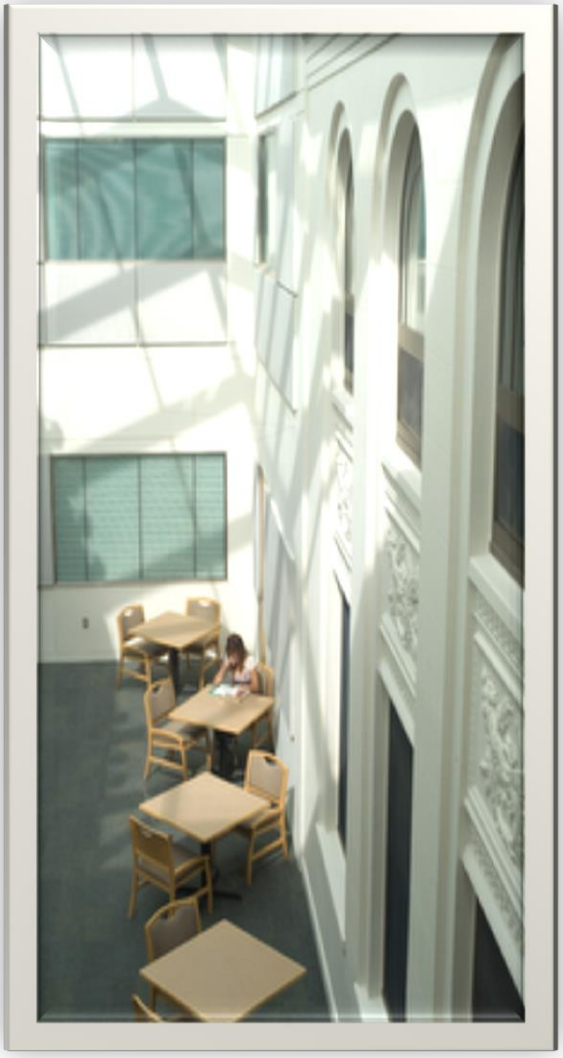

Atrium:

Student Writing from American University's College Writing Program

2014

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Cover photo: Courtesy University Publications, by Jeff Watts

Introduction

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When I began my teaching career as a graduate student at Boston College, I used *Fresh Ink*, a collection of student essays written for the first-year writing seminar. When I came to American University, I found myself copying those essays over and over. I used them in classes to demonstrate certain writing techniques, to provide examples of different ways of addressing assignments, or to workshop (and a whole host of other applications too long to list here). As the essays got older and older, I saw the writings my current students were producing were more relevant. That got me thinking: why can't American have a text like *Fresh Ink*? And, *Atrium* was born.

I'm thrilled to introduce the first volume of *Atrium: Student Writing from American University's College Writing Program, 2014*. The collection both celebrates student writing and serves as models for future students. In these essays you'll discover a wide variety of topics and formats: the subjects range from explorations of culture to accounts of overcoming personal obstacles to scholarly articles; the styles vary from conversational prose to structured research to academic voices. This diversity highlights the depth, breadth, and strengths of our College Writing Program.

I anticipate using the collection in my classes in much the same ways I have used any other text: to serve as models for particular assignments; to highlight ways of incorporating research; and to practice peer conferencing and workshopping skills. I'll pick and choose the essays that work best for my class; I may even leave some of the choice up to my students. I see *Atrium* as a resource for both faculty and students. I hope you find it to be a useful as well.

I want to thank the people who made this possible: my co-editors Cindy Bair Van Dam, John Hyman, and Kate Wilson. Without their work, this collection would not exist. They read every submitted essay, sat through summer meetings to select the ones to put in the collection, and worked individually with the students to polish their essays. I also want to thank the faculty who submitted essays; it was a pleasure to have the opportunity to read so many outstanding pieces. In addition, special thanks go to Gretchen Vanwormer for her name suggestion, *Atrium*. As she explained: "In Battelle, the atrium seems to be a spot to share conversations and art. And in general I think of an atrium as an open, sunny room where things grow."

Enjoy the collection. I hope *Atrium* inspires you.

Stina Kasik Oakes
Editor-in-Chief

Entering the Conversation

§

Power in The Wire: *A Typical Depiction?*

Victoria Donnelly

Abstract

This essay focuses on the depiction of power in the fictional crime drama TV series, *The Wire*. The theories of Michel Foucault are drawn upon in order to explore the complexities of institutional power. Those theories are then used to analyze the portrayal of the effect of institutional power on a street character and an official character from the show. The claim is made that the depiction of the street characters as being unable to change their position of power within any institution is indicative of a stereotypical portrayal of these characters in the show. This analysis is useful for gaining a better understanding of the way power is depicted in fictional television shows and specifically how institutional power functions. The scope of this analysis is limited to only the first season of the show and only to two characters.

> Making robberies into larcenies. Making rapes disappear. You juke the stats, and majors become colonels. I've been here before.
>
> - Detective Roland 'Prez' Pryzbylewski

> They want me to stand with them, right? But where the fuck they at when they supposed to be standing by us? I mean, when shit goes bad and there's hell to pay, where they at? This game is rigged, man. We like the little bitches on a chessboard.
>
> -Preston 'Bodie' Broadus

These quotes are from HBO's crime drama television series *The Wire,* created by David Simon. Each is indicative of the power struggles that are portrayed in the series. Detective Pryzbylewski understands that the only way to gain a higher position of power within the police department is to appear to be performing well, even if that means being dishonest. Preston Broadus reflects on his inability to progress in the illegal drug trade despite his loyalty to his superiors. Despite belonging to different and even opposing institutions, both characters are portrayed as confined in power under their respective institution. However, Pryzbylewski can see a way of gaining more power within his institution, while Broadus cannot.

Introduction

Despite its classification as a crime drama, Kinder (2008) argues that *The Wire* is much more complex than other series that fit this category, such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. What is unique about *The Wire* is its systemic analysis of the city of Baltimore, Maryland, and the different institutions that operate within it. This focus on institutional power is evident because each of the five seasons focuses on a specific institution: the illegal drug trade, the seaport system, the city government and bureaucracy, the education system, and the print media. Instead of neatly wrapping up a murder case in each sixty-minute episode, as is the case with *CSI* episodes, creator David Simon seeks to depict the reality of crime, drugs, and murder in a way that provides a deeper analysis of the institutions that operate within Baltimore. Unlike *CSI*, which "never illuminates its urban context," *The Wire* centers on the city context, and specifically on the institutions that serve Baltimore (Kinder, 2008, p.50).

It is this deeper focus that has garnered critical acclaim for the series, despite low viewership. According to Schaub (2010), only 1.1 million people watched the series finale of *The Wire,* "despite its reputation as 'the best TV show ever broadcast in America'" (p. 122). *CSI*, on the other hand, was considered "the most popular crime series currently on TV" when it ended (Kinder, 2008, p. 50). The disconnect between reviews of the show and viewership is one interesting facet of *The Wire*. Despite being considered more in-depth and realistic than *CSI, The Wire* has never been as successful.

The Wire is also very different from *CSI* and other crime dramas because the main characters do not only belong to law enforcement. Rowe and Collins (2009) state that *The Wire* "gives equal attention to the people who live on the edges of the system, in this case poor inner-city residents" (p. 182). Instead of showing only the work of the police force in solving a murder, the viewers often see a murder planned and executed by the street characters long before the police learn of it.

Therefore, the show focuses on two separate sets of characters, which for the purpose of this discussion will be referred to as the official characters and the street characters. The official characters in *The Wire* are tied to the many different bureaucratic institutions, but the focus of this paper will be on the officers of the Baltimore Police Department. The police characters operate under the influence of the law enforcement hierarchy. The street characters are tied to the drug trade, and operate specifically under the drug empire of Avon Barksdale.

In this discussion I aim to analyze the way that the power of institutions influences both the street characters and the official characters. After providing a definition of power, I will analyze the street characters and the official characters to see if Foucault's ideas about power hold true in *The Wire*'s depiction of institutional power. I argue that the street and official characters are both constrained by webs of power within their respective institutions, but

that those in the police department are able to change their position of power as Foucault describes, whereas those in the street are not.

Definitions of Power

A common definition of power is the possession of control, authority, or influence over others. Typically, people interpret this meaning in the context of one person exerting power over another, the way a mother exerts power over her child. This is valid, because a mother presumably has control, authority and influence over her child. However, power can become much more complex than this linear view when considered in the context of institutions.

The works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault offer a very different view of power than this common definition. Foucault created the concept of "governmentality," which according to Collins and Rowe (2009), essentially means that democracies have managed to systematically control every aspect of the lives of their citizens. This is considered a "more thorough and complex version" of his theories related to the power and control in the panopticon (Collins & Rowe, 2009, p. 183).

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault (1978) elaborates on institutional power, saying that "power is everywhere… because it comes from everywhere" (p. 92). According to Foucault (1978), institutional power is not exerted in a top down fashion as with the mother and child. Instead, power spreads in a web, where everyone has access to some power, even those who are oppressed. Because power is being exerted from all sides, not just from the top down, everyone has access to power and everyone is subject to power. Foucault (1978) also states that "where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 92). Just as there is no one source of power, there is no one source of rebellion either. Foucault (1978) therefore argues that there is opportunity for everyone, even the oppressed groups, to change their position of power within the web, since everyone has some access to power and resistance.

Foucault's theories about governmentality and power are directly applicable to *The Wire* because of its depiction of the different institutions that exert power over the citizens of Baltimore. Rowe and Collins (2009) explain: "the drama provides a fictional view of how various official levers of control—police, judges, and politicians—exert power over the area that they are positioned to govern" (p. 182). There are therefore many depictions of governmental power within the show to analyze using Foucault's definition of power. As previously mentioned, *The Wire* also gives equal attention to the street characters, which provides the opportunity to analyze the drug empire as well.

Methods & Materials

For this discussion on the power of institutions in *The Wire,* I will focus on the first season, about the illegal drug trade, because it gives the most attention to these two institutions. I watched all thirteen episode of the first season in order to analyze the depiction of power in this show. I did not choose specific episodes from the first season to analyze, because not all characters are present in every episode. I instead chose one character from the streets and one character from the police force to focus on.

I chose characters for analysis based on their visibility throughout the season and their position of power at the beginning of the season. I chose characters that are present in the entire first season, ruling out ones who died part of the way through. Also, because this analysis will include the character's ability to change their position of power, I chose to focus on characters who are at a lower level of power within their specific institution. That way, both characters could potentially improve their position of power. I also believe that these characters are more likely than characters of higher rank to be constrained by the power structure of their institution.

In order to apply Foucault's theories of power, I will analyze the street character and the police character using these specific aspects of institutional power: (1) access to power, (2) ability to resist power, and (3) ability to change position of power.

Power on the Streets

In order to discuss the nature of power among the street characters, this section will focus on one particular street character named Bodie. At the beginning of season one, Bodie is sixteen and is one of many young dealers selling drugs under the Barksdale organization in the low-rise housing projects they refer to as "The Pit." Bodie emerges as one of three main drug dealers working under D'Angelo Barksdale's wing, along with his companions, Wallace and Poot. Bodie lives in The Pit with his grandmother because his mother died from a heroin overdose when he was young, and he has no father. Bodie is characterized as possessing an angry, violent temper and as often making decisions too quickly. It is this temperament that causes him to have many run-ins with various members of the police force, whom he always meets with resentment and resistance.

Access to power

Bodie is constrained by the official characters in the way described by Foucault's ideas of governmentality. The government forces, including law enforcement, have found a way to control every aspect of Bodie's life. He has no access to basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and safety. His family lives in a poor, rundown neighborhood, and the government has not done anything to help him or any of the other street characters. Because the government

controls the means he needs to survive, Bodie has nothing. He has no job or education, and therefore has no legal way to make money.

Therefore, Bodie becomes a part of the drug empire as a way of gaining power over his own life in a way that the government has not allowed. Collins and Rowe (2009) explain that the street characters have "little or no access to the established levers of power… and they respond by creating their own system of governance that earns them power and creates its own system of control" (p. 182). The drug trade allows Bodie the opportunity to have access to power by providing him with the things he could not get from "official" society. Most importantly, through the drug organization, Bodie has access to money, which he cannot get through bureaucracy. This is his most important leverage of power, and because he cannot get it in a legal way, he finds that power in the drug organization.

But changing from one institution to another does not give Bodie complete freedom to exert his power. While it allows him access to power previously denied to him, the drug trade also creates new sets of limitations on his ability to exert power. The Barksdale organization has many rules that dealers have to follow, which are limiting to Bodie in many instances. One rule is that no one who is dealing is allowed to use the product. Also, there are strict rules about pager and pay phone use. No dealer is allowed to have or use a cell phone. Bodie expresses his discontent with this rule on several occasions, because he has to walk to the payphone to make calls, even in emergencies,.

In summary, while Bodie does not have access to power in official society, he does find access to power in the drug organization. However, both institutions present their own limitations to Bodie's ability to access power.

Ability to resist power

A sharp contrast is made early on in the first season between quick-tempered, violent Bodie and his softer, pensive overseer, D'Angelo. While Bodie may not be in a high position within the drug empire, he does have the ability to exercise resistance against his overseer. Bodie resists D'Angelo's orders on several occasions. For example, in episode one, "The Target," D'Angelo tells Bodie that he is not treating the customers correctly (Simon & Burns, 2002). D'Angelo believes that the dealers should treat their buyers with respect, just as if they were selling any other product. Bodie openly disagrees with D'Angelo, not only in words but also in actions. After an argument with D'Angelo over the topic, Bodie continues to treat customers as below him, going so far as to severely beat a customer to defy D'Angelo.

Ability to change position

During the first season of *The Wire,* Bodie does not change his position of power within the Barksdale organization. Bodie remains a low-level drug dealer in The Pit, never advancing even to become a dealer in the high-rise apartments referred to as "The Towers." In episode thirteen, "Sentencing," D'Angelo is sentenced to twenty years of prison and the kingpin, Avon

Barksdale, is imprisoned along with many other higher-ranking members (Simon & Burns, 2002). Things go into disarray for the entire organization. But Bodie is not appointed to a higher position of power within The Pit to replace D'Angelo or within the organization's higher ranks to replace those who were imprisoned. None of the young dealers in The Pit experience any change in position within the drug empire during the first season.

The same is true for Bodie's position within the official society of Baltimore. He is never able to make enough money to improve his life situation. He does not get out of "the game," he does not try to move, and he never goes to school. Therefore, as far as his position of power within official society, he is still powerless. Without money, a legal job, or an education, he is considered to be in a very low position in society. Bodie is also continuously arrested for various charges related to distribution or violence. With legal charges brought against him, he may even be at a lower position of power in society by the end of the first season.

Although he is given several opportunities where he could change his position within official society, his decisions ultimately prevent him from making any change. In episode four, "Old Cases," two police officers, Detectives Herc and Carver, pick up Bodie on a distribution charge (Simon & Burns, 2002). They take him in for questioning, hoping that he will offer some inside information about the Barksdale organization in exchange for them dropping the charges. This is Bodie's opportunity to walk away free of charges, but he instead maintains his loyalty to the Barksdale organization and does not give up any information. Herc and Carver later take him to a Maryland Juvenile Detention Facility, where he is supposed to remain for a short sentence and rehabilitation. Again, this could have been a chance for Bodie to get out of his current way of life, but he quickly escapes during his first day there, stealing a car and returning to his life in Baltimore.

It is clear through this analysis that despite access to power and ability to resist power, Bodie is not able to change his position of power within the drug empire or within the official society because of his own decisions and because of the constraining nature of the two institutions.

Power in the Police Force

For the discussion on the power of official characters, I will focus on the main police character for season one, Jimmy McNulty. McNulty is the first character introduced in *The Wire,* beginning with the first scene of the first episode. At the beginning of the season, he is a detective for Baltimore City Homicide with his partner, Bunk Moreland. He operates under a long chain of command, including his immediate boss, Major Rawls, with whom he has a tense relationship. McNulty is talented and dedicated to his work and usually does his job morally and without corruption, which is what gains him the title of "good police." But his devotion often causes him to work at the expense of

his fellow detectives and to cross his commanding officers in order to get what he wants. McNulty's perseverance and interest is what creates the police detail dedicated to investigating the Barksdale organization.

Access to power

From the very beginning of season one, tension is established between McNulty and his superiors. As a former patrolman for the Western District, McNulty is knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its inhabitants, and therefore, the Barksdale organization. He becomes frustrated with the fact that nothing is being done to try to bring down the huge drug empire, as the police department is instead focusing on cases it can solve, mostly buy-busts. The police force is aware that because kingpins and other high-ranking members never touch drugs or money, they will be hard to catch, and therefore they are left alone. McNulty feels strongly that something should be done about the organization, and therefore takes it into his own hands to create more attention for his cause. McNulty uses power available to him, through the web of power he operates within, in order to successfully create an entire detail unit dedicated to the Barksdale organization. In episode one, during a court case in which D'Angelo Barksdale is being tried for murder, McNulty notices many high-ranking drug dealers in the courtroom, who scare a witness out of testifying (Simon & Burns, 2002). McNulty decides to bring this matter up with the presiding judge, with whom he appears to already have a relationship. It is this judge, outraged by what happened in his court, who publicly speaks out about the Barksdale organization, sparking media coverage of the story about the lack of police intervention. It is through the power of this judge that McNulty is able to get what he wants. The police are forced to respond to the negative media coverage by creating a task force of investigators (including McNulty) to bring down the Barksdale organization.

It is important to note here that while McNulty does have access to power within the police force, most of his power is secondhand. McNulty repeatedly goes through other powerful characters to accomplish his goals. While he has access to power, that power is not necessarily his.

Ability to resist power

McNulty's resistance to power within the police force is best described as passive. He does not disobey his superiors in an outright manner in the same way that Bodie does with D'Angelo. When McNulty is trying to reach a goal but is constrained by the orders of a superior, he often goes above that superior's head to someone with even more power in order to get what he wants. In episode thirteen, McNulty refuses to allow his superiors to shut down the detail after uncovering political corruption related to drug money and the Barksdale organization (Simon & Burns, 2002). He takes the case to the FBI in hopes that they will further explore the corruption, completely ignoring orders and attempting to resist the power of his superiors.

Ability to change position

McNulty changes his position of power within the police force several times. Throughout the season it is made clear that years before, McNulty had been a patrol officer on the streets in the Western district, and this is why he knows the Barksdale crew so well. The Western district is a very poor area in Baltimore, and this is where the Barksdale organization operates its drug empire. While still a patrolman, McNulty helps a homicide detective to solve a murder, which gets him promoted to a detective in the homicide unit. In this case, McNulty was clearly able to gain more power within the law enforcement institution.

But there are also instances in which McNulty lowers his position of power. In episode one, when Major Rawls finds out that McNulty is the one who went behind his back and talked to the judge, he makes sure that McNulty is kicked out of his homicide unit and is assigned to the detail investigating the Barksdale case (Simon & Burns, 2002). While this assignment is what McNulty ultimately wanted, everyone in the police force considered it a lower position of power because the people who were assigned to the detail are basically "rejects" from other units.

In the first season, it is made clear that McNulty has the ability to change his position to both increase and decrease his power within the police force.

Conclusion

After analyzing one street character and one official character using Foucault's theories of power, I have noticed several important aspects about institutional power in *The Wire*. First, both the street characters and the official characters are greatly constrained by institutions. Throughout the season, both characters face obstacles to their goals, which are created by the institutions they belong to. However, the street characters are constrained not only by the drug organization, but also by official institutions. Since the drug dealers live in almost two worlds (their illegal world and the legal world outside of it), it makes sense that they experience two levels of constraint. This aspect is an important expansion on Foucault's idea of governmentality. The reality for the street characters is that they are not only constrained by the official institutions, such as the government, but also by their own institutions. The Barksdale organization also has complete control over their lives, in addition to the government.

Another important result of the analysis is that both the street characters and the official characters have access to power in some way. This is congruent with Foucault's ideas that everyone has access because power is a web structure. A distinction can be made, however, because the street characters in *The Wire* seem only to have access to power within the drug organization, not within the official institutions. The reason why the drug

organization exists is to fill the need for power that the street characters did not have in the official institutions. Also, the official character's access to power seems to be more secondhand than that of the street characters. The official characters access power through other people within their institution. For the official characters, access to power seems to be about who they know, while for the street characters it is more about what they have.

Also in agreement with Foucault's ideas is the finding that both the street characters and the official characters have the ability to resist power in *The Wire*. It makes sense from Foucault's theories that if both of the characters have access to power then they should have the ability to resist power as well.

The major difference is that the official characters are able to change their position of power while the street characters cannot. Bodie is not able to change his position of power, which is representative of all of the other street characters who experience the same situation. McNulty, on the other hand, like the other official characters, is able to change his position of power for better or for worse throughout the first season. I attribute this difference as either a counter to Foucault's theories about power or as a stereotypical portrayal of the street characters.

It is possible that Foucault's theories about power do not hold true for every institution. In this case, it is probable that Foucault's theories apply accurately to the official institution but not to the drug organization. On the other hand, Foucault's ideas may apply to the real-life institutions that *The Wire* portrays, but the fictionalized version could be unrealistic. In other words, David Simon may portray the street characters in a stereotypical way that makes them seem more powerless than they really are. Some authors have already studied the possibility of *The Wire* portraying stereotypes that most viewers believe the show to be free of.

Rowe and Collins (2009) studied the depiction of power in *The Wire* with a different aim. The authors analyze the way that individual characters exert power in order to better understand how the official and the street institutions use power differently. First, the types of power stereotypically used by each group in most crime dramas (like *CSI*) were identified. For example, the official group stereotypically uses law as their form of power, and the street group uses force. After studying the first season of *The Wire,* the authors concluded that the official characters used law most often, and the street group most often used force as their source of power. Therefore, the authors concluded that while *The Wire* is different from other crime dramas, it does perpetuate some of the stereotypical uses of power used in other shows like *CSI*.

I believe that there is valid evidence from my own analysis of *The Wire* and other studies that power is portrayed in a stereotypical way in this show. In particular, the street character's ability to change their position of power seems to be the aspect that is portrayed stereotypically. Perhaps it is due to Simon's

desire to "dramatize the dire need for policy reform" in Baltimore (Kinder, 2008, p. 50). It was Simon's goal to create a systemic analysis of Baltimore so that the public could understand how horrifying inner city life is. It is possible that to this extent he dramatized the street character's plights beyond reality. I believe that further study into the depiction of power in *The Wire,* encompassing more characters and more seasons, could reveal further information about whether or not *The Wire* stereotypically portrays power in similar ways to other crime dramas.

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Gay Masculinities: The Hegemonic, the Hybrid, and the Homosexual

Emily Manning

§

Introduction

While feminism and women's studies have been around for a while, the scholarly examination of men and masculinities is a comparatively recent development. Historically, maleness (particularly straight, white maleness) has been interpreted as the default, where women and sexual and ethnic minorities are dismissed as categorical "others." The study of masculinities seeks to examine, among other ideas, the sociological role of men and how power structures such as patriarchy are created and maintained. A number of explanations have been put forward, most notably R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell's theory faces considerable critique (Demetriou, 2001; Beasley, 2012; Bridges, 2014; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; etc.), but it continues to serve as the "central reference point for many, if not most, writers on men and masculinity" (Weatherell and Edley, 1998 as cited in Beasley, 2012).

The study of homosexuality is certainly incorporated into the field of masculinities. Historically categorized with other forms of "deviance," outdated discourses around homosexuality began to be challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by the gay liberation movement as doctors failed to prove a legitimate pathology associated with homosexuality (Connell, 1992). Today, gay male characters appear across popular culture, and gay men crusading for equal marriage rights serve as the face for the contemporary queer movement. Gay men negotiate an interesting intersection of gender and sexuality, and their roles of and experiences with power can and should be analyzed through the lens of masculinities.

Hegemonic Masculinity

R.W. Connell is widely recognized within the field of masculinities as the architect of the term "hegemonic masculinity" to characterize the means by which patriarchy seeks to ensure its reproduction. According to Connell, "the

dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity embodies the currently successful strategy for subordinating women" (1997). In modern Western society, this hegemonic masculinity is defined primarily as homosocial, heterosexual, aggressive, and competitive (Connell, 1997). Demetriou (2001) expands on this categorization to define this theoretically global hegemonic masculinity as "white, Western, rational, calculative, individualist, violent, and heterosexual" as it stands in contrast to "black, non-Western, irrational, effeminate, or non-violent" masculinities.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize that the structural superiority of this masculinity is definitively hegemonic in its perpetuation; that is, it is maintained through culture, institutions, and persuasion rather than violence, and it retains its power because of the complicity of men and women alike rather than the activity of any group. Such a structure resists simple dismantling and reproduces itself subtly.

The idea of a hegemonic masculinity both necessitates the existence of multiple masculinities and establishes a hierarchy among them. Connell (1997) suggests that the theory of multiple masculinities – the absence of a single biological or sociological truth about men across history and culture and the recognition of multiple expressions of masculinity across geography and time – is backed by "overwhelming" evidence. Multiple versions of masculinity also coexist in the same place and time, although the relationship between them is hierarchical. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as dominant in relation to the subordinated and marginalized masculinities of gay men and racial minorities, respectively (Connell, 1997).

Importantly, this hegemony is normative rather than normal; it is an ideal perpetuated by cultural figureheads rather than a set of characteristics within most men (Connell, 1997; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). While a majority or even many men might not embody the hegemonic ideal, they define themselves and all other men in relation to it.

Hybrid Masculinities

One of the most recent and hotly debated elements in the field of masculinities is that of "hybrid" masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). This new concept seeks to complicate Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities by suggesting that dominant masculinities appropriate practices from subordinate masculinities in order to simultaneously reinforce and mask their power (Demetriou, 2001; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). Demetriou (2001) introduces the idea of a "hegemonic bloc" which constantly appropriates elements from subordinate masculinities in order to remain flexible in the face of a changing historical context. By reshaping and then incorporating selective elements of the "other," this hybrid masculine bloc is able to maintain its hegemonic power even as the cultural dynamics within a society shift. Demetriou further examines the incorporation of gay cultural elements into

heterosexual male normativity, such as fashion and fashion photography, and makes brief mention of the idea that such appearances of gender flexibility serve to conceal patriarchy rather than dismantle it.

Bridges and Pascoe (2014) expound upon this concept of subtle reinforcement, classifying the actions of this evolving hegemonic bloc as threefold: (1) discursive distancing – i.e., using language to distance oneself from traditional perceptions of masculinity; (2) strategic borrowing – i.e., reformulating elements of subordinate masculinities to alter the appearance but not structural position of hegemonic masculinity; and (3) fortifying boundaries – i.e., using shifts in attitude and/or practice to reify hegemonic norms even as they appear to undermine them. While men may associate in part with feminist causes or other traditionally non-masculine activities, they often make sure to certify their masculinity in other ways (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). These associations also allow the men who participate to distance themselves from problematic elements of masculinity by association alone, without requiring any substantial dismantling of their own privilege; thus, men maintain their own power while creating the illusion of its willing sacrifice (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014).

Homosexual Masculinities

The study of masculinities, particularly as they relate to Connell's concept of hegemony, naturally seeks to examine homosexuality. Connell (1997) argues that the rising visibility of gay men legitimated the creation of a hegemonic masculinity. While gay men are portrayed as feminine, they are not "definitively excluded from masculinity" (Connell, 1992, p. 737). Rather, they face conflict from within the masculine hierarchy and are seen as categorically lesser.

Gay men, like all other men, live a variety of masculinities (Connell, 1992; Nardi, 1999; Clarkson, 2006). Their masculinities, however, are frequently distilled into a universalizing aesthetic or otherwise represented as inherently feminized. Nardi (1999) examines the roots of this practice and traces it to the conflation of gender and sexuality that arose around new medical definitions of sexual deviance in the late 19th century. This conflation occurred because of a heteronormative standard that enforced male masculinity and female femininity as complementary and saw those roles as the necessary components of a natural heterosexuality; all behaviors outside of the standard were dismissed as a singular sex/gender deviance.

Despite today's language of distinction between sexuality and gender, stereotypes continue to conflate the two. "Gayness" is therefore often essentialized into a singular aesthetic. Rather than referring to actual distinct, universal concepts, so-called "gay aesthetics" hint at a universalizing characterization of sexuality (Bridges, 2014). In other words, male homosexuality is understood as unified model of behaviors, tastes, and

ideologies where no such unification really exists. The straight men in Bridges' (2014) study indicate a vague range of these behaviors, tastes, and ideologies that apply to their own lives that they denote as particularly "gay." They also implicitly connect male homosexuality and gay aesthetics with effeminacy (Bridges, 2014).

This characterization of gay men as inherently feminized is replicated in Linneman's (2008) study of language in the popular television sitcom *Will and Grace*. Although the show on its surface appears to challenge stereotypical perceptions of homosexual masculinity by presenting both an effeminate gay male character and a traditionally masculine gay male character (differentiated by personality traits, profession, and clothing), references over the course of the show to both men as coded female indicate an essential distinction of homosexual masculinity as feminized and fundamentally different from heterosexual masculinity (Linneman, 2008).

Within the gay community, however, perceived effeminacy is far from celebrated. Clarkson (2006), through his examination of self-described "straight acting" gay men on a particular Internet site, addresses the way hegemonic masculinity has infiltrated masculinities within the gay community itself. He reveals the gay community's predisposition toward hypermasculinity and the subsequent marginalization of effeminate gay men and others who display evidence of gender nonconformity. Moreover, the label "straight-acting," adopted by some gay men to distance themselves from stereotypical and flamboyant effeminacy, hints at pressures to normalize homosexuality within the heterosexual, hegemonic framework (Clarkson, 2006). These masculine gay men are not content in proclaiming their masculinity on their own terms; they must legitimize it through association with the hegemonic structure.

Conclusion

The discursive concepts of hegemonic and hybrid masculinities established by the scholarship succeed in clarifying the nature of homosexual masculinities within the larger hierarchy. Gay men's masculinity is always defined, both from within the community and without, in relation to a masculine hierarchy that prizes heterosexuality and undermines effeminacy. Their subordination is enhanced (and disguised) by practices of hybrid masculinities in which the hegemon incorporates favorable traits associated with male homosexuality, such as fashion or "sensitivity," without dismantling the hierarchal power structure that oppresses deviance from a heterosexual, gender-conforming norm.

Scholars such as Linneman (2008) have taken care to critically examine claims of progress by scrutinizing texts, like *Will and Grace*, that exist as part of mainstream culture. As the gay liberation and feminist movements advance in the contemporary period, it is both interesting and necessary to continue to

assess the role of media and pop culture in perpetuating or challenging these power structures.

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Synthesis Dialogue
Austin Morgan

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The Sources:

Angie Dahl and **Renee Galliher**: "Sexual Minority Young Adult Religiosity, Sexual Orientation Conflict, Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms."

Dr. Angie Dahl, a professor at Ferrum College, has extensively studied both religion and psychology, and having worked in clinical psychology, she became interested in how religion and other cultural context influences development and identity in young people. Renee Galliher, a professor at Utah State University's Department of Psychology, is interested in communication and interpersonal relationships among adolescents. She is particularly interested in studying young people from diverse and rural backgrounds.

Hans C. Clausen: "The "Privilege of Speech" in a "Pleasantly Authoritarian Country": How Canada's Judiciary Allowed Laws Proscribing Discourse Critical Of Homosexuality To Trump Free Speech And Religious Liberty."

Hans C. Clausen is a lawyer based in Atlanta, GA, who received his J.D. from Vanderbilt University. He is a former judicial clerk to the Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the former Editor-in-Chief of *The Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. He doesn't seem to focus on these issues very often, but his law background is definitely relevant.

Rebecca J. Hamblin and **Alan M. Gross**: "Religious Faith, Homosexuality, and Psychological Well-Being: A Theoretical and Empirical Review."

Rebecca J. Hamblin is a clinical psychologist who received her MA from the University of Mississippi and is currently enrolled in the doctoral program. Dr. Alan M. Gross is a clinical psychology professor at the University of Mississippi focusing on developmental and abnormal psychology. He has done research on sexual assault and child behavior problems.

Douglas NeJaime: "Marriage Inequality: Same-Sex Relationships, Religious Exemptions, And The Production of Sexual Orientation Discrimination."

Douglas NeJaime is a law professor at UC Irvine School of Law who is an expert on sexual orientation law, same-sex marriage, law and social movements, family law, cause lawyering, and anti-discrimination law (in other words, very relevant subjects to this paper).

Austin Morgan is a super great freshman at American University in Washington, DC, majoring in International Studies and Economics. Severely outclassed in academic experience by his panelists, Austin relies on the assistance of the wonderful American University College Writing Program and *They Say/I Say* strategies to strengthen his arguments and catalyze his intellectual and academic development.

The Dialogue

This synthesis dialogue was written relatively early in the essay process, during a time when I had read some of the sources, but was still working out exactly what the focus *of my essay would be and still trying to understand some of the legal intricacies of my topic. The argument here, therefore, does not exactly reflect the final product, and is definitely missing some big pieces, but it does reflect where I was at the time and the benefits of using tools such as the synthesis dialogue as a stepping stone toward that final product. This was one of the most helpful activities in class for really getting the important "stuff" out of my sources, and it helped me see how all the different "stuff" might be able to fit together. So without further ado,*

AUSTIN: Hello, reader, my name is Austin Morgan and today I will be moderating a discussion among respected academics and experts… and Mr. Clausen.

HANS CLAUSEN: (*chortles*) Very funny. Call me Hans.

AUSTIN: You know I'm just giving you a hard time, Hans. As I was saying, I am joined today by legal experts Mr. Hans C. Clausen and Mr. Douglas

NeJaime, and psychologists Dr. Renee Galliher and Ms. Rebecca J. Hamblin. Welcome, everyone, and thank you so much for joining me!

ALL: (*simultaneously and gratefully*) You're very welcome. What an honor.

AUSTIN: The topic of discussion today is very current, regarding legislation affecting sexual minorities, including self-identified "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," etc. people.

HANS: And people of faith!

AUSTIN: Yes, Hans, I was getting to that. There are many laws created in the name of religious liberty that may actually be overstepping the line of freedom of religion, causing more harm than good. It is important to keep in mind religious concerns when creating legislation, but these days we find "freedom of religion" in conflict with "freedom from religion." Regarding sexual minorities, we must ensure that they are afforded equal protection under the law, and taking into consideration mental health and social concerns makes some legislation problematic, such as the recently-overturned "right to discriminate bill" in Arizona. Mr. NeJaime, as our focus is legislation and you are an expert on law related to sexual minorities, would you like to briefly summarize your position?

NEJAIME: Certainly. I'll start small and work to the larger point if you don't mind. I believe that the thing that makes sexual minorities "sexual minorities" at the most essential level is the same-sex relationship. It is the most crucial part of their identity and its expression. Legislation enacted in the name of religious liberty is centered on inherent objections to same-sex relationships. Discrimination in this area is a denial of that fundamental aspect of the identity of sexual minorities. Same-sex marriage is just one of many issues where religious liberty finds itself in opposition to sexual orientation equality. Any "religious exemption" to anti-discrimination laws outside the realm of marriage is merely a shroud for discrimination.

AUSTIN: Hans, you hold a very different view. Would you like to jump in here?

HANS: Thank you for your points, Mr. NeJaime, though as Austin says I must disagree. There has recently been some legislation proposed in neighboring Canada and elsewhere which restricts speech critical of homosexuality. I'm sure this sounds good to you, Mr. NeJaime; however, I see it as a sacrifice of our fundamental rights to free discourse and religious liberty in favor of promoting the homosexual lifestyle. This is more than just stopping discrimination. It's an agenda. I mean, I have nothing against them and nothing against stopping discrimination, but apparently homosexuals are more important than speech and religious freedom now.

AUSTIN: Thank you both. That wraps up both sides of the legal argument. Ms. Hamblin, I believe you might have something to say about "free discourse" regarding sexual minorities?

HAMBLIN: Indeed I would, Austin. Hans, I understand your reservations about legislation limiting speech; however, I believe my research about sexual minorities may change your mind. Religion does not have to be in conflict with homosexuality. Church and religiosity may offer comfort and support to sexual minorities, who in the face of discrimination and hate truly need it. We do know that there are many happy religious people in same-sex relationships, after all. However, religion interpreted in a certain way is very harmful to the mental health and well-being of these people.

AUSTIN: Thanks, Rebecca. I guess this is a good time for me to jump in to say that religious objections to same-sex relationships are fine in theory, and are protected under the law, but perhaps it is when they become detrimental to the well-being of others that lawmakers feel the need to intervene. I'd now like to briefly turn it over to Dr. Galliher, since I think she would agree with a lot of what we are saying.

GALLIHER: Yes, I would agree with that. My research indicates that societal homonegativity based in religion contributes to the disproportionately high rate of suicide, depression, and other self-harm or mental health issues among the LGBQ population. The religious base reinforces homonegative ideas, and the cognitive dissonance and internalized homophobia that this creates, particularly in gay and bisexual people of faith, leads to a number of psychological issues.

