011) makes compelling arguments for how children's literature conveys a conservative ideology, the novels Abate analyzes in her novel are overtly conservative with titles such as *Help Mom! There's Liberals Under My Bed!*, and most of the novels she analyzes do not enjoy as wide of an audience as young adult dystopia novels today (p. 16). I would like to expand on Abate's observation in this article by analyzing more "mainstream" and widely read young adult dystopian novels that are aimed at an older teenage audience who is more likely to be affected by the ideologies conveyed by these novels and take political action.

Young adults have often been considered the least politically active demographic group in America. A 2007 Pew Research Survey found that on a questionnaire of twelve highly publicized political events, those 18-29 years old only answered 5.5 questions correctly. Moreover, a recent survey of 3,000 college students found that "20% claimed they would sell their next vote for an iPod and half said that for one million dollars they would give up their right to vote forever" (Ames, 2013, p. 4). These results show that young adults are becoming disillusioned with the political process and do not view voting or other forms of political behavior as important. This disillusionment is a problem because voting and political engagement are the cornerstones of America's democratic process, and if citizens do not vote or are not knowledgeable on political events, America's democracy may crumble. Fortunately, the recent popularity of young adult dystopian novels that portray characters with high levels of political engagement and activity could prove a turning point in the apathetic nature of teenagers. These novels may convey certain traits and political ideologies that motivate previously apathetic teenagers to become more politically engaged citizens by raising awareness about political issues.

I will begin by examining the existing conversation on young adult dystopian novels and how scholarly analysis of them has changed over time. Then, I will provide a concrete definition for "liberal" and "conservative" adopted from Farmer's book *American Political Ideologies*, as I will be borrowing and using the terms heavily throughout the remainder of the article. Using the novels *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The 5th Wave*, I will argue that young adult dystopian novels convey a liberal political ideology to teenagers. Following this analysis, I will elaborate on the principles of general self-efficacy as defined by

Condon and Holleque and explain how young adult novels encourage teenagers to develop a higher general self-efficacy, possibly promoting higher levels of political activity (especially within the Democratic Party) in teenagers. Throughout the paper, I will argue that through the characters' rejection of conservative governments, these young adult dystopia novels convey liberal political ideologies to teenagers.

Existing Conversation

Young adult dystopian novels have been around for decades. From *A Wrinkle in Time* to *The Giver* to *The Hunger Games*, these novels have taken teenagers to catastrophic worlds that are eerily close to the world we live in today. Although in all dystopian novels, the underlying theme of an entirely possible apocalyptic world is evident, the ways in which scholars have analyzed these novels have changed greatly over time.

Three scholars who have done extensive research on young adult dystopian novels are Celeste Lempke, Melissia Ames, and Stephen Wolk. Each provides their own unique perspective on the effects young adult literature has on teenagers. Celeste Lempke, a graduate student at University of Nebraska, comments that the main focus of scholars when analyzing these novels in the past has been on the *topoi* or setting of the novel. As a result of the increased focus of authors on character development, Lempke (2012) concludes that scholars must change the ways they analyze young adult novels and take into account the shifting focus from setting to character development (p. 7). On the other hand, Melissa Ames, a Professor at Eastern Illinois University, argues that young adult dystopia novels reflect the fear-based nature of post-9/11 America using the setting and governmental structure of the novel as opposed to using characters. After 9/11, the government increased government surveillance through the Patriot Act, leaving many citizens with the concern that the government is intruding in their personal lives. Ames (2013) believes that young adult dystopian novels reflect these increased fears of government surveillance and totalitarianism in ways that are appealing to young adults. The popularity of these novels, in Ames's opinion, is a testament to how teenagers are becoming ever more involved and interested in politics (p. 4). Combining Lempke and Ames's approach, Steven Wolk, Professor at Northeastern Illinois University argues that young adult novels can teach teenagers important principles of social responsibility such as multiculturalism, self-identity, and skepticism of the government through both characters and setting. Wolk (2009) believes young adult novels are instrumental agents of education since they teach principles of social responsibility to teenagers and make them better-informed citizens (p. 665).

While extensive research has been done on the social and political messages conveyed to teenagers through young adult novels, little research has been done that attributes a specific political ideology to popular young adult

novels aimed at teenagers or argues that young adult novels can increase political behavior in teenagers. In this paper, I will expand past research on young adult dystopian novels in two ways. First, using Farmer's text as a model, I will establish concrete definitions of "liberal" and "conservative" in order to analyze three popular young adult dystopian novels for instances where a certain political ideology is reflected. Then, using Condon and Holleque's principles of general self-efficacy, I will present the future implications of my research that young adult novels may increase levels of political engagement in teenagers and cause them to identify more heavily with the Democratic party.

Theoretical Approach

Political Ideologies

In his book *American Political Ideologies*, Brian Farmer, a Professor of Social Sciences at Amarillo College, explains the political beliefs of each major political ideology present in contemporary American society. Farmer uses anecdotes from major intellectual leaders of each ideology as well as historical trends of the major groups associated with each ideology in order to structure his definition of each ideological group. For example, when determining the major beliefs of conservatives, Farmer looks at the history of the Republican Party and its stance on major issues. For the purposes of this research paper, I will focus on the two most prevalent political ideologies in American society: contemporary liberalism and conservatism. I will also focus on their social rather than fiscal dimensions since teenagers are more likely to be concerned with social issues. In a report issued by Reason Foundation, a public policy think tank, the authors demonstrate how Millennials are becoming increasingly concerned with social rather than fiscal issues. For example, in the report, fiscal issues such as taxes are not ranked in Millennial's top concerns while issues such as equal rights and civil liberties were ranked among Millennial's top concerns (Reason Foundation, 2014, p. 78). Therefore, I will focus on social rather than fiscal concerns in my analysis, as these issues are more salient among teenagers.

Contemporary liberalism as defined by Farmer has three major principles: a focus on government regulation of markets, increased personal liberties and decreased government surveillance, and a view that every person is intrinsically equal and should be treated as such (Farmer, 2006, p. 99-124).

Conservatism as defined by Farmer also has three main principles: the belief that the government should only be involved in the surveillance and security of the country, resistance to social change, and a skepticism towards alleviating inequality as this process only perpetuates laziness (Farmer, 2006, p. 38-63).

I will borrow Farmer's definitions of "liberal" and "conservative" as a lens through which to analyze three young adult dystopia novels for ideological messages.

Method and Materials

Using Farmer's definition of "liberal" and "conservative," I will analyze three contemporary young adult dystopia novels for instances where the characters or events in the novel seem to endorse a specific political ideology. I will specifically focus on the governmental or societal structure of the country within the novels and the protagonists' reactions to these societal structures. If the characters' reactions to the governmental or societal structure reflect Farmer's principles of liberalism, I will conclude that the novel advocates a liberal ideology while if they adhere to his principles of conservatism, I will determine that the novel advocates a conservative ideology. The novels I will be analyzing are *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and *The 5th Wave* by Rick Yancey. I chose to analyze these novels since they each are considered popular young adult dystopia novels (each spent weeks on the *New York Times* Bestsellers List) and because they are all from different times in the 21st Century (2008, 2010, and 2013, respectively), which controls for the fact that political events in one year could have made these novels more liberal or conservative. A brief summary of each novel ensues.

The Hunger Games follows a teenage girl, Katniss Everdeen, who competes in an event called the Hunger Games where two members from each of the twelve districts are chosen to fight to the death for glory and as a reminder to the districts to not rebel against the Capital. While competing in the Games, Katniss begins to view the Capital for what it really is: a totalitarian, militaristic regime that oppresses the masses for the gain of a few wealthy people.

Divergent follows Beatrice Prior, a teenage girl who lives in a society where every citizen is forced to choose a faction or group of people to live with when they turn sixteen. Tris is categorized as a Divergent, or a person who does not fit in one single faction but has an aptitude for all of the five factions. After joining a faction and trying to hide her divergence, Tris realizes that divergence is more dangerous than she ever knew, as those within the factions want to exterminate divergence in order to execute a plot to overthrow the government.

The 5th Wave depicts a post-apocalyptic world where aliens have taken out most of the human population in four waves of attacks. The novel follows Cassie Sullivan as she tries to find her missing younger brother before the 5th Wave comes upon them. Along the way, Cassie realizes that the military and those protecting the few remaining citizens may not be as trustworthy as they once seemed.

Analysis

The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games is one example of a contemporary young adult dystopian novel that advocates a liberal political ideology. By focusing on the

societal structure of the country Panem and Katniss's reactions to this societal structure, one is able to decipher underlying political messages in the novel *The Hunger Games*. Specifically, *The Hunger Games* has an underlying liberal ideology since it advocates increased personal liberties and decreased governmental surveillance and a view that every person is intrinsically equal and should be treated as such.

To start, *The Hunger Games* advocates increased personal liberties and decreased surveillance through Katniss's reaction to the phenomenon of the Hunger Games. From early on in the novel, Katniss views the Hunger Games as an agent for President Snow's totalitarian control over the districts. While watching the annual message that is played before the choosing ceremony, Katniss remarks, "taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another- this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy" (Collins, 2008, p. 18). The Capitol exerts complete control over the citizens, forcing them to take part in the Hunger Games as punishment for a past rebellion. The citizens of the districts have no civil liberties since they have no choice in participating in the games. Even the very young such as Katniss's 12-year-old sister are not exempt from the Games, as Katniss acknowledges before the choosing ceremony: "I protect Prim in every way I can, but I'm powerless against the reaping" (Collins, 2008, p. 15). By demonstrating how the citizens have no control over their participation in the Hunger Games and the ruthless motives behind the Games, Collins shows the dangers of decreased civil liberties. With decreased civil liberties comes oppression from the government and an authoritarian, totalitarian regime that has control over your every action.

Furthermore, the novel *The Hunger Games* also exhibits another of Farmer's traits of a liberal ideology: a view that everyone is intrinsically equal and should be treated as such. There is devastating income disparity between the districts and the Capitol. When describing her District, District 12, Katniss states, starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body (Collins, 2008, p. 28).

Contrast this depiction of District 12 with the depiction of the Capitol: [T]he cameras haven't lied about its grandeur. If anything, they have not quite captured the extravagance of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal (Collins, 2008, p. 59).

District 12 is depicted as a bleak place riddled with the bodies of starving children, while the Capitol is depicted as a colorful place where the citizens live in excess, never in want of anything. This contrast of images reveals the dangers of a society that does not treat all citizens equally. While residents of the Capitol do not need to participate in the Hunger Games and receive all of their needs from the districts, members of the districts must participate in the Games and create all of the goods that go to the Capitol while none of it comes back to them. Residents of the districts often even have to enter their names into the Hunger Games multiple times in order to receive more food and feed their starving families. Through this depiction of the results of treating different members of the population in different ways, Collins reinforces the liberal idea that the government should treat all citizens equally so that they do not live in poverty and starvation as they live under the conservative government of the Capitol.

Divergent

The novel *Divergent*, by Veronica Roth, is another example of a young adult dystopian novel that advocates a liberal ideology. Tris's reaction to the societal structure of Chicago in the novel aligns with liberal beliefs in increased personal liberties and decreased surveillance and the belief that every citizen is intrinsically equal.

To begin with, Tris's reaction to the societal structure of her country reveals the dangers of decreased personal liberties and increased government surveillance. Tris's city is organized into factions, each of which embodies a certain trait that is essential to the survival of their society. A government leader describes the structure of the city before the Choosing ceremony, which is when 16 year olds decide which faction they want to belong to:

[D]ecades ago our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world. Rather, they determined that it was the fault of human personality—of humankind's inclination toward evil, in whatever form that is. They divided into factions that sought to eradicate those qualities they believed responsible for the world's disarray (Roth, 2011, p. 42).

The attempt to eradicate “destructive” emotions from people's minds and fit them into one faction that endorses a specific emotion is an extreme deprivation of liberty on the government's part, which is a conservative belief since conservatives believe that liberty should be deprived in order to ensure the safety of the public. On her aptitude test, which determines what faction a person fits into, Tris is declared as Divergent, which means that she fits into more than one faction. However, the government forces her to pick one faction to fit into and hide her divergence from the rest of the world. The motto “faction before blood” is a guiding principle in Tris's society (Roth, 2011, p. 43). By forcing Tris to fit in with one faction, the government stifles Tris's

individuality and causes her many future problems when she feels like she does not fit into any faction. Through Tris's response to the faction system, Roth advocates a liberal ideology since she describes the problems associated with depriving civil liberties and forcing a person to fit into a preconceived societal structure.

Moreover, *Divergent* also supports a liberal ideology since the novel advocates the equal treatment of everyone by the government. In Tris's city, the factions create an inseparable divide and an insurmountable tension among factions. Each faction has a different identity and a different set of rules they live by. Factions often have resentments towards members of other factions. For example, even after Tris switches factions to Dauntless, she experiences exclusion and teasing from other factions. When she takes off her jacket, another initiate remarks, "Ooh. *Scandalous!* A Stiff's flashing some skin!" (Roth, 2011, p. 56). "Stiff" is slang for a member of Abnegation, Tris's previous faction which values selflessness and modesty. Even after switching factions, Tris is still treated with disrespect from members of her new faction, representing how past perceptions of people in opposing factions never die. As a result, people are never able to fully accept each other and tensions between factions ensue. The factions Erudite and Abnegation have a long lasting tension between them, which eventually leads to all out war. A report written in a Erudite newspaper states, "perhaps the answer is that we have entrusted our city to a group of proselytizing tyrants [Abnegation] who do not know how to lead us out of poverty and into prosperity" (Roth, 2011, p.243-244). This report sparks increased tensions between Erudite and Abnegation, eventually leading to war between the two factions. Through her depiction of the effects of treating different members of society in different ways, Roth advocates a principle of the liberal ideology that everyone (and in this case every faction) should be treated equally in order to ensure that insurmountable tensions between groups do not arise and affect the effectiveness of the government.

The 5th Wave

The novel *The 5th Wave* is yet another example of a modern young adult dystopia novel that advances a liberal agenda. Through analysis of the protagonists Cassis Sullivan, Ben Parish, and Sam Sullivan and their treatment by the military, one is able to discern the underlying liberal ideology of the novel.

To begin, in *The 5th Wave*, the protagonists who serve in the military are subject to dehumanizing violations of personal liberties. For example, upon entering the military, the commander tells Ben, "I will teach you to love death. I will empty you of grief and guilt and self-pity and fill you up with hate and cunning and the spirit of vengeance" (Yancey, 2013, p. 131). The next time we hear from Ben, he asserts, "Ben Parish is dead" and that "Zombie" (his nickname in the military) has replaced him (Yancey, 2013, p. 213). Through the dehumanization of Ben after he joins the military, Yancey conveys a cautionary message to teenagers about the negative effects too much government control

can have on a person's character. Yancey's depiction of the problems associated with joining the military illustrate a common belief in liberal ideology: that one should never be deprived of civil liberties because of the damaging effect to a person's humanity.

Yancey also comments on the dangers of increased government (or in this case military) surveillance. In the novel, the government has failed after an alien invasion, causing the military to take over the control of the people. However, toward the end of the novel, the military is revealed to be aliens with the conscripted human soldiers killing humans when they thought they were killing aliens. Cassie learns that she cannot trust the military and thus the government because they are actually aliens intent on exterminating the human population. Therefore, through Cassie's rebellion against the conservative government focused on surveillance, Yancey illustrates another core belief of the liberal ideology: that the government cannot be trusted with increased surveillance over citizens.

In *The 5th Wave*, Yancey also advocates a liberal ideology through his advocacy of the belief that every person should be treated equally. In the novel Cassie meets a boy named Evan who helps her find her younger brother, Sam. However, it is later revealed that Evan is actually an alien. Cassie comes to the realization that although aliens come from a different planet, they still should be treated the same way as humans because they live in a human body and did not know they were aliens until the invasion began. When Cassie realizes that Evan is an alien, she begins to understand that he has a sense of humanity and should be treated as one, stating, "and then there are real human tears in his real human eyes . . . I am humanity but who is Evan Walker? Human and Other. Both and Neither" (Yancey, 2013, p. 372). Through Cassie's acceptance that Evan is an alien but should not be treated differently from a human, Yancey plants the liberal idea that everyone is intrinsically equal and should be treated as such in teenagers' minds.

Future Implications for the Political Process

In Meghan Condon and Matthew Holleque's article "Entering Politics: General Self-Efficacy and Voting Behavior Among Young People," Condon, a Professor at Loyola University Chicago and Holleque, an independent researcher, argue that higher levels of general self-efficacy in teenagers influence them to engage in political behaviors such as voting. General self-efficacy is defined as one's "feelings of mastery and control of oneself and the environment, nurtured in childhood and reinforced (or inhibited) by society" (Condon and Holleque, 2013, p.168). In other words, general self-efficacy is the feeling that a person has control over his or her own life. Psychologists have found that when people have less experience in a situation, they rely on their general self-efficacy levels for support and motivation. Since teenagers do not have much experience with

politics and voting, they are more likely to rely on their own feelings of general self-efficacy when deciding whether or not to participate in politics. Condon and Holleque found that higher political engagement (measured in this case through voting) is correlated to higher levels of general self-efficacy. Therefore, when teenagers feel like they have more control over their lives and feel like they have higher levels of self-confidence, they are more likely to engage in political behavior.

To apply Condon and Holleque's theory to young adult novels, young adult dystopian literature has strong protagonists who start out with little control over their lives but progress through the novel to gain higher levels of control and, thus, higher levels of general self-efficacy. Protagonists of these novels encourage the development of higher levels of general self-efficacy in teenagers by providing models for development that teenagers can follow. When teenagers read about another teenager like themselves who can create positive change in the world, they see that teenagers can make a difference in the world. This perceived sense of belonging in turn might increase their general self-efficacy because they feel like they can have more control over their lives like the protagonists of these dystopian novels. Therefore, by modeling that teenagers can have higher levels of general self-efficacy, young adult dystopian novels encourage teenagers to have higher general self-efficacy, and in turn, engage more heavily in the political process.

This concept is significant because in my analysis of young adult dystopian novels, I found that these novels promote a liberal ideology in young teenagers. Since these novels promote higher levels of general self-efficacy and liberal ideologies, contemporary young adult dystopian novels may cause a greater identification of teenagers with the Democratic Party.

Conclusion

Through analysis of three contemporary young adult novels, I have revealed some of the hidden liberal ideological messages these novels convey to teenagers. These findings are significant for two reasons. First, the tendency of these novels to endorse a certain political ideology may cause teenagers to become more involved in the political process. In an era where the teenage electorate is becoming increasingly disenfranchised with the political process, it is important that their voice is heard so that their opinions are represented in the government. These novels might increase political behavior in young adults since they feature role models that make a difference in the political process and have high levels of general self-efficacy. These characters show teenagers that they too can make a difference in the political process, increasing teenagers' feelings of general self-efficacy and participation in the political process. Second, the liberal ideology presented by young adult dystopia novels may cause teenagers to identify more strongly with the Democratic Party, which endorses a liberal

ideology. A recent Pew Research Center study on voting patterns among Millennials in the 2012 election found that, “half of Millennials (50%) think of themselves as Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents while just 36% affiliate with or lean toward the GOP” continuing the widespread trend for teenagers to identify with the Democratic party (2011). The tendency for young adult dystopian novels that are becoming increasingly popular among Millennials to advocate liberal principles may hasten the process by which young adults identify with the Democratic Party.

Further research on the topic could be done analyzing the political ideologies conveyed by different young adult dystopian novels that have become popular among teenagers in recent years to determine if more of these novels convey a liberal ideology or if there are some that advocate a conservative ideology. After analyzing the past three years of young adult novels on the *New York Times* Bestsellers list for the month of November, some young adult dystopia novels I have found that could be analyzed for conveying a conservative ideology would be *The Young Elites*, *Steelheart*, *The Eye of Minds*, *Every Day*, *Never Fade*, *Legend*, *Endgame: The Calling*, and *Atlantia*. Further in-depth analysis would need to be done to determine if these novels are conservative in nature. Furthermore, since I only analyzed the social dimension of political ideologies, further research would have to be done on the fiscal dimension of political ideologies and whether or not these novels represent a fiscally liberal as well as socially liberal political ideology.

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The Importance and Challenges " of General Education: A Review of Literature "

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Introduction

Today, approximately 95 percent of four-year colleges and universities in the United States offer general education programs—"broad courses that students usually take in the initial phase of college, before focusing on a major" (Aloi, Gardner, & Lusher, 2003; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007, p. 13). These courses take up almost 30 percent of the undergraduate curriculum and have become an "important feature of the student academic experience in American colleges and universities" (Brint, Proctor, Murphy, Turk-Bicakci, & Hanneman, 2009, p. 605). Most general education programs today are designed to generate valuable student outcomes and play a significant role in the undergraduate curriculum.

General education programs, however, encounter several challenges that prevent desired student learning. At the same time, assessments of these courses have raised their importance and recognition. Currently, almost 90 percent of higher education institutions are in the process of assessing or modifying their general education programs (Hart Research Associates, 2009). Because general education programs play a significant role in students' education in American colleges and universities today, I contend that the importance and challenges of general education programs should be reexamined.

History and Evolution of General Education

General education requirements are rooted in the liberal arts tradition, whose history are traced to "Roman and Greek orators and philosophers over two thousand years ago" (Bourke, Bray, & Horton, 2009, p. 221). These classic European models focused on preparing students for professional careers mostly in law and medicine, and focused mainly on "classic literary works, philosophy, foreign languages, rhetoric, and logic" (Hachtmann, 2012, p. 16). According to Hachtmann (2012), these models emphasized on transmitting "knowledge of disciplinary facts and concepts" to students (p. 19).

The roles and goals of general education, however, evolved throughout the history of American higher education. A study conducted through the 1975-2000 period shows that general education curricula expanded and diversified incrementally to include more subject areas (Brint et al., 2009). In fact, general education programs in the US now offer courses in various fields, including performing arts, humanities, science, and mathematics. According to Brint et al. (2009), these changes were implemented to satisfy the needs of influential business and governmental actors that sought higher career outcomes from graduates. Driven by these demands, general education programs have evolved into the current model, which provides diverse and practical courses that prepare students to be “responsible citizens and professionals upon graduation” (Hatchmann, 2012, p. 19). Similarly, most general education programs today are designed to acquaint students with the skills that employers and other education stakeholders value, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, and social responsibility (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007; Miller & Sundre, 2008). In contrast to the classic European models, the current general education programs in the US offer a wide variety of courses that are designed to create valuable outcomes for both the students and future employers.

Challenges of General Education Assessments

Despite the importance and valuable outcomes of general education, however, these programs fall short of their desired outcomes. In order to bring about institutional strategies that improve student learning, it is essential to assess whether students are learning what they are supposed to learn in these courses (Aloi et al., 2003). In fact, most American universities and colleges are currently in the process of general education assessments (Hart Research Associates, 2009). Studies show that general education programs encounter three main challenges that prevent desired outcomes.

First, many students do not value these courses. A study by Miller and Sundre (2008) shows that while entering students show equal motivation toward all of their courses, by the second year of college, students become “much less motivated to learn and perform in their general education courses” as compared to other courses (p. 165). In another study, conducted by Harmes and Miller, students reported that general education courses “often did not promote higher-level engagement and did not provide sufficient depth of coverage of the subject matter” (Miller & Sundre, 2008, p. 152). As Glynn, Aultman, and Owens (2005) maintain that motivation plays a fundamental role in promoting successful learning in general education programs, it is difficult to produce desired student outcomes when students show low motivation towards these courses.

Second, the broad nature of general education programs makes it more difficult to establish clear goals. Yin and Volkweint (2010) holds that specifying “clear purposes, learning goals, and assessment audiences” is essential for creating good foundations for any assessment program (p. 84). According to Aloi et al. (2003), however, assessment of general education is “difficult to design and implement because general education curriculum is the responsibility of all faculty, yet no one individual or group is held accountable for program results” (p. 242). Because instructors that teach general education courses are from various academic departments, consensus on the desired outcomes and goals is seldom reached.

Lastly, Yin and Volkweint (2010) add that “the selection of appropriate methods and instruments” is another difficulty that general education assessments encounter (p. 86). Wehlburg (2010) agrees that the overall goals of general education—critical thinking, problem solving, and communication—are difficult to measure. As Marinara, Vajravelu, and Young (2004) note, general education programs are not usually “constructed as a ‘program’ in the same sense that majors are” (p. 1), which makes it difficult for higher education institutions to create effective measurement to assess general education programs.

Future of General Education

As these studies show, assessing general education is a difficult process. In order to grapple with these challenges, scholars have suggested ways to improve student learning in these courses. Several authors emphasize the following five steps in assessment: 1) specify the purposes, goals, and audiences, 2) design methods and measures, 3) carry out the data collection and analysis, 4) communicate the findings to the audience, and 5) obtain feedback, follow-up, redesign, and improvement (Yin & Volkweint, 2010). Numerous scholars support that articulating a clear goal is a crucial first step for developing successful assessments. For example, Wehlburg (2010) argues that effective assessment plans cannot be created without “an integrated concept of which general education’s goals students should reach” (p. 90). Furman (2013) agrees that it is essential to reexamine general education in meaningful ways that can be articulated and measured for building a strong assessment of general education. As these studies show, there is a broad consensus on the importance of establishing clear goals, and that it must be the top priority in general education assessments.

How to measure student learning is another key factor in general education assessments. Aloi et al. (2003) suggest using a variety of assessment techniques—including both direct and indirect assessments—to ensure validity in the data collected. While direct assessments usually take the form of exams to gain

“evidence about student learning and the learning environment,” indirect assessments measure “how students feel about learning and their learning environment” through surveys and interviews (Eder, 2004, p. 137). Wehlburg (2010) agrees that data-based assessments that focus on “how to enhance student learning,” would be effective and meaningful to improve student outcomes in general education (p. 91). In addition to articulating the goals of general education, it is crucial to reexamine the methods to measure student outcomes.

Conclusion

As general education programs take up a large portion of the undergraduate curriculum in the US, the courses have significant implications on students’ learning and future careers. General education programs do not only teach the specific contents but also acquaint students with valuable knowledge and skills that are vital throughout the collegiate experience and for future careers. General education programs encounter several challenges—low student motivation, unclear goals, difficult measurements. Many scholars emphasize the importance of articulating clear goals and using various assessment techniques to ensure validity in the collection of data.

It is interesting that even though studies indicate that students show different attitudes towards general education and non-general education courses, little research focused on the different pedagogical approaches that work effectively in those courses. Also, little research showed how student outcomes and motivation could be promoted in general education courses. Future research can and should focus on the effective pedagogical approaches that ensure desired learning outcomes in general education programs.

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Analyzing Texts &

“With you / in me”:
 Gary Snyder and the Wild Within
Jason Handy

While eating dinner in Nevada City with Dana Goodyear of *The New Yorker*, Gary Snyder takes a break from his goat-cheese cake appetizer and leaves the table for a moment. Goodyear has been listening to Snyder talk about knives, hunting, and the impending Sierra Nevada winter. While he’s gone from the table, a waiter approaches Goodyear. “He’s one of my absolute heroes,” she says. When he returns, his gold tooth glistening as he smiles, Goodyear tells Snyder what the waiter said to her. Snyder, whose 78 years of life have been filled with poetry, mountain climbing, essay writing, teaching, political activism, his family, his neighbors, and his friends, responds, “You shouldn’t have told me that” (Goodyear).

If Snyder is not a hero, he is certainly daring, adventurous, and wild. Some fifty years before Goodyear’s interview with Snyder, the poet was dangling from a cliff in the mountains of Japan. The only thing protecting him from falling to his death was a thin rope attached to his foot. A group of Japanese monks stood at the edge of the cliff, holding the other end of the rope. The monks were initiating Snyder — testing his will and dedication to Zen principles. Snyder came to Japan not to escape and live in solitude, but to discover the natural wildness inherent in humanity. Snyder believed the monks knew this secret — that they were among the few who understood the intimate connection between humanity and nature. “We’ll drop you if you don’t tell the truth,” the monks threatened. When Goodyear asks Snyder about this experience, he responds, “I have some very wonderful overalls from them” (Goodyear). In spite of this harrowing encounter, Snyder focuses not on the extreme danger he faced, or even on the personal lessons he learned from the experience, but on his distinctly human experience with these monks. The monks were kind enough to give him overalls — they were people helping people, following some “golden rule” of balance, harmony, and community — and that’s all that really matters to Snyder.

Indeed, Snyder is not of the tradition of other nature writers who create a sharp distinction between humanity and nature. It is common for nature writers to see humans as a sort of cancer that threatens the purity of the natural environment. For this reason, “discovering nature” is often conceived as escaping into the woods to live alone — to remove any hint of human presence and call such a barren world “pure.” In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau states, “I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating” (111). Snyder represents an entirely

different perception of the relationship between humans and nature. Rather than separating the two, Snyder sees humans as an inherent part of a larger ecological whole. Snyder describes himself as “a poet who has preferred not to distinguish in poetry between nature and humanity” (Goodyear). In Snyder’s view, we must embrace our wild humanness and see ourselves as no different from the plants, trees, and grass that surround us.

We see this emphasis on human connection in a photo printed in *Look* magazine in 1969. As described by Goodyear, the photo depicts Gary Snyder and his wife bathing in the Yuba River near their home in the Sierra Nevada. Snyder stands naked in the water, holding up his newborn son, Kai. His wife sits on the side of the river looking onward, her pregnant belly protruding over her jeans (Goodyear). There is a raw earthiness to the photo that roots Snyder in the wild, back-to-nature aesthetic one expects of a new-age nature writer. Yet the photo ultimately paints Snyder as a family man. Unlike Thoreau, to whom he is often compared, Snyder’s philosophy does not include the denial of human connection and sanctification of solitude so typical of the genre. As the photo emphasizes, Snyder asserts the importance of family and community within the framework of ecology. He embraces his inner wildness in all that he does.

Though Snyder has more recently expressed his ecological worldview through essays and speaking engagements, he is first and foremost a poet, and his poetry is infused with the ideas of deep ecology and harmony with nature. Tracing the literary history of Snyder is central to understanding his philosophical message and the way his perception of nature has been interpreted.

Less than a year before Snyder’s harrowing experience with the Japanese monks, he was performing with Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and other Beat poets at the Six Gallery reading, an event which would bring the literary and countercultural movement of the Beat generation to fruition. At the reading, Snyder recited “A Berry Feast,” a poem about the destruction of wild lands for the development of suburbs. “Dead city in dry summer,” the poem laments, “where berries grow.” From the beginning of the Beat movement, it is clear that Snyder represents a unique voice for nature and the environment. While other Beat poets were distinctly urban, Snyder acted as a voice for nature, weaving the Beat counterculture into his own ecological worldview (Goodyear). The Beat movement clearly influenced Snyder, giving him a raw and radical edge and cementing him as a prominent countercultural figure. Yet as Snyder became more immersed in Buddhist and Zen ideologies, he would soon depart from the Beats and forge a path still rooted in anti-establishment rhetoric, but with a new focus on humanity’s deep connection with nature.

Snyder’s academic interest in Eastern philosophy began long before his stint in Japan. Snyder devoted much of his early career to translating the poetry of Han Shan, a T’ang dynasty dharma bum (Campbell), and studying East Asian *sumi* painting under artist Chiura Obata (Goodyear). After immersing himself

more deeply in Eastern religions while in Japan, these philosophies became not just an academic interest, but inherently rooted in Snyder's character. As Ayako Takahashi describes in "The Shaping of Gary Snyder's Ecological Consciousness," Snyder's conceptualization of deep ecology was most influenced by Hua-yen Buddhism, which emphasizes the "infinitely crossing relationships and the interconnectedness of all things" (314). The influence of Buddhist and Zen philosophies came to define Snyder's poetry and, later, his political philosophy.

Interestingly, there exists among scholarly circles a debate as to the legitimacy of Snyder's interpretation of Eastern religions. Many criticize Snyder of *whiteshaminism*, a concept that, according to David Landis Barnhill, "refers to white writers (often very concerned with nature) who claim that their writings have the shamanistic function of healing" (117). Referencing the cultural borrowing from Indian and Native American poets, Barnhill continues, "The result is that Indian writers are supplanted as white scholars and poets set the standard for Indianness in scholarship and literature. [...] Native American poets, then, lose their ability to express their own Indianness as the literary audience turns to whites" (118-119). In this interpretation, Snyder appropriates elements of shamanistic cultures to fit a romanticized and falsified conception of nature that is tailored to the West. It is cultural theft, robbing Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Native American writers of their voice while misrepresenting their cultures in a way that perpetuates white supremacy.

Though Snyder's appropriation of shamanism is questionable, his beautiful articulation of deep ecology cannot be ignored, as it is central to Snyder's identity as a poet. Taking a brief look at Snyder's poetry from a literary perspective makes clear the extent to which the concept of deep ecology penetrates his work. In "Gary Snyder's Ecopiety" from the *Environmental History Review*, Hwa Yol Jung and Petee Jung analyze the philosophical and literary significance of Snyder's poetry. Particularly fascinating is the authors' analysis of Snyder's poem "Running Water Music II," from *Regarding Wave*. An excerpt of the poem reads:

Clear running stream
 Clear running stream
 Your water is light
 to my mouth
 And a light to my dry body
 and your flowing
 Music,
 in my ears. free,
 Flowing free!
 With you
 in me.

The intimate connection between the poem's narrator and the stream is apparent. As Jung and Jung describe, "Here the music of the stream's flow and the mood (*Stimmung*) of the poet interpenetrate: 'Without' and 'Within' are the two reversible or chiasmic sides of the same happening, they are two moments of one process or unity" (78). The narrator is speaking directly to the stream, treating it as an equal. In addition, Snyder states that the stream is literally flowing within the narrator. The stream and the narrator are essentially one and the same. This expression of the intimate and symbiotic relationship between humanity and the natural environment is common throughout Snyder's poetry.

It is clear that Snyder's poems have philosophical significance, yet we can also see an inherently political message — these poems aren't simply analyses of nature, but act as a call to action. Snyder does not necessarily make the political nature of his poetry obvious, at least in his early writing, but the political significance cannot be denied in light of the growing environmental crises of the time. Since the Six Gallery reading in 1955, America's habits of overconsumption and environmental degradation only grew. From the destructive testing of nuclear weapons in the 1950s and 60s, to the devastating effects of napalm and other environmentally harmful substances in the Vietnam War, to the impacts of air and water pollution, the crises of the environment were becoming hard to ignore. In light of this, it seems almost inevitable that Snyder's poetry would be read as critiques of the modern consumption machine. Patrick D. Murphy, a literary critic and expert on Snyder's written works, states, "Snyder's poetry and his prose cannot afford to be read only to appreciate their aesthetic qualities. The message is too important to be ignored" (169). Later in his career, Snyder makes clear mention of political activism in his poetry. In "I Went into the Maverick Bar" from his 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Turtle Island*, he writes, "I came back to myself, / To the real work, to / 'What is to be done.'" Given Snyder's poetic history and his established ecological rhetoric, we can assume this "real work" involves fighting for the protection of the environment.

Indeed, it wasn't long before Snyder was recognized not simply for his importance in the literary community, but also as a political visionary and leader of the environmental movement. The publishing of his essay "Four Changes" in *Turtle Island* propelled Snyder as a unique and important voice for environmentalism. In the essay, Snyder warns of overpopulation, pollution, and overconsumption, and asserts that "a 'growing economy' is no longer healthy." Snyder's solution to these societal ills centers on community and harmony with nature. He states, "...if we are to survive, we must transform the five-millennia-long urbanizing civilization tradition into a new ecologically-sensitive, harmony-oriented, wild-minded scientific/spiritual culture." Though such sentiments had certainly been expressed in the past (including in the Eastern religions studied by Snyder), Snyder was among the first major American voices to articulate this ecological perspective on the environment. Jack Shoemaker, a friend of Snyder's, states, "'Four Changes' really elevated him to be an environmental leader of the

counterculture. It wasn't a hippie-dippy, feather-wearing poem. It was a manifesto, and the national environmental movement had to take it seriously" (Goodyear).

