

Writing  
*for a*  
Real World

*A multidisciplinary anthology by USF students*

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*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* staff photographer, 1942

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## Editor's Introduction

BILL GOLDMAN's empty office in Kalmanovitz Hall reminds us daily of his shocking and untimely passing in the summer of 2017. Not just among his colleagues and students in the Department of International Studies, Bill was respected, admired, and appreciated. His magnanimity, his warmth, his altruism, his teaching abilities, and indeed his scholarship were all irreplaceable assets to the USF community, and he has been—and will continue to be—deeply missed. We humbly dedicate the fifteenth issue of our annual research journal to his memory.

## Notes on the Selection and Publication Process

This issue, as with all fourteen of its predecessors, is the result of a competitive selection process. Each year the WRW publication committee issues a call for students to submit their top two papers in May. More than twenty faculty reviewers, in service to the university, then spend about three weeks anonymously scoring the work. Everything here in print—and every honorable mention—received high marks from at least four faculty reviewers. (Naturally, all reviewers agree to recuse themselves if they recognize their own students' work.) From our many submissions we selected only ten works. Notifications were issued in June, after which the authors were invited to revise and polish their work before resubmitting manuscripts in August. Student copyeditors in my RHET 325 course then took over in August and helped read, lay out, and revise every page of this book throughout the fall, remaining in close contact with the authors.

## Notes on This Year's Publications

First and foremost, we congratulate Ariana Varela, winner of the *Fr. Urban Grassi, S.J., Award for Eloquentia Perfecta* for her top-scoring entry, "Blackness in Colonial Mexico." Written for Professor Katrina Olds' history course, Ariana's work offers an insightful analysis of Vicente Ramón Guerrero Saldaña's presidency in Mexico, during which he abolished slavery (1829). Ariana's essay claims that when current historians compare Guerrero with Lincoln and Washington, they miss the complexity of how racial identity functioned in the early days of Mexico's



founding. It's an impressive work of scholarship, and it is likely prologue for more top-notch work to come from Ariana.

Following Ariana's essay we present Madison Jackie Amido's outstanding research, "'You Defy the Odds': First Generation Students with Immigrant Parents Communicate About College Experiences." Written for Professor Brandi Lawless' Communication Studies course, Madison's qualitative research offers valuable new insights on the strengths and struggles these students face. Madison then offers suggestions on how universities can better support this valued population.

Next we are proud to print Sarah Frei's "The Underlying Foundations of Political Identity and its Interaction with Opinion Media." Written for Professor Bernadette Barker-Plummer's class, this ambitious research delves into the cognitive and moral foundation theories that underpin our historically challenging political discourse.

Following Sarah's piece is Michelle Gatesy's "The Modern Rom: Literature, Culture, and Identity," which presents an important original contribution to research on Romani literature. There is, as Michelle underscores, a serious dearth of research on this topic, but her essay unquestionably helps advance the field. Professor Christina Garcia Lopez has high praise for Michelle's work in her introduction, and I echo her sentiments here.

Vivien Glocker's research, "The Role of Insulin in Co-Occurring Depression and Diabetes," written for Dr. Ed Munnich's Biopsychology class, offers important observations on the significant overlap between two damaging health conditions. The profound implications for this research and Vivien's call for combined psychological and physiological treatment are truly compelling.

Moving from Psychology to literary studies, we are happy to be able to print Kristen Henderson's essay, "For the Sons or Daughters?: Contextualizing Differential Interpretations of La Malinche," which explores the shockingly wide rift between various interpretations of La Malinche as an important Mexican archetype in the wake of the Chicano movement. This essay, too, flourished in a class taught by Dr. Christina Garcia Lopez.

Our seventh essay, "Identity Politics are a Trick(ster)y Thing: SNL, Parody and the Performance of Race and Gender," written by Katharine Hong, offers a very insightful look at how norms are expressed in comedy shows. Written as a Media Studies capstone for Dr. Inna Ar-

zumanova, Katharine's exploration of three randomly selected episodes from *Saturday Night Live* through recent decades points to some unexpected trends.

"Leaving Behind the Binary: Embracing Gender on a Spectrum," by Leisha Ishikawa, was written for Dr. Kimberly Richman and Dr. Daniel Morgan as a Sociology Honors Thesis. Leisha's qualitative research, based on six long-form interviews, brings fresh insight that underscores the need to move beyond the "trans umbrella" when accurately portraying the stories of gender non-binary identifying individuals.

Eleanor O. Sammons' "Transgenerational Inheritance: The Effects of Trauma," written for Professor Lisa Biesemeyer, not only covers a very ambitious topic with a keen eye, it absolutely succeeds as a model literature review for future students in Writing in Psychology.

To powerfully conclude our issue, Kirstin Thordarsen's "The Mirror of Nationhood: Female Depictions in Prints as Symbols of Meiji and Taishō Japan," written for Professor Karen Fraser's Modern Japanese Art class, presents numerous fascinating observations about accelerated cultural shifts in pre-war Japan during the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō periods (1912–1926).

### Our Gratitude

To bring *Writing for a Real World* to fruition both as a book and as an annual celebration of student writing requires an enormous collaborative effort. People at every level of the university are involved—from the dozens of students who submitted papers, to the 24 faculty members who judged manuscripts, to the eight student copyeditors who created and pored over all the layouts, to the valuable behind-the-scenes work of the WRW Publication Committee members and our program assistants, to the presentations of our inspiring guest speakers at our ceremonies, to the fine work of our tech support crew who have enabled us to accept online submissions, and to the Deans who have enthusiastically supported our efforts—this project could not be what it is without multivalenced support. I thank you all for rallying behind this project with such enthusiasm.

Let me name here a number of our valued allies and supporters. We are, first of all, deeply grateful to Provost Donald Heller, for his support. We also thank Marcelo Camperi, Dean of the College of Arts and Sci-

ences, and Eileen Fung, Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences—both of whom continue to back this project with unwavering enthusiasm.

To my staff of eight ace copyeditors who pored over every sentence you'll read in this book, I owe a great debt. They truly helped professionalize this edition, and many of them will be compassionately wielding red pens in editorial capacities in the future. Their names are proudly and prominently listed on our masthead.

In terms of tech support, I'd like to thank Alexey Fedosov for helping us maintain our online submissions database. Alexey's creation of our online portal has helped us make a quantum leap in terms of garnering more submissions and enabling our reviewers to do their work remotely. A significant number of trees have been saved thanks to you, Alexey.

I'd also like to thank several people for helping us arrive at our cover image. I first encountered this haunting image in an exhibition called *Something from Nothing: Art and Handcrafted Objects from America's Concentration Camps* at the Thatcher Gallery at USF. Gallery Director Glori Simmons, who has also consistently helped create thoroughly compelling visual experiences, put me in touch with Nell Herbert, who did all of the research and obtained all of the images for the exhibition. Nell then very kindly directed me to contact the Museum of History and Industry where the image originates. The photograph, taken in 1942 by an unknown photographer for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, shows Mrs. Sumiko Furuta as she travels on a ferry from Bainbridge Island to Seattle, as part of her journey to Manzanar, California. Manzanar, of course, was just one of ten interment camps in the United States during the war. We chose this image not only because it speaks to the human costs incurred here in the Western Addition neighborhood as the result of Executive Order 9066 in the 1940s, but also because, given our current political climate, we hope that the image might serve as a stark reminder that the United States has not always fulfilled its promises. Our profound thanks, then, go to Glori Simmons, Nell Herbert, as well as Adam Lyon and Kathleen Kennedy Knies at the Museum of History and Industry.