HAMBLIN: Absolutely. And my argument, which I believe Mr. NeJaime and Dr. Galliher would agree with, is simply that it is possible to grant rights and protections to sexual minorities without undermining Christianity.

AUSTIN: Thank you both for your contribution. Hans, it would appear that the psychologists are in agreement with Mr. NeJaime here. If you would like to respond, by all means…

HANS: You have read my work regarding this issue, Austin, wherein I describe a very extreme example, yet one that exemplifies my point. In Washington state there has for a long time been a billboard with anti-homosexual messages, one of the most infamous examples being "AIDS IS A MIRACLE DISEASE. IT TURNS FRUITS INTO VEGETABLES."

AUSTIN: It took me a minute to get that since I'm not a terrible person, but it is one of the vilest things I have ever heard. How could you possibly justify something like this?

HANS: Well you see, that's the point. I'm not saying I agree with the sign or that I would put up something similar, but I think the billboard is great. Our First Amendment rights are a huge part of what makes us American. I don't like what the man who put up the billboard said, but I love that he can say it. He summed it up best when one day he made the billboard say "THERE ARE NO BILLBOARDS IN RUSSIA, CUBA, OR COMMUNIST CHINA."

HAMBLIN: Hans, I admire your adherence to our nation's Constitution, and though I disagree with your specific beliefs here, I also admire that you stick to a very sound moral code. But I must ask you to try to put yourself into the

shoes of one of these "fruits." The man who made that billboard thinks that the death of millions of people is funny. People die of AIDS regardless of their sexual orientation, but in this case, he targets sexual minorities in a way that I do not find acceptable. The sheer self-loathing that these outward displays of homophobia promote is grounds enough to take the billboard down; regardless of what the man believes, that is public enough that there is a problem.

AUSTIN: Hans, care to comment?

HANS: I still firmly believe in the principle of freedom of speech. Limiting speech is crossing the line into authoritarianism, and that is not acceptable regardless of what the people are saying. If you remember, the Supreme Court upheld the Westboro Baptist Church's right to protest at funerals and say whatever they want.

AUSTIN: I do remember, Hans, and I do believe that we should continue to protect freedom of speech; however, in my opinion some of this type of speech is nothing more than violence. The AIDS billboard isn't an important, subversive political statement that needs protection. The man can say what he wants in private, but such a public display, whether he paid for it or not, is inherently going to have to take into consideration members of the public. The fact that a gay youth could see that billboard and understand what it means is disgusting. The man can express his desire for freedom of religion and his opposition to same-sex marriage, but when you go this far, it is clearly violent, inciting language intended to provoke, dehumanize, and essentially taunt anyone opposed to it under "freedom of speech."

HANS: Violent? It's just speech. It's his opinion!

AUSTIN: His "opinion" in this case happens to be a public, unavoidable statement that laughs at the tragic deaths of millions based on their sexual orientation. We've seen the psychological damage this kind of stuff can do from our two psychological sources, and I firmly believe that allowing this billboard and things like it under the protection of freedom of speech, while great for whomever's saying it, is then a violation of the rights of others.

HANS: I see your point, but where do you draw the line? It's a slippery slope to—

NEJAIME: It's a slippery slope to even more protections for sexual minorities, that's what it is.

AUSTIN: Care to explain, Mr. NeJaime?

NEJAIME: We can't always give a religious exemption. I believe that a single ruling in the US favoring sexual minorities over those who exercise power over them is a huge step forward to really tackling the discrimination that these people face. We've seen the psychological effects, and it seems clear that the concerns for the well-being of the targeted people trumps the protection of the person who potentially could incite violence or at least hatred against those people.

AUSTIN: I agree. Actually I believe that this billboard story could apply to a lot of legal scenarios. Let's look at the Arizona "right to discriminate" bill that was recently shut down. So basically businesses could hypothetically refuse service to same-sex couples on religious grounds.
HANS: That is not the same as just a billboard. This bill was shut down, too, as you said, so I don't see the point of this.
AUSTIN: We already established that it's not "just a billboard"; you'll see the parallel in a moment. So my argument here is that yes, you have the right to speak about same-sex-attracted people, and yes you can theoretically refuse service to someone, but you cannot refuse service to someone because their behavior and the expression of one of the most fundamental parts of their identity is "wrong" in your eyes. It's pure discrimination, wouldn't you agree?
HANS: I suppose, but as I said, the bill was shut down. This is not the same thing.
AUSTIN: I'd argue that it is "the same thing," and that the billboard should have been shut down as well. You see, again, the man can believe what he wants, but the moment that people in public are exposed to that violent hate speech, he loses that freedom. A shop owner again can believe what s/he wants, but the minute a customer is unjustly refused service, we have a problem.
HANS: I still feel like homosexuals are getting special treatment against religious people. What if I'm offended by a billboard with a homosexual couple promoting gay marriage?
AUSTIN: You're offended by that?
HANS: Well, it's against my religion.
AUSTIN: Then don't get married to a man. Religious people have oppressed "homosexuals" for centuries, so unfortunately certain measures must be taken to ensure their protection *from* religious people. You heard the suicide statistics. You've seen the hate crimes on the news.
HANS: Then shield those people from the world, don't change it.
AUSTIN: You know, in a lot of places, same-sex couples can't even go to high school prom together. Either it's not allowed or it's discouraged. The justification for discouraging it at my high school was that "it would cause controversy." The school didn't want to have a scene at prom, so they discouraged gay and bisexual students from attending. Shouldn't we instead discourage the students who will create the problem from attending? The gay and bisexual kids are just living their lives, not asking for any trouble. To say that somehow their mere presence is asking for trouble highlights the root of society's problem. Stop the person who will beat up a gay kid after prom, or the girls who won't talk to their lesbian friend anymore, not the kids who just want to dance. Stop the person who refuses service across the board to those s/he sees as inferior and corrupted, not the couples who just want to buy something. Stop the man who laughs at the death and suffering of real human beings, not

the young people who are the butt of the joke. No, they can't do something else on prom night. No, they can't take their business elsewhere. No, they can't drive another way or look away from the billboard. We need to stop justifying hate and discrimination in our society, and instead counter it with meaningful legislation. Stop protecting those in power from seeing their dominance challenged. There are lives on the line here, and we have a responsibility to take a critical look at "freedom of speech" and "freedom of religion" in a modern world that sees them challenged. Thank you all for joining me.

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Annotated Bibliography
Kari M. Lorentson

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Cingel, Drew P., and S. Shyam Sundar. "Texting, Techspeak, And Tweens: The Relationship Between Text Messaging And English Grammar Skills." *New Media & Society* 14.8 (2012): 1304-1320. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 26 Mar. 2014.

In Cingel and Sundar's piece, the authors first provide the reader definitions for the nuances of textspeak. Textspeak involves both word adaptions and structural changes. Word adaptions include shortening words, and structural changes encompass lacking or over-emphasized punctuations. The article conducts a study on the impact of text speak on middle school students, and then applies this to the educational arena.

First, though, it is important to recognize the perceptions that the authors bring to the table. Textspeak is perceived to be less harmful by adolescents than by adults, possibly because they grew up with the "language." However, most teens recognize that texting lacks the equivalent of real writing. Finally, education leaders and parents are worried about the perceived dangers of textspeak, especially since middle school is a formative time for the comprehension of grammar skills.

Now, to the study. The authors conducted a study on the grammar proficiency of middle school students over their 6-8th grade years. The result, though it cannot be determined as cause and effect, does show a general negative correlation between textspeak and adolescent grammar skills.

As for textspeak's inclusion in education, the authors propose lessons to help students learn the definite difference between textspeak and formal writing. It also encourages the practice of more formal writings, rather than an inclusion in the technological world. While the data and perceptions of this piece are helpful, the educational propositions made go against much of the

other research I have collected, which may either weaken my argument, or provide for interesting conversations between scholars.

Ferguson, Niall. "Texting Makes U Stupid." *Newsweek* 158.12 (2011): 11. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 24 Mar. 2014.

Niall Ferguson, a professor of history at Harvard University, contributed to *Newsweek* with this article titled "Texting Makes U Stupid." In his piece, Ferguson's central argument claims that the decline in literacy of American children and teenagers is a result of the surge in texting. Another consequence, according to Ferguson, in this new text culture, is the decline of pleasurable reading. The author claims this will alienate the teens of today from past generations because of their ignorance of the past.

The article provides useful statistics supporting the claim. A Nielson study reported that 13-17 year olds send an average of 3339 texts per month. Also, in 2004 the National Endowment for the Arts estimated that less than 1/3 of 13 year olds read for pleasure each day. Finally, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reported that the reading gap for 15 year olds in Shanghai and the US is just as big as the gap between the US and Serbia.

Because this is more of a popular article, it emphasizes a perception that lots of people accept. Thus, this article can help to stimulate the conversation as to how the perception of an under-literate generation can affect media/news reporting in society. I will just need to be skeptical when referencing Ferguson's data to make sure it is not arbitrary but that a trend is taking place in reading for pleasure and the literacy gap.

Lu, M. "Effectiveness Of Vocabulary Learning Via Mobile Phone." *Journal Of Computer Assisted Learning* 24.6 (2008): 515-525. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 26 Mar. 2014.

In Lu's article, he researches and discusses how effective mobile phones and text messaging can be on the growth of one's secondary langauge vocabulary. In one of his studies, students who used text messaging to learn vocabulary outscored both those who learned through computers or on paper. He cites that the environment of mobile phones is more conducive to a student's lifestyle. The time span can vary, occurring at different lengths and times of the day, which is much more natural than studying through cramming. Similar results were also found for English speakers; using texting for

educational purposes actually increased their vocabulary growth levels more than did paper methods.

One limitation that Lu understands for learning a new language with the help of texts is the maximum amount of characters that can be used in each message. Choppy, half-complete sentences have the potential to confuse students.

This article is helping to shape my application of research. I knew previously that I wanted to focus on the effects of text messaging in either education or media. This article, along with a few more, give me scholarly articles that support embracing text messaging as a new medium of teaching that embraces student environments and possibly motivates the participation of more students.

Sweeny, Sheelah M. "Writing For The Instant Messaging And Text Messaging Generation: Using New Literacies To Support Writing Instruction." *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54.2 (2010): 121-130. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.

Sweeney's article focuses on the techniques that can be used to enhance writing instruction for a new(er) generation: the millennials. The author identifies this generation as a techno-savvy group with constant interactions with the Internet and cell-phones. Given this new generation's relationship with this technology, Sweeney indicates that these new and evolving literacies should be woven in to education rather than being avoided. In other words, communication is changing, as should education.

One of Sweeney's arguments rest on the fact that schools need to help students function in the world outside of the classroom. With that, rather than alienating the new literary world of text speak and technology as a mode of communicating thought, schools should embrace these methods. One method of messaging applications in education is to use texts. Teachers would have students provide a summary of a passage through a text message. Or, by students creating Twitter accounts and having to post so many times per week, a greater sense of community can be felt.

Sweeney's guidance to the education sector leaves me skeptical, which I find useful for my paper. Sending a summary in one single text can prove to be restraining, with less room for a creative and comprehensive approach. This limiting approach seems to have the danger of lacking the development of truly complex thoughts, but it does possibly engage students to a greater level.

Verheijen, Lieke. "The Effects of Text Messaging and Instant Messaging on Literacy." *English Studies* 94.5 (2013): 582-602. *Ebsco Host*. Web. 23 March 2014.

The millennial generation is increasingly using instant messages and text messages as a form of communication. In Verheijen's article, he reviews media perceptions of this communication medium as well as the scholarly research revolving around the topic.

Verheijen first begins by defining terms surrounding this topic. A variation of text language exists in the conversation, ranging from terminology like textese, text talk, and text language. He also emphasizes efficiency (both in time and money) as a core reason for the expansive use of textese.

The conversation of the topic of texting's effect on literacy has created opposing viewpoints, as the research has been split in its conclusions. However, Verheijen does recognize that more studies have concluded that there exists a positive correlation between English literacy and text messaging than negative correlations or no correlation.

Despite the inconclusive results and difficulty in establishing causality, Verheijen's attention to the media's perception will be very helpful to the paper. The author provides ample examples of media bashing on the perceived effects of texting. In fact, media's overwhelming view of this topic is extremely pessimistic, with texting being called the "threat of social progress."

These perceptions will help my paper as I discuss the importance of perception in this issue, while the various studies give examples for the scholarly research. Media perception influences its readers, which has the potential to affect how textspeak will influence other sectors of society, like education and advertisements.

Witte, Shelbie. "'That's Online Writing, Not Boring School Writing': Writing With Blogs And The Talkback Project." *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 51.2 (2007): 92-96. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 26 Mar. 2014.

Witte begins this article with a personal anecdote about a former student in order to show the growing divide between traditional, print teaching and a new form on online writings such as blogs. Witte writes that on-line writing excites and motivates students to a higher level. This adaptation of technologies grows with the Millennial Generation, and these students thrive on technology.

Witte's article focuses on a program called the Talkback Program, which uses on-line blogs to engage students in writing. With educational standards under the former No Child Left Behind Act and a new initiative called the Common Core State Standards, technological literacy has become a growing topic of importance. Traditional methods are no longer engaging students, so new techniques must be created. The Talkback Program exemplifies this idea.

Witte's article, although a few years old, places the emphasis on teachers' willingness to adapt. In the age of texting and smartphones, this can continue. Her article made me think of ways to engage with students, such as writing each stanza of a poem through one text, or posting their research not on notecards to prove that they have sought out information, but rather on an on-line blog, which will be helpful in my paper.

One hindrance to this article is its small purview of application. It focuses just on one program and not education in general. But, I think it can act as a starting base for my original ideas.

On Culture

Statehood and Legitimacy *In* The Walking Dead

Gregory Heeren

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The premise behind hit TV show *The Walking Dead* sounds fairly simple. In an apocalyptic world, in which the vast majority of the population has been wiped out by a virus that has turned them into bloodthirsty, brainless automatons, a small band of survivors struggles to stay alive and optimistic. Beyond the more obvious elements of the show, the superficial hacking to pieces of zombies, inter-group squabbles, and skirmishes with other surviving clans, there exists a broad reservoir of implications and inferences that can be drawn from the ways in which these characters interact with one another and the way that they compete and organize in order to stay alive. By looking at the show through a lens of political theory, we can apply the ideas of several key theorists about issues such as statehood, leadership, legitimacy, and rights, using the show as a practical testing ground for influential ideas about political organization. Ultimately, by analyzing the particular threats that the characters face and the roots of their failings in adequately protecting themselves from those threats, we see that the characters' failure to organize effectively is chiefly due to their inability to form stable and reliable governing structures.

It will be useful to first outline some basic plot and thematic elements of the show. The first episode opens with a middle-aged man named Rick Grimes waking up in an abandoned hospital. After stumbling outside, he finds himself in a dystopian nightmare. Fortunately, Rick soon runs into some survivors in Atlanta and miraculously is led to his family, who are living in a camp nearby. The main characters of concern are Shane (Rick's best friend and 'cop buddy'), Lori (Rick's wife and Shane's love interest), and Carl (Rick's nine year old son.) In the group's struggle to survive they eventually end up squatting on a farm owned by a man named Hershall. The second season is primarily set on this farm, where the group struggles to survive amid zombie attacks and

inner-group conflict. As the characters grapple with relationships, personal pride, and the ever-looming zombie threat, the relationships that develop between these key characters become increasingly illustrative of the obstacles to successful political organization.

In his article "The Walking Dead, Like All Zombie Stories:… Not About Zombies At All," journalist Jeffrey Goldberg points out that "Zombies are quite one dimensional as characters…so they're deeply uninteresting" (Goldberg). As the story of the Walking Dead develops, and as the conflicts and struggles between (living) characters grow richer and more complex, the show becomes less and less about the zombies and more about the characters themselves. The point has been made in academic literature that horror fiction involving zombies is particularly well suited for social commentary. Unlike stories about werewolves or abstract monsters, zombies give us an image of a widespread collapse of humanity, of human institutions, and of the moral frameworks that humans have set up. Zombies are "exceptional vessels for allegory because, essentially, they are us—or, more accurately, they were us. Since zombies retain their human form, no matter how mangled, we recognize ourselves in them" (Weed 14). Zombies are therefore "products of the same society they threaten" (15), opening them of to a range of theoretical social interpretations.

The Walking Dead is open to rich analysis through a range of lenses, including psychology and philosophy. However, the show especially lends itself to deep political analysis. With all pre-existing government structures and institutions, as well as contracts and guarantees, demolished, those existing survivors have to band together against a common threat (the zombie hordes) for their mutual benefit and protection. This organization is natural, and it is the fundamental basis for political theory about state formation. While the addition of zombies presents a fun extra element of surprise and terror into the equation, and one that surely impacts the attempted political organization, the show is essentially about a primitive political effort by a group of humans without institutions to successfully organize itself. This paper will consider the organizational structures of authority set up by the group, first stressing the importance of the family unit as a means of organization, and then considering the emergence of statehood. In the discussion on statehood, I will consider the sources of political legitimacy and the forms that it takes. Also crucial to this discussion will be an analysis of the rights of the people in this developing governing structure and the bounds of authority. Finally, the forms of governance adopted by the group will be viewed critically, and be considered as the institutional basis for the group's weakness.

Perhaps it is relevant to raise the academic discussion about the zombie craze itself as indicative of a larger pop culture movement to dehumanize people who, in the real world, are viewed as enemies, and to provide social commentary on this fear and hatred. Zombies, while largely recognized to be

allegorical of social problems, are also seen as "stand-ins for Islamist terrorists, illegal immigrants, carriers of foreign contagions, and other 'dangerous' border crossers" (Saunders 81). While this is certainly a valuable discussion, viewing the organization of conscious people as the more interesting political question, this paper will consider zombies to be a largely faceless, inhuman security threat, and will in fact view the zombies rather than the humans as 'The Walking Dead.'

The Family Unit

"All I am anymore is a man looking for his wife and son. Anybody that gets in the way of that is gonna lose," Rick snarls at Merrell Dixon in the second episode of the first season, immediately after Merrell has threatened Rick and his small clan with a gun ("Guts"). After walking out of the abandoned hospital Rick, naturally, tries to go to his home. After discovering that his family has left home, finding them becomes his main priority. In an amazing stroke of luck he is reunited with them, and at that point his sole concern becomes protecting them. We can consider the family unit the primary and immediate means of governance in this post-apocalyptic world. It has a crucial role to play in the organization and preservation of survivors. The formal state has crumbled along with all of its institutions and its obligations, legal and implicit, to the citizens. The only remnant of a stable organizing structure still intact from the old world, the only social grouping that people are familiar with and already recognize, is that of the family unit. Love of family is one of the key motivations for the survivors to continue to live and to strive to improve their situation, which will require political organization. Acclaimed horror author Kim Paffenroth acknowledges that "the committed love among family members is the only reliable, if fragile, source of meaning or purpose in an otherwise bleak human existence" (249). We can see this at work from the outset of the show in Rick's obsession with finding his wife and son. Once they are reunited, we instantly witness how this family bond will affect decision-making within the group. The day after Rick returns, he already is pleading with his wife to allow him to return to Atlanta, where he has just come from, in order to rescue Merrell, the aggressive and ambitious racist he accidentally left tied to the roof of a building. He can no longer independently decide to do this; instead, he has to plead and negotiate with his wife for her to allow him to return, which she eventually agrees to. This shift from independent from group, in this case family, decision making represents the birth of a type of societal structure of decision making, albeit one that the characters are used to and comfortable with. This family unit, with all of its embedded implications about protection and obligation, is arguably what also gives rise to a more developed extra-familial 'state' identity. Because family is all that the group has left, they also recognize its importance and sanctity, prompting them, somewhat

ironically, to occasionally intervene within families in order to protect the family unit.

Because of the sanctity of the family unit, "the most serious threat in *The Walking Dead* (*sic*) is from those men who threaten the established family units" (Paffenroth 247). When Carol's abusive husband Ed grabs her arm and starts to lead her back to the camp against her will, Shane takes it upon himself to tackle Ed to the ground and beat his face to a pulp. After this brutal retributive attack he menacingly threatens, "you put your hands on your wife…anyone in this camp again, I will not stop next time" ("Tell It to the Frogs"). Shane has asserted his right to interfere in order to protect the family unit before expanding this claim of protection to the whole camp. In some ways then, the group widens their sense of family to extend to all the group's members. In other ways, this family association might be dangerous to the formation of a cohesive group. At one point Rick admits to Lori, "I'd kill every single one of the people here if I thought it'd keep you safe" ("This Sorrowful…."). This mindset clearly makes family a liability. Socrates understood this divisive impact of family, expressing in *The Republic* the need for a society to be "free of faction." This leads Socrates to propose that in the ideal city people should be lied to and told that they were all crafted underground by mother earth. This will cause them to "think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth," freeing them from faction and causing them to look out for the common good rather than private interest (III/414 b-e). In the show, despite the factions that arise from these family allegiances, this need to protect the core family unit is evidently the main factor that gives rise to a sense of 'state.'

Statehood and Rights

Thomas Hobbes is often credited as being the first truly modern (Western) political theorist. Locke's theory of rights and state formation, on which much of the modern western Democratic state is built, can be considered in several ways a response to Hobbes. The idea of a state emerging from savagery is directly applicable to the situation that the survivors in *The Walking Dead* find themselves in. Finding themselves in a 'state of nature,' the group organizes for their mutual security and protection. Hobbes writes that the life of man in a state of nature is "solitary, poor, brutish, nasty, and short" (Locke). It is natural then that people organize into some political form to avoid the danger surrounding them. According to Hobbes, this necessity for organization will naturally cause a leader to rise up and rule as a sovereign. Ideas about rights and morality are empty without "a sovereign to determine its content and enforce it by the credible threat of violence" (Walker 62). Locke, on the other hand, believes that every person has natural rights to "life, health, liberty, and possessions" (Locke) which are present before the state, and which it is the mission of the state to protect.

We can see both sides of this theory of state formation present in the show. Rick and Shane both rise up as sovereigns in the show, creating what is essentially an issue of jurisdiction, which will culminate in Rick being forced to kill Shane. The process of rule making for the group consists of Rick and Shane making decisions for everyone, with the others occasionally disagreeing but being ultimately overruled. These two also set the bounds of rights for everyone. Rick once boldly tells the group "We don't kill the living" ("Wildfire"), standing up for the implicit right to life; however, he breaks this rule when he shoots two men from a different group who attack him. Property rights last for an even shorter time. When Andrea at first hesitates to take a necklace from a shop, Rick tells her "I don't think those rules apply anymore" ("Guts…"). But this opens up the question, what rights do apply anymore? This is what the group, and its two self-elected leaders, fail to define. In season two, when the group moves to the farm of an elderly man named Hershall, they vow to respect his right to property. Hershall tells the group not to carry guns on his property, a rule that Rick respects but that Shane disobeys as soon as it becomes inconvenient. Additionally, Hershall commands the group not to open his barn (which happens to be filled with his zombie family), but Shane eventually disobeys this rule, leading to a dangerous zombie massacre. The issue of defining rights can be tied directly to the issue of leadership. The competing claim to authority by Rick and Shane is a primary cause for the inability of the group to develop a coherent and stable code of law to govern their behavior.

Legitimacy

"We're gonna have ourselves a little pow-wow. Talk about who's in charge. I vote me. Anybody else?" ("Guts…"). This quote is not from Rick or Shane, but rather from the aggressive racist Merrell. The small group is on a rooftop in Atlanta, surrounded by 'walkers,' and Merrell is pointing a gun at the group of survivors. This scene illustrates the real nature of danger and power in this nightmarish world. The true challenge of survival is not from the zombies. While they present an enormous threat, they begin to drift into the scenery. The real struggle is in organizing a group and bringing it under a single centralized 'government,' which Merrell briefly attempts to do through force. Rick rises from background to calmly reply "Yeah," before knocking Merrell to the floor. In doing so, he is asserting his own supremacy and his own right to govern. He does so, in this instance, by using force not against the group, but against another, more dangerous ruler. Does this then give Rick legitimacy in his governance? An understanding of the type of state that forms within the main group in *The Walking Dead*, how it comes to form, and the inherent problems it has requires a discussion of the legitimacy of the ruling party, or in this case one individual. In the wake of the collapse of civilization, groups of survivors are immediately concerned with just one thing: survival. As Si Sheppherd writes in his essay about clan leaders in *The Walking Dead*, states are formed to move

from anarchy to some order, and they necessitate "individuals (surrendering) their autonomy in exchange for security" (Sheppard 89). As the group struggles to organize itself and seek out leadership, it also struggles to identify what constitutes a 'legitimate' claim of governmental authority for which every member of the group is willing to give up personal autonomy.

In the few scenes before Rick arrives in the camp, it is apparent that Shane has adopted the primary leadership role in the camp. He has clearly taken charge of the group and is seen giving orders. This assertion of authority is in some ways unsurprising. Because Shane was a police officer before the virus, the group views him as a natural figure of authority to rise up and take charge (Sheppard 90). Rick arrives at the camp with this same qualification, creating a power struggle between the two former best friends for this alpha-dog, leading position. This struggle very quickly creates tension, made even more complicated and intense by the relationship between Shane and Rick's wife while Rick was in the hospital. Rick arrives at the camp in the second episode of the first season, and already in the fifth episode we see Shane pointing a gun at his back, on the verge of killing him.

Another way that we can analyze these competing claims to leadership, beyond personal qualifications, is by viewing them through the theory of charismatic authority. Many theorists have conceptualized the idea of a charismatic authority in different ways; however, the original and most famous interpretation is that of Max Weber. A simplified version of charismatic authority can be drawn out of his writings, where he at one point describes the theory as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person […]" (Weber 215). This is, according to Weber, one form of political legitimacy, the other two being tradition and rule of law. Focusing in on charismatic authority, we see that this framework maps closely onto the relationship between Rick and the rest of the group. While both Rick and Shane begin with a level of 'traditional' legitimacy, derived from their status as police officers, Rick quickly takes a firmer leadership position by seeking to establish charismatic legitimacy. As previously mentioned, the day after arriving at the camp Rick unilaterally decides to return to Atlanta to rescue Merrell. While he asks his wife first, he makes it clear that this is something he personally feels he needs to do for the good of the group, and it is clear that whatever his wife's response he will find a way to accomplish this task. During the commitment stage of charismatic leadership the leader demonstrates his "extreme commitment" to the group, which "often takes the shape of some kind of sacrifice on the part of the leader or impending danger on the leader" (Palshikar 4). This makes the leader appear "courageous" in the eyes of the followers and gives him legitimacy. By returning to Atlanta to save Merrell, who is significantly the brother of another member of the group, and also to gather more guns, Rick shows that he is willing to put himself at risk for the good of the group. Later when a girl in the group, Sophia, gets lost in the

woods, Rick immediately rushes in to find her. While Shane takes a more utilitarian approach to leadership, constantly analyzing what is in the best interest of the group as a whole, Rick constantly shows his willingness to sacrifice his personal safety for the good of the group, causing him to appear more devoted to the good of the whole group and more charismatic.

The question remains of whether or not this really constitutes legitimacy. After making sacrifices for the group, a charismatic leader naturally loses a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of his people. His followers will "(suspect) their leader as pompous and a hypocrite" (Palshikar 4). This shift in thinking occurs when the group starts to become angry and disillusioned with Rick after they fail to find Sophia. They begin complaining about Rick, forcing his wife Lori to stand up for him. She angrily confronts them, saying "if y'all think you can do this on your own no one is stopping you. You look to him for answers and blame him when he isn't perfect" ("What Lies…"). This statement exemplifies the process and development of charismatic authority.

If there is any doubt that Shane and Rick are competing for nothing less than the claim of ownership of the nomadic group-state, we need only look as far as Max Weber's definition of statehood. His definition of a state, the most used definition in contemporary political theory, is "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (qtd. in Jung 34). Through this lens we can understand what 'the state' is in its most basic terms. The state claims to be the authority capable of *legitimately* using force. It becomes clear in the course of *The Walking Dead* that this is essentially what the competition between Shane and Rick comes down to. The two confront this reality in one particular incident when they find a teenager named Randall who previously attacked their group. Significantly, Randall also knows where the group is staying. As Shane pulls out his gun and fires at Randall, Rick knocks the gun away just in time for the bullet to miss the teenager. This incites an unprecedented vicious fight between the two. Rick has finally asserted his rule of the state, his position as *the* government, by making a claim that he alone is allowed to decide when to use force against other people. While Shane is justifying killing Randall based on a utilitarian principle that it will be safer in the long run, Rick clings to a Lockean notion that the rights to life exists regardless of any particular interests of the state and cannot be arbitrarily taken away.

Problems

As the famous sociologist Norbert Elias explains, typically the monopoly on the use of force will be transferred from the leadership to the people over time. This marks a movement from authoritarian to democratic rule (Jung 34). As this happens political institutions will develop under the rule of the people. This process never takes place in *The Walking Dead*. The group never truly has the luxury of time or safety to consider this shift. Instead, the

demands of protecting themselves from zombies and the complex power struggles between members of the group leads them to constantly search for leadership, changing their allegiance and support of leaders when it is convenient. Problematically, Rick has nothing firm in which he can ground his claim of leadership. Relying upon a mixture of traditional and charismatic authority, Rick leads the group, but never with a clear or defined mandate. Thus, the relationship of the leader to the people is always tenuous and in question. As aptly observed by Si Sheppard, "Rick's ultimate flaw is his inability to translate these qualities into the institutional basis for his leadership" (Sheppard 94). Stated another way, "[t]here are no formal or informal mechanisms to uphold his decisions" (Sheppard 93). This plays out when Rick announces his personal decision to execute Randall. Some members of the group are complacent and others are indignant. Dale in particular demands that they hold a hearing where each member gives his opinion. But at this hearing, rather pathetically, no one can agree on the procedure of the hearing. Some members simply want Rick to make the decision, some want no part in it, and others, notably Dale, demand a democratic procedure to decide Randall's fate. Ultimately, they end up choosing what Rick and, thankfully, Shane both decide, in a way that leaves no one truly satisfied.

The inability to establish institutional mechanisms for legal proceedings and conflict resolution, and thus to provide legitimization for the regime, is what truly undermines the continued survival of the group, and what keeps them in constant peril. Differences of opinion in matters such as the execution of Randall are not the primary danger for the group; rather, the complete lack of a formal mechanism through which they can resolve these differences of opinion keeps them weak. Associations and allegiances such as that of the family unit create factions within the group, and unclear definitions of the laws and rights of individuals within the group leaves members unclear as to their status in relation to the group. Meanwhile, the competing claims to authority from Rick and Shane, and the inability or lack of motivation for the rest of the members to rise up and set a clear definition of state-legitimacy, coupled with the lack of formal institutions to put into practice and guarantee the decisions of the governing body are followed, leaves the group confused and disorganized. This disorganization is a constant threat to the group's survival, demonstrating the crucial importance of state-institutions and legitimacy in human survival and prosperity.

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Hipsters Love Beer, YouTube Sensation

Elle Smiley

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Hipsters have reached the pinnacle of Cool, or at least that's what their critics sarcastically claim. This ironic subculture has been increasingly mocked in the mainstream, much to their despair. Hipsters, as a rule, try to remove themselves as much as possible from the mainstream, creating a unique niche for themselves. In fact, even being called a "Hipster" is considered derogatory to them, since the term is so popularized. According to Michael Greif, Hipsters are essentially "rebel consumers" who use their purchases and self-presentation to express their political, social, and economic discontent with the mainstream. Jokingly, this translates to a well-educated, well-dressed, young, mustachioed, thin, progressive, and aloof persons. Oftentimes they can be seen at bars drinking craft beers. This is why the niche industry of craft beer is often connected with Hipsterism. The craft beer industry arose out of a dissatisfaction with the watered-down beverages that dominated American beer culture for decades, also known as "Big Beer": Budweiser, Coors, and Miller (Williams 14:21). The rejection of all mainstream beer and subsequent creation of a kitsch artisan drink selection piqued the Hipster's interest: craft beers basically attempt to model what Hipsters do as individuals. Therefore, when the popular YouTube Video "Hipsters Love Beer" emerged, the mainstream finally achieved a masterful critique of Hipsterism as a whole. This video mocks Hipsterism in two ways: first, it synthesizes the Hipster and craft beer subcultures into one in order to poke fun at their respective failures to remain outside of the mainstream; second, it has the Hipsters who order drinks pollute their individualistic ideas by incorporating mainstream references into their drink descriptions.

The short video opens with the non-Hipster bartender nonchalantly polishing a glass, looking at the camera, and jokingly citing a trend he's noticed: "these people are *really* into their craft beers" (Nacho Punch 0:08). Then he throws his bar towel over his shoulder, and adding a quick hand gesture of welcome, he invites the audience to step into his shoes. The video rapidly cuts to different Hipsters leaning over the bar toward the camera, which is set up from the bartender's perspective, allowing the viewer to see the trend from his point of view. This opening clip begins the mockery, since the bartender does

not appear to be a Hipster: he has no beard, mustache, fedora, or 40s-style fashion. At first glance, the viewer might be tempted to label him as the "passive observer," especially since he only speaks at the beginning to introduce the Hipsters, and at the end to kick out a "Bro." But a closer analysis proves this to be incorrect. Instead, the bartender represents the "Average Joe" of the mainstream, watching the Hipsters practically mock themselves. The bartender, in effect, is a stand-in for the mainstream's perspectives on the Hipster and craft beer subcultures in general.

The setting of Hipster culture shown in "Hipsters Love Beer" depicts the ideal Hipster venue: a chill bar with an atmosphere that resonates with obscure acoustic music and aloofness. Competition for "coolness" is key. The patrons all dress in 40s-style vintage with fedoras, facial hair, and suspenders. Each one looks just as artsy and homogenous as the others, since Hipsters, according to *Urban Dictionary,* are technically conformists within their own subculture. The acoustic music in the background demonstrates the iconic music genre of Hipsters. Likewise, the aloofness of each patron caricatures the desired indifference of a Hipster. So, when each Hipster in the center of the frame orders his or her drink, the surrounding patrons must appear unenthused because they have to pretend as if they are somehow better than that Hipster.

Each of the Hipsters' drink presentations caricatures their arrogance. Hipsters shout across the bar to no one in particular, look around to ensure that their order is heard by the other bar patrons, lean in towards the barkeep with the "secret" of their order, or even proclaim the uniqueness of their drink to their fellow Hipster. When three different Hipsters order an "Arrogant Bastard," a "Pompous Asshole," and a "Dickhead Neighbor who doesn't respect property lines…" (Nacho Punch 0:24), the names of the beers serve as a sort of character development, painting a clear picture of arrogant youths who want to maintain independence and autonomy over others, including fellow Hipster "neighbors." Also, the Hipsters in the video never order the same beers. This competition to be original characterizes the elitism of Hipsters, who "go out of their way to thwart societal expectations and buck norms" (Hendlin, Anderson and Glantz) so that they appear more knowledgeable or progressive than others. The arrogance of and competition between the Hipsters is a large part of their interaction. Each wants to be the most individual and knowledgeable, so they try to upstage one another.

The Hipsters' desire to know more about individual beers than their friends does not translate to the craft beer lover. Though it may be true for some, not all craft beer lovers are Hipsters, despite media portrayals like the Nacho Punch video. In fact, two different demographic studies of the consumers of craft beer do not use the term "Hipster." Instead, each discusses the niche market of craft beer that has developed due to the push of young, wealthy, and demanding consumers (Murray and O'Neill; Baginski and Bell). Each study marks important differences in the demographic. The Murray and

O'Neill study comments on the competitiveness of the "expertise" required to discuss obscure beers, which "provide[s] the credibility and 'first in' recognition" that Hipsters seek. The "'first in' recognition" equates itself to the Hipster mantra: "I knew about this before it was cool." In the Baginski and Bell study, craft beer consumers are described as having earned a university degree, living in areas with higher costs of living, employed in "creative" professions, within the young adult age range of 25-34, and in areas cited as tolerant toward homosexuality, diversity, and immigrants. This demographic seems to be well-educated, young, artsy, progressive, and have higher socioeconomic status.

The niche market for craft beer can be seen as a countercultural market to the "Big Beer," like Coors, Miller, and Budweiser. This is often where the link between Hipster countercultural movements and craft beer is found. Baginski and Bell reference "flavor notes," glassware, neolocalism, and other unique qualities that allow consumers to "actualize tastes that may not be considered 'mainstream'" (168). The mainstream of beer is run by Big Beer companies, who produce watered-down, "tasteless fizzy yellow beverage" according to craft beer entrepreneurs ("Arrogant Bastard Ale"). The desire to avoid tastelessness is exactly what the artisan beers strive for. Since prohibition ended, the culture of beer in America was dominated by the mainstream Big Three, which permeated society and gave Americans a cheap source of watered-down alcohol (Williams). The rise in the craft beer industry is often discussed as a cultural shift among producers, who often collaborate about flavors, recipes, and sales ideas (Williams 14:12). Though brewers could make similar beers and enter into a competitive, profit-seeking battle, they choose not to, unlike the Big Three who spend more money on advertisement than the development of new products (Williams). Essentially, the craft beer industry wants to work cohesively so that they can introduce people to the possibilities that beer has to offer.