After publishing "Four Changes," Snyder began lecturing at universities and conferences, acting as a major voice in environmental discourse in the 1970s and beyond. His unique philosophy, known as "bioregionalism," emphasizes the importance of local culture and community-based organizing. Peter Berg, an environmental activist from the Planet Drum Foundation, describes a bioregion as "a geographic area defined by natural characteristics, including watersheds, landforms, soils, geological qualities, native plants and animals, climate, and weather ... [which] includes human beings as a species in the interplay of these natural characteristics" (Ewert 439). Essentially, bioregionalism is a political articulation of the spiritual philosophy of nature which Snyder has expressed throughout his literary career. Bioregionalism takes Snyder's deep ecology and gives it a political context by suggesting that our politics ought to be influenced by these bioregional concerns — concerns which are as central to humans as they are to the "natural" world. In an interview with *Mother Earth Magazine*, Snyder states that strengthening ties to our local communities and environment "would enable us to tune our local societies more precisely to the natural resources that are already in place, and to form our human communities and associations more appropriately to the natural communities. It's a step toward actually asserting the unity of the tree and bird communities with the human."

Snyder embraces this philosophy of bioregionalism in his personal life. Though he lives isolated on a ranch in the Sierra Nevada, Snyder nonetheless maintains a close bond with his neighbors. In his profile on Gary Snyder in *The Guardian*, James Campbell describes Snyder's relationship with the residents of Nevada City, a small town some thirty miles away from Snyder's ranch. "Greeted on all sides as he makes his way along the main street, reminiscent of Wild West film sets, Snyder has time for everyone," Campbell states. Snyder describes his neighbors as "pretty self-sufficient, though we all cooperate and lend each other things" (Campbell). This intimate communal bond reflects Snyder's belief in the importance of remaining in touch with both our biological and human neighbors.

Through activism, Snyder expands the application of bioregionalism beyond his personal life to include a concern for his home state of California. In "Coming into the Watershed: Biological and Cultural Diversity in the California Habitat," Snyder questions existing political boundaries that divide the state. He suggests that natural boundaries in line with the existing environmental biomes would foster greater concern for the health of nature and encourage a more intimate relationship between humans and the natural world. He asks, "What is this 'California'?" It is, after all, a recent human invention with straight-line boundaries that were drawn with a ruler on a map and rushed off to an office in D.C. The political boundaries of the Western states were established in haste and ignorance. Landscapes have their own shapes and structures, centers and edges,

which must be respected” (77). What was once a philosophy expressed in the intimate setting of the Six Gallery reading in 1955, and later expressed through spiritual nature poetry, then applied to Snyder’s personal life with his family and community, has now expanded to a truly unique political framework from which Snyder seeks to shift common perceptions of the wild.

At a time when the environmental movement has framed climate change and environmental degradation as an “us versus them” issue, Snyder’s voice is especially relevant. Rather than targeting global institutions, multinational corporations, and governments, Snyder’s rhetoric focuses on people. Snyder does indeed see these institutions as the enemy, but he believes the solution lies within the people who compose these institutions — the average citizen, who must learn to see himself as innately wild and inherently tied to the natural environment. Until we fully understand our symbiotic relationship with nature and see ourselves as part of larger natural and human communities, we will continue to degrade and destroy the environment. Snyder’s poetic activism reminds us that the streams, the rivers, the wind, the waves — nature’s gentle pulse — are “Flowing Free! / With you, / in me.”

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The Mystery and Mystique of Pablo Neruda: "
An English-Speaker's Dilemma
Catherine Harlos

“Te amo como la planta que no florece y lleva dentro de sí, escondida, la luz de aquellas flores, y gracias a tu amor vive oscuro en mi cuerpo el apretado aroma que ascendió de la tierra” (Neruda). The earthy rhythm and luscious flow of these words is undeniable, even for one who does not understand Español. When you say the words aloud, no matter your comprehension, they roll off the tongue with a certain sensitivity and fluidity that is just not exuded from English words. The above stanza in English is “I love you as the plant that doesn’t bloom, but carries the light of those flowers, hidden, within itself, and thanks to your love, the tight aroma that arose from the earth lives dimly in my body” (Neruda, Trans. Eisner).

The emotion just does not compare. English is clunky, stemming from Germanic languages rather than ever-so-graceful Latin. In Spanish, there is a certain romantic quality to the phonetics that adds its own unique color to meaning. The words shimmer. They dance. And this central vibrance is lost in the English translations of Spanish language – whether it be books, songs, or poetry. Some Spanish poetry is so intricately lyrical that an accurate translation is near impossible. This is true for the work of the Chilean Pablo Neruda – “a poet, a public servant, a nationalist and a Communist”– and the author of the introductory phrase (Becker). His poetry is “very hard to translate,” thus his English work is only “a small portion of his total output.” Nevertheless, John Leonard crowned Neruda the “Whitman of the south”– perhaps a tad too Eurocentric of a complement, but a monumental honor nonetheless (Biography: Pablo Neruda). Neruda is a Chileno hero; he is a true champion in the Latin American literary sphere.

However, how much of Neruda’s work can English speakers truly appreciate? How much of its ethereal beauty is lost to the constraints and chains of language? To understand this, we must honor the opinions and thoughts of those who both speak Spanish language and have a rich understanding and appreciation of Hispanic culture.

Maria Gaxiola Borla, when asked what is lost in translations of Spanish to English, answered “everything.” Borla is a bilingual Mexican-American mother of two from Schaumburg, Illinois. She argues that Spanish is more than just a language; it encompasses unique meaning that completely disappears in translation. “I think the essence of any poem is lost with any translation,” she

said. “Same for songs.” Borla’s favorite poem, “Reir Llorando” by Juan de Dios Peza, just doesn’t touch her “at the same level” in English (Borla). Borla argues that this lack of emotional complexity makes any Spanish to English translation essentially void. Burton Raffel, the author of *The Art of Translating Poetry*, would agree. “If every human language is distinct (as it is) in structure, sound, and vocabulary... then clearly it is literally impossible to fully render anything written in one language into another” (Verástegui 4). And in poems, where structure and sound are so central to the heart of the matter, any translation is entirely changed from the original work of art, disrespecting the original art on a certain level. “No, seriously,” Borla said. “I think poetry shouldn’t be translated at all. It’s supposed to be written with the soul of that one writing it” (Borla).

Neruda did add a dimension of soul to his poetry – a soul that was woven together by the Spanish language and draped in Latin American pride. Pablo Neruda, born as Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, was born in Southern Chile in 1904. As a young man, he was a consul and a writer. His first work, *Residencia en la Tierra*, was written between 1925 and 1935. It contained “oblique imagery, difficult metaphors and a deep sense of melancholy” – surreal eroticism and romanticism capturing both his heart-wrenching love and “subjugation” for women. This was the beginning of the core foundation of his poetry – the connection between humanity and the earth. Neruda first accessed this “joyous” connection through “physical love.” He would often relate earthy creations (such as pines, mountains, and waves) and human creations (such as bells and lights) to the fleshy, feminine body of his lover (Becker).

Neruda’s obsession with tangible romance soon intertwined with his increasingly left-leaning political views. He became an avid member of the Chile’s Communist Party and in 1948 he fled his country, across the Andes Mountains, on the back of a horse. His politics bled a sort of romanticized universalism into his prose. Rather than intensely “intimate” like his younger poetry, his literary world expanded – valuing the “communal over the individual” in a “Communist fashion.” Keeping his fervid eroticism in full effect, he now connected his romance with the universe, such as this excerpt from “The Great Ocean,” the fourteenth canto of his *Canto General* (Becker).

“At night I dream that you and I are two plants
that grew together, roots entwined,
that you know earth and rain like my mouth,
because we’re made of earth and rain. Sometimes
I think that with death we’ll sleep below, "
in the depths of the effigy’s feet,
gazing at the Ocean that brought us to build and to love.”

And the Spanish:

De noche sueño que tú y yo somos dos plantas
que se elevaron juntas, con raíces enredadas,
y que tú conoces la tierra y la lluvia como mi boca,

porque de tierra y de lluvia estamos hechos. A veces
 pienso que con la muerte dormiremos abajo,
 en la profundidad de los pies de la efigie,
 mirando el Océano que nos trajo a construir y a amar.

This broad, expanding feeling of love captures his own romance between lyrical expressions of sex and Communism. He was indeed passionate; Neruda himself described his poems as “coloring by passion” (Becker). He succeeded in coloring his world with passion and the rest of world couldn’t help but notice. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in Paris, and he died in Chile shortly after in 1973 (Biography: Pablo Neruda). But even decades after his death, Pablo Neruda’s symbol lives on – he left a “strong presence in Chile and in poetry today, politically and artistically” (Becker).

Nicolas Troconso Olate is from Concepción, Chile. He has lived in both the United States and Chile and speaks beautiful English and Spanish. Although not as completely turned off by translations as Borla, he found them distracting from the original Spanish elegance. “A lot of the words in the Spanish version, when translated into English, lose a little bit of meaning... The translation is a different feel with the words that they use.” He emphasized that this “feel” was different, but even then he had trouble articulating this “feel” in English.

In Spanish it’s easier to connect – it’s more passionate, you could say. It’s more... I don’t know, I’m trying to think of the word in English [chuckles]. It’s more passionate... In Spanish you can understand it better. Especially from Chile, with the words that he’s using, it has different feel. So not many things are lost when it’s translated into English, but the main thing is the passion. Even though it’s already passionate in English, in Spanish it’s even *more* passionate. (Olate) Olate could not even come up with accurate English words to explain Neruda’s level of emotion; passion was the closest he could find. English words that correctly capture the richness, the textures, and the complexity of Neruda’s verbal displays of love just do not exist in English.

Olate also described the rhythmic changes in switching languages. “You have to get into the poetic rhythm to understand what he’s saying in English.” He went on to describe that with any poem you must find the poetic rhythm of the words to fully experience it. He found that both languages require this poetic rhythm, and that does not differ greatly, but in Spanish, the rhythm is essentially easier to experience. “To be honest, there’s not much change. But you gotta understand the ‘feel,’ and in Spanish that [feel] makes more sense” (Olate). Indeed, the rhythm of the original Spanish verse is a completely different listening and speaking experience. The differences in the movements of your tongue against your teeth when you pronounce the words puts emphasis on different syllables and changes the fundamental pulse of the poem. And the play between syntax and sound within the limits of the Spanish language was Neruda’s specialty.

Alastair Reid, Neruda's close friend and translator, found that Neruda's voice provided the frameworks for his own personal translation. "[Neruda] had this very slow, affecting voice and his voice was the instrument for which he wrote.... I listened to that voice endlessly because I knew what I had to find in English, in translating, was a form of English that more or less reflected the same tones and the same moods as the Spanish did." Neruda's voice was a genuine instrument, with "sound and syntax" as the "harmony" (qtd. In Verástegui 3-4). As he expressed himself in warm, passionate Spanish, his words sang. Such a beautiful collection of rhythm and tone is, and should be, universal – a type of music – without having to be entirely changed into English.

Being a Chileno, Olate also found that the Spanish words have entirely different meanings unique to Chile and Chile's cultural context. "Even though he was a famous poet, he used a lot of words that have a different sense – or meaning – in Chile than they do anywhere else in Latin America," he said. These distinct yet subtle meanings and connotations are completely lost in translation. We must remember that "the translation of a text is part of the translation of a culture," according to Françoise Wuilmart. The original language and the target languages may be expressing entirely different "world visions." These mistranslations can be expressed in "conjugation, syntax, shades of meaning and modulations, as well as in the very rhythm of the sentences" (qtd. in Verástegui 15). Olate's reading experience differs entirely not only from mine, but also from any *Mexicano*, *Colombiano*, or *Hondureño*. The Chilean dialect coloring Neruda's expression is entirely unique to that of Chile. This is an exquisite dimension of Neruda's poetry that vanishes with any sort of meddling, obviously including English translation. "The translator who chooses to adapt original cultural elements to the 'receiving' culture/language ruins the exotic – and genuine – dimension of the original text and levels his translated text in an improper manner" (Verástegui 15).

To illustrate the dimensions of Neruda's work that have been entirely transformed, Maristela Verástegui explores several different translations of the first phrase of Neruda's Sonnet XII. Vividly erotic and thick with imagery, this poem explores "geography as a feature of the female body" from the "stars down to earth" (2). Even within the first simple phrase, the three different translations entirely transform the subtle meanings and feelings. The poem begins with "Plena mujer, manzana carnal, luna caliente," painting a picture of a lust-filled night time scene between lovers (Verástegui 3).

Tapscott translated the first line into "Full woman, flesh-apple, hot moon" (qtd. in Verástegui 3). The phrase "full woman" does an adequate job of capturing the Biblical idea that a woman needs a man to be whole, via sexual intercourse – alluding that that is indeed occurring. This also hints to a bit of cultural Latin American machismo, where there is "incompleteness of women as part of its structure of male dominance" (Verástegui 6). Without this crucial layer of cultural knowledge, an American reader may not fully understand what exactly "plena mujer" or "full woman" truly means. As Verástegui states, "Neruda may

have been a communist, but there is no evidence that he was a feminist” (6). To Neruda, a full woman meant that a man was there to make her complete.

Mitchell’s translation is similar – “Full woman, fleshly apple, hot moon” (Verástegui 3). He keeps the “full woman” unchanged, but he differs from Tapscott with “freshly apple” rather than “flesh-apple.” In both Spanish and English, the apple, paired with sex, has a sinful connotation. Now the woman is a sort of sexualized Eve, “who not only ate the apple, but has become the apple.” Her body is forbidden fruit – sin, temptation. “By penetrating her, the poet tastes the forbidden fruit made flesh.” Tapscott’s “flesh-apple” “equalizes” these two images. However, in the Spanish version, the manzana (apple) is being qualified by carnal (fleshy). Tapscott’s presentation of the flesh and the apple as one fails to act as a “compendium of features that modify and describe woman” (Verástegui 9). Mitchell’s “fleshy apple” does a better job of correctly describing this ripe woman of sin. But even then, “fleshy” does not have nearly as much of the dark, sinful connotation that “carnal” does in Spanish. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “fleshy” as “Rarely of persons: Given up to bodily lusts; =CARNAL.” But the *Diccionario de la lengua Española* defines carnal as “concerning or relative to the flesh,” “lascivious or lustful,” and “earthly and only concerned with worldly things” (qtd. in Verástegui 9). The slight difference in definitions creates a large difference in the description of this female as a forbidden fruit. The Spanish “carnal” gives her a darker, more sexual quality of “lascivious.” This cannot be captured in English.

Belitt translates the phrase a bit differently into “Carnal apple, woman incarnate, incandescent moon” (qtd. in Verástegui 3). In this version, the sexual connotation of “plena” or “full” is lost. Incarnate, meaning embodied in flesh, is somewhat redundant and does not truly capture the sensual tone Neruda’s original “plena mujer” encompasses (Verástegui 7). In addition, the repetition of “carnal” and “incarnate” changes the entire sound of the verse; it is an oratory repetition that Neruda did not ask for (Verástegui 7). And the movement of the woman from the first to the second clause shifts the spotlight off of her and onto the apple. Neruda had the full woman first, as the subject of the sentence and the poem. By changing that, Belitt entirely transforms the meaning.

The final clause, “luna caliente,” is probably the most critical to the central meaning of this poem. This paradoxical binary explores the both English and Spanish concepts of hot/cold, sun/moon, and male/female. However, these binaries have a special importance in the “context of Hispanic culture.” They “date back to the creation myths and the lore of pre-Hispanic peoples” (Verástegui 10). This, of course, is entirely lost in English translation. The moon, la luna, is a culturally feminine word and concept – more cool, gentle, and soft than the flaming sun. Yet Neruda described her as “caliente,” alluding to a dynamic male presence amidst her fresh, pearly glow. Caliente is defined as “having or producing heat,” “lustful, prone to sexual appetite” and “sexually aroused” by the *Diccionario de la lengua Española* (qtd. in Verástegui 11). Indeed,

“luna caliente” has a sexual bite to it. Mitchell and Tapscott do an OK job of encompassing this with “hot moon.” Although not nearly as sensual as “luna caliente,” there is a slim shadow of sexuality that the English reader can somewhat grasp. However, Belitt’s “incandescent moon,” turning the woman into a luminous, shining beacon, utterly fails to capture her arousal by a warm, male presence (qtd. in Verástegui 11). The sexual connotation is completely lost, and the gorgeous Hispanic binary is as well.

Although there are many translations of Neruda’s work, each varying in quality and accuracy, none of them wholly encompass the true meanings that are expressed in Spanish. No matter how hard translators try to stay true to the cultural connotations, the central meanings of the poems, and the rhythmic pulse of the prose, it is just impossible. English speakers can strive to experience the bare skeleton of Spanish poetry and song, but we will never be able to capture and comprehend the true essence of the Spanish language – especially with such deep poetry as Neruda.

"The night is star-filled and the blue stars are shivering in the distance" simply does not equal "La noche está estrellada, y tiritan, azules, los astros, a los lejos" (Neruda, Trans. Johnson). It cannot and will not ever be equal in complexity, meaning, or musicality. The dimensions of Neruda’s romance will always be a mystery to those who do not speak Spanish.

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Opera in the Time of the Millennials

Brittany Jones

My first encounter with opera opened with an orgy. Women's breasts were hanging out of their Victorian dresses like drooping flower petals as they traipsed around the room, hanging on the men and the men hanging on them, chasing after the men and the men chasing after them, laughing and screaming and obviously not very far from making love, from having sex right there on stage in front of thousands at the Royal Opera House in London. And indeed, that is what I eventually observe when a woman who throughout the scene had been clothed only in a blanket is stripped completely naked and raped on the stage. It looks like a scene out of one of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies when Jack Sparrow goes to recruit pirates for his ship from Tortuga—except with additional nudity and sexual implications that Disney would never have even considered.

But even the music, as this scene opens and the actors converge on the stage, could possibly be placed in a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. It bounces like something out of a carnival ride, all instruments until the Duke of Mantua arrives. His is the first voice we hear, and he begins the opera by proudly singing his indifference towards the women at the party, any of whom—all of whom—he would happily seduce. *Questa o quella?* “This one or that one?” As the rest of the play continues to expound, he doesn't care.

The opera is Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, though (as I learned only after I had already seen this version, directed by David McViar) most stagings of *Rigoletto* do not include the nudity that this production included. But it's one of many operas still produced and reproduced regularly across the world, as it has been since it was first performed in Venice in 1851. Now it's considered one of the classics of opera, including all that a good opera should: catchy music, misguided love, some sex and seduction, a dramatic death, characters that are psychologically complex. It's a perfect opera for those new to the genre, for those interested in seeing what opera is all about.

Or this, at least, was what one writer from *The Atlantic* said, and knowing nothing about opera myself, I took his word for it. I didn't, I felt, have too many other options. Because operas—though certainly at least similarly priced—are not like Broadway shows or other theater productions: I can't ask my friends or parents or other family members which opera is a good one to see first, which ones they've watched, which operas they like best. I know no one personally that I could talk to about opera. Not, of course, that this is unusual: in 2012 only 2.1%

of Americans saw an opera; only 1.8% of people under 25 saw an opera. So the chances of me—or anybody—knowing someone who’s seen an opera are slim.

Yet in the rare moments that opera comes up in popular novels or news articles, people mostly seem to rave about it: about its emotional power and musical beauty and dramatic strength. It’s just that few people seem to be listening. Because when I would later hear opera ridiculed, it was mostly from those who had never actually seen it. I’d hear it ridiculed on TV shows or made fun of by teenagers: opera, they’d say, is only fat people and weird singing. This image, I knew, was a caricature, developed from other caricatures they had seen. But in today’s world, there seem to be fewer and fewer people standing up for opera and arguing against this caricature, as the people extolling the wonders of opera seem to be quietly but consistently dwindling.

And because of this, what I don’t know—what I’ve wondered—is whether opera deserves to have people to stand up for it. Whether it’s going to survive into my generation. Whether it *should* survive into my generation, especially when considering how much it costs to maintain. In 2011, for example, it was in large part due to the \$182 million in donations that the Metropolitan Opera was able to balance its budget. That’s money that could be going elsewhere—that could be going to art shows and theater productions watched and enjoyed by more of the population, rather than to an art form that often seems to cater mostly to the elite, an art form whose supporters are dwindling.

Though perhaps it is more accurate to say—not that supporters are dwindling—but that supporters are dying. Opera, though not nearly as old as most art forms, seems to have already reached its peak a little over a century or so ago, and since then its fans have gotten fewer and richer and older. In this way, at least, opera seems to be coming full circle, back to its beginning, as these kinds of fans are also the ones opera started with. At the end of the sixteenth century, when the idea of opera was born out a group of intellectuals in Italy hoping to create a new form of musical drama—something to become the ultimate art form—opera was a luxury for the few and the wealthy: the first was performed in 1598 at the marriage of King Henry IV of France, and opera remained, at its infancy, something enjoyed only by a small group of elites. While operas aren’t quite at this stage yet, the price of their current productions (in some cases tickets are more than \$400 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City) may be helping it get there.

So, perhaps, rather than reaching the end of an arc, opera’s audiences today are more like operas’ audiences during the mid-seventeenth century, when opera toddled into childhood as opera houses started opening in Venice, all owned by aristocrats who sold tickets pricey enough to keep out the masses a little longer. But even then—unlike today—opera was steadily getting bigger, taller, larger. Productions were becoming scaled back enough to be more

commercialized, and it wasn't long before they were being exported around Europe.

By the eighteenth century, then, operas were almost the opposite of what they are today: a casual social event for almost everybody. They lasted upwards of three hours, but as actors and actresses performed on stage, audiences ambled around the aisles, talked, gossiped, ate and drank. The show would start but all the lights in the opera house would stay on, large candle-lit chandeliers illuminating the performers on the stage, the women playing cards, and the men walking down aisles as they flirted with the ladies and the spectators, who climbed onto the stage itself to better view the opera's action.

The nineteenth century did not lose this enthusiasm, but further cultivated it: the epoch brought increasingly large opera houses, an opera house in almost every Italian town, and—perhaps most importantly—two of the most well known opera composers. In 1813, Giuseppe Verdi and Wilhelm Richard Wagner were both born thousands of miles apart, Verdi in Italy and Wagner in Germany, but their achievements and corresponding legacies would often leave their names only inches or minutes apart, commonly mentioned together as two of opera's greatest. The composers' legacies, however, came not only from the beauty or complexity of the operas they composed, but from what their operas inspired—the politics their operas shined a light on. Verdi's operas became national propaganda when Italians fought to unify their divided states into one country; Wagner's operas were made national propaganda when used by the Nazis decades after Wagner died.

But we don't teach opera in most history classes, despite the role it played in European politics. I can remember, in high school, talking about the storming of the Bastille at the start of the French Revolution, but there was no mention of the event two days earlier when 3000 people stormed an opera house and forced it to close for nine days. We certainly didn't talk about Daniel Aubert's *La Muette de Portici*, an opera whose themes actually started a revolution when performed in Brussels in 1830, a revolution that eventually won the people their freedom. I don't even remember talking about the People's Opera, created by Roosevelt during the Great Depression in New York City to give musicians jobs and to give the people some art, some opera. I can remember a couple of days in my Western Civilizations class in high school that were devoted to art and art history, but there was no time given to the history of opera.

Instead of being discussed as history, opera, especially recently, has reenacted history. American operas did not really start gaining an audience until the twentieth century, and they are still not as well known as foreign operas, but the American operas that *have* become popular often deal with political events. One of the most popular is *Nixon in China*: an opera composed by John Adams in 1987 about President Nixon's visit to China and meeting with Chairman Mao in 1972. Another popular—and very controversial—opera of the twentieth century is *The Death of Klinghoffer*, an opera composed in 1991 (also by Adams),

about the Palestinian hijacking of a cruise liner in 1985. Set on the ship, the walls behind the stage are clothed in a projection of blue waves like a waterfall, the opera following the Palestinian terrorists as they take over the ship along with the passengers on board as they lament our world: one failing to come to the rescue. “If a hundred people were murdered,” a woman sings, “and their blood flowed in the wake of this ship like oil, only then would the world intervene.” Her voice moves slowly, as though drawing the words out from the water. It is the end of the opera, and she has recently found out that her husband, Klinghoffer, has been shot by the hijackers, his body thrown over the boat.

This opera, not unlike some of those from the nineteenth century, created a ripple through one of the communities involved: whatever impression I may have about opera’s insignificance in today’s culture, *The Death of Klinghoffer* was deemed significant enough to yield multiple protests from the Jewish community. Klinghoffer was Jewish, and he was often verbally attacked and eventually killed for his religion by the hijackers. The Jewish community, when protesting, argued the Palestinians in the opera are too humanized, and the anti-Semitic remarks made are insulting. Not everyone who is Jewish agrees, and the opera continues to be staged, but the reaction it garnered indicates that opera maintains at least some kind of impact in our culture and country.

Indeed, today’s operas often seem to be trying to garner some kind of impact or reaction from its viewers. I was frequently surprised when hearing the plots of some of the newest operas being composed, many of which deal with truly twentieth and twenty-first century problems and fears and ideas and settings. In October 2013, for example, the opera *Two Boys*, composed by Nico Muhly, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera. Another true story, *Two Boys* is about the Internet. Or, more specifically, it’s about two boys, aged 13 and 16, who met in England in 2003 in a chat room over the Internet, and it details the lies and mystery and murder that unfolded afterward. Before composing the opera, Muhly’s work experience included playing keyboard with Arcade Fire and orchestrating songs for Grizzly Bear and Sigur Ros, some of today’s most popular alternative bands. Now, his opera stands as a blatant lunge for the younger generations, its content making it obviously one more attempt to save opera and to keep it from dying with its current fans.

The difference, however, between my generation—the Millennial generation—and those that have come before us is that we have so many mediums of entertainment to pull from. Movies and musicals and plays make it seem like we don’t need opera. We can get the drama and history of something like *The Death of Klinghoffer* from a movie like *Captain Phillips* or *Argo*. We can get musical scores to sing along to from productions like *Wicked* or *The Lion King*. We can find stories revolving around the Internet from many current movies or TV show. And we can watch dramatic romances and love stories like *Rigoletto* or most older operas from whichever romantic comedy or drama we pick out on Netflix. I wondered, then, what makes opera unique enough to keep it around—what

about it makes the people who know it keep going back to it, even when other forms of entertainment may be easier to get to and cheaper to see.

What is different about opera, opera-lovers explain, is the music; opera is about the music. Which may seem obvious. But that is to say opera is about emotion: language-less emotion that cannot be rendered into words because there aren't really words that could express it, and so music is used to express it, instead. In an opera, unlike a musical, the language and lyrics (*the libretto*, as the text of an opera is called) are second to sound.

But because music reigns supreme, the dramatic realism we're used to in today's television and movies is dropped perhaps even below language, further alienating would-be opera fans. When I first watched *Rigoletto*, it was, admittedly, somewhat difficult to get used to Gilda, one of the play's main characters, who's supposed to be a young girl but looks somewhat old. But opera often doesn't make the same kind of effort movies and TV shows do to dress or select actors that look like their roles, and performers in opera are often much better at singing than they are at acting. In an opera, that kind of traditional realism just isn't as important as the emotional realism the music achieves.

The emotional realism, however, is very real. Performers, for example, will sometimes sing different words with different moods simultaneously to convey the conflicting emotions of their characters. In spoken dramas—or even, often, in musicals—you would rarely hear two people speaking at the same time. If there are two characters each experiencing a different emotion, the two emotions would have to be conveyed either at the same time through actions and appearance, or at two separate times through language.

In opera, however, various emotions can be expressed vocally all at once, because it doesn't matter if the words becomes garbled or jumbled or lost or twisted and braided into one another. The words themselves may be meaningless, but their meaning is dissolved into the harmony of the music; the sounds of the words create an auditory image of the emotion. It contributes to the emotional realism: people, after all, do not experience emotions in isolated snapshots. Rather, they experience emotions all at once, multiple people perhaps standing together but each feeling and experiencing something unique. In a movie, we'll often see these emotions separately, each character expressing his or her emotion in a different shot or scene. But with opera, the emotions can be expressed simultaneously just as they are experienced simultaneously, more accurately depicting the chaos and variation of human emotions.

I got to see this in the last scene of *Rigoletto*: Rigoletto, Gilda, the Duke and Maddalena, each voice adding to the other but each singing something different, *feeling* something different. Rigoletto's low baritone voice consoles his daughter Gilda as she leans despairingly against a door and sings about her anguish while listening to the Duke's tenor voice, the man she loves, seduce and sing to Maddalena who returns the Duke's "love" and sings about her own. The

words melt into one another, but they also melt the barriers between the audience and the performers. Even as I write this, I've been listening to the short scene repeatedly, playing it and then playing it again, and in a way it takes me out of myself: into the rushed confusion of so many emotions, into the very human minds of all four of these characters. It's sung entirely in Italian and because it is without subtitles, I have little clue as to the specific words they sing, but there isn't really a need for the subtitles or the exact words. Everything seems quite clear without them.

In many ways, music allows for something that speech doesn't. Even outside of opera, it seems to affect people in a way simply speaking may not be able to. Personally, a song's effect can be extraordinary, sometimes taking me out of stupors or at other times putting me in them, often folding me into the mood of the soundtrack. Thomas Moser, an American opera singer, was attracted to music because he had always had a difficult time expressing thoughts and emotions, but with music he "found a craft with which [he] could express those things and [he] found within that craft a language and that was singing." Music, thus, provides a kind of forum for emotions. This, however, is particularly the case in opera; in opera, after all, music is everything.

There have been many studies, particularly recently, investigating this connection between emotion and music. Although the studies look at music in general, rather than opera, the same principles and neurological processes likely apply. Recently, studies have shown that, like with language, we are wired from birth with the ability to process music. And like with almost every mental process, multiple parts of the brain are involved. One of the most significant components involved, however—at least in the connection between music and emotion—is the nucleus accumbens: the component of the brain that releases dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure that we release during meals and sex.

Dopamine is also released, studies have found, while listening to music. Neuroscientist Valorie Salimpoor is one of the leading scholars on the science of music, and while her and her co-researchers' findings are not entirely conclusive, this connection between dopamine and music is just one of their recent discoveries. Neuroscientists already discovered that dopamine is released when we expect a reward—when we make predictions that expect such a reward. Thus scholars such as Valimpoor have been led to theorize that music, similarly, is related to predictions and outcomes. As we listen to a song, we start making predictions as to what is going to happen next: we use what we know about a specific type of music genre to unconsciously envision future notes. This, then, leads to a sense of anticipation. Eventually, as the music unfolds and our expectations are either confirmed or denied, we experience emotion (and the brain releases dopamine) based on that prediction: based on whether the music exceeded our expectations, or was worse than what we expected.

This also explains why people like certain types of music—and why people may not like opera. If Salimpoor's findings are correct, people's tastes in

music are acquired as they're exposed to more songs in a particular genre or form. When you listen to a type of music you haven't heard before (or at least haven't heard often), you don't have the templates to make predictions regarding where the music will go, and thus can't fully appreciate it; when you don't make any predictions, you can't have your predictions exceeded. I know, personally, the evolution of my taste in music adheres to this kind of thinking: as I started to listen to indie music, there were many songs I heard that left me bored and unengaged—that I didn't even think were very good. But as I continued listening to the genre, I began to find that the songs I'd found uninteresting before were suddenly some of my favorites. Even now, as I listen to and watch opera, I've realized that the more I listen, the more I like it. Beginning *Rigoletto*, I would get distracted easily, and I thought the music was okay but not particularly catchy. I'd turn the opera on and then I'd turn it off, watching it in parts on my computer. But by the time I had finished, I was humming the tune to one of the songs as I brushed my teeth in the bathroom, and now I turn the opera on occasionally just for background music.

And yet, I continue to have a difficult time getting through a full opera, at least all at once. They're easy to stream on my computer off the Internet, but difficult to watch in a single run, without pausing or getting distracted. And it's even more difficult to get to an actual opera in an opera house. I've looked around, tried to find some, but have been constrained either by price or by timing; operas are not being performed everywhere, or often. The Washington National Opera in DC isn't performing another opera until early May—nearly two months from when I write this in March.

But for all the people who say opera is dying, there are those who say it's steady—albeit not strong. Indeed, in other parts of the world, opera is doing alright: while the Metropolitan Opera in New York filled 80% of their seats in 2014, the Vienna State Opera in Austria filled 98% of their seats; La Scala in Italy filled 95% of their seats; the Royal Opera House in London also filled 95% of their seats. Alex Beard, chief executive at the Royal Opera, even believes that “opera is on a roll.” Opera houses may not be as popular as movie theaters in these other countries, but opera at least has more of a following than it does in the U.S., demonstrating that opera is, indeed, not completely dead, and can still be relevant in the modern day. However, this is still not to say that opera in other countries are not at all worried about their following; even in Italy, the birthplace of opera, managers aren't often staging new works, and opera goers aren't often of the younger generation.

Thus, opera fans and managers of opera houses have been experimenting with ways to extend opera's audience and pick up newcomers—to introduce the genre to anyone who hasn't previously been introduced. In 2004, for instance, BBC produced an opera during rush hour at a train station in London, even broadcasting the performance on one of their stations. It was called *Flashmob the*

Opera, free to all in the train station at the time or anyone watching it on their television, and was very much a beginner's opera, comprising some of the most famous arias of opera.

To make sure people could continue listening and watching even as they moved away from the performers to catch a train, televisions throughout the station showed the performers live. And for those who did not have to rush out, people could watch feet in front of them as a middle-aged woman lugged around a suitcase and sang about her anger towards her husband for loving sports more than his wife; they could listen to another idler at the train station try to woo her; they could listen to her husband sing to his wife as he tried to win her back. All with the backdrop of the train station, the people milling and rushing about, the announcements in the background, the trains and the audience arriving, then departing, then arriving. It was a new kind of opera—a new kind of theater.

And it's not the only recent innovation producers have tried with opera. The Washington National Opera, for example, is playing their upcoming opera in May for free at the National's ballpark on the large television screens in the stadium. And the Met started a trend recently by streaming their operas in HD to movie theaters around the world. While tickets cost more than a regular movie, they're still much less than a ticket to the actual opera house itself, and often have the added convenience of being a bit closer to viewers' homes than the Met is.

But the people taking advantage of this are still often not the people the Met needs. Seventy five percent of their cinema audience is over age 65, and thirty percent is over age 75. And now the Metropolitan Opera, one of the largest operas in the world, was just last year on the verge of bankruptcy—just a year after the New York City Opera (also known as the People's Opera, created during the Great Depression) filed for bankruptcy and shut down. And with attendance at only 80%, incredibly expensive sets, and performers to pay, the Met is still in danger of becoming bankrupt; expenses are extensive but not often recouped through ticket sales. It's why such large outside donations as mentioned earlier are required. And it does not speak well of opera's future in the U.S.

Opera, of course, doesn't need to reach everybody, either to stay alive or to be worth its expense. It's an art form: like literature, like poetry, like musical theater, like Shakespeare, it's never going to have every American watching or enjoying or loving it, and that doesn't make it insubstantial. Opera doesn't need every American, or every teenager. It doesn't need me.