We also gratefully acknowledge the important work of Digital Collections Librarian Zheng Lu who spearheaded digitizing WRW—making this, and every issue, available for future researchers.

Special thanks also goes to Deja Gill, program assistant for the Department of Rhetoric and Language. Deja deserves special praise for helping us with publication, publicity, distribution, and ceremony details.

Many thanks of course go to John Pinelli and Dan Dao for helping us pay the bills.

I'd also like to underscore my thanks to all 24 of our journal referees who spent many collective hours reviewing the research that ultimately ends up in WRW. As the saying goes: "Many hands make light work"—but the fact that so many people rallied to carefully review so many manuscripts while also grading final papers and resisting the siren song of summer, well, that effort demonstrates the real camaraderie to be found here at USF—and—the genuine devotion to honoring student work, as we have done in various forms for more than a century.

Our deepest thanks, of course, are reserved for those students who submitted their work. As our Honorable Mentions list illustrates on the following page, we received many more fine papers than we were able to publish. Congratulations go to all those who earned honorable mention, and especially to those students whose work we hope you will now read.

—David Holler, *Editor*

## Honorable Mentions

### ELIZABETH ANGAROLA

“Love: A Weapon of Mass Manipulation  
in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*”

Written for English 340: Shakespeare  
Professor Carolyn Brown, Department of English  
*and*

“Dracula’s Guide to the Destruction of Masculinity”

Written for English 320: The Gothic Novel  
Professor Ana Rojas, Department of English

### GABRIELLA BARNES

“Rembrandt van Rijn and His Preoccupation with the Ideas of Sight”

Written for Art 390: Rubens vs. Rembrandt  
Professor Catherine Lusheck, Department of Art + Architecture

### MEGHAN CROWTHER

“Water Protectors: A Content Analysis of News Representations  
of the Standing Rock Protests”

Written for Media Studies 400: Politics and the Media  
Professor Bernadette Barker-Plummer, Department of Media Studies

### SOPHIA PAGE

“What is a Ukrainian Identity?:  
Communicating Across Lines to Bridge Narratives  
Within the Ukraine Conflict”

Written for Communication Studies 375:  
International Conflict and Alliance Building  
Professor Brandi Lawless, Department of Communication Studies





*This issue is dedicated to the memory of  
William Sachs Goldman  
(1979–2017)  
Assistant Professor of International Studies*





# ARIANA VARELA

## Blackness in Colonial Mexico



*Ariana Varela, class of  
2017, graduated summa  
cum laude with a degree in  
History with a concentration  
in Latin American History.*

## WRITER'S COMMENTS

This project came from Professor Olds' Senior Seminar which focused on uncovering historical myths or distortions that were made popular during the time of nation building. In line with Michel Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*, I chose to research blackness in colonial Mexico to understand how the nationalist idea of *mestizaje* perpetuated an erasure of the histories of black and indigenous populations. Considering the continued debate over the recognition of Mexicans of African descent on the census, and my experience of anti-blackness in Latinx communities, I believe it to be important and necessary to research the history of blackness and its legacy on identity. While it is important to address anti-blackness in Latinx communities, it is also important to take a nuanced approach when discussing the history of blackness and individuals of African descent in Mexico. Yes, slavery did exist in Mexico, and, yes, there are still many people of African descent in Mexico today, but slavery in Mexico—and its legacy on race relations—is very different from the United States. Continued research on individuals of African descent in Latin America is necessary in order to give recognition and agency to these important historical actors.

—Ariana Varela

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

In her final research paper as a history major, Ariana Varela hoped to uncover the long-hidden history of Mexicans of African descent. This was an appropriate topic for a class on "Invented Past," but it was also a formidably difficult one. As she worked long and hard to find a manageable topic, Ariana kept finding rich and complex historical questions that could not be answered in only one semester. For example: was the first black president of the Americas actually Vicente Guerrero (d. 1831), Mexico's second president, even if he did not necessarily consider himself 'black'? In order to address this and other fascinating questions, Ariana interrogated the entire notion of 'race' by tracing individual cases of 'difference' in the Spanish colonial period. In the process, she challenges our easy certainties about 'race' and much else, in the past and present.

—Katrina Olds, Department of History

## Blackness in Colonial Mexico

### Introduction

VICENTE GUERRERO (1780–1831), “Mexico’s first black president,” who formally abolished slavery in 1829, has been dubbed Mexico’s George Washington and Abraham Lincoln combined into one.<sup>1</sup> Independent scholar Theodore G. Vincent, who argues for the above assertion, notes that Guerrero’s race is unclear due to the fact that in the year of his birth a rebellious priest refused to mark children’s race at the time of their baptism. Vincent concludes that Guerrero was indeed black due to the fact that his father was a mule driver, an occupation historically held by slaves.<sup>2</sup> While campaigning for the Mexican presidency, Guerrero pursued a democratic platform that would incorporate *mestizos*, mulattoes, and natives. According to Vincent, Guerrero sought to create nationalist unity against the European looking elite “who supported foreign economic and cultural dominance of Mexico.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout his campaign, Guerrero faced opposition from both the liberal and conservative elites. Vincent points out that, “Guerrero’s response to the racist attacks was not to form a ‘black agenda’ or a specific ‘Afro-Mexican’ interest group but rather to organize a broad multiracial coalition of mulattos, mestizos, and natives predicated on a one-person, one-vote democracy.”<sup>4</sup>

Why didn’t Guerrero pursue a “black agenda?” Did his contemporaries view him as black and indigenous? If Guerrero managed to pass legislation that abolished slavery and challenged the rule by the elite, then why is his figure seldom celebrated in Mexican national identity? Is it possible to call Guerrero the first *black* president of Mexico and project this racial category onto the past? In order to understand the social, political, and cultural context that Guerrero lived in, I will look at the century before his presidency and the complex social organizing of urban colonial Mex-

1 Theodore G. Vincent, “The Contributions of Mexico’s First Black Indian President, Vicente Guerrero,” *The Journal of Negro History* 86, 2 (Spring 2001): 153.

2 Ibid., 148.

3 Theodore G. Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico’s First Black Indian President* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 4.

4 Ibid., 4.

ico. Special attention will be given to the institution of slavery in order to assess “black consciousness,” social organizing, and the erasure of blackness from Mexican history. This will shed light on whether or not it is acceptable to dub Guerrero the Washington and Lincoln of Mexico.