There are widely noted differences between Hipsters and craft beer enthusiasts. One in particular is the lack of competition between brewers. While there is competition between individual consumers, the artisan industry as a whole has a friendly reputation noted for its overwhelming amount of collaboration (Tuttle). The craft beer industry and enthusiasts as a whole want to come up with the best brews for each meal, person, and occasion, which yields a huge variety. They band together against Big Beer, eliminating any "discernible tension or hint of competitiveness" with other craft brewing companies (Reaves). Craft beer enthusiasts encourage competition for the betterment of all, whereas Hipsters compete to be the best overall.

Since the flavors of beer have endless possibilities, the craft industry borrowed the idea of "flavor notes" from the wine industry. Flavor notes describe the nuances of an artisan beer's taste and incorporate them into their advertisements. This is mocked in the Nacho Punch video endlessly. For example, one female Hipster quips, "it's so bitter you'll no longer be able to

dream," mocking the bitterness that the hops-heavy craft beers carry. In a hilarious and hyperbolic example of these flavor notes, funny substitutes for real drinks are put into cups in place of beer, like sawdust and fake blood. The sawdust spoofs the "woody top notes" of some beers (Nacho Punch 0:16). The fake blood spoofs a grassy finish by creating a disturbing pun of a "glassy finish" (Nacho Punch 0:56) that appears to make the drinker's mouth bleed profusely. Drinking sawdust and expelling fake blood from one's mouth are obviously meant to mock flavor notes of kitsch artisan beers, since they are so ridiculous and gross. One beer order in "Hipsters Love Beer" is called the "Baby Dick Belgian White," which alludes to the Belgian beer Manneken Pis, a famous fountain in Brussels of a young boy peeing. During cultural festivals, the fountain is tapped into many kegs of Belgian beers to highlight different flavors present in the brews (Manneken Pis Brussels Belgium). Real home brewers allude to this popular statue as well, like the blogging home brewer Chad, who captures the arrogant, flavor-loving caricature of the Hipster. Here, he describes his latest brew, the "Moby Dick Belgian White" that has a surprising mix of flavors:

> I decided it was time for a new homebrew. And as I give all my beers Led Zeppelin song names, I figured Moby Dick would be perfect for a Belgian White… Flavor is mostly wheat malt, orange, and coriander. Not much in the way of hops (as intended), just a dry, grassy finish.

Chad produces the quintessential example of a "Hipsters Love Beer" drink here, through its ironically mainstream title and its odd flavor combination of orange, spice, and grass. Flavor notes and titles are important to Hipsters because they describe the unique qualities of each beer. However, the jokes about flavor notes point out the absurd extreme that both beer drinkers and brewers will go to. In order to be unique, people are actually drinking beer that is peed out of a fountain or purposefully made to taste like spice and grass. This highlights the absurd creativity of the market for craft beer.

The market seems to have borrowed a lot from the wine-tasting tradition, not only with the flavor notes, but also with specific glassware meant to maximize the enjoyment of different drinks. Silly containers mock the spike in specialized glassware, like a fedora that leaks beer all over one Hipster's beard (0:47), a birdfeeder which two characters flick their tongues along the openings (1:20), a Goblet of Fire that is actually in flames (1:02), and a urine sample cup (1:06). These odd objects that are not meant to hold beer serve to parody the desire to be unique and kitsch among Hipsters, taking it to an absurd level. Since beer isn't served in any of these containers normally, the characters in the video supposedly have the upper hand on the latest vessel for their prized beer, making them "good" Hipsters.

One of the great advantages that Hipsters and craft brew lovers have is neolocalism, the support of local industry, which is also mocked in the video. In

the bloopers of the video, Batman comes up to the bar as a Hipster and makes his own pun about beer with sultry grumble: "Is this Gotham Brood? I only drink Gotham-brewed." Another Hipster drunkenly proclaims, "Yeah, it's brewed by slutty nuns up in the Appalachian mountains." Not only are these both unrealistic and silly claims, but also they are location-specific. Notably, there are many craft breweries or microbreweries along the entire Appalachian Mountain range, including Asheville, NC, and Frederick, MD (Baginski and Bell). According to Reaves, the owners of breweries also express an "intense desire to create a neighborhood-oriented workplace," characterizing the neolocalist attitude that their patrons echo. Hipsters can find their favorite beers before their friends because many region-specific beers are introduced and featured in certain towns before others. Craft beer lovers will often take vacations based on the beer scene at the vacation destination (Baginski and Bell 177), potentially to gain the upper hand on their Hipster friends by knowing about the beer from a certain city before everyone else, in the true Hipster fashion. As Mark Greif quips, the Hipster always consumes products that are "expensive, rare, and knowledge-intensive" in order to express their desire to be the first to know.

Finally, the Hipsters set themselves in the mainstream by paralleling pop culture allusions with Hipster-y ones, amplifying the ridiculous tone. Some obscure references include the Bollywood song "Pooch Daddy Se" and the famous-among-hipsters folk band "Blue Caboose" (Nacho Punch 0:11). Alongside these references and counter to them, the characters bring up blockbuster films like *Harry Potter, Batman, Indiana Jones, The Lion King*, and the TV character Clifford the Big Red Dog. Other references include the cinnamon challenge, a popular Internet trend where people eat a tablespoon of cinnamon that causes them to vomit. Since the script artfully places the obscure and popular references alongside one another, it allows the viewer to understand much of the irony inherent to Hipsterism: their desperate desire to stay out of the mainstream fails because as they run counter to it, they become an integral part of it. In other words, the more the Hipsters reject the mainstream and point out its flaws, the more they are acknowledged by it and integrated into its culture.

In the last official scene of the video before the bloopers at the end, The Bro/Average Joe walks in. As the antithesis to the entire caricature of hipsters he is broad-shouldered, muscular, backwards-baseball-cap-wearing, smiling, and appears down to earth in his T-Shirt (Nacho Punch 1:44). The bartender amusingly throws the Bro out for ordering a Bud Light, the epitome of a mainstream beer. This was included to demonstrate how Hipsters hate the mainstream culture. Kicking out the mainstream man was the final moment for the video's champion mockery, because it mirrors exactly what a Hipster would want to do in their brewpub.

Hipsters have been increasingly mocked in the mainstream. Their desired niche has been idealized, stereotyped, and adopted by popular culture as a whole while they simultaneously accept the mainstream by utilizing popular culture references in return. Although the craft beer industry was developed as a countercultural beer movement, I can imagine that they don't mind being adopted by the mainstream, unlike the Hipsters. Not only would it give them more business, but also the drinkers in America as a whole might become more cultured when introduced to the complex and varying flavors that the artisan industry has to offer. Both subcultures were mocked extensively in the video, still, to demonstrate their likeness and their odd kitsch behavior.

The consumption of Hipsters and the rise in the craft beer industry ultimately have one thing in common: they capture the quintessential American ideal of individuality. This, in turn, exemplifies patriotism through the promotion of local economies, small business, and civic awareness. Hipsterism leads to the mindful purchase of products that the consumer considers to be acceptable according to their individual beliefs, taking ownership over their purchases instead of buying into the mindless materialism that many consider to plague Americans. Therefore, Hipsters are attempting to make a positive impact on America with every purchase they make. The overall economic impact of craft beer cannot be questioned, either. It is one of the largest growing industries in America, having doubled its sales between 2007 and 2012 to about $12 billion (Williams 13:31). Additionally, half the employees working for a beer company in the US are employed by the craft beer industry (Williams 4:24). Unfortunately, the mockery of both subcultures is rampant, causing the mainstream to ignore the positive impact of these Americans. Hipsters and craft beer lovers are here to stay, and they will surely grow their product on the mainstream "side of the fence, despite numerous e-mails and a surveyor from city hall who comes out to delineate their property boundaries," just like one of the Hipster characters complains about.

Link to Nacho Punch video: http://youtu.be/KWBV7yKWhWE

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Glee: *A Cultural Phenomenon?*

Jayne Smyth

§

Hailed as a "cultural phenomenon" by FOX broadcasting company, the TV show *Glee* has been praised for transcending its purpose of not only entertaining Americans but also furthering social change as well. Helen Oliviero, a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal- Constitution*, interviewed local choir teachers in Atlanta who raved about the ability *Glee* had to eliminate stereotypes within their schools and encourage kids from all different social groups to break down the barriers and unite in a common positive outlet: singing. Sources like *Entertainment Weekly* have praised the show for showcasing "the daily high school realities of bullying, discrimination and ignorance" (Weimann). *Glee* has even been recognized by prominent organizations within the LGBT community. In 2010, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Awards recognized *Glee* and its accomplishments when the TV show nabbed the award for best comedy series ("TV's 'Glee'").

While most would agree that *Glee* has served as a prominent vehicle for social change in high schools, the negative ramifications the show produces are vastly overlooked. While I do agree *Glee* has taken on the challenge of portraying teenagers trying to navigate the challenges of high school, I question the accuracy with which the show depicts these characters. Instead of acknowledging the everyday obstacles faced by teenagers, *Glee*'s character depiction only ends up broadcasting a cookie cutter version that undermines the real, severe issues plaguing teenagers, negatively affecting them and their environment.

Many may question why this is even an issue; *Glee* is a television show, and a television program's job is to merely entertain citizens and to serve as an escape from reality. However, I believe *Glee* transcends this typical social function for television because it has a civic and moral duty to portray teenage characters in an accurate way due to the fact they have willingly taken on this social responsibility.

Glee's recognition by the LGBT community serves as one prominent example of how the show's creators have taken on this civic and moral duty. When *Glee* appeared on the nomination list for the 21st annual GLAAD awards in 2010, Jarrett Barrios, the President of GLAAD and an activist for reform in

the gay community, described the significance of this nomination: "With these awards, we seek to recognize news coverage and entertainment programming that go beyond stock stereotypes with LGBT storylines that more fully reflects the challenges gay and transgender people face and the aspirations we hold for ourselves and our families" ("GLAAD Awards"). By accepting this nomination, *Glee* had therefore also accepted the job of accurately portraying gay teenagers in the right way, in the hopes of bettering the community for gay citizens.

Glee's avid use of self-promotion also demonstrates that the show has accepted this social responsibility. Ryan Murphy, the co-creator of the hit show, was quoted in the *New York Times* in 2010 speaking about *Glee's* gay character Kurt saying, "I think that character is in many ways the most important character on television, particularly for kids. When I was growing up, there was nobody like that. I think that character changes lives" (Itzkoff). This bold statement conveys that *Glee* and its creators market themselves as catalysts for positive change. *Glee* has continued to enforce this image by releasing their first 3D movie in theatres in 2011. Advertised as a one hour and twenty-four minute concert experience, it grossed nearly 11.9 million dollars at the box office ("Glee: The 3D"). While the main focus of the film was musical numbers performed during the tour, the movie also featured testimonies from fans of the show that discussed how *Glee* had impacted their lives positively. One fan, a 19 year old from Rhode Island named Trenton Thompson, spoke about how Kurt had helped him cope with being a gay teenager as well (Burke). This facet of the movie showed America that *Glee* was all about existing to help gay teenagers thrive. The use of this personal account set a standard for *Glee* to have to live up to. It proves *Glee* wants to promote an image that they play a vital role in the movement for reform in the gay community, therefore making it their civic duty to uphold this idea. From the interviews conducted with the co-creator Ryan Murphy to the relentless propaganda the show uses in an attempt to portray themselves as a platform for gay rights, *Glee* is continuing to give a false representation to the public of what they are really achieving. What the public perceives as fact is merely twisted biases that the *Glee* franchise has sold them.

Of course *Glee* is purely fiction and does not claim in any way to be a documentary. Some might argue that television alone does not have the power to influence viewer's daily actions and thoughts. However, television does contain this innate ability to affect individuals and their lives immensely. In an *Out Magazine* interview, Ryan Murphy recounted a conversation he had with lawyers who were fighting for Proposition Eight to be overturned. When Murphy asked them why they thought public opinion had drastically changed over the issue of gay marriage so quickly, the lawyers simply replied it was because of television (Vargas-Cooper). This example proves how television has the ability to shape public opinion about something as powerful as national court cases. With Proposition Eight serving as such a controversial issue that divided the nation unlike any other, it is proven in the most radical way that

television has an undeniable power to affect and reach the minds of citizens. A study in the *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research* found that "television (TV) is considered… the most potent and easiest entertainment means to affect the lives of human beings" (Tomar). With *Glee* addressing such a pertinent issue in today's culture, through a medium as powerful as the television, one might wonder what the possible repercussions of misinterpretations of the struggle faced by these teenagers.

A prominent example of inaccurate character portrayals can be seen throughout the gay characters on the show. The bullying tactics used in *Glee* are nothing but shallow, watered down versions of bullying that in no way justify what real gay teens experience in school. In the show, the gay students are bullied infamously by being "slushied," an act in which the bullies throw slushies in the faces of the gay characters as a way to torment them (Weinmann). While this comes off as comedic and entertaining for viewers, being "slushied" is not a normal occurrence for gay teens facing harassment in high schools. In a study conducted by George W. Smith, a gay man himself, where gay teenagers were interviewed about their experience in high school, one student revealed that it often normal for harassment to progress to violent fights where the gay student is heavily outnumbered by teenage homophobes (Smith). This gay teen depicted harassment that included merciless gossip and constant name calling, even escalating to students graffiti-ing anti-gay remarks in places like the restrooms (Smith). These very real, traumatizing bullying tactics will not be found anywhere in the plot of *Glee*. Instead, viewers will observe the real harassment faced by gays being belittled to a slap-stick comedy routine that fails to depict what serious harassment issues are actually taking place in high schools today, in turn keeping anyone who tunes into the show unaware of these serious issues. Irene Monroe, a lesbian activist and writer, investigated the rise of anti-gay bullying on a deeper level and found that in just one month, nine teenage suicides had occurred due to this national epidemic (Monroe). Monroe wrote about listening to Sirdeaner L. Walker of Springfield, Massachusetts, pleading for strong legislation to be passed against bullying, after losing her eleven-year-old son to suicide (Monroe). At a time when teenagers are turning to suicide as the only solution, *Glee* has the perfect opportunity to tackle these hard topics in an effort to show teenagers that suicide is not the answer. Instead, though, teens wrestling with vicious tormenters will take no comfort in the mockery of their situation being made on FOX. Having no ability to relate to the campy gag of a slushy, *Glee* will have failed the average gay teenager again. While *Glee* does accurately depict the lack of openness teenagers have for homosexual students, this lack of true realism makes the issue seems insignificant, when in fact, anti-gay harassment is increasingly finding a place among not only today's culture, but the death rate as well.

This trend of depicting real life issues as underdeveloped subplots continues to live on in numerous facets of the show, not just within the gay

characters. On *Glee*, one of the sweetest and certainly most naïve characters, Marley, develops bulimia and struggles with self-image after being told by a fellow classmate that being thin will solve all her problems (*Glee*). Marley's eating disorder is short-lived and not fully developed, seemingly disappearing magically after a just a few episodes (*Glee*). In reality, negative self-image has been reported to develop in girls as young as first to third grade (Giudice). This immediately makes Marley's sudden body image issue at age sixteen an inaccurate portrayal of eating disorders. Belittling the true psychological depth that correlates with eating disorders, this gives viewers the idea that eating disorders are merely a "stage" or normal occurrence for teenage girls, when in reality they are a highly detrimental mental disorder that develops over a long span of time.

In an in-depth investigation on eating disorders, Brenda Broussard described bulimia as a "chronic and a potentially life long health issue" (2). While *Glee* depicts the effect of dehydration that can be produced from bulimia through Marley passing out during a performance, *Glee* fails to address the many other harmful body effects bulimia causes, like the eroding of teeth and gums, tearing of the esophagus, cardiac arrest, osteoporosis, and the possibility of a ruptured stomach (Broussard 5-6).

Broussard expresses in her investigation that "gaining bulimic women's perspective could promote a compressive appreciation of bulimia; its etiology, and direction for relevant treatment alternatives (14). With *Glee* neglecting to address the very serious health risks brought on by bulimic behavior and depicting Marley's struggle as easy to overcome, eating disorders are not portrayed to viewers as the truly detrimental disorders they are. This negative portrayal could stunt or prevent treatments from being developed for women who are suffering from a real eating disorder, not the superficial cookie cutter disorder portrayed on *Glee*. When Marley passes out at sectionals, her fellow teammates respond with anger because she cost them the win, not because they care about her eating disorder. The characters are so upset about the loss, it is not even addressed that Marley passed out due to the fact that she was bingeing and purging. This lack of a supportive, caring environment sets up a negative image for viewers as to how people would respond to such a disorder. This is significant because it can cause young girls to hide their disorders further because they fear they will only be ridiculed for sharing their problem.

While *Glee* did depict the trials of teenage pregnancy accurately, the show reverted to its cookie cutter ways when the aftermath of something as detrimental as teen pregnancy was shown as a breeze. *Glee* was sure to not make pregnancy look like a walk in the park for the character Quinn Fabray in the beginning by having her parents kick her out and having her coveted spot as head cheerleader on the cheerleading squad be taken away from her (*Glee*). But, after Quinn finally does give birth to her child, the emotional struggle she faces

is short-lived, and only brought on by the fact that she gives her baby up for adoption.

In reality, the emotional trauma of teen pregnancy does not stop after the baby is born. In an analysis of teenage pregnancy, Luisana Barraza explores the negative emotional strains that pregnancy has on teenage girls. Barraza notes that a 1996 study found that "in a sample of 114 adolescents mothers, 36%... had elevated depression scores at two months postpartum and elevated scores of 32% at 4 months postpartum." Barraza also describes how pregnant teens experience "crying, loneliness, sadness, sleep change, and mood swings" (15). While Quinn Fabray is portrayed crying and lonely at times during her pregnancy, when she is shown after the birth of the baby, it is as if the pregnancy never happened and Quinn thrives again in high school, reclaiming her spot as head cheerleader and dating again instantly (*Glee*).

This false depiction of how easy it is to overcome a teen pregnancy gives teenage girls an inaccurate portrayal of the difficult burdens that come with teen pregnancy. It sets the idea that while there will be challenging moments during the actual pregnancy, once the baby is born, your life will return to the way it was before, with no emotional baggage or trauma. In a time now more than ever when girls need to be educated properly on the negative effects on teen pregnancy, *Glee* chooses to show only half of the story, potentially repressing social change.

All of these subplots only further prove the idea that instead of inspiring social change, *Glee* relies on cookie cutter versions to depict characters and plots and only strays farther from reform. While a surface level look at *Glee* may provoke the idea it is a positive thing for teenagers struggling with issues like homosexuality, eating disorders, and pregnancy, a deeper look reveals that it is achieving just the opposite. While *Glee's* creators and advertisements speak highly of its social advancements, the characters themselves fail to show any real aspect of the struggle faced by these teenagers. Being so hyper-focused on trying to instill the idea within viewer's minds that they have incited social change, the show lacks the element of detail that is needed to actually bring about any real awareness of these issues. Because the show only halfway depicts the struggles faced by these societal groups, citizens are not accurately informed about the issues, and therefore are not motivated to take a stand or help improve these conditions. This false representation only ends up promoting similar behavior in the future instead of repressing it because of the fanciful, unrealistic way *Glee* chooses to represent them.

While the idea of *Glee's* false depiction has been established, it is also revealed how easy it is for *Glee* to get society to buy into the idea that they have served as such a benchmark in the community. With all advertisements and statements made by the *Glee* franchise themselves put aside, what solid proof really exists anywhere else that they have lived up to this social and moral obligation? Though *Glee* is a revolutionary in the sense that it shows on

television in somewhat new ways teenagers in groundbreaking situations like discovering their sexuality or dealing with an eating disorder, anyone who agrees it has truly done this accurately has merely fallen into the trap of brilliant advertising and propaganda. Failing to achieve the moral and civic duty the show has built its premise and popularity on, *Glee* serves as yet another example of how powerful not only the medium of television can be, but the art of persuasion as well.

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Life's a Drag, So Be a Queen
David Henry Zatyko

§

In the navy blue darkness by the river, industrial lights illuminate abandoned warehouses and rubble along the path to an inconspicuous building labeled only with a pink neon "Z/S." A police car rolls by; then, the street again is silent. Eventually, a car pulls up and a lean, fairly muscular man with a black t-shirt, sweatpants, and a crew cut steps out into the crisp night air. He has rigid cheekbones and slightly sunken eyes, but a smirk is painted across his face. He grabs a grey toolbox and a massive suitcase almost half his height and enters a hardly-noticeable door under those lit-up letters. He marches leisurely through a pitch black showroom around tables, chairs, platforms and stripper poles, ultimately stepping down some stairs into the silent lights of a back kitchen area. Dozens of cardboard boxes are stuffed haphazardly along the walls, and dull metallic tables line the corner of the narrow room. He stops, places the toolbox on the table with a thud, and flips open the suitcase. Out pop a green dress, a bleached blonde wig, and deep red nipples on the enormous breasts of a chest piece. Mark Milligan, his name while not performing, grins and turns back to his toolbox, sets up his three-paneled mirror, and lays out his dozens of brushes, at least eight colors of makeup, creams, and foundations. "I'm going back to my slut look tonight," he remarks through bright white teeth making up a devious smile. Somehow I have a feeling this is supposed to be a positive notion. Coming from Ms. Eclipse, I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

"On Thursdays, my job is to make customers get naked and dance," he says without much inflection. He picks out a brush and begins applying a cream-colored layer of foundation to his skin. "It's easy for me 'cause I'm a whore," he smirks in my direction, holding back the brush for a moment. Being a "whore" is another way to say "performing in drag" for Mark – but he wouldn't straight-up tell you that way, because it would be too plain, too boring. He needs to add flair to the conversation, give some bite to the statement – make it last. Drag is, as Mark would say, and as scholars would agree, the act of on-stage impersonation of another gender. Mark never has seen drag as something to just "do," and it isn't just some job for him– it's meant to cause a scene, to rouse a reaction. Drag, for Mark, is an explosive, reactive gesture, and it has been all his life. First, he was naked and strutting around the house in his

mother's high heels; soon, he was a Marine, showing up to training with makeup smeared across his face; now, he convinces men to tear off their clothes. Drag lets Mark be Ms. Eclipse, an even more over-the-top, out-of-the-box, overwhelming force of nature, of pure energy, punch, and charisma, than he is while not transformed. For Mark, drag is a powerful tool of self-empowerment. Not that he needs to be self-empowered: "I'm one of those people who's never really cared about other people's opinions," he comments, finishing up the first layer and glancing into the mirror before moving on, "As long as I'm happy with myself. Which is probably why I'm still single," he adds, smirking again, entertaining as always. Drag is an outlet for this constant outpouring of energy to amuse, to please, to show off, to impress, to shock. To induce a reaction. And while this is how he has always seen drag, American culture's perception of drag has definitely gone through its own growing pains.

In fact, drag's general acceptance today is only the current stop on a path that has been traveled for over one hundred years in American culture – and what a bumpy road it's been. The drag that we know today, in which gay men are often the performers, originates in the drag balls of New York, starting in the 1890s. Founded by gay men, they were a "subcultural response" to more mainstream masquerade balls at the time, but by the Roaring Twenties they were on the cusp of the mainstream. Some of these drag balls, often called "Faggots' Balls," were held at popular locations such as Madison Square Garden, the Astor Hotel, and the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. Performers wore "lavish costumes," often with "plumes, jewelry, and feathers," all of which are still heavily used on drag costumes today (The Nat'l Museum & Archive of Gay and Lesbian History 164-172). However, when the Depression hit, the Hoover administration decided that they wanted "values adjusted" and men and women to "pick up the wrecks from less competent people" (qtd. in Eaklor 62). Similarly, the Hays Code was established, which controlled what "values" could be portrayed in cinema and other public arts. Meanwhile, there was a growing fear of countercultural movements, as socialism and communism were stigmatized during the Depression and after in the Cold War. These were all precursors to the swift disappearance of drag culture from the mainstream public. In fact, drag was not brought back to the forefront of American culture until 1969, when the Stonewall riots struck. Considered a blowback to thirty-plus years of suppression, the riots at this gay club against police were believed to have been started by drag queens, and sparked a revolution – the gay rights movement. This in turn led to additional hard-won fights, bringing drag and gay culture as a whole to the level of acceptance it has reached today (Eaklor 122-123).

It was quite a progression – but queens weren't exactly pretty while doing it, Mark notes. Touching up around the cheeks, adding colorful striated layers zigzagging between lines and curves, he mentions, "Back then it was

mostly just men in dresses – not that that isn't what it is today. We're just slightly more contoured." Some would say Mark is missing the point.

"It's not about being pretty; it's about representing a culture. Sure, it's nice to make tips and be pretty, and I'm not going to lie, it's great when people applaud you," says Tempest DuJour, a Tucson drag queen embracing what she calls 'drag power.' "I'm not one for doing anything halfway and I put my heart and soul into it. Part of the reason I do that is because I'm representing a culture" (qtd. in Herreras). Tempest and Mark would agree that it's not just about being pretty, but definitely not on the reasoning behind it. For queens like Tempest, drag is about strength and unity in the community – something Mark scoffs at. He doesn't even think there is such a thing as unity in the drag community, at least not in DC – and he has a case, even if it's just a personal anecdote.

Mark, having worked as a nurse at several clinics throughout Washington and Maryland over the past six years, once found himself working under a fellow drag queen. And while some, like Tempest, would expect this unity of a shared community would empower them both, it instead only empowered the other queen – to fire Mark for wearing pink scrubs one day. Definitely not the unity Tempest envisioned. The positive, empowering culture she believes in isn't what Mark believes is expressed in DC drag culture, or in drag culture in general. He thinks many are cutthroat and vicious here – making drag brutal, serious, and unenjoyable for all. Having been through the terrors of drag in the past, Mark believes drag culture can be bitchy, even downright 'fugly.' But then, Mark is just one opinion, just one voice – even if he happens to have been through a lot of life.

Mark grew up in suburban Minnesota, moving between being homeless and living in garages and basements of his friends' houses throughout the '90s and early '00s. His father left his family for Cuba when he was very young, and his mother, bipolar and schizophrenic, was "a whole lot of crazy in one body," as Mark insists. Still, despite the upheaval and instability, he found his true love in drag. After dressing at Halloween drag balls as young as fourteen, Mark decided to make his debut in high school – coming to school in high heels, a dress, and face lavished in his best attempt at makeup. They tried to make him change, but he refused.

"I wasn't breaking dress code," he says nonchalantly, shrugging his shoulders back as he dabs on more dazzling layers of color to his face. He was expelled from high school twice – the first time, for smacking a bigoted bully in band across the face with his flute so hard that it sent him to the hospital; the second time, for stealing class instruction guides from his teachers (apparently government property). Mark joined the Marines at eighteen, entirely on a bet – his friends said he was too feminine to survive, so he wanted to prove them wrong. Still, drag stayed a part of his life throughout his journey in the Marines,

even up to the time when he accidently went in with makeup still lathered across his face from a show the night before.

"I ripped the soap dispenser of the wall when I saw the makeup still caked on my face. I sat in a stall and scrubbed till it was painful," he details as he softly dots his cheeks, preparing to move on to his eyes. Luckily, no one saw him – but that wasn't enough to stop him from eventually getting discharged a few years later – for being gay, of course, in the era of DADT ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell"). Nevertheless, he wound up working in the day as a nurse at a clinic in Alexandria, and at night under the dim "Z/S" (Ziegfeld's Secrets, as it's known by the inside crowd). Here, he enjoys a much kinder circle of queens than some of the others he has experienced in the past. He has finally found acceptance within local drag community, which in turn reflects the growing acceptance of drag in society due to the gay rights movement.

Stonewall helped bring about this shift. After that cataclysm, gay and drag cultures were back at the forefront of counter-culture, fighting for their rights as a movement. Queens wanted freedom to express themselves, to be out and open in the world, and it is a battle they still fight to this day, although many of their wars have since been won. Drag's journey reached its zenith in the '90s – RuPaul, a gorgeous, African American queen, had a hit song, and Kurt Cobain, lead singer of grunge band Nirvana, celebrated him – a moment of stars colliding and shining even brighter together. According to Darragh McManus, grunge, an alternative rock scene demanding freedom from social alienation and apathy in society, fit hand in hand with drag. Although entirely opposite in look, they were united in their counter-cultural origins and goals (McManus). Both, also, were embraced by the mainstream as it continued its liberalizing path, shedding the conservative values the country had embraced for decades along the way (McManus). Today, RuPaul has his own TV show, a drag competition he hosts, called *RuPaul's Drag Race*, seen by millions of viewers each week (Rogers). And drag's influence is spreading beyond just those who watch the show or listened to Nirvana. Some parents, like mommy/blogger Joy Martina-Malone, even want their children to hold drag queens up in higher esteem than Disney princesses – after all, you don't have to have a perfect body or marry royalty to become a queen in the land of drag.

"Drag every year becomes more accepted," he notes, applying an ample amount of powder to his cheeks and nose. This is apparent, given the ratings juggernaut that *RuPaul's Drag Race* has become. However, this is not to say drag culture doesn't still have its detractors. "The main group of people who look down their noses at drag are gay men," Mark huffs, shaking his head as he pulls away the heavy brush for a moment. Blurring gender lines is frightening for so many gay men because of their insecurities about being seen as effeminate. Or perhaps it's that, a theory Mark proposes, "Bitchy little queens need something to complain about!"

Blunt, but not without backing. This issue isn't one that only Mark is seeing – in fact, many gay men today have a lot to learn about drag, and what it really means. Jarred Stancil, a sophomore at George Washington University, understands now, but only after putting on the heels and skirt of a famous queen from the musical *Rent* named Angel. He reported in *The GW Hatchet* that before the production, he saw drag as a way for "broken and confused people to masquerade as someone else, or to fill some void within themselves" (Stancil). Mark has no voids to fill, except maybe the one in his quest to find a boyfriend. But Stancil learns quickly that drag isn't about a deficiency – it's about creation, at least to him. He interprets that drag queens, like the character Angel, use drag as an art form to fulfill their "burning desire to create something they love to share with their communities" (Stancil). This is just one interpretation of the meaning of drag – another added meaning, when there already exist so many. And yet, this fear of being seen as feminine isn't surprising – although it confounds Mark.

"It's bullshit," he frustratingly asserts as he layers more colors onto his face.

Mark thinks it's "bullshit," but it's been going on for decades. In fact, the fight about "straight-acting" and the "masc. (masculine) vs. fem. (feminine)" paradigm will likely continue for years to come in the gay community. It turns attraction into something subtly hateful, more about domination and fear than about pleasure and love. Perhaps, even, about being anti-feminist – in this context, anti-feminist meaning the suppression of women or against the equality of women. Drag culture likes to think it's ahead of the curve, of course, and it might be – but not everyone would agree even on that. Some might even suggest many gay men fear drag because they are anti-feminist, and those who do participate are only using it as an outlet to portray their own anti-feminism for the benefit of other men. Drag historians Schacht and Underwood discuss whether drag is a subversive performance style – an act of rebellion against conservative, more mainstream culture – or whether it is really just another patriarchal tool to suppress women. Their particular study suggests that men dressing as women is inherently anti-feminist, as it perpetuates the "hegemonic masculine structure" (Schacht and Underwood). Men take on the role and image of the female, parade her around to other men, and therefore conquer the feminine as well as the masculine. This theory states that drag is not meant to be an attempt to break down gender barriers or to be a countercultural action, but instead is a means of amassing power, playing into the patriarchy, and asserting men as the dominant sex (Schacht and Underwood).

Mark would definitely not agree, at least not about all of drag culture. As he begins to draw out smooth, dark curving lines with a black pencil – outlining huge eyes over his own and up well beyond their natural size – he scoffs at the likes of RuPaul and what he calls her "pretty-girl" look: an attempt

to look as much like a woman as possible. Mainstream drag, as Mark would say, is all about looking like a pretty girl, and that's just not how it should be. Maybe that part of drag isn't subversive – maybe RuPaul, drag hero, has been playing into the "hegemonic masculine structure" all along.

"It's important to be *out there* – you can't always just go straight for the pretty-girl look," Mark mentions, starting to color in the lines with heavy black strokes, filling out his face and drawing out his eyes. He draws on new eyebrows, high above the real brows, and suddenly his appearance has actually started to change. He is different from before, as if through our discussion the transformation occurred without me realizing, even though I watched it happen. He seems a different person – I am hearing him, Mark, but I am looking at her, Ms. Eclipse.

And the transformation into Ms. Eclipse was mirrored in the transformation of society, with RuPaul giving birth to this newfound American culture which embraces drag and its male imitation of the feminine. But Ms. Eclipse would never say RuPaul is anti-feminist, just, perhaps, that he's boring. She would suggest, instead, that drag performers branch out and give themselves a wide array of drag personas – from celebrity impersonators, to androgynous personas, to different subcultural looks, to even more wild options. Ms. Eclipse, for example, has been experimenting with illusions for the past several weeks, an addition to her pantheon of personas.

Scholar Holly Brubach would argue that Ms. Eclipse is proof that the notion of drag enforcing gender norms is, as Mark would say, "bullshit." In her book *Girlfriend: Men, Women, and Drag*, Brubach agrees that, at its core, drag is about imitating the female, and thus taking on the traditionally female role of using illusion through makeup. However, this blurring of the real and the imaginary is not anti-feminist in intent or in practice. Instead, according to Brubach, drag is a veneration of the feminine. It shows the flimsiness of the masculine identity, as it is adding female roles to a male figure, and acts a subversion to the gender binary and the rigid gender roles used back in the Victorian era. This explains why it was so popular at the turn of the 20th century – drag was a response to the social constriction of the previous era (Brubach 161-168).

Most importantly, this shows that drag is about blurring gender lines and promoting freedom of gender expression and sexuality, and has nothing to do with any "hegemonic masculine structure." Looking like a woman just isn't what drag is really about.

"It's about playing dress up," Ms. Eclipse says as she cleans up stray marks and lines around her face. She gets all of the finishing touches just right, trying to be 100% sure she's as perfect as can be. She reaches back to grab her wig from the top of the suitcase, and, above her masterpiece-quality face, adorns her head with the crown of luscious locks.

"Drag is about having fun," she adds, and I can't think of any reason why this wouldn't be a good enough reason for it to exist. Whether it's about being a "slut," being creative and artistic, being part of a community, having the freedom to blur the lines of the gender binary, or just being your zany, reactive self, drag is about having fun. So get out there and work it, girlfriend.

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Taking a Stand

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If the Stiletto Fits: A Discursive Analysis of the Adoption and Normalization of Recreational Pole Dancing

Tailor S. Dortona

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Keeping Our Daughters Off the Pole

My father and I used to joke about me growing up and pursuing a career as a pole dancer. Well, not exactly. You see, there was an inconspicuous white building down the road from the home in which I grew up which was labeled with the words, "Zebra Club." As a kindergartener, I was filled with questions about the mini zoo which my mother refused to acknowledge the existence of. I took these questions to my father, who admitted to me that the Zebra Club was not home to zebras at all. Unsurprisingly, this intel only piqued my curiosity and resulted in me begging my dad to bring me to the human zoo every day after school. Following an incident involving our dining room table, wild dance moves, and a naked five-year-old Tailor, my dad explained that we could never venture inside the club, but we *could* pretend we were there every time we drove past. This resulted in us singing "zebra club zebra club" and performing iconic go-go dancer moves, such as the monkey, every morning and afternoon for the remaining years we lived in that house.

Fathers do not want to envision their little girls as they gaze upon the erotic dancer executing the superman during their weekly "business meeting," but what is everyone else's excuse? As an informed, global citizen, I am well aware of the commonly held beliefs surrounding the performance of pole dancing in strip clubs: that occupational pole dancers are coerced into accepting their position or that the sole reason women continue to work in strip clubs is the paycheck. Many opponents of traditional pole dancing argue that coerced commodification leads to the objectification of the dancers, which is demeaning.

In addition to the act of pole dancing itself, poling opponents view the setting in which it occurs, strip clubs, as being extremely problematic. Strip clubs are thought of as a breeding ground for human trafficking, partly because most people cannot begin to imagine why a woman would ever *willingly* engage

in this occupation, but also because of the clandestine nature of strip clubs, which promotes the allegation that strip clubs are a hotbed for criminal activity. Overall, it is thought that the activities which occur within the club promote values which do not adhere to the status quo. When these clubs are an accepted aspect of a community, these bad values are, in turn, imparted to young people.

But what if pole dancing's primary purpose was no longer to sexually arouse men? Would pole dancing suddenly become acceptable? What if men were excluded from this practice entirely? What would pole dancing become if it ended the commodification of women, occurred in a non-strip club setting, and participation were never coerced? Take traditional pole dancing, eliminate all of the men, replace the strip clubs with yoga studios, swap the dress code of leather tops and lace thongs for sports bras and breathable spandex, and create a sweat-inducing routine, in lieu of a boner-inducing one. The resulting activity is recreational pole dancing.

A House Divided

Perhaps it was my previous fascination with the Zebra Club which incited me to enroll in a recreational pole dancing class this past October, or maybe it was simply the allure of being able to partake in such a controversial activity as a means of academic research. Enrolling in the class was also an excuse to learn a skill which I had only heard about.