It does, however, need more than it currently has. "

And opera *can*, I think, find those additional audience members. Shakespeare's plays, as just one example, are much older than most operas, even more difficult for the common American to understand, with characters just as outdated as many of operas' characters—but they're still performed regularly, seen regularly, read regularly, taught regularly in schools. Obviously, then, just because an art form is old or set in the past does not mean it isn't still worth something in the modern day and cannot have many modern fans. Thus, if opera

doesn't maintain its audience like Shakespeare plays do, I have to believe its more the fault of opera producers before it's the fault of opera. It's the fault of expensive opera tickets, of opera's limited availability, of our culture that thinks of opera as antiquated and tedious—our culture whose view is not challenged as it needs to be for the perception to change.

It'll take more, however, than what opera houses have done already. What they've done is innovative and expansive, but it's not enough. It's hard, of course, to say what would be enough—or, rather, if there even *is* something that can be done that would be enough. They would need advertisements that reach the younger generations, my generation. They would need to shorten some of their productions to make them more appealing to the often busy public, who don't have time for a four hour opera. They would need to decrease the price of tickets—or, really, they would need to decrease the price of production, so they'd be able to afford decreasing the price of tickets. In 2014, the Met spent \$169,000 on a poppy field set for one of their operas; things like that aren't necessary, and are simply expenses further pushing modern, middle class Americans out of opera houses by forcing increases in ticket prices.

There's one other change that could (or should) be implemented, though it is possibly the most difficult—though also, possibly, the most rewarding. That is: the introduction of opera into schools, perhaps even into school curriculae. It was, in fact, my own quick introduction to it during an English class that sparked my initial interest in opera. Obviously, however, this wouldn't be an easy thing to do—possibly it's not even a realistic consideration. It would require finding classes to teach it in and instructors who understand it, and the lessons would likely have to extend past elementary music classes to have a real effect; it would have to make its way into high schools to find people old enough to appreciate and understand it. And teaching it would take away from time teaching other disciplines or skills. But increased exposure through something like a school may be a must to keep opera alive. As Salimpoor observed, you need to listen to a style of music fairly often before you can appreciate it. Perhaps, then, if Americans are only exposed to the music more often—even if not the entire opera—they will come to like it and will want to save it. Play the music in schools, in elevators, in restaurants, or, if possible, convince people to actually watch an opera—even just one, in their home on their television—and they'll get to know the music and admire it; perhaps they'll even realize they enjoy it.

And, perhaps, they'll come to realize that just because opera isn't what they're used to doesn't mean they can't get used to it, and doesn't mean it should be allowed to die with its current fans; they'll come to realize opera provides a depth they don't otherwise often find in art and other forms of entertainment. Because in a culture where everything moves quickly, where attention spans last only a few minutes and relationships get lost behind screens and emotions get pushed to the side, opera forces us to stop and to recognize the complexity of relationships. It reveals to us the complexity and depth of human emotion.

Movies, these days, seem to offer us mostly happy endings, or they are fast-paced and fast-moving and jump over emotions and relationships to get to that action, that car chase, that shoot out. Opera, however, does not shy away from tragedy. It draws the emotions out. It spins out feelings in elaborate loops and lines and jagged spikes. It gives us productions like *Rigoletto*, with its ending that is not at all happy or quiet or understated but instead explosive in its tragedy, in its raw wretchedness like scraped bone. And opera allows, then, the audience to experience the emotions of the characters in full, and to recognize the intricacy of that emotion—an understanding that connects the audience to the characters in a way movies and TV shows and other theater productions don't. It allows us, in fact, to connect to other humans in a way our lives often don't. Because what is inexpressible in words, opera expresses. What is private in our lives, opera shares. The emotional realism of opera connects, for a few hours, each individual watching, both to the other audience members and to the performers. And even Millennials—in this era where relationships are made and lost as easily as wifi connections—feel deeply and think deeply and need those kinds of deep connections with others to feel less lonely, and to understand that they are not on their own in what they feel.

Opera, after all, is art. It inspires, it upsets, it energizes, it excites, it depresses, it arouses its viewers' deepest emotions, its viewers' appreciation for beauty and sense of collective humanity. It expresses what could not otherwise be expressed. It deserves to be saved.

In the last act of *Rigoletto*, Gilda sacrifices herself for the Duke: for this man she loves, for this man who raped her, who doesn't love her, who goes from one woman to the next and then the next, who she knows perfectly well doesn't love her and never has loved her, despite what lies he may have once told. But she knocks on the door of the assassin, knowing when she does she'll be stabbed, but also knowing if she doesn't the assassin will kill the Duke. So she sings: *Ah, s'egli al mio amore divenne rubello, io vo' per la sua gettar la mia vita.* "Ah, even if he betrayed my love I shall save his life with my own!" *Perdona tu, o padre, a quest'infelice! Sia l'uomo felice ch'or vado a salvar.* "Father, forgive your unhappy child! May the man I am saving be happy." The music, like her time left, runs quickly, and it crescendos as she commits to the decision to die.

So she knocks on the door; she is stabbed. Eventually, she dies in the arms of her father, the hunchbacked Rigoletto. He holds her, sitting on the ground beside her, clutching the fabric of her shirt around her stab wound, wiping his face with her blood that has gotten on his hands. He sings: *Se t'invola, qui sol rimarrei. Non morire, o ch'io teco morirò!* "If you go away, I shall be alone! Do not die, or I shall die beside you!" The music moves with his emotions: his singing is at one moment quick, loud, swallowing the opera house and the audience in its rage like a stage light. And then, very suddenly, it is slow and soft, something with a texture like moths, and he despairs: his singing weeps. Gilda, almost dead but

not quite, sings but her voice even then is otherworldly, already not of this Earth: it is high and steady while she consoles—not her dying self—but the anguished father beside her.

Soon, however, Gilda's eyes close; her head droops back slowly towards the ground, as if falling into water. And one last time, Rigoletto sings: he cries out. He grabs his daughter's lifeless body and he pulls her into him, he shakes her, he weeps. The curtains close; the screen goes black.

Notes

¶ 1, 2: *Rigoletto*. Dir. David McVicar. Opus Arte, 2002. DVD.

I checked this out from the Katzen music library, or (as I realized later) it can also be streamed on your computer through the library's search database, as can many other operas.

¶ 3, 4: Plotkin, Fred. "Learning to Love Opera: 'Rigoletto'." *The Atlantic*. 22 Sep 2014. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

"While I could never say what the best opera is, and seldom reveal what my favorite one is, I have no doubt the Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* is the perfect work for someone sticking a toe in operatic waters. And yet it also never fails to move even the most experienced operagoer with the freshness of its music and a story that is both accessible and psychologically complex."

¶ 4: Wisniewski, Mary. "Opera strives to strike a chord with U.S. youth." *Reuters*. 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

"Nationally just 2.1 percent of Americans saw an opera in 2012, down from 3.2 percent in 2002, according to the National Endowment for the Arts. The generational news is worse. Among those under the age of 25, just 1.8 percent saw an opera in 2012 compared to 3.3 percent for those aged 65-74."

¶ 6: Walkin, Daniel and Kevin Flynn. "A Metropolitan Opera High Note, as Donations Hit \$182 Million." *The New York Times*. 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.

"According to preliminary figures released for the first time, the Met hauled in \$182 million, an astonishing amount in a tough economic climate and 50 percent more than it raised just the year before."

¶ 7: Wisniewski, Mary. "Opera strives to strike a chord with U.S. youth." *Reuters*. 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

"'There's a concern that if we see a lot of senior citizens, what happens when they pass away and who will fill those seats?' said Cayenne Harris, manager of Chicago's 'Lyric Unlimited' outreach program at the city's 61-year-old Lyric Opera."

¶ 7: Wilson, Alexandra. "A Brief History of Opera." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010. Print.

For a more detailed history of opera, start here.

¶ 7: *The Birth and Life of Opera. Films On Demand*. Films Media Group, 1999. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

Or start here, if you would rather watch something than read something.

¶ 7: "The 2014-15 Season." *The Metropolitan Opera*. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

Depending on where you choose to sit, tickets for an evening Saturday showing of *Manon* range from \$27 (in the family seating at the very top of the opera house) to \$460.

¶ 8: Wilson, Alexandra. "A Brief History of Opera." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010.

Print.

¶ 9: "18th Century Opera." *Victoria and Albert Museum*. Web. 17 Mar. 2015. "

"Theatres were noisy, chaotic places and the aim was to see and be seen. The stage and the auditorium were lit from great chandeliers that hung from the ceiling and the audience was as visible as the performers. Audiences would chat, walk around and play games."

¶ 10: Wilson, Alexandra. "Opera and Politics." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010.

Print.

¶ 11: Rabb, Theodore. "Introduction: Opera, Musicology, and History." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary*

History 36.3 (2006). 321-330. The MIT Press. Web. 27 Feb 2015.

¶ 11: Beha, Christopher. "Supernumerary: Onstage with the People's Opera." *Harper's Magazine*.

March 2011. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

"City Opera grew out of the Depression, when Roosevelt's WPA Music Project created orchestras, putting unemployed musicians to work throughout the country playing twenty-five-cent concerts."

¶ 12: "Synopsis of Nixon in China." *The Metropolitan Opera*. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.

¶ 12: Bayoumi, Moustafa, Kayla Epstein, Alan Yuhas, and Eli Valley. "We took four New Yorkers to

The Death of Klinghoffer: what was their verdict?" *The Guardian*. 21 Oct. 2014. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.

"If this opera has a purpose, it's to force its viewers to hear and experience perspectives that they wouldn't ordinarily listen to, and in fact may be determinedly avoiding."

"And then Leon Klinghoffer is murdered, and the people in the audience, on the ship, silently gasp, because the tragedy on stage is as real as it is horrifying, heartbreaking history, and it is art."

¶ 13: Meyer, Robinson. "Finally, an Art Form That Gets the Internet: Opera." *The Atlantic*. 30 Oct.

2013. Web. 16 Mar. 2015.

"Nico Muhly, its composer, is 32, the youngest musician ever commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. You have probably heard his music: He scored the film *The Reader*, played keyboards with the Arcade Fire on *Saturday Night Live*, orchestrated songs for albums by Grizzly Bear and Sigur Rós's Jónsi."

¶ 15: Tommasini, Anthony. "Opera? Musical? Please Respect the Difference." *The New York Times*. 7

July 2011. Web. 25 Feb 2015.

"But in opera, music is the driving force; in musical theater, words come first."

¶ 16: Simon, Henry W. "It is Opera, But is it Grand? Beauty in Opera." *New York Times (1923-Current*

file): 137. Nov 17 1946. ProQuest. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

"Liberal realism is a poor thing compared to an emotional realism so strong it carries the audience into articulate appreciation."

"Opera tells us best how people feel" while spoken drama "tells us best what people do."

¶ 20: Scherer, Klaus. "The Singer's Paradox: On Authenticity in Emotional Expression on the Opera

Stage." *The Emotional Power of Music*. Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

¶ 21: Zuccarini, Carlo. "Hearing Voices: Neuropsychanalysis And Opera." *Interdisciplinary Science*

Reviews 35.2 (2010): 154-165. Academic Search Alumni Edition. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

"Research indicates that we are born with the ability to process music, just as we are born with the ability to acquire language (Patel 2008a, 361). Language and music processing appear to involve closely-related cognitive and neural systems."

¶ 21, 22, 23: Salimpoor, Valorie N. "Predictions and the Brain: How Musical Sounds Become

Rewarding." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19.2 (2015). Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

An overview of Salimpoor's findings can also be found in a Time article by Michael Lemonick called "Why Your Brain Craves Music." Salimpoor has published many articles about her findings, though this is one of the most recent.

¶ 24: "Opera." *The Kennedy Center*. Web. 22 Mar. 2015. "

From May 9 to May 21 they'll be staging *Cinderella*. After this, they won't be performing another opera until September, when they'll stage *Carmen*.

¶ 25: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter

Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

¶ 25: Kimmelman, Michael. "In Italy, a compact attempt to save a dying art." *The New York Times*. 13

Nov 2007. Web. 31 Mar 2015.

"Young Italians don't go to operas... and new productions are rare."

¶ 26: Wilson, Alexandra. "Opera On and Offstage." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010. Print.

¶ 27: "Washington National Opera: M&M'S(r) Opera in the Outfield Simulcast: *Cinderella*." *The Kennedy Center*. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

It's taking place on May 16 at 7:00 PM, open to the public, lasting about three hours. Activities and entertainment will be available beforehand; kids are encouraged to dress up, and can parade around the outfield in their costumes if they come.

¶ 27: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"The HD cinema broadcasts, which beam to 2,000 cinemas in 66 countries 'in every continent apart from Antarctica', are Gelb's most famous innovation. It has inspired every opera company worth its salt to roll out similar schemes and on the surface could hardly be more successful, allowing more people simultaneously to be part of a live operatic experience than ever before – as well as, arguably, creating a new, hybrid art form of opera and cinema."

¶ 28: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"The Met's much vaunted innovation of HD live broadcasts to cinemas... is merely entertaining an existing and dwindling audience, [Peter Gelb, general manager of the Met] says, rather than creating a new one."

¶ 32: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"Box office receipts are flatlining, and seat occupancy was down to 80% in the most recent season, while costs are soaring; the opera recently spent \$169,000 (£100,000) on a spectacular poppy field set for a new production of Borodin's *Prince Igor*."

¶ 35, 36: "'Rigoletto' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto." *DM's Opera Site*. Web. 22 Mar. 2014
This website includes both the original Italian libretto and the translation into English for *Rigoletto*.

It's a White-Washed Life

Andrea Lin

She lives in an orphanage, has hair as big as her personality, and wears a smile full of hope that has won the heart of a billionaire time and time again – and she'll be played by Quvenzhané Wallis this December in the 2014 film version of *Annie*. When a census from modern day America's adoption system reports that only 16.1% of adopted children are African-American, it makes sense that Annie would more likely be black than white with ginger hair.

The trailer, released in March, was met with extreme reactions, from the enthusiastic to the not-as-enthusiastic. Twitter-user Nana News responded to the new adaption, “how is a black girl playing Annie in the Anne remake? A fucking travesty [sic].” This and many similar reactions arose over a traditionally white character being played by an African-American actress (with numerous acting awards and nominations despite only being 11 years old). Their arguments echoed a very similar issue brought up just a year ago when African-American actor Michael B. Jordan was signed on to play The Human Torch in the reboot of the movie *The Fantastic Four*.

Among these claims, angry fans remark that were the situation reversed, there would not be this kind of backlash and discussion occurring – that in fact, because of this, they were being held to a double standard, a type of “reverse racism” and discrimination.

They're right. Almost.

What is colloquially known as “white-washing” or the act of casting white actors in roles meant for minorities has a history that reaches back since minstrel shows in the 19th century to the beginning of Hollywood and still exists today. *Huffington Post* writer Amanda Scherker reports on this long winding history, beginning from the 1930s when a white actor named Warner Oland portrayed the overly caricatured comic book detective Charlie Chan in a series of movies “often wearing...yellowface or assuming exaggerated accents and movements.” Although offensive stereotypical representations increasingly drew critique, Hollywood's practice of casting white actors as minority characters continued, whitewashing roles such as Genghis Khan, Othello, Cleopatra, the Prince of Persia, Tonto, etc.

So this reverse situation that some fans talk about? It's already been happening, and it happens a lot, and although people react, it never reaches this level of outrage in mainstream media. What this situation isn't, is “reverse

racism". The refusal to accept an African-American in a traditional leading role is a by-product of just plain racism.

In most media, audience members are expected to relate to white-characters who represent a universal figure. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a Sociology professor at Duke University and author of *Racism without Racists*, writes that, "[o]ur visual culture expects...that people of color suspend belief and become white-like, otherwise, 'no soup for you'." Since white-leading movies are so prevalent, minorities will watch such movies without question, which creates a white-normative culture. In this way, the effects and traces of racism still thrive today without being detected. As author and University of California at Santa Barbara professor Robert Samuels writes in his analysis of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, "all modes of representation... in our current culture tend to idealize the desire for whiteness and devalue the presence of blackness." With most roles being made for white actors to begin with, the best chance for a minority actor to land a part is for them to audition for roles that are specifically meant for a person of color. Whitewashing roles effectively exacerbate the lack of minority representation in media and harm the image of minority communities.

Andrew Weaver, an associate professor in the Telecommunications Department at Indiana University, found, "the failure to cast minority actors in even a few such roles represents a missed opportunity to potentially break down audience-held stereotypes." Movies and other media are not only reflections of ourselves, but also incredibly influential determinants of our values. The message we send when we whitewash roles meant for minorities convey to our youth that if they are a minority, they are not important enough to be leading players.

This problematic message also reveals the deeper inequalities of minority representation in media. Why aren't there more roles? Why do minority characters have to be roles specifically about race? Weaver's studies on audience reaction to movies with casts of different racial make-up concluded that Hollywood was caught in "a vicious cycle: Producers are hesitant to cast minorities in race-neutral romantic roles because of a fear that the White audience will perceive the films as 'not for them', but White audiences perceive romantic films with minorities as 'not for them' because they seldom see minorities in race-neutral romantic roles." The vicious cycle leads to an even more intricate contradiction that underlays the problem of racism: do we pretend to be colorblind and risk erasing the history of discrimination and injustices, or do we highlight race and risk limiting minorities to be defined only by their ethnicity?

Both of these choices lie at opposing sides of a spectrum, but the reality is we still struggle to view minorities as fully-fleshed individuals instead of one-dimensional side-kicks or a singular representation of a vast community. In an interview with radio talk show host Brooke Gladstone, Vincent Williams points out that "one of the continuing challenges for African-Americans, and particularly the African-American middle class, is to be seen as run of the mill." This result comes from perpetuating both extremes: being color-blind and being

overly color-conscious. Currently, there is only one way to obtain the desired middle-ground, the idea of normality and of universal personhood – and that is by being white.

The real travesty within this modern re-make of *Annie* lies within the inability of mainstream media to accept an adaptation with mainly people of color and yet marketed towards everyone. Although attempting to subvert the normalization of whiteness in media, some fans interpret the re-make as minorities “stealing” the role of traditionally white characters. The story of *Annie* was never meant to be “traditionally white” though; it was meant as a universal standard to relate to. The subversion of races in the new adaptation also does not inflict nearly the same amount of harm as the practice of white-washing does.

Having an Africa-American character be played by a white actor (as opposed to having a white character be played by an African-American actor) takes away the already limited roles that minorities can play and erases the identities of minorities in reality. It essentially denies minorities a reflection of their existence and devalues their worth accordingly. Dr. Michael D. Baran, a Harvard professor and founder of Cambridge Diversity Consulting, stated, “It is critical that children see all sorts of people playing both the good and the bad roles in media. Otherwise, they may take those absences as meaningful and it may affect how they understand social categories.” The outrage over *Annie* reveals a much deeper wound within our conceptualizations of what it means to be a human being; it is this wound that allows us to disassociate an entire group of people from ourselves, to ignore the injustices done to them because it doesn’t pertain to us, and to perpetuate a class system that raises human worth solely based on the lowering of others.

And yet, it is a wound that we are hesitant to address. We still see movies coming out today that white-wash characters, an issue that we promise to fix tomorrow. But in order to see a better tomorrow that we can love, we need to begin acting like it’s already tomorrow, today.

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The Pursuit of Excellence

Riley O'Connell

College students are more stressed than ever before – activities, campus jobs, internships, friends, and the pursuit of a 4.0 GPA weigh heavily on students in elite institutions across America. William Deresiewicz, former professor at Columbia University and esteemed scholar, pulls back the curtain on these institutions that churn out high-achieving careerists in *Excellent Sheep*, a polemic affronting mind-washing elitist education. The sentiments of *Excellent Sheep* rouse readers with thought-provoking consideration, while simultaneously raising questions on the author's true intentions and society's grasp on the education of America's youth.

William Deresiewicz believes in the Ivy League system. He believes students at these universities are capable of changing the world, and possess the mental strength for the unthinkable. But he uses *Excellent Sheep* as a platform to criticize the lack of individuality found in students in these institutions. And he uses this platform well. Deresiewicz's argument breathes in the pages – I can picture his pen flying across a notepad, or his fingers typing feverishly at his keyboard. I see him wicking sweat from his brow, laughing and croaking with a wild grin that his work evokes. *Excellent Sheep* is a call to arms for students in the upper-ranks of the undergraduate education system. Deresiewicz begs students to experience college outside of their comfort zone, academically as well as socially, and criticizes the system that creates cookie-cutter versions of college students and implements their “stunted sense of purpose” (Deresiewicz 3). He argues that “moral imagination,” the possession of the brain-power to imagine new and unconventional ways to live one's life, and “moral courage,” the inner strength to actually live that life, are rarely found in the average over-achiever. These students all travel down the same career paths, and don't have the tools to pursue their passions. The intensity of Deresiewicz's argument is palpable and exciting, but is it well-founded?

Deresiewicz tries to empower students by criticizing a large, respected, and seriously envied institution, but he doesn't have a true grasp on the specific aspects of what he's criticizing. He uses broad and sweeping language to engage his audience. Some of his topic sentences are so abrasive and aphoristic that they would be laughable – if they weren't so captivating. He drops heavy lines in every paragraph, such as “Society is a conspiracy to keep itself from the truth” (80), and “Everybody does the same thing because everybody's doing the same thing” (21). This language is padded, as noted by reviewers Miller and Garner, but

“rarely dull” (Garner). Deresiewicz uses these lines to distract and set an agenda for his argument, but they quickly reveal his shallow thinking. He constantly points out the lack of diversity in institutions, and cries for individuality, but in the next sentence discredits students, as well as readers, for pursuing a fake authenticity. How is this warranted? His contradicting criticisms made me second guess my own intentions. For the argument’s sake, say I have always wanted to get a tattoo. I come to college, feel comfortable and daring enough to take the leap, and I get a tattoo. This should be great for me, but, according to his own argument, Deresiewicz would look down on me and say this does not make me an individual. Alternatively, what if I’ve always wanted a tattoo, but I decide not to get one bearing in mind that it might prevent me from getting a job in the future? In this scenario, I can picture Deresiewicz grabbing me by the shoulders, shaking me senseless, screaming, “Try harder to be an individual! Take risks!” So what exactly does it take to separate myself from the crowd? What, in Deresiewicz’s eyes, should I be doing to be the best possible version of myself?

Excellent Sheep garnered substantial critical attention for its contradictory argument, and the national context its conversation carries. The reviewers’ opinions and intensity of their responses to the argument varied. Most of the reviewers comment on the heavy language Deresiewicz uses to present his argument, and the contradictions that so quickly follow the rigorous points he makes. Laura Miller, co-founder of *Salon.com*, points out elements of Deresiewicz’s self-contradiction that I also found frustrating: “He urges students to pursue their quirkier dreams, such as becoming an organic farmer, then scolds them for thinking running an organic farm constitutes meaningful social engagement” (Miller). Deresiewicz goes at his audience with passion and vigor about the changes that need to be made to elite institutions, and the changes the students in these institutions must undergo to succeed. He criticizes so much of the institution, but, as reviewers Carlos Lozada and Douglas Greenberg egregiously point out, he is a product of his own criticism. They find him in the wrong for writing out of his own experience and excluding arguments that can be made for people of a lesser social status who don’t have the opportunities he (maybe unintentionally) mocks in his book.

Is he truly in the wrong? What is someone supposed to write about, if not their own experiences and opinions? These critics agree that Deresiewicz is in the wrong in his lack of self-awareness. Lozada, editor of ‘Outlook,’ the opinion section of *The Washington Post*, describes *Excellent Sheep* as a “how-to guide to anti-elitism, except it caters to elites themselves” (Lozada). Deresiewicz’s scope is narrow, and he caters to his audience by giving them abundant space and opportunity, while tip-toeing around the unspoken truth that these opportunities are greatly specific and lost upon so many people who may deserve them. Other reviewers empathize with Deresiewicz’s points. Miller gives credit to Deresiewicz’s thesis “because it matters” (Miller). She argues that students from these elite universities directly affect the lives of the everyday citizen because they

end up being the innovators and advocates that lead our nation. By paying attention to these “excellent sheep,” we may learn more about ourselves.

Sometimes Deresiewicz’s criticism seems to be unfounded and maybe even wrong in the context he frames his arguments. Miller’s argument has its merits, but logically, how will the everyday reader, student, and citizen benefit from understanding ideologies and “struggles” of Ivy Leaguers? Deresiewicz is not pointing his argument towards the average citizen, and barely even to me. He is talking directly to the elite, willing them to break free, despite the freedom they already possess. Lozada and Greenberg ruthlessly attack Deresiewicz’s argument. They resent his condescension and claim his argument leaves little room for the likes of the students falling short of the class line he blatantly targets. Lozada and Greenberg’s arguments may be intense, but they are necessary. Shining light on the rigid structure of elitism that keeps so many in our country from rising to their potential is critical.

For Thanksgiving break I travelled home to New Jersey with a few friends from high school who go to college in the D.C. area. The conversations we had reflected thoughts I’ve had in my first semester of college and questions of my own potential I’ve poured over while reading *Excellent Sheep*. An AU student, two students from Georgetown, and a student from Catholic may be experiencing education differently at the moment, but our insights into our college experiences thus far mirrored each other’s. We were returning home for essentially the first time since the summer, so we had much to talk about - new friends we’ve grown to love, classes and professors that excite us and those that make us fall asleep, the pantries in our homes that we’ll immediately scour when we sprint through our front doors, and our education so far and how it has compared to our experiences at Red Bank Catholic High School. Our majors varied - a Georgetown theater major, a Georgetown English major and theater minor, a Catholic University finance and computer science double major, and me, an undeclared AU student. But we all seemed to have similar thoughts on future careers and the way college is pushing us towards adulthood. We talked about following a vocation and the philosophy behind education. As an undeclared student, I fear that I’ll end up declaring a major that will leave me jobless and hopeless in the future, or that I’ll face the adverse possibility of majoring in something that will lead me to a successful career, but have me hating my job and subsequently my life: a future of regret and what-ifs. I fear the possibility of finally realizing my “calling” too late in my college career and having little time to pursue a dream. Is there a time-limit on the pursuit of fulfillment? I don’t want to settle for a career I do not have a strong passion for, but what if I never find my true passion? I do not want to continue down a path of discontentment or, even worse, settle for small sparks of contentment sparsely scattered through long streaks of gray.

We pondered the ambiguous, sometimes blind, direction we trudge towards the completion of our education. There is simply not enough time in

these eight semesters to take the most exciting classes, get the best internships, and have the most fun. And what if you spend substantial time at school pursuing something and sometime down the line you abruptly realize you no longer have an interest in that track? Aidan, the student from Catholic, no longer wants to pursue his double-major in finance and computer science, but he's terrified he wasted credits on those classes. The fear of wasting time weighs heavily on freshmen, even in the very first semester of college.

On Thanksgiving Day I snuck from room to room at the family party I attended trying to avoid probing questions from cousins, aunts, and uncles. I know they all meant well, but each question I answered evoked a different response about what I should be majoring in, what activities I should join, what job I should aim to get when I graduate. At one point in the evening I was cornered and asked if I planned on attending law school after college. I haven't even declared a major, nor have I booked my train ticket to return to AU on Sunday, so no, I have not made a decision about law school. These inquiries from family members shouldn't surprise me, but the content of the conversations always catch me off guard. I find the general public opinion towards college students is they have it all figured out: they know exactly what they want to major in and what career they want to pursue, and they've carefully assembled their ten-year-plan. These assumptions nearly bring me to tears because they leave little room for students who are trying to take their education day-by-day and are not quite sure how they want to spend their lives. I feel sometimes it takes moral courage and some moral imagination to field these questions from family and friends. Many times I lie; I drop names of random majors I've entertained the idea of but have no intention of really pursuing. I talk at length about my friends and their pursuits to draw the attention away from me and my reddening cheeks. And then I remember that lying is exhausting, and I respond with the truth: "I don't know what I want to do with my life."

Deresiewicz's assumes that students in elite institutions aren't given the chance to think about their own passions and pursue their dreams, but he disregards that many students may not realize their vocation apart from the crunch of the university system. His sentiments and critiques can apply to a wide audience, but the specific group he narrowly tries to attract limits the truth in his work. I find truth and fault in his argument, but I don't necessarily fit into the crowd Deresiewicz targets. I still feel the stress of academics, the college experience, and figuring my life out, but I don't attend Harvard, Yale, or Columbia. In Deresiewicz's eyes, does this detract from my experience? At times I wondered if I should even have been reading *Excellent Sheep*. The razor-sharp lines Deresiewicz drew in his argument seemed to slice me and so many others out of his target audience. Regardless of my personal connection, this book is a passionate and exciting plea to think and act on a grander scale. But that doesn't detract from the fact that the book idealizes much of what the college experience can and should be, begs for a change to institutions that already have great global

exposure and reach, and weighs on students to extend themselves farther than they already have for the system.

My peers at AU have varying attitudes towards their academic pursuits. There are students who do it all for the grade and treat college as an ongoing battle between them and their GPA. There are those who rarely go to class, but talk frequently about their future career at the United Nations. I don't know where this attitude will lead these people, but I can't help but respect their confidence. This is naive of me to feel, but I envy the fiery ambition that some have instilled in their being that I have trouble channeling in myself. If I can't get out of bed for my 10:20 a.m. class (which I've undeniably been at fault of), can I expect myself to be ready and raring to work five days a week in five years, if that is where I find myself? As of now, indications point to no. Some of my classmates seem to have it all figured out - they have good grades, are involved in activities they love, somehow got the internship that everyone fought for, and manage to balance their social lives seemingly with ease. Is this authentic, or is it a facade? Deresiewicz describes these students as "Super People." They've balanced their grades, hobbies, activities, and social life "with an apparent effortlessness, a serene self-assurance" (Deresiewicz 7). A student like this may have it figured out to someone like me, who has taken steps through college with extreme varying levels of confidence and uncertainty, but maybe "The Girl Who Has It All" finds herself drowning under the stress of keeping up the image of completion.

No matter where you go to school, college is challenging. The expectations laid across students' backs to perform and succeed are crushing, and may be stunting the natural process of learning, and therefore preventing a more affluent society from growing. While I argue that college students today are curious thinkers, forging their path through the academic wilderness, you may say that these students are privileged floaters. You may say that these students have no real sense of direction and only a sense of entitlement and expectations. Still, I believe that these achievers are driving forces in their own destiny, despite whether they know who they want to be after college or not. At 18, 19, and 20, we're not meant to be complete. We're meant to be figuring it out. And if the image we have today of completion does not come into fruition, who cares? At least we tried.

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First Person Perspectives &

A Rainbow with Gold at Both Ends

Madelyn Daigle

Tall buildings shade the street at the center of the city, wind rushes through the passages, and the chill of the atmosphere at 13,000 ft. bites through my jacket.

“Vamos a sacar dinero aquí,” says Beatriz, the volunteer coordinator. One by one we enter the ATM cubicle and withdraw a few hundred Bolivianos. I shuffle forward, hyperaware of the money belt around my waist, reminding myself to hide the cash before stepping out of the little room. I lock the door behind me and punch in my pin. I hesitate when the machine prompts me to enter the amount I wish to withdraw, as if I have to calculate the exchange rate one more time. I wonder if it’s a point of no return. If I don’t take out any Bolivianos, maybe I can fly home tomorrow and pretend it never happened.

Beep, beep, beep. The ATM reminds me to take the cash. I fold the Bolivianos, zip up my money belt, and step back onto the street.

~

The 355 minibus starts its route from the top of a hill just a minute’s walk from the *Hogar de Niñas Obrajes*. The altitude turns that hill into a mountain and I’m breathing heavily when I reach the bus. It’s empty; the driver is having his lunch at the stand across the street. I use both hands to fight the hill’s gravity and slide open the side door. I climb into a seat next to the window. Without a smartphone to scroll through, I survey the neighborhood until the driver returns.

Unlike buses in the United States, here minibuses only pick you up if you flag them down and they only stop to let you off when you shout that request. Handwritten posters in the front window indicate major route markers like popular streets, monuments, and plazas. The route numbers (indicated by a sign on the roof of the bus) are mostly useless unless you need to get to a very specific place only serviced by one route. Once you wave to the driver of the appropriate bus, you decide where to sit. Sometimes hopping in the front passenger seat is the best bet because you have good visibility, which is helpful if you’re not quite sure where to get off the bus. If you climb in at the side door to sit in the back, you squeeze in next to the other passengers on bench seats. Whenever you climb into a minibus it is appropriate to greet the other passengers with a “Buenos días”

or “Buenas tardes.” The other passengers respond with the same salutation. I find this especially important to indicate to the driver and passengers that I speak Spanish and have at least a semblance of an idea of what I’m doing.

When you are approaching the place you would like to disembark the bus, there are a few ways to indicate to the driver that you would like to stop. Old men usually bark out “¡Bajo!” right as we pass a corner and the driver quickly puts on the brakes. I find it more polite to let them know a few seconds sooner, and shout out “¡Bajo en la esquina, por favor!” Sometimes just “¡Esquina, por favor!” depending on how much time I estimate I have to speak before we pass the corner in question.

Some of the 355 drivers are used to the volunteers and know our stop near the Fundación Arco Iris building on the other side of the city. They look up into the rearview mirror and make eye contact when we turn onto the street. “¿Vas a bajar?” they ask.

~

I move one thread at a time into the shape of the number four. I pull the end of the thread through the opening in the “four” and tighten it around the other threads. Slowly, a pattern takes shape on the *manilla*. The boys sitting on the bench next to me have made more progress. Except for Michael, but he’s only six years old and he has to keep asking me which thread to use. My *manilla* is alternating blues and greens, but I must have missed a memo because everyone else is using light blue and white—the colors of the *fútbol* team Bolívar—or red, green, and yellow—the colors of the Bolivian flag. My fingers feel clunky in the chilly basement.

It’s our first week working as volunteers full time. The nineteen of us have been doled out to the twelve projects of the *Fundación*. I’ve only been volunteering with *Talleres Ocupacionales* for a few days and the thought of making *manillas* in this basement for the next ten months makes the room feel even colder and darker.

I move a small piece of sandpaper back and forth over the surface of a wooden jewelry box. The basement is still cold and dark, and now my arms hurt. Only one of the boys is here working on a latch hook rug. I wonder how long I have to keep doing this until I can go back to making *manillas*.

Two weeks later, I move my stuff upstairs to the *Casa de Paso* office. Finally, I’m out of the basement of arts and crafts and I’m ready to actually make a difference for the *Fundación* by helping where help is needed.

~

Theresa and I herd the boys into their dormitory. “Ven, Michael,” I say. I’m trying to remember what it was like when I was that young and whether my mom still dressed me in the mornings. “Manos en el aire, por favor.” I pull his

shirt over his head and help him change into his school uniform. I fold his play clothes and place them on his pillow.

The *dormitorio* is grim, but it could be worse. The linoleum floor is bland and the wood-paneled walls are undecorated. The barred windows let in some sunlight. Each bunk has one pillow and one thick alpaca blanket on it. The clothes I put on Michael's bunk are his only outfit besides his uniform.

Theresa has been assigned to *Casa de Paso* since our first week. She used to have to take care of the younger boys by herself; now we divide the work. Sometimes Michael and Angel egg each other on and hold their arms stubbornly by their sides. Angel is easygoing and quick to smile; he uses his cuteness to his advantage. Michael is more likely to sulk until he gets what he wants. Theresa reasons with them in Spanish, “Ya hemos llegado tarde muchas veces. Tienes que poner la ropa porque salimos en cinco minutos, no más.”

I start singing in English, “So put your hands in the air...and wave ‘em like you just don’t care.” The boys laugh a little when I wave my arms above my head. “Vámonos,” I say. “¡Canta conmigo!” They give in and let us change their clothes.