Race and ethnicity in colonial Latin America were both rigid and fluid; categories of identification are always contextual. Contemporary racial categories should not be projected onto the past because they do not grasp the complexities of colonial social organizing, especially in Mexico during the seventeenth century. Slavery in colonial Mexico was not restricted to the narrative of plantation slavery; instead, the institution of slavery took on multiple expressions and produced institutions and social interactions that differed from the narrative of slavery found in the United States. Thus it is necessary to analyze the complexities of the institution of slavery in Mexico in order to challenge nationalist narratives that silence and erase individuals of African descent in order to promote a specific political agenda.

The process of nation building entails the creation of an “imagined community,” where specific aspects of identity determine whether or not an individual belongs to this imagined nation.<sup>5</sup> Vicente Guerrero became president during a tumultuous time due to Mexico’s recent independence from Spain. Liberal and conservative elites were attempting to decide what kind of government to establish in Mexico and what constituted Mexican national identity. Mexico was constructed as a *mestizo* (mixed) nation, one free of racism due to the intermingling of all races. Rather than being a color-blind society, Mexican national identity silences the history of slavery and the impact people of African descent had on society and culture. According to Herman L. Bennett, renowned scholar on the African diaspora in Latin America:

For the same reasons that the black past was silenced and rendered invisible in the colonial epic that sustains nationalists’ renditions of Mexican history, invoking and insisting on the inscription of that past involves far more than a historiographical intervention ... Representing the formation of colonial Mexico’s black culture disrupts the hegemonic and

5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

ideological conceit of national culture. In a discursive domain defined by nationalism, writing about the black presence is a provocation aimed at redefining the terrain of culture and nation.<sup>6</sup>

The century prior to the official proclamation that abolished slavery illustrates the complexity of identity and the various ways that the institution of slavery in Latin America differs from the narrative of slavery in the United States.

It is important to avoid projecting categories of race onto the past when attempting to give agency and representation to historical actors. The nuances of racial and ethnic labeling must be identified and analyzed in order to complicate and better understand the multiple factors that influence identity formation. Racial and ethnic labels are always used in specific sociohistorical contexts; thus, an in-depth analysis of the context and complexities of racial categorizations provides a more thorough analysis of ethnicity and social organization.

Many scholars argue that race and ethnicity in colonial Latin America do not fall into simple categories, nor do categories of race used today capture the complexity and contextual specificity of identity. Scholars analyze the various ways that identity was constructed and how identity was thought of differently in order to give agency back to historical actors who experienced colonial institutions. In *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, editors Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara assert that an individual's identity is constructed by political and cultural experiences. They define identity as "fluid, malleable, yet constrained ... identity as being born out of a dynamic between individuals and the givens of cultural and political life—the relations of being—through which humans make themselves and succeeding conditions of experience."<sup>7</sup>

6 Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 14–15.

7 Fisher, Andrew and Matthew O'Hara, eds., *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), ix.

## Colonial Blackness Historiography

Pioneering scholars in the field of slavery in colonial Mexico and the idea of blackness offer various analyses about the reality of living in colonial times. In *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720*, R. Douglas Cope argues that the developing labor system and patron–client relationship defined the division between individuals, both slave and free, in urban colonial Mexico. He argues against the idea that a racial ideology built on violent suppression, like the one that would later develop in the United States, organized Mexican society. Race labels were utilized to establish social networks, and create a sense of ethnic consciousness depending on the individuals one interacted with. Occupations were handed down through real and fictive kin, highlighting the importance of community and establishing labor as a system of social control.<sup>8</sup> Cope offers an analysis of slavery and employment, stating that poor *castas* (castes) and Spaniards were motivated by their need to earn money, not an ideology that purported the inferiority of certain races.

In *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*, Herman L. Bennett analyzes slavery in colonial Mexico in order to understand contemporary social organization and the formation of “blackness.” Bennett argues that a focus on slavery and the brutality enacted on people of African descent creates an image where people of African descent are restricted to an ahistorical, monolithic past that created this one idea of blackness that is similar to African Americans in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Bennett questions whether or not it is possible to discuss a black community when individuals of African descent identified as mulatto or any other *casta* identifier. He highlights the fact that if blackness is associated with the slave experience, this limits the possibility of discussing a black community once a certain notion of freedom is attained. Bennett focuses on the sociocultural themes of kinship, community building, and canon authority to amend the “historical amnesia” about blackness in Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Bennett claims that Latin Americanists privilege social mobility over community formation and solely discuss people of African descent in

8 R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 87–88.

9 Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 5–6.

10 Ibid., 19–21.

relation to white society.<sup>11</sup> In response, he focuses on kinship ties and the intricacies of multi-ethnic communities to analyze identity formation and ethnic consciousness. This builds on Cope's argument where he places labor and patron–client relationships at the crux of social control. Bennett diverges from Cope's analysis due to Cope's broad use of the term *castas* when discussing the non-Spanish and non-mestizo. Bennett states, “many scholars of New Spain's urban centers reduce all free blacks to ‘plebeians’ or ‘castas,’ overlooking the many nuances of racial identity among urban Africans, blacks and mulattos.”<sup>12</sup> Bennett moves beyond the narrative of slavery to analyze the free black population as part of the larger social fabric.

In “African Diasporic Ethnicity in Mexico City to 1650,” Frank “Trey” Proctor expands on Bennett's analysis of kinship building and community formation as a means of analyzing ethnic identity. Proctor analyzes marriage petitions for the self-identified racial labels that individuals of African descent declared. Proctor determines that while these “racial” categories were initially given by colonial powers in relation to the ports where groups of slaves were purchased, individuals of African descent were able to imbue these ethnic identifies with meaning and appropriate these labels for their own lives. He asserts that “despite the powerful acculturative force of Catholicism, Africans in New Spain proved more than able to manipulate Catholic institutions such as marriage and confraternities to define and maintain distinctive identities.”<sup>13</sup> Proctor rephrases Bennett's analysis of the power of the Catholic institution. He argues that individuals had agency when dealing with religious institutions; they were not simply impacted by Catholic law and values.

Although he focuses on slavery, Proctor gives agency back to the historical actors by analyzing the way that spouses were chosen and identity was self-generated. He points out that “slave marriages in Mexico City highlight the creation of African diasporic ethnicities that were spontaneously articulated in the Diaspora and were based on the redefinition of the common linguistic and cultural traits shared by slaves who originated

11 Ibid., xii.

12 Ibid., 146.

13 Frank “Trey” Proctor III, “African Diasporic Ethnicity in Mexico City to 1650,” in *Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora*, ed. Sherwin K. Bryant, Sarah Rachel O'Toole, and BenVinson III (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2012), 56.

from within common regions in Africa.”<sup>14</sup> Proctor focuses on the way people of African descent were able to retain distinct ethnic identities despite the assimilative force of Catholicism. He writes that “the ethnicity and race of persons found in parish records indicate personal declarations of ethnic or racial identities.”<sup>15</sup> The choice to marry an individual of a similar geographic origin in Africa challenges the idea of *mestizaje* and the blending out of African culture through racial mixture. Further research on the legacy of African tradition on Mexican culture is needed.