When I revealed to my classmates, coworkers, friends, and family that I had chosen to write a research essay on pole dancing, most were initially taken aback, yet amused, while others were horrified at my audacity to choose such a vulgar topic for an academic essay. My mother even told me that it "would not be possible" to write such a paper through a scholarly lens. Upon immediately clarifying that I was, in fact, researching pole dancing *fitness* classes, also known as recreational pole dancing, or poling, as opposed to *traditional* pole dancing, also referred to as occupational pole dancing, people's reactions tended to drastically change. Common responses to my clarification included, "I thought you meant the *other* kind of pole dancing," "that's a totally different story," and "I always wanted to learn how to do that, it looks so sexy! Apparently it's a really good workout, too." But when I asked my friends and family to *identify* the primary difference(s), their responses were unanimous; everyone resolutely labeled traditional pole dancing as demeaning and objectifying. Though they all agreed that recreational poling is a socially acceptable practice for women to participate in, no one could confidently pinpoint which aspects make it so.

After participating in a poling class, I immediately agreed with the belief that traditional pole dancing and recreational pole dancing are "totally different stories." That said, the Internet is home to angry blogs and ranting articles of numerous poling adversaries, the majority of whom argue that poling is no different from traditional pole dancing, or at least not different enough to deem one a social menace and the other socially acceptable (Deuce).

One thing both sides of the house agree upon is the fact that occupational pole dancing demeans and objectifies women. If gender equality*[1] is promoted by a majority in the status quo, which is arguably the case in places such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, the four societies which are examined by the vast majority of recreational pole dancing researchers, then occupational pole dancing is a hindrance to the gender equality movement. So if recreational pole dancing's adversaries are arguing that poling is not a large enough deviation from occupational pole dancing to deem it socially acceptable within the status quo, then poling's supporters must be able to distinguish between the two forms of pole dancing by citing poling's specific deviations from traditional pole dancing.

The Apple Never Falls Far From the Tree…Unless it's Windy

Though the location of the first recreational pole dancing studio is uncertain, societies around the world began to embrace recreational pole dancing in the early 2000s, despite the fact that it originated from an occupation which is widely regarded as degrading and reprehensible (Owen 84). The mass espousal of poling occurred with little regard to the societal implications of normalizing this activity while *simultaneously* continuing to reject its raunch culture origins, which leaves poling vulnerable to criticism from opponents of traditional pole dancing. While some people believe that recreational pole dancing helps to liberate women from the patriarchal societies in which they live, others assert that poling directly harms the gender equality movement.

In order to justify the *rejection* of one and concurrent *exaltation* of the other, societies which have normalized poling in the status quo necessitate the ability to identify ample distinctions between *occupation* and *recreational* pole dancing. If substantial differences cannot be identified, then the emergence of the poling industry will be stymied by its opponents on the grounds of gaping logical discrepancies. Operating under the assumption that occupational pole dancing will continue to be abhorred in the status quo, adversaries of recreational pole dancing commonly build their cases around these inconsistencies. This is why societies which have welcomed poling in the status quo must decide, and be able to defend, which it does for the movement – help or hinder. The inability to avoid inconsistencies will ultimately result in either the cessation of the poling industry or the regression of the gender equality movement.

After conducting a thorough investigation of the arguments for and against the practice of recreational pole dancing, from both the global academic community and general population, I am convinced that poling helps to *further*

*For the purpose of this analysis, I am defining the gender equality movement as the efforts of individuals, both male and female, to promote the elimination of gender-based discrimination in all societal sectors.

the objectives of the gender equality movement. Recreational pole dancing achieves this by taking occupational pole dancing, which has historically been used as a means of objectifying and commodifying women, and altering this activity in ways which foster female liberation and self-empowerment. This is primarily achieved through shifting the objectives of pole dancing (Donaghue et al. 446), de-commodifying female participants (Whitehead and Kurz 235), and drastically altering traditional pole dancing's setting and spectators (Whitehead and Kurz 233).

The Best Way for a Flirty Girl to Get Fit

The poling industry has worked hard to establish a distinction between their fitness routines and the performances of women who participate in pole dancing professionally. Analyzing the content of the promotional websites of poling studios and the instructional videos of poling trainers is the most obvious way to analyze the poling industry's intended image projection. Whether these websites and videos choose to focus on the self-confidence boosting nature of poling, the entertaining and enjoyable nature of the activity, or the rigor of the workout, the majority do not acknowledge the occupation from which poling originated, and only a handful choose to highlight the *sensual* side of poling.

Tracy Gray, co-founder/owner of Arcadia Fitness, Canada's first recreational pole dancing studio, quit her job as a branch manager at the Bank of Montreal in order to dedicate all of her time to strengthening and expanding her studio because she believed in the power of poling to restore a woman's self-confidence (Halloway 1). In the first paragraph of Arcadia's website's FAQ page, Gray states that "women today are striving for authenticity… [at Arcadia Fitness] we understand that a woman's sensuality is a beautiful part of who she is and what she brings to this world." Gray acknowledges that poling includes aspects of a woman's sensuality, though she strays from harping on this poling element, and instead goes on to say that Arcadia Fitness helps to "teach women to unapologetically love their bodies and themselves." Also on the FAQ page, Gray addresses the frequent concern of prospective students that the class will be too difficult or overly sensual. Arcadia's reaction to such concerns is an explanation and reassurance that in beginner classes, "you will learn to shift & sway your hips as you walk [and] how to take the time to transition between stretches by running your hand over your hips & embracing the curves of your body." As is made clear through these official responses to FAQs, as well as the rest of their promotional website, Arcadia Fitness has chosen to focus on the aspects of poling that can improve a woman's self-esteem, in addition to attaining a toned body.

As Donaghue, Kurz and Whitehead describe in their analysis of the promotional websites of various Australian poling studios, most poling studios avoid direct acknowledgment of poling's origins, and instead choose to focus

on the fitness aspect of the activity (Donaghue et al. 445). In their groundbreaking empirical research paper, "'Empowerment' and the Pole: A Discursive Investigation of the Reinvention of Pole Dancing as a Recreation Activity," Whitehead and Kurtz interviewed twenty randomly selected women throughout Australia, all of whom had taken, or were presently taking, pole dancing fitness courses. Most of the women used the fact that recreational pole dancing is a *fun* way to get fit as a means of "negating, shutting-down, or side-stepping potential accusations that [poling is a degrading activity]" (Whitehead and Kurtz 233).

Flirty Girl Fitness, an instructional pole dancing fitness video series, released a YouTube commercial in 2009 which opens with the words "long, lean, tight [and] beautiful" flashing across the screen. The commercial then describes "the world's sexiest dance moves" and the "fun, fat-burning, guaranteed results" of the featured routine. The announcer states the "secret is the flirtatiously fun dance progressions, designed to flatten your abs, thin hips and thighs, plus lift and firm your booty, all while you are just having fun moving and dancing to the music!" Though the product being advertised is an instructional video and accompanying pole, an actual pole has yet to be shown. This is also the first time that the word "flirtatious" is used in the advertisement, thus establishing an association between flirtation and pole dancing. The commercial does not further the association between the fitness routine and pole dancing – or pole dancing and flirtation – until the pitch. The announcer enthusiastically exclaims that this DVD features "super sexy fat burning routines from your favorite music videos" and if you buy immediately, Flirty Girl Fitness will send you a bonus DVD, which includes a "flirtatiously fun chair dance!" The commercial offers a bonus DVD which features a lap dance routine, but purposefully markets it as a "fun chair dance," just as the pole dancing routine is never referred to as a pole dancing routine. The focus of this commercial is the testimonies of women who experienced weight loss following their participation in the Flirty Girl Fitness program. By separating the subject of the instruction video from the traditional purpose of pole dancing and spending the majority of the airtime discussing weight loss, the advertisement shifts the focus from pole dancing. This shift in attention, combined with the fact that the weight loss testimonies came from "average," "normal" looking women, as opposed to hyper-sexualized erotic dancers or porn stars, works to normalize the video's content and make it socially acceptable for average women to purchase the product without feeling trashy or whorish.

Sex Sells

The second central distinction between occupational and recreational pole dancing is the commodification of women. The lack of monetary exchange from consumer to audience is critical in distinguishing between the two forms

of pole dancing. In poling, there *is* a monetary exchange, but it occurs between the poling students and their teachers, who are almost always female. After examining the promotional websites of dozens of poling studios and scouring the papers of numerous scholars, I did not come across a single example of a poling studio which allows males to participate or teach in the same classroom as female polers. This is not to say that female students cannot be objectified by female instructors, but rather that the receivers of the monetary compensation are teaching skills, not performing with the intention of sexually arousing, or being aroused by, their students. By eliminating the presence of males and shifting the receiver of payment to female instructors, the poling industry has further distanced itself from its raunchy origins.

According to Whitehead and Kurtz's focus groups, many women believe that the degrading aspect of traditional pole dancing stems from the fact that women are getting *paid* to perform, as if to imply that the monetary incentive eliminated the possibility that professional pole dancers engage in this activity of their own free will (Whitehead and Kurtz 235). Poling combats this argument by eliminating payment to the woman on the pole.

What Happens in the Studio, Stays in the Studio

Those opposed to the practice of occupational pole dancing would likely point to the aroused male consumer as the industry's foremost problematic element. Alternatively, recreational pole dancing takes place in studios which resemble those of childhood ballet classes. According to Whitehead and Katz's focus group research, this change in venue makes all the difference for many women (Whitehead and Kurtz 233). The interviewed women essentially believe that pole dancing is "an inherently neutral activity that can be seen as empowering or disempowering, as a function of the specific context of its enactment" (233). If it is not the act of pole dancing, but rather the setting of the activity which can be constructed as either empowering or disempowering, then how can recreational pole dancing, which takes place in a yoga studio, possibly be construed as inherently degrading? And if pole dancing only gains meaning through context, then what is the meaning of recreational pole dancing? Fitness.

The second part of this distinction concerns the audience. I initially did not want to participate in a poling class, but was denied entrance to a class if my sole purpose was to observe. Moreover, men can neither observe nor participate in poling classes. By eliminating the audience that is viewed as the perpetrators of the objectification of female pole dancers, poling has eliminated one of the largest problems of this industry. A woman can *choose* whether or not she wishes to enroll in a class, just as she can *choose* whether or not she wishes to exhibit her skills for an audience. But this exhibition is beyond the scope of the class itself and is not facilitated by studios.

Poling's adversaries assert that even though polers are not being paid, they are still engaging in an activity which has historically been used to oppress women; therefore poling participants are hindering the fight for gender equality by transitive property. The opposition believes that the two activities aren't different enough to establish one as "wrong" and degrading and the other as acceptable, even normal, for the average woman to participate in. After reviewing testimonies of pole dancers, analyzing the work of various scholars in a variety of related fields and attending poling classes myself, I believe that the opposition is correct; the differences between pole dancing as an occupation and recreational activity are not substantial enough to normalize one and not the other. But I also contend that poling is not a hindrance to the gender equality movement. After reexamining the reasons why the status quo rejects occupational pole dancing, I have begun to think that perhaps societies ought to normalize recreational *and* occupational pole dancing for the same reasons that they should continue to promote poling.

Power of the Pussy

Most poling supporters believe the acceptance of recreational pole dancing as the status quo allows for the simultaneous rejection of occupational pole dancing. On the other hand, poling adversaries argue that rejection of occupational pole dancing would necessitate the simultaneous rejection of recreational pole dancing. I assert that the best option is to adopt and normalize both.

Several feminist writers, such as Kathy Whitehead and Ngaire Donaghue, have described participation in recreational pole dancing, and similar raunch culture activities, as the ultimate form of liberation. The radical notion rests on the concept of self-objectification, which asserts that in order to possess full control over her own body and personhood, a person must have the ability to fully exercise her agency (Whitehead and Kurtz 226; Donaghue et al. 445). A truly liberated woman not only has the ability to choose *not* to engage in pole dancing, but also has the ability to participate in either recreational *or* occupational pole dancing, no matter her beliefs surrounding pole dancing's effect on the gender equality movement. The concept of a woman *choosing* to be objectified only seems ridiculous to those who would never choose this for themselves. In a truly equal world, everyone would have the ability to freely choose whether or not they are objectified, regardless of gender.

When a woman attends a poling class in order to learn moves solely for her partner's benefit (as in, attendance was coerced), she has been stripped of her agency. If a woman attends classes because she has been told that she isn't "sexy enough," or has been made to feel that way, then there is a problem. But true liberation is defined by agency, and that includes a woman's ability to *choose* a career in pole dancing, just as she can *choose* to enroll in a poling class. What women choose do with their skills beyond the studio or stage is beyond the

scope of the act of pole dancing itself and it is presumptuous to assert that *all* female pole dancers and polers are not acting of their own free will.

The opposition argues that whether a woman is practicing pole dancing as a means of fitness, simply to have a laugh with friends, or to perform in a strip club for a predominantly male audience, the only way she can be truly empowered is when there is an absence of monetary incentive. I reject these arguments because, by this logic, any activity which has a monetary incentive cannot be entered into by a person's own free will. This would mean that any person who plays the lottery, competes in professional sports, or works any type of paying job, is doing so under duress because the prospect of earning money has stripped them of their free will.

All of the opposition's objections to poling stem from the belief that the entire adult entertainment industry, which encompasses occupational pole dancing, is objectifying and cannot possibly be empowering. The opposition is operating under the assumption that the moment a woman begins to work at a strip club her agency is stripped away, thus making it impossible for her to be liberated. And because empowerment stems from liberation, a pole dancer cannot possibly be furthering the gender equality movement. But this assumption, which is the basis for the dissenters' entire case against occupational pole dancing, is not inherently true. Not *all* pole dancers were coerced into dancing at a strip club and not *all* pole dancers are mistreated by their bosses or clients.

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Perceptions of Imperial Power in Steampunk

Ryan Gyukeri

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Introduction

The age of imperialism was a defining point in the course of history, putting in place political and economic conditions that drive international relations to this day. However, its effects weren't limited to post-colonial regions such as Africa or Southeast Asia: the popular culture of the "Global North" also shows telling signs of how people view the role of power in projecting global influence. This is particularly evident through steampunk, both the genre of science fiction inspired by adventure stories of the 19th century and the subculture known for its anachronistic take on the Victorian living and style. Efforts have been made to diversify steampunk's European culture and move past its colonial heritage, but tales of clockwork contraptions and airship battles still have much to say about the popular perception of geopolitics and empire in the modern world.

This essay introduces the changing terminology and issues within steampunk and the role of imperialism in International Relations theory. It then looks at two anthologies of short fiction – *Steampunk* and *Steampunk II* (Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, editors) – that contain several stories set within "imperialist" worlds. One story addresses the concept of hard power, a second soft power, and a third anticolonial struggle. Through these stories, it becomes clear that while efforts to diversify steampunk are bearing fruit, the underlying factors of imperialism still drive the authors' worldviews.

By Way of a Summary

More so than most, Steampunk is a genre under constant re-evaluation. Stories that would now be considered "steampunk" have been written since the 1970's, but the term was first coined by sci-fi author K.W Jeter in a letter to *Locus* magazine:

> …Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term… Something based on the appropriate technology of the era; like 'steam-punks', perhaps."(Jeter 1987)

The stories of Jeter and others took a whimsical look at 19th century fiction, with stories inspired by Verne and Wells and characters inspired by the classic Victorian gentleman or lady. For the greater part of a decade, the steampunk genre remained obscure; the more popular "-punk" at the time was cyberpunk, a type of sci-fi focused on the effects of rapid technological advancement and individual freedoms in the near future (Person 1999). During the mid-90's, as popular culture gained a brighter edge and science fiction moved away from that darker, introspective tone, steampunk moved onto the scene. The first book to include the term in its title was Paul DiFilippo's *The Steampunk Trilogy* in 1995 (Bebergal 2007), and a decade later steampunk tropes could be seen in the films of Guillermo Del Toro and Hayao Miyazaki (McGrath 2008).

For the first few decades of its existence, steampunk's popularity was niche; a greater public knowledge of steampunk did not come until its style was adapted by those independent of the literary science fiction community. It was in these aesthetics – elaborate costumes, computers retrofitted with brass and wood exteriors, and handmade clockwork contraptions – that the genre became a movement. This pop-culture adaptation had its commercial side; recent music videos from Panic! At the Disco (2011), Justin Bieber (2011), and David Guetta (2012) have featured whizzing gears and pseudo-Victorian outfits. But the growing popularity of steampunk has also drawn hip, idealistic professionals into the subculture. One can find scores of websites for local steampunk communities, which host conventions, promote artisans and craftsmen, and advocate a genteel, refined life inspired by our 19th century ancestors (Power 2011).

Steampunk has gained a life beyond the literature that inspired it, and consequently recent steampunk publications have been the product of their subculture rather than vice versa. Two works emblematic of this trend are a pair of fiction anthologies published by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, *Steampunk* (2008) and *Steampunk II* (2010). The VanderMeers' first anthology consists of rather standard steampunk fare: technology-driven mysteries, whimsical adventures, and airships abound. This general content was deliberate, meant to represent a "full range" of possibilities for beginning steampunks (Jones 2008), but by the time *Steampunk II* was written, the subculture's popularity had been established and new fans had begun taking a deeper look at its historical influences. While steampunks draw from the Victorian era, they often ignore the sexual repression, colonialism, and socioeconomic inequalities of the time. The genre's Western European tradition smarts of an antiquated mentality about culture and class. This cognitive dissonance hasn't gone unaddressed; in the introduction to *Steampunk II*, the VanderMeers write:

> …While parts of this community might pay too little attention to the dark underpinnings of true Victorian society, in general it is progressive, inquisitive, and inclusive… In another generation, the true energy

> behind steampunk may have moved away from Anglo settings and perspectives altogether. (VanderMeer 2010, p. 11)

This second anthology was structured accordingly, with stories that tackle social and cultural issues across the spectrum. While the steampunk community still has a distinct Global North flavor, it's the VanderMeers' hope that stories of clockwork Mughals and airship-flying Incas might begin to reverse this trend.

As science fiction has developed nuance and variety in its relatively brief history, so has the study of international relations. The historical influences in steampunk reflect greater cultural shifts in the developed world; Llewellyn and Heilmann (2013) call the tensions and cultural obsessions of the Anglophone world a "neo-Victorianism" that is inexorably reshaping our society, and one can easily see steampunk as the quirky, genre fiction arm of such a trend. While Llewellyn and Heilmann have much to say about how neo-Victorianism drives the socioeconomics and culture of the West, there is little discussion about its role for the rest of the world. Ho (2012) does explore such issues, showing how the neo-Victorian mindset has been damaging for Chinese-Western relations and how steampunk's drive on "getting back to the way we were" contains overtones of archaic cultural and racial thought. By promoting a Western worldview based on outdated ways of thinking, Ho writes, we run the risk of isolating ourselves from the rest of the world.

The legacy of imperialism in international relations is a subject under much dispute within academia. To use Destradi's (2011) definition of the term, an "empire" is a state whose external relations are purely realist in nature and who relies on military and economic force to subdue weaker states. Destradi believes that the age of imperialism is over, and that the great powers of our time are "hegemons" who rely on political coercion and mutual goals to project international influence. This academic clarification hasn't made the term lose its appeal – since the invasion of Iraq and the United States' increasing drone presence around the world have become popular topics, it's in vogue to call the US and its allies a new empire. Indeed, some scholars believe that we may as well adapt the term to modern issues because it doesn't seem to be going away (Kettell 2013). Other scholars also adopt this idea, saying that while states no longer launch imperial ventures as the Persians, Romans, or Spaniards did, they still think of themselves in the same way (Maier 2009).

The "imperial" criticism of developed nations also draws inspiration from the oft-maligned Dependency Theory. Marxist circles point to Dependency Theory as the guiding principle for the post-imperial world system – ideologues from communist states (Lenin 1917) had long painted imperialism and capitalism as two sides of the same coin, and so it seemed natural that even when political controls were severed from a mother country and its colonies, the underlying economic ties would remain. Its allure as a lens of global analysis is understandable: Prashad's *The Darker Nations* (2008) paints a vivid picture of how post-colonial and developing states struggled to escape the legacy of

imperialism, but then fell victim to economic collapse, totalitarian regimes, or internal chaos. His analysis, while it attributes stagnation in the developing world to political forces within individual nations, also acknowledges that these forces were established as a legacy of imperialism.

Despite such issues, a dependency theory explanation for global inequality is inherently flawed. Friedmann and Wayne (1977) already saw this flaw during the Cold War, saying that Dependency Theory's emphasis on production and exploitation hampered analysts from exploring individual states' trade and political relations with the developed world. When states such as South Korea and Singapore experienced rapid economic development during the late 80's, these flaws became clear. The rising middle classes in India, Nigeria, and Malaysia have further reinforced the idea that dependency is not a system which may only be broken by revolution, as Marxist scholars had suggested. Indeed, a combination of free-market policies and effective accountable government, as advocated by Oxford Economist Paul Collier (2007), may be the best way out.

What remains to change is the way the public views this relationship. The perception of developing world as a charity case for the developed world may actually be damaging in the long-run – Collier (2007) estimates that some nations have actually become poorer due to their reliance on foreign aid (p. 9). "Imperial" critiques of the United States abound, and historical parallels to Rome and Britain color how our endeavors abroad are seen by the public (Kettell and Sutton 2013 p. 246). These perceptions extend into our popular fiction, and a genre as influenced by the age of imperialism as steampunk has much to show in this regard.

Hard and Soft Power

The drive to shake up established cultural trends in steampunk is best encapsulated by two stories in *Steampunk II*: Stephen Baxter's "The Unblinking Eye" (2009) and Chris Roberson's "O One" (2003). Each presents distinctly non-Western points of view as a focal point of the story, but they also betray a way of thinking dominated by the way of empire.

"The Unblinking Eye" speculates on what may have happened if our position in the Milky Way was different, and the subsequent effects this would have on navigation and exploration. It concerns the first state visit of Huayna Capac XIII, emperor of the Inca, to the backwards Frankish Empire and the intrigues which ensue. Over the course of the story we are given various details surrounding the Incan dominance: even though the year is 1966, Europeans never gained the astronomical knowledge to venture beyond familiar shores, while their Andean neighbors to the south have charted the globe. While the Franks tinker with lumbering contraptions driven by steam and coal, the Inca fly sleek flying vessels and communicate via "farspeaker", presumably driven by electricity. While the West is divided between stagnant feuding kingdoms, the

Inca control much of the southern hemisphere – Capac's aide, who befriends the Franks, is what we would call an Australian Aboriginal. Much of the story's dialogue, between Capac and the Frankish bishop Darwin, is a role reversal of classic intellectual conversations between the industrial and primitive worlds. There are echoes of *The Man Who Would be King* (Kipling 1888) and *Shogun* (Clavell 1975) as Capac explains Incan astronomy to the ignorant Frank, and while they may speak Quechua instead of English or French, the air of superiority held by the dominating power is drawn from Western texts. It is no surprise, then, that the Incan crewmembers look "on the Europeans with amused contempt" (Baxter 2009 p. 56).

Most of the story progresses in the same manner, with the reader and Incan dignitaries repeatedly thrown off guard by how painfully ignorant the Europeans appear. This light tension escalates, however, when the Franks discover that over the course of their diplomatic visit the Inca placed a "sunbomb" in London. While the implications of this move are clear to the reader, Capac explains that the outcome of any prolonged war between his people and Europe is "beyond doubt" and a quick resolution, showcasing his people's inherent technological superiority and the futility of armed resistance, is ideal. Before the situation can escalate too far out of hand, a Frankish prince gets a warning out to Europe on the "farspeaker" that allows the bomb to be disabled and the ensuing tension between Incan and Frank to be WMD-free. The story ends with an uncertain future for both sides, as the Inca devise other means to dominate the world and the shocked nations of Europe have no choice but to operate under the watchful eye of a great power. While the extremity of Capac's scheme is shocking even to the reader, his methods are not completely out of the realm of possibility. Before the USSR developed its first atomic bomb in 1949, the United States held absolute control over Weapons of Mass Destruction, had allies across the globe, and had established an international order that, for the time being, bent to its will. Had the US government wished to defeat the Soviet Union through a nuclear force of arms, they very well could have, but the suffering of World War II was such a recent memory that another war between great powers was not to be (Cox 1990). Moral judgments aside, the US government and the fictional Inca of Baxter's story had the ultimate in hard power at their disposal, and the latter's willingness to use it exemplifies a commitment to global dominance through force that is highly imperial (see Destradi 2010; Kettell and Sutton 2013; Maier 2009; Mommsen 1977).

Chris Roberson takes a more subtle look at the perks of imperial power in "O One" (2003). Set in a world where dynastic China is the leading empire, this story concerns a competition between Chief Computator Tsui, a master of the abacus, and Proctor Napier, an inventor from the vassal land of Britain whose Analytical Machine threatens to upset the harmony of imperial court life. As the emperor's expert in all things mathematical, it Tsui's responsibility to

defend the Imperial House of Calculation and its traditional methods from the British contraption. While the simplest of calculations are solved by Tsui with a scholar's grace, the Analytical Engine begins to outperform the human mind as the numbers and operators involved become more complex. Napier emerges victorious and appears to have won the emperor's favor, but after Tsui and the Lord Chamberlain voice their displeasure at the idea the unlucky Briton is thrown to a pool of piranhas (a gift from the emperor's South American vassals). If not for its place in an anthology of steampunk literature, one would almost label Roberson's work as "anti-steampunk."

Such a label would be deceptive, however, as the fictional China in this story demonstrates one of imperialism's most enduring qualities: soft power. vanGoudoever (2010) claims that this is one of the least-explored aspects of what makes an empire truly powerful. Languages, customs, and ways of thinking have a habit of lasting longer than any colonial garrison. It becomes clear throughout the story that the emperor's grip on his subjects is slipping in this very regard; Napier's device uses Arabic numerals and is powered by the binary system of Gottfried Leibniz, and outperforms the wholly Chinese abacus. While the Chinese are able to save face through unsavory methods, the power shift to those who they assumed subdued remains an issue. Such an issue is emblematic of the hubris all empires face; Ford (2012) writes that the United States' waning "soft power" might be their most overlooked issue abroad, as they fight to maintain goodwill and cultural influence around the world. The Roberson story focuses on a particularly Chinese aspect of this problem; Niall Ferguson (2012) writes that the greatest advantage Western Europe had over states of greater size and population were their "killer applications" of science, technology, and law. While such "apps" could be learned, many states did not do so for a myriad of reasons. In China's case, it was anathema to the scholarly elite that a foreign way of doing things might be better than their own. Roberson's China has done an excellent job of overwhelming the world through some ambiguous sort of force, but the soft power they so harshly maintain is showing signs of wear.

Airship Anti-Colonialism, and its Pitfalls

While many of the VanderMeers' selected stories are set in empires, acting well in accordance to standard IR theories, one narrative sticks out in its attempt to stop such a process dead in its tracks. The very first story in *Steampunk* is an excerpt from the novel *The Warlord of the Air*, Michael Moorcock's "Benediction" (1971). It's one of the earliest works of steampunk fiction and, on the surface, the most hostile to steampunk tropes. The excerpt describes an alternate universe where the great empires of the 19th century never fell, and a battle between them and the anti-imperialist coalition of Dawn City is imminent. Moorcock describes the oncoming imperial armada, flying sleek and powerful over rural China, as "… exacting fierce vengeance on the upstarts

who had sought to question the power of those [they] served." The ships of individual nations are also singled out for criticism: the French airships are "an affront to the ideals of the French Revolution" while the American ones "[bear] the stars and stripes, no longer the banner of liberty" (Moorcock 1971, pgs. 13-14). The ensuing battle is brief, tactical, and heroic: by launching small, agile fighter planes against their lumbering foes, the anti-imperialists win a crushing victory with minimal losses. The wounded imperial fleet turns back, and the voice of defiance against empire lives another day. The scene is a stirring introduction to the airship battles and roguish characters that have drawn so many to the genre, although it also pushes the reader back to the darkest parts of steampunk's lineage. Contrasting the splendor of an imperial airship armada with the ragtag army of freedom fighters is a concise way to tip the iconic imagery of the genre on its head, but the way in which it's done betrays the author's bias about how imperialism is most effectively dismantled.

The direct, militant aspect of the story speaks to many experiences the author had with anti-imperialism. Moorcock wrote *Warlord of the Air* around the same time as the Vietnam and Rhodesian Wars, two conflicts that showcased the bloody cost of empire in the modern world. The messy process of decolonization had given Marxist thought a second wind during the waning days of the Cold War; the struggle against imperialism became a highly militarized one, with advocates of anti-imperialism being armed and trained by the Soviet Union. Some argue that the Cold War itself turned cultural tensions into polarized, militant camps, since hegemonic powers required such a state of affairs for their own success (Duara 2011). While dominant theories at the time of *Warlord*'s writing suggested that violent struggle was the only way to break free of imperialism, we now know this is not the case: South Africa's peaceful transition from white rule has been shaky, but not disastrous, while Zimbabwe and Angola's revolutions left their countries impoverished and their governments unstable. Scholars agree that today's "American empire" will not end because of military setbacks; it must be the diplomatic efforts of other states and social movements within the empire that finally bring it to a stop (Gindin 2003, Pieterse 2006). The airship captains of Dawn City might win a battle, but unless they gain wider political support they seem destined to lose the war.

The makeup of Moorcock's anti-imperial movement reveals much about the perception of who can, and ought to, challenge the status quo. The named characters in the story are all western (Mr. Bastable, Una Persson, Korzeniowski, and so on), though their defiant stand against the imperial coalition is fought in China, with a presumably Chinese army. While this cultural blend appears to be a touch of the cosmopolitan, it implies that the struggle against Western imperialism may only be won by westerners. Such a view is antithetical to academic analysis of the colonial period in our own history; Kaempf (2009) writes that one of the greatest weaknesses of the

colonial system was its "Manichean" nature, which is to say that the dualistic relationship between colonizer and colonized could be exploited in the anti-imperialist's favor, while Williams (1998) attributes colonialism's slow death to the "vision" of Europeans that they alone could end the process which their ancestors had begun. While such thought had not been fully refined at the time *Warlord* was written, he still does a disservice by placing the onus of anticolonial struggle onto the Europeans. Their defiance against imperialism does not meaningfully involve those for whom it should truly be done.

Conclusion

The steampunk community's eclecticism extends to their written works: where there is cultural diversity the political structures of the 19th century remain, and where the imperial status quo is challenged it is done with a white face and a gun. Steampunk will, of course, change with the world around it. As the Global North becomes more diverse and multi-polarity grows to dominate international politics, the genre and its fans will undoubtedly diversify as well. But will this come to pass soon enough? The German essayist Peter Schneider wrote that America's greatest weakness was its "multicultural unilateralism," an unwillingness to hear anything but its own opinions and follow its own traditions (2004). In the age of information and pop culture, an uninformed perception held by many can have the same effects on American society as government policy. But can the same not be said for the Global North, only writ large? The steampunk movement's great strength has always been to make the past something new. But if its followers and creators are unwilling to break from that past, in a meaningful, less-than-cosmetic way, they risk becoming as obsolete as the Victorians themselves.

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Microtargeting: Politics of Participation, Politics of Polarization

Brian Hamel

Abstract

In this paper, I argue the microtargeting tactics used by political campaigns are both a positive and a negative for the political process. Microtargeting increases the level of political participation, and, in turn, voter turnout by disseminating information to voters, by intensifying voter preference, and by mobilizing voters. Yet, the same microtargeting techniques that increase political activism also have a negative effect on the electoral process because microtargeting enables a campaign to target and intensify both niche groups and wedge issues. Ultimately, the targeting of these groups and these issues greatly influences voting behavior and allows a campaign to avoid common themes and instead opt to focus on the most divisive issues of all. Microtargeting strategies in political campaigns are nothing new; however, with time and technology also comes a much higher level of influence and effect. Going forward, it is expected that the tools at the campaigns' disposal as well as the role and significance of these tools in the political process will only increase.

In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, microtargeting strategies have been heralded by political consultants and the pundit class alike as the reason for President Obama's decisive re-election (Young). And indeed, microtargeting, a simple, yet incredibly complex term, does, in fact, hold the key to victory for politicians in the 21st century. Microtargeting tactics, however, are not entirely a godsend to American politics. The effects of microtargeting tactics are two-fold. On the one hand, microtargeting tactics enable a campaign to deliver pertinent information to specific voters, thereby increasing participation in the political process and voter turnout. Conversely, in using microtargeting techniques, campaigns foster a level of polarization within the electorate by encouraging political participation with only divisive issues in

mind. In practice, campaigns are able to microtarget because of "Big Data," the combination of public data (zip codes and other demographic information), private data (what kind of car a voter drives, where the voter prefers to shop, etc.), and online data (what websites the voter visits and how the voter does or does not interact on social media) (Foughy). The combination of this data allows a campaign to, according to Chris Cillizza, a nationally recognized reporter for The Washington Post, to "unravel your political DNA" (Cillizza). A campaign will then take such voter DNA to target voters with specific messages, and essentially, according to Sasha Issenberg, the author of The Victory Lab, "have a different conversation with everyone on the block" (qtd. in Hinman).

Take Nella Stevens for example. Stevens, a 52-year-old voter from Charlotte, North Carolina was an undecided voter last fall (Wise and Helling). In trying to make a decision last November, Nella found herself being followed as she surfed the Internet because, in trying to persuade Stevens, both the Obama and Romney campaigns were searching for that one issue that would sway her vote. Nella remarked, "If I go to one site to research or I start Googling his views on things, then for the next day Obama just scrolls across my screen, and the same thing for Romney. I started noticing it, and it's very funny after a while. I was like, 'This is very strange'" (Wise and Helling). Strange, indeed. But, what Nella does not know is that this mechanism of microtargeting is pointed and deliberate. And it is the pointed and deliberate nature of it all that has a profound effect on American politics.

Microtargeting techniques can serve as a positive for democracy by encouraging political participation and increasing voter turnout by homing in on three key campaign-controlled variables: information, intensity, and mobilization.

While the verdict is not yet in on whether the voting populace is ill-informed or well-informed, one can discern from years of research that an increase in information has a positive effect on political participation and voter turnout. In "The Effect of Information on Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Natural Experiment," David Dreyer Lassen, a professor of Political Economics at the University of Copenhagen, uses empirical estimates based on survey data from a Copenhagen referendum election to conclude that there is a "sizable and statistically significant casual effect of being informed on the propensity to vote" (103). Indeed, turnout among informed voters, according to Lassen's data, is 78.4%, whereas turnout among uninformed voters is 69.0% (110). Indeed, the level of information in the political process has an effect on participation because the "learning of candidate stances increases the amount of information at voter's disposal" (Strauss 19-20).

Information for the sake of information, however, is not good enough. While Lassen's data is compelling, and the logic behind the relationship between information and voting behavior quite commonsensical, the campaign

must use microtargeting information to understand voters both personally and privately with one goal in mind: to intensify voter preference. Campaigns must provide a voter the information that matters most to them by creating a level of intensity that provides a deep connection between the candidate and the voter. In The American Voter Revisited, a 2008 book by a quartet of accomplished political scientists, it is noted that "intensity of voting preferences catches an important motivational factor" (Lewis-Beck et al. 90). Most notably, research shows that as intensity of preference rises, the percentage of those voting relentlessly increases, so much so that the percentage voting ends up to be nearly 100% (Lewis-Beck et al. 91).

In 2004, the Bush re-election campaign – known in political circles as the pioneers of political microtargeting – microtargeted black Democratic voters in the key battleground state of Ohio (Edsall). In 2000, Bush received only 9% of the black vote in Ohio (Edsall). But in 2004, Bush received 16% of the black vote (Edsall). The Bush campaign did not achieve this modest, yet potentially decisive, result by simply paying more attention to black Democratic voters in Ohio. No, the Bush campaign targeted black Democratic voters on the issue of same-sex marriage, an issue at the time that was of particular concern to the typically socially conservative black Democrat (Edsall). This shows how microtargeting enables a campaign to get a clear understanding of each voter on individual level. As such, a campaign can tailor information and deliver the appropriate information and message to the right audience. This strategy gives a campaign the chance for their message to be heard. In this way, campaigns use what Raymond Nickerson, a Tufts University psychologist, calls confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the "seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs" (Nickerson 175). Thus, if a voter is targeted with advertising on an issue he or she is passionate about, or more importantly, that confirms his or her own belief, then the voter is more likely to respond favorably and more likely to vote for that candidate.

With the intensity of an issue in mind, it is important to note the tone of the message and information being delivered to a voter. Political scientist Gregg Murray and computer scientist Anthony Scime published an article titled, "Microtargeting and Electorate Segmentation: Data Mining the American National Election Studies," in which they argued that "overall participation may be improved by communicating more effective messages that better inform intended voters" (143). They use "decision tree" analysis—a decision tool that considers both the chance of event outcomes and the consequences of such decisions—to determine how a voter votes, and most notably, they argue that through the tone of the message a campaign can persuade (particularly through negative advertising on the opposition) a voter in their direction (Murray and Scime 157). The Bush campaign used microtargeting techniques to not only understand the electorate and to target information with a eye towards what

matters to individual voters, but also to determine the tone that will intensify voter preference and, in turn, increase voter turnout.