~

It's Saturday, and Theresa and I are at *Casa de Paso* to help with laundry. The boys don't have too many clothes to wash but they don't have washing machines either. The sun beats down on the roof in true high altitude fashion—threatening to burn without providing any real warmth. We drag tin basins to the sinks and fill them with cold water. The clothes are thrown in with a sprinkle of powdered detergent. The older boys attack the laundry with as much enthusiasm as laundry can command. They've been washing their own clothes for a long time. Soon the rooftop is ringing with shouts and splashing water. I feel self-conscious for my hesitation. I want to tell them that I obviously know how to do laundry—just a different way, with a washer and a dryer.

Theresa handles it well, scrubbing the younger boys' clothes with determination and in that moment looking more like a mother than a volunteer. I move from one place to another, washing at the sinks for a while, then rinsing the clothes that others washed, then wringing out the clean laundry and draping it over the walls that enclose the rooftop patio. My knees ache from the concrete floor and my hands are wrinkled from the water. I feel guilty for feeling unfulfilled by the work. The younger boys hoist up their pants and stomp around on the laundry in the tubs. Theresa keeps scrubbing.

~

The sky is pitch black and pouring rain from all directions. We're walking up the hill from our apartment in the *Hogar de Niñas Obrajes*. The other half of this year's volunteers live in a house in a neighborhood at the top of the hill and

they invited us over for drinks before going out to a *discoteca*. I'm pretty damp from the inside out because power-walking up the hill is making me sweat and the rain is soaking through the bottom of my jeans. Step after step the wet denim chafes against my ankles and regret chafes against my good humor. The rain has put a real damper on the festivities.

The group begins to split—the volunteers in better shape maintain their pace up several flights of stairs and I'm slowly falling behind. I take ragged breaths of thin air, willing my legs up the stairs because I don't want to arrive after everyone else. We finally reach the outer gate of the volunteers' house and ring the bell.

“¡Hola, hola!” they answer the door and welcome us in with enthusiasm. I resent them a little for their cheery dispositions, but I also desperately want them to like me. I'm the only volunteer that arrived at the *Fundación* independently. The others are German students sponsored by the government-funded *Weltwärts* and they've been together since a pre-trip orientation. Two other American volunteers are college graduates that came through a foundation called Hope Worldwide. The Germans are comfortable in the room full of alcohol and their native language. I lean back into the couch, trying to pick up anything I can from the conversation. I sip the juice in my cup and smile like I'm having a good time.

“Hey, Español, todos!” one of the volunteers calls out. “We want to include everybody.” I smile and say I don't mind. The conversation quickly returns to German.

~

“¡Vámonos!” I call out to the boys. Angel, Derry, Michael, and Gabriel run past me and into the street while I sign us out at the *portería*. The notebooks and loose pencils in their backpacks bounce tumultuously as they speed down the steep street.

“¡Espera, por favor!” I hope they remember to stop at the bottom of the hill. Angel turns around and asks me to carry his backpack. I drape it over my shoulder and he takes off running again. They're far ahead and I have to pass by the *cervezería* at the end of the street by myself. I pretend that the men standing against the wall don't intimidate me at all. I let the backpack shield me from their attention.

The four-lane freeway at the bottom of the hill funnels all traffic into the city. The boys are waiting for me at the curb. “Dame las manos,” I say. Derry takes one of my hands and Angel takes the other. Derry holds Michael's hand and Gabriel holds onto the backpack I'm carrying. As soon as I see an opening in traffic we sprint to the median. Gabriel lets go of the backpack and sprints through traffic to the other side as well. “¡Espera!” I warn the others, and a truck

rolls past us. “Ok,” another opening and we run to the other side. We’re halfway to school.

~

The minibus speeds down the freeway to *Zona Sur*, the wealthy neighborhood of La Paz. I know where to stop, but I read the street signs to be sure. We pass 14th Street, 15th Street, 16th Street...“¡Bajo en la diecisiete, por favor!” The driver brakes and I hand over 2.10 Bolivianos in change before climbing out. 17th street reminds me more of home than anything else I’ve seen in the city. *Zona Sur* is full of residential homes, shopping, and restaurants not unlike a suburban town in the United States. Even the air seems clearer here, and I breathe in deeply. I make my way to my favorite coffee shop. My usual table is available and I open my computer to access the Wi-Fi. I feel a familiar sense of guilt for letting my guard down here among strangers more than I do at the *Fundación*. I don’t dwell on it, but the feeling is there at the back of my thoughts. My parents should be on Skype any minute now. My coffee arrives and I’m sipping it contentedly when I hear the familiar ringtone. “Hey guys!” I say, as my parents’ image pops up on my screen.

“Hey sweetie,” my dad replies.

“¡Hola chica!” from my mom.

I feel the pinch at the back of my eyes that precedes the tears.

~

I knock on the doorframe and Beatriz looks up. “Hola, Madelyn,” she says. “Pasa, por favor.”

I take a seat across from her and she asks how I’m doing. I try to explain how I want to switch projects again. There is too much quiet time at *Casa de Paso* and I’d feel better if I was busier during the workday. It’s the same reason I moved from *Talleres Ocupacionales* and even I’m not sure I’m convinced it’s the whole truth. At least this time I lasted three months. Beatriz calls the *coordinadora* of a different project to see if she could use another volunteer. I’m perched on the edge of the seat with an accelerated heart rate, hoping for a “yes.” I look at the clock, out the window, and at the papers on the desk instead of looking at Beatriz. She listens and says “sí” in agreement.

In less than a week I’m walking into the office of *Apoyo Social Familiar* for the first day at my new project.

~

I look down at the hand-drawn map of an intersection and try to orient myself correctly. There aren’t any markers on the corners to indicate street names. I sigh and start walking down one of the streets anyway. At first the sun feels nice and the walk is pleasant after the hour-long minibus ride. The sun quickly becomes too hot and the wide streets feel more like a desert with each dusty step.

I spot a schoolyard up ahead and check the map again. No school. I wish I could call the volunteer that drew this map last year, and ask them what they were thinking. Instead I approach a *tienda* to ask for directions. “¿Conoce Usted una familia Orozco por aquí?”

“No, no. La señora se ha ido. Ya se fue.”

“¿Sabe Usted adónde?” I asked, trying to get some information to bring back with me.

“No, no sé.”

I thank the woman and turn around. I’ve spent long enough looking for the Orozco family. If they wanted the help of *Apoyo Social Familiar* they should’ve called us to give their new address. I dread the next home visit on my list, wondering if it’s another dead end.

I wonder if the discontent and cynicism have crept in too far for me to be satisfied with any of the work here. Maybe the feeling of satisfaction and productivity that I’m yearning for doesn’t exist in long-term volunteer work, where I find more setbacks than triumphs. After nine months of this, I want to go home more than ever.

~

It’s early morning and I’m in a cab on my way to the airport. I eagerly glance down at my watch and back up at the nearly empty freeway. I want to make it there before their plane lands.

The arrival terminal is sleepy when I walk in. Only a few people wait on the rows of plastic chairs. One monitor shows the incoming flights. My family should be here soon.

A few minutes pass and travelers begin filing through the automatic doors at the end of the hall. I can’t help myself, I edge closer. I can’t tear my eyes away from those doors as I scan the faces that emerge every few seconds. As if to counter the excitement, an irrational fear bubbles up that maybe they weren’t on this flight. I shove it back down but I start to scan even more eagerly. Finally, three faces I recognize walk through the doors. I cry again.

I’ve known for a few weeks now that I’ll be leaving Bolivia two months earlier than I had planned. I want my family to see everything that I’ve seen, but above all I want them to understand why I decided to leave early. I want them to reassure me.

~

Warm tears are welling up at the corners of my eyes. I put a smile on my face and turn around one last time to wave goodbye to the other volunteers. That makes a few of the tears fall down my cheeks. When I turn back around there is no one else in line and the immigration officer calls me forward to his desk. He’s wearing a dark green uniform and has that unfeeling expression on his face that

seems standard-issue for foreign military. I lug my suitcase through the door with one hand and hike up the big backpack over my shoulder with my other hand. He flips through my passport and scrutinizes my visa.

“Cuánto tiempo has estado en Bolivia?” He asks.

“Nueve meses,” I reply. “Desde Agosto.”

“Qué haces?”

“He trabajado con la Fundación Arco Iris como voluntaria.”

“Vas a volver a venir a Bolivia?”

“No,” I answer steadily but another tear drips down my cheek. I can’t imagine willingly returning to the country anytime soon. “Tal vez en el futuro pero ahora no sé cuando voy a volver.”

He stamps my passport and slides it across the desk. “Gracias por todo lo que has hecho para Bolivia.”

I can’t formulate a response, so I nod a little and take my passport. I feel sick as I walk to my gate. I don’t know if I did anything for this country that warranted a thank you, much less a thank you from a uniformed officer. I want to put it all behind me. For a while I forget what the officer said to me. But someday I will want to remember.

Glossary of Spanish Terms

“Vamos a sacar dinero aquí.”	We’re going to take out money here.
Hogar de Niñas Obrajes	Literally: home of the girls of Obrajes, an orphanage where some of the volunteers live in the Obrajes neighborhood of La Paz
“Buenos días.”	Good morning
“Buenas tardes.”	Good afternoon
“¡Bajo!”	Literally: I descend.
“¡Bajo en la esquina, por favor!”	Literally: I descend at the corner, please!
“¡Esquina, por favor!”	Corner, please!
“¿Vas a bajar?”	Colloquially: Are you going to get off?
Manilla	Bracelet
Fútbol	Soccer
Fundación	Foundation
Talleres Ocupacionales	Occupational Workshops, a project that teaches boys in the <i>Casa de Paso</i> orphanage how to make crafts
Casa de Paso	It means: house of passing, a small home for boys transitioning from living on the street before placement in a larger orphanage
“Ven, Michael.”	Come on, Michael. "
“Manos en el aire, por favor.”	Hands in the air, please. "
Dormitorio	Dormitory "
“Ya hemos llegado tarde muchas veces. Tienes que poner la ropa porque salimos en cinco minutos, no más.”	We’ve already been late a lot. You have to put on the uniform because we’re leaving in five minutes.
“Vámanos”	Let’s go.
“¡Canta conmigo!”	Sing with me! "
Discoteca	Nightclub "
“¡Hola, hola!”	Hey, hey! "
“Hey, Español, todos!”	Hey, Spanish, everyone! "
Portería	Gate

“¡Espera, por favor!”	Wait, please! "
Cervezería	Brewery "
“Dame las manos.”	Give me your hands. "
“¡Espera!”	Wait! "
Zona Sur	Southern Zone "
“¡Bajo en la diecisiete, por favor!”	I’m getting off at 17 th Street, please! "
“Pasa, por favor.”	Please come in. "
Coordinadora	Coordinator "
“Sí.”	Yes "
Apovo Social Familiar	Literally: social family help, a project that provides services and food to families in extreme poverty
Tienda	Small shop
“¿Conoce Usted una familia Orozco por aquí?”	Do you know an Orozco family that lives around here?
“No, no. La señora se ha ido. Ya se fue.”	No, no. The woman left. She’s already gone.
“¿Sabe Usted adónde?”	Do you know where she went?
“No, no sé.”	No, I don’t know.
“Cuánto tiempo has estado en Bolivia?”	How long have you been in Bolivia? "
“Nueve Meses. Desde Agosto.”	Nine months. Since August. "
“¿Qué haces?”	What do you do? "
“He trabajado con la Fundación Arco Iris como voluntaria.”	I’ve been working with the Rainbow Foundation as a volunteer. "
“¿Vas a volver a venir a Bolivia?”	Are you going to come back to Bolivia? "
“No. Tal vez en el futuro pero ahora no sé cuando voy a volver.”	No. Maybe in the future but right now I don’t know when I’ll return.
“Gracias por todo lo que has hecho para Bolivia.”	Thank you for everything you’ve done for Bolivia.

Banana

Willow Karfiol

I am a banana. On the outside I'm yellow, but on the inside I'm white. My story begins when a single, white, Jewish woman adopted me from Shanghai, China. I don't remember my birth mother leaving me in the market, the orphanage I lived in for the first eight months of my life, or the first time I met my real mom, the mother who raised me and supports me in every way. Of course, my mom wants to keep me connected to my Chinese heritage. That's why I am a dragon boat paddler, and why we celebrate Chinese holidays, but also why I was bat mitzvahed and why we celebrate the High Holy Days.

I started paddling when I was eight and have continued ever since. Every summer I sit on the top of the still boat, remembering how the hard wood hurts my butt and the slippery water drenches my shorts. When we take off, I no longer care about my soaked shorts or the discomfort of the seat. All I can sense is the smell of the water and the rhythm of the boat. "UP UP UP, HIT HIT HIT, REACH REACH REACH." The feeling of the boat surging through the waves with frequent splashes of water coming at me from all directions, the laughter of the junior members of the "Blazing Paddles" cheering us on as we soar past them, the sound of the drum echoing through my entire body, and knowing that my mom is in the boat, bedside me.

~

Annual Chinese New Year dinners are no ordinary events. One second the room is empty, but in the blink of an eye, the room is crowded with adults talking seriously, little kids playing with the turntables and hiding under tables, and teenagers trying to be cool and sneaking outside. My favorite ritual is opening the surprise folder on my plate. The colorful red envelope with the picture of a dragon sealed with a stamp is like my own treasure chest. Whether there is a sticker, a dollar, or a Chinese coin in the envelope, whatever is inside is gold to me. To this day I have a secret drawer filled with these New Year envelopes.

~

Envelopes of money were handed to me on another occasion—my bat mitzvah. For months in advance I trudged to temple every Saturday and practiced my sermon and chanted my Torah portions. The day of the event my voice was

crackling, my palms were sweaty, and my heart was beating out of my chest. First I welcomed everyone, and the next thing I know I was being embraced by all my friends and family. I did it! I am now a woman in the eyes of God.

Being a woman in the eyes of God comes with many responsibilities, which include attending High Holy Day services during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. No longer am I supposed to sneak out of services with my friends to scavenge for food and play with grammar school building blocks. No longer is it acceptable for me to play on the playground, like I had throughout my childhood. The very same play structure where I formed many cuts, scrapes, and friendships still stands. But ideally, the past is in the past. Now it is expected that I sit next to my family, dutifully present as a newly equal participant of the temple congregation. My head held high, my legs crossed, and my dress crisply ironed; my new stage of adulthood has obligations I can't fully conform to. As much as I try to be an adult, I can't contain giggling with my friends from across the aisle or texting them secretly under my prayer book while nobody is watching.

~

My life is a bit of a mixing pot. There are moments when I feel more "Asian" and moments when I feel "white." I'll never forget when I went with my friends to Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles for lunch. My friends who accompanied me included an African American, a Hispanic, and multiple Caucasians. My African American friend looked at each of us, then said in a joking way, "Wow, you guys, we're so diverse! We only need an Asian and an Indian!" I had known before that my friends and I didn't see each other based on the color of our skin, but for all of them to forget I was Asian was strange for me. Of course, this wasn't the first time I either labeled myself or was labeled as one ethnicity over another.

As a child holding my mom's hand I never thought of myself as "different." We both have brown hair, I swear we have the same color eyes, and we are both on the petite side. Strangers randomly ask me where I am from. Their mouths quietly whisper the words as if they are embarrassed to ask, but not embarrassed enough not to. Sometimes they ask what type of Asian I am and I say, "Oh, I'm from Shanghai, China." They may tell me how beautiful it is. I smile politely, but have no idea what they're talking about. Even though I was born in China, the land itself is as familiar to me as a postcard.

~

As I gaze at myself in the mirror, I see two people. There is my identity, which has been branded upon me because of the color of my skin, the texture of my hair, the features of my face, and my actions as a dragon-boater and red envelope collector. Simultaneously there's another, the person that calls family a white Jewish woman, the girl that spiritually transformed into a woman, and the

adult whose obligations are to pray. Now as I look in the mirror I see one person. I am not confused about who I am anymore. I am Asian. I am Jewish. I am White. I am Willow.

Family Recipe

Olimar Rivera Noa

Dishes, forks, knives, spoons, and glasses clicking against each other. People talking, the cash register opening and closing, the phone ringing, the blender screaming around the place, the beef and the eggs on the griddle demanding silence – ttssshhhhhhhhh. Silence please! A gust of odors fills the places the sounds do not cover. The smell of ham, pepper, onion, garlic, roasted chicken, *sofrito*, toasted bread, coffee, mango, papaya, banana, salt, green peppers, *recao*, plantains, parsley, pasta, tomato sauce, and *sazón* combine in the air, producing a delicious chemical reaction that results with, “Mmmmm, I am hungry.” The tables are in the middle of the room – eighteen tables and seventy two chairs, to be exact. On the left side, a counter with ten more chairs faces two blenders, one milkshake maker, two griddles, three fridges, a coffeemaker and the cash register. At the far end of the room, the kitchen – a temple where perfection is made, unless my mom is the one cooking. Café Don Juan is located in Gautier Benítez Avenue in Caguas, Puerto Rico.

Don Angel makes the sandwiches. María and my mom are in charge of cleaning the tables, attending to the customers, and, on some occasions, working at the cash register. Doña Katín, Mariluz, and María Josefina work in the kitchen. My sister and I are in charge of the deliveries. My dad, well, he is all over the place. When something is missing, he goes to Sam’s, Costco, or Oscar’s to buy it. When we have orders to deliver, he comes with us to take them to the place. When the cafeteria is too full, he goes to the kitchen to help. Café Don Juan, open from Monday to Saturdays from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm.

During the week, my sister and I have breakfast at the counter of the cafeteria. Every day we want something different: pancakes, oatmeal, omelet, a ham and cheese sandwich, hot chocolate, toast, fried eggs, boiled eggs, bacon, milk with *Nesquik* and more. Then, for our school snack, we have a turkey sandwich with Swiss cheese sprayed with a garlic sauce. What? We hate the food from our school’s dining room so that sandwich is also our lunch. My sister, as always, remembers ten minutes before it is time to go to school that she has homework she “forgot” to do. I, as always, end up doing her homework while my mom, as always, starts with the litany, “You need to learn some responsibility. This is the last time your sister does your work.” Yeah, of course. We all know, including my sister, that tomorrow she is also going to forget she had homework. Café Don Juan, a peaceful family environment.

Once we return school, which is three streets away from the cafeteria (approximately a five minute walk), we eat and then we help our parents clean

the tables and wash some dishes. This afternoon, my parents have news for us, “We are closing the cafeteria.”

Multiple factors combined to lead my parents to their radical decision. The mall that was constructed a few years ago, not so far from the cafeteria, was attracting our customers. People were looking for places where they could find free air conditioning, so my parents decided to install central air in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, two months after they bought it, someone stole the copper pipe that made it work. Then, the bills started to accumulate – our school tuition, the electricity bill, the water bill, the house mortgage, and the rent of the building space. My brother had just been born, and my aunt and my grandmother had just arrived from Cuba which increased the expenses in our house. Last but not least, the new car my mom and my dad bought in order to have more space for the whole family was also stolen. We were broke.

I was incredibly confused. What we were going to do with three new family members, no business, and a huge debt? The place where I practically grew up was closed. Never again would I feel the adrenaline of working there, running from one side to another, taking and delivering the orders. Never again would I be able to hear the sound of the busy and chaotic days. Never again would I be able to smell the delicious odors that emanated from the kitchen. I would miss being in the cafeteria so much. I was happy there; that was my temple and now, it was going to close.

My dad, on the contrary, was not worried at all. As soon as he closed the cafeteria he started a new project. He started making fruit cocktails, with watermelon on the bottom, pineapple, grapes, strawberries, mango, and a piece of kiwi on the top, making a fresh combination of sweet and sour fruits at a price of two dollars per bowl. He went to the mall, store by store, offering them to the employees. He started making twenty fruit cocktails each day, then forty, then fifty, then one hundred. Besides the fruit cocktails, he started selling custards, strawberries with chocolate, brownies, *tres leche* (a delicious moist cake with sweet cream) and sometimes lunch. My mom found a job in Zale’s Corporation and, little by little, everything started getting better. We were able to afford more things, buy better clothes, go out on Sundays, and make all the payments on time. However, I still felt like something was missing.

One day my dad was making dinner and he noticed that I was intrigued with what he was cooking, so he asked me if I wanted to help him. At first I helped him with the chopping the vegetables. The next day, I learned how to season the meats. After that, he taught me how to do the rice without burning it, like my mom does. Soon after, my sister joined the cooking lessons. Suddenly the whole family was in the kitchen again. We all share an authentic love for the food, a love that allows us to be closer as a family.

A prodigious culinary repertoire entertained our palates. *Alcapurrias*, *bacalaitos*, *pernil*, rice with *gandules*, *tostones*, fried plantains, yucca, *congris*, *pasteles*, chicken fricassee, *chuletas* (pork chops), rice, beans, salads, *mofongo*... The

combination of odors and flavors produced an inexplicable happiness in our house. The time to cook was family time. My sister chopped the vegetables, I seasoned the meats, my dad cooked it, my brother decorated the dessert and my mom... well, she washed the dishes.

Dishes, forks, knives, spoons, and glasses clicked against each other. My family sat at the table, we talked about everyone's day, the coquis kept us company with their symphony on the background, the pan cooled down on the counter as it pronounced its last words –sshhhhh. Silence arrived and the craziness of the day and the noise of the scene were replaced by the subtle smiles on my family's faces from that first bite.

A year ago, when I was packing my suitcase to go to college, I felt sad for having to leave my family behind but at the same time relieved because I knew I was prepared to embark on the college journey. I packed all the lessons I learned during those years of working next to my family. The work ethic that eventually got me a job and a scholarship at the university was next to my bottles of *adobo*. The persistence my posse had when trying to rescue the cafeteria and support our family was next to the *sofrito* my grandmother prepared for me. Next to the leaves of *recao* that my dad cut from the backyard was the responsibility my mom was trying to teach my sister every morning while we were having breakfast at the cafeteria. The memories of these experiences have become my family recipe and I carry these ingredients with me every day.

Taking a Stand &

(Cultural) Identity Crisis: "
The Internet & the Indian Diaspora "
Esha Dholia

The first truly Indian space I came across on the Internet was an email chain. The summer after fourth grade I visited India for my uncle's wedding, and some of my cousins and I got on so well we decided to exchange email addresses. For about six months we kept in constant touch. Though that thread was a nonsensical mess of neon-colored fonts, the early 2000's equivalent of bad memes, and general pointlessness, I knew there was something special about conversing with my family in this particular way. The kids at school had called my *mehendi* disgusting, and the temporary Indian accent I'd picked up in India had worn off; physically, I was as far from India as I possibly could have been, and the week it took me to adjust to the 12-hour time difference proved that. That email thread, though, was a piece of India I had that no one could touch, and no one did touch.

My story is not unique. The Internet is littered with tales like mine, of young South Asians struggling to balance being from countries that are both exoticized and mocked. There is a real lack of South Asian representation anywhere in the US, and save for a few sad stories of children in slums and Julia Roberts' *Eat Pray Love* excursion, India is nothing but an exotic mystery, especially for those who live in its diaspora. This is why the Internet is so important; as Dr. Madhavi Mallapragada, professor of communications and Asian studies, says, it provides people with access to resources and tools that may not necessarily be mainstream to explore and form connections with where they come from (Mallapragada 34). In response to prejudice towards and the essential erasure of its experiences in the US, the Indian diaspora began using the Internet to create specific spaces and resources to build communities and share experiences and ideas specific to the diaspora. Though it is argued by many that living in the Indian American diaspora can lead to the fragmentation of culture and a person's sense of cultural identity, the Internet is a force that brings people together and strengthens how they experience Indian culture. Consequently, the Indian American diaspora has been able to create for itself a new cultural identity that is built specifically on experiences unique to them.

Physically, the Indian diaspora refers to all those Indian communities that exist outside the physical borders of India. Despite its longevity in the US, the diaspora has a complicated relationship with itself because major forms of Indian and Indian American media – most obviously film and literature – constantly push that to be of the diaspora means to ‘lose’ one’s culture and sense of being Indian. The 2000 Bollywood film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* perfectly demonstrates this. Rahul, the protagonist, moves from India to London, and is shown to become by Indian standards ‘westernized;’ his values shift from family to money and work above all else. Films like this one insinuate that to leave India isn’t a good thing and results in losing an individual’s sense of culture.

The concept of culture itself is not easily defined. It is too multi-faceted and is experienced differently by everyone, and so a few words could never properly explain any single variety. Perhaps this is why the idea of ‘losing’ one’s culture is seemingly so scary; not practicing it in an expected and typical way can lead to others passing judgments that are just as difficult to deal with as the struggle that comes with balancing culture is itself. This isn’t surprising. In social anthropologist Steven Vertovec’s paper “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified among South Asian Religions,” he argues that a major proponent of diaspora is the conflicted identities of an individual between their ‘homeland’ and a second country in which they’re living (10). Vertovec’s claims are further supported by different literature. The book *Born Confused* by Indian American author Tanuja Desai Hidier relates the experiences of a young girl, Dimple, who struggles to balance being ‘Indian’ with also living in the US. Her struggle is one primarily based on trying to balance both cultures at the same time in spite of the emphasis by her family time and time again that to become ‘too American’ is to completely lose being Indian. Dimple’s and Rahul’s experiences are similar to mine and those of many of my diasporic friends and family – we’re told we’ll lose our culture if we become too ‘Westernized,’ but being Indian in the West is difficult because of the prejudice and lack of understanding most people have of India. In Dimple’s case, the protagonist’s white best friend Gwyn is a manifestation of the typical attitude non-South Asians have of South Asia. She loves saris and bindis, but scoffs at the prospect of arranged marriage; she likes the Indian culture when it’s convenient and ignores it when it’s not (Hidier 32). This is where the Internet comes into play; though it is not a conventional medium of connection, the Internet is a way by which diasporic Indians can connect back to and experience their culture without judgment or ignorance on anyone’s part.

Young Indian Americans in particular use the Internet as a tool to talk about the manifestation of cultural identity in the US, demonstrating how diasporic Indians do not lose their culture abroad. Sociologist Stuart Hall defines

cultural identity in several ways in his text “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” One of these definitions sees it “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’...which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (223). This definition assumes that all people of a certain culture practice it in the same way, and that this remains constant even with the increasing prevalence of immigration and shifting time. Hall argues this definition leads to a one-dimensional view of culture, when in reality culture is malleable and experienced differently by everyone. The motive behind an Indian American youth’s Tumblr blog, *Reclaim the Bindi*, is in part to shed light on this idea. One of her posts, which received 287 ‘likes’ and ‘reblogs’ on the site, discusses differences between the cultural identities of Indians living in India and Indians living abroad. She recognizes prejudices and internalized racism diasporic Indians experience, such as “[cringing] in embarrassment when your parents spoke your mother tongue to you in front of friends...[and] reclaiming your culture and identity from the same people who stared at you oddly when your mother spoke your native language in public [and now] have pillows with namaste written on them” (*Reclaim the Bindi*). There are qualities of culture that transcend borders like language and religion, but the way these characteristics manifest themselves in India and the US are very different. This is in part because Indian culture is the minority abroad versus native to India. Indian Americans are perhaps even more aware of the unique qualities that characterize their culture because of its foreignness, causing expression and discussion online like the one found on the *Reclaim the Bindi* blog. That this discussion about different experiences with culture is occurring shows that culture is not lost in the diaspora; in actuality, it is experienced in full and in a way that is colored by the minority status that comes with being Indian in the US. The acknowledgement of the variation in the ways culture is practiced abroad versus in India – and the consequent recognition of the pitfalls of one of Hall’s definitions of cultural identity – is the foundation for the adoption of a cultural identity unique to Indian Americans.

Perhaps one of the most interesting things to come from the American diaspora is the large presence of South Asian and Indian religions online. These websites are significant to the diaspora because they represent the growing prevalence of Indian culture in the US. The creation of this more tangible community relates to Hall’s second definition of cultural identity and is far closer to the actuality of how culture exists than the first. In this definition, cultural identity calls for “becoming” a member of a culture in order to “belong” (225). “Becoming” has to do with how someone experiences all the facets of his or her culture, and religion is certainly an elemental aspect of the Indian American one. These religions have existed for thousands of years, and as a result Hinduism, Jainism, and other traditionally South Asian belief systems are linked very closely

to South Asian ethnicity and culture. As a child, I recall being sent picture books from India about the mythology of different Hindu gods. I've never seen these books as religious texts or teachings, but an elemental part of my upbringing and a key player in my understanding where my family came from. Similarly, through participating in online religious communities, the diaspora can come together to "become" a part of the Indian culture in the context of the US.

In his essay "The Politics of History on the Internet: Cyber-Diasporic Hinduism and the North American Hindu Diaspora," Dr. Vinay Lal, a history professor at UCLA, discusses the inception and evolution of Hinduism in North America that is happening online. Lal mentions the existence of many different websites that specifically have to do with Hinduism, such as *alt.hindu* and *soc.culture.indian*, and claims they were created in the diaspora because of the billion people living in India, only one million individuals readily and consistently have access to the Internet (140, 154). Lal goes on to contrast Hinduism in the US versus India, claiming, "Hindus [in America] have embraced forms of worship pursued by only the most dedicated Hindus in India" (148). This dedication has led to Indian American Hindus creating websites to document and share religious practices, and the online Hindu community is apparently flourishing. Hinduism in and of itself is a very decentralized and large religion; there are thousands of deities responsible for thousands of different things, and there is no one singular text all Hindus agree on as the authority (152). I've seen this work to the advantage of my grandparents and older members of my family, who all immigrated to the US within the last twenty years or so. They use YouTube to listen to *bhajans*, Hindu devotional songs, and have full autonomy over their song choice. The easy accessibility of YouTube fits their lifestyle in the US, where the nearest temple is nearly an hour from their home. I believe the dependence my relatives place upon themselves and on YouTube to stay connected to their religion strengthens their sense of cultural identity and allows it to flourish. By Hall's second definition, they're been able to "be" culturally Indian because they use the Internet to integrate themselves into their culture and religion in the diaspora (254). Hinduism's vastness also benefits independent religious websites, which allow members of the Hindu community to consolidate and share their interpretations of the religion with one another. This leads to the forging of significant relationships within the diasporic community and an increased identification with the Indian culture. The commitment people have to the creation and maintenance of these sites demonstrates that diasporic Indians do not lose their culture.

In addition to these religious websites and resources, the Internet is home to a hub of social media platforms that allow diasporic Indians to network and form their own communities in the US as well as connect with family and friends

living abroad. By maintaining and building these relationships, diasporic Indians are able to preserve their senses of culture and cultural identities. First generation Indians are Indians who have grown up in India and moved to the US later on in their lifetime. Surabhi Goswami, a Digital Communications Officer with the Technical University of Denmark, wrote her MA thesis on the Indian diaspora's relationship with social media. In examining first generation Indians' usage of Facebook, Goswami found that this particular group of Indian immigrants tended to use the platform as "an alternative space for the diaspora to engage in identity and community construction, and...to provide the support structure and companionship of a 'virtual family away from home' (80). In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, first generation Indian Rahul is shown to avoid speaking to his estranged family in India and does not seem to have many Indian friends outside his family in London. Though this may have been the norm for Rahul, Goswami's study demonstrates that it certainly isn't so for many diasporic Indians. The formation of these communities – and the sense of 'home away from home' they provide – allow first generation Indians to remain connected to their culture by building relationships bases specifically on being Indian and being of the diaspora.

Though the way first generation Indians use the Internet is fairly different from the way second generation Indians use it, that social media and the Internet are major forces in shaping their cultural identities remains constant across age and time. Second generation Indians are born and raised in the diaspora, the children of first generation immigrants, and the formation of virtual communities like their parents' is based more on the specific experiences diasporic Indians face rather than the desire to forge a "virtual family." Janaki Tambe's YouTube series *Bad Indian* reflects this. In the first episode of her self-produced show, the 30-year-old second generation woman acts in scenes that mimic experiences members of the diaspora are all too familiar with; from the deliberate mispronunciation of her name by non-Indian coworkers, to being compared to other young Indian women of the same age, to enduring the judgment by older Indian family friends for being unmarried, *Bad Indian* does a good job of portraying some of the definitive aspects of the Indian American experience. It also does well displaying experiences of a typical young person in the US, like getting laid off or being unable to find an apartment. As a second generation Indian myself, I think being Indian American is very typical but simultaneously not typical at all, and it is this confusing hodgepodge of an experience that Tambe portrays so well and second generation Indians are able to so readily connect with. The series was well received, and in the comments section of the first episode several other self-proclaimed second generation Indians claimed to have found a lot to relate to. *Bad Indian* is a testament to the Indian diasporic experience and has been a means of bringing together diasporic individuals to

share and bond over these mutual experiences. This forging of a community and its significance resembles the “virtual families” of first generation Indians. The longevity of groups like these, that are inherently based on being Indian and being of the diaspora, prove just how powerful of a tool the Internet can be in influencing diasporic cultural identity. In particular, it is through the mass agreement of second generation Indians in their shared experiences and struggles as Indian Americans that shows how Indian culture survives in spite of large generational gaps. These individuals and myself recognize being Indian and aspects of a ‘traditional’ Indian upbringing as important tenets to their being Indian American, just as growing up in this US society was. Exposure to the Indian culture as children makes it possible for the diaspora to stay connected to it, but more than that the narrative diasporic individuals share, in which being Indian American is difficult and confusing as Tambe’s web series shows, strengthens the second generational cultural identification in being Indian.

The Indian culture has manifested itself in many different ways on the Internet. Religious and social communities are thriving and allow Indians in the US to engage with their culture in a way that suits the technology-dependent way of life in the US. Even though it has been argued that the Indian culture is forgotten by those living in the Indian American diaspora because they don’t experience and practice it in the same way Indians in India do, the Internet demonstrates this is not so. Through bringing together and forging communities in the diaspora, the Internet enables Indian Americans to create for themselves a cultural identity specific to their experiences as members of the diaspora.

The Berklee School of Music recently collaborated with renowned Indian composer A.R. Rahman – famed for his work on *Slumdog Millionaire* and other films – to cover some of Rahman’s most popular songs. Rahman’s contributions to the music industry are beloved across the globe, and so even though Berklee’s adaptations of his tunes were well-received in India, they were adored in the US and gained over a million views on YouTube. One of the songs covered was “Yeh Jo Des Hai Tera” – “This Land of Yours” – from the movie *Swades*. The film is about a NRI who travels back to India after living in the US for some years, and this tune chronicles the emotions he feels being back in his home country. The song is so important to me; I think its sentiments are ones all diasporic Indians who have struggled with being Indian abroad have had at some point: “Yeh jo des hai tera / Swades hai tera / Tujhe hai pukara / Yeh joh bandhan hai jo kabhi toot nahin sakta” (1-4). Directly translated: “this land of yours, this is your motherland. It is calling out to you, and the bond you share can never be broken.”

The students who perform this song are Indians of the diaspora themselves in one way or another. Some are in the US from India to study; others

are second generation Indians, hailing from Chicago or San Jose or other cities across America. In each of these students' faces is so much joy, so much love, for the song they were singing. And in the comments – which generally and especially on YouTube tend to be very negative – are words of praise, and understanding, and adoration. Non-resident Indians expressed their joy and love for this song that had been changed from its original state, melded and adapted to fit today's diaspora perfectly. This is the power of the Internet – it takes the vast beauty and richness of the Indian culture and makes it easily accessible to the diaspora via Google Chrome and a power cord. The Internet brings together and builds communities; the Internet reaffirms people's love in being Indian.

Learning to meld my Indian heritage with my American surroundings has been challenging, but I have realized that embracing where my family is from does not mean I belong in the US any less than anyone else. My skin is dark with melanin and my *mehendi* is the richest red; you can smell my culture on my skin and see it in my face today and every day. I am proud to be where I am from. It only took ten years and an email chain to realize that.