### Agency and “Blackness”

In an attempt to assert dominance and societal order, the Spanish created an elaborate system of identifiers by designating each ethnic mixture as a *casta*. R. Douglas Cope defines the “*sistema de castas* [caste system]” as “a hierarchical ordering of racial groups according to their proportion of Spanish blood. At its most extreme, this model distinguished more than forty racial categories, though few of these had any practical significance.”<sup>16</sup> In the context of the colonial lived reality, divisions based on physical appearance were much more complex. According to Fisher and O’Hara, the “racial or caste-based terminology was thus believed to map out, at least in broad strokes, a social reality, namely a ‘pigmentocracy’ or hierarchy of color that structured colonial societies, more visible through the lens of labor.”<sup>17</sup> Factors like occupation, social status, and kinship ties affected the way individuals interacted with colonial institutions and the extent to which they were held accountable for violating laws and legislation.

Although the Spanish sought to enforce strict social categories that restricted individual’s actions and appearance, economic power, and social relations diminished the enforcement of Spanish law and allowed individuals from the *castas* to transgress restrictions without punishment. “Once large numbers of *castas* became ensconced in the Hispanic economy,” Cope writes, “much of the city’s social control legislation was rendered meaningless. *Castas* could not realistically be prevented from

14 Ibid., 55.

15 Ibid., 60.

16 Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 24.

17 Fisher, Andrew and Matthew O’Hara, eds., *Imperial Subjects*, 10.



establishing their own households, from gathering in large groups and at night, or from possessing arms.”<sup>18</sup> Edgar F. Love notes how “individuals classified as Negroes or mulattoes were required to pay tribute, prohibited from carrying arms or sharp pointed weapons, not accepted into the ecclesiastical orders, not allowed to wear gold, pearls or silk, forbidden to go out after dark, denied the privileges of riding horses, [and] not permitted to live in Indian villages.”<sup>19</sup> The numerous restrictions placed on people of African descent largely went unenforced by colonial authorities. In British general Thomas Gage’s account of Mexico City’s black and mulatto women, Gage describes them as “in fashion” with a neck chain, bracelets of pearls, and earrings.<sup>20</sup> Although on paper there were restrictions on physical appearance and activities, these laws often went unenforced. This brings into question the process of caste labeling and the consistency in racial divisions.

An analysis of court documents exemplifies the inconsistency in racial labeling. One court record shows conflicting racial categories used for the same person. Skin color was not enough to determine racial categories; physical appearance and language were also used to determine an individual’s *casta*. Witnesses brought into court were often friends and acquaintances of the individuals involved in the proceedings and even these individuals had difficulty determining their friend’s *casta*.<sup>21</sup> Instances of “passing” frequently come up in court records. Because *casta* categories relied on multiple distinguishing factors in order to determine placement, an individual could change their cultural traits, lifestyle, and physical appearance to claim a different *casta* category. These individuals relied on social networks to protest records that labeled their race.

In colonial Latin America the “black experience” challenges the narrative of slavery and instead offers complex lived realities and social hierarchies. In colonial Mexico, the institution of slavery transcended the reality of plantation slavery that in effect created alternative social relations between people of various ethnicities. This ethnic diversity complicates the black and white racial dichotomy found in the United States.

18 Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 22.

19 Edgar F. Love, “Negro Resistance to Spanish Rule in Colonial Mexico,” *The Journal of Negro History* 52, 2 (April, 1967): 90–1.

20 Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 22.

21 Ibid., 53.

As Bennett points out:

Mexico housed a diverse population of impoverished Spaniards, conquered but differentiated Indians, enslaved Africans (*ladinos*, individuals who were linguistically conversant in Castilian, and *bozales*, individuals directly from Guinea, or Africa, who were unable to speak Castilian), and the new hybrid populations (*mestizos*, *mulattos*, and *zambos*, persons with both Indian and African heritage).<sup>22</sup>

The presence of multiple ethnicities explains the Spanish attempt to classify racial mixing in order to assert control over the expanding population. Divisions were based on of restrictions in physical appearance, language capabilities, and occupation, not a racial ideology like one that would develop in the United States.

In *The Limits of Racial Domination*, Cope asserts that in the urban center, “the typical Mexico City slave was a maid, a coachman, or a personal attendant.”<sup>23</sup> He also cites occasional instances where masters apprenticed their slaves in order for them to acquire a skill and earn wages. For example, Cope mentions Juan Mateo, known as Juan de la Plata, was a slave apprenticed to a silversmith who gained a prestigious reputation for his skill throughout the community. Although most of his wages went to his owner, Mateo was granted special privileges and mobility due to his lucrative trade.<sup>24</sup>

Recent scholars do not ignore the existence of plantation slavery along the coast of Mexico, rather they place an emphasis on the intricacies of urban slavery as distinct from, but equally important to, the narrative of slavery. Bennett writes, “[t]he need for labor, rather than an immutable and growing perception of difference among members of Spain’s social hierarchy, explains the decision to enslave Africans.”<sup>25</sup> In New Spain Africans were used to transport goods and were integral to the process of commodification. “As slaves,” Bennett says, “Africans were the vanguard of an increasingly extensive commercial economy that revolved around

22 Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 23.

23 Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 96–97.

24 Ibid., 96–97.

25 Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 10.

commodification of goods and people.”<sup>26</sup>

The social organization and labor demanded of an urban environment further differentiates slavery in colonial Mexico from the dominant narrative of plantation slavery in the United States. Urban slavery during seventeenth century colonial Mexico created a social arrangement that made it difficult to establish a cherished white space not to be infringed upon by slaves, free people of African descent, or indigenous people. Bennett states,

By the seventeenth century, Spanish households were established in close proximity to the *plaza mayor*, the cathedral, the *cabildo* (town council), and the viceregal palace. Angolans, along with the descendants of earlier arrivals from West Africa, inhabited the same space as the Spanish elite. Collectively, they lived and worshipped in close proximity to each other. But slaves and servants with access to street life by virtue of their work also shaped recreational worlds that were not frequented by their owners and employers.<sup>27</sup>

The urban layout made restrictions on interactions and public space difficult. In the urban landscape, slave subjects interacted with free persons and people of various ethnic makeups on a daily basis. Bennett notes that “As enslaved Africans, blacks, and mulattos worked in Mexico City’s commercial sector and domestic households, their patterns of interaction assumed an urban cultural expression that shaped slavery, eventually engendering novel manifestations of community formation and freedom.”<sup>28</sup>

An analysis of the relationships that slaves fostered exemplifies the need to move beyond the focus on slave violence and slave–master relationships. Bennett writes, “[t]he narrow focus on the master–slave relationship and the tendency to differentiate between slave society and colonial society in New Spain obscures the existence of a free black population that straddled both domains.”<sup>29</sup> The study of “blackness” in colonial Mexico must begin with the incorporation of people of African descent into the total political process and not just as individuals affected by colonial institutions. In or-

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Ibid., 20.