But even given the importance of tailored messages and information to foment intensity among voters, a campaign must still energize, engage, and mobilize voters. Mobilization is one of, if not the, key concepts of political participation. If a campaign does not mobilize its voters before and on Election Day, the prospects of victory will inevitably decrease. Microtargeting allows campaigns to mobilize voters because it gives campaigns the opportunity and the necessary information needed to make an appeal for engagement in the political process on a level that is both meaningful and personal. In 2008, the Obama campaign masterfully used microtargeting techniques to engage an entirely new block of voters in the electoral process. For example, the Obama campaign created social networks that included segments of Obama supporters (Spiller and Bergner 69). These segments of supporters were motivated "to team up with other individuals to cohost events for fundraising, volunteer recruitment, information dissemination" (Spiller and Bergner 69-70) and the like. Furthermore, on Election Day, supporters were asked to contact a list of five likely Obama supporters who lived on their street and shared common interests (Spiller and Bergner 69). The goal was to encourage and mobilize people to vote, and in doing so, participation in the electoral process simultaneously increased. The Obama campaign combined geographic information and issue interests to engage people in the political process. This engagement and activism is not the end, however. This engagement leads to the most important action of all: voting.

President Obama faced a tough challenge for re-election. The Obama re-election team knew that in order to win in 2012, they would need to re-energize and mobilize the young voters and voters of other key demographics that led the President to victory in 2008. To do so, the campaign developed a voter turnout program that relied on microtargeting techniques as the primary means of demographic voter outreach. The results were profound: the Obama re-election team, despite overall national turnout among Democrats down 3.5 million voters (Wakefield), was able to increase turnout among young, black, Hispanic, and urban voters to 70% in the key swing states (Young).

Similarly, in the 2012 Republican presidential primary, Michele Bachmann ran a series of Facebook and YouTube pre-roll advertisements in advance of the August 2011 Ames, Iowa Straw Poll. The Iowa-centric Bachmann ads were targeted to Republican primary voters who lived near Ames, Iowa and frequently surfed the Internet for political news (Smith and Schultheis). Bachmann won the Straw Poll, and the results of the web advertisements were telling. Indeed, "more than half a million Iowans saw the videos, and roughly 75 percent sat through them to completion" (Smith and Schultheis). Of course, the effect of the Bachmann's microtargeting efforts on

the straw poll results are difficult to measure, but one has to assume these efforts did not hurt her in mobilizing voters to support her.

Microtargeting is a tool that gives a campaign the power to directly influence political participation and voter turnout. By understanding the electorate and its preferences, campaigns can disseminate the right information to the right audience, campaigns can intensify voter preference, and campaigns can mobilize its supporters in a way that makes civil duties more personal. But, one must also consider the deeper implication behind this seemingly positive development in electoral politics. Ultimately, microtargeting is not an entirely positive facet of modern American politics because political microtargeting increases the level of participation for all of the wrong reasons and creates polarization among the electorate that transcends political life.

David Helfenbein, a longtime aide to Hillary Rodham Clinton, observed in his journal article "Political Polarization in America, Through the Eyes of a President," that there are three types of polarization: (a) among the public (that is, voters and non-voters), (b) among the electorate (the voters), and (c) among the elite (the politicians and the party) (19). Helfenbein considers these three interconnected, yet he argues that they should be considered as separate and independent entities (19). In the case of microtargeting, however, it seems that microtargeting tactics create a level of polarization among the electorate that is entirely caused by and dependent upon the actions of the elite (in this case, the campaigns). Aaron Strauss, the director of the Decision Analytics team at The Mellman Group, a research-based strategy firm, introduces the concept of cue-taking and argues that "since microtargeting increases polarization and elite affection, advancements in campaigns' targeting abilities may increase the probability of cue-taking from elites" (22). The elite, essentially, polarize the electorate and create a division between voters by prescribing tailored messages to voters that pit one against the other. Thus, voters vote based on the cues – the targeted messages – delivered by the elite.

The elite, *i.e.* the campaigns, create this level of polarization with cue-taking, first and foremost, by the way in which the voter profiles are composed. Political consultants will argue that microtargeting tactics allow the campaign to get a better understanding of the issues that matter to the voting populace. Yet, in the audiences campaigns create from voter profiles, the trend is clear. These audiences are representative of one of two things: (a) single issues, often small, insignificant ones that have little impact on actual policy, or (b) ideologically wayward rhetoric and issue positions. Neither is a positive.

For example, in 2004, the Kerry campaign, in conducting its microtargeting efforts and in segmenting the electorate, identified a group of individual votes that they called "Christian Conservative Environmentalists" (Levy). Additionally, Mitt Romney's campaign, in what can easily be considered the strangest target subset of them all, identified a group of voters in an area of northern Virginia who were concerned with the spread of Lyme Disease

(Hinman). In both cases, the two campaigns were able to target single-issue voters. Throughout the campaign, the Romney campaign had been targeting this tiny pool of voters with a platform focused on "getting control of this epidemic that is wreaking havoc on Northern Virginians" (Hinman). These types of issues, these groups of people, are not the ones who typically dominate and determine national elections, but microtargeting allows these people to be identified – and divided from the rest.

In 2004, the Bush campaign created a group called "Flag and Family Republicans" who were targeted with advertising about an amendment that would ban flag-burning (Lundry). Certainly, many people hold the same position on this issue as the "Flag and Family Republicans," but this group was targeted, it seems, because they regard this sensitive issue as being important. This not an issue a candidate will run a national campaign on. Indeed, though it is an ideologically extreme issue, it is one that microtargeting techniques enable a campaign to exploit.

Additionally, as campaigns have been granted more and more access to consumer information, the creation of niche groups and ideological extremes has extended to patterns of apolitical life as well. Now, as explicated by veteran political journalist and Columbia University professor Thomas Edsall is his piece, "Let the Nanotargeting Begin," voting behavior is being determined by what kind of car you drive, what television shows you watch, and what kind of alcohol you consume (Edsall). This tactic takes stereotyping to an entirely new level: where campaigns look at the differences in taste between people to prepare voting profiles so they can target groups of voters accordingly. Indeed, microtargeting techniques have been able to identify that a liberal is more likely to drive a Subaru or a Honda, while a Republican is likely to drink Miller Lite and a Democrat Miller High Life (Edsall). The introduction of consumer information into political campaigns presents voters with a challenge: they are constantly being put into categories by the elite no matter what they do or what they think.

The creation of these niche groups allows campaigns to intensify these niches, and ultimately, lead a voter to pulling the lever for the wrong reasons. Consider the previous example of the Bush 2004 re-election campaign in Ohio. The Bush campaign successfully increased their share of the vote among black voters by targeting them with information. But, the information targeted to them focused entirely on the major wedge issue of the 2004 campaign: same-sex marriage. Certainly, at this time, black voters overwhelmingly opposed same-sex marriage, but it was not, given the state of national security, the most important issue facing voters. Yet, for black Democrats in Ohio, it was made the most important issue because the Bush campaign focused the black Democratic target audience relentlessly on the issue. By making same-sex marriage the most important issue, the Bush campaign utilized anchoring, a term used by psychologists to describe the tendency "to rely too heavily . . . on

one trait or piece of information when making decisions" ("Anchoring Bias"). The campaign intensified the issue in the minds of black Democratic voters. Thus, the campaign made sure this target audience would be universally focused on this issue, on the piece of information given to them on this issue, when deciding whether to vote for George W. Bush or John Kerry.

The intensification of issues again raises the idea of cue-taking from the elites. When a campaign uses microtargeting tactics to segment the electorate into groups, the campaign is exploiting the beliefs of the electorate, and by tailoring messages that pertain to said beliefs, voters ultimately take cues from the elite on what is most important in voting. Indeed, this intensifying of information leads voters to vote, but not because they necessarily believe Bush should be re-elected, but rather because the campaign divided them into an audience, and within that audience, voters are told what is to be the main consideration in voting choice.

When campaigns use microtargeting as the means for victory, campaigns simultaneously polarize the electorate and, in turn, concede it is not possible to win with a common theme. In 2012, I served as Digital Director for Mark Greenberg, a Republican congressional candidate in Connecticut. Locked in a tight, four-way Republican primary, it was our goal to rally and turn out the conservative base of the Republican Party. As Greenberg was the only pro-life candidate in the race, much of our microtargeting work was done to find and follow – mainly on the Internet – the pro-life base of the party among likely voters. From there, these socially conservatives voters were targeted with ads promoting Greenberg's pro-life stance (see advertisement below), and in some cases, opposing the pro-choice stance of our three opponents (Targeted Victory). In doing so, we conceded that there was no unifying message, even among voters of the same party, that could deliver us the roughly 9,500 votes needed to win the primary. In essence, the campaign sought to polarize the electorate by creating a micro-constituency of those who fit into our mold, while ignoring – in large part – the rest of the Republican electorate simply because they did not fit into our niche. The tactic worked, to a certain degree. Internal polling indicated that Greenberg did well among conservative pro-life Republicans, but poorly among moderate Republicans, a constituency that can prove to be important in Connecticut. Greenberg fell short on primary day – perhaps because the microtargeting strategies used divided the electorate

in half. This example is but one demonstrating the power of microtargeting as an engine for political polarization.

The basis of microtargeting rests on the idea that in order to win, a campaign must run campaigns within campaigns, where cues are delivered to segments of the population that exploit and intensify wedge issues and cater to ideologues that rarely have an influence in political discourse. Ultimately, the electorate becomes a large whole made up of many small parts. Undoubtedly, this development should cause concern for all worried about the well-being of the electoral process and it this development that will be at the forefront of discussion over the political culture of the United States.

A key question thus remains: what do voters think of microtargeting and what does it mean for politics in the United States? Joseph Turow, a professor of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, released a July 2012 report titled "Americans Roundly Reject Tailored Political Advertising" which found that that 86% do not want political campaigns to tailor advertisements (3). Turow wonders what this widespread disapproval from the public means. Given such a clear divide between what is practiced and what voters believe should be practiced, it is possible that as the scope of microtargeting continues to expand with the growth of technology, voters will become even more disillusioned in the nation's electoral system (Turow 26). Ultimately, there is potential for a rapid and even more pronounced decrease in citizen-to-politician trust, which would likely be devastating to the nation's historically stable process of elections.

Much to Turow's chagrin, microtargeting tactics are here to stay. Jim Walsh is the Cofounder and CEO of DSPolitical, a Democratic digital consulting firm and "Home of the Political Cookie" (DSPolitical.com). I corresponded with Walsh via email and from the get-go, Wash was keen to note that "at the end of the day, the reality on the ground is that [microtargeting] isn't going anywhere," especially considering that it is not a new trend (Walsh). Indeed, according to Chris Cillizza, during the 1976 presidential campaign, Pat Caddell, Jimmy Carter's pollster, created a chart that outlined what issues were important (and which were unimportant) in each region of the country (Cillizza). Caddell's albeit cruder form of microtargeting enabled the campaign to better understand the electorate and by extension, allowed Carter the candidate to campaign and persuade voters more effectively as he traveled the country.

As for microtargeting in the future, Walsh wonders what the critics propose as the alternative. Why would a campaign spend a limited budget on speaking to the entire universe of voters when a certain percentage are already "deaf to your message?" (Walsh). Moving forward, Walsh expects that the technology and how it uses the data will grow to be more intelligent and that "campaigns will devote at least 25% of their total media budgets to online advertising in 2016" (Walsh). Thus, the amount of money designated by a

campaign to microtarget and tailor messages to voters (particularly on the web) is only likely to increase with each election cycle.

And Walsh is right. Microtargeting tactics, no matter the consequences – positive, negative, or otherwise – are here to stay. The ultimate, and truly the only, goal of a political campaign is to win – no matter the cost. Campaign tactics such as microtargeting are campaign-controlled; thus, microtargeting tactics will remain an ever-growing aspect of the electoral process so long as they are effective. There is no evidence that this trend will let up. Soon, "Big Data" will soon become "Bigger Data," and with that the advances in technology will enable a campaign to expand and enrich its microtargeting program. One must praise microtargeting for the good it does, the good of political participation, and indeed, the good that keeps democracy afloat. Yet, one must be remain skeptical of microtargeting and be critical of its tendencies to venture into the polarizing fields of political extremism.

In the end, with each passing election cycle, the use of microtargeting will likely continue, and for Nella Stevens, the undecided swing-state voter from North Carolina, and the millions like her, mining the Internet for information about candidates and elections will only get stranger. Political scientists and political pundits will continue to express disapproval over the use of microtargeting, but in the words of Jim Walsh, engaging in the discussion over the consequences of this phenomenon, is "an entirely academic exercise" (Walsh). Why? Because microtargeting works.

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Helping our Heroes: The Case for Veteran's Benefits Reform

Todd Kowalski

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You are a member of the US Armed Forces and are deployed overseas to fight in the War on Terror. You spend months or years of your life in the war zone, getting shot at, risking your life on a daily basis. You pray that you will be fortunate enough to return home safely to see your family and loved ones again, and you are overwhelmed with joy when you finally do. However, your battle isn't over yet. You are likely still grappling with wounds, either physical or mental. You may often awake in the night terrified from a nightmare about the war, or have trouble going about your day-to-day life because of a physical disability as a result of combat. And you have a new enemy: government bureaucracy. The next few years will entail endless paperwork, waiting lines, job searching, and financial burden as you wait for healthcare from the government.

Such a story is a reality for hundreds of thousands of veterans returning home. There is no doubt that our nation appreciates their service: bumper stickers saying "Support Our Veterans" are a common sight, and this year's Veteran's Day featured countless parades and celebrations. However, our nation has not done enough to support veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in readjusting back into their civilian lives, and our governmental policies have left many heroes feeling helpless and forgotten. Psychological and physical illness as a result of their time spent in the warzone, like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and traumatic brain injury, are all too common, and those who suffer from them find difficulty getting medical treatment. Also, many veterans are suffering economically as well as psychologically from homelessness, joblessness, and financial troubles, and monetary benefits promised to them are often delayed. Our nation needs to reform the policies of the Departments of Defense and Veteran's Affairs (VA) to ensure that those who fought for our country get the help they deserve.

Psychological illness is a huge problem affecting many veterans. Although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced far fewer physical casualties than past US wars, the extreme conditions of combat still exist: the

constant fear of danger, the loud noise of explosions and gunfire, and the horror of seeing a comrade wounded or killed. Along with these factors, conditions unique to the War on Terror, like extended tours of duty and the high survivability rate of wounds, make recent veterans especially vulnerable to psychological illness (Tanielian 5). It is estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of all veterans who have served in the War or Terror suffer from some degree of mental illness. This means that of the population of approximately 1.64 million Americans who served, around 500,000 need treatment for their mental wounds (Tanielian iii).

The most common mental wounds are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and traumatic brain injury. PTSD is an anxiety disorder that develops after experiencing a traumatic event, and can carry symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, and frequent psychological distress (Pukay-Martin et al. 579). Veterans of war are highly susceptible to PTSD, especially those who have seen combat. Another common injury, traumatic brain injury (TBI), also affects many veterans. TBI is caused when the brain is rocked up against the inside of the skull causing severe damage, often the result of close proximity to an explosion (Tanielian 6). Finally, many veterans suffer from depression. A 2012 study concluded that there is a high comorbidity between PTSD and major depression disorder, indicating that veterans are highly susceptible to depression if they have witnessed a traumatic event, such as the death of a comrade (Pukay-Martin et al. 582). These three illnesses can place a huge mental burden on veterans returning home.

Take Private Nic DeNinno as an example. DeNinno enlisted in the Army wanting to serve his country and was deployed in Baghdad for fourteen months in 2007-2008. His unit saw intense fighting, and DeNinno was forced to kill enemy insurgents and beat up an Iraqi man on one occasion. Upon coming home, DeNinno began having nightmares and flashbacks and had to be institutionalized after attempting suicide. In the hospital he was diagnosed with PTSD and put on anti-depressants, which he still takes today (Finkel). DeNinno's story is representative of tens of thousands of veterans who face similar problems, an issue that is becoming increasingly apparent to the American public.

Although the current issue of psychological illness in veterans is widely recognized, the situation is not getting better. Many veterans who may suffer from PTSD or TBI are never evaluated; a study by the think tank RAND Corporation found that more than half of those at risk never reach out for help (Tanielian xxi). This could be a result of the lack of psychological screening by the Army on soldiers returning from combat and also from prevailing cultural attitudes that view mental illness as a stigma. These attitudes may be highly prevalent in the armed forces, where those who are disturbed by combat may think of themselves as "cowardly" or "not tough enough," and be reluctant to admit they have a problem (Leal). One soldier, expressing his concern over his

recent diagnosis of PTSD on an online forum for veterans, worried that people would "never look at [him] the same" (Koalabiter). Cultural attitudes like this one, that view mental illness as a weakness rather than a commonly occurring disease that the sufferer has no control over, can bar receiving treatment.

Another barrier to treatment is the government's policy. Secretary of the Department of Veteran's Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said in 2009, "this nation has a solemn obligation to the men and women who have honorably served this country and suffer from the often devastating emotional wounds of war" ("Federal"). While the VA's intentions are good, their policies have not been effective in fulfilling the obligation Secretary Shinseki speaks of and are actually preventing this goal from being achieved. To begin with, veterans have to request to be evaluated for mental illness, which many refrain from doing because of cultural attitudes. If they do seek treatment, it could take months for them to receive it, and treatment at VA hospitals is not confidential, which many veterans feel will hurt their career opportunities (Tanielian 436). Another bizarre policy by the VA is that all diagnoses of PTSD are automatically entitled to a 50% disability payment, or half of one's enlisted salary. This creates a conflict of interest for those seeking treatment: they may feign symptoms of PTSD in order to receive greater benefits when they really suffer from a different illness that requires totally different treatment (Ritchie). Finally, there is the issue of government funding. Budget deficits in the federal government and many states have forced VA hospitals and clinics to ration their care for the 6 million veterans who depend on them (Leal). While VA should be committed to caring for every veteran who needs help, shortcomings in funding pose a serious obstacle to this goal.

The budget problem can be solved by reforming VA's policies. Reynaldo Leal, an Army veteran and representative for the group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, testified before Congress about the challenges facing veterans and explored possible solutions. Mr. Leal suggested that the VA health care budget be funded one full year in advance. This way VA can continue to give care without having to worry about losing funds (Leal). As for the huge cost of treating every case of illness, RAND estimates that the amount is much less than the cost of lost productivity if illness is left untreated (Tanielian 440). The disability policy for PTSD can also be changed so that disability levels are determined on a case-by-case basis, so that the most severe cases are given more benefits. The VA or Army can also implement mandatory, confidential psychological evaluations as soon as a soldier is discharged that will catch cases of psychological illness early on. In addition to this, attitudinal barriers to receiving care need to be torn down. The VA can establish reach-out programs for veterans who may be suffering, and the Army can implement programs that encourage veterans to get treatment and let them know that there is no shame in seeking help. In these ways the VA can change so that every veteran receives adequate care for his or her psychological wounds.

These policy adjustments will do much to help the emotionally wounded, but wider changes in the way the VA processes benefits claims are needed to ensure all veterans get care. All veterans who are entitled to government benefits, not limited to those who need them from psychological illness, are affected by the huge backlog of applications in the VA. Many veterans qualify for benefits in the form of medical or psychological treatment, disability compensation for wounds, and employment and education support. These benefits are one way we help veterans reenter civilian life upon returning home.

Translating military skills into civilian ones can be difficult, and translating mindsets can be even harder. Bob Woodruff is a journalist for ABC who spent almost a year with our soldiers in Iraq reporting on the war. Mr. Woodruff has started a foundation that raises money to fund programs that support veterans. He says of the transition back into civilian life, "[l]ife gets a little more simple when you're in the warzone and you've got *x* to accomplish, you get up and this is your schedule. And you've got your friends, who you're so close with. Then you go back to the civilian world, and you've got this gigantic world. What are you going to do the day you get back? And then when you add some kind of wound, visible or invisible, and you can't imagine how it is to adjust to that" (Woodruff). During the war, soldiers are thinking about accomplishing their mission, looking out for their friends, and staying alive day to day. When they come home, although they no longer face the dangers of combat, a whole new set of troubles confronts them, in which they have to finish school, find a job, and pay the rent. Dealing with a wound can make this even more difficult. Poverty, unemployment and debt are disproportionately high among veterans compared to the rest of the population. The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that 30% of veterans ages 18-24 are unemployed, and it is estimated that one in seven homeless people are veterans (Hawryluk and Ridley-Kerr). Also, many veterans come home without confidence in their ability to get a job. In a 2007 survey by the Center for American Progress on Iraq and Afghanistan vets, more than half of all veterans were unsure of how to professionally network, and nearly three in four felt unprepared to negotiate salary and benefits and/or unable to effectively translate military skills (Hawryluk and Ridley-Kerr). These heroes literally risk taking a bullet for our freedom, but they need our help getting on their feet. The VA benefits system exists for this purpose.

To receive these benefits, a veteran must file a paper application and send it in by mail, as the VA does not have an online system set up to manage benefits claims. This application is then mailed to a regional VA office where it is shoved into a file cabinet and waits to be processed. The all-paper system used by the VA is horribly inefficient and error-prone: as of March 2013, 600,000 veterans were awaiting their first payment, with an average waiting time of 272 days. Some veterans have been waiting for several years, and when their

claim is finally processed there is a 30% chance that there will be an error and it will be sent back into the massive backlog (Reno). This problem can keep those with mental illness from receiving treatment, or those who need the money to make ends meet have to sleep on the street.

To understand the VA's perspective on the backlog issue, I interviewed Jose Llamas, a Public Relations Specialist at the Department of Veteran's Affairs. Mr. Llamas gave me some insight into how VA is dealing with this issue. While the backlog of claims is massive, the VA is making slow but steady progress, and estimates that it the number will be down to around 400,000 claims by the end of 2013 from the 600,000-claim peak in March. The oldest claims are being processed first, to serve the veterans who have been waiting the longest, and the error rate has also improved (Llamas). While this is a slight improvement, it is not enough to completely ameliorate the situation. 400,000 is still a high number, and at this rate the backlog will not be solved for another two years. That is still a lot of time for veterans to wait. Also, VA has to expect even more claims to be filed as more soldiers return home from duty.

The delay in benefits is a huge burden for veterans. When you have depression and need therapy or medication, or are unemployed and need to eat, you can't wait for 272 days for a check in the mail. You need the money right away. The VA needs to make system-level changes so that benefits claims can be processed more efficiently and correctly. The first thing they can do to fix this bureaucratic mess is design a website where veterans can go to file an online claim. A paperless system not only gets rid of time spent in the mail, but also provides a way where all benefits can be sorted and processed electronically by a computer system rather than a human worker. This will keep the current backlog from piling up further and provide a future method to handle benefit claims. With the recent failure of healthcare.gov, many Americans may doubt the government's ability to produce a website that works. But this is the military we're talking about, the organization that has satellites that can read a newspaper from outer space, and guidance systems that can put a missile down a chimney. They certainly have no shortage of technology experts available who can design a website to help their comrades.

Earlier this year the American Legion submitted some suggestions to the House of Representatives on ways to reform the benefits process. To solve problems with errors, they told the VA to implement a credit system for the regional offices that process claims. For example, if an office completed 5,000 claims but 20% of them had errors, they would only get paid for 4,000 of them. That would create an incentive for workers to be extra careful in their work and keep the error rate low (Legion). Also, the Legion offered a clever idea on how to handle backlogged claims: hire veterans to do the work. Many veterans need employment, and they have special knowledge about military jargon needed to interpret the applications (Legion). Hiring veterans could speed up the benefits processing, reduce errors, and give veterans a steady income that could result in

fewer claims being filed in the first place.

Another way VA can help veterans get on their feet is by making veterans more attractive candidates for civilian jobs. In the American Progress 2007 survey, less than half of employers surveyed understood the special protections they must give to veteran employees, and most did not understand the job qualifications of military service. As mentioned earlier, the same survey showed that three fourths of veterans were unsure of their ability to professionally network and negotiate their salary (Hawryluk and Ridley-Kerr). The VA can combat this by starting a campaign that informs employers about the special skills veterans gain from their military experience, such as leadership and initiative, which can be highly valuable in the civilian market. They can also give veterans career advice on how to find a job that suits their skills, along with offering classes that teach interviewing, networking, and negotiating skills, and providing other information needed for finding and maintaining a good job. These are some of the steps that can be taken to reduce veteran unemployment.

As the situation stands now, veterans are facing huge problems of mental illness, unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. Failing to remedy these issues will have huge consequences not only for our veterans, but also for our entire country. These problems affect about 1 million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. One million human beings who have risked their lives for our security and are now being ignored. One million lives close to ruin because of mental illness and economic adversity. Letting these problems go will have disastrous results for veterans and their families for decades to come. The costs for treating mental illness over years or decades will be carried by the veterans who suffer, and they will probably be more than most can afford. Along with paying these huge bills, veterans will have even greater economic troubles as they find it impossible to find a good job and make ends meet. There will likely be an increase in veteran unemployment, homelessness, and suicide. As for our nation, we will experience huge economic and moral consequences. One million people who cannot participate in the labor force make up a large loss in potential economic gain and productivity. Although treating all cases of veteran mental illness will be expensive, RAND Corporation estimates that the cost is tiny compared to the loss in economic productivity from leaving illness untreated (Tanielian 439). Also, ignoring veterans after they serve will likely be a deterrent to future Americans who are thinking about joining the military, which will bring major national security problems if we find ourselves entering another war. Yet the consequences for our nation are not coldly utilitarian: we will also hurt our image and our consciences. How will other countries view us, making our young men and women fight for us and then turning our backs on them? Will we as a country look back at our inaction as a great mistake in American history? We cannot let this happen. The VA needs to act now.

Despite its flaws, the VA's intentions remain pure. They sincerely want to help all of the veterans they can, and the number of veterans they have

successfully delivered benefits or treated for mental illness cannot be understated. The problems with the VA are merely technical, which means that they can be easily identified and analyzed for possible solutions. And these solutions are clear: implement more proactive policies for treating mental illness. Fix existing policies about mental illness so that they are fairer. Reform the system for applying for benefits so that they can be given to deserving veterans on a timely basis. And aid veterans in finding jobs after their service. These changes may not be easy ones to make, since unfortunately very little is done quickly and without resistance in government. But the good news is that we know what needs to be done, and we all agree that our veterans deserve all the help we can give them. Let's not forget all of the many great things our nation has accomplished when we unified our purpose. We have created a Constitution that revolutionized world politics, defeated tyranny abroad, and put human beings on the moon. Fixing the way our veterans get help should be a small task to what we, as a great nation, have already done.

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Post Script

July 16, 2014

In late April of 2014, reporters at CNN announced that 35 veterans in the Phoenix, Arizona Veteran's Hospital Administration had died while awaiting treatment. A following investigation into the conduct of the VA by federal officials uncovered that 120,000 veterans were left waiting for care or forgotten altogether, and that the VA made efforts to alter documents and schedules to make waiting times seem more palatable. The scandal shocked the nation, and many VA officials, including Secretary Eric Shinseki, resigned. While this event surprised the nation and the government, existing problems with veteran's health management, many of which led me to write this paper, provided clear signs that such an event was inevitable. One needed only to pay attention to early reports of VA incompetence, innumerable complaints by veteran's interest groups, or even Jon Stewart's discourse on *The Daily Show* to see that huge problems lingered just under our noses. It was these signs that led me to pursue the issue of veteran's benefits reform. While my research at first dealt with changes that could be made to entitlement policies, by far the most troubling information I uncovered dealt with veteran's healthcare. Huge backlogs in health care requests, bizarre policies for sufferers of PTSD, and an egregiously ineffective claims handling system were only a few of the signs I found that the VA must immediately adjust its health management policies. While I wish that the deaths of the Phoenix area veterans and the delays caused to hundreds of thousands of others could have been prevented, this scandal proves the urgency with which this problem needs to be addressed.

The Lenses of Truth: Photographers' Moral Responsibility to Document Injustice in Most Situations

Lindsay Maizland

§

A small fire burned as the sun rose in the East. Children wearing tattered shirts whispered to two older women who smiled as they tended the flames. They, members of a Tanzanian Bushmen tribe, seemed to share secrets, while I, an outsider with white skin and blonde hair, gazed on. Our skin color was not our only difference. My clothing was clean and new. My hair was long and combed. It was early morning and the family should have been eating breakfast, but there was no food in sight. My family and I ate before hiking to meet the Bushmen and had snacks in our van. Only words filled their mouths while uncomfortable silence filled ours. They lacked basic necessities that we take for granted: food, clothing and even shelter, as they lived in caves. It was impossible to feel comfortable; to them, we were symbols of wealth. To us, they were symbols of poverty.

My camera, large and obtrusive, hung around my neck. I wanted to document them, but I hesitated because I intruded on their daily lives. Soon though, I began snapping pictures. I watched as the Bushmen patriarchs hunted for birds and snakes too small to feed the entire village, while the women and children were left to find their own sources of nutrition. I watched as the children asked their mothers for food and as the men greedily devoured what little meat they could find. "How can I help these people?," I questioned. My family and I ended up sharing some of our snacks, but when I view the pictures today, I feel deep remorse for not helping more.

My guilt is not an isolated incident; it is a feeling that many photographers and photojournalists experience. They echo my question, "Should I help the victim or document the moment with my camera?" Although many journalists and ethicists argue that photographers' civil responsibilities should always surpass their professional assignments, in most circumstances, photographers *must* document societal injustice. Photojournalists fill a role that no other professionals fill – they document the often disturbing, but very real, truth and broadcast their findings to the world. This, in turn, promotes policy change and civilian service. In a sense, photojournalists indirectly help the victims of tragedy and immediate action should not be expected of them.

The Case of Kevin Carter

Kevin Carter's photo (Krauss).

My personal experience is indeed representative of photographers' inner struggles, though my conflict was drastically less complicated than a professional photographer's. Take Kevin Carter, for example, a photojournalist who shot a heart-wrenching photo of a starving, Sudanese child being stalked by a vulture. The photo, as seen above, was published in *The New York Times* in March 1993. Unsurprisingly, readers' responses were widely varied. Some praised Carter for his effort, and others offered only harsh criticisms. Called the "true vulture" and described as "devoid of humanity," Carter was widely criticized for not carrying the child to the feeding shelter that she struggled toward (Cate). Carter responded to his critics and said:

> It may be difficult for people to understand, but as a photojournalist, my first instinct was to make the photograph. As soon as that job was done and the child moved on, I felt completely devastated. I think I tried to pray; I tried to talk to God to assure Him that if He got me out of this place I would change my life (Krauss).

Carter followed his "instinct" and acted as a photographer rather than carrying the child to food. Carter's critics strongly believed that Carter neglected his duties as a human being. A conflicted Carter commented to his friend, "I'm really, really sorry I didn't pick the child up" (Cate). Soon after receiving a Pulitzer Prize for the photo in 1994, Carter committed suicide.

Despite the widespread criticism, several journalists praised Carter. Bob Steele, the director of the ethics program at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, explained the importance of photojournalists:

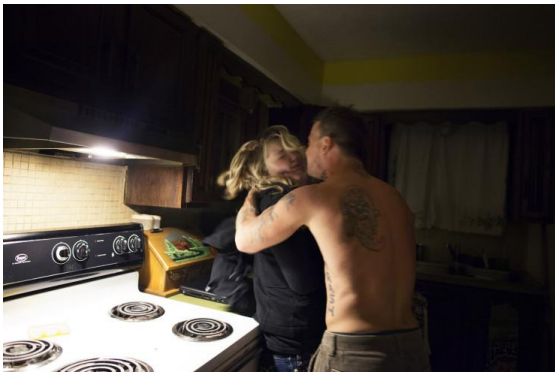
> There were, ideally, lots of other people to give aid, medicines, care, but nobody is going to replace the role of the journalist. The military, the aid workers, the Red Cross--no one filled the role Kevin Carter did. He was the one who got the message out to the rest of the world (Cate).

Carter's job was to take photos of the complete devastation; others, such as United Nations Food workers and the Red Cross, should have helped the child. In fact, as Steele explained, Carter effectively broadcasted the famine to the world by publishing the photo. Funds streamed in to help feed the hungry in Africa after Carter's photo was displayed in *The New York Times* and after it received the Nobel Prize. Although he did not directly help the child, Carter's efforts saved countless of Sudanese children's lives.

Photojournalists' Critics

Carter's critics and supporters illustrate that there seem to be two stances on the role of photographers in their environments: either photographers must always offer help to the victim and follow their duty as a human being, or photographers must always document the injustice and follow their professional duty. However, this is a false dichotomy; moral decisions are not that simple. As in Carter's case, his photo eventually saved many. It is wrong to call him "devoid of humanity." He initially followed his professionally duty, and in doing so, fulfilled his duty as a human being.

Earlier this year, a photojournalist faced similar criticisms after she documented domestic violence. Photojournalist Sara Naomi Lewkowicz spent several weeks chronicling the relationship between Maggie and Shane, an ex-convict, "while working on a project about the stigma associated with being an ex-convict" (Lewkowicz). Her project took an unexpected turn after Shane abused Maggie one evening. Lewkowicz captured the abuse, and the photos were published on *Time Magazine's* "Lightbox." Lewkowicz explained, "After I confirmed one



Lewkowicz's photo of domestic violence (Lewkowicz).

of the housemates had called the police, I then continued to document the abuse – my instincts as a photojournalist began kicking in" (Lewkowicz). The story received 1,860 online comments, many of which criticized her and questioned why she did not stop the abuse. One commenter's statement echoes many others: "What kind of person stands there and watches this happen?... This so-called photojournalist is an idiot who exploited Maggie and her children" (Lewkowicz).

Like Carter, Lewkowicz also followed her professional "instincts." Her photos shed new light on the prominence of domestic violence in the United States, as "many people remain ignorant (or in denial) about the real state of domestic abuse in this country" (Roller). It is too soon to tell what the consequences of Lewkowicz's photo series are, but there is a large possibility that increased publicity will lead to governmental and social change.

Critics continue to argue that photographers aim to profit from the victims' circumstances and therefore "exploit" them. Another argument is that photographers are inhumane for not intervening, as seen in Kevin Carter's case. Finally, photographers are scorned for being too preoccupied with their own lives and neglect helping others.

Code of Ethics

In order to help photojournalists decide whether to intervene or document, the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) composed a "Code of Ethics," which is, "intended to promote the highest quality in all forms of visual journalism and to strengthen public confidence in the profession" (NPPA). One standard that is especially relevant to this debate is, "While photographing subjects do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events" (NPPA). These standards are not absolute rules but rather are recommendations on how photographers should act. Keeping that in mind, the NPPA asserts that photographers should not take action in most situations. The last standard in the Code of Ethics acknowledges the conflict between professional and moral obligations and states, "When confronted with situations in which the proper action is not clear, seek the counsel of those who exhibit the highest standards of the profession" (NPPA). Sometimes, though, it is impossible for journalists to consult others, as decisions must be made in seconds. The suggested Code of Ethics demonstrates the complexity of the issue and how photographers' responses may vary in different situations.

Importance of Capturing Tragedy

However, despite these criticisms, photographers document the injustices prevalent throughout the world. In most circumstances, I believe that photographers should and must photograph injustice, whether a deadly famine or abusive relationship. This documentation is crucial as it gives the people being documented a feeling of worth and enables those who view the photos an

opportunity to reflect on their own lives. Photojournalists communicate the issue to a broader audience, thus promoting global support.

Taking a photo is a simple way of conveying sympathy and a wish to remember. By capturing images of individuals, photojournalists demonstrate that they care. In essence, a photograph is a symbol of hope. In a recent speech at American University, broadcast journalist Anderson Cooper, who has witnessed tragedy throughout the world, stated, "Even people who are in the midst of grief, even people who are going to die tomorrow want you to know their names. They want to tell you their stories" (Cooper). Cooper continued and said that people find great peace in telling their stories to those who will actually listen to them. Perhaps a simple interaction with a photographer is all that it takes to make sufferers realize that they are important and that there is hope for the future.

I can attest to this. Last year, I travelled to a rural village in China to document the unseen aspects of the Miao minority groups. By interviewing the villagers, I learned about their hopes and dreams – one woman's goal was to send both of her children to college; another's dream was to travel to Beijing. Their faces lit up with joy as we snapped pictures and talked with them (see photo). Although they did not explicitly comment on the importance of our photojournalism, it was apparent that they felt appreciated and hopeful after having their photos taken.

Zhu Jianying, a Miao villager, beams with joy while showing me her daughter's artwork.

Photos also allow viewers to gain insight on their own lives. For example, after viewing Kevin Carter's photo, I questioned why I deserve to consume three meals a day while children throughout the world barely receive one. Because of that photo, I created a goal to waste less and truly appreciate what I have been given. In seeing what others do not have, we can further appreciate our possessions. In his book *On Art and War and Terror,* Alex Danchev commented on pictures' instructional ability in helping us learn more about ourselves: "What is more, they [the people in the photos] instruct. They tell us about themselves, and they tell us about us – who we are, and who we may become; what we are, and what we are capable of" (Danchev). I could have been a starving child. I could have been a warlord who blindly kills. The photographs reveal the evils that society, "we," is "capable" of creating. This all goes back to the feeling of guilt. Returning to Carter's photograph, according to one author, it "begs the viewer to act" because "people felt – horror, empathy, anger" (Dougherty). After seeing people less fortunate than themselves, people typically feel strong emotions

and compelled to help. It is in this way that photographs cause an influx of global support.