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Why Did We Care About Kacy Catanzaro?

Greg Schaefer

“Catanzaro, feet away from doing it,” *American Ninja Warrior* host Matt Iseman yelled, audibly excited for the historic moment to come.

“Do you think she smells victory here? Do you think she smells victory here?!” Iseman’s co-host, Akbar Gbaja Biamala shrieked into his microphone. Kacy Catanzaro, 24 years old, at 5 feet even, 100 pounds (Kacy), was about to set history, become a role model for women everywhere, and launch *American Ninja Warrior* above all of its competitors in ratings (Bibel).

American Ninja Warrior is a television game show of sorts, where the competitors must tackle obstacle courses of increasing difficulty. To make it to the national finals, each competitor must complete a regional qualifying course, followed by a regional finals course. At the national finals, usually held in Las Vegas, the competitors must conquer all four stages of the course to achieve total victory. This is a feat that had, at this point, only been accomplished in the Japanese version of the show, never before on American soil. With the competition’s growing popularity, however, many felt that this could be the year we crown a victor.

Now, hanging onto two red rings, Kacy swung her body effortlessly, and landed on the pad to finish the obstacle, dubbed the Ring Toss. “And she’s done it,” Iseman proclaims, barely audible over a screaming crowd. “Kacy Catanzaro, matching the best performance we’ve ever seen by a woman!”

Wait, what? *Matching the best performance?* The crowd is on their feet, clapping, whistling, and yelling, but she has yet to finish the course. The way the crowd was reacting, I thought she had finished the course.

I originally saw this clip, like many, as it made its way around the internet via social media. My initial reaction? I had to show my wife. This was incredible! It didn’t even occur to me that, amid all the excitement in the video, I was missing the elephant in the room: Why did I care about Kacy Catanzaro? She was slower than most of her competitors. Before she started the course, the announcers told us that she had never finished any course before, so she had no name recognition or reputation to uphold. Yet, as she advanced towards the next obstacle, nothing could have peeled my eyes from the screen.

We all know that gender roles in fitness and sports are very clear: there are some activities that are socially accepted as being masculine or feminine, such as baseball and softball, while others are considered neutral, like swimming and

tennis (Schmalz 538-539). When we are honest with ourselves, we know that even the neutral sports, which men and women more or less equally participate in, pique our interest more so when men compete than when women do. It appears, at a glance, that sports are dominated by men.

How did we get to this point, where we are servants to the notion of sport as a male area of expertise? Without realizing it, this idea is engrained in our heads well before we are old enough to take a stab at an *American Ninja Warrior* course. Knowing that the way gender roles are presented in the media had already been thoroughly researched, Emily Roper and Alexandra Clifton turned to children's books as a way to understand how we view women in sports, specifically in books that portray a female-athlete as a main character. Studying ten of these books, none based on factual events, several things become apparent. First, father figures, in most of the books, played the lead role of encouragement in their daughters' athletic endeavors, many also acting in a participatory role (Roper). Even though the main character participating in the sport was a girl, it was implied that such skills could not be learned from anyone but a man. Additionally, in three of these books, the female athletes are compared to their male counterparts, with the males as the standard for the females to continue working towards (Roper). Collectively, this paints a picture to our youth that women can participate in sports, but they need to find men to emulate and learn from if they want any measure of success. Furthermore, success might not be as big of an accomplishment if it is only over other women. It would seem that the expectations society sets for female athletes at a young age offer little variance from what persists leading up to and throughout adulthood.

With men understood to be the gatekeepers of the sporting universe, are our expectations for gender in sports beyond our control? While the sports we choose to participate in seem to be our choice, the ones we have available to choose from appear to be given to us by society. Schmalz's idea that "social norms dictate that men are expected to possess masculine characteristics and women are expected to possess feminine characteristics" (538) has become so engrained in our minds that we can't ignore when a girl makes the high school football team or when a guy tells you he is a cheerleader. It makes us feel good to tell the world that we are in favor of equality in all things, including sports, but we find ourselves surprised and intrigued every time we learn of such instances of violated gender roles.

What are we telling society when we choose to go against what we're told we should do in sports? Schmalz tells us the type of leisure or exercise one engages in is used as a means of communicating personal information to others (Schmalz 538). This is to say that in choosing to do a particular sport or activity, we are telling everyone around us something about ourselves; for example, a male quarterback for a high school football team would signify one's status as masculine. Schmalz goes on to say the risk associated with violating the type of exercise assigned to one's own gender is being assigned negative stereotypes

(Schmalz 538). Now imagine the quarterback is female. How does that change the perception and status of the individual? These negative stereotypes are given by everyone, consciously or not. If you, incorrectly, disagree with that idea, explain why my entire class roared with laughter upon learning I, a bulky, bearded, Marine Corps veteran, would be attending a Zumba class as a boundary-pushing experience for a writing assignment. This wouldn't be the last instance of shaming prior to my actually stepping onto the hardwood dance floor.

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I attended my Zumba class at Henderson Hall, a Marine Corps base, in Arlington, Virginia. Unable to locate where the class was being taught, I went to the front desk at the gym and asked the gentleman behind the counter for help. "Did you say Zumba," he asked, not hiding an ounce of judgment. I told him that was correct. Giving me a look of confusion, he pointed behind me and explained where I needed to go. Is it possible that, at 6'1", 220 pounds, I don't look like the typical Zumba student?

Having found the tiny dance room, the next hour consisted of my seven newest friends and me dancing to high-intensity music. Well, the seven women in the class were dancing; I was desperately trying to imitate the movements around me without falling flat on my face. Maria, the military wife next to me, told me that if I just kept counting to four with the music and timed all of my dance moves with it that I would do fine. The instructor sneaking looks at me in the mirror and stifling laughter while shaking her head confirmed what I thought: I looked ridiculous.

At the end of class, a few of the women took the time to introduce themselves before leaving. Every conversation, regardless of how it started or ended, had me being asked, "What made you want to come to Zumba?" The stereotypes were being thrown at me left and right. Collegiate peers, facility supervisors, and participants of Zumba all unanimously agree: I'm not "supposed" to do Zumba.

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"And now, the Warped Wall, standing between her and history!" The crowd had calmed slightly, starting chants to support Kacy. Her boyfriend stood off to the side, giving her last minute advice as she stared down Goliath. "Six seasons of *American Ninja Warrior*, no woman has ever completed a qualifying course." With a deep breath and body language that screamed, *I've got this*, Kacy sprinted at the wall that towered over her, nearly three times her height.

Step – step – step – step, lean back, jump and extend!

"Oooh! Her fingers just grazed the top of the wall, missing by inches!" The crowd "Oooh'd" and "Aaah'd" as she stumbled back to the bottom to regroup.

Looking at her boyfriend, he said something inaudible, to which she nodded. As she squared back up to the Warped Wall, silence consumed the crowd.

As I watched Kacy prepare for a second attempt, I couldn't help but notice her boyfriend's presence was subtly being made significant. He stood off to the side, but was continually zoomed in on, clapping and cheering her on. JoEllen Vrazel, PhD, Ruth P. Saunders, PhD, and Sara Wilcox, PhD, all professors in the fields of Exercise Science and Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior, used 43 studies that "identify key social-environmental influences on the physical-activity behavior of women" (Vrazel 3) in order to figure out when adult women feel exercise and physical activities are acceptable, and why. What caught my eye, in regards to Kacy Catanzaro, was this: "Results from qualitative research revealed that women perceived acceptance for physical-activity behavior from spouses and significant others as a necessary and essential component for allowing them to take time to participate in physical activity" (Vrazel 7). Watching the entire video, we see a clear example of this, with Kacy looking to her boyfriend between almost every obstacle on the course. It is almost as if, as the researchers argue, she needs his approval in order to succeed. To emphasize this dynamic, we see the producers ensuring the cameras notice him on the sidelines supporting her. Could the masses rally behind a woman if she didn't have her significant other's approval?

Step – step – step – step, lean back, jump and extend!

The hosts of *American Ninja Warrior*, along with the entire crowd, erupted as one. Matt Iseman, barely audible over the spectators, yelled, "YES! YES! SHE'S DONE IT! History has been made!" Kacy Catanzaro, former Division I Gymnast of the Year from Towson University, had firmly cemented herself in another sport, becoming the first woman to climb the Warped Wall and complete a qualifying course.

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"Now finishing the qualifying course was one thing, but she'll have to get past four more incredibly difficult obstacles to complete this finals course," Matt Iseman informs us. It was time for the regional finals to begin, where four additional obstacles are added on to the end of the original qualifying course. Kacy looks to her left, blows a kiss to her boyfriend, and the bell sounds for her to begin.

With the regional qualifiers completed and the regional finals in full swing, Kacy was no longer the only female ninja-hopeful in the media. Meagan Martin and Michelle Warnky both completed regional qualifiers as well. Comments such as, "The women have arrived," dominated the commentators' narrative. As many caught the *American Ninja Warrior* bug, thanks in part to the viral spread of Catanzaro's efforts, my curiosity chased it. For the life of me, I could not figure out why we cared about it.

That is a lie. I had known all along why we cared. It's shallow, but it's simple. We were following Kacy Catanzaro and her friends because they were women, playing a man's game. While we said to each other how great it would

be to see one of them win, we knew in the back of our minds that it was only a matter of time until the men outlasted them. How did we know this to be true?

I watched, in depth, every one of Kacy, Meagan, and Michelle's runs. In Kacy's opening run, the Denver Qualifier, she takes 5:26 to finish the course. In that time, the announcers say "woman" or "women" ten times. They mention her gender every 32.6 seconds, on average. This is the episode that was made into a social media sensation, blazing across the internet like a California wildfire. Her performance was nowhere close to the best time, but we were constantly reminded she was a woman. After all, something had to make her interesting.

Kacy and Meagan ran three courses each: their respective regional qualifiers and finals, and the national final. Michelle only participated in the regional qualifier and final, so between the three of them, they ran eight courses. In a composite time of 31:19, the words "woman," "women," or "female" were used 60 times. That breaks down to a gender role being highlighted by commentators every 31.3 seconds, on average. Contrasted with a gender role only being used in the top five men's runs every 87.8 seconds, on average, it becomes crystal clear that the interest with women is not how well they perform, so much as their presence in the competition. Hearing that women are competing, we get sucked in.

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Why are we pulled in by this, and why is it exciting to have women in the limelight? According to a 2013 study that looked into how gender roles and stereotypes in sports affect individuals, women account for forty percent of sports participation, whereas only five to eight percent of sports coverage is dedicated to women's sports (Chalabaev). This implies that we can't satiate our hunger for sports solely, or even mostly, with women's athletics. It is becoming increasingly clearer that women act as a side show in this male dominated arena, capable of attracting attention for short, unsustainable periods of time. Whereas Americans may watch most of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, more commonly known as March Madness, the NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Game will gain only a fraction of the attention. Since women in sports don't have the media appeal that men have, the next step would be to see what kind of ratings jump Catanzaro generated.

In 2013, the fifth season, before Kacy was in the competition, *American Ninja Warrior* aired on Mondays, from 9-10PM ET, with ratings floating around 5.25 million viewers each week (Bibel). It is important to consider that, while Kacy and other women did participate in this season, none of them were able to produce any results worth highlighting. All the finishers were men and ratings were steady from the first episode to the last, never hitting more than 5.5 million viewers in an episode. The theme of all-male success varied little from the first four seasons, giving potential new viewers little to get hooked on.

In 2014, NBC made the decision to extend the show to a two-hour segment, airing Monday nights from 9-11PM ET (Bibel). Prior to Kacy

Catanzaro's debut, the show's ratings started out around where they left off, at 5.15 million (Bibel). We were getting the same product as the previous season, and the same people were tuning in to watch it. Nothing was happening to bring in new viewers. Several episodes into the season, Kacy's qualifying run went viral and was being talked about by the masses. Her first episode created a surge in ratings, and by the end of the season, *American Ninja Warrior* was regularly being viewed by 6.1 to 6.5 million people (Bibel). Was the twenty percent increase in viewership because of her? The competition was, and still is, dominated by men, but, when the word got out that a woman was attempting the impossible, we tuned in to see how long she could hang with the men. Surely no one expected her to achieve total victory by completing all four stages at the national finals.

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"...and the amazing run of Kacy Catanzaro comes to an end at the Jumping Spider." The hosts barely sounded surprised, as Kacy pulled herself out of the water, having been unable to hold herself between the two vertical boards suspended mid-air. Their soft tone and calm demeanor sent the message that it was simply a matter of time; the women were expected to fail.

Everywhere we look, we see signs of gender roles dictating who should be doing what:

Girls going out for the football team. *Shouldn't they be trying out for the dance team?*

Men asking for directions to Zumba classes. *Don't they know we have a weight room?*

Jenn Brown, co-host on *American Ninja Warrior*, closed her final interview with Kacy Catanzaro after her failure to complete the National Finals course in Vegas with, "Well, I think I can speak for everybody, all the ninjas, and everybody at home, that we loved watching you run, and we cannot wait to see you back next year."

"I'll definitely be here."

As will America, Kacy.

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Welcome to the Developing World,
(Insert Do-Gooder's Name Here)

Danielle Smith

"Ugh. Mom look at this photo Melody V. put up of her mission trip to Guatemala. I can't stand people like her," I mindlessly say to my mother over breakfast one morning.

*My mom looks at me in disbelief. "Excuse me?" she says, "People like her are trying to make a **difference** in this world."*

"Is she actually trying to make a difference or is she using those children for a photo op?" I retort.

*My mother becomes flustered and launches into a debate about how I think charity work is awful and I shouldn't be so hard on people who are out there **seriously** trying to make a difference, and how the liberal institution I attend has transformed my beautiful, optimistic mind into this pile of cynical mush. I remain silent, as this conversation has failed to come across as logical to my mom numerous times. I don't blame her. Most people truly want to believe everyone who goes on these trips or signs up for the Peace Corps are honestly doing it for the benefit of others. Sadly, this is not the case as I've come to realize over the last couple of years. My question is: Why?*

There is a bustle of students passing in and out of the airy SIS atrium at American University. Some are running to class, some have their heads bent, texting or checking email; others walk with coffee in hand, engaged in a discussion with their friends. More often than not, these conversations are centered on one thing: the rest of the world. While this seems like it would be more than "one thing," to these students, the world is their oyster, the one thing they care about, and the one thing they decided to spend \$60,000 a year to study, explore, discuss, and eventually, exploit. Yes, these students all have one thing in common: they wish to be the movers and shakers out in the "real world." Ever since their heads were filled with the wise words of Gandhi, "Be the change you wish to see in the world," droves of students flock to AU with high hopes that they'll become the next Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, or David Gregory.

Little do they know their chances of winning the presidency, let alone finding a job, are slim. College graduates know they have been handed a pile of crap in regards to the job market, economy, environment, foreign relations, and beyond. There is no apparent hope for the future. Feeling hopeless, students decide they need to do something in order to realize this dream of making the world a better place. A majority of the time, they turn to institutions and organizations such as Teach for America, Greenpeace, or the Peace Corps to fill this void in their lives. Many are stunned when I interject into their conversations

with my bold claims to check out the legitimacy of these organizations and their purposes for doing what they do.

Yes, mom, in fact, sending me to American University, in Washington D.C., our nation's capital, did help me realize these notions were jaded, but just not in the way you'd think. American University is ranked as the second highest medium sized supplier of Peace Corps volunteers for the year 2015, falling behind Western Washington by only six volunteers. This hallowed and proud service organization has been in business since March of 1961, sending its prodigies to over 140 countries to do good deeds. The Corps, which has been hailed as the saving grace of the developing world, appears at surface level to be all about those in need, when really most are no different from the thousands of voluntourists who have been flooding *Facebook* with tales and pictures of their adventures.

I looked around at my peers, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, eager to step out into the real world to make their impact, and I slowly begin to realize one thing similar in all of them: they boasted about wishing to better the world and make *their* impact on the world in *their* own way. They know where *they* wanted to help, how *they* plan on getting there, the classes *they* are taking, and what *they* want to major in so *they* can use *their* new skills to make *their* dreams a reality. When I first met these students, I wanted to ask each one how they had become so selfless, but soon realized they weren't actually empathetic. They possessed a purely self-centered notion to make change *they* saw fit. There is a lot of commentary about the "them," and not so much about the people they wish to help. In a group of students that appeared to be all about helping the other, they rarely mentioned, let alone thought about those in need.

I have brought this up to my peers on several different occasions. Each time, their stunned faces and blank stares answer my inquiry of their purposes for enlisting in the Peace Corps. They become taken back by my comments and cannot believe I would ever suggest such blasphemy about their valiant efforts. Still I wonder - if they truly are going into this service for the good of others, why not just say that? Why get so offended? I often believe this shock is due to the fact they probably haven't thought of this themselves. They somehow managed to suppress this notion in their minds, convince themselves they truly are in it for "the greater good," and I'm just this hyper-judgmental person who kicks babies and thinks charity work is the root of all evil. Robert L. Strauss had a similar experience when he wrote a *New York Times* Op-Ed questioning the legitimacy of many of the younger volunteers abroad. He received several letters to the editor, all responses from former Peace Corps volunteers, each viciously defending their experiences abroad. How could he be so quick to nonchalantly attack this great organization? He, the Peace Corps country director of Cameroon for six years, *clearly* did not have any idea about what the organization stood for or how it operated. Strauss was clearly in the wrong for voicing an opinion contrasting the norm.

Perhaps as historian Michael R. Hall stated in his article discussing the Peace Corps' effects domestically and internationally, "the Peace Corps symbolizes an ideal form of American altruism divorced from the mandate of direct political and economic benefit of the US, yet imbued with the best attributes of its national character." The Peace Corps has come to stand for America and her values as a whole: helping those in need. This institution has become a lens for the American people to view not only their country, but also themselves. Anyone who bad-mouths it does not share the same values as those in the Corps, and therefore is un-American.

After World War Two, Americans believed it was up to them to rebuild war torn Europe, as well as aid developing nations since the rest of the West was trying to support their own economies again. This shift in responsibility from the traditional powers of Great Britain and France to America brought a new vision of the world into view, a vision which has been held to high standards ever since. College graduates and dropouts alike flood to Peace Corps registration offices to enlist their service for whatever length of time needed, wherever needed.

Strauss argues many volunteers are not qualified or driven for a specific area of aid and apply simply to apply, giving themselves at least the impression they are making a difference. He states a reevaluation of member eligibility "would reveal that while volunteers generate good will for the United States, they do little or nothing to actually aid development in poor countries." Some might argue this is just one man's opinion, but it is also the opinion of a man who has directed and administered an entire country's Peace Corps branch for six years. While it is all well and nice to listen to the returned volunteers boast tales of the lives they've impacted, hearing this negative opinion from a head honcho holds a little more weight in my book.

Like my mother, many people have asked me, if not us, then whom? Who is going to save the "poor Third World?" I often retort with the idea that the country might not need "saving" as many people like to claim. Many of the countries under scrutiny from Western "saviors" have either just recently received their independence from colonization or had a shift in governments that has allowed them to enter the free markets and expand their economies. They haven't had the same amount of time as America has had to grow and develop. By sending in Peace Corps volunteers, their path to development is practically determined and then reinforced by the volunteers who are expected to share a polished image of America and her values.

For a good amount of the time, these countries have also been torn apart by a war the U.S.A. and other NATO nations may have started or prolonged. For example, after the United States military helped disperse the student protestors in Chile prior to the Pinochet era, it was added to the Peace Corps list of countries that needed "saving." Afghanistan and Iran were recently added to the growing list of countries visited, both areas of recent conflict involving the U.S. military. Taking an educated guess, I can bet the two events aren't mere coincidences.

There seems to be a pattern involving U.S. involved or perpetuated conflicts and the Peace Corps involvement, more than likely due to the fact one of the Peace Corps' goals is to preserve other culture's perceptions of America.

Many former volunteers, including Saral Waldorf, have suggested reorganizing the Peace Corps to choose either acting as an educational gauntlet for people of other cultures to learn about America and vice versa, or limit the eligibility of workers to trained professionals and assist with their placement in other countries. Their current goal of doing both has various flaws, mostly organizationally, but also philosophically. Though the Corps brags of being an independent organization, it truly is no more than an extension of U.S. diplomacy efforts through undertrained, unpaid, and more often than not, underqualified volunteers. This too has received harsh criticism from past volunteers, all stating that while they were under qualified, they did the best they could with what they were given.

This mindset reinforces the idea the Peace Corps are not only a representation of America's values and image, but also a reflection of the volunteers themselves. It is time to move beyond the *me* narrative, and move towards the *them* narrative when it comes to service work. I don't blame people who have this point of view, but I encourage them to truly investigate their motives and ask what they are looking to get out of the service they wish to do. If their answer has an "I" or "me" in it, I highly suggest staying home. Donating from your couch will have a more powerful impact than trying to aid the developing world with the wrong mindset.

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Basic Bitches in the Workplace

Carly R. Thaw

Abstract

Women are constantly under strict scrutiny in terms of how they conduct themselves in a professional atmosphere. Even though in recent years there has been a massive surge in feminist thought, there has also been a surge in negative female stereotypes and stigmatization. In this paper, I explain the cultural phenomenon of the Basic Bitch and how it fits into the swirling and conceptual idea of third-wave feminism and, more importantly, how the Basic Bitch fits into the professional sphere.

“Yes, I’ll take a pumpkin spiced latte with extra whipped cream please.” If I told you that the person who ordered that drink was my fifteen-year-old brother and not an eighteen-year-old white girl from Scottsdale, would you believe me? The stigma of the Basic Bitch goes beyond association of material items. Because of the connotation that accompanies the random items that are associated with being “basic,” women and girls who want to escape being labeled as a stereotype must completely eliminate all association with any of the items deemed “basic.” These items range from holiday drinks (the pumpkin spiced latte specifically) – well, pretty much anything pumpkin spice flavored – to yoga pants, to Ugg boots, and the list goes on. These stereotyped materials don’t necessarily hold a bad connotation; they just hold a very specific female identity.

There are endless *Buzzfeed* lists and how-to blogs on being or becoming a Basic Bitch. The Basic Bitch is socially savvy. She loves to party and just can’t wait for fall! She is fun, but she is not serious. But what happens when the so-called Basic Bitch wants to compete for a high-paying managerial position? In this scenario, the identification as a Basic Bitch may not only hold her back, it may hinder any professional progression, because who wants to hire someone who isn’t serious? On the flipside, “bro,” the equally materially-associated masculine stereotype holds none of the stigmatizing qualities of that of the Basic Bitch. According to Gene Demby’s NPR analysis, “bro’ has evolved into a shorthand for a specific kind of fratty masculinity. Baseball cap with the frayed brim (possibly backward), sky-blue oxford shirt or sports team shirt, cargo shorts,

maybe some sandals¹ or boat shoes” (Demby). In other words, “bro” is just an appearance-based term of endearment. In an article for *The Guardian*, Daisy Buchanan argues that the best thing to do is just embrace the stereotype – like the bro – as a way to combat the stigmatization (Buchanan). While this is all well and good, I argue that the label itself is part of the problem. It creates a divide and isolates specific groups of people – good or bad.

While the trendy label of the Basic Bitch is goofy and oh-so-relatable, it raises the bigger question of how our culture is handling gender stigmatization and stereotyping. In this paper I will explore why, in a budding surge of women’s empowerment, women still have to constantly adapt the ways that they behave based on perceptions that stem from existing social stereotypes. I want to explore the hoops women must jump through in order to progress in the professional sphere, especially if they enjoy surfing the wedding section of Pinterest and grabbing a skinny vanilla latte before yoga class. I am not going to look at the racial aspect of the Basic Bitch stereotype, as that is an entirely different, albeit important, angle. I am going to be focusing on the stereotype as it applies to gender specifically. I argue that constructing social barriers that stigmatize very specific groups of people and “things” actually detracts from the steps taken to achieve gender diversity in the professional landscape and even strengthens the ever-looming glass ceiling².

Contextualizing the Author

Before I begin, I want to clarify where I am coming from. I am a nineteen-year-old freshman in college. I was brought up in classic middle-class America. Both of my parents work: My mom is an occupational therapist and my dad is an engineer. They are, and have always been, very concerned with my success as a “working woman.” I grew up surrounded by feminists (both of my grandmothers were active participants in the second-wave of feminism³). I was brought up under the assumption that I would go to college and enter the professional world as an adult. There was never any question as to what my future would be.

As a child, I never thought that the sheer fact that I was a woman would hinder my success, but as I got older, the evidence of gender disparity became clearer to me. I also had never really thought about the girlie stereotype as something that would hold me back, but I knew I didn’t fit it.

I am most certainly a tomboy. I have developed my own alternative feminine style as I have gotten older, but as a young child, my wardrobe consisted of basketball shorts and t-shirts. I don’t fit the stereotype that is now considered the “Basic Bitch” so I’m safe, right? Wrong. As I began to apply for jobs and go out in public alone, I became more and more aware of how I was presenting myself and what other people thought of me, even though I insisted that I was

not affected by social pressures. Everyone is. I may not have submitted to the mainstream pressures, but the inevitable criticisms of my capabilities because I am a woman affect me.

This realization that there was nothing I could do about female stigmatization really hit me my junior year of high school. I had just wrapped up a production of *Legally Blonde The Musical* – which is, simply put, a show about a Basic Bitch becoming a successful lawyer in the face of adversity. I played the part of one of lead character Elle Woods’s sorority sisters. At that time, my hair was very blonde and came down to the middle of my back. In this show, I wore it in a straight ponytail on top of my head. My costume was a pink mini-skirt and a tank top with sorority letters on it. I entertain a wardrobe of predominantly gray and beige, so this smattering of fluorescent colors and tight-fitting clothes was not consistent with my personal taste. Looking at myself in the mirror, however, I began to get a clear understanding of what the stigmatization of wardrobe items can do to self-perception. I looked dumb. Unintelligent. This intrusive thought startled me; there I was, judging myself based on my own appearance.

I spent hours in front of the mirror changing my clothes and redoing my hair before my first “real” job interview. I wanted to make sure that I looked professional – without looking like I was trying too hard, and original – without looking like a crazy person. I wanted to make sure my hair was put together – without looking like I was going to prom, and that I spoke with purpose – without sounding like a peppy cheerleader, or worse, a bossy bitch. I rehearsed over and over again the answers to possible questions about my resume – which I was still unsatisfied with.

What if on my resume, they think that where I worked at a daycare center, I was just a glorified babysitter? Sometimes I even tutored them! What if where I put that I was the secretary of my student council, they think I was like a 1960s subordinate office secretary? I basically ran that council! How will they know I was serious about all of the positions I held? These were all questions that dominated my thoughts for days before my interview, not because I lacked confidence or didn’t believe in myself, but because I was so worried that they would think I was just another silly blonde girl that I bordered on overcompensation.

The Basic Bitch

So what does that mean, the Basic Bitch? According to Maggie Lange’s *New York Magazine* article, the Basic Bitch is “the opposite of the Bad Bitch, or the Dope Bitch” (Lange). Got it? No? In more academic terms, the “Basic Bitch” is an American colloquialism used as a derogatory term towards women who fall

into certain social stereotypes. It is a term that has gained traction in the last five years to describe “unoriginal behaviors” of women.

Unlike me, the truly “Basic Bitch” is not afraid to own the hyper-feminine aesthetic. In a New York Magazine article, Noreen Malone writes that “[the Basic Bitch] expresses traditionally feminine desires, like wanting to get married or to have kids.” Malone concludes that the Basic Bitch “likes what she likes and she doesn’t care if it doesn’t make her outwardly special” (Malone). I agree with this feminist take on the stereotype, but will add that the problem is not with the definition; the problem is with the connotation. As Lange flatly puts it, “The Basic Bitch is inauthentic” (Lange). Malone adds, “it seems to me that while what [the Basic Bitch] pretends to criticize is unoriginality of thought and action, most of what *basic* actually seeks to dismiss is consumption patterns... without dismissing consumption itself” (Malone). So, simply put, the Basic Bitch is materialistic and always on the bandwagon.

This materialism isn’t just a general love of shopping when referring to the Basic Bitch. In an article about the cult-culture around Starbucks Coffee, Visakan Veerasamy’s theorizes that “the Starbucks experience becomes something to aspire towards, a sort of comforting indulgence. You drink coffee, but you treat yourself to a Starbucks. Celebrities drink Starbucks because it’s a status symbol” (Veerasamy). I argue that this Starbucks culture can be extended to the more extensive list of materials associated with the Basic Bitch. There is a very specific collection of “things” that have been deemed “basic” and so carry with them a stigma. Malone details the nuances of what entails “basic” materialism.

Basic, according to the *BuzzFeed* quizzes and College Humor videos that wrested the term from the hip-hop world and brought it into the realm of white-girl-on-white-girl insults, means someone who owns things like Uggs and North Face and leggings. She likes yogurt and fears carbs (there is an exception for brunch), and loves her friends, unless and until she secretly hates them. She finds peplum flattering and long (or at least shoulder-grazing) hair reliably attractive. She exercises in various non-bulk-building ways, some of which have inspired her to purchase special socks for the experience. She bought the *Us Weekly* with Lauren Conrad’s wedding on the cover. She Pins. She runs her gel-manicured hands up and down the spine of female-centric popular culture of the last 15 years, and is satisfied with what she feels. She doesn’t, apparently, long for more (Malone).

Based on Malone’s description, the Basic Bitch is satisfied with her social position, so why does it carry such a negative stigma?

The label of “Basic Bitch” holds significantly more weight than any other generic label would. It is a cultural phenomenon. Cathy Bakewell and Mitchell

Vincent-Wayne touch on this phenomenon in their article on Generation Y consumerism. They expound that “generation Ys have been brought up in an era where shopping is not regarded as a simple act of purchasing. The proliferation of retail and product choice has resulted in a retail culture where acts of shopping have taken on new entertainment and/or experiential dimensions” (Bakewell). I feel what these new dimensions that Bakewell and Vincent-Wayne are referring to are the levels of social connotations that come with different consumerist habits.

The habits of the Basic Bitch are obvious and identifiable, but still somehow hold a demeaning quality. We use the term “basic” as an unwarranted, lazy insult. Malone observes: “*basic* rolls beautifully off the tongue. It’s a useful insult... It derives its power from the knowledge that if you recognize someone or something as basic, you probably, yourself, aren’t it” (Malone). One major flaw with Malone’s observation is that even if I fit none of the major materialistic qualities of a Basic Bitch, I will still be presumed intellectually inferior if I go to class in yoga pants. The dictionary definition of the Basic Bitch is vague and relies on cultural evolution to carry that image. As Kraeyshawn⁴ so eloquently concludes in Lange’s article, “you can smell a basic bitch from a mile away. You can smell that bitch’s perfume. A basic bitch is just someone who likes what’s typical to like. The radio puts stuff on the radio that they think is typical and you should like it, and that’s something a basic bitch would like. She likes those normal brands and wears them all the time because that’s some basic shit” (Lange).

Basic Feminism: Getting To Know The Third Wave

Now that I have fleshed out the requirements of the stereotype, it is important to look at it in the context of modern feminism. The up-and-coming feminist movement has been controversially deemed the “third-wave” of feminism. The easiest way to explain Third-Wave Feminism is through Joan C. Williams’s theory of “Difference Feminism.” In her article entitled “Deconstructing Gender,” Williams explains “the basic insight of ‘difference’ feminists: that gender exists, that men and women differ as groups” (Williams). Difference Feminism and Third-Wave Feminism relate in that they both focus on individuality of women as opposed to radicalization. In her article on the defense of feminist individuality, R. Claire Snyder gives this concept the name of Choice Feminism and defines it as “the idea that feminism should simply give women choices and not pass judgment on what they choose” (Snyder-Hall, 255). Simply put, Third-Wave Feminism, Choice Feminism, and Difference Feminism all take a nuanced look at feminism that basically dictates that all women should be able to act however they feel most comfortable without fear of judgment.

Third-Wave Feminism sparks controversy because it argues that women who are content living a domestic life for example, should not be judged or ridiculed for succumbing to the patriarchy⁵. This type of thinking would not fly with the more radical and, in William's words, "sameness"-oriented⁶, Second-Wave Feminists. The third wave of feminism is an attempt to include all levels of femininity. According to another article by Snyder, more specifically on Third-Wave Feminism, "Third-Wave Feminism emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political" (Snyder 176). In other words, third-wave feminism is more about women's freedom than women's domination.

The third-wave of feminists isn't a defined generation; it is a subgroup of feminists who have emerged from the more generationally-defined second-wave. In her article, Amber E. Kinser does an excellent job of contextualizing the modern or "third-wave" feminist movement. She explains that feminism is "an ongoing process, ebbing and flowing, slowing and quickening its pace in succession" (131). She is explaining how feminism is ever-present but has moments of acceleration. Catherine M. Orr analyzes the most recent "flow" in her article entitled "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave." She explains that "the earliest mention of the term 'third wave' took place in the mid-eighties" (Orr). In other words, it is a fairly new term. Snyder expands on the nature of these feminists in her third-wave article by saying that "third-wavers claim to be less rigid and judgmental than their mothers' generation, which they often represent as antimale, antisex, anti-femininity, and antifun" (Snyder 179). She is saying that third-wave feminists more freely acknowledge that some women are just inherently feminine, but that doesn't make them weak. The idea of femininity being associated with weakness is a whole other issue that I could write an entire book on, but for the purposes of this paper, I am focusing specifically on the association of professionalism with masculinity.

This masculinity/power dynamic is what second-wave feminists are most concerned with – be the same as men in order to succeed. Third-wave feminists are more concerned with success as an individual. It is interesting to acknowledge the overlap of the second and third waves of feminism. Snyder expands that the young women of the 1980's and 1990's "are the first generation for whom feminism has been entwined in the fabric of [their daily] lives" (Snyder 175). Third-wavers are the children of second-wavers. The concept of women's empowerment is ingrained in the minds and practices of these women. It is only because the first and second waves of feminism were so radical, that we are finally able to attempt a nuanced view of feminism.

If we follow this trend of free and individually empowering feminism, then why is the Basic Bitch constantly being ridiculed? Like I said before, third-

wave feminism is not necessarily a generational thing; therefore, a large portion of the population is not even aware that hyper-feminine stay-at-home moms can be feminists at all. The housewives of the 1950s and 60s would never be considered a part of the second wave of feminism. Snyder explains that “third-wavers feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise), and actively play with femininity. Girl power, or girlie culture, is a central—yet contested—strand within the third wave” (Snyder, 179). It is contested because, historically, “girlie” and “feminist” were never synonymous. The majority of the argument for the importance of inclusiveness in the third wave feminist movement is the acknowledgement that women are inherently different from men – but not inferior to them.

It is the aforementioned difference that I am going to be speaking to for the remainder of this paper. In her article on the dilemmas of the feminist academic, Sherry Sabbarwal frankly observes: “Feminism can be defined as the doctrine advancing the view that women are systematically disadvantaged and are advocating a collective or individual struggle for equality. Defined this way, feminism is a political position” (Sabbarwal 267, 268). Basically what she is saying is that feminism is so much more than women wanting to be taken seriously: it is a movement fighting for the fair and equal treatment of all humans.

Basic Professionals: Basic Bitches In The Workplace

Based on the context that I have provided in the first two sections, I argue that the stereotype of the Basic Bitch has caused a major roadblock in the third wave of feminism. Even without the added stigmatization of women who fit certain social constructs, women’s achievement in the professional landscape has historically been a struggle. In his article, John Cassidy analyzes the nature of the glass ceiling. He explains that “despite the progress that has been made in promoting gender equality in the workplace, it sometimes seems like only superwomen break through the glass ceiling.” He goes into great detail about how even though it is becoming easier for women to climb the ladder to elite professionalism, they don’t stay there for long. He posits that “over the past thirty years, the holes in the glass ceiling have grown a lot bigger, and that many more women have clambered through them. Despite these improvements, though, the ceiling remains intact: women still make up less than a fifth of the economic elite” (Cassidy). To steal Cassidy’s term, beyond the glass ceiling is a paper floor⁷.