28 Ibid., 5.

29 Ibid., 39.

der to study people of African descent in Mexico, it is necessary to include the expanding free black population. At the height of slavery, the free black population was almost as large as the enslaved population. Throughout the seventeenth century, the free black population continued to increase due to the free womb policy.<sup>30</sup> The free womb policy entailed that when children were born they took on the legal status of the mother; if an enslaved man of African descent were to have a child with a free indigenous woman, this child would assume a free status.

Identity formation occurred through interactions and relationships with surrounding individuals. Kinship ties, community formation, and social networks were integral to the creation of ethnic identity. Rather than focusing on the impact of colonial law and institutions, shifting focus toward the way institutions were impacted by interactions with individuals gives agency back to those “dominated” by colonial powers. Bennett writes,

Specific markets, squares (*trazas*), and streets emerged as playgrounds for ethnic dances, coronations, and festivities. The various parish churches in which baptisms, weddings, funerals, and the activities of confections took place served as locations of ethnic, cultural and community gatherings that complemented these other, more private neighborhood sites.<sup>31</sup>

Ethnic and cultural character was built through communities and interactions between individuals. The importance of these relationships is shown through the witnesses detailed in court records that testified on behalf of the character of the individuals involved in the court proceedings.

In urban colonial Mexico, populations were diverse with people of various ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses. Due to the complexity in legal status and ethnic background, Christian values and church institutions became a common factor that influenced community formation and ethnic consciousness. Bennett notes that “[i]n New Spain’s complex social landscape, the shared experience of race and slavery was not enough to forge a collective African, slave, or black consciousness ... In urban New Spain, Christianity rather than race or slavery provided the structural contour of

30 Ibid., 39.

31 Ibid., 20.

blackness.”<sup>32</sup> Archival records of ecclesiastical court proceedings illustrate “expressions of blackness” as individuals came into contact with authority figures. Along with marriage petitions, these proceedings show charges that primarily deal with illicit sex between interracial couples, which composes what Bennett calls “black interiority.”<sup>33</sup>

Court records illustrate both the personal lives that slaves were able to form and an alternative sense of freedom they had in an urban atmosphere. In one instance described by Bennett, a Spanish woman, Doña Ana de Colmenares, testified in front of the ecclesiastical judge that her mulatto slave, Salvador Antonio, had married a *morisca* freed-woman Josefa de Sámano who also worked in Doña Ana’s home.<sup>34</sup> Since Josefa was on her deathbed, the priest issued a speedy marriage license and rid of the required public announcement of the marriage. Doña Ana came to court to testify because she remembered after the two had been married that Josefa was Salvador’s godmother, thus making the marriage incestuous. Before the judge could launch the investigation, Doña Ana’s niece, Maria de Marradón, came to the judge and petitioned to marry Salvador and declare his marriage to Josefa void. Maria claimed that Salvador promised to marry her and consequently took her virginity. She also claimed that her aunt had staged the incestuous marriage in order to hide Maria and Salvador’s marriage and the fact that Maria was pregnant with Salvador’s child.<sup>35</sup> This investigation illustrates an enslaved mulatto lived in close proximity to Spanish elites and forged a private life with a free Spanish woman. Salvador was free to create a personal life with his surrounding social network until Catholic law intervened and altered this freedom.

Christianity provided people of African descent with a type of agency and power to leverage against colonial authorities. Ecclesiastical documents also highlight the way that canon law and the rights given through Catholicism allowed people of African descent to petition the courts or challenge accusations brought against them. In one court case, the free mulatto Maria de San Diego appeared before a judge to oppose the marriage of Manuel Figueroa and Manuela Ortiz. Maria

32 Ibid., 61.

33 Ibid., 34.

34 Ibid., 34.

35 Ibid., 169–171.

stated that Manuel promised to marry her and subsequently took her virginity. Once interrogated, Manuel responded by conceding that they had engaged in illicit sexual relations, but he denied the fact that Maria was a virgin. Manuel was arrested as the judge attempted to sort out the events through witness testimonies. Both individuals relied on kinship ties as witnesses in order to corroborate their stories to the authorities. Even though Manuel was eventually released, this trial highlights the power provided by Christian virtues and the existence of interracial relations. Bennett writes, “[t]he fact that a young black woman could legitimately stake such a claim in the contours of a rapacious colonial slave society ... speaks to Maria’s Christian consciousness.”<sup>36</sup> This court proceeding highlights the influence of Catholic thought and the ability for individuals to bring cases to ecclesiastical court. It also exemplifies the importance of kinship ties as each individual brought forth witnesses to testify on behalf of their character.

Catholicism and canonical law also impacted the lives of enslaved individuals. Focusing on slavery in colonial Mexico during the seventeenth century challenges the idea of rural agriculture as the locus for preserving African culture and forming one type of blackness.<sup>37</sup> Bennett writes, “In the Spanish Indies the institution of slavery—a juridical category that defined enslaved Africans as property—had to contend with the competing institutional mechanisms that accorded slaves rights as Christian beings (persons), a process that precipitated the growth of a population of free blacks and coloreds.”<sup>38</sup> Slavery in urban areas of colonial Mexico differed from dominant notions of slavery because, “as a patriarchal ideology and the dominant disciplinary institution, Christianity delimited a form of personal liberty by determining the appropriate Christian forms of personhood. Christianity enabled the enslaved to stake claims to a social self, but it bound that social existence to the Christian social order.”<sup>39</sup> Through knowledge of the social order and rights afforded to Christians, slaves could contest cruel punishment from their masters. As Bennett says, “This is not to suggest that Spain and its colonies were free of racial prejudice

36 Ibid., 137–138.

37 Ibid., 4.

38 Ibid., 6.

39 Ibid., 33.

... however acknowledgment of a slave's humanity and rights and a liberal manumission policy eased the transition from slave to citizen and allowed the formation of a significant free black society throughout the Spanish world.<sup>7</sup><sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

What is "blackness" in colonial Mexico? There is no simple answer. Blackness in colonial Mexico differed from blackness in the United States: "As the embodiment of a localized subjectivity," Bennett says, "blackness was the antithesis of racial consciousness with its emphasis on some transcendent identity that purportedly linked all persons of African descent."<sup>41</sup> The complex framework of colonial society and changing demands in labor prevented the formation of a black racial consciousness that drew from a singular experience. Community formation through selected kinship ties such as friendships and marriages created an ethnic consciousness as individuals interacted with others who had similar experiences. The colonial urban landscape influenced social networks and daily interactions, creating a diverse community with individuals of various ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses. Blackness did not disappear from society and culture in Mexico; rather it took on multiple expressions.

Despite the extensive *sistema de castas* the Spanish attempted to impose on colonial society, the lived experience shows that these regulations largely went unenforced or were manipulated. Racial categorization was inconsistent and depended on many factors, not just skin color. Physical traits, attire, language, lifestyle, and occupation were important aspects of determining an individual's *casta*. Labor demands and occupation influenced social networks and the institution of slavery. Urban slavery in seventeenth-century Mexico challenges the dominant narrative of plantation slavery that formed a singular experience for African Americans living in the United States. Individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds lived in close proximity and interacted on a daily basis.