The Catch: Action in Some Situations

On the contrary, as I mentioned before, photographers must document injustice in *most* circumstances, not all; there are several situations in which photographers should and must take action. Researchers Gail Marion and Ralph Izard noted,

> While detached observation is thus a primary journalistic goal, situations have arisen, and will continue to arise, which might tempt a journalist to cast aside his or her cloak of objectivity and function as citizen and human being (Marion).

Throughout their essay, Marion and Izard attempt to answer the question, "The journalist in life-saving situations: detached observer or Good Samaritan?" by citing examples and quotes from various photographers and journalists (Marion). Their research, however, only reaches a tentative conclusion; they argue that journalists' moral responsibilities depend on the situation. Another researcher, Yung Soo Kim was inspired by this article and conducted a study on how photographers, specifically, should act in certain situations. His study explored how photographers' actions were affected by three different situational characteristics: "the presence of other helpers, the intention of the victim to engage in political speech and the possibility of intervention by the photographer" (Kim). After sending 88 photographers an online survey, Kim discovered that photographers were more likely to take photos if bystanders were already helping, if harm was self-inflicted (as opposed to accidental), and if it was impossible for the photographers to intervene (Kim). This therefore supported his thesis, "For photojournalists caught in the ethical dilemma, this study provides a clear indication that a reply of 'it depends' is not only reasonable, but also widely accepted by photojournalists and the public alike" (Kim). In my situation described in this essay's opening, I decided that providing food was an ethical response because there was no other way in which I could have immediately helped.

The controversial New York Post front page. (Bercovici).

Photojournalists should be held partially responsible for injury or death if they could have easily intervened but chose not to. In a recent controversy, freelance photographer R. Umar Abbasi photographed a man who was pushed onto the subway track as a train sped into the station. The man was struck and killed. The photo was then published on the front page of the *New York Post* with the headline, "Doomed. Pushed onto the subway tracks, this man is about to die"

(Bercovici). Abbasi contended that he took the photos "hoping the train driver would see something and be able to stop" and that "the victim was so far away from me" (Abbasi). However, despite his comments, I believe that Abbasi should have dropped his camera and run to save the man's life. John Long, a photographer of 35 years and chairman of the National Press Photographers Association, agrees:

> If you have placed yourself in a situation where you can help, you are morally obligated. The proper thing to do would've been to put down the camera and try to get the guy out…. Your job as a human being, so to speak, outweighs your job as a photojournalist (Bercovici).

In this situation, the photographer should have taken action. There was a possibility that he could have helped and the man's death was, as Kim would say, "accidental."

Action must also be taken when the photograph will not greatly benefit society. Abbasi's photograph did not advance society – the photograph was selfishly published for his and the magazine's own profit. In contrast, Kevin Carter's photo of a starving child greatly benefited society because, as mentioned earlier, it led to increased awareness and donations. Jeff Bercovici, a writer for *Forbes Magazine*, similarly asserted, "Newspapers have an obligation to publish images, even horrifying ones, that might affect public debate over important issues" (Berovici).

Consequences of Photographer's Choices

In his article recounting his photojournalistic experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Marcus Bleasdale wrote, "I've always been taught that journalists must comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. With our words and pictures, we can trigger a reaction from the general public and from the leaders they elect" (Bleasedale). Rather than physically helping a single individual, photographers have the ability to drastically change the world by calling the global public's attention to injustices and tragedies. As I established earlier, photographs convey human emotion that evokes immense sympathy; and, in turn, the photographs promote anger toward the systems that cause injustice. An example in which photographs sparked immediate change was when photographers documented injustices in Somalia during the early 1990's. President George Bush announced that the United States would enter Somalia to help the United Nations forces in December 1992 and stated, "Every American has seen the shocking images from Somalia. The people of Somalia, especially the children of Somalia, need our help" (Perlmutter). The American people witnessed atrocities through film and called on their government to take action.

The fact that photographers' face great emotional turmoil after deciding whether to act is another huge consequence of photography ethics. As mentioned, Kevin Carter took his own life after enduring harsh criticism and hatred. His final words in his suicide note were very disturbing and revealed that

he was "haunted by the vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain… of starving & wounded children" (610 Dougherty). Many photographers similarly live with the thoughts of their subjects in the back of their minds. I feel remorse for not doing more when visiting the Bushmen. Photojournalist Marcus Bleasdeale reflected again on his time in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

> Scenes from this war are forever burned inside of me – children crying over the dead body of their mother…. At night these images linger in my mind. I carry them with me as I travel from village to village in Congo, where I hope each time not to stumble onto another horrific scene. Too often I do (Bleasdale).

Photographers sacrifice their mental sanity and well-being to help the public understand the horrors that permeate this world. They form relationships with individuals who rarely receive any human sympathy and might not survive the night, and they place themselves in life-threatening situations. Photographers should be the last people blamed for "not acting," as so many critics have commented. Rather, the governments or groups that disrupt communities in the first place and the individuals who view the photographs and do nothing should take full responsibility.

Who Should Take Responsibility

The destructive groups that cause violence, poverty, and oppression should be held accountable for injustices. Photojournalists have absolutely nothing to do with conflicts; they are assigned to cover certain regions and do just that. Individuals who view photographs and do nothing should also be held responsible. A photographer's job is complete after he documents something. The action is then passed on to the viewer – it is their decision whether they want to help or do nothing. In the words of photographer Gary Winogrand, "The photograph is not my problem… it's yours" (Danchev). Photographers should not be isolated individuals who carry the emotional burden of conflict, death and tragedy; everyone who views photographs should also feel guilt, anger and sadness. *Photographers* must document cruelty in most situations. *Viewers* must take meaningful action within their own lives to benefit the victims and society at large.

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What is *a Classic?*

Adam Schasel

§

Literature – the art of the written word. It's a familiar field, as we've been bombarded with classic literature since grade school. But what are these classics?

The Odyssey. L'Inferno. War and Peace.

Stuffy old tomes you've read the Cliff's Notes of. Your teacher told you they were important and somewhere, deep down, you knew it was true. But why? They were so old, so long, so *boring*. If these behemoths of language were considered classics, then you didn't want anything to do with them.

The Great Gatsby. Of Mice and Men. To Kill a Mockingbird.

Now we're talking. Much like the previous titles, these books have something to say, but they have the distinct advantage of being written in the past century, and likely more readable. The messages of these works – the death of the romantic in *Gatsby*, squandered dreams in *Mice and Men*, innocence lost and racial injustice in *Mockingbird* – were and are relevant enough to join the ongoing cultural discussion and to be cemented in society's collective mind as classics.

Star Wars. Watchmen. BioShock – wait, what?

No, these titles do not belong to traditional novels. But they are literature nonetheless. S*tar Wars*, *Watchmen* (a graphic novel) and *BioShock* (a video game) are all pieces of art whose messages, with the help of visuals, are communicated through written word; yes, movies, comics and games are mediums in their own right, but just like novels, plays and poems, they are examples of how the umbrella of literature is still unfolding, revealing new classics along the way.

In fact, this democratization and evolution of literary media, and also the increasing interconnectedness of the world's societies, has a revolutionary, but not all-too unexpected consequence; since these new forms of literature complicate the old, established relationship between author and reader, the old rules to determine what a classic is just can't apply anymore.

But before we can figure out these new rules, what were the old ones to begin with?

As long as literature has existed, people have tried to answer this question. One of the early notable attempts was made by French literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, who, in his mid-eighteenth century essay, "What is a Classic?" laments the traditional, dictionary definition of a classic: "a classic, according to the usual definition, is an old author canonized by admiration, and an authority in a particular style." He even goes so far as to identify a dichotomy that's plagued the classic for years – the struggle between the old, structured, dense classic and the classic that innovates in both style and substance and is – God forbid – a pleasure to read. Ultimately, Sainte-Beuve settles on his preferred definition of a classic, which "is an author who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, and caused it to advance a step; who has discovered some moral and not equivocal truth, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered… who has spoken to all in his own peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style without neologism, new and old, easily contemporary with all time."

Sainte-Beuve's description of a classic, while hardly a testable hypothesis, is actually the only saving grace of his argument. According to Sainte-Beuve, a classic, rather than attempting to be the master of a certain style, instead uses its own style to communicate its message. And if that style can "enrich the human mind" and "increase its treasure" while "discover[ing] some moral and not equivocal truth," then it has earned its right to be a permanent participant of that ongoing cultural discussion. Sainte-Beuve's claim that classics utilize their own distinct style could even be interpreted as an endorsement of the new mediums of literature that have cropped up and come of age in the 20th and 21st centuries. If applied today, Sainte-Beuve's argument says that there is no set-in-stone requirement about the actual medium through which a work is expressed. As long as it can enter that unending cultural discussion that transcends time, a work of literature becomes a classic. What his admittedly vague thesis does is set the stage for future acceptance of new media, and new classics as a result of them.

So in a broad sense, Sainte-Beuve's definition still holds up. But it doesn't bode well for your argument as a whole when your most wishy-washy statement is, in fact, your most poignant one – a truth Sainte-Beuve falls victim to. This is because when you zoom in to see his more concrete criteria for defining a classic, they fail even by his own standards. He asserts that classics can only be determined in hindsight, but then contradicts himself in his admission that "Dante appeared, and from the start posterity greeted him as a classic." Furthermore, Sainte-Beuve claims that a classic does not necessarily have to revolutionize literature, but later says that "the greatest names to be seen at the beginning of literatures are those which disturb and run counter to certain fixed ideas of what is beautiful and appropriate," citing the inarguable

classics of Shakespeare. He even acknowledges his argument's incompetency, somewhat, in his admission that "there is no [recipe] for making classics."

Thankfully, T.S. Eliot avoids such contradictions in a 1944 speech, also titled "What is a Classic?" to the Virgil Society. Just like his French counterpart, Eliot frames the classic question in vague terms. He admits that the word has "several meanings in several contexts," and even realizes, much like Sainte-Beuve, that the term can imply "either the highest praise or the most contemptuous abuse… either the perfection of the form, or the absolute frigidity." But while Sainte-Beuve drowns in his inability to come to terms with his explicit rules for determining a classic, Eliot sails with his specifics. Maturity, Eliot argues, is the main arbiter of classicdom. And this makes sense, especially in regard to new media. University of New Mexico professor Iain Thomson, in his essay "Deconstructing the Hero," marks *Watchmen* – Alan Moore's gripping deconstruction of the superhero genre comics are so famous for – as the defining work when "comic books came of age." Thomson's statement, of course, implies that before *Watchmen,* the comic book medium had not reached its critical point of maturity, where it could have contributed to history a classic of its own.

But how does one identify maturity? Eliot's response: "if we are properly mature, as well as educated persons, we can recognize maturity in a civilization and in a literature, as we do in the other human beings we encounter." In other words, we'll know maturity when we see it; but we can only see maturity if we ourselves are mature, and we'll know when we're mature because we'll see maturity, and so on and so forth.

But Eliot's tautology shouldn't be confused with Sainte-Beuve's indecisiveness. Eliot explores the concept of maturity without qualifier, leaving his argument intact for others to pick apart. He argues that in order to create a classic, there needs to be maturity in the writer, maturity in the society that produced the writer, and maturity in the language the work has been written in. This isn't an entirely novel concept – Sainte-Beuve asserted that certain periods are "the only true classical ages, those which offer protection and a favourable climate to real talent," only to contradict himself later by saying that Shakespeare, Dante and Milton all fashioned classics in spite of not living in one of these "classical ages" – but Eliot refines the argument enough to make it his own. In fact, he didn't say it, but Eliot develops something of a triangular process for determining maturity – take a side away, and it falls apart. Eliot reflects this sentiment when he says that "a writer who individually has a more mature mind, may belong to a less mature period than another, so that in that respect his work will be less mature" and therefore not be a classic.

While this may have been true in the past, Eliot understates one side of his triangle while overstating the other two. For example, take *The Kite Runner,* the 2003 novel by Afghan-American Khaled Hosseini. Although Hosseini wrote the book in America, one could argue that the society that truly produced

the work was Afghanistan, since the novel's plot and themes draw entirely from the recent history of a country that has not experienced stability in living memory – hardly the pinnacle of maturity in Eliot's eyes. And yet *The Kite Runner* has already been listed twice on essay prompts as a work of literary merit alongside such classics as *Invisible Man*, *The Scarlett Letter* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on the College Board's AP Literature exam, which has become the defining determiner of what students read in the classroom.

The widespread participation of the exam grants the College Board the authority, whether wanted or not, in choosing which works are represented in the ongoing (and in this case, literal) discussion of what a classic is and should be. And although in their AP Literature course description, College Board emphasizes that "There is no recommended or required reading list for the AP English Literature and Composition course," the repeated inclusion of certain pieces as suggested works of literary merit (and therefore mature pieces in their own right) makes them mainstays in classroom curricula across the country.

Eliot had reason to believe that the society that produces the author and her work needed to be mature, as he lived in a time where societies remained largely independent of each other; where if a classic arose, it was influenced primarily by the culture it came from. But this all changed in the aftermath of World War II, where decolonization swept the developing world. Works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* – even those as early as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – depict the tenuous relationships between colonies and their colonizers. They don't belong to any one culture; their entire authority to be called "classics" is derived from their communication of an experience shared across the cultural and historical divide; the oppression of one society inflicted upon another.

The claim of language as an important aspect in determining a classic piece of literature is also not new. Sainte-Beuve explains that "modern Italy had her classical authors, and Spain had every right to believe that she also had hers at a time when France was yet seeking hers," while Eliot ridiculously proclaims that "we have no classic age, no classic poet, in English."

The language distinction is arbitrary, even for Sainte-Beuve and Eliot's respective times. There *may* have been a time – before even the archaic classics of Homer and Virgil – where certain languages lacked lexicons developed enough to create a classic work of literature. But every single modern language has classics it can point to – both Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and Saavedra's *Don Quixote* were published well before Sainte-Beuve's time – but the very nature of what a classic is makes the language of origin completely meaningless. For a work to be a classic, both the ideas it generates and the message it communicates transcend linguistic and societal boundaries to enter that perpetual cultural debate. *Don Quixote* is as much of a classic in Spanish as it is in English, Chinese, French – whatever. Just because it was originally written in

Spanish does not mean Saavedra's themes or message deteriorate if his work was written in another language.

Take, for example, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which chronicles the lives of individuals born on the eve of Indian independence. Rushdie faced the moral dilemma of writing the novel in English or his country's native Hindi, but he ultimately chose to write the piece in English. He reasoned that "those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it … perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles … To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (Baker 550). Rushdie didn't refuse to write his novel in his native Urdu because the language wasn't *mature*; rather, he made a stylistic decision by writing in English – it adds depth to his depiction of a new generation of Indians picking up the pieces after the damage done by its former ruler.

Language distinctions are becoming increasingly obsolete with the rise of new forms of literature as well. Comics, films, video games – even without the crucial element of language, the visual components of these mediums bear an equal share of the burden of communicating their messages. This in turn makes it much easier to compel these new classics into cross-cultural ubiquity – a necessity for a classic. Even the advent of subtitles, as simple as they may be, make a work's language of origin even more meaningless – maybe, in some cases, a stylistic option.

So two of Eliot's claims – maturity of both society and language – do not hold up. He should be thankful that his third one – maturity of the author – does. In fact, amidst the increasing irrelevance of language divisions and distinctions between colliding, overlapping and combining societies, this is the most important factor of all. And it is guaranteed to be held constant for the foreseeable future because a classic needs an author to create it in the first place.

But how does one identify a mature author? A good sign, Eliot suggests, "is a development towards greater complexity of sentence and period structure."

Eliot qualifies his ludicrous statement, as he should – this isn't to say an author should simply use big words when small ones would do. Instead, the reasoning goes, complex ideas are more likely to be expressed if they are put into complex sentences. His argument unravels when faced by perhaps the most prolific author of the 20th century, an author who has touched more minds than any other – Theodore Geisel. Geisel, under his pseudonym Dr. Seuss, wrote nearly fifty books in a career that lasted as many years. He was honored by a series of awards, such as a 1984 Pulitzer Prize for his contribution "to the education and enjoyment of America's children and their parents" (Pace). And while forced to keep his vernacular simple for his target audience, Geisel easily achieved the purpose of his Pulitzer while also packing poignancy

in such pieces as *Yertle the Turtle*, *Horton Hears a Who!*, and *The Sneeches*, among others.

Geisel's books aren't classics simply because they're bestsellers. They fulfill an essential criterion that Daniel Johnson, in his 1995 column for *The Times*, says is unique to the past couple of centuries of literary history. He argues that up until the 1800s, classics were primarily defined as "the archetypal classic," which "creates or develops a recognisable archetype or pattern."

What Johnson says makes sense. The quintessential characters, stories and settings – even rhetorical devices – of literature all have their origins in antiquity. For example, *The Odyssey* does not live on for its commentary on a particular subject. Instead, it earns its spot as a classic for its introduction of timeless literary constructs like the Epic Journey, the hero crippled by hubris, and the *deus ex machina*. Subsequent classics have added to this literary lexicon, often including a moral or statement of universal truth. Johnson elaborates further: "The oldest classics… all create their archetypes within a theological or metaphysical framework. Their human conflicts are played out according to unspoken but unquestioned moral criteria… [The archetypal classics] have all bounded the mental horizons of every generation down to our own. They have created the moral vocabulary which enables us to interpret our own lives. Language does not limit their appeal; and through countless allusions, often unconscious ones, they remain living, albeit subterranean, presences in our midst."

But at the turn of the 19th century, the classic criteria changed. Instead of the archetypal classic, which "creates or develops," the analytical classic, which "dismantles, dissects or 'deconstructs'" archetypes, ultimately took charge. For their credit, though, 19th century authors didn't stop trying to compete with their archetypal ancestors. Johnson says the Romantic Movement of the 1800s "was the most international of all literary movements, but even though their works are archetypal classics, Coleridge and Keats, Kleist and Holderlin, Pushkin and Lermontov have all failed to become popular in translation, and their direct influence has remained localised." The *analytical* classics, which didn't seek to discover (as Sainte-Beuve would argue a classic should do) "some moral and not equivocal truth," were instead "of their place and time. All have replaced divinity with psychopathology, even if they have immortal longings" (Johnson).

So where does Dr. Seuss fit into all of this? Johnson argues that in the 20th and 21st centuries, a classic should "take into account, however indirectly, the horrors of our time." By and large, this trend sticks – see the postcolonial works discussed earlier, Orwell's warnings against totalitarianism and Stalinism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, *Watchmen*'s caricature of Cold-War hysteria and superhero culture, and *BioShock*'s criticism of Objectivism taken to both a logical and fantastical resolution.

But most of all, look past the simplicity of Dr. Seuss's picture books. *Yertle the Turtle*? A tirade against Hitler and authoritarianism. *Horton Hears a Who!*? A statement against, and apology for prior support of, Japanese-American internment camps. *Sneeches*? Racial equality. It is no secret that Dr. Seuss planted political messages in many of his books. But their simple presentation makes it an easier pill to swallow for audiences, allowing the message to spread farther and farther, across cultures and countries and languages and, yes, time. The same applies to games, movies and comics. Their intuitive, visual components don't bar them from entering that ongoing cultural discussion; when used right, they can be an asset in communicating their messages to an audience Homer and Dante could never have dreamed of.

This brings us back to our central question: *What is a Classic?* With evolving mediums accompanying an evolving world, it is more difficult to answer than ever. Just as Eliot said the word "classic" "had several meanings in several contexts," it also had several meanings at several different times. Today, a classic shouldn't establish new archetypes; it should smash them. And even when it uses those archetypes, it should reinvent them and apply them to the struggles individuals and societies face today.

Perhaps Mark Van Doren, a professor at Columbia University, sums it up best: a classic is simply any work that manages to stay in print (Trelease). So when future high school students are discussing the themes of *The Matrix* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, we'll know for sure.

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The Loudness War

John Slights

§

An Introduction

In late 2012, legendary rock group ZZ Top released their latest studio album (and their first in a decade) *La Futura*. It was produced by Rick Rubin, and it was heralded as a critical and commercial success. Several publications called the album a "comeback" album, and it comes as no surprise that the group embarked on a massive arena tour after its release. On June 18, 2013, famed hip-hop artist Kanye West also released his latest studio album, *Yeezus*, which was also produced by Rubin. The album contained singles such as "Black Skinhead" and "Blood on the Leaves," and it was a critical and commercial success.

So what do both of these albums have in common (besides sharing the same producer, of course)? Sonically, they are both disasters. What this means is that the sound quality on both of these albums is atrocious in the ears of many critics. They're overly loud and distorted, which destroys the quality of the album.

While many audio engineers utilize excessive loudness, others have publicly spoken out against it. One of these engineers is Greg Calbi. Calbi has worked on recordings for artists such as Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Bruce Cockburn, and Paul Simon. In a recent interview, Calbi discussed what the role of an audio engineer should be. "The goal has always been to make [the recording] as loud as you can and still sound good," Calbi said. "Nowadays, you're making [the recording] loud before you're making it good…and that is the root of the problem" (Calbi).

This "problem" was nonexistent in the earlier decades of recorded music, but has emerged within the last twenty-five years. This problem is referred to by many as "brickwalling," which is a part of the dilemma known as the "loudness war," where producers turn up the volume on sound recordings, creating a deafeningly loud and distorted effect on the recording.

Rubin, a famed producer, is one of the biggest culprits of the loudness war. He is behind the production of Black Sabbath's 2013 album *13*, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' 1999 album *Californication*, and Johnny Cash's 2010

posthumous release *American V: Ain't No Grave*. All of these recordings are horribly compressed and distorted, which is consistent with the production style contained on *Yeezus* and *La Futura*. Once known for his tight and airy production style, such as the original Johnny Cash *American Recordings*, Rubin has traded it away in the last fifteen years for loudness at all costs.

Loudness at All Costs

The textbook example of "loudness at all costs" is Metallica's 2008 album *Death Magnetic*. Widely considered to be a return to form for the band, it had all of the makings of a classic heavy metal album. It had memorable riffs, strong writing, and technically advanced playing. There was one trait it did not have – clean sound. Sonically, it is considered to be one of the poorest productions ever made. Critics and fans have complained about the lack of "warmth" contained in the recording, and perhaps rightfully so. Rubin's production was panned, and audiophiles were infuriated, with many proclaiming it to be the worst produced album of all-time. This would lead to drummer Lars Ulrich responding to the criticism in the media:

> Listen, there's nothing up with the audio quality. It's 2008, and that's how we make records. Rick Rubin's whole thing is to try and get it to sound lively, to get it sound loud, to get it to sound exciting, to get it to jump out of the speakers. Of course, I've heard that there are a few people complaining. But I've been listening to it the last couple of days in my car, and it sounds smokin.' (Hall)

His defense of the sound quality shows that he is either in denial or completely oblivious to the overwhelming compression found on his band's most recent album.

What is the Loudness War?

To understand the battle over sound, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the "loudness war" and what it means. The "loudness war" is the term given to describe the louder quality of music that has been released since the mid-1990s. According to mastering engineer Ian Shepherd, "the Loudness War is a sonic 'arms race' where every artist and label feel they need to crush their music onto CD at the highest possible level, for fear of not being 'competitive' – and in the process removing all the contrast, all the light, shade and depth – ruining the sound." In other words, it is turning up the volume on the recording and destroying the sound quality contained therein. It is not known exactly who coined the phrase and where exactly it came from, but it is the umbrella under which terms like "dynamic range" and "compression" can be found. Recently the loudness war has reached new heights, and the lack of quality sound continues to the present day. In fact, an argument can be stated that sound quality on recordings is continuing to get worse, not better.

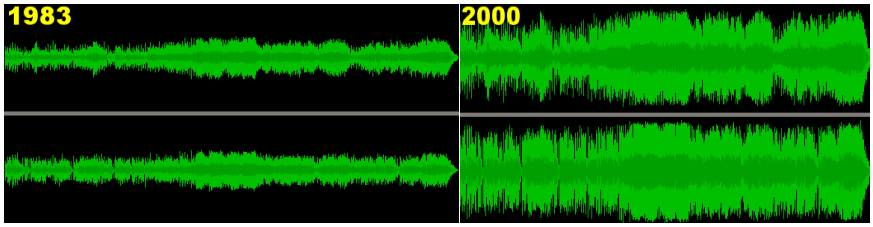

Fig. 1. The audio of The Beatles' 1968 track 'Something.' On the left is the track mastered on the original 1983 CD of* Abbey Road*. To the right is the version mastered in 2000 for their greatest hits album* 1*. The 1983 version has plenty of dynamics, where the 2000 version is completely lacking in this area. Source: MK-Guitar.com

In 1982, the first compact discs were released to the public. The first CD ever released was Billy Joel's 1978 album *52nd Street* (Giles). The sound quality on the disc was considered to be phenomenal, containing plenty of dynamic range and crispness that are common attributes of an incredible-sounding disc. It was carefully mastered and transferred to disc in a manner that allowed all of the dynamic range from the vinyl recording to be carried over to the disc. This practice continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s as older albums (and new albums) were released on CD. They were cautiously transferred to disc in a way that allowed the clear sound quality to be retained. This practice continued into the early 1990s. An example of this practice can be found by comparing the sound quality of the rock group Nirvana's 1991 album *Nevermind* with their 1996 live album *From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah*. While *Nevermind* features plenty of dynamic range, *From the Muddy Banks* is overcompressed and lacks the airy quality of CDs released earlier in the decade ("Nirvana").

It was in 1995 when the loudness war truly started. British alternative rock group Oasis released their breakthrough album, *What's the Story Morning Glory?* The record was praised by critics (with *Rolling Stone* magazine later ranking it #378 on their list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All-Time) ("500 Greatest") and sold 347,000 copies in its first week, a record at the time (Mugan). However, it opened the door to a trend – having a recording be as loud as possible, even if it means sacrificing the dynamic range of the album. Oasis did precisely this, mastering the record at an incredibly loud volume. Record companies caught onto this practice, and soon began insisting that all records produced follow this practice.

Terminology

There are several key terms that are vital to understanding what the "loudness war" is and the impact it has on modern recordings. The first of these terms is "dynamic range," or "dynamics." According to WhatIs.com, dynamic range "describes the ratio of the softest sound to the loudest sound in

a musical instrument or piece of electronic equipment. This ratio is measured in decibels (abbreviated as dB) units." Dynamic range is perhaps the most important part of a recording, as it describes the contrast between the quieter sounds of the recording and the louder passages. One of the main criticisms of the "loudness war" is the fact that all elements of the recording are mastered at equal volume. The quieter portions of the recordings are loud, and the loud portions of the recording are also loud. Both elements are mastered equally, "squashing" the dynamic range on the album.

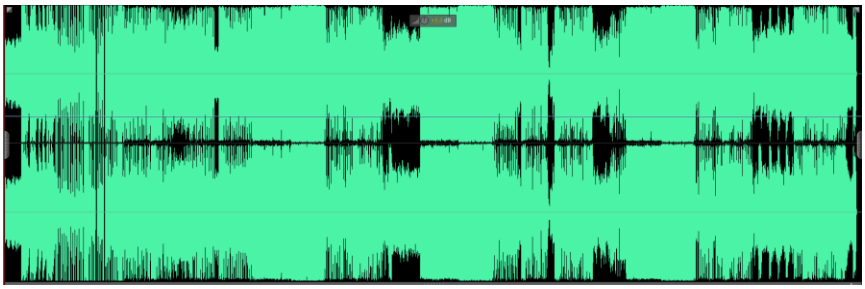

Fig. 2. The dynamic range of the track 'Black Skinhead,' from Kanye West's 2013 album* Yeezus*, produced by Rick Rubin. Notice the compression and distortion present throughout the track. Source for image: Reddit.com

"Compression" is also a term that audiophiles frequently use in the "loudness war" debate. It has long been a part of the recording process, but it has been abused frequently in recent times. Compression makes quiet passages louder. This is done by narrowing the audio's dynamic range, thus "compressing" it. There are devices known as "compressors" that are used in recording studios that achieve this effect. It is present in most modern sound recordings, and in modern times it has been greatly misused (thus resulting in the "loudness war" that is so prevalent in modern recordings).

Another crucial term that is frequently mentioned in the "loudness war" discussion is "clipping." Mark Harris, a producer and audio engineer who has been active since the mid-1980s, described clipping recently in an article:

> There is a limit to the amount of power supplying the amplifier inside the speaker – if the requirements go beyond this then the amplifier will clip the input signal. In this circumstance, instead of a smooth sine wave being produced for normal audio, a square waveform (clipped) will be outputted by the amplifier resulting in sound distortion.

In other words, clipping leads to distortion in sound recordings. Notice in the example above the number of square waveforms that appear in the graph. Kanye West's *Yeezus* album contains massive amounts of clipping, with the track 'Black Skinhead' being one of the many casualties.

Why Loudness?

There are many theories as to why this occurs. Perhaps the most common theory (and likely the most plausible) is that recordings are mastered loudly (and without dynamics) in order to be the loudest and most noticeable of all. It is a competition to see which recording is the loudest and thus which recording grabs your attention and holds onto it. Record companies have been playing this game since the release of *Morning Glory*. It is one of the major factors that allows the "loudness war" to continue into the present day.

As was earlier mentioned, loudness grabs your attention. Compression is used at locations such as shopping malls in order for music that is being played quietly to be audible. This is a possible explanation for why record companies use the loudness war as a selling point – that is, the notion that louder recordings equal more sales. For example, Donald Fagen, best known as the frontman of the jazz rock group Steely Dan, released an album that was impeccably mastered last year. Entitled *Sunken Condos*, the record entered the Billboard 200 album chart at #12 during the week of October 20. During this time, the #1 album on the chart was Mumford & Sons' *Babel* album (Bonner). *Babel* suffered massive issues from a sonic standpoint, with compression being audible at numerous points throughout the album ("Mumford & Sons"). This further adds to the notion that loudness sells records, and that dynamic range is no longer a selling point.

An example of another recent recording that is mastered brilliantly is Jack White's debut solo album *Blunderbuss*. *Blunderbuss* was a critical and commercial success, reaching #1 on the Billboard 200 album chart and earning high reviews from publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Entertainment Weekly*. When asked about why he wanted to do an album without squashing the dynamic range, White replied:

> I read this book, *Perfecting Sound Forever* [by Greg Milner], and it was very interesting, talking about the loudness wars and the speed wars back then—33 versus 45 [rpm]—and how history has gone through all this bizarreness of trying to get the best-quality sound. So this album came up, and I was like, 'Can we just not change the dynamics of the song? Just make it louder, but don't compress or limit it?' Bob Ludwig was like, 'Of course we can do that.' And I was like, 'Why the hell didn't anyone tell me that you can do that?! I've been asking this question for years!'" So the master came back, and it sounded great. There's nothing squashed or lost in the dynamics, and it still sounded really loud. (qtd. in Gordon 5)

White was looking to make an album that was still loud and powerful, but contained plenty of dynamic range, contrasting him from many of his contemporaries.

Fig. 3. Jack White's 2012 album* Blunderbuss *(left) is an example of a modern recording that is mastered properly, whereas Metallica's 2008 album* Death Magnetic *has been hailed by some as one of the poorest sounding albums of all-time. Source for images: Amazon.com.

What Do Musicians Think?

Many artists who have had long recording careers are guilty of releasing albums that are "casualties of the loudness war." David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Jeff Beck, and Eric Clapton have all released recordings in the past decade that lack dynamic range. Another group that has done this is the English alternative band Depeche Mode, whose last album, *Delta Machine* has been criticized for its harsh sound.

One of the group's former members, Alan Wilder, has actively spoken out against the loudness war. Wilder, who was in the band from its inception in 1980 until his departure in 1996, has been critical of the sound of modern recordings. "The effect of excessive compression is to obscure sonic detail and rob music of its emotional power leaving listeners strangely unmoved," Wilder wrote in a January 2008 article he authored for *Recoil* magazine. "Our sophisticated human brains have evolved to pay particular attention to any loud noise, so initially, compressed sounds seem more exciting. It is short lived. After a few minutes, research shows, constant volume grows tiresome and fatiguing" (Wilder). Wilder states that the loudness contained in recordings is not a pleasant experience, but rather a tiring and "fatiguing" one.

Steven Wilson, a musician who has fronted the progressive rock band Porcupine Tree since 1987, has also stated he is not interested in being a casualty of the "loudness war." In a 2011 press conference, Wilson stated that "music is art, and it should be presented as such." He later added, the "quality of music can be much higher than the way people are now experiencing it" (Wilson). Wilson is stating that making recordings louder is not necessarily the best way to listen to them.

Using the Dynamic Range (DR) Database

A helpful tool in understanding the loudness war is the Dynamic Range (abbreviated DR) Database. This tool analyzes recordings on a "bad – transition – good" scale. It uses a color-coded and number-based system that makes it easy to understand and determine which recordings sound good and which recordings are casualties of the "loudness war." This is a simple yet accurate way to determine what sound recordings reach a high level of quality and which recordings are severely lacking sonically.

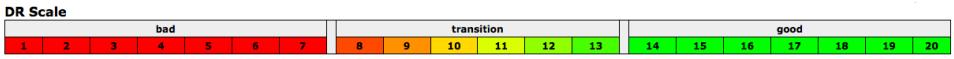

Fig. 4. The DR Scale that is used on the Dynamic Range Database to grade the sound quality on recordings. Source: Dynamic Range Database.

Conclusion

The loudness war has become a major problem in the modern recording industry. Whereas such an issue was nonexistent as recently as twenty-five years ago, it has now emerged as the primary recording technique. It is a practice that should be and needs to be broken, as there are many great recordings that are being issued that lack dynamic range. While Metallica's *Death Magnetic* and Kanye West's *Yeezus* albums are fine examples of botched mastering jobs (both courtesy of Rick Rubin), other albums such as *Sunken Condos* by Donald Fagen and *Blunderbuss* by Jack White remind us that quality sound recordings still do exist. These albums certainly give hope that the future of sound recordings is bright; however, like most issues, it takes an army to accomplish, and that is what must be done here. There must be an "army" of producers, musicians, engineers, record company executives, and, most importantly, record buyers, that are willing to demand audio quality over loudness at all costs. That is truly the way to win the "loudness war."

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First Person Perspectives

§

Soaring Pride
XY Lau

ʃ

"Now let's go around in a circle. State your name and where you're from."

Oh no, not this again.

"Hi, I'm Jack. I'm from Detroit, Michigan."

Why do we have to do this in every class?

"My name is Tim, and I am from Annapolis, Maryland."

I'm coming up soon… how am I going to phrase it this time?

"I'm Jake. I'm from Florida."

Okay, well, here we go again…

"Hi! I'm XY, which is short for my Chinese name, Xiang Yi. I was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, but grew up in Shanghai, China, where I learned English from an American International school."

Nailed it.

I have written way too many essays about my name. These papers defined my days learning at an international school, sharing classes with classmates of all nations, so like – yet so unlike – me. Ever since I picked up my pen, each one of my English teachers would face my multicolored, multicultural class and throw out this "find out what your name means" assignment. And with every passing year, the teachers seemed increasingly excited and pleased with themselves about this project, as if they all thought they were being original.

ʃ

刘翔毅. These characters that my father gingerly handpicked out of a pool of Chinese alphabet soup mean a lot more when written this way than they do in their English phonetic translation: Lau Xiang Yi. Standing testament to my Chinese identity, these three little bundles hold the high hopes of my family, as well as the essence of my personality within their complicated meshes of dots and lines. 翔, or Xiang, means "to soar," while 毅, or Yi, means "pride."

Crowned with my surname, 刘 (Lau), my purpose in life, according to my given moniker, is to be the Lau who Soars with Pride.

I can recall those early days growing up, when I was the center of attention in the family. I was the son of the pride of the Lau family – the son of my father, who was the first person in the family to ever attend and graduate from university. I knew from a young age that to be my father's son – to be given a name like Xiang Yi – meant that big things were expected of me. After all, the son of the victorious son can and should bring only prosperity to the family.

If one were to carefully examine the very spelling of my name, one would discover a subtle fact about my family before ever meeting me in person. The name Lau Xiang Yi indicates the Chinese melting pot that I was born into. In Malaysia, where the struggling Chinese minority from a variety of regions (Fujian, Hainan, and Canton) set aside their differences to form a unified Chinese front, my family ended up becoming a mix of all three of these regions. My surname, Lau, is the Hokkien (Fujianese) and Cantonese translation of the character 刘, while my first name, Xiang Yi, is a Mandarin translation of 翔毅. Any expert who notices this subtle quirk in my name will uncover the intercultural, intra-cultural mix of my Canto-Hokkien, essentially Chinese, family.