Now, if we add in the stigmatization of the Basic Bitch to a woman trying to advance professionally, we run into even more trouble. In her book *Wonder Woman: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection*, Debora Spar articulates the challenges that women face in some of the top-tier professions. She concludes that even though the women who achieve these heights are immensely successful,

the women who “had it all”... still had lives that were fundamentally different from and more difficult than men’s. They were still, and almost always, in the minority. They were still dodging comments and innuendoes that took them aback” (Spar, 6). I am going to go ahead and say that the Basic Bitch would be a prime candidate for such innuendos, and for this, would be unfairly judged based upon her looks and interests.

Even though feminism is evolving to encompass all women and all of their interests, labels like the Basic Bitch are preventing the movement from truly making headway. John Colombotos’s analysis of sex and professionalism breaks down common assumptions of women in the workplace. One assumption he cites is that “for the majority of women teachers, especially those who are married, their work roles are secondary to their family roles as sources of personal identity” (Colombotos). Now, if I take that assumption and compare it to what Malone described as traits of the Basic Bitch: “[the Basic Bitch] expresses traditionally feminine desires, like wanting to get married or to have kids,” a startling pattern begins to form.

Let’s say a woman fits all of the traits of “basicness.” She loves her Starbucks, and just started this super rad new kale diet, but she also works full time at a successful insurance company, and is highly qualified to move up the executive ladder. Based on what Malone observed – that the Basic Bitch desires a traditional family – and how Colombotos explained that people assume that women who want families will not perform in a professional setting as well as those who are not interested in traditional gender roles, this woman automatically loses a significant portion of her credibility. All of this is based solely on the fact that she is labeled based on her appearance.

We learn as children to never judge a book by its cover. A study published in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* reveals that labeling creates subconscious biases toward or against those who fall within the defined barriers of a stereotype (Jussim). Stigmatizing stereotypes like the Basic Bitch are what hold the feminist movement back. The third-wave feminists are doing their best to acknowledge that the feminine aesthetic is something that women should be comfortable expressing if they so choose, but there is only so much they can do. Women should not have to masculinize their wardrobes or censor their interests in order to succeed in the professional landscape. Buchanan resolves that “dismissing all cultural feminine signifiers might look like a feminist act, but it's rude” (Buchanan). I agree. To boil it all down, women should never have to choose between professionalism and femininity. Individuality is what makes the world interesting; so let’s capitalize on that instead of judging capability on arbitrary stereotypes.

Notes

¹ The *Urban Dictionary* defines the mandal (man-sandal) as “a men's summer shoe that consists of black or brown leather that covers more than 50% of the foot, buckles, and [has] a thick sole” (Urban Dictionary).

² Glass ceiling: the term used for the invisible barrier that prevents women and members of minority groups from achieving top-tier professional positions (Merriam-Webster).

³ Amber E. Kinser gives a detailed account of the second wave of feminism in her book. She explains that “the ‘Second-Wave Feminism’ title was coined by Marsha Lear when women of the 1960s sought to connect their ideas to those as reasonable, and by then noncontroversial, as the right to vote... [It] gave activist women of the late '60s the double-rhetorical advantage of cultivating new ideas while simultaneously rooting them in older, more established ground [that the suffrage-oriented first wave developed]” (Kinser 129).

⁴ “Kreayshaw” is the stage name for Natassia Zolot, a rapper and director from Oakland, California (Kreayshaw). In her song “Gucci Gucci,” she references Basic Bitches with the lyrics: “Gucci Gucci, Louis Louis, Fendi Fendi, Prada. The basic bitches wear that shit, so I don't even bother.”

⁵ The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the patriarchy as a “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; *broadly*: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power” (Merriam-Webster). I, however, am using the more colloquial reference that the *Urban Dictionary* defines as “a social organization that grants power to men and oppresses women through political, social and economic institutions. Harmful side effects include the gender binary, unequal wages and Rush Limbaugh” (Urban Dictionary).

⁶ Williams defines “Sameness Feminists” as feminists who “focus on the similarities between individual men and individual women... [and] advocate ‘gender-neutral’ categories that do not rely on gender stereotypes to differentiate between men and women” (Williams 837).

⁷ The “paper floor” refers to the “tendency for women who did very well [professionally] one year to fall off the next” (Cassidy).

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Entering the Scholarly Conversation &

Revival

George Gu

On the morning of a day like any other, you open your eyes to the sight of your home's stone ceiling. You walk outside. Small children play in the fields, and the chirps of birds animate the air. You check your mail and see you have received a request from the grand elder to meet at the top of the village. With ease and familiarity, you scale the vertical platforms of your settlement in the sky in order to meet the old man at the very top. He informs you the time has come for your grand adventure to begin.

The ground begins to rumble and shake. A bright light, sharper than any you have seen, pierces the sky and an object of monolithic proportions materializes above your head. It shines a bright white gold and it appears to occupy dimensions beyond your abilities of perception. In an instant, the god-like entity teleports you into an altar-like space made of stone. You begin to levitate in mid-air and you watch as the monolith bathes you a column of bright light. The world around you begins to spin around at a mind boggling speed; you feel mystic knowledge flooding into your brain at an incredible rate. Then all at once, it stops. The monolith returns you to the ground, and the light disappears. But it is not over. Just as the large entity fades from your view, you see a small object begin to descend from the sky. It grows larger in your vision, and you see finally as it nears you that it is a small hat. In one final flash of light, it lands squarely on your head. In this moment, the world around you appears odd, being at once exactly the same, yet also different. You realize that you have been granted the power to control a higher dimension: the power of a new perspective.

The above description captures what a player might experience at the beginning of the 2012 game *Fez*. Developed by Polytron Studios, *Fez* follows the story of Gomez, a small two-dimensional creature who lives in what he believes to be a two-dimensional world. However, upon being bestowed with the eponymous *Fez* hat, he discovers that his world is, in fact, three-dimensional - and that he has the power to rotate it at will. This ability is the central mechanic of *Fez*; with Gomez only able to navigate in two dimensions, the player must rotate the environment around him in order to progress.

Fez is one in a spate of games in recent years that have revisited the visual, aural, and mechanical designs of classic 8-bit style games, characterized by pixellated art, synth-like music, and two-dimensional platform mechanics. On the surface, *Fez* has much in common with its contemporary peers; a screenshot of the game would look right at home with the 8-bit and 16-bit sprite games of yore.

But *Fez* is not a sterile reproduction of those games which have come before it, nor can it be fairly described as a nostalgic visitation of an era long gone. *Fez* is rather a genuine *revival* of the game materials and elements that were common in the classic two-dimensional era of games, and is a cultural text that pays homage to the past while also repossessing older creative elements for use in its own artistic and cultural statements. In one sense, *Fez* is exactly like the games that inspired it; usually operating in a two-dimensional plane, the player largely interacts with the game in a manner identical to classic platform games, and the art and musical style of *Fez* feel as though they could have been created during that period of computer game history. But the general design of the game, centered around the ability to rotate the world and deal with its three-dimensionality, is such that these game elements are contextualized in a new way. Each two-dimensional gameplay plane in *Fez* exists as only one of several sides of a three-dimensional game world; with the introduction of the rotation mechanic, *Fez* forces the player to visualize Gomez's world in both its two-dimensional and three-dimensional iterations *simultaneously*. Thus, *Fez* at once reintroduces the idea of the traditional two-dimensional platform while also revising it to become something unique. Intensely aware of its own historical and cultural context, *Fez* epitomizes the way in which games as a medium engage in the process of authentic cultural revival and restructuring. In this paper, I will seek to explore how cultural revivals similar to *Fez* abound in the video game sphere, a phenomenon that presents an optimistic and encouraging view of culture in the postmodern age.

As defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a revival is “the action of reviving something after [its] decline or discontinuance,” with the verb form being an intransitive that describes a “return to consciousness” (“Revival”; “Revive”). Though describing the reintroduction of a thing, a style, or an idea, a revival resuscitates what was once thought dead or outmoded. Not simply a fond remembrance of the past, revival refers to a kind of resurrection that inevitably reimagines its subject within a new context. This process, wide and varied in its method and application, is critical to the discovery of future avenues and conduits of cultural currency. Indeed, one must do more than rehash the work of one's predecessors to move forward; in the manner of revival, one must also be willing to renovate, restructure, and even destroy it.

It is interesting to discuss the revival in the context of the postmodern age. By all accounts, cultural critics of decades past predicted our information-saturated present would not be conducive to authentic cultural activity. In his 1936 essay, German philosopher Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” argued that the inevitable future of art and culture lay not in *revival*, but in *reproduction*. As Benjamin describes, art was once highly ritualized; in cave drawings of spirits and statues of gods alike, art served as an instrument to the practice of the rite and the maintenance of the mystic realm as it evolved and changed over time (223–224). Furthermore, art was not simply

beholden to its status as an instrument for spiritual ends; by virtue of being man-made, a work of art also existed within a complex set of historical circumstances related to its construction and appreciation (Benjamin). Without the ability to replicate something through the use of mechanical means, Benjamin argued thusly that an object could not escape, as it were, its contextual uniqueness (223).

It would take the emergence of new tools for artistic creation - ones that allowed an artist to reproduce a work of art - to finally and irrevocably alter the nature of art as historically placed artifact. The rise of digitized and mechanized methods of artistic production *à la camera*, microphone, and computer, enabled artists to approach art in an entirely new way: to produce and manipulate it as secularized data, information stripped of its associated context. It is in this way that a painting is rent asunder from its proverbial frame; no longer a singular entity hanging on the wall of a museum, a painting of the modern age exists as layers of a digital raster image, capable of being propagated and displayed on any myriad of digital devices across the world.

This phenomenon bears significant consequences. Artifacts that can be reproduced, as well as artifacts designed for reproducibility, do not simply separate art from context: as Benjamin describes, they destroy it. The intrinsic relationship between an object and its context constitutes an artifact's "aura" - a particular kind of integrity that speaks to its unique and authentic identity (221). As Benjamin notes, reproduction "substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence;" in the process of doing so, reproduction compromises the authenticity and authority of the original artifact (221). The realm of the aura thus recedes in importance with reproducible works to the point of becoming non-existent. Mediums born in the computer age such as the computer game epitomize the reproducible work; they are perfectly reproducible and entirely secularized from auratic appreciation.

It was not only Benjamin who proclaimed a potentially stark future for the work of art. In his *Simulacra and Simulation*, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard explored the implications of the aura's destruction for human life and society. Baudrillard argued that reality, the space in which all "auras" may be feasibly said to stem, is itself a fiction - an imaginary construct devised to allow for belief in the absolute. In the words of Baudrillard himself, what humans perceive as real is "a real without origin or reality;" human meaning-making takes place within a "hyperreal" existence, one in which "reality" in its common connotation is does not exist (1). In place of the real, simulacra emerged: symbols, simulations, and representations that do not hold an original reference point. By holding the effects of reality without bearing the identity of the real, simulacra disrupt the dichotomy between reality and falsity, thus dislodging the notion of the absolutely "real" or "true." The collapse of "reality" signals the rise of a new epoch in human history: a "precession of simulacra" in which representation, rebelling from its origins, separates from reality and encloses itself within a contained loop of self-derivation and recombination (1).

One must wonder what implications we might draw out from Benjamin and Baudrillard's work. One interpretation is defeatist; it mourns the loss of the aura and of the dislodging of the absolute. But there may also be an optimistic interpretation of this unfolding of events. Meaning, rather than losing its value, has been reclaimed as a malleable, human-derived abstract; similarly, the aura has not been lost, rather being altered and revised in a way as to be a more fluid and experiential concept. If we are to look to the media of the modern age in search of evidence to corroborate either the former interpretation or the latter, we will find that it is not entirely either explanation - it is rather a mixture of both.

One need go no further to see that this is the case than to examine the state of affairs in modern music. As we might predict from our time with Benjamin, the rise of recorded music opened the gate for reckless textual appropriation, where songs may be stripped of their original cultural relations on a whim. There is indeed evidence to suggest that this may be the case for music. Websites designed for music propagation like SoundCloud are overflowing with artists cutting and mashing each other's work; one only need to input the search term "remix" on the site to discover hundreds upon thousands of songs that all reuse intact material from other musical compositions.

But there are also musical works that bear a deep sense of cultural sensitivity and care - works that choose to *revive* rather than reproduce. Such is the case with Daft Punk's latest work, *Random Access Memories*. Chosen at the Grammy Awards in 2013 as Album of the Year, *RAM* is a prime example of a revival of musical conventions and production methods long phased out from the musical mainstream (Past Winners Search). As noted in his review of the album, *Pitchfork* writer Mark Richardson describes how Daft Punk took a step away from their "highly influential, riff-heavy EDM" in order to "luxuriate in the sounds, styles, and production techniques of the 1970s and early 80s." The duo, in an interview with NPR, described a desire with their album to replicate "a certain craftsmanship" that the group enjoyed about musical records produced during this period of time in western music. To do so, the pair chose to craft their songs with real artists rather than with electronic samples, collaborating with Golden Age artists like Nile Rodgers, Giorgio Moroder, and Paul Williams (Yanigun). Utilizing danceable tempos and the kind of instrumentation that characterized these earlier decades, Daft Punk created an album that did not merely dust off an old recording; instead, the group chose to revive, in full force, the musical vernacular and production methods of a prior time.

Daft Punk's own words confirm this line of thought, but also suggest something more. In the same interview, the electronic duo spoke of a desire to make their album "something composite (...) something that didn't really exist" (qtd. in Yanigun). Calling on a vast repertoire of musical skill cultivated throughout their prior work, Daft Punk recast the musical traditions of the past in their own image. Baselines and guitar riffs are organized into impeccably regular loops and timings; robotic voices croon notes of lyrical excitement and

melancholy; harsh synths, orchestral overtures, and delicate ballads dance alongside the main disco-esque instrumentation (Daft Punk). By combining these musical elements in novel ways, *Random Access Memories* juxtaposes disparate musical elements such that they inform one another and establish new musical frontiers. The album is, without doubt, a revival - an album that re-establishes the music of the past in the present, reframing it within a new and novel context.

While more examples of revival within music like *RAM* can surely be found, it remains the case that the vast volume of musical creations in the digital age represent the former *reproductive* mode of cultural work rather than the *revivalist* mode. This, however, is not the case with video games. Only truly emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, computer games place themselves firmly after the collapse of the modern era (Video Game History Timeline); they bear characteristics that would epitomize the reproducible artifact. Despite this, games have not served as aura-less husks to the cultural machinery of the postmodern age. Rather, they stand as a medium more than any other in which revival has thrived and reproduction has not.

Take the game *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP*. Published and developed by Capybara Games, *Sword & Sworcery* interweaves the conventions of a musical album with those of a video game. Placing the player into the shoes of a young girl named The Scythian, the game seamlessly links the movement of player and plot to a musical score that ebbs and flows throughout. Unlike most video games today, *Sword & Sworcery* does not use three-dimensional polygonal models to render scenes and characters; instead, the game uses sprites, pixel-based art assets that were common in the early days of computer game rendering due to limitations of then contemporary hardware. In choosing to work in the mode of past games rather than merely reproduce and replicate their conventions and content, *Sword & Sworcery* pushes beyond sprite art's artistic and technical boundaries. With the power of higher-resolution, wide color gamut monitors, *Sword & Sworcery's* artistry utilizes color, animation, and shape in a way that could not have been possible in the early days of the video game. In comparison to early sprite-based games, *Sword & Sworcery's* landscapes are massive and awe-inspiring; the in-game world is a beautiful, muted mix of greens, browns, and grays. Through its revival of sprite artwork, *Sword & Sworcery* thus propels the vital force of the games that served as its inspiration into the modern day.

The revival of sprite artwork is not the only kind of revival possible within a game. Video games are far more than mere visual affairs; indeed, one game contains within it multiple individually identifiable yet inextricably connected components, ranging from its storyline to its game engine. It is thus that we now examine another kind of video game revival: the revival of video game mechanics.

A game that exemplifies the revival of older video game mechanics is Machine Games' *Wolfenstein: The New Order*. Released in May of 2014, *The New Order* is the third game in a reboot of iD Software's *Wolfenstein* franchise, a series that pits players against a sci-fi-inflected Nazi Germany (Gies). Part of a long-

running lineage of first person shooters that finds its beginnings at the genesis of the genre itself, *The New Order* is a game that discards many of the common game conventions and mechanics adopted by most first person shooters today. While single-player campaigns in series like *Battlefield* feature regenerating health and greater physical presence for the player's avatar, *The New Order* utilizes a pack-based health and armor system and grants the player a near-superhuman level of agility (*Battlefield 4*; *Wolfenstein*). As described by Arthur Gies in his review of the game for *Polygon*, the developers took mechanics in the *The New Order* "back to [the series'] roots" in the "old school" era of first person shooters, with a gameplay system that even allowed the player to dual wield "every weapon available" and still have the ability to use weapons in "alternate firing modes." In this way, *The New Order* resuscitates the same feeling of environmental traversal and interaction that characterized its ancestral forebears.

But rather than merely reproducing these game mechanics, *The New Order* repossesses and extends their underlying logic. With the flexibility afforded by modern game development engines and software, Machine Games introduced new traversal mechanics for the series, such as sliding to cover, peeking and firing past walls, and even combating the Nazi threat through the use of silenced pistols and other clandestine weaponry. Such elements, with the potential to disrupt the more traditional mechanics of the game, were rather skillfully and artfully integrated as part of a cohesive vision for the game's mechanics and varying play styles. Through dynamically revisiting and revising the original *Wolfenstein's* mechanics, Machine Games sidestepped the sterility and stagnancy of simple reconstitution and created a game which sustains the traditions and conventions that came before it.

It is thus that video games, despite their entirely digital nature, embody a reaffirming vision for the future of cultural creation. Though embattled and forced to constantly redefine itself, the aura lives; in the same way, we may also see that meaning also remains. But their vitality remains contingent on the care they are afforded by their human guardians. If video games are to be any indicator, it would seem that the importance of this cultural stewardship has not been lost. Revivalist video games and other cultural works that work in the revivalist mode demonstrate that our cultural future burns bright.

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Eating Concrete: The Fall of the Bagel

Jonathan Kaufmann

A mere seventy years ago, eating a bagel might have been described as similar to “taking a bite out of concrete.” They were small, dense circles of bread with a tough outer crust, charred from hours of baking. A dozen bagels would take hours to produce, requiring specialized knowledge and a team of four to work the oven. Today, however, bagels bear little resemblance to those found in Jewish delis in the 1950’s. Technology played a large part in the bagel’s transition into the mainstream. Whereas a team of bagel bakers could produce maybe 1200 bagels on a good day, the bagel machine increased daily production to over 10,000 (Goodman 95). Other factors, such as the frozen bagel, mass marketing campaigns, and an increasing variety of flavors also contributed to the rise of the bagel. But these advancements were not without cost. The bagel, once a flavorful, crusty Jewish ethnic food, now is nothing more than a roll with a hole. Even as it diminished in relation to the Jewish people, so too did it diminish in flavor.

The first record of the bagel was four centuries ago. As Darra Goldstein, a professor at Williams College and the founding editor of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, writes, “The precise origin of the bagel is unclear, though its written record has been traced back to 1610, when rings of dough were mentioned in the community regulations of Krakow, Poland, as appropriate to give to women in childbirth” (20). It is possible to infer, then, that the bagel began its journey to America in Krakow, where there was a vibrant Jewish community (Hundert 261). Bagels were unique in Eastern Europe in that, unlike other breads, they would be prepared not in a bakery, but in home kitchens. Subsequently, they were sold on the street (Marks 35). Joan Nathan, a contributor to the *New York Times* food section and the author of *Jewish Cooking in America*, speculates that it is possible the hole in the bagel originated to facilitate hawking on street corners, as the opening would allow the seller of a bagel to “thread such a roll on a stick or a string, facilitating transport.”

There are numerous theories of where the bagel may have come from prior to being in Poland. Some suggestions have included the *taralli* or *buccellatum* from Italy, or the *girde* from China. There are even references to circular breads with holes in Egyptian hieroglyphs (Nathan 1). There is a tale that “the bagel was born in Vienna in 1683, as a tribute to the Polish cavalry that had helped save the city from the invading Turks. In honor of the cavalry’s efforts... a Viennese baker produced a roll in the shape of a horse’s stirrup, known in German as a

Steighbügel' (Goodman 92). Some have postulated it comes from the Jews in Spain, who had a boiled bread. Yet others have suggested it comes from the Jews in Central Asia (Marks 35). Even in its earliest days, the bagel likely had a link to the Jewish people.

The bagel came to the United States in the 1890's with the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe, and its consumption was largely limited to Jews at this point (Goldstein 20). Many of these immigrants came to New York. At the time, the city had the largest German population in the country, and while the Germans brought with them many things that entered the American mainstream, perhaps the most relevant is the delicatessen (Levine 67). Harry Levine, a professor of sociology at Queens College, explains that the German Jews opened their own delis in New York, and there were more than 1000 of these delis across the country at one point (68). The quick expansion of the Jewish deli, along with the iconic bagels they sold, no doubt contributed to "the rise of the bagel in American culinary consciousness" (Goldstein 20).

Before the 1950's, bagel baking was the sole providence of the Bagel Bakers Union Local 338 in New York City. The knowledge of how to bake a bagel was tightly controlled, and only sons or nephews of members were allowed to join. As such, the Union had a lot of power, and bagel bakers rose to middle class standing around this time. They received pensions, vacation, and other benefits, along with a high wage. Perhaps the greatest testament to Local 338 was that the owners of bagel bakeries often were not even allowed to set foot in their own establishment (Goodman 93-4). Prior to the 1920's the minutes for Union meetings were taken entirely in Yiddish, a language spoken by German and Polish Jews (Goodman 93). After that, they transitioned to English, but the organization was still entirely Jewish due to the familial relation membership rule. Local 338 reached the height of its power in the 1950's, but that was short lived. At the time, the Union supplied almost every deli that served bagels in the area. Bagels were entirely controlled by the Jewish population of New York. This would all change in 1963.

That year, the first bagel machine was sold by Daniel Thompson. Back in 1910, Meyer Thompson bought a bagel bakery in Canada. It was there he would develop the first-ever bagel machine. After moving to Los Angeles, his son, Daniel Thompson, began helping him refine the machine. By 1958, Daniel's prototype was able to produce 2,400 bagels an hour. In 1963, his machine was complete, and he sent letters to every large bagel bakery in the country. Only Lender's bagels, owned by Murray Lender, responded (Goldstein 21).

Lender had a long history of innovation in bagel baking. Many of his ideas were directed at non-Jewish clientele. One of Lender's most successful innovations was his line of frozen bagels. Whereas bagels of the time were cooked fresh and without preservatives, Lender's frozen bagels could be shipped and stored for long periods (Goodman 95). This allowed consumers to get their bagel directly from grocery stores. Lender could also supply distant bagel stores that

had no local bakeries. But it was his purchase of the bagel machine that would ultimately create the Lender's Bagel Empire. Not only could Lender now produce upwards of 10,000 bagels a day, whereas his competitors could only produce about 1,200 (Goodman 65), but he could also ship anywhere in the country due to the preservative nature of freezing. This, combined with his added flavors and the even further invention of pre-slicing the bagel before it got to the consumer, led the bagel to be a viable national product. Within two years of Lender's buying that first bagel machine, eighteen of the largest bakeries had also purchased one (Goodman 95).

Nonetheless, the knowledge of bagel baking was still consolidated to a few people. Even if these large bakeries could produce the ring of dough needed to bake the bagel quickly, the bakers couldn't cook that fast. Around this time, however, extreme advancements in the oven were made. Whereas the previous coal or wood fire oven required skill to use, the new gas powered one did not. As one member of Local 338 put it, "It took the skill out of it...Anybody could be taught to bake in an hour and a half. So now all you needed was a little bagel machine, a little kettle, and a little rack oven. Everybody and his mother started going into the bagel business" (Goodman 96). The advancements meant that bagel bakeries could increase production by using unskilled labor and not having to deal with stubborn unions. This oven would prove to be the downfall of Bagel Baker's Union Local 338.

The bagel's history provides insight into the cultural background of the food. Many of the origin stories of the bagel were related to Jews or Poland, which has a strong Jewish population. Bagels were first known to be baked and sold by Jewish families in Krakow. But the bagel truly became Jewish in New York, where it was baked and eaten exclusively by Jews until the 1950's. It was at this time that the bagel began to enter the mainstream, and the cultural associations of the bagel became more nuanced. Donna Gabaccia, a US food historian, wrote about that transition:

[Bagels] became firmly identified as "Jewish" only as Jewish bakers began selling them to their multiethnic urban neighbors. When bagels emerged from ghetto stores as a Jewish novelty, bagels with cream cheese quickly became a staple of the cuisine known as "New York deli," and was marketed and mass-produced throughout the country under this new regional identity. When international trade brought bagels to Israel, they acquired a third identity as "American." And finally, coming full circle so to speak, the bagel's Americanization sent purists off in search of bagels that seemed more authentically "New York Jewish." (38)

The bagel was largely found in "New York delis" (even if the deli was nowhere near New York). It was also often marketed in grocery stores as the "New York Style Bagel." Nonetheless, bagels are usually considered Jewish

ethnic food in the United States. Yet they are known as American food in Israel (Goldstein 27). This suggests a significant cultural shift in the view of the bagel, as many Israelites were originally Jews from Germany, Austria, and Poland, where the bagel originated. In order to further understand the “Americanization” of bagels that Gabaccia proposes, it is necessary to examine how the entrance of the bagel into the American mainstream altered it fundamentally.

While the first bagels were made in home kitchens in Eastern Europe, the production process was quickly industrialized after it came to America. The members of Local 338 would bake in teams of four. Two “benchmen” rolled the dough, which was made of flour, water, yeast, salt, and malt syrup. They passed the bagel onto the “kettleman,” who boiled the rings for two to three minutes. After that, the “ovenman” put the bagels in the oven, which was wood or coal fired and produced uneven pockets of heat. Baking required a great deal of skill, as the ovenman would have to move the bagels around so the bagel would cook evenly and not burn. This produced a dense bread with a crackly crust that was difficult to chew. At this point, bagels were three inches in diameter (Goodman 94-7).

The new technology brought with it several changes to the bagel. While bagels were originally made in only two flavors, plain and salt, Lender’s Bagels began to sell others, such as the wildly popular pumpernickel and onion. Lender’s also added eggs and shortening to the dough to soften the bagel and make it more palatable to non-Jews. The invention of the bagel machine required dough to be less stiff, and so water was added, which further softened the bagel. Improvements to the oven around this time completely changed how the bagel was produced. The bagel basically cooked itself in the new rack ovens and lost the charred and smoky flavor it had from the wood or coal. The new ovens were gas or oil powered, and it was easy to train new bakers to use them (Goodman 95-97).

Another new method of bagel cooking was steaming, which was quicker and easier than boiling. Instead of the crackly, chewy crust previous bagels had, steamed bagels were softer and had only a thin, flimsy lamina. Further advancements to the bagel machine were made, allowing bagels to be produced at a rate of 5,000 per hour (Goldstein 21). Bagel dough also had to become even softer and less sticky to be placed through these improved machines, so oil was added as a lubricant. Soon after came “bagel conditioners.” Though bagels previously had to rise and ferment for several hours, bagel conditioners allowed bakeries to skip this step. Now used by an estimated fifty percent of bagel shops, bagel conditioners are known to completely eliminate the traditional taste—or any taste at all—of bagels (Goodman 97).

Bagel shops soon realized they needed to stay open for lunch in order to increase profitability. This required changing a breakfast food into a lunch sandwich. In order to allow for a greater variety of fillings, the bagel was enlarged to its current supersized state. This allowed for many cold cuts to be added, such

as ham and cheese or pastrami. These bagel shops would play a large role in bringing the bagel in to the American mainstream, as soon there would be one in almost every city in the country (Goldstein 22).

Today, bagels can be found in many fast food chains, signaling a complete shift into the American mainstream. Burger King, McDonald's, and Dunkin Donuts all sell bagels. There are even many bagel chains, such as Einstein Bros Bagels, which can be found across the country. Bagels are an everyday food here in America. Indeed, the pillowy soft roll with a hole we identify as a bagel today bears little resemblance to the hard, chewy ring served in Krakow several centuries ago.

One of Lender's "greatest" achievements was the world's largest bagel. Weighing in at a whopping 714 pounds, the ring in the center was large enough to fit around a man. Clearly a promotional stunt, this event perfectly illustrated the American need to make everything bigger and "better." Lender led numerous marketing stunts, including successfully declaring March "Frozen Foods Month" in response to declining sales of frozen bagels in 1984. He started to cross-promote with companies such as Kraft and Minute Maid by placing coupons for their foods on his packaging. He created green bagels for St. Patrick's Day, and produced bagels in the shape of world leaders during a G7 summit. He even sent oval-shaped bagels to the Oval Office, where President Lyndon B. Johnson ate them on national television. He played off the health food craze by creating "all natural" and "whole grain" bagels ("Murray Lender").

Continuing Lender's trend of ridiculous marketing strategies, Heinz created the first bagel monstrosity, Bagel Bites. These miniature bagels are topped with small amounts of cheese and marinara sauce before being frozen. After microwaving, they are steamy little bites of pizza bagel. Sara Lee created the "fortified bagel," with all the extra nutrients and vitamins you need to go about your day. Due to the popularity of low-carb diets, the "low-carb bagel" was invented, which has significantly fewer carbs and calories and is ironically the same size as the original bagel. Bagels and cream cheese have also been turned into a breakfast bar called "Bagelers," which are about as hideous as they sound. "Flagels" are a new phenomenon sweeping the nation, which are flatter and thinner versions of a regular bagel. Lastly, a strangely square bagel known as a "squagel" has recently entered the market (Goldstein 26).

The Americanization of the bagel is truly complete. The food has been supersized, all flavor has been removed, and mass production has begun. We even see alternative forms of the food that claim to differentiate themselves from the competition, such as the flagel and the squagel. Bagels are now built to maximize efficiency for the producer and the consumer. No longer does the baker need to bother themselves with baking, they just need to steam. No longer does the consumer need to work hard to "enjoy" a bagel sandwich. It is clear that the market structure of America set up this travesty. Daniel Young, a food writer for the *New York Times*, interviewed many of the executives in bagel companies

about the reasons for changes in the bagel market: “[Americans are] used to hamburger rolls, hot-dog buns and white bread,” said Broney Gadman, president of Bakery Machinery Distributors of Bohemia, L.I., the company that introduced bagel-steaming equipment in 1982. “They prefer a less crusty, less chewy, less tough product. As the market expands, bagels will change from a mouth-feel point of view.” Lender simply capitalized upon this. His ability to supply anyone with a bland, tasteless food that upon which any number of delicacies could be heaped was unrivaled. The changes to the bagel were made with the consumer in mind. “We chose the steaming process because we felt most new bagel customers would appreciate the mouth appeal of the softer bagel,” said Lance Rembar, the chief executive officer of Big Apple Baking Company ... “They are not familiar with it as a traditional, ethnic product centered in New York” (Young). This has some interesting implications. Considering the consumer’s preference for an unbroken surface on which to place cream cheese, Young postulates that the hole in bagels could eventually be removed completely.

Even as some of the more terrifying takes on the bagel are entering the mainstream, we can see how the bagel only vaguely resembles the Jewish ethnic food it once was. As the technology that allowed the bagel to enter the national market improved, it required the taste of bagels to be diminished. So, too, was the bagels relation to the Jewish people diminished. What was once a food that was only eaten by Jews on weekends is now consumed every morning by millions of Americans. This alteration of the bagel as it enters the American culinary consciousness has been mimicked by several other foods; consider the “improved” version of Mexican food known as Tex-Mex or the Americanization of pizza. Americans have an interesting propensity for snatching up foods that are easily produced and changing them to suit the mainstream. Thus was the American bagel born, with only a vague resemblance to the small, crusty rings of bread hawked on the street corners by children in Krakow.

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Outliers in a Consumerist Market Society: Neoliberalism, "
Commercialization, and Mental Health
Treatment in the United States "

Dan Kirwin

Abstract

In this paper, I present important developments in the way that mental health treatment is conducted, and how the system has changed since ushering in the system of neoliberalism. I use the lens of neoliberalism and the consumerist market society that it characterizes to analyze the system of mental health treatment in the United States. Building upon research that has been previously conducted, I conclude that the tenants of consumerism that pervade neoliberalism have led mental health treatment to be commercialized in the United States. This commercialization, coupled with the ever changing of what is viewed as "normal," has led to an explosion of those being treated for mental illnesses like depression. In addition, this commercialization has led to a massive increase in the prescription and consumption of pharmaceuticals that treat these illnesses and an attempt to rehabilitate the consumption habits of patients.

Introduction

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." This poem, "The New Colossus" written by Emma Lazarus, is inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty. For decades upon decades, this couplet embodied the beacon of the United States. The United States was the place to go to start anew, to build a life from scratch and live "The American Dream." However, gone are the days where the tired, poor, huddled masses find reprieve in the United States. Gone are the days of a nation that looks to help the sick and the poor. In today's world of corporatization and privatization, the sick and the weary are no longer those in need, but rather outliers in a consumerist market society that places consumption above all else. They are no longer seen as in need of assistance, rather they drive the profit-hungry pharmaceutical and insurance industries. There is no clearer example of this change in priorities than the treatment of those with mental illness. In a society that lets the market define what behavior is proper and normal, those with mental illness have been commoditized or left behind.

How did we get from a beacon of hope to where we are today? The story goes back almost three-quarters of a century, but the most important changes happened not fifty years ago. Promulgated by the election of Ronald Reagan as President, an era of neoliberal government swept the nation. In this paper, I will present the background of mental health treatment policy in the United States and current issues in the area of mental health treatment. I will then present neoliberalism as a lens to view the development of mental health treatment. Finally, I will use the lens of neoliberalism to argue that mental health treatment in the past half-century has shifted to rehabilitate the mentally ill into what the neoliberal consumerist market society views as socially acceptable.

Background

Treatment for the mentally ill has changed by leaps and bounds over the past century. Burriss (2004) notes the evolution of mental health treatment over time, explaining how the burden of taking care of a mentally ill patient has shifted away from families since the mid-nineteenth century. Accordino, Porter and Morse (2001) further explain that one of the greatest developments in mental health treatment came in the 1940's, after the end of World War Two (WWII). Accordino, Porter and Morse (2001), all specialists in rehabilitation of the mentally ill, add that the influx of American servicemen and women returning from WWII brought widespread attention to treatment for the mentally ill, specifically the inhumane conditions in state mental institutions. Davis *et al.* (2012) build upon this idea by arguing that the increased psychiatric demand post-WWII made it apparent that the mental health profession lacked sufficient resources to treat those in need. This realization led to a legislative push to depopulate state-run mental hospitals in favor of private community mental health centers, more commonly known as deinstitutionalization. Initially, deinstitutionalization had a positive effect on patients. However, as time went on, it was clear that deinstitutionalization caused more harm than benefit.

Another major development in mental health treatment has been the introduction of pharmaceuticals that treat mental illness. Many attribute the decline in the population of state mental hospitals to the advent of psychiatric medication (Esposito & Perez, 2014). However, Esposito and Perez (2014), both professors of sociology at Barry University, further argue that "the introduction of these drugs represented an extension, and not the cause, of a discharge trend that had been taking place for some time" (p. 424). As the 20th century progressed, as shown later, the use of psychiatric medication to treat mental illness proliferated dramatically.