Christianity offered slaves a form of agency by allowing them to resist charges brought against them. Ecclesiastical records highlight the

40 Ibid., 8.

41 Ibid., 21.

personal lives that people of African descent—enslaved and free—were able to form despite a supposed “rigid” colonial institution. Christianity and ecclesiastical court records provide insights into the contours of blackness. The religious institution provided a base for diverse individuals to form a community, thus influencing their ethnic formation. Colonial institutions like the church were in turn influenced by interactions with imperial subjects, including individuals of African descent.

Bennett asks, “How does our understanding of the black present change when we configure complexity onto the slave past?”<sup>42</sup> Mexican nationalist history silences blackness because of an idea of national identity, *Mexicanidad*, which excludes certain individuals whose ethnic makeup does not fit into the mold of belonging. In order to combat the silencing of individuals, it is necessary to analyze the nuances of history, including racial and ethnic categories, in order to avoid silences and better understand the way history has impacted society today. Bennett further asks, “In what ways can we really understand race relations if there is no understanding of what the historical subjects bring to their encounters with the dominant power and with those who are also subject to dominance?”<sup>43</sup> The continued research of “blackness” in colonial Mexico offers political representation that resists ethnic cleansing during the process of nation building.

It’s important to recognize the African presence in Mexico in order to address the colorism that exists and the ways that individuals of African descent are often still marginalized by institutional powers due to social structures formed during colonial times. Colonial history and individuals of African descent are not monolithic, nor do they relate to the institution of plantation slavery practiced in the United States and the Caribbean.

While it is essential to analyze power and silences throughout history, it’s also important to provide a nuanced analysis that explains why it isn’t appropriate to dub Vicente Guerrero as “Mexico’s first black president” or as a George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in one. Racial categories projected onto the past do not capture the complexity of social organization, nor do contemporary categories and structures align with the

42 Ibid., xiii.

43 Ibid., 11.



colonial lived reality. Furthermore, the institution of slavery in Mexico is distinct from the racial ideology and social organizing created by the institution of slavery in the United States. Colonial blackness challenges the notion of *mestizaje*. Continued research might further suggest the way that blackness did not in fact disappear in Mexico, nor was it a non-event.

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# MADISON JACKIE AMIDO

**“You Defy the Odds”:  
First-Generation Students  
With Immigrant Parents  
Communicate About College Experiences**



*Madison Jackie Amido, class  
of 2018, is pursuing a degree in  
Communication Studies.*

### WRITER'S COMMENTS

I am a first-generation college student, and my mother immigrated into this country from Mexico. The fact that I'm here, a senior at USF writing author's comments in this undergraduate research journal, shocks and humbles me simultaneously. Higher education is coveted by many, but still remains a privilege for a select few. I wanted to learn about the experiences and complexities first-generation college students of immigrant parents encounter in college. Using qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach, I sought to explore shared experiences between this specific student population. I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with these students, to find out how they communicate about their college experiences. Mine and my siblings' college careers mark the first time our family has walked through the doorway leading to college. With this research, I hope to prop that door open for other first-generation students to come forward with their stories.

—*Madison Jackie Amido*

### INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

Madison Amido's article emerges from personal experience and exemplifies strong qualitative research methods in Communication Studies. Whereas other studies have sought to understand the experiences of first-generation students or children of immigrant parents, Madison's work focuses on the intersection of these two unique phenomena. This paper is a result of several hours of recorded one-on-one interviews. Her findings reveal a series of struggles and coping mechanisms used by first-generation college students with immigrant parents that offer insight into the lives of marginalized students. The voices of these students offer detailed accounts of transitioning to academia, constructing identity, and overcoming stigma. Additionally, she offers insight into the implications for working with these unique student populations in a time where issues of immigration and education are in the national spotlight. Madison's own positionality becomes evident in the paper.

—*Brandi Lawless, Communication Studies*

### Abstract

Using qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach, this study aimed to learn how first-generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences. The duality of researching first-generation college students with immigrant parents, rather than solely researching students who identify as first-generation, lends itself to the revelation of new, unheard, and often overlooked experiences. Data was collected through six in-depth, one-on-one interviews with participants, each lasting between thirty minutes to an hour. Five of the six participants were current college students, and one participant was a recent graduate. Each participant stated their parents' country of origin, with places ranging from the Philippines, Russia, Mexico, and Taiwan, to name a few. Three common themes emerged from the data. Participants discussed the importance of mentorship and guidance throughout college, as well as various challenges and obligations they face, and explained how their parents' immigration influences their identities and experiences as a first-generation student.

*Keywords:* First-generation students, immigrants, sub-community, phenomenological study, shared experiences, higher education

## **“You Defy the Odds”: First-Generation Students With Immigrant Parents Communicate About College Experiences**

### **Introduction**

**B**Y THE TIME I GRADUATE in Spring of 2018, I will be the first person in my family to earn a degree from a four-year university. Being a first-generation college student is an honor that I wear proudly, but it's undoubtedly a major responsibility that often comes along with a sense of pressure. As a junior in college, I'm in a major stage in my life right now, but I am aware that attending college is an experience that I don't have in common with my parents. My father was born and raised in Los Angeles, but my mother immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was a child. Both of my parents briefly attended community college, but neither of them ever obtained a degree. On my father's side, my grandparents' education did not surpass high school. On my mother's side, my grandparents' education did not surpass second grade. My mother's experiences as an immigrant have had a tremendous impact on my life in more ways than one. She always emphasized the importance of attending a four-year university, and even though that wasn't a possibility for her or my father when they were growing up, both of my parents have done everything in their power to ensure my siblings and I have this chance that wasn't available to them.

Although I'm attending college for my own personal growth, perhaps more than anything, I want to make my parents proud. I want to show my younger siblings that even if the odds seem stacked against us, we can get a degree and have a meaningful college experience just like any other student. My mother's identity as an immigrant is absolutely linked to my identity as a first-generation college student. I wouldn't be here without her family's decision to enter the United States, clinging to their vision of an “American dream” and all that it encompasses, including higher education. Embarking on this research project felt slightly ironic in the beginning, especially now as I sit in my college's library, writing a paper about first-generation college students with immigrant parents, when I myself belong to the very community that I seek to

study. I know that in 2018 when I receive my diploma in Saint Ignatius Church, and move my tassel from right to left, I will have gone where no one in my family has gone before. Picturing graduation day gives me an overwhelming sense of pride and emotion. I may be the first in my family to pave this path towards obtaining a degree at a four-year university, but I want to make sure I'm not the last.