ʃ

On the first day of July 1997, the British government returned Hong Kong to China. For the first time in nearly a century, the citizens of this decolonized state finally received a nationality guaranteed by a people who looked more like their own: a Han Chinese-dominated government residing in central Beijing. The mood in the air could not have been more lively – thousands of angry demonstrators took to the streets in a mass protest, and have taken to the streets on every first of July since then (activists claim that the 2012 demonstrations drew a record turnout of 400,000 people). The residents of Hong Kong complained that this new government planned to "strip them of their culture" by enforcing its "communist principles" on their traditional Chinese customs. The rest of the world balked at the bizarre spectacle of this small state, one that spent generations under western rule, fighting to keep its "culture" free from the clutches of the original nation from which it came.

My friends from Hong Kong cringe at the sound of being called "local Chinese." To them, the authenticity of the term died with the Cultural Revolution. While colonial Hong Kong was actually allowed to keep and nurture its traditional Chinese culture, Communist China hacked out and burned its roots in a blood oath to the new order. The Cultural Revolution saw young, ignorant Red Guards painting the skies crimson with the inferno of burning books and blazing temples. The cries of the old Chinese principles,

dragged out and slaughtered to make room for a new religion under Mao, rose and mingled with the smoke; in the span of just ten years, the indoctrinated kids managed to wipe out over five thousand years of Chinese heritage and tradition. The bottom line was that the "local Chinese" people who waved goodbye to their newly colonized brothers in 1898 looked nothing like the "local Chinese" people to whom these brothers returned in 1997. In fact, throughout the first half of the 20th century, a good portion of these original "local Chinese" people sensed the incoming tsunamis of change and fled their homeland in droves while they still could, taking their traditions with them and congregating into little Chinese communities in foreign countries all over the world. And ever since they ran away, China has never been the same.

I come from a family of such runaways. My ancestors escaped to Malaysia right at the end of the dynasties, during the waning of the Middle Kingdom under the Emperor's dragon. In the absence of my kin, China set off on its Long March towards agrarian communism, forfeiting its role as the guardian of its traditions. In a sense, as my family embarked on its journey, they were passed the baton of Chinese culture to share and preserve with the rest of the escaped Chinese families who now reside in the Chinatowns all over the world.

While the "local Chinese" children back in the motherland spent their summers learning and reciting the words of their beloved Party, I spent my childhood summers following my grandma through the sweltering heat of Malaysia, handing her incense sticks to poke into pots of ashes before bowing up and down three times in prayer to my ancestors. While "local Chinese" grandparents complained about how the West was ruining the old Communist principles, my grandparents complained about how the West was ruining the old, *traditional* Chinese principles. While "local Chinese" mothers escaped overseas to give birth to American, Australian, and British citizens who would one day attend international schools worldwide in the hopes of a future *anywhere else but here*, my father sat me down right before I left for America and reminded me for the hundredth time to "never forget that you are a Chinese."

I took my father's words to heart. I spent my first month at American University telling everybody of life at home, dispelling the appalling myths and prejudices of China that met me wherever I went. "Don't listen to him," I would hear the 'local Chinese' kids exclaim behind me all the time, "Who does he think he is, anyway? He's not even a *real* Chinese."

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I guess they were right in a certain way. My name may say a lot about my cultural heritage, but it says very little of the life that I have led. My name does not, for example, account for the Chinese 30-day Tourist Visa that I have

in my Malaysian Passport. It does not account for the American-International high school that I attended when I stayed in China as an outsider. My name does not mention the numerous times that I walked down the streets of Shanghai, completely invisible in a sea of twenty million people until I opened my mouth to reveal the foreign boy within the Chinese skin, opening myself up to being spoken to and then passed around like a foreigner. It does not mention the times I drifted down the streets of Kuala Lumpur, avoided like a foreigner as well.

In fact, my name does not mention the times in China when I wished I were "home" in Malaysia, or the times in Malaysia, when I wished I were "home" in China. From these incidents of longing sprouted great bouts of confusion in my first days of university at American— while people around me complained of homesickness, I still struggled to define where my home truly was.

My name, soaked in the waters of a Confucian filial piety, does not show that I am just as close to my mother as I am to my father, that a good portion of my attitudes and approaches to life had been, for the most part, taught by Mom, since Dad would work the late nights all the time. As my name roars of victory and triumph, it does not take heed of the failures and downfalls in my adolescence that only my mother and I, or sometimes just I alone, know about. As I, the Lau who soars with Pride, lived a few thousand miles away in Shanghai from my family back home in Kuala Lumpur, I took advantage of the shameful privilege of flying away from China every Chinese New Year to bring home to my Malaysian family all my good news, and somehow to always fail to mention any bad news.

Now that I live by myself in America, a few thousand miles away from both my immediate family in Shanghai and my extended family in Malaysia, it scares me to realize how much of the truth I can neglect to send home. Without Mom, Dad, or Mei (my sister) watching me by my side, it soon registered that there was only so much that I could write in the limited text messages I sent their way every night. Like the single, or dual-cultured kids around me who could not possibly begin to comprehend my life, even my family will now receive an incomplete, iPhone screen-sized picture of my daily life. Upon grasping the fact that from now on, only I and nobody else would know how I truly feel, I find myself submerged into a bizarre cocktail of melancholic, contradicting sentiments. My Third Culture Kid instincts have kicked into full throttle, and I have never felt so liberated, yet so isolated at the same time.

∫

My name, in itself, neglects to show that I consider myself to be a Sino-Malaysian-*American*. In fact, most Americans cringe whenever I tell them

that my name is Xiang Yi. The first time I travelled to the States (and choked on the clean, unpolluted air), I was constantly asked whether I had a nickname immediately after I introduced myself; when I said I didn't, I was met with a forced smile and a quick handshake before I proceeded to be neglected, avoided, and/or completely forgotten. As people were embarrassed of either mispronouncing or completely forgetting my name, I quickly shortened my name from Xiang Yi to just the initials, XY. And that, I can safely say, could be the most significant decision I have ever made for myself.

"XY," I soon realized, was a lot easier to remember than "Xiang Yi," and, to my teenage delight, a lot cooler. I earned a fresh new audience with this name, and every visit I paid to the US since was a bonanza. As if XY was not amazing enough, it yielded a roll of nicknames for itself: XYZ, Chromosome… a girl even started calling me Sex-Y. I had, in other words, successfully Americanized my name with a couple of capital letters.

"I gave all of you Cs on the test. Don't come to me and complain about it. You got what you deserved. You Chinese kids have to learn that your GPA is not the thing that will get you into college."

I would be lying if I denied the warped exposure to Americana I received before I ever set foot on this country. This "GPA is not what will get you into college" argument was used by so many reckless American teacher-vigilantes at my school who, for some reason, made it their personal mission to destroy our paths to America by attempting to "Americanize" us. In their crusades to rid us of the "shallow" Asian, study-hard mentality, they managed to deny the As to those who truly deserved it, and to amplify (and sometimes even exalt) the behaviors of those who did not try at all.

"What is a Democrat, and what is a Republican?" I remember asking my teacher. It was the 2008 presidential elections, and the polls were rolling in on the live CNN stream at our auditorium. Donkeys and elephants rolled back and forth on the screen, and my 8th grade self was trying to make sense of all the fuss. "If you're a Democrat, you're awesome," the kid next to me shouted to the class, "And if you're a Republican, you're evil!" Our teacher cracked up, doubling over with laughter for a whole minute before finally throwing up her hands and exclaimed, "Yup. Pretty much."

Later that day, I joined the rest of my friends to heckle and browbeat little Timothy Yin, the Ohio-born Chinese kid who was the only Republican in our grade. "You're a racist!" we yelled, "You hate Obama! You like McCain! You like old men!" Our screams echoed the hallways, as little Tim cowered in the bathroom.

It was not until I took an American History class two years later when I learned the true definitions behind the two parties. This was when I realized that, after spending my whole life in constant fear of the Chinese communist

government one day returning to its socialist roots and seizing my family's assets, perhaps I would actually prefer a smaller government under a Republican party as well.

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After my first two months at American, I realized I belonged to so many places at once that I truly didn't belong anywhere at all. I first found myself at a Chinese Students at AU party, nervously laughing with my peers at jokes I didn't understand. In some ways, the "local Chinese" kids were right; the China that I preached to my friends about was indeed the view of an outsider, someone who never fit into the fabric of "local China." A few days later, I was invited to a South-East Asian Students at AU party as well, to which I was asked to wear "traditional Malaysian garments" (which I didn't have), and to sing a song in Malaysian (which I didn't speak). Arriving at the social with a dress shirt and a Chinese song ready to play, I closed down the night singing an unknown song that nobody sang along to. I walked into these social events yearning to reconnect with my former self, and I walked out feeling I would never find it again.

My iPhone screen-sized window shows me that my former life back at home has transformed. Change is the motto of any international community; I used to change with the community in Shanghai, but ever since I moved away, it has changed without me. Old, ugly buildings that my sister and I would pass by every day on our way to school have been torn down and replaced with new, uglier ones. Some old families with whom I shared a warm, intimate relationship have long moved away, replaced with new families that I can only meet through a cold, flat screen. The people from my international Class of 2013 now lead their own lives on all corners of the globe, busying themselves with colleges, or army trainings, or gap years. Soon even my sister and her class will march towards an eventful future, branching out across the map of the world. As the wonderland of Shanghai that I took for granted slowly mutated with time, I started losing hope of going back to a home that stayed exactly the way I left it. Not much time passed before I found myself longing to return to a place that didn't exist anymore.

§

"Never forget that you are Chinese," my dad told me. Last night, I arrived back in my American room after watching an epic American movie with my pleasant American friends. I took out my American iPhone to put on some soft, American jazz, bending down to turn up the volume of my American speakers. I emptied the American change from my American jacket pockets

before changing into my American sweatshirt. It was not until I opened that bag of American chips like a true, stereotypical American when I glanced into my American mirror to see a Chinese face staring back at me. I let out an old-fashioned, American gasp. I had already forgotten who I was.

As the calendar on my wall slims down with every passing month, my phases of melancholy slim down with it. I have started to refer to myself less as the outsider from nowhere, and more as the American from another universe. In my universe, people all speak English with the proper American accent, but can speak with two or three other accents as well. In my America, barely anybody understands the thrill of baseball, as swimming is the dominant sport. In my universe, Americans are all classy blues and jazz fans, filling the nightclubs with smoke and groove.

In my America, I adopt new values to add to my traditional, Chinese principles. I recall an old Chinese proverb, preaching that true beauty lies not in appearance, but in a person's ability to view his life though many eyes and still stand proud in his originality; perhaps that's what my father meant when he told me not to forget where I was from before I left for the land ruled by first impressions. Perhaps that's what he meant when he named me Soaring Pride. The Chinese Phoenix in me that once flew with such passion and grace has transformed into an American Eagle, and it soars higher than ever.

My Thermos:
Lunchtime Throughout My Academic Career
AmiLin McCLure

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Finding My Footing
Riley Oshiro

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The weird thing is, I see skating everywhere. I see it in the way people walk: the extension of the leg and the transfer of weight is like the takeoff of any jump. I see it when I watch someone raise her hand in class: a clean, swift movement, extending delicately all the way to the tips of the fingers. I watch steam swirl and rise off a hot cup of tea and see the tantalizing first movements in a program. I see it inside my head while listening to any piece of music, hip hop or classical, it doesn't matter; I can feel my body moving, see the choreography, hear the ferociously satisfying tear of blade on ice underneath my feet. For twelve years, skating was my world. Injuries, sparkles, smiles, spins, jumps, falls, joy, and tears. I literally cannot remember not knowing how to skate. It was my identity. My source of both passionate love and hate.

I was six when I fell in love for the first time. It was the real deal. I was enamored. Skating is unlike any other feeling in the world. I and I alone am in control of everything I do and somehow landing on a piece of steel less than a centimeter wide makes perfect sense. It is graceful and beautiful and terrifying all at once. It is absolutely euphoric, an addiction and a high like no other. And, as it often goes with love, skating and the choices I made were all part of a balancing act. Mistakes and complications occurred and for twelve years I pushed through them all, until now.

I didn't think the last day I skated would be my last. I knew plenty of girls who stopped once they got to college and plenty of girls who continued. I was sure I would continue. I was in love, and you don't just *give up* on love.

I often think back to my last season competing. It was the one right before I left for college. I had never hated skating as much as I did that summer. The practices were long and hard. The fact that I was leaving soon caused me to be anxious and jumpy on the ice, and my coaches got frustrated.

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"Choreography!" I can hear Lou Anne's voice yelling at me from the side of the rink. "When you focus too much on the jumps you lose the flow and the program goes flat," she says.

I stare up at her, thinking, "And if I fall on every single jump, think about all the points I lose. Isn't it better to have a flat program?" I've been on the ice for nearly two hours. I am cold, frustrated, sore, angry, and on the verge of tears. Instead of voicing these thoughts, I just try again, skating out of the axel at one end of the rink to the double salchow double loop at the other: a section I perform nearly twenty times a day, six days a week. This time, I fall.

"Better, but you lost your focus. Keep your shoulders level on the second jump."

In figure skating it's remarkable that you can get praise for falling, that sometimes failing at what you're supposed to do provides a breakthrough. This time my focus is just on the shoulders as I skate down the ice and into the jump.

Legs tight, shoulders level, chin up. It's perfect.

ʃ

When I remember moments like these I feel an inescapable sense of loss. I remember who I was, and who I am now, and the two just don't fit together. It's like I have two puzzle pieces inside of me; they have similar patterns but no matter how hard I try, they won't click. I miss hating something so much it makes me cry. I miss someone yelling at me across an ice rink, not because she hates me, but because she loves me so much that all she wants is for me to succeed. I miss falling over and over and over. I miss the moment of magic that comes when I finally get it right.

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"She comes to us from the Rocky Mountain Figure Skating Club in Westminster, Colorado, please welcome Riley Oshiro." Clapping and indistinguishable cheers from friends punctuated by the occasional "smile!" fill my ears.

Lou Anne grabs my hands and squeezes, "Take out the loop, you're stressing over it, so stop. Speed, don't stop pushing the whole time. Breathe, two deep ones before you start. Trust your body and stay in the moment, no rushing, you don't need to. Okay, good luck. You've got this."

Quick high five and I turn and smile. Crossovers around the corner as I glide and present, judges first, always judges first. I stop and roll my neck and ankles, shake out my arms, two deep breaths and find my starting pose. The first notes of Brian Tyler's "Summon the Worms" from *Children of Dune* rumble through my ears and I'm off.

This is all me.

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There is a picture of me from that last competition where, when I look at it, I can't recognize myself in that girl's eyes. In the photo I'm in a position called a Biellmann: my arm is pulling my foot up over my head and I'm perfectly balanced on one foot, flying down the ice. In the photo the girl's chin is up. Her lips appear to be blowing a kiss, but really they're just exhaling a long breath out. Her body is muscle: lithe and powerful. I see confidence, someone who knows exactly who she is. If you do something for long enough, it becomes you. I wasn't "Riley the girl who figure skates," I was "Riley the figure skater." Now I'm just "Riley." I can't remember what it feels like to have my foot stretched over my head and the cold air tearing and biting at my cheeks and lungs as I skate. I see the beautiful girl in the red dress made especially for her, and I know it isn't me.

ʃ

I have never written about skating. I've never had the guts; I always thought it would be too painful. How do you relate twelve years of love, hard work, and undying dedication through words? How do I describe flying to a person who has never flown? Never felt a blade cutting through butter under her feet. Never let the movement of her body tell her story. Skating is a part of me. It's part of my core and part of my soul. I know I haven't forgotten how to skate, but I'm not sure I have the gumption to just get back out there.

The last day I skated was September 16, 2013. I had a tryout for a team based out of the Ballston Ice Center in Maryland. I remember performing for the coach: nothing special, just basic footwork, spins, and jumps. She offered me a place on the team, and I almost accepted on the spot. A week after I had moved into school I got the official offer.

"Practice from 6am to 1pm on Saturday and Sunday. Three private lessons a week plus 15 hours outside of that. Where am I going to find the time?" I asked my parents over Skype. "Plus it takes over an hour to get there on the Metro. I don't know if I can do it."

"If you want to, you'll find a way," my mother responded. "It's up to you Ri, we support you no matter what."

I sat thinking about my life before I left home and my life now. Did I really want to continue waking up at 4:30am to get on the ice? Was I okay not being able to go out with friends on the weekend? Did I still have the drive to skate this much?

Ultimately the decision to stop skating was all mine. No one influenced me, and I was completely in control. The decision eats at me. There are times when every fiber of my being wishes I were on the ice. Maybe that's why I see

skating everywhere; it's a part of me I can never lose, something that flows through my body that was once as vital to me as blood. I don't know if I am better off without skating and I know I am still searching for my new identity, waiting to fall in love again. I look at myself and I'm not the beautiful girl who could fly, who could turn ice into fire, and music into life.

The Act of Contrition
Kayla Perkins

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Analyzing Texts

Girls (and Guys) Just Want to Have Fonts

Madeline Black

§

Think about your morning routine. You wake up, turn off your alarm, brush your teeth, have some breakfast while you read the paper, and drive to work. This may not be your exact routine, but chances are it looks familiar. Think about the words you see when you're going about your morning routine. The numbers on your alarm clock, the nutrition information on your cereal box, the signs directing you as you drive. How many different written words do you think you encounter? How many different fonts?

In all likelihood, you don't notice the fonts in your day-to-day life, and if you do, you're not going to think much of them. And with good reason: whenever you see a written word, you see a font. If one were to note each font one saw, there would be little room for any other thought. In his book, *Just My Type,* Simon Garfield tells the story of a man who tried to avoid the omnipresent Helvetica for a single day, going to such lengths as averting his eyes when he saw something written in the typeface and not using "any Helvetica-signed transport, nor buy any Helvetica-brand products" (Garfield 126). His task was more difficult than it would first appear to be, as the man found himself unable to use any public transportation in New York City or eat at any restaurant that used Helvetica on the menu (Garfield 126). This man experienced first hand the degree to which written language is used in everyday life. It is not obvious how important words and fonts are until you try to do without them. The things that most influence people aren't always the most arresting or grand; oftentimes, what changes lives the most are those things that we don't even notice. Fonts are one of these influencing factors. Though it may not necessarily be conscious, every single font one encounters elicits a distinct reaction in the individual.

Even to the average person with no knowledge of typeface or design, there is a clear change in the way different fonts are perceived. A college professor would never accept an essay written in a font like Papyrus, but would likely be perfectly happy to take one in typed in Times New Roman. Perhaps this is because Papyrus is difficult to read, perhaps it is because Times New Roman is required for MLA, or perhaps there is a deeper, subconscious reason: perhaps professors trust words written in Times New Roman over Papyrus. In

a survey conducted by the *New York Times*, it was found that participants trusted a statement written in Baskerville over the same one written in Comic Sans (Morris). Those participating in this survey did not know their reaction to the font was what was being gauged, but the varied reactions towards different fonts were evident: statements written in Baskerville had the highest amount of weighted agreement, as well as the lowest amount of weighted disagreement (Morris). Statements written in Comic Sans, on the other hand, had the lowest amount of weighted agreement and one of the highest amounts of weighted disagreement (Morris). Overall, Baskerville had a 1.5% advantage in terms of perceived truthfulness (Morris). This study demonstrates that the trust we place in words is dependent on the way words are written.

On the surface, there is no logical explanation for why some fonts are given more credibility than others: if the statement is the same in both fonts, there is no *real* reason that levels of trust should change. In the same way that a logical, well-written speech is rendered ineffective by a poor orator, the persuasiveness of written words is dependent on their appearance. The change in trust, it seems, must come from the font, or the presentation of the word. The fonts chosen for this particular study come from opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of credibility. Baskerville is a font with a history going back several centuries (Garfield 97-105), whereas Comic Sans is often ridiculed and was created in the early nineties (Garfield 10-21). The long history of Baskerville gives it a trustworthiness that the relatively new and generally derided Comic Sans simply does not have. Baskerville is the kind of font used in the first editions of authors like Dickens and Tolstoy; Comic Sans is used on diner menus and children's book reports. While the fact that studies have actually been done about fonts may be surprising, the results likely aren't a huge shock to anyone who has ever seen these fonts. Baskerville looks like it belongs on a playbill for a Shakespearian tragedy; Comics Sans looks like it belongs on the homework assignment of a first grader. Baskerville simply looks more official, and, if you're anything like me, you tend to trust official looking things.

Why is it that we associate credibility with appearance? Is the phenomenon of trusting certain fonts over others really logical? Perhaps. Making judgments about the reliability or credibility of a font based on its appearance is just as rational as when you judge someone based on what clothes they're wearing. Fonts are essentially the clothing of a word. Like how a hipster clad in plaid is perceived differently than a jock in a jersey, the word "hipster" typed in 12 point Futura is perceived differently than the word "**jock**" typed in 24 point **Impact**. Even if you typed the same word in two different fonts, perception of the word would change. The word "**hipster**" typed in Impact looks out of place compared to Futura. Indeed, it almost appears threatening, an adjective that generally doesn't come to mind when thinking of hipsters.

As with clothes, there is a wide variety of ways that fonts can be perceived. For example, typefaces "can have gender…heavy, bold jagged fonts are mostly male, and whimsical, lighter curly fonts are mostly female" (Garfield 25). In the same way pink is traditionally perceived to be a "female color," fonts like Curlz MT, are perceived as feminine (Garfield 25). Professor of Psychology David Dunning, as quoted in Morris Errol's Opinionator blog, goes so far as to say "fonts have different personalities. It seems to me that one thing you can say about Baskerville is that it feels more formal or looks more formal" (Morris). If fonts are like clothes, then Baskerville is a three-piece suit and Comic Sans is a clown costume. One would automatically take someone in a suit more seriously than a clown costume because of the implications that the costume holds. From just visually comparing the two, it is obvious that Baskerville is the more formal font.

While it is clear that certain fonts appear more official than others, it is difficult to determine what exactly makes one more formal than another. Perhaps looking at the history of fonts gives the most insight into why we look at certain typefaces with more trust than others. In the same way that an older book is presumed to have more literary merit than one recently published, an older font is looked at with more respect than a newer one. The primary visual difference between modern and classic fonts lies in whether or not they have serifs. The difference between a serif and a sans serif font "lies at the feet or tips of the letters, with a serif typeface carrying a finishing stroke often appearing to ground the letter on the page" (Garfield 35). The letter A typed in Baskerville compared to an A typed in Helvetica demonstrates the visual difference between serif and sans serif fonts. The first example of a serif utilized in the Latin alphabet can be traced back to the 2nd century BC, and the characteristic has continued to be "used for centuries in many forms of scripts, and has of course come down to modern times in printed capital letters as well as in those cut in stone" (Harrer 4). In contrast, the oldest Sans Serif font is probably Caslon Egyptian, which dates back only to 1816 (Garfield 36). The fact that serif fonts have been around for so long gives them more credibility.

Serif fonts were utilized in some of the first printed books: while Gutenberg's 1455 Bible used a typeface that resembled Old English calligraphy (and is quite illegible to the modern eye), serif font would become popularized in Venice by the 1470s (Garfield 28-29, 78-79). Venetian type of the 15th century was the first typeface to break "away entirely from the gothic weights of Gutenberg, Schoeffer and Fust: it is easily readable to use today… the first truly modern printed font" (Garfield 79). The works of Virgil, Shakespeare, and Copernicus were all first printed in serif typefaces. Though it may seem inconsequential, the little wings at the bottom of letters help to tell the story of language. The sheer amount of history that comes with serif type likely leads people to trust words written in these fonts more than those without serifs.

The perceived trustworthiness of serif fonts has real world applications in fields like advertising and marketing. Perception of fonts is particularly important for political advertising as candidates attempt to win the trust of voters. When politicians are seeking to find more credibility in an election year, the font chosen for campaign merchandise and advertising usually features a serif because it implies something that has been around for a while and will continue to remain steadfast. People like David Nalle use knowledge of fonts to their advantage; Nalle works as a font designer and a political consultant, reconciling artistry and practicality (Murphy). Nalle analyzed the advertising of the 2010 midterm elections to find that many Democratic candidates forsook progressivism and utilized serif fonts to compete with the grass-roots, handwritten quality of Tea Party signs (Murphy). The contrast between the handwritten signs of Tea Party protestors and the sleek steadfastness of the serif fonts used by party candidates attempted to emphasize the reliability of the party establishment. Think back to your daily routine. The font of the newspaper you read and the logo of the news program you watch are likely serif because these are entities that people want credibility from. *Time* magazine, CBS, and all the major daily newspapers (with the exception of *USA Today*) all use serif fonts, likely for this exact reason: readers and viewers expect to trust where their news comes from.

Though they may be perceived as less trustworthy, sans serif fonts are not any less important than their older relatives. Some of the most influential and widely used fonts in today's society are sans serif: Helvetica and Univers both emerged from Switzerland in 1957 and went on to change the world of design (Garfield 124). Helvetica, in particular, has been significant. Sans serif, readable, sleek, "Helvetica is a font of such practicality… that it is both ubiquitous and something of a cult" (Garfield 126). It is notable for its un-notableness: it is so unexpressive and clean that it can be used in almost any context. Helvetica first gained popularity in the 1960s as advertisers sought to simplify and modernize their images. Gaudy script typefaces were "swept away in favor of just one word in Helvetica" (Garfield 128). It is near impossible to navigate in modern society without it: BMW, Jeep, Urban Outfitters, Verizon, Nestle, Saab, Oral B, and Energizer all use the font for their logo, and it is used on many public transport signs (Garfield 127). Though it may be one of the most widely used typefaces in the entire world, Helvetica doesn't actually *say* much as a font. If Comic Sans is a clown costume, and Baskerville is a three-piece suit, then Helvetica must be a white, plain button-down shirt. Despite what some would call its blandness, Helvetica still manages to generate distinct emotional reactions from individuals. By simply altering the thickness or angle of the font, people's perception of Helvetica changed.

There are different versions of every font. On a basic Mac word processor, Helvetica comes in six different varieties, including **bold**, *oblique*,

and light. Helvetica Neue (simply an updated version of the original Helvetica created by the Swiss) comes in eleven different varieties. In addition to regular, bold, and italicized, one can type in a light, **ultra light**, or **condensed** version of the font. Even small variations like these can change the perception of a font. A recent study attempted to find out whether individuals associate different fonts with different emotions. Beth Koch, who conducted the study, sought to find out three major things: whether viewing typefaces produced emotional responses, whether people have the same responses, and whether certain emotions were associated with specific features of the font (bold, condensed, so on) (Koch 207). Koch used different versions of Helvetica to test emotional reactions to fonts (210). The study found that subjects associated different versions of Helvetica with diverse emotions: **Helvetica Ultra Light** was associated with desire, **Helvetica Bold** with fear, and **Helvetica Condensed Bold** with joy (Koch 211). Though many of those who took this particular study had some background in typography (Koch 213), a layman like myself can see the emotion in these particular fonts. The fact that even in a font like Helvetica, which seems so boring and common, people still perceive emotion speaks to the way we process words. Even the small changes in a font are noticeable. Simon Garfield gives the example of typing a love letter: one wouldn't write a note like this in a font like **Helvetica Condensed Bold** (Garfield 141). Indeed, it would look quite threatening, as if you were saying "love me, or else." Instead, the lighter, more gentle **Helvetica Ultra Light** might be better suited to that particular proclamation of emotion. Though we may not notice the way we perceive emotions in specific fonts, it is a phenomenon that influences us all in an imperceptible way.

Font doesn't just influence perception on an emotional level. Certain fonts have continually proven to be better for learning than others (French and Blood 301). In a study published in Great Britain's *Journal of Educational Research*, analysts saw that certain fonts helped students better retain information (French and Blood 303). The study found that while many educators preferred simpler fonts because they believed they would "reduce the cognitive load on the learner," in actuality, there is "evidence that harder-to-read, or disfluent, fonts hold promise for promoting recall and retention of written information" (French and Blood 302). Researchers hypothesized that this phenomenon was because students had to read over words written in more disfluent fonts multiple times, thus helping them to better retain the information (French and Blood 303). Disfluent fonts include ones with serifs, those that are italicized, or those that are otherwise ornamental. Using a disfluent font like *Monotype Corsiva* or even Comic Sans has been proven to be useful for the information retention of all students, but is particularly beneficial to those with dyslexia; indeed, this particular study saw an

improvement of 19% between the regular and disfluent fonts for dyslexic students (French and Blood 303). In this case, the influence of fonts on individual perception goes past a merely emotional response: fonts have the power to change one's life for the better.

Next time you go about your morning routine, try to note the different typefaces you see. How many times do you see Helvetica? Times New Roman? Question why the font on your box of Cheerios is different from the one on your toothpaste, and ask yourself what it says about that product. By choosing Helvetica over Futura, what is the designer of a product trying to convey to you, the consumer? Humans are visual creatures. Everyday, we are bombarded with different images, from advertisements on billboards to posters stapled on telephone poles, and are forced to determine their meaning. Visual literacy, or the practice of being able to see and interpret different images, has become a critical part of today's world (Elkins 4). The visual literacy that comes with looking at a font is more subtle than that of looking at an actual picture because it is impossible for "written word to be separated from fonts. Yes, we *read* the word 'horse,' but we also see the letters, the typefaces, the shape of the word on the page. Is this not part of the *meaning*?" (Morris). Nevertheless, recognizing the effects fonts have on us is necessary: being able to identify the way a font is perceived allows you to harness this power to influence others. Whether it is through advertising, political campaigning, or education, fonts have the power to change minds and change the world.

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Contemporary Western Death-Culture: What Our Cemeteries Say About Us

Trent Burns

§

You are going to die. Death is, after all, universal; it transcends social, ideological, and geographical differences. Despite this, each culture has a unique, and sometimes deeply contrasting, attitude towards mortality. As Western culture has evolved, so have its customs surrounding death. In her dissertation, "Death Perception: Envisioning a Cemetery Landscape for the 21st Century," Erin Sawatzky identifies a historical pattern in which so-called Western "death-culture" fluctuates between two main extremes: necrophobia and necro-romanticism. Necrophobia, the extreme fear of dying and dead bodies, is a term applied to attitudes that reflect an overall cultural stigma towards death. In contrast, necro-romanticism refers to attitudes that embrace or are otherwise intrigued by death. Throughout its development, Western culture has moved back and forth across Sawatzky's hypothetical death-culture spectrum, and has illustrated its boundaries with these two opposing attitudes. History provides different reasons for Western attitudes to shift, but the polar ends of the spectrum remain largely the same. The cycle appears to have developed so that death is alternatingly feared and romanticized. The most tangible examples of these shifting attitudes are cemeteries. Their physical appearance and roles within communities can be highly indicative of a society's death-culture.

In Western culture, burial grounds have long reflected social attitudes towards death and memorialization. Their surroundings, proximity to communities, public access parameters, and policies regarding memorials all illustrate Western views throughout history. In particular, shifts in cemetery policies may also be examined as a reflection of cultural attitude; cemeteries can be viewed as sacred, closed spaces, or as romanticized green spaces that the community can use for a variety of purposes. Sawatzky looks at a broad range of historical eras and movements to trace major shifts in Western attitudes, including early Christian attitudes and continuing up until post-WWII views. Her argument for a cyclical "pendulum pattern" is convincing, but her research stops short of identifying where exactly in the cyclical pattern contemporary

Western attitudes towards death fall. In the northwest United States, cemeteries are beginning to function as romanticized park spaces as well as burial grounds. However, this trend is still relatively new, and it remains unclear how far across Sawatzky's spectrum current attitudes may shift. Locally, Oak Hill Cemetery provides an interesting case study for the evolution of contemporary death-culture, and stands at a crossroads of Western attitudes overall. It represents a park space in the urban environment of Washington, D.C. However, it remains a privatized cemetery and does not represent a complete shift towards multifunctional park spaces. Its management recognizes the value of romantic cemeteries, but is adamant about differentiating between 'green space' and 'park space' statuses. Oak Hill Cemetery is neither entirely necrophobic, nor is it entirely romanticized. However, its historic romanticism and growing trends of cemeteries as park space may indicate a broader movement of Western culture towards romantic attitudes once again.

Necrophobic attitudes towards death can be seen throughout history. A cultural fear of dying evolved from Christian beliefs regarding judgment in death. This eventually shifted Western attitudes towards widespread necrophobia that persisted for several hundred years. Sawatzky notes that, "As this fear of death increased, so too did the elaboration of rituals and of individual memorials in attempts to alleviate the dread and isolation now associated with death" (39). She also goes on to observe that this fear of death drove cemeteries closer to the church, and were responsible for a rise in the closing off of once public burial grounds (39). Death had become a malevolent entity, so cemeteries began to reflect this. Gothic architecture and gated spaces became more common, and burial grounds were often attached to churches in an effort to separate the dead from the general community. Elaborate memorials, tombs, and mausoleums all became reflections of the deceased. These outward signs of righteousness were, to the living, a triumph over death's finality. Hierarchal memorials and burial sites represented a tangible legacy of those who had died, and artificially maintained the social gradient that death ultimately eradicates.

Contemporary science and medicine facilitated another shift in Western death-culture post WWII. Death became reduced to its most basic medical terms. Romantic ideals were eschewed in favor of more modern attitudes, which stripped death of mystery and of intimacy. Cremation provided an alternative to traditional burial that was viewed as cleaner, more modern, and a more efficient form of internment (Sawatzky 59). Fran Helner, in a piece for a Catholic periodical, highlighted and clarified the church's growing support of cremation. In 1963, the Catholic Church began allowing cremations (Helner), and cremation rates rose dramatically throughout the 1970's until the early 2000's. By 2005, cremation accounted for roughly one third of post-mortem services in the US ("US Cremation Statistics"). This shift in favor of cremation reflects a significant turn away from romantic attitudes in the West. It marks a

sterilization of post-mortem rituals, and a shift towards the secular image of death fostered by contemporary science. Sawatzky notes that, "Death became 'medicalized,' no longer considered natural, but rather a failure" (62). The advancement of medical science led to a new era of necrophobic attitudes in the West. As scientific advancements prolonged life, death resumed its role as an antagonist and as an "unnatural" event. Post-WWII attitudes reduced it to a failure on the part of the medical or scientific communities. Western culture began to accept that bodies are no more than organic matter that will rot once dead. The accompanying increase in cremation ceremonies illustrates its latent anxiety and subsequent desire for control - even over one's decomposition.

Historically, romantic Western views of death can be traced back as far as ancient Greece, where it was viewed as an intrinsic part of life. Through rituals and memorialization the dead continued to play important roles in society long after their deaths. Sawatzky notes that this made cemeteries a romantic blending of two worlds: that of the living and that of the dead (17). This meshing of the living and dead, of space and place, illustrates some of the earliest romantic attitudes towards death.

However, normative attitudes like this would not be seen again until the Victorian Era, which once again romanticized the dead through complex systems of mourning and fanatical memento keeping. Victorian burial sites, despite moving away from densely populated areas in response to growing health concerns, were designed similarly to gardens. They represented communal space, and were well-landscaped with paths and plots balanced against dedicated green space (Johnson 787). This, coupled with extensive mourning protocols, publicized death during the Victorian Era and moved Western culture towards a far more accepting attitude of death.

Some of these attitudes can be seen at Oak Hill Cemetery, which was founded in 1850 at the height of romantic death-culture. Situated on 22 acres of land overlooking Rock Creek, it was designed to intertwine its plots with the natural surroundings: a typical element of the 19th century Romantic Movement ("Oak Hill Cemetery History"). Anthropologist Thomas Harvey, in analyzing the romanticism of cemeteries, notes that cemeteries can be valuable wildlife habitats, historical locations, and green spaces particularly in urban environments (298). This is especially true of Oak Hill,

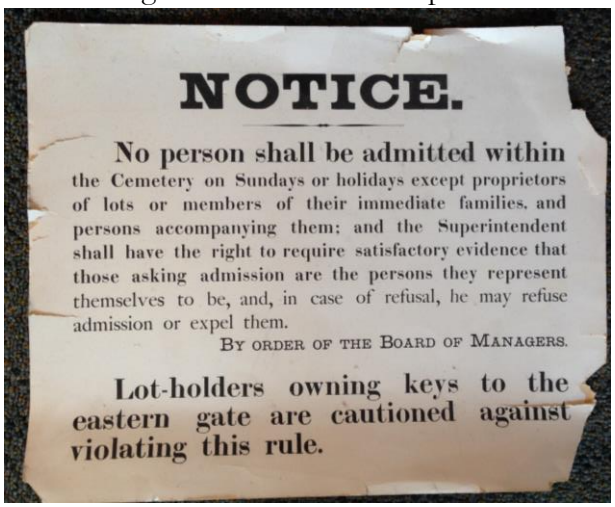

Fig.1. Period sign from the early 20th century indicate increasingly restrictive policies regarding the public use of Oak Hill land.

since Washington, DC, has long been a city that recognizes the importance of park space. David Jackson, superintendent of Oak Hill Cemetery, concluded in an interview that 19th century attitudes towards burial grounds were fundamentally different than contemporary views. He notes, "There was more openness with regard to access within the cemetery...As late as the 20th century it was not uncommon for families to use cemeteries as a picnic area" (Jackson). He also recalls cemetery board meeting minutes in which the administrative board expressed concern over the use of cemetery grounds by non-owners.
Jackson acknowledges the value of Oak Hill Cemetery as precious green space in a highly urbanized city, but does not see the cemetery being used as park space anytime soon. "Today's views are just different," he says, "it wouldn't be the norm today" (Jackson).