In the late 1980's, mental health treatment began to drastically change as neoliberal leaders came into power, slashed hospitals budgets, further privatized mental health care, and commoditized mental health treatment. The 1980's were a period of devastating inflation in the United States, and this was truer in the

health sector than almost anywhere else (Newton, 1982). The result, as Patricia Newton (1982) explains, was the closure of many mental health treatment centers, primarily in the public sector. Furthermore, a commentary by Gary Gottlieb, President and CEO of Partners in Health, Benjamin Liptzin, psychiatry chair at Baystate Health and Paul Summergrad, psychiatrist-in-chief at Tufts medical center (2007), explains that changes in the insurance payment system drastically increased the profitability of psychiatric services in private hospitals, albeit temporarily. The 2007 commentary continues that as a result of the rising profitability of psychiatric treatment, private hospitals' investment in psychiatric services also proliferated, and therefore, so did the availability of inpatient psychiatric treatment. However, as the insurance industry was consolidated, the profitable repayment plans ceased to be profitable (Gottlieb, Liptzin & Summergrad, 2007). Instead of bringing in money, the psychiatric units began to sap the capital out of hospitals, threatening their very existence (Gottlieb, Liptzin & Summergrad, 2007). Because of the threat that psychiatric wards posed to the private hospitals' bottom line, many downsized their programs and cut their staff, even though they were the primary method of treatment for those on both public and private insurance with severe mental illness (Gottlieb, Liptzin & Summergrad, 2007). These cuts resulted in situations like the one that Baker and Gutheil (2011) use as a case study, where staffs are under-trained, which results in poorer treatment and the possibility of injury due to a patient's outbursts. What has brought about the major changes in past several decades? The answer boils down to one word: neoliberalism.

The neoliberal ideology, explained further in the section below, has led to a health system that has become corporatized, commercialized and profit hungry. This system of "treatment" is no longer about treating those who need it; it is about maximizing profits and rehabilitating the consumer in patients. Esposito and Perez (2014) argue that the perfect example of the system's new priorities is the increase of pharmaceutical treatment and the way that that treatment is presented and marketed to patients and the public at large.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is an ideology that came to prominence and power in the United States during the 1980's with the election of Ronald Reagan. Terry Carney (2000), a member of the University of Sydney's law faculty and a past president of the *International Academy of Law and Health*, explains that neoliberalism focuses on outsourcing government responsibility for programs, especially social programs, to the private sector. Esposito and Perez (2014) continue to say that neoliberalism goes beyond simply deregulation and privatization; neoliberalism is an all-encompassing ideology that evaluates an individual's actions based on "what is deemed as valuable, acceptable, or desirable by 'the market'" (p. 416). The key portion of Esposito and Perez's (2014) explanation of neoliberalism is that the neoliberal ideology is based on the market and market perceptions of

individual behavior. The market then prescribes a certain set of behaviors that are deemed “normal,” with any deviance from normal being seen as a “social deviance and/or pathology” (Esposito & Perez, 2014; p. 416).

In order to illustrate neoliberalism, I will use President Ronald Reagan’s policies as a case study of sort, specifically with regard to mental illness, to show the connection between the neoliberalism and cuts for mental health funding. The Reagan administration came into office riding a wave of conservative fervor. Incredibly pro-business, like all neoliberals, Reagan justified decreasing corporate taxes by reducing government expenditures on social-welfare programs, though budget deficits actually ballooned under his presidency according to the Congressional Budget Office (Thomas, 1998; Congressional Budget Office, 2014). To summarize Alexander Thomas (1998), a professor of sociology at SUNY Oneonta, social-welfare programs like mental health treatment were seen as “big government,” and as such were detrimental to the well being of our nation. Those who utilized them, as Thomas (1998) asserts, were “stigmatized as lazy or even criminal” (p. 4). This example returns to the idea above suggested by Esposito and Perez (2014): those who do not fit into the market norm are stigmatized. As a result, mental health funding was cut throughout the 1980’s, or was outsourced to the private sector, which has been a complete disaster (Thomas, 1998). However, using neoliberalism as a lens to analyze the commercialization of health care provides us interesting insights.

Commercialization of Healthcare

Esposito and Perez (2014) discuss in depth the consequences of neoliberalism on mental healthcare; however, this paper will build upon their work by using the neoliberal idea of maximizing private profit and the idea of individuals as consumers to explain why mental healthcare has become commoditized and commercialized. Esposito and Perez (2014) summarize articulately that “neoliberalism supports... a type of health care system in which health care delivery becomes a commodity as opposed to a right” (p. 416). Dissecting this statement through the lens of neoliberalism shows us something intriguing about the health care system and provides an explanation as to why health care has become so commercialized.

To begin, it is important to define a commodity. For the purposes of this paper, a commodity is a good or service that can be traded for a set value of currency. Yet, just in defining a commodity, it is obvious why health care has become commercialized. When a service takes on value in relation to a currency in order to be traded, providers are motivated to maximize their profits; the bottom-line becomes the top priority. It certainly explains why out of *Fortune’s* 500 largest companies in 2013, 39 deal primarily in the healthcare or insurance industry (Fortune, n.d.). The massive nature of these businesses would also explain the proliferation of mental health insurance and care provision in the early 1980’s and their collapse once reimbursement declined. Insurance has

become a business, and mental healthcare provision is now a costly enterprise. Gottlieb, Liptzin and Summergrad (2007) cite a statistic saying that private general hospitals that provided psychiatric care were only being reimbursed 61 cents on the dollar by 2002. Their commentary continues to say, “Financial losses from inpatient psychiatric units threatened the viability of the entire hospital” (p. 1469). There is huge profit to be made in providing healthcare insurance and services, but very little in providing mental healthcare insurance and services.

It is fairly easy to see that there is the huge ability to make profits in the field of mental health treatment. Take for example the way that pharmaceuticals are presented to consumers. In the past several decades, the direct advertisement of pharmaceutical drugs has proliferated at an unprecedented rate. The United States is one of the two countries in the world that allows for the advertisement of pharmaceuticals directly to consumers, and as a result, Esposito and Perez (2014) report that there has been an increase in patients being treated for mental illness. However, I differ partially in my reasoning for this increase in treatment. Esposito and Perez (2014) argue that the proliferation of diagnoses of mental illness is due to “the failure of medicalization as the primary way to deal with mental distress,” and the pressure that neoliberal society puts on people to perform in a way that is deemed normal (p. 427). Though latter seems to be compelling, I argue that the proliferation of mental illness is equal parts difficulty conforming to the neoliberal’s idea of normal and the corporatization of mental healthcare.

With the advent of psychiatric medicines to treat illnesses like minor and major depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, there is great profit to be made in making, marketing and prescribing these drugs. This is not to say that more people are not suffering from mental illness; such an assertion would make perfect sense. Kohn et al (2004) cite a statistic saying that almost half of all adults have experienced mental disorders. I argue that this can be attributed to the narrowing of what is considered acceptable by neoliberal society. The societal norm is continually shifting, and as it becomes more and more difficult to conform to the neoliberal idea of normal people face enormous amounts of mental stress. It is no longer good enough to simply have a job, a house and a family. A college education has become expected, in addition to having a family, a well paying job, a home with a white picket fence, etc. The finish line is continuously being moved, increasing the number of those who do not fit the societal norm and are stigmatized for it. However, by moving the finish line, creating that stigma, and increasing those who become mentally ill because of it, pharmaceutical companies profit through selling more Prozac.

What is interesting, however, is that not only does the prescription of psychiatric medication increase profits for pharmaceutical companies, but it also reinforces the consumerist ideals of neoliberalism. Take, for example, Fluoxetine, more commonly known as Prozac. The United States National Library of Health explains that Prozac is what is known as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor

(SSRI), which is used to treat mental illnesses like depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, and even eating disorders. Peter Wehewein (2011), a contributor to Harvard Health Publications, cites a government report that found that one in ten Americans is prescribed an antidepressant, with the prescription of Prozac up 400% since it was introduced in the 1980's. While it is helpful to analyze this massive increase for its face value, which is that many more people are receiving treatment for their illness, looking just beneath the surface provides an enlightening insight into the use of prescription drug treatment for mental health issues.

Are 400% more people being diagnosed with mental illnesses like depression, anxiety and eating disorders than when Prozac was introduced? It is quite possible, but Samuel Zuvekas (2005) of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has found that the prescriptions of other pharmaceuticals that treat mental illness are up as well. In fact, and perhaps most interestingly, Zuvekas (2005) found that consumer spending on prescriptions for drugs that treat mental illness increased at a rate of nearly 20% per year between 1996 and 2001. I argue that this increase in consumption is a symptom of the consumerist market ideals of neoliberalism. As implied above, one of the pinnacles of neoliberalism is that individuals first and foremost are consumers. Behavior that is seen as disruptive to an individual's ability to consume is outside the realm of what is characterized as normal. They are, therefore, are prescribed medication that alters their behavior in a way that allows them to become good consumers again. What is more is that the prescription of these medications is part of their rehabilitation, both in the sense that it minimizes their symptoms and that they are becoming consumers again through the purchase of their prescription. In a way, being prescribed a medication that alters their behavior to rehabilitate them into the neoliberal consumerist market society is the first step in once again becoming good consumers.

Counseling, of course, is an option as well. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2014) projects that the job growth rate for mental health counselors will grow faster than average over the next decade, while psychologists are projected to grow at an average rate. However, counseling is similar to the prescription treatment of mental illness. While it does not physically alter a person's brain chemistry like medication does, the goal is still to rewire the person's mental state so that they fit into the neat mold of "consumer" that neoliberalism calls for. Furthermore, counseling requires consumption similar to that of being prescribed to purchase pharmaceuticals. The United States is one of the few industrialized nations in the world that does not provide healthcare for its citizens (Bell et al., 2008). Because healthcare is not a right provided to all people of this nation, people who need treatment are forced to *purchase* healthcare, further enabling the commercialization of the healthcare system. The sad truth of the matter is that mental healthcare has been commercialized beyond reason. The system no longer exists to heal those that are ill, rather it exists to

create profits and rehabilitate the consumer mentality that is required to be considered a normal member of the neoliberal society.

Conclusion

Further research should compare in greater depth the diagnosis of certain mental illnesses linked with behavior, like mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and attention deficit disorders with data regarding the prescription of relevant pharmaceutical drugs. Further research may also find interest in comparing the prescription of certain pharmaceuticals with consumption habits in the United States. More quantitative research would be helpful to sustain the theoretical arguments made in this paper, as such is a limit to the arguments.

An analysis of mental health treatment in the United States through the lens of neoliberalism has provided several interesting conclusions. As long as the United States continues to be governed by the neoliberal model, both in the sense of actual government as well as societal governance, the issues plaguing the mental healthcare system will only get worse. It would not be surprising to see an even greater proliferation in the diagnoses of mental illness in the next several decades, as the provision of pharmaceutical treatment becomes more profitable. We can already see this in the increasing diagnoses of attention deficit disorders (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

As the neoliberal mold of normal continues to shrink, fewer and fewer people will be able to fit into it. As a result, those who are stigmatized for not fitting in will be characterized as different and will be asked by society to change their behavior in a way that is more conducive to the consumerist society that they live in. As mentioned in the paragraph above, this will lead to the diagnoses of new mental illnesses, or increased diagnoses in known mental illnesses that can be treated by counseling and pharmaceuticals. Coupled with the fact that patents will eventually expire, and the cost of producing of these drugs will inevitably fall, the system of mental health treatment only stands to become more profitable as time goes on. As the system becomes more profitable the issue is exacerbated, creating a sort of feedback loop where profits drive what is considered normal, which further drives up profits. The real victims of this terrible cycle are those who are actually suffering from the pain of mental illness. These people that struggle to get out of bed in the morning are told that their illness makes them different; they are stigmatized, ostracized, and then they are commoditized.

The quote inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty embodies what was once great about the United States. Yet, those days are gone. As long as the healthcare system is one based on profit, a system where healthcare is a commodity rather than a right, mental health treatment will continue to put profits over patients. It does not have to be like this, though. The United States can join the rest of the industrialized world in the way that it provides healthcare,

or can reject the neoliberal model altogether. For now, however, consume or be left behind.

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Terror Management Theory in " Cards Against Humanity "

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Abstract

This essay explores the behavioral psychology concept of Terror Management Theory within the context of the popular party game, Cards Against Humanity. I use examples of answers in the game to demonstrate that the players' behavior fits the principles of the theory and show further connections between terror management, humor, and anxiety. I further add to the conversation by suggesting that the popularity of this game, which is mostly limited to college students and young adults, is a result of greater levels of death anxiety among the millennial generation. These findings reveal a need for further research surrounding the intense fear of death among the millennials and the coping mechanisms employed by college students to deal with that fear.

Introduction

"But before I kill you, Mr. Bond, I want to show you _____
_____." **"A micropig wearing a tiny raincoat and booties!"** Few games could replace the classic dorm night-in staples of "Truth or Dare" and "Never Have I Ever," but lately a new form of entertainment has begun to occupy the laundry-covered, linoleum floors of college residence halls. College students all over the U.S. have adopted the card game, *Cards Against Humanity: A Party Game for Horrible People*, as their new too-cold-to-go-out pastime. In a few short months, *Cards Against Humanity* (CAH) became the most popular party game among college-age kids. The incredible thing about the game's popularity is that the company behind the twisted game did little to no advertising. There were no commercials on TV advertising it, no posters put up at Target entrances, and no tabling. *USA Today* cites one of the creators of the game, Mark Temkin, as stating, "I think college students are pretty tapped into pop culture; we don't advertise Cards Against Humanity and it's only available online, so it has to spread through word of mouth..." (Prattas 1). The game's success is entirely based on its ability to connect with college-age kids and make them want to play this game over and over again.

As the R-rated version of the classic children's game *Apples to Apples*, CAH consists of cards referencing everything from politics to pop culture to

historical events. The cards contain major figures such as **Barack Obama**, **Oprah**, **John Wilkes Booth**, and **Gandhi** as well as movements like **women's suffrage** and world problems like **AIDS**. Additionally, at any given time, the cards in play could also include anything ranging from **vigorous jazz hands** to **German dungeon porn** to **helplessly giggling at the mention of Hutus and Tootsies**. The game is packed with highly sexual and offensive ideas meant to be combined for the purpose of humor beyond just the initial shock value. Suddenly, people you have never even heard curse are making jokes about Auschwitz. In fact, everyone playing the game is laughing hysterically and cracking jokes that they would never even come up with in any other situation. One reviewer noted: "It reveals people's dirty sides regardless of previous interaction because this is a side of people that others rarely see and it makes everything that much more funny..." (Prottas 2). What accounts for this consistent, complete change in personality? What allows us to universally become horrible people, as the game makers suggest, within a few minutes of playing CAH? Is it just that the game allows you to use "**Pacman uncontrollably guzzling cum**" and "**Miley Cyrus at 55**" in the same sentence? Or is there more to it than that?

In this essay, I will discuss the psychological effects of Cards Against Humanity. I will apply the behavioral psychology concept of Terror Management Theory to the game. I will argue that the structure and formatting of the game reminds the players of death and supplies them with opportunities to react to that by discrediting and undermining the "other." I will connect Terror Management Theory to humor as a coping mechanism and point out that using "sick" humor at the expense of other groups seems to be a way to cope with the effects of Terror Management Theory. Finally, I will explore Terror Management Theory as it relates to the generation Y college students. I show these connections both inside and outside of the contexts of the game.

Introduction to the Theory

While many theories seek to explain human behavior in relation to death, one theory that has continued to evolve is Terror Management Theory (TMT). Developed by social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski in the 1990s, the theory states that humans react to mortality saliences, or reminders of death and mortality, by strengthening their defense of their own cultural world views and degrading alternative world views (Rosenblatt 690). Through a series of social experiments, Greenburg and his associates found that stimuli like a television clip of a funeral can trigger a reaction where a person needs to "reassert their faith in their worldview by bolstering their worldview through derogation, invalidation, or seeking to harm the different other..." as expert Michael Salzman puts it (177). Once reminded of mortality, an individual will demonstrate uncharacteristic antagonism towards individuals or groups he or she does not identify with. In a political context, the individual will often

advocate greater punishment or more violence toward that group. Simultaneously, the person will place a greater value on their own identity within a group.

TMT is based on the research of Greenberg and his colleague, Ernst Becker, who theorized that humans have an innate fear of death and a cognitive need to avoid thoughts about the subject (Navarrete 373). Becker argued that the reason for this fear is humans' unique need for self-preservation by finding meaning in their lives through constructing set realities and ideologies they can believe in. Because of humans' ability to think in this abstract way, we have acute anxiety about death. TMT describes the defense mechanism humans have created to protect themselves from death anxiety.

More recent scholars such as Michael Salzman expanded on Becker's ideas when they explained that culture provides the frame for Becker's construction of reality (Salzman 174). They asserted that culture is a context by which people can regulate and predict their lives. By strictly adhering to the beliefs, rules, and traditions of a culture, humans achieve "symbolic immortality" (Salzman 176). In this way, people feel they can live on after their bodies have died through the continuance of the existence of their world view. This is why the thought of death provokes a fierce defense of culture. Because humans feel a need for stability and control over their lives, they create a reality where that exists by maintaining a set worldview that is usually informed by race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, political party, and other factors. When they are reminded of death, their attachment to that worldview and sense of belonging with groups that share the view deepen and their defense mechanisms are engaged.

Psychologists and scholars have continued to develop the theory of TMT by conceptualizing the motivations and implications of this culture-defending behavior. The theory has become a popular research topic because of the implications it has for intolerance and discrimination against minorities. Skeptics criticize the theory for being overextended because it has been applied to a large variety of situations ranging from coping with tragedy to binge drinking (Paulhus and Trapnell). However, in a world where humans are acutely aware of death due to mass media and events such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the War on Terror, this topic continues to stay relevant.

TMT and Humor

Freud first introduced the idea of humor as a coping mechanism for tragedy, one of his more widely accepted theories (Salzman 178). He coined the term "gallows humor" to describe the type of humor made about death or tragedy. He suggested that by purposefully making jokes about these events, we perceive that we regain control over our lives. Since then, many researchers have expanded on that theory. At this point, most scholars accept the idea that humor provides a safe forum for humans to explore the concept of death and deal with mortality. We use it to examine death, just as we do for so many difficult

scenarios (Elgee 487). Expert Neil Elgee even adds: "Humor is a major means by which we keep repressed from immediate consciousness a morbid and paralyzing preoccupation with the spectacle of death. We use humor to free ourselves from the slavery of death" (487). By Elgee's standard, we use humor in the same way we use Greenburg and associates' defense of a worldview. Both are used to defend ourselves from experiencing the anxiety at bay in our subconscious.

Specific studies relating TMT with humor have been published only in the last three years and the research around the topic is still very new. However, they are very important to the field. First, Charles Hackney demonstrated the existence of a correlation between mortality salience and humor by having college students assess the comedy of three jokes after exposure to a mortality salience and comparing them to a control group (Hackney 1). The college students exposed to the mortality salience picked the joke most closely associated with mortality as most funny, where their control group counterparts varied in their choices. The joke was also about an execution, which potentially exhibits the college students' desire for greater punishment of an outsider group, which correlates to the behavior portrayed in Terror Management Theory.

Where Hackney studied mortality salience and humor appreciation, Christopher Long and Dara Greenwood researched the connection between mortality salience and humor production (Long and Greenwood) as compared to pain and humor. Humor production is related to TMT because it is often focused around culture and can reinforce a person's membership in a group, both of which play a role in the theory. Long and Greenwood tested 104 college students, some who were primed with death reminders and some who were part of a control group and were not. Of those exposed to a death reminder, some of them saw the word "death" flash on a screen as they were pairing other words that flashed on screen together. Others were asked to respond to open-ended questions like "Please briefly describe the thoughts and emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you." After being primed with a death salience or a pain salience, the students were asked to write captions for comic images that were given to them. A group of six Psychology students rated each caption on a scale ranging from "extremely unfunny" to "extremely funny" based on what they individually found humorous. They found that students exposed to a mortality salience produced funnier captions than those who were exposed to a pain salience or no salience. This finding demonstrates that thoughts of death ignite humorous and creative tendencies in individuals that may not have been triggered otherwise. This suggests that humor could be a coping mechanism for a mortality salience.

Back to the Cards

Like the participants in Long and Greenwood's study, the players of Cards Against Humanity also have to produce their own humor. The cards in the game provide prompts and possible responses, but it is up to the players to

combine the cards in a way that is as humorous as possible. The players themselves actually have to create the humor based on what is in front of them.

The game is made up of white cards and black cards. In each round, a player selects a black card which has a prompt with a question like, **“What’s there a ton of in heaven?”** or **“What did Obama drop on the children of Afghanistan?”** Each of the other players selects one of the seven white cards they have in their hand as the best responses to those questions. The players answer anonymously by putting the cards face down in front of the Card Czar, the person who drew the black card. The Czar reads each person’s answer out loud and decides which answer best fits the prompt. The player who put down that answer wins the round and gets to keep the black card.

Let’s play a round. We are circled up on the floor with a few other hallmates with a pile of white cards and a pile of black cards in the middle of the circle. You are the Card Czar. You deal each of us seven white cards. Then you draw a black card. This is the first prompt. The card says, **“___: That’s how I want to die.”** Now it’s up to me and the other players to fill in the blank with one of our white cards. The seven white cards I have in my hand are, **“50,000 volts straight to the nipples,”** **“The Care Bear Stare,”** **“Surprise Sex,”** **“Funky Fresh Rhythms,”** **“Serfdom,”** **“Stephen Hawking Talking Dirty,”** and **“Not Wearing Pants.”** I select **“50,000 volts straight to the nipples”** as the best beginning to the sentence so I put the card face down in front of you. You also receive white cards from the rest of the players. Now you have to pick which card you think is the best answer. Your choices are, **“50,000 volts straight to the nipples,”** **“Unfathomable stupidity,”** **“Giving birth to the Antichrist,”** **“Switching to Geico,”** and **“8 oz. of sweet Mexican black tar heroin.”** You like my answer the best and choose that card as the winner of the round, so I get to keep my black card, **“_____: That’s how I want to die.”** Then we begin the next round. The first player to accumulate 10 black cards wins the game.

By my count, there are roughly 56 white cards in Cards Against Humanity out of 440 that act as mortality saliences. These are either cards that explicitly refer to death, like **“a windmill full of corpses”** or **“civilian casualties,”** or cards that one would likely associate with death like **“Auschwitz”** or **“hospice care.”** 56 is a conservative number, given that I did not include cards that referred to aging, historical figures unless they are directly associated with death (i.e. **John Wilkes Booth**), or things that could potentially, but not necessarily cause death (i.e. **Alcoholism**). My argument relies only on cards that would immediately lead most people to think of death, therefore causing them subconscious death anxiety.

With 56 death cards out of 440, each time a player draws a card he or she has a roughly 13% chance of drawing a mortality salience. This number may not seem very high, but when combined with the possibility of another player answering with a mortality salience and exposing the entire group to it, there is a

high chance of one or more of the players experiencing death anxiety at any given time. There are also prompts that require players to draw two or three cards from the deck on one turn, doubling or tripling the probability of drawing a death reminder card. Additionally, there are 10 black cards that are also direct reminders of death, such as “_____ : **That’s how I want to die.**” and “**That’s right I killed _____ . How you ask? _____.**” Because these represent 1/9 of the black cards in the box, there is approximately an 11% chance that any of those cards will be drawn on any given turn and expose the entire group to death-related anxiety.

There are 103 total cards that refer to an “other,” a group that has a different world view from the majority of the people playing the game. This category includes any card from “**brown people**” to “**Republicans**” to “**Asians who aren’t good at math.**” However, other cards seem to fit into this category, including, for example, any figures who are clearly leaders of these groups or representative figures of that culture. This meant that the number includes cards like “**Stalin,**” “**George W. Bush,**” and “**Tom Cruise.**” These people are consistently associated with a school of thought and a view that would differ from a lot of the people playing the game. Cards that represent differing religious ideologies also belong to the “other” cards as they also represent a different world view for a lot of people. This adds cards like “**Mohammed, praise his holy name,**” “**God,**” and “**The Holy Bible**” to the number. Some dispute may arise at where to draw the line at what defines an “other” or a differing perspective. However, the list is limited to cards containing clear references to a specific group and figures or texts that would clearly be associated with those groups. With 103 “other” cards out of 440 cards, there is a 23.4% chance that a player will draw an “other” card on any given turn. That chance increases if the players encounter a “pick two” or “pick three” prompt. While some players in the game may belong to a certain group like “**Italians**” or “**Gays,**” the vast majority of the cards will not apply to them.

Cards Against Humanity literally hands you the two major components of Terror Management Theory: a reminder of death and an alternative world view. The only thing the player has to do is fill in the behavior. Terror Management Theory can occur within the game in two ways. The first is that the player draws a death card to put in his hand or someone else plays a death card. Let’s say our player picks up the card “**The inevitable heat death of the universe.**” This card is an instant reminder of death. It even contains the word “death.” Our player now feels a subconscious fear of death and anxiety about dying. He may not actively be aware of it, but it is there and he must do something to deal with that anxiety. The next black card that is drawn is “**After months of practice with _____ , I am finally ready for _____.**” Our player takes two cards from his hand and answers “After months of practice with *Muhammed (Praise be Unto Him)*, I am finally ready for *72 Virgins.*” Our player has dealt with his reminder of mortality by making a joke about Muslim

beliefs. By creating humor surrounding the promiscuity of one of the foremost figures of Islam, our player has undermined and discredited another cultural perspective. The same idea would be true had our player answered “After months of practice with **The South**, I am finally ready for **Racism**.” Our player would be capitalizing on the stereotype that all people in the South are racist and thereby demeaning Southerners’ cultural perspective.

Terror Management Theory can also occur in another way. This is if the Card Czar draws a black card that reminds him or her of death. In this case, Terror Management Theory occurs more rapidly. The black card has a prompt such as, “**That’s right I killed _____ . How, you ask? _____**” that will instantly remind people of death. In this case the players are all equally exposed to a mortality salience and all experience a subconscious fear of death. Our player may submit something like, “That’s right I killed **the Pope**. How, you ask? **Praying the gay away.**” Assuming our player is not Catholic or gay, she has made a joke about world views that are not her own. While she likely did not mean it offensively, she is undermining the gay perspective by making a joke about that group. She is discrediting another culture that is different from her own. No doubt the response time will be varied and not every player will submit a response that makes fun of another cultural point of view. However, psychology insists that this behavior will likely occur, if not during this round, then shortly thereafter.

Group Dynamics As One’s Own Cultural Worldview

So far, I have argued that Cards Against Humanity creates an environment where players experience TMT because they are exposed to a death reminder, subconsciously feel anxiety about death, and then react to that anxiety by using the game to make jokes about other world views. However, people who experience Terror Management Theory not only discredit other world views, but cling harder to and defend their own world view. In the early 1990s, Greenberg and associates determined that people who experience a mortality salience displayed greater loyalty to both religious and national identities (Hackney 54). They also demonstrated uncharacteristic hostility toward people who had different political ideologies. I would argue that the players of Cards Against Humanity are unlikely to make jokes about a group they identify strongly with. Jewish students playing this game after synagogue are probably not going to play the **Mecha-Hitler** card. But while playing the game, they may begin to feel a stronger sense of attachment to the Jewish culture and tradition.

Within the context of Cards Against Humanity, your group may not just refer to your basic biographical information – race, ethnicity, gender, *etc.* In addition to strengthening one’s loyalty to those groups, the player will form a greater bond to the other players participating in the game. The player will also feel a greater defense of the collective identity and world view shared by that group. One *USAToday College* article about CAH explains: “It’s a bonding

experience,' says Laura Krause, a sophomore psychology major at Northeastern University. 'In a weird way it also kind of shows you who your true friends are; like someone picks your answer card because they think it was funny, and you just think 'yeah, she's a homie'" (Prottas 1). A group of college students at a particular university has a unique view of the world that they are bringing to this game. The players of this game are also taking risks by making jokes about controversial topics in front of their peers. Because of this, the players participating in the game will begin to form a collective identity throughout the course of the game. This identity also informs their world view and they will be equally as defensive of this group when reminded of death as they will be of the groups that represent their background.

Humor as a Coping Mechanism

It is generally accepted by scientists that humor is an effective coping strategy for people in a variety of scenarios. Making jokes allows people to process traumatic events and deal with them emotionally (Kuipers 74). However, these ideas have usually been applied to external traumas like Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, and the war in Iraq. It is conceivable that humor could be applied to internal trauma as well.

So far, this paper has presented two separate theories: Terror Management Theory, which argues that people react to death reminders by diminishing other cultures, and the theory of humor as an effective coping mechanism. We have seen that when presented with a mortality salience in *Cards Against Humanity*, a person will often respond by making jokes about other groups. Not only do other participants generally agree with the player, but they also laugh just as hysterically. CAH quickly becomes a circus of continual reminders of death that are dealt with by using the "other" cards to make jokes that demean a particular group. Eventually, everyone playing the game will be an active example of Terror Management Theory. Every player has been reminded of death and every play deals with it in the same way.

Because of this, I propose that this type of "gallows humor" is an extension of Terror Management Theory. TMT suggests that when reminded of death, one feels the need to undermine others' cultural world view. It does not say how or what method is used to do this. However, the case of *Cards Against Humanity* demonstrates that the undermining of others' cultural world view, at least among young adults, can be done predominantly through humor. Young adults do not feel comfortable simply making fun of another group of people in every day conversation. They prefer to do it under the pretense of a game. *Cards Against Humanity* provides a perfect context for these ideas.

We can see other examples in which humor is used as terror management. Following 9/11, many jokes were made about the war in Iraq, the collapsing of the twin towers, *etc.* (Knoll 8). They were almost always centered on al-Qaeda, Muslims, or Terrorists. Events like 9/11 remind people of death and specifically

how quickly our lives can end in a matter of moments. Because we are so afraid of death, we react by putting down other groups with a differing worldview.

The bitter grandfather making jokes about the Viet Cong or the North Koreans is also experiencing TMT. At first, these jokes may seem odd or out of place and we roll our eyes at grandpa being grandpa. However, his memories of war are mortality saliences. Whenever he remembers going to war, he remembers how many of his friends and acquaintances died and how easily he could have too. He copes with that fear by making jokes about the group he was fighting. He chooses this group because they are the easiest target and clearly their world view differs from his. Humor is not only a way of coping with trauma, but an extension of TMT. We can't deal with the idea of death so we make jokes about other cultures in order to help ourselves stay close to our own cultural worldview.

Anxiety

College students in this era are particularly prone to using the type of gallows humor present in *Cards Against Humanity* because of their inability to cope with anxiety. College students right now, in particular, are vulnerable to anxiety and stress. Many researchers, including Helen Bland, have identified the college years as one of the most stressful times in a person's life (3). The transition from high school to college is a culture shock to many young adults and having to adjust to a tougher curriculum, life in a dorm, and living without the structure of parental supervision causes a great deal of anxiety in many students. Additionally, the current college generation, the millennials (people born between 1980 and 2000), demonstrate traits that have been linked to greater stress levels, such as being overscheduled and feeling pressure to achieve high academic success. The scientific community recognizes the millennial generation as being far more stressed than previous generations. Not only do they experience greater levels of anxiety, but they have not developed strategies to effectively cope with stress. Because of the lack of structure introduced to them when they enter college, many students abandon any successful coping mechanisms when they leave home. They rely on avoidance techniques like distracting themselves by watching TV or listening to music to deal with stress instead of addressing those feelings and implementing a plan to reduce their anxiety.

College-age kids are also far more prone to death anxiety. In 1996, psychologists Rasmussen and Brem identified an inverse relationship between level of death anxiety and age. People who are younger experience far greater degrees of death anxiety than their older counterparts (Rasmussen 63). Younger people may be less willing to process the idea of their inevitable death where older adults have come to terms with this fate. As very young adults, college students are one of the groups most prone to high levels of death anxiety. Furthermore, Ernst Becker, one of the forefathers of TMT, and his associate David Lester found that death anxiety in college students has increased significantly over time by administering the same survey to college students in

1935 and 1991 (219). They found that the most consistently feared causes of death are cancer and car accidents. It is noteworthy that there are three black cards that reference some type of cancer. Not only are college students more prone to anxiety now, but they are also especially prone to death anxiety and, as a result, the behaviors associated with Terror Management Theory. Their intense fear of death drives their need for a forum to discredit other views and use humor to undermine other cultures in a way that is socially acceptable. Cards Against Humanity provides that forum.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored Terror Management Theory as it applies to the behavior of the players in Cards Against Humanity. I have shown that humor has become an extension of TMT in that it is the way many people, including the players of the game, discredit other cultural perspectives. I then showed that college students have adopted this game where other age groups have not because, unlike those groups, college students at this time have more intense feelings of death anxiety. This anxiety motivates young people to undermine and discredit other world views through dark, “sick” humor. However, what research has yet to address is what exactly is causing millennials to have much deeper fears of death than previous generations. What have they experienced or been exposed to that has intensified this anxiety to this degree? This remains to be seen.

Additionally, strategies need to be found to help college students today deal with anxiety in more productive ways. Cards Against Humanity does not just raise the issue of mental health in young adults. It also raises a question of morality. Regardless of who is playing, the contents of the game are designed to make fun of large groups of people in ways that are often highly offensive. The fact that **Auschwitz** is even included in the game is proof of that. Is there a moral problem with playing this game? Do we as a society have an obligation to teach young adults to cope with stress in a way that won't offend people? Further discussion is necessary.

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The Evolution of Chinatown and the Cultural Effects of Gentrification "

Yan Shi

In November 1986, D.C., with the help of sister city Beijing, erected the Chinese-style “Friendship Arch” in Chinatown, signifying the supposed new beginning for the neighborhood. According to sociologist Esther Ngan-ling Chow, the arch is meant to symbolize “the intended revitalization of the Chinatown community” (205). Furthermore, professors Leeman and Modan of George Mason University and Ohio State University claim that the Friendship Arch was “a recognition of the neighborhood’s history and culture” (344). However, history will show that the intention of keeping the neighborhood’s history and culture was all for naught, as officials and businesses sought gentrification of Chinatown in order to boost tourism. While the gentrification of Chinatown has made the area safer and more profitable to residents and businesses alike, the gentrification of the neighborhood has contributed to the decline of culture, community, and language within the area as well as the unfair displacement of its residents.

First, a distinction must be made between the word *gentrification* and the word *revitalization*. In an article from *The Examiner*, staff writer Aubrey Whelan notes, “gentrifying neighborhoods will [sic] see a demographic shift as property values rise, with wealthier white residents replacing poorer minority residents.” In contrast, revitalizing neighborhoods “take a more community-oriented approach to economic and demographic shifts.” This means that the community’s culture will remain, but it will also be diversified—unlike gentrification that can cause displacement of residents, residents will not be displaced in a neighborhood undergoing revitalization.

The history of DC’s Chinatown began in the 1880s in what is now the John Marshall Place. The formation of the District’s Chinatown was “primarily a self-defense mechanism” (Chow 192) as most Chinese people faced discrimination and racial tensions by white people. Thus, Chinatown was a safe zone for many of the residents. As the years passed, the community grew and prospered. Businesses increased in numbers, and organizations such as the On Leong Merchants Association appeared to keep the peace within Chinatown and to make sure residents were happy. However, in 1929, the federal government

“forced the evacuation of Chinatown to make room for the construction of federal and district municipal buildings planned as part of the Federal Triangle Project” (Chow 195). The On Leong Merchants Association tried to find new homes in the area of present-day Chinatown. However, many white property owners were heavily against this move, so they worked with real estate agents to avoid heavy concentrations of the Chinese. As a result, their living space was reduced—thus, their capability to grow in terms of space and in population was also reduced. Nonetheless, the Chinese forged on and created a new close-knit community teeming with life and tradition in the area that is now present-day Chinatown.