Research has been conducted on first-generation college students, yet minimal literature and research has focused on the unique sub-population of first-generation college students with immigrant parents. This population needs more attention in academic research because their college experiences deserve to be heard in order to understand where they're coming from, and what they experience in college. The duality of researching first-generation college students with immigrant parents, rather than solely researching students who identify as first-generation, lends itself to the revelation of new, unheard, and often overlooked experiences. Researchers need to acknowledge the distinct set of shared experiences and insight that first-generation college students with immigrant parents, have to offer.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand how first-generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) defines a first-generation college student as an individual whose parents did not receive a baccalaureate degree. At this stage in the research, first-generation college students will be generally referred to as those who are the first in their family to attend a four-year college or university, meaning that their parents did not attend or receive a degree from a four-year institution. In what follows, I provide a literature review on preexisting first-generation college student research, explain the methods of my study, describe the findings of my study, and explore communication implications relating to this central phenomenon of first-generation college students with immigrant parents.

### Literature Review

When conducting research on preexisting data published about first-generation college students, I came across articles and sources that primarily focused on the multifaceted issues and challenges that the first-genera-

tion student population often encounters, as well as the role their families play in their educational pursuits. Preexisting literature I examined mainly focused on the experiences of first-generation college students, without acknowledging those first-generation students whose parents immigrated into this country. This literature review exposes the unique set of experiences that first-generation students face during their academic career, both from a personal and academic viewpoint. In this literature review we explore three major themes that have emerged from different sources concerning first-generation college students, including: (1) Challenges First-Generation College Students Encounter (2) Overall Family Influences, and (3) Parent Relationships in First-Generation College Students' Lives.

### Challenges First-Generation College Students Encounter

One overarching theme that emerged within the literature is that first-generation students face multiple challenges and obstacles throughout their college career, which sets them apart from their peers. Specifically, first-generation students are especially at risk of not staying in college, since it is more likely for these students to leave a four-year institution before their second year, in comparison to non-first-generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). At the same time, while retention is a relevant risk that first-generation students face, these students are much more likely to earn a bachelor's degree if they start their higher education at a four-year institution, instead of a two-year college (Bui, 2002). Even then, it is important to take into consideration the underlying factors that have proven problematic or difficult for this specific population of college students. For starters, most first-generation students come from a low socioeconomic background, and they likely identify as ethnic minorities (Bui, 2002). In addition, these students are more likely to speak another language at home, and this becomes an even more complex situation when considering intercultural communication they may face in the household setting. When looking at intercultural communication, specifically between immigrants, research shows that cultural and linguistic tendencies are constantly readjusting, forming on a case-by-case basis from the speaker to their addressee. This balancing act of determining an appropriate intercultural or linguistic response given the context of a conversation can be applied to first-generation students who



speak more than one language in their home settings (Bolden, 2014; Bui, 2002). Sy and Romero (2008) assert that Latina college students from immigrant families may even find themselves encountering language and cultural brokering in their household settings; students explain there are differences in cultural norms and expectations, attributing the change to their older relatives (Sy & Romero, 2008).

In addition to these challenges, first-generation students tend to fear that they'll fail in school, often worrying about financial aid and feeling unaccepted among their peers (Bui, 2002). Research also shows a discrepancy between these students' academic goals in comparison to their actual academic achievement. For example, 40.2% of the first-generation student participants in one study expressed their goal of receiving a bachelor's degree; however, only 29.5% of those students actually earned a bachelor's degree (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). These challenges facing first-generation students are noteworthy and further emphasize the importance of collecting data from this population.

### **Overall Family Influences**

Previous research also provides insight into how first-generation students' families influence their lives, both personally and academically. The connection and relationships between first-generation students and their relatives can be a source of support for many students, as well as a friendly reminder of where they came from (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). One major source of familial conflict for these students is when their personal academic goals somehow conflict with their family's collective goals for them (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). First-generation students' family members may encourage students not to worry about the family while they're in school, and instead focus on their studies. However, at the same time, other first-generation students feel a voluntary responsibility to financially contribute to their family while they are in school (Wang, 2014; Sy & Romero, 2008). Family can influence a first-generation student's academic career prior to attending college, while the student is away at school, and can continue to impact their post-graduation goals. Students place importance in bringing honor to their family, and assisting their family financially once they finish college (Bui, 2002; Wang 2012). Staying connected to relatives and remaining grounded to

their origins while students are away at school further shows the strong connection between first-generation students and their family (Wang, 2012). Seeing how strongly families influence first-generation student's academic and personal lives reinforces the significance of their position as the first in the family to pursue higher education.

### Parent Relationships

The relationship between these students and their parents is an especially interesting area to study. Parents greatly influence first-generation students' perceptions about college from an early age, and parents may communicate important messages to their children about the connection significance of family in relation to education. Often first-generation students are told by their parents, or by their college mentors, that it is crucial to incorporate their family into their academic life. These sentiments are echoed through statements that remind first-generation students that parents and family are always there to support students throughout their college career, and it is important to put family first, but at the same time students should focus on their studies while in school (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). It can be helpful for students to remember where they came from, who they are, and what their families are sacrificing in order for them to attend college (Wang, 2012). There is a positive correlation between first-generation students' college aspirations and their parents' involvement in their postsecondary lives. In addition, including parents in the educational process can help minimize college culture shock, and increase students' educational aspirations (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

While this research provides an in-depth view into the lives of first-generation students, there are gaps due to the lack of research on sub-communities of first-generation students, such as those with immigrant parents. Researchers and communication scholars need to acknowledge this community of first-generation students with immigrant parents, in order to strengthen preexisting literature, providing a voice to this marginalized community of students on college campuses. A majority of the sources featured in this literature review fail to address the experiences of first-generation students with immigrant parents, and as a result, accurate preexisting research is severely limited. My study aims to fill these gaps by proposing the following research question: How do first-gener-

ation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences?

Research from my study can benefit first-generation college students with immigrant parents since it can show them the shared experiences they may have in common with their other first-generation peers. In addition, this research is beneficial for parents of first-generation college students, for university administration and faculty, such as admissions offices and recruiters, administration concerned with retention rates, and campus-wide resources and offices that focus on student achievement and success. This research can help highlight some of the main areas of concern, and provide ways to improve university offices assistance to these students.

## Methods

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods in order to use in-depth interviews as a means of exploring and understanding how first-generation college students with immigrant parents, communicate about their college experiences. Denzin (2010) describes qualitative research, saying, “We study the way people represent their experiences to themselves and to others” (p. 10). Using qualitative methods, I specifically decided to take a phenomenological approach. Within this phenomenological study, I aimed to learn more about the shared experiences between these types of first-generation college students.

### Data Collection

#### *Participants*

In this study, I interviewed six individuals who identify as first-generation college students, and whose parents immigrated into the United States. Five of the participants are currently in college, with one being a recent graduate. All participants attended universities in Northern California. For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants, and their respective universities will not be disclosed. Two participants identify as male, with the other four identifying as female. In this case, five of the six participants’ mothers and fathers

## FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

immigrated to the United States. Participants identified with a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Each participant stated their parents' places of origin: Amber's parents immigrated from the Philippines, Emma's parents immigrated from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Isabel's parents are from Mexico and El Salvador, Leo's parents are from China, Nate's parents are from Russia and Ukraine, and Yolanda's mother is from Vietnam.

### *Procedures*

Participants were found through convenience sampling. This study occurred in a private, four-year university in Northern California during the fall semester of 2016. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants one-on-one in a neutral setting. A semi-structured interview guide was used in all interviews. Questions were open-ended, and the semi-structured interview guide provided the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, and introduce new questions during the interviews. Some of the questions asked included: "How do you think your college experience as a first-generation student with immigrant parents differentiates you from your other peers, if at all?" and "When does your identity as a first-generation college student become salient to you?" Five of the interviews occurred in person, with one occurring over FaceTime. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. Throughout the research process, informed consent procedures were clearly followed, explained, and disclosed to the participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Data gathered from the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Overall, the data collection led to fifty-one pages of double-spaced, loose transcriptions.

### *Data Analysis*

Data collected from this study was analyzed through the thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis process included summarizing data through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Significant statements were then found within the data by using insight, intuition, and impression (Dey, 1995). Finally, these significant statements were coded and grouped into overarching themes that encompassed the statements' meaning. The coding process led to three main communication themes

that emerged from the data: (1) Mentorship and Guidance; (2) Challenges and Obligations; and (3) Parental Influences in Students' Education.

## Analysis

### Mentorship and Guidance

When reviewing data from this study, each participant mentioned the significance of mentorship and guidance in their college careers, yet as first-generation college students, most participants lacked the very mentorship they deemed important. The theme of mentorship and guidance was addressed in a variety of ways in these interviews. It was overwhelmingly clear that these students longed for a mentor, someone who has gone through the college process and could provide insight and assistance, especially since these students are among the first in their family to venture out into college. Participants could not find mentorship through their parents, and took on a newfound role as the educator in which they educated their parents on the college process and expectations of higher education. These students do not have a template to follow, or someone to tell them what to expect. As a result, those who did not have older siblings in college and were the very first in their families to attend college had to seek mentorship elsewhere whether it be independently, through friends on campus, or through campus resources.

Uncertainty in not knowing what to do next in specific college situations was consistent throughout the interviews. Isabel mentioned the difficulty of not being able to turn to her family for help in certain instances:

It's hard to relate your own college experiences with your family because they don't have those experiences and it is kind of hard to get specific advice but there's just different things, like whenever you don't know how to do something in college, or like freshman year problems—how do I register for classes? Do that? I kind of had to do all that by myself and learn it myself because my parents never really did that and that's just a thing that first-generation college students go through as a whole. In applying to colleges, same thing; it's like I have to

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do my applications by myself and learn all that. My parents wanted to help but it's like I kind of took it on myself to do it myself, but I was able to get outside help from outside sources like counselors and stuff. But you can't really rely all on your parents for help with things specific to college.

Isabel's insight displays the difficulty in having to face technical college tasks alone without guidance from family. Several other participants echoed this sentiment and listed independence as a common character trait among first-generation college students with immigrant parents. This independence stems from these students relying on themselves when seeking help on various tasks or situations they encounter in college.

Leo also discussed how he gained independence by navigating the college education system without the help of his parents. He mentioned that as early as high school, he found himself in situations where he had to take the helm and figure out what he needed to do in order to get into college, since his parents weren't fully aware themselves. For example, he stated:

Being a first-generation college student, you're initiating a lot of things for yourself and while you have your parents' financial support, they don't know how to give you emotional support or guidance in the right direction, or telling you what's right or what's wrong in your college education. So it's a lot of independence, initiating things to start on your own if you want to get somewhere and also sharing more responsibility with your parents.

As demonstrated in this participant's experience, a common message of independence emerged from the data, as participants took it upon themselves to navigate the higher education system. In addition, most of the participants were the oldest sibling in their families, meaning they were truly the first in their immediate family to go to college. Leo also added that as a first-generation student, you do not have a structured checklist to follow. He found himself writing a checklist of all the various tasks he needed to complete and familiarize himself with; however, without

a mentor, he wasn't certain if his checklist encapsulated everything he truly needed. He said, "You're writing the checklist and you kind of feel like there's always something missing . . . the first-generation college student is like, 'I need to do this, too?'"

Mentorship was also addressed when participants explained that now, as college students, they find themselves helping their younger siblings and providing the guidance they wished they had when applying, enrolling, and attending college. Isabel and Emma in particular, went in depth to explain their new role as mentor to their younger siblings. Isabel explained that when she thinks of responsibilities as a first-generation student, the two main ideas that come to mind include acting as a role model to her younger relatives and getting good grades. Isabel's younger cousins often consult her for advice regarding higher education, and her sister is currently applying to college. During the college application process, Isabel helped her sister with her personal statement, figuring out which schools she's interested in, and determining what she might major in. Isabel noted the importance of including her family in her college experiences as much as possible, and as the first in her family to go to college; she feels pressure to be a good role model to her younger relatives. She added, "It's an honor because obviously I want all of my younger cousins and siblings to go to college and get the experience too, so it's nice that I can be a role model and show them I can do it, and they can do it too." Although Isabel herself didn't have anyone in her family to look up to for guidance while in college, she acknowledges that she is now a mentor to her younger relatives who are aspiring first-generation college students. Isabel understands the importance of mentorship and guidance since it is a facet she didn't have in the collegiate process.

Emma also discussed her relationship with her younger sister, and said that by sharing her positive college experiences with her sister, she hopes that she can encourage and motivate her sister to attend college too. Emma's older brother went to college but did not graduate within a four-year time frame, and now they'll be graduating college just one semester apart from each other. As a result, Emma didn't find complete mentorship from her older brother. "Seeing that this is what I went through and I wish my brother could've done these things for me when I was going through all of that, now I can do it for my sister," she said. Emma stated that she has very maternal instincts when it comes to her

younger sister. She tries to keep her sister engaged in the fun and positive experiences she's had at college, in hopes that this will motivate her to branch out and pursue college. While participants explained the importance of mentorship, as well as their lack of familial mentorship when they embarked on their college journeys, some of them are now providing that mentorship to their younger relatives.

### Challenges and Obligations

Throughout all of the interviews, data revealed key challenges that this population faces during their college careers. Financial stress, financial obligations, and challenging socioeconomic status was consistently expressed by participants. The financial burden of attending college, and all of the subsequent financial worries, emerged as the most common challenge and concern. Filling out FAFSA every year was a challenge for participants, but it also posed as a financial worry. Participants explained balancing school-work and part-time jobs needed to help ease the financial burden on their family, and help cover the costs of anything ranging from rent to food. Steep tuition prices are also a concern among participants, such as Amber. In addition to addressing the financial challenges that arise during college, Amber also mentioned her family's push for her to secure a high-paying job once she graduates. Immersed in financial pressure presently during her college career, and anticipating financial worries upon graduation through repayment of loans she had to take out to fund her education, finances are Amber's main concern. This was not an isolated occurrence but a common theme throughout each interview with each participant. Paying bills, sending money back to relatives, taking on part-time jobs whenever they aren't in class, and finding ways to fund their educational pursuits, were consistent concerns. Yolanda provided insight into her average work-day, and financial obligations during her college years:

I had like 10-, 11-, 12-hour days