Oak Hill's reluctance to relax policies regarding public use may also stem from the difficulties of operating as both a cemetery and a park space. A general increase in property wear and tear, modified hours of operation, and vandalism are all factors that would make it difficult for Oak Hill to operate as park space even if it wanted to. This is not to say that Oak Hill Cemetery is an inaccessible green space; despite being a privately owned cemetery, its grounds are generally open to the public. A sign posted at its gate does, however, make the prohibition of leisurely activities clear; Oak Hill does not allow joggers, dogs, or bicycles on the property:

Fig. 2. Current sign from Oak Hill Cemetery.

While Oak Hill's administration is reluctant to modify its policies, other cemeteries across the US are taking a much more active role in the so-called neo-romantic movement.

In his article, Harvey also examines similar historically romantic cemeteries in Portland, Oregon, saying "cemeteries have developed into multiple-use landscapes -- contemplative parks, arboretums, recreational spaces…in addition to their function as burial grounds. They reflect our changing attitudes towards the cemetery landscape…" (Harvey 310). While Oak

Hill Cemetery has yet to move this far forward in becoming a multipurpose space, its management remains firmly dedicated to the upkeep of the romantic landscaping and its presence as a park space within the community.

A small but growing movement on the west coast of the US may be indicative of a shift away from the current Western death-culture. A movement towards the romanticism seen in the 19th and early-20th centuries can especially be seen in the progressive Northwest. Harvey calls it a "romantic landscape park movement" (Harvey 302), and *American Cemetery*, a trade publication for cemetery owners and managers, calls it a "green" or "natural burial" movement. The central tenets of the movement include a desire to utilize cemeteries as park spaces, particularly in and around urban areas, as well as an increased sense of responsibility for the land on which the burial sites are located. While most Green Burial Council approved cemeteries in the US are located on the west coast, more are either being established or converted on the east coast every year ("Green Burial Council"). Despite approved burial grounds being established in neighboring states such as Virginia, DC law explicitly prohibits green burials within its jurisdiction (Jackson). This means that vaults and caskets must be sealed, eliminating biodegradable options that carry less environmental impact.

"There's a definite movement, that's undeniable," says Oak Hill superintendent David Jackson, but he remains uncertain about the feasibility of neo-romantic cemeteries in DC. Unlike the sprawling, environmentally conscious burial grounds found near Portland, Jackson looks at the lack of space in and around DC as a central challenge for cemeteries looking to join such a movement. "Those cemeteries have the luxury of…having the space and the legislation to do that," he says of neo-romantic cemeteries, "but it's certainly the 'in' thing to do" (Jackson). If the romantic cemetery movement continues to spread across the east coast, existing legislation will need to be reevaluated in order to sustain such a shift in attitude. Harvey's research shows that cemetery policies and related laws have already been reformed in areas like Portland, and east coat states are beginning to reflect a similar transition in death-culture.

One of the largest and most successful green cemeteries has embraced this highly romantic view of death, and aims to benefit its community as well as its clients. According to Kimberly Campbell, natural burial sites "put death in its rightful place," and encourage a healthier attitude towards a natural life cycle (qtd. in "Green is Good" 22). Campbell's family owns and operates one of the first green cemeteries on the east coast in South Carolina. The 74-acre property includes walking trails, and remains open for public use. Like other romantic park movement supporters, Campbell views this park space is valuable for cemetery visitors and members of the public alike; "Life in all its glory is going on around you" ("Green is Good" 23). Similarly, Harvey examines a romantic cemetery movement in and around Portland, Oregon, as an example of cemeteries embracing a renewed sense of necro-romanticism.

One cemetery in Portland, he notes, is open to pedestrians and bicyclists at virtually all times and provides a "commuting route that is safer and more pleasant than…the surrounding streets" (Harvey 304). While Oak Hill has not modified its policies to this extent, it still provides a valuable green space for its community. Pedestrians are welcome, and the landscaping of Oak Hill Cemetery continues to be one of the administrations central concerns. The scenic location and park space atmosphere of the cemetery may be indicative of a slow shift away from Sawatzky's proposed necrophobic attitude that rose throughout the late 20th century.

Sawatzky's research provides convincing historical evidence that Western death-culture has evolved along a single spectrum. This cyclical pattern alternately romanticizes and eschews death, with different historical events impacting the dynamic of each shift. What Sawatzky fails to identify, however, is what her research implies about a shift towards necro-romanticism in contemporary Western death-culture. In this respect, analyses like Harvey's may indicate early signs of the next major shift in these views, at least in the US. What remains unclear about this new romantic movement is whether or not it will extend past its west coast roots, and if it will in fact mark the beginning of the next major attitude shift. Oak Hill Cemetery is historically romantic, but the direction it will go in remains somewhat unclear. For several reasons Oak Hill has yet to completely embrace a neo-romantic attitude towards death in so far as opening its space to the community around it. As its administration notes, it exists as a green space but not as a park space. In Sawatzky's death-culture spectrum, Oak Hill falls somewhere in between the necro-romantic and the necro-phobic. However, its importance as a green space, if not a park space, makes it an interesting case study for where contemporary attitudes may move in the near future. Death-culture is in a continual state of flux, and the changing role of sites like Oak Hill Cemetery will ultimately say more about our future than the pasts they contain.

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Historiography and Slaughterhouse-Five: *The Role of Creative Works in Preserving our Past*

Kristen Pellizzi

§

How does the human race define itself as a species? How does it gauge its progress or understand its roots? In the timeframe of human existence, students and scholars of all ages have studied, analyzed, and interpreted past events in attempts to answer these questions and more. In my personal experience, which is not unlike that of the average American student, I was first exposed to this nature of study in a class simply referred to as "history." *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines history as "the discipline that studies the chronological record of events (as affecting a nation or people), based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their causes" ("History"). Thinking analytically back to this subject and its role in shaping my education, it became more clear to me that the tools used to teach history were crucial in shaping my understanding of it. I recalled years of exposure to secondary sources, such as textbooks, and primary sources, like speeches or journal entries, that were used to explain past events to students like myself. The name that can be used to describe these sources and the study of them is "historiography." *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines historiography as "the writing of history […] [and] the theory and history of historical writing" ("Historiography"). It is important to note that there is a slight difference between history and historiography. To clarify, "history" refers to the overall discipline that focuses on the study and interpretation of past events, while "historiography" refers to the written record of these events, as well as the study of the development of history as a discipline over time.

The existence of historiography is somewhat disquieting, but also intriguing. Why is historiography disquieting? The answer to this question is rooted in the notion that the discourse of history and the mediums used to convey it are commonly accepted as fact. For instance, when a student attends a history class and reads from a textbook, both teacher and pupil generally expect that the information in this source can be trusted. The existence of historiography indicates, however, that "history" is not merely a series of facts

in a textbook detailing historical events, but is rather an assembled construct: certain events are included, some are omitted, and the same incident can be described from a variety of perspectives. All of these elements impact our understanding of the past, which in turn impacts our understanding of contemporary events.

Armed with this idea of historiography and the constructed-ness of history, it becomes compelling to reexamine the tools used to teach history. In particular, the critically acclaimed German-American author, Kurt Vonnegut, and his most successful piece of literature, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, provide a forceful backdrop with which to reexamine historical events. Thus, it is plausible that *Slaughterhouse-Five,* despite its blend of fact and fiction, functions as a form of historiography because it encourages a reexamination of history, it exposes cultural attitudes surrounding past and currents events, and creative works like Vonnegut's are debatably more effective at reflecting how an event *felt* to those who experienced it*,* rather than simply relaying what *happened*. Going even further, I argue that the proliferation of more nontraditional teaching tools, such as creative works like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, are not only supplemental, but also necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of history.

To begin this exploration, one must have a general understanding of Kurt Vonnegut and the context of his novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Philip Beidler, a professor of American literature at the University of Alabama and considered "one of the founding fathers of Vietnam War studies," provides a comprehensive overview of Vonnegut's World War II experiences and how they correlate with events in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* with his crudely titled scholarly article, "What Kurt Vonnegut Saw in World War II That Made Him Crazy (Along with Billy Pilgrim, Rabo Karabekian, Eliot Rosewater, Et Al.)." Beidler describes how Kurt Vonnegut was confined as a prisoner of war in the German city of Dresden. During a raid, Allied forces dropped high-explosive bombs and incendiary devices onto the city of Dresden. Vonnegut and his fellow POWs survived the raid because they were confined in an airtight meat locker of a slaughterhouse. When they emerged from the shelter, the architecturally rich city was destroyed. German soldiers then ordered Vonnegut and the surviving POWs to excavate and burn human remains—the vast majority of them civilians—in order to prevent the spread of disease. The utter destruction of the city was evident, but the casualty estimates have been debated over the last several decades. Lower estimates range from 18,000 to 25,000, while higher estimates have fluctuated anywhere between 35,000 all the way up 500,000 (Connolly). The number Vonnegut references in *Slaughterhouse-Five* when discussing the destruction of Dresden is 135,000 casualties (Vonnegut 10).

Although Vonnegut emerged physically unscathed in the aftermath of the bombing, he struggled to put this experience to the page for more than twenty years until *Slaughterhouse-Five* was finally published in 1969, a conflict he addresses in the very first chapter of his novel (Vonnegut 2). The novel focuses

on the main character—a meek, awkward man named Billy Pilgrim—who becomes "unstuck in time," meaning that he involuntarily "jumps" to random moments in his life (Vonnegut 22). These moments include anything from Billy's abduction by an alien race known as the Tralfamadorians, to Billy's survival of the Dresden bombings, which mirror Vonnegut's own World War II experiences. As a result of these "jumps" to different moments in Billy's life, the structure of the novel is nonlinear. This structure serves a direct purpose: for Vonnegut to describe the destruction of Dresden in the most effective way he possibly could. Vonnegut references the very structure of his book in the first chapter, explaining, "It is so short and jumbled and jangled […] because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (Vonnegut 19). A distinctive mixture of fictional elements, historical details, and Kurt Vonnegut's own experiences also supplement the non-linear, jumbled structure of the text. As a result of this mixture, the novel engages with the complicated notion of historical "fact" in a literary, artistic way. Furthermore, Vonnegut's novel demonstrates that creative works of fiction may provide alternative conduits to historical preservation. In other words, they can function as unique forms of historiography.

The first way in which *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be read as a form of historiography is that it encourages a reexamination of historical events. Christoph Classen and Wulf Kansteiner, in their foreword, "Truth and Authenticity in Contemporary Historical Culture: An Introduction to Historical Representation and Historical Truth," contend that cultural artifacts can probe, challenge, and alter our understanding of historical fact. To begin this discussion, Classen and Kansteiner introduce a series of essays that examine the way cultural artifacts impact various perspectives on World War II and the Holocaust. For example, Classen and Kansteiner present Ann Rigney's argument that Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* has shaped cultural memories of the Dresden Bombings. Specifically, the novel helped turn the Dresden bombings from a relatively unknown event into a heavily criticized military decision, despite the fact that the book contains factual errors. Professor Wayne D. McGinnis, one of several featured essayists in the 2010 publication of *Critical Insights: Slaughterhouse-Five,* edited by Leonard Mustazza, in his essay titled, "The Arbitrary Cycle of *Slaughterhouse-Five*: A Relation of Form to Theme," describes this transformation that Classen and Kansteiner touched upon in further detail. McGinnis writes, "Historical events like the bombing of Dresden are usually 'read' in the framework of moral and historical interpretation" (56). To explain this concept, McGinnis describes how Harry Truman's announcement of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden,* both of which are mentioned within Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, describe the destruction that occurred during both bombings in terms of "war priorities" (56-57). However, when Vonnegut frames the destruction of Dresden as a senseless massacre, the historical event is understood in a

drastically different manner, and Truman's announcement and Irving's text appear disturbing in comparison.

In addition to how *Slaughterhouse-Five* forced a reexamination of the Dresden bombings, it also led to a reevaluation of how World War II was viewed as a whole. Christina Jarvis, a humanities professor at SUNY Fredonia, explores the topic of war glorification and masculinity extensively in other publications, such as in her 2010 book, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II*. In her essay, "The Vietnamization Of World War II In *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow*," Jarvis examines how Cold War events of the Vietnam War opened a dialogue for challenging cultural narratives surrounding masculinity and World War II. She supports her argument with analysis of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* to show how iconic authors of the Vietnam War period have questioned the glorification of World War II in America's cultural imagination. Specifically in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Vonnegut did not write a depiction of World War II in a glorious, flattering manner (Jarvis 98). His main character, Billy Pilgrim, is not a stereotypical "macho" war hero, but rather functions as an anti-hero. This means that Billy is not a courageous, idealistic soldier, but is rather an inquisitive observer whose experiences expose a larger societal problem: certain wars are revered, and the resulting bloodshed and destruction is glossed over or romanticized.

Evidently, Classen and Kansteiner's introduction, McGinnis's essay, and Jarvis's piece all recognize how *Slaughterhouse-Five* was pivotal in sparking discussion about World War II and the Dresden bombings. Thus, despite its use of abstract elements, *Slaughterhouse-Five* acts as a unique form of historiography because it documents a crucial perspective on World War II and the Dresden bombings. While the Dresden bombings could be boiled down to a few short sentences in a history textbook, or completely omitted in favor of more "significant" events such as the Normandy invasion or the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Slaughterhouse-Five* demands that attention be paid to this moment in history. In doing so, Vonnegut enriches our understanding of history, and his book becomes a critical form of historiography.

Going further, *Slaughterhouse-Five's* role as a form of historiography is two-fold: not only does it document cultural attitudes about past events (as discussed previously in regards to the Dresden bombings), but it also forces the audience to recognize cultural attitudes surrounding more recent events. Therefore, the timing of *Slaughterhouse-Five's* publication deserves notice: in 1969, the United States was in the midst of the Vietnam War, and Vonnegut was widely considered an outspoken pacifist ("Kurt Vonnegut: Still Speaking to the War Weary"). Appearing when it did, Vonnegut's novel was interpreted as making a strong statement not only on World War II, but on the Vietnam War as well. Referring back to Christina Jarvis's essay, "The Vietnamization Of

World War II In *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow*," she highlights not only general parallels in Vonnegut's work and the Vietnam War, but also points to direct references to the war that Vonnegut makes in his text. For example, Jarvis notes that Vonnegut alludes to Curtis LeMay, the general and commander of the Air Force who originally suggested that the U.S. should bomb the North Vietnamese "back to the Stone Age" during the Vietnam War (99-100). With the allusion to LeMay, Jarvis argues, Vonnegut sets up multiple parallels and continuities between World War II and the Vietnam War, namely by focusing on the senseless destruction that occurred during both conflicts.

In addition to the Vietnam War, themes in *Slaughterhouse-Five* also correlate with cultural attitudes surrounding more recent historical events. For example, Tom Vitale, in his NPR radio broadcast "Kurt Vonnegut: Still Speaking to the War Weary," introduces archived audio of interviews in which Kurt Vonnegut discusses his intent to write a novel that did not romanticize war. By positioning Billy Pilgrim as an anti-hero and by framing the Dresden Bombing as a senseless massacre, Vonnegut effectively portrayed the irrationality and destruction of war. As a result, Vitale argues that the themes of irrationality and destruction depicted in Kurt Vonnegut's fiction are still highly relevant decades after the book was initially published. Delving into the correlation between *Slaughterhouse-Five* and contemporary events in even further depth, David L. Vanderwerken, who currently serves as professor of twentieth century American fiction at Texas Christian University, argues that Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is even more representative of America's current mood post-September 11th, 2001, than it was when it was published in 1969 in his essay "Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* at Forty: Billy Pilgrim—Even More a Man of Our Times." He supports his argument with a discussion of how audiences reacted to the novel when it was first released and how these reactions are applicable today. Specifically, in the 1960s and 1970s, readers interpreted *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a potential commentary on the unpopular Vietnam War through the lens of World War II. In regards to today, Vanderweken contends that general sentiments of the American public echo Vonnegut's story of Billy Pilgrim's disillusionment and meek paralysis. He writes, "Billy's overwhelming sense of his own helplessness is something contemporary Americans continue to validate. Vast forces assault Americans at every turn—two seemingly endless wars, an economy that seems inexplicable, natural and human-caused disasters—so much so that the nation is exhibiting the symptoms of clinical depression" (48). In summation, *Slaughterhouse-Five* not only documents cultural attitudes surrounding past events like the Dresden bombings, but it also forces audience to recognize cultural attitudes surrounding more recent events relating to the Vietnam War and post-September 11th United States. Thus, *Slaughterhouse-Five* functions as a unique form of historiography because it encourages a conscious reexamination of

attitudes surrounding historical events that affects the way history is interpreted and recorded.

It is arguable that *Slaughterhouse-Five's* ability to act as a commentary for both historical and contemporary events may mean that the work's original intention is being manipulated or that the integrity of the work is threatened. This calls into question whether *Slaughterhouse-Five* can serve as a form of historiography that can stand the test of time. Vanderwerken, in his same essay, shows how inherent meaning in literary works, as well in society's own perceptions of historical events, is arbitrary. In other words, different texts and events can be reinterpreted to reflect or fit a country's current attitude or cultural norms. However, I would argue that this flexibility is what makes this work timeless and therefore an even more effective form of historiography. With advancements in technology, education, and general knowledge, it makes sense that our understanding of certain works will change over time. In addition, the fictitious elements present in *Slaughterhouse-Five* should not detract from its merit as a conduit of historical preservation. Lars Ole Sauerberg, professor of literature in English at University of Southern Denmark, in his essay "Fact-Flirting Fiction: Historiographical Potential or Involuntary Parody?" argues that when novelists inject pieces of reality into the traditionally fictitious space of their stories, they run the risk of unintentionally creating parody. However, Sauerberg notes that the mixture of factual and fictitious elements of *Slaughterhouse-Five* serves a clear, effective purpose. He notes, "Vonnegut's 'irrational' narrative is meant to discourage any easy familiarization with irrational events" (193). In other words, Vonnegut did not want audiences to romanticize the depictions of war within his text. Rather, Vonnegut sought to expose the horrors and senseless destruction he himself witnessed.

With this idea in mind, *Slaughterhouse-Five* appears to be an important form of historiography because it expresses the emotional breadth of historical events with more accuracy that a sanitized, completely factual textbook could. Stacey Peebles, assistant professor of English and director of the Film Studies program at Centre College, in her essay, "Fighting to Understand: Violence, Form, and Truth-Claims in Lesy, Vonnegut, and Herr," argues that complex individual experiences with violence and war may be sanitized or negated by more established collective histories. Peebles supports her argument with an analysis of how *Wisconsin Death Trip* by Michael Lesy, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, and *Dispatches* by Michael Herr challenge collective histories. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Vonnegut mainly challenges the collective "good war" perspective of World War II (Peebles).

However, some historians would argue that works like *Slaughterhouse-Five* contain too many fictitious elements to be considered against more accurate collective histories. In response to this critique, Ann Rigney, who currently serves as chair of Comparative Literature at the University of Utrecht, in her essay "All This Happened, More or Less: What a Novelist Made of the

Bombing of Dresden," argues that theoretical reflection should account for the fact that historiography and literature play distinct roles in one's understanding of history. Therefore, readers need to critique these genres in different ways. Rigney acknowledges that historians criticize *Slaughterhouse-Five* for inaccuracies in its depiction of the Dresden bombings; however, she asserts that the text is more similar to a graphic novel than to a realist narrative. As a result, its significance as a historical artifact cannot be judged by the degree to which it gives a full and accurate description of past events, but rather by how effectively and imaginatively the novel engages the readers with the horrors of war. Thus, it is important for audiences to recognize that a combination of both artistic and historiographical practices produces valuable agents for understanding the past. Simply put, a creative work like *Slaughterhouse-Five* can encompass the emotional breadth of an event in a way that a paragraph in a traditional school textbook cannot. If only certain versions of history are considered the authorities on bygone eras, then society misses the emotive impact of these events, and subsequently loses a more complete version of history.

After analyzing the ways in which *Slaughterhouse-Five* functions as a form of historiography, larger implications of this exploration must be considered. Namely, I contend that the proliferation of more nontraditional teaching tools, such as creative works like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, are not only supplemental, but also necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of history. In regards to creative works, I do not just refer to literary works, but to other creative works as well. When economies falter, one of the side effects are budget cuts in school districts; this means that classes that focus on creativity, such as art, or music, are often the first to be eliminated because they are considered less crucial than other subjects (Hawkins). However, this logic could not be more misdirected. Rather, creative works are another opportunity for generating teaching tools: they act as windows into the past, as well as reflections onto today. For instance, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* depicts the chaos of the bombing of Guernica with more emotional clarity than a blurb in a textbook. Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* portrays not only the hysteria of witch hunts in seventeenth century Salem, but also the unjust McCarthyism and "Red Scares" of 1950s Cold War America through the craft of allegorical theater. These creative works, in addition to Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five,* are just a few of countless other conduits to historical preservation. Their presence and integrity as forms of historiography, therefore, should not be easily slighted.

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Sofia Coppola's Camera and its Gaze

Monica Remmers

§

Sofia Coppola deals in atmospheric filmmaking. Her camera lingers on things we might otherwise see as mundane, and moves languidly from one object to the next. Sunlight struggling to make its way through the leaves of a tree and face-to-face shots of characters underwater are some of her visual trademarks. Coppola's characters are in transitional moments in their lives—they exist in liminal spaces—and Coppola's visual style communicates their sense of being uncertain and overwhelmed, surrounded by material things. "[H]er speciality," writes Anna Rogers, "is visually mapping the world of someone who is lost in his environment" (44). The camera doesn't necessarily explore the inner workings of these languid characters, but instead explores their external world—languidly.

Yet for all its careful calculation, Coppola's filmmaking is routinely criticized as frivolous and shallow: all style and no substance. She is an incredibly divisive filmmaker. She often makes films about seemingly shallow people, to be sure, and she makes no attempt to soften or make sympathetic such characters. Rather, she reveals through her filmmaking the limitations and subjectivity of the traditional camera. Sofia Coppola's is a feminine camera that actively engages and subverts the male gaze as defined by Laura Mulvey. Though Coppola's female characters are often liminal creatures within the context of their own stories, they are far from passive in terms of *how* their stories are told. Or, as Pam Cook puts it, "in Coppola's film, style is substance" (40).

Laura Mulvey deconstructs the roles of female characters in film in her influential 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema." She argues that women in film are objectified and made passive through the audience's identification with the on-screen male actors and by the masculine camera itself. She writes, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (832), thus making women the "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (834). Coppola's women are very much on display, but they are not, as Mulvey insists

they must necessarily be, coded for the erotic impact of the audience. They are also imminently aware that they are being looked at, and many of them actively (though wordlessly) challenge the gaze of the camera. The camera thus becomes a stand-in for society's gaze. However, we are meant not to identify with the gaze of the camera, which attempts to judge, but with the glassy-eyed gazes of Coppola's protagonists, who are struggling to find their place in the world.

Coppola's women often indulge themselves in excesses—pastries, shoes, melodrama—to fill the void created by "the absence of a desired object when desire becomes almost an imperative" (Smaill 158). That is, these women know that they are supposed to aspire to something, but they don't know what. Their lives become inundated with vapid, material things: an essentially feminine excess. These characters, one critic writes, "all struggle with expressing feminine agency in some form" (Kennedy 41). So although Coppola's characters live in worlds that value shallow things, they are not necessarily shallow for pursuing such things themselves. They are searching for meaning, but haven't a clue where to find it.

Through an examination of each of Sofia Coppola's five feature films, I will argue that her films are not only in conversation with Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, but that Coppola works to subvert this concept by having her characters challenge the camera. Sofia Coppola thus asks her audience to question their participation in the gaze.

The Virgin Suicides (1999)

On the face of it, it would seem that *The Virgin Suicides*, based on the 1992 novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, would fail any measure of women having agency in their own stories. After all, this story of the five Lisbon sisters who, mysteriously, all committed suicide, is relayed by a male narrator. (More accurately, the story is told by a collective narrator—the book uses the pronoun "we.") The girls are transformed into goddesses by the obsessive boys who tell their story, and they have little voice in telling it.

But *The Virgin Suicides* cleverly reveals the limitations of the male observers in telling women's stories. These boys are not objective narrators. In the first few minutes of the film, the youngest girl is carted off to the hospital after her first suicide attempt. While she rests in bed, a doctor (his back to the camera) asks her, "What are you doing here, honey? You're not even old enough to know how bad life gets." Her answer is immediate and confident: "Obviously, doctor, you've never been a thirteen-year-old girl." In this exchange, the doctor asks the question that is likely resting on the lips of every audience member. He is the Spectator, the stand-in for the audience in this moment. The girl's answer to him, then, can be read as a near-direct challenge to the audience. You cannot judge or understand me, says the girl. All you can do is try to feel my pain.

Moments later, the film's title appears in elaborately feminine handwriting, the "i"s dotted with tiny hearts. The ethereal face of Lux, the eldest Lisbon sister (played by Kirsten Dunst), fades in over the title, and she winks—she *winks!*—directly at the camera. While the Lisbon girls' story is not told from their perspective, the story is covered by their fingerprints. Moments like the one where the youngest girl challenges her doctor and where Lux winks knowingly at the camera are direct challenges to the males who presume to tell their story.

The male narrator admits that "we" will never understand the mystery of the Lisbon girls, try as we might to solve the puzzle. This narrator (and our guide through the story) owns up to his insufficient knowledge. The only way to truly understand what happened would be to get inside the girls' heads, which is beyond the scope of the boys' collective gaze—and Coppola's camera.

***Lost in Translation* (2003)**

2003's critically acclaimed *Lost in Translation* follows two lonely people, both in crisis and searching for meaning, as they meet in a Tokyo hotel. The first is aging actor Bob Harris (played by Bill Murray), who is in the city to film a whiskey commercial, and the second is Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), a recent philosophy graduate who is in Tokyo to accompany her photographer husband. The two are underwhelmed by the excessive culture all around them. In his article "There is Nothing *Lost in Translation*," Todd McGowen writes of their relationship, "they see absence where others see excessive presence" (McGowan 58). There are several shots of Bob and Charlotte gazing listlessly out of cab windows as the garish rainbow lights of myriad advertisements are distortedly reflected over the glass that separates them from the city. Bob and Charlotte literally cannot connect with these excesses, nor can they even comprehend them fully. They are isolated from the city and the culture of excess.

Like Coppola's first feature, *Lost in Translation* also opens with a sequence that subverts Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. A long shot—very long, at thirty-six seconds—of Scarlett Johansson's "panty-clad rear end" (Kennedy 41) would seem to be, by definition, reflective of feminine passivity objectification. "What is interesting about this shot," writes Todd Kennedy, "is that it lasts so long as to become awkward—forcing the audience to become aware of (and potentially even question) their participation in the gaze" (45).

But as the film continues, the audience is repeatedly asked to gaze *with* her, not *at* her. Charlotte spends much time gazing out the window of her hotel room, and the camera is repeatedly positioned ever so slightly behind her. We cannot see the object of her gaze through her perspective nor can we objectify her. We merely notice her gaze and how it differs from that of the camera. Charlotte manages to avoid the camera's direct gaze initially, and ironically, the middle-aged Bob is (somewhat unwillingly) the exhibitionist on whom we focus

our gaze. Fascinated bystanders gossip unseen about Bob's identity as he sits at the hotel bar, and we are privy to their conversation. Bob is objectified by strangers throughout the film, while Charlotte passes through various conversations and situations almost invisibly. This contrast inverts Mulvey's assigned gender roles and shows that men be objectified, and women can be makers of meaning. The confrontational opening shot is a direct challenge to Mulvey's way of looking at men and women, and the film that follows explores another possible view.

***Marie Antoinette* (2006)**

Sofia Coppola's revisionist take on Marie Antoinette is, as Todd Kennedy puts it, "not so much concerned with a 'realistic' depiction of a historical figure; instead, the film is concerned with making the audience aware of the degree to which the female protagonist is defined and constrained by the image—and with it identity—imposed upon her both by her society and the society and the film itself" (Kennedy 45). Again, Coppola is exploring the construction of identity and image, and their points of intersection.

The film, like *Lost in Translation* and *The Virgin Suicides*, opens with a subversion of Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. Kirsten Dunst's young Marie Antoinette, semi-dressed, is reclining luxuriously on a chaise longue while a servant massages her foot. She drags a finger down the tiers of a puffy pink-iced cake and then sharply turns her head to the camera, as if she'd suddenly become aware of it. Her challenging look almost says, "What are you looking at?" (Kennedy 48). But just as suddenly as she acknowledges the camera, she becomes bored and, it seems, allows the camera to stay. This opening shot establishes both the conversation and the tension between character and camera.

When the queen-to-be first comes to Versailles, she receives an extended lesson in court manners. Naked, and standing awkwardly before her many servants, she is told that she is not allowed to dress herself, or even reach for any clothing. She must wait for the highest-ranked person in the room to dress her, but, of course, individuals of increasingly higher rank enter the room one-by-one during the dressing process. "This is ridiculous," she mutters in a 21st-century drawl, hinting at her alignment with a modern audience. Marie Antoinette's lack of agency is diegetic, and not imposed on her by the camera. In fact, the camera is positioned behind Marie, which forces the audience to "focus their attention on the women who stare at her rather than focus on Marie's naked body" (Kennedy 52).

Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette is not a particularly sympathetic creature—she is, if anything, a self- and fashion-obsessed teenager—but that is not the point. "[W]e are not invited to decide whether she is good or bad. Rather, we are encouraged to respond on an emotional level to her situation" (Cook 37). As an audience, we are also made to look upon those who gaze at

(and judge) Marie Antoinette and realize, perhaps, what it is like to be an object of this harsh gaze. And as the opening shot reminds us, we cannot always trust the lenses through which we are shown the world. Coppola makes a strong case here for the subjectivity of storytelling. As she draws attention to this subjectivity, Coppola casts a light on the subjectivity of a camera's gaze as well. Because the camera's gaze can be both so fickle (in the shifting of perspective) and so inflexible (in the failure to show the *right* perspective), it cannot be married to the male gaze—at least not in Sofia Coppola's world.

***Somewhere* (2010)**

Somewhere, like *Lost in Translation*, features a male protagonist, but the film is not necessarily from his perspective. In many ways, it is *about* a particular man's gaze, from which the audience's gaze is divorced. Johnny Marco is an aging movie star who is submerged in the superficialities of Hollywood life, but he finds no pleasure or engagement from this shallow sensory overload. So much around him seems to exist to give him pleasure, yet he finds none. His point of view is challenged when his 11-year-old daughter Cleo is sent to live with him.

The film's first fifteen minutes are nearly without dialogue, which forces the audience to put their attention on the image: its meaning and its veracity. In two extended sequences, a pair of identical twin pole-dancers come to Johnny's hotel (toting their own collapsible poles) to entertain him. In both scenes, the women are awkwardly framed by an unmoving camera; various parts of their tanned bodies are frequently out of view. They smile searchingly at the middle-aged movie star outstretched on his bed, but his eyes are vacant. The girls here are so pathetic as to be sympathetic: they search for meaning where there is none. The fact that the camera, meant to represent Johnny's perspective, ungraciously lops off their twisting heads and arms reveals just how myopic and nonrepresentive of reality our protagonist's gaze is. His gaze is divorced from the audience's.

In a counterpoint to the twin performances by the identical strippers, Johnny, when first looking after his daughter for the weekend, watches her long-form ice skating routine. The subdued blue of her soft, feminine leotard and her pale skin are in stark contrast with the bronzed bodies and garish outfits of Johnny's pole-dancing twins. Johnny's gaze wanders at first, his attention on his phone and the million other stimuli in his life, before finally focusing in wonder at his daughter. But unlike the scantily clad strippers, the prepubescent Cleo never looks into Johnny's eyes. She has no desire to mold her performance to his expectations. For the moment, at least, she exists outside of the sexualizing male gaze.

Both of these sets of performances are in direct contrast with Laura Mulvey's conception of female bodies in performance on film. Mulvey argues that women in film are often (conveniently) placed in the role of performer so

that the contrivance of their bodies being the subject of the camera's gaze is minimized. But even though both the pole-dancers and Johnny's daughter are females in performance, *Somewhere* argues that the male gaze is insufficient in capturing their experiences. The unnamed strippers try and fail to appease the male gaze, while Cleo, on the other end of the spectrum, is shown to be impenetrable to it. While the camera may mimic Johnny's gaze (Kasna), it does not endorse it.

The Bling Ring **(2013)**

Marie Antoinette's themes of feminine excess and the vapidity of celebrity culture reemerge in 2013's *The Bling Ring*. Based on the true story of a group of upper middle-class California teens who, obsessed with celebrity lifestyle, start robbing the homes of the people whose lifestyles they covet, *The Bling Ring* is a story of images. The protagonists are deeply (or perhaps shallowly) concerned with images, and variants of the question "How does this make me look?" pervade the film. The only gaze that matters to the ring of petty thieves is their own; they absolutely reject any external gaze. The most sympathetic character, a new kid in school named Marc, is introduced in a shot where he's staring into his full-length mirror, trying to decide on an outfit. He's every bit as shallow as the girls he'll fall in with.

Selfies and mirrors play a critical role in *The Bling Ring*. They serve as a way for these characters to construct their own image, and the selfies, as posted on Facebook, are intercut with the rest of the film. They are given equal weight to the intercuts of TMZ snapshots, perhaps speaking to these characters' delusions of grandeur. In multiple scenes, characters even use their webcams as mirrors, emphasizing both their narcissism and lust for fame. Through the Hermès handbags and spikey Louboutin pumps they steal and wear out the door, these Hollywood burglars fashion fantastic identities for themselves. Through the snapshots they steal with their iPhone cameras and upload online, they hijack Coppola's camera and attempt to create their own images in a void.

Much like in *Marie Antoinette*, we are not invited to pass judgment on these characters. Coppola's camera is, for the most part, completely restrained. The most memorable shot of the film involves a long take and a slow, slight zoom in on B-list celebrity Audrina Patridge's glass-walled house as two members of the bling ring, like shadows in the night, break in and sweep up expensive goodies as they move from room to room. It is a moment in which their identities are completely erased by the darkness, and they have, for the first time, no control in the image they project.

Only in the final shot of the movie does Sofia Coppola break the fourth wall and directly address the audience. The character who has been most successful in negotiating her own image, Nicki (played expertly by Emma Watson), uses her small celebrity to express penitence to the eager paparazzi. She sits down for an interview with *Vanity Fair* (a nod to the film's source

material) and makes a talk show appearance. In that televised interview, she turns directly to the camera and says with the utmost sincerity, "You can follow everything about me and my journey at NickiMooreForever.com." And then the credits roll.

This final shot, within the context of film itself, is yet another example of Nicki working to construct her own image. However, it is the first time this image construction has gone so far as to manipulate the camera, which has supposedly been *documenting* the girls' story all along. This suggests that the camera is not as objective as one would like to think, nor is it necessarily sympathetic to the "right" people. *The Bling Ring* is a film centered on a gaggle of vacuous, fame-obsessed teens: the sort of people we'd normally expect to see punished on screen. Coppola's camera offers little insight into the girls' thoughts and does not even damn the characters by the film's end—in fact, in the final shot, the camera seems taken in with the girls. By revealing its subjectivity, Coppola has once again shed light on the limitations of the conventional camera's gaze.

Conclusion

Coppola's first feature is ostensibly from a masculine perspective, but the girls in the film suggest (and boys explicitly admit) that that perspective is insufficient to understanding their story. The camerawork in *Lost in Translation* suggests the limitations of traditional filmmaking in conveying feminine excess and communicates a modern ennui. The character of Marie Antoinette directly challenges the camera, which will later show her story through her eyes. The shallowness of a male gaze is revealed in *Somewhere*, and the camera in *The Bling Ring* is ultimately revealed to be contributing to the consumerist culture highlighted in the film. Sofia Coppola's films reveal the subjectivity of the camera, and the camera is indeed a character in the films she makes.

Perhaps what makes Sofia Coppola's filmmaking particularly feminine (and controversial) is that all of her characters, male and female, seem to be bearers of meaning, not makers of meaning. Or rather, Coppola's camera refuses to make explicit the meaning her characters make. Her camera is restrained, and her characters' thoughts are often impenetrable. But her characters and the camera are always in conversation, if not in outright conflict.

Though Laura Mulvey was writing in 1975, the zeal with which representations of women in film are discussed has yet to diminish. Mulvey's theory was based on the canon of talking pictures, a canon, not coincidentally, built up almost entirely by men. Today, there is still a real paucity of female filmmakers. In fact, Sofia Coppola is one of only four women to ever have been nominated for an Academy Award in directing. It is no surprise then that the way in which women are portrayed in female directors' films is subject to especial scrutiny. And the fact the Sofia Coppola so openly invokes and plays with seminal ideas of women in film is one that deserves applause.

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