Chinatown’s existence was threatened again by Washington’s plans for redevelopment in the 1970s. The District planned on creating a convention center, hotels, a metro station, and department stores to feed the tourist industry that was beginning to make its debut. As a result of the construction, several residents would have been displaced and housing would have been less affordable—Chinatown, in general, would shrink (Chow 202). Residents protested against the changes as it would undermine their community, but they had to settle under a modified agreement that the buildings would be built farther away from the center of Chinatown. Regardless, residents were still displaced, and many (particularly the elderly) moved into the newly constructed Wah Luck House, which was built to ease the displacement of residents and to offer affordable housing. Other residents from second and third generation families and more affluent residents moved out into the suburbs (Chow 200).

Throughout the years, the construction of buildings like the Convention Center and the metro station caused severe damage. The construction, according to Chow, was bad for business. In some cases, stores and merchandise owned by the Chinese were damaged in the process of building the metro station and the Convention Center (205). In 1997, the Verizon Center was built in the center of Chinatown, and it created the same results as its predecessors, hiking up property prices to the point that business owners could not afford them. Stores were slowly closing one by one. Jing Chun Li, a resident in Chinatown, commented, “When I first came here, there were ten Chinese restaurants and two grocery stores, and they carried many things. Now there’s none. Chinatown has only the name” (qtd. in Nakamura). The closing of so many businesses created a lull, but the American stores around them picked up the slack. While business slowly picked back up, it came at the price of losing small businesses owned by Asian Americans—thus, a small portion of Chinese culture was lost.

The loss of Chinese businesses and residents resulted in a decrease in population. Chinatown was becoming smaller and smaller. David Nakamura, writer from *The Washington Post*, used the word *corner* to describe the current physical situation of Chinatown in his article “From Chinatown to Chinacorner.” While crime rates dropped and property values rose, “Chinese-owned businesses were replaced by national chains” as a result. American chain stores like

Fuddruckers and Starbucks replaced the restaurants and the bakeries owned by Asian Americans. As businesses and families moved away, the culture and community within the area dwindled, leaving only the shell of buildings for tourists to see. Nakamura wrote his article in 2011, and residents of the Wah Luck House that he interviewed said that they were afraid that they would be forced to move out of their building after the building's contract expired as most felt the most comfortable in DC's Chinatown. The residents had created a micro-community within the Wah Luck House. Several of the elderly residents could not speak English very well, and displacement would put them out of their comfort zone. The people living here were a large percentage of the last few Chinese Americans living around Chinatown. While the apartment was put on the market, no one wanted to buy the building at the company's posted price—so leases were renewed through 2015. While the residents of the Wah Luck House can rest in peace for now, when 2015 comes, the threat of displacement may arise again.

A similar situation occurred in early August. Robert Samuels of *The Washington Post*, wrote about the owner of Museum Square—another building much like the Wah Luck House—who wanted to demolish the building to build something new and more pleasing to the growing affluent population in the area. However, the demolition would have displaced at least two hundred ninety-one households, “which include[d] nearly half of the Chinese immigrant population left in and around Chinatown.” A co-owner of the building, Michele Ball, says that they were “trying to maximize the value of the property” (qtd. in Samuels). Because of the Verizon Center and the Convention Center's construction, there has been a need to adapt to keep up with the changing economic climate. According to Ball, displacement did not matter so as long as there was a voucher involved. Vouchers allowed for the displaced family to move into housing of their choosing, so as long as it fit the standards set (United States). Rent payment assistance would be included, but the help is often not often to offset the new costs of living in a new home and area—especially in DC. Samuels notes that many of the residents—Chinese, black, and Latino—were all frightened by the prospect of displacement. In the end, the property owners allowed the residents to stay for up to a year, giving them enough time to make their case. Nonetheless, like the Wah Luck House's residents, the Museum Square residents may face displacement in the near future.

The Wah Luck House and the Museum Square situation had an underlying tone of the promise in revitalization, but one must recall the definitions of gentrification and revitalization. Both situations fell under the definition of the former, in which the population of less-affluent individuals would have been forced out and replaced with more affluent individuals. Displacement or lack of displacement of residents of a particular area is a key factor in determining whether or not the improvements and developments are an example of gentrification or revitalization.

Based on the history mentioned, changes in favor of profits have always been in the making, whether private or government-issued. According to writer Tricia Miller of *Roll Call*, the “last time the District made a serious effort in Chinatown was 1986. That year, the Gallery Place Metro stop was renamed Gallery Place-Chinatown and the Friendship Arch was built...” Those two events made the neighborhood “official,” in that it was recognized as a *destination*, a legitimate place. The renaming and the arch offered nothing to the Chinese community other than acknowledgement that they exist after so many years—yet, by present-day, a majority of the culture, language, and community disappeared.

While developers may have wanted to preserve the culture of Chinatown, they destroyed it by allowing the Verizon Center and the Convention Center to come to fruition. Language is a vital part to culture, so, to make up for it, they added Chinese lettering to the signs of the American chains that took the place of the small Chinese-owned businesses. The stores were required to have Chinese architecture elements in their buildings in an attempt to preserve culture, but it only served as a mock, non-genuine display when coupled with the bilingual signage, where the Chinese on the national chains’ sign do not even matter—in other words, the language is used *solely* for aesthetic purposes (Leeman and Modan 347). Leeman and Modan provided other examples, such as the Starbucks sign in Chinatown versus a Starbucks sign in China. In D.C.’s Chinatown, Starbucks is directly translated into Chinese. However, in China, the English name is used in its sign, no translation given. From this information, what conclusions can be made? The answer is simple: the signage in Chinatown is only there to “transport” tourists to an “exotic” destination. It is not genuine—culture revolves around language, and it is more helpful and more immersive to hear someone else speaking the language or to see writing that conveys an actual, meaningful message. This is especially the case for those wishing to learn the language and the culture—Chinatown can be a place where one can experience a piece of American Chinese culture without having to venture far distances.

Culture contains language, and it also contains community. Chow, at the end of her essay, “From Pennsylvania Avenue to H Street NW: The Transformation of Washington’s Chinatown,” offered an interesting perspective. She suggested that some may “feel that residential decentralization among Chinese Americans may also indicate that the community has transcended the spatial and economic boundaries of Chinatown” (206). In regards to the spatial boundaries of Chinatown, Chinatown has always had small borders due to the actions of the white property owners in 1929. There was hardly any room for growth, and it limited the growth of the Chinese population in that area, thus people *had* to move out. In terms of the economic boundaries, Chinatown has flourished significantly after national chain stores opened up in the area, forcing Chinese-owned stores out of business, as most could not afford the property prices or the living costs. A majority of the residents (mostly second and third

generation) moved out into the suburbs, but the elders stayed behind in Chinatown as it was more convenient for them. However, as the prices continue to rise in Chinatown and the need to renovate by property owners intensifies, the elders may one day face a tough decision to leave their comfort zone. While a majority consciously made the decision to move out of Chinatown, one cannot ignore the fact that many moved out due to the rising property prices that occurred after the gentrification of the neighborhood. As the Chinese continue to move out of the area, the culture will go with them. Furthermore, while the Chinese living in and outside of Chinatown can still interact with one another, there is no longer a focal point or center. As a result, there is no definite sense of a strong community, aside from the invisible ties through friendships, kinships, and so forth. Community is required for culture to flourish and grow. In other words, culture revolves around community, among other things, and without this, it is difficult to say that developers succeeded in preserving Chinatown.

The Chinese residents and business owners were not satisfied with the commoditization of the Chinese language. The letterings did the opposite of what was intended. Instead of preserving the culture, the writing turned it into a profit instead, something that was “exotic” enough to attract the tourists. The architecture gave the appearance of Chinatown, but it does not make the experience. Residents, displaced, angry, tired, wanted something more substantial. There is a lack of community in Chinatown now, and residents recognize this and want to combat it.

Despite the dwindling numbers of Chinese American residents and business owners in Chinatown, many people want to preserve the culture that has been there for so many years. Stan Lou, vice president of the D.C. chapter of the Organization of Chinese Americans, comments, “Chinatown is an important touchstone to us Asian Americans. It’s a place where we can identify with our culture. In D.C., particularly in our nation’s capital, we need to figure out how we can make it more ethically appealing and preserve that history” (qtd. in Rudansky). Not only is preserving the culture important for history and education purposes, it is important to remind the youth that is connected to that culture where they come from. The dilution of the culture of Chinatown not only affects those currently living in the area, but it also affects people of Chinese descent living *around* the area—Chinatown has always been meant to be a place to feel connected, to feel a sense of belonging and community. For some, it may be a place to reconnect and to better understand the culture that they come from. At its current state, Chinatown is not something to be proud of.

Many are hoping to gain momentum from the Chinese New Year parades—they hope that that will start to bring the culture back to Washington’s Chinatown, if at least just once a year. Others have proposed a Chinatown Park, in which open-air markets would exist and Chinese cultural events could be held (Miller). However, nothing has been done yet due to money constraints and the depressing economy—many are still waiting for change. In the meantime,

organizations like the Chinatown Community Cultural Center help “preserve and promote Chinatown’s cultural identity while simultaneously focusing on education and empowering immigrants in Chinatown and the Washington D.C. area.” Their mission is to cultivate Chinatown’s culture and to enrich what still remains by offering programs and cultural classes to the community. Those of Chinese descent can come here to learn more about their culture, to learn the language, and to practice martial arts like Tai Chi.

In the end, Chinatown was gentrified rather than revitalized. Gentrification may lead to safer environments and more profits, but it does not come without consequences. While affluent people may find new homes, minority groups like the Chinese in Chinatown are displaced and must find new homes outside of their comfort zones. Revitalization would have allowed the neighborhood to flourish in a more positive way, in that residents are not forced out due to rising property costs. As a result of displacement, culture within the area will start to disappear and become merely a memory. However, through lobbying, planning, and community organizations, parts of the culture can be preserved for future generations to come.

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Gettin' Hitched among the Hay Stacks:
Barn Weddings as a Manifestation of American Attitudes
toward Marriage and Tradition

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Abstract

The United States boasts a robust agrarian origin and an even heartier modern commercial industry. Ironically, the same commercial industries in which the urban United States population takes pride also robs the American people of cultural rituals devoid of advertisers' influences. Service industries and invented traditions form a lucrative partnership—the multibillion-dollar wedding industry. Among recent style trends in the bridal industry is the barn wedding. The rustic wedding theme mimics the idyll of the American rural society. Nineteenth century American rural society developed outside of urban society's commercial influences, which qualifies agrarian traditions as uniquely and wholly American. I argue that couples' interest in barn weddings is an attempt to preserve their genuine American heritage and respond to the dismal disposition of modern culture towards marriage. Despite the commercial industry's influence on barn weddings, couples employ the rustic theme in order to infuse commercialized traditions with personally meaningful sentiments.

Keywords: barn wedding, traditions, American, wedding industry

Introduction

Evidence of American preoccupation with the wedding and passionate romantic love manifests itself in the overwhelming collection of bridal magazines, blogs, wedding-focused television shows, and wedding channel options. An internet search for bridal magazine subscriptions yields ten major magazines: *Brides*, *Bridal Guide*, *Martha Stewart Weddings*, *You and Your Wedding*, *The Knot*, *Southern Bride*, *Wedding Style*, *Get Married*, *Inside Weddings*, and *Premier Bride*. Each magazine hosts a website overflowing with wedding style ideas, blogs with picturesque photos documenting the latest trends, wedding gowns on flawless models, and a search engine to locate local vendors. States with the highest number of wedding businesses and vendors are California with 1,293 businesses, Florida with 1,024 businesses, Texas with 894 businesses, and New Jersey with

627 businesses (“Geographic Research”, 2014). Of course, the previous lists exclude the thousands of Pinterest pins on the hundreds of boards under the bridal and wedding categories. Facebook boasts hundreds of pages as well for vendors, event planners, and photographers to publicize their niche services to the public (“Dellwood Barn Weddings”, n.d.; “S Bar S Barn”, n.d.). In addition to the bounty of bridal advertising, American entertainment feeds Americans’ appetite for opulent nuptial fodder. *Rich Bride Poor Bride*, *Bridezillas*, *Four Weddings*, *Say Yes to the Dress*, *Platinum Weddings*, and *My Fair Wedding* constitute a few of the wedding-themed television reality series that air on stations like, *TLC* and *Wedding Central*. Wedding reality series propagate popular attitudes and fashion trends within the greater bridal industry.

Currently, theme weddings occupy the attentions of popular bridal fashion sources. Specifically, the eco chic—also referred to as rustic chic or shabby chic—style barn wedding dominates the décor interests of brides across the nation (Geiser, 2014; Shaw, 2014; S Hill, 2014). While there are several spin-offs of the barn wedding, including rustic industrial and steam punk and country/farm weddings, this paper focuses on the overarching, more general barn wedding. I believe that my argument still applies to the subthemes but, for clarity and brevity, I focus on the barn wedding. The barn wedding replaces champagne glasses with mason jars and the church with a renovated barn (Geiser, 2014). Bosman (2014) and Geiser (2014) reported for the *New York Times* and *The Daily Record*, respectively, that couples from all regions of the U.S. mainland are traveling to Southern states, New England, and the Midwest to host their weddings. Surprisingly, the couples hail from urban areas and have had little to no exposure to the agricultural lifestyle in their lifetime (Bosman, 2014; O’Brien, 2014). When asked, couples explain that the rural-theme wedding best showcases their uniqueness as individuals and as a couple (Shaw, 2014).

Barn wedding bride Kate Baker, from Rockville, Maryland, agreed that the rural theme “positively affected the meaningfulness” of her wedding ceremony. “Café string lights” and “greenery” instead of traditional floral accents matched her and the groom’s “relaxed” and “fun” personalities. Unlike the more common “uptight” and “fancy” venues in hotels or banquet rooms, the barn acted as a “blank canvas” for the young couple to infuse personal elements reflective of their individuality as a married couple. After the ceremony, guests commented that they could “sense the love and friendship” between the Bakers and their families and friends. A barn wedding allowed the couple to overcome the “orchestrated” feel of traditional ceremonies. As a religious couple, the Bakers felt that the barn wedding “outside, under a giant tree, with wind blowing” increased their awareness of God’s presence than would a “beautiful church wedding” (Kate Baker, personal communication, November 11, 2014). Inspired. Spiritual. Intimate. Perfect. Couples like the Bakers who choose a barn wedding understand the theme to be a holistic, natural means to celebrate their love in contrast with the wedding industry’s commercialized vision.

Contrary to the couples' rationale, Otnes (1996) and Scott (1996), Penner (2004), and Montemurro (2008)—scholars of advertising, American culture, and social history, respectively—argued that the American wedding industry sells the theme wedding to couples through elaborate marketing strategies. Since the commercialization of the wedding ceremony after the Civil War, industries annually exploit the nuptial ceremony to achieve profit increases (Howard, 2003; Montemurro, 2008; Penner, 2004). Marsh (2005), Howard (2003), and Penner (2004) espoused in their analyses of modern American weddings that the multibillion dollar wedding industry in the U.S. robs the American culture of a meaningful and authentic wedding tradition. In response to popular belief and scholars' insights, I argue that American couples demonstrate a uniquely American culture through rustic theme weddings despite the wedding industry's inevitable and inescapable influence. Barn weddings—more so than wedding themes not inspired by the distinctive American agrarian era—allow couples to preserve and emphasize facets of American rural culture through an idyllic pastoral representation that disappears from the physical landscape each year. Couples use the rustic theme as a vehicle to incorporate personally significant sentiments into the ceremony outside of long-established religious and cultural traditions.

The Birth of the American Wedding Industry

Before the birth of the wedding industry, weddings were intimate affairs hosted by families; very little ritual and circumstance characterized the wedding day from any other (Montemurro, 2008). Fancy dinners and extensive guest lists occurred almost exclusively at exorbitantly rich families' nuptial ceremonies and were outliers from the cultural norm (Marsh, 2005; Montemurro, 2008). However, Marsh (2005) indicates a proliferation of lavish weddings among middle and lower-class brides during the latter part of the twentieth century. Penner (2004) ascribes the shift in working and middle-class brides' expectations of the wedding ceremony to the clever marketing of service industries. Accepted costly components of modern wedding celebrations come from late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century invented traditions that the various markets of goods and services created to increase the demand for their products and acquire a new consumer market (Penner, 2004).

One such profit-motivated wedding practice is the bridal registry for wedding presents. Bridal gifts were not a social obligation until after the Civil War in the late nineteenth century (Montemurro, 2008; Penner, 2004). Industries marketed a need for bridal gifts which matured into status symbols, not only for the newlywed couple, but for the wedding guests who presented the gifts (Penner, 2004). The practice of bridal registries and wedding gifts inspired businesses like department stores to produce catalogs which resulted in families and wedding guests spending all their money at one business location (Montemurro, 2008). Businesses appealed to the American attraction to material status. With the rise

of the wedding as a status symbol of wealth and as a prediction of the couple's prosperity, the acceptable price associated with the wedding increased (Penner, 2004). After the mid-twentieth century, what was once a lavish celebration in which only the well-off could indulge became the standard for couples from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Marsh, 2005; Montemurro, 2008). Once the other service industries recognized the power they wielded over the hearts and expectations of the American people, the bridal industry was born.

The markets of goods and services not only appealed to the American greed for status but also to the American people's more sentimental, romantic side. An example of an invented tradition is that of the double-ring ceremony (Howard, 2003). While jewelers promoted the idea that men ought to wear wedding bands like those of the women decades before World War I, the fad did not catch on until the deployment of American young men to fight in the Great War (Howard, 2003). At the start of the twentieth century, advertisers focused on the sentimental value of the male wedding band as a token of remembrance (Howard, 2003). The young soldiers wore symbols of their love and commitment to their wives back at home. The emotional connection with the new practice found its way into Hollywood movies, which cemented the double-ring ritual into American society and expectation (Dowd & Pallotta, 2000; Howard, 2003).

The De Beers diamond cartel's introduction of the diamond engagement ring into American tradition reconstructed female nuptial expectations and led to an increase in necessary wedding expenses (Marsh, 2005; Otnes & Scott, 1996). De Beers fabricated rich American histories behind the engagement ring in order to integrate its product into women's expectations (Otnes & Scott, 1996; Penner, 2004). In their article for the *Journal of Advertising*, Otnes and Scott (1996) describes the outcome of De Beers' genius promotion of the diamond engagement ring as an "instilled norm" by the 1960s (p. 37). According to Otnes and Scott (1996), De Beers' invented engagement ring tradition marked the end of the age of ritual innovation. Now, advertisers use the authority they gained from the previous period to determine the appropriate expense for the "ritual artifacts" (Otnes & Scott, 1996, p. 38) of the wedding celebration. Intuitively, one can predict that the industry-certified cost for objects will be steep and, considering the consumerist tendencies of the American public, met. In 2014, the average wedding cost \$30,000 (Hicken, 2014). The necessity to invest tens of thousands of dollars on a wedding may shock some individuals, but, when one considers that each aspect of the wedding patronizes a service industry, \$30,000 seems like an accurate and reasonable approximation. From the DJ who spins the reception tunes to the barn owner who hosts the venue, modern weddings rely heavily on businesses. According to CNN, the venue and catering alone can cost \$13,385 (2014). Decorations and flowers easily total \$2,069 (Hicken, 2014).

Couples' ideas of what the ceremony should look like is dictated by the individuals who sell them the materials to make it happen. When society allows the "jewelers, gown manufacturers, and caterers set the standards to which

American brides...aspire” (Mead, 2007, p. 5), only a flawless wedding satisfies brides and grooms imaginations. Of course, this standard for perfection on one’s wedding day relies heavily on costly décor and specialized expertise in order to come to fruition (Mead, 2007). As discovered in both Sniezek (2005) and Currie’s (1993) studies on wedding planning, brides, as well as grooms, exert much of their energies to the planning of the nuptial ceremony. There is an external pressure by advertisers and an internal pressure by peers to have a flawless ceremony with an unforgettable reception. Glossy magazines and charming Pinterest posts craft the ideal wedding. Facebook pages that publicize the weddings of friends and friends of friends increase the competition among couples to have the best wedding (Geiser, 2014). Barn weddings are no exception. Although barn wedding brides’ attempts to protect their rustic design visions from the wedding industry’s influence, Pinterest displays over a 1,000 pins on the Barn Wedding Décor board alone. The wedding industry certainly capitalizes on each opportunity to profit from the barn wedding trend. Like other theme weddings, barn weddings are a boon to the commercial wedding industry.

In addition to Pinterest, antique shops and rural society benefit from the rustic bride’s ambition for the sweetest Southern wedding (Shaw, 2014). The revenue that barn weddings generate funds the preservation of the older barns (Shaw, 2014). Therefore, the hearty barn wedding trend stimulates the still recovering economy from the Great Recession all while it serves the rural community it seeks to imitate (Hicken, 2014). Venue fees for historic barns range from \$2,000 to \$6,000 dollars per event (Shaw, 2014). Farmers and barn owners who want to remain a part of the rural landscape benefit and the wedding industry continues to prosper.

A Question of Authenticity

Despite the significant financial gains of historic barn owners, there is disagreement over whether the barn weddings are preserving culture or hurting what culture remains (Bosman, 2014). Rural dwellers complain that the ruckus from the events disturbs their quiet, secluded lifestyle (Mohr, 2014). These complaints reinforce that barn weddings are not accurate holistic reproductions of rural life but independent productions of couples’ own inspiration. There exists a conflict between the reality of modern rural society’s value system and what urbanites personalize as rural values; couples, like the nineteenth century inventive businesses, exploit the cultural landscape for their own gain. In this instance, the profit is not monetary but experiential. Couples wish to assume the roles of an actual rural bride and groom but, unfortunately, fail to do so because they rely on the commercial outputs of the wedding industry to portray the theme. Instead of an honest reflection of rural life, couples invent settings akin to nothing in reality. Still, I believe that barn wedding couples demonstrate a desire to dissent from the materialistic, commercial-saturated culture around them; barn weddings are a means to that end.

Modern American culture's fascination and romanticism of the rural lifestyle is nothing new. Nineteenth and twentieth century urban society admired the grit of the rural folk culture and adopted a sense of pride for the accomplishments of the rural society (Shideler, 1991). I propose that the rural society finds a timeless favor in the eyes of the non-rural American public today for the same reason it did at the time of the Industrial Revolution: American rural culture resolves an identity crisis among the American people. The Industrial Revolution did not captivate the fantasies of the people because it was not authentic to the U.S. That is, Britain experienced urbanization almost a century before the U.S. (Rosenfeld, 2006). Urban culture is not wholly unique to the American people. Now, with the globalization of culture and businesses, the phenomenon of placelessness assimilates cultural landscapes to look the same and operate similarly. The rural idyll captures the element of uniqueness that people search for, and, in the United States, people worship. In her response to *New York Times* coverage of the barn wedding's popularity, O'Brien (2014) recalls her childhood growing up in a renovated barn; she credits the stability, security, and sentimentality that she grew up with for the urban dwellers' attraction to the rural landscape.

O'Brien's experience notwithstanding, American farm life in the nineteenth century was anything but idyllic. The farmers and their large families toiled every day for long hours in variable weather conditions (Shideler, 1991). Frequent hardships and loss fortified the relationships of the rural community members (Shideler, 1991). Once the Industrial Revolution began on the East Coast, wearied farmers left the fields for a less labor intensive life in the factories (Rosenfeld, 2006; Shideler, 1991). Although the reality of farm life in the Midwest was more apparent at the time of the late nineteenth century, an idyll of agrarian culture arose among the members of urban society (Shideler, 1991). In their research on the romanticism of the rural landscape in the UK, Bosworth and Willett (2011) describe a phenomenon similar to that of the one in the U.S. The impression that the "idyllic countryside" (Bosworth & Willett, 2011, p. 196) exists continues to distort perceptions of modern and historical rural society.

The misperception of rural society manifests itself in the design of the barn wedding. Barn weddings depict a lifestyle of sweet tea with hearty lunches and frolicking in fields at sundown. Stacked hay bales bookend the altar with warm pastel color schemes lined up as the wedding party on each side ("Barn Weddings", n.d.). Candlelight chandeliers hang from worn wooden beams of the barns; their light bounces off the gilded geometric frame décor on the walls ("Barn Weddings", n.d.). Poppy arrangements cinch white curtains to beams that frame the banquet table for the wedding party ("Barn Weddings", 2014). A wooden sign directs guests to "choose a seat, not a side" when they arrive for ceremony (Plumley, 2014). "Shabby-chic antique" (Shaw, 2014, para. 33) furniture decorates the spacious barn venue as well as serves a practical purpose as dining tables and chairs (Kitts, n.d.). Lace adorns the antique furniture pieces

and, depending on the tastes of the couple, plays a major role in the backdrop of the wedding (Geiser, 2014; Kitts, n.d.). While this description does not accurately depict rural life, I argue that the idyll retains its legitimacy as a component of American identity. People believe this bucolic picture is reality. A reality rooted in traditions and practices genuine—authentic—to the United States culture. Therefore, when couples admire the pastoral idyll with a barn wedding, they do not celebrate the history of rural society; they celebrate the rural idyll. Even though the rural idyll does not accurately represent the historical rural society, Americans still consider it a realistic representation of their rural cultural history and a significant influence on their identity.

Talking Back to the Culture

Marriage comprises an important aspect of the American cultural identity. Rural society considered marriage to be a vital and important institution. With the present societal and cultural concerns about marriage as an institution, barn weddings—manifestations of a cultural idyll—allow optimistic couples to partake in the culture-wide conversation on the relevancy of marriage and its achievability for the long-term. Divorce rates plague the marriage scene with about 48% of women's first marriages ending in divorce (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). In comparison, divorce rates ranged from 3%-7% between 1867 and 1900, which is the time period that barn weddings reimagine (United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973). The divorce rates among the American people did not begin to increase in urban areas until the Industrial Revolution (Rosenfeld, 2006). Over the last forty years, divorce transitioned from a social rarity to a more common occurrence with a decreased negative stigma (United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). The lack of cultural expectation for marriages to last casts a negative light on marriage as an institution.

In a discussion about the reason why couples' marriages seem more fickle now than in previous generations, Wilding (2003) attributes the cause to the lack of social barriers that couples must unite against. Dowd (2000), Pallotta (2000), and Wilding (2003) argues that much of the equality movements removed the barriers of social class, race, and culture that separated couples, or united them in rebellion against the societal norms. A sign of the decreased social barriers to marriage, Rosenfeld (2006) presents data that after 1960, interracial marriages in the U.S. began to increase. This would be at the same time as the Civil Rights Movements as well as the feminist movement. In fact, "5.4 out of every 1,000 white women were married to black men" by 2000 (Rosenfeld, 2006, p. 43). Rosenfeld (2006) notes that the increase of interracial marriages occurs largely among the younger generation. The same generation that enjoys the benefits of the equality movements is the same population of people who choose barn weddings.

I disagree with the scholarship that believes that barriers for couples to fight against fell with the equality movements. I argue that the fight changed. Barriers to a couple's success are just as tall today as in previous generations. While opposition to the marital union of a couple previously based itself on superficial characteristics, current opposition manifests itself in low expectations for a marriage's survival which, while less tangible, are just as ostensible and harmful. Barn weddings allow couples to both rebel against negative mainstream attitudes and emphasize positive aspects of modern society. For example, historical rural society was "more often patriarchal" than the modernly preferred "partnership" between man and wife; however, the rural families boasted a strong sense of "family, self-sufficiency, independence, individuality, and neighborhood community" (Shideler, 1991, p.19). Modern couples forsake the antiquated gender roles but maintain an affection for strong communities and robust individuality. With the barn wedding, couples can pursue marriage with greater gender and race equality not present during the historical rural period, and instill the sense of commitment from the old rural society.

Destination Barn Wedding

Rustic weddings are a bit like cultural patchwork. Couples take from the strengths of past rural society and stitch them together with the progressive ideals of today. For example, the difference in gender roles. The joint selection of wedding details reflect "an ideology of partner equality and harmony" (Sniezek, 2005, p. 223) between the couple. In a rural wedding during the late nineteenth century, the man would have little to do with the planning of the ceremony. Now, men typically take on a more aware, if not active role, in the event's planning process; however, rarely, if ever, do the efforts of the groom eclipse that of the bride (Sniezek, 2005). In Sniezek's (2005) study on labor division between fiancées in the wedding planning process, she observes an increase in couples' use of the pronoun "we" to describe the vision and desires for the wedding ceremony as compared to earlier generations (Sniezek, 2005). Sniezek (2005) believes that the pronoun choice is reflective of the couples' view of the planning as a "joint enterprise" or "joint effort" (p. 222). The dreamy quality of a barn wedding allows couples to create a society all their own where the security that comes from firm gender roles mixes well with the modern, more fluid, equality of the genders. Also, the rural commitment to nature encourages a purer perspective on love and marriage untainted by the materialistic hunger of the urban life (Shideler, 1991; Wherry, 2013). Couples' emphasis on a strong connection to nature refutes Wherry's (1993) idea that they are marrying more for material gain and status elevation but for love and commitment. Ironically, couples still hold onto the traditional cultural understanding that the more perfect—which translates to expensive—a wedding is, the more prosperity a couple will experience (Penner, 2004).

The atmosphere of the barn wedding provides an experience that *Economic Times* likens to a destination wedding (Reddy, 2012). The barn wedding invites guests back to a time—although the time may only exist in the daydreams of urbanites—where the realities of divorce were unknown by most and marriage lasted through trials of sickness and worse. Rustic theme weddings present to society what a couple values—family, devotion, partnerships, work, commitment, admiration for nature, and pure love—and shout back to a refusal to acquiesce to the negative forecast for marriage success rates.

The barn wedding experience is a type of escapism. It allows couples to retreat away from the culture's often dismal and sometimes hostile disposition toward marriage. In a study on escapism and its prevalence and manifestations, Rutgers Distinguished Professor and scholar of psychology Elizabeth Hirschman lists three primary ways that people achieve an escape from their concerns: a person assumes another role, uses products to change his present perception of the world, and enters into an environment that sections him off from the unpleasant realities around him (Hirschman, 1983). Hirschman (1983) also lists potential escapist activities: “dancing, attending a religious service, [spending time] in nature, eating and watching dancing” (p. 66). The barn wedding satisfies each of these criteria. The bride dons a pretty, often simple, gown, and the groom wears the couple's imagination of a farmer's wedding garb (“Barn Weddings”, n.d.; “Barn Weddings”, 2014; Shaw, 2014). Humble, antique period furniture pieces create a setting that facilitates the couple's escape to the rural idyll (Geiser, 2014). A barn venue set back in the still country fields of a rural area secludes the couple from the hustle and bustle of urban life, where they associate the location and source of the negative realities of marriage survival (Bosman, 2014; Rosenfield, 2006). Amidst the countryside backdrop, the couple and their guests participate in Hirschman's list of escapist activities. While almost all wedding celebrations include the listed escapist outlets, the barn wedding combines the activities within an environment that, since it occurs within a picture-perfect setting, intensifies the experience of the wedding.

Conclusion

Escapism, the rebirth of the rural idyll, and the combination of the cultural benefits of rural society and modern equality allow the couple to reinvent themselves apart from the mainstream culture. Not only do they preserve the aspect of their heritage that is authentically American, but they also respond to the popular and scholarly conversations that doubt a modern couple's ability to survive. Couples symbolically prepare themselves to fight against the overwhelming lack of expectations for their commitment, much like the agrarian couples from centuries past who prepared themselves for the tribulations that would threaten their survival. While it is too early to evaluate the success of modern couples' efforts, one can surely see the passion behind their actions.

As Dr. Tamara Sniezek (2005), a professor of sociology at California State University Stanislaus, notes in her exploration on the labor distribution in wedding planning between fiancées, the wedding is an opportunity for the woman to “construct her identity” (p. 216). The wedding is not only an occasion to celebrate her union with another person, to select the right color scheme, or even an opportunity to don a beautiful gown. According to Sniezek, the wedding is like a rite of passage into adulthood (2005). The ceremony provides one of the most visible projections of who an individual is and who she hopes to become in the future. For brides from the relatively young United States, there lacks plentiful cultural artifacts and rituals to enrich the ceremony; individuals must draw upon the hollow traditions created by popular culture and firms (Wherry, 2013; Otnes & Scott, 1996; Penner, 2004). Barn weddings are an example of how couples introduce meaning to the smothering abundance of wedding commercialism. The rustic ceremonies remedy the perceived lack of originality in American wedding traditions. Since the wedding is central to how individuals process the abstract passage into adulthood, it is of interest to focus on how individuals cope with commercial influences on American traditions. Currently, rustic wedding themes are the vehicle of choice. So, I contend that a careful review of the relationship between popular wedding trends and the American wedding ceremony will increase understanding of the complexities of American culture and identity.

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Reflection Essay: " Research as a Conversation "

When I began the research project for “Gettin’ Hitched among the Hay Stacks: Barn Weddings as a Manifestation of American Attitudes toward Marriage and Tradition” in September, I saw research as gathering a list of sources to bolster a predetermined argument. Dense scholarly sources intimidated me; I thought that I was in no position to engage with them. In my previous research experiences, I devised a plausible thesis and searched for sources to support it. I relied on the *Google* search engine/*GoogleScholar* and general library databases to gather all of my sources; I avoided “naysaying” sources. Through research strategies led by Professor Alison Thomas, I learned how to participate in the scholarly conversations within academic sources, how to allow research to shape my argument, and how to access the diverse variety of library resources.

Since I embarked on the barn wedding project with the misconception that research is a sterile and rigid process, I experienced frustration when my argument seemed messy or unclear. Although not always in this order, I researched, wrote, edited, and revised; I spent the majority of the time pondering how to apply ideas from scholarship to create a deeper understanding of popular culture’s barn wedding trend. Thankfully, there were several tools and strategies to help with the pursuit and organization of the research. I used Boolean Operators to narrow and widen search results from large search engines like *EBSCO*, *LexisNexis*, and *SearchBox*. To increase the efficacy of my searches, I kept a list of terms associated with my topic and related subjects. When I came across a related term in an article, I logged it and used it later to generate new applicable search results. The *ProQuest Flow* source organization tool allowed me to keep track of over a dozen diverse sources. Furthermore, when American University did not have a print source that I needed, I submitted a request through the Consortium to have the material delivered to me directly at Bender Library. In addition to the library resources that retrieve research, I benefitted from the advice and guidance of Associate Librarian Alex Hodges. He offered creative suggestions for how to obtain the types of specific information that I needed from interesting sources like *Simply Map*. Alex also suggested subject specific databases like *GenderWatch* and *Sociological Abstracts*, which provided the journals and census data that the project required.

With a level of expertise on barn weddings and a familiarity with American Studies scholarship, I felt well-equipped and confident to enter into a conversation among scholars. Once I completed a second annotated bibliography an argument emerged. I honed my skills of summary and paraphrase with two annotated bibliographies that encouraged close reading and comprehension of dense sources. I can now discern when to summarize a source's main points and when to paraphrase a scholar's idea. Because I allowed the research to guide my conclusions, I developed a valid thesis that not only possessed supportive evidence, but also addressed naysaying sources.

After I realized that the research process is fluid and flexible, I pursued an argument open to whatever I might discover. Now, I see scholarly literature and popular sources as contributions to a greater conversation. Equipped with strategies and tools to access research tools and resources, I am empowered to participate in the greater conversation. My research experience led to a personally increased level of information literacy and a dynamic contribution to American Studies scholars' conversations about wedding traditions and marriage in the United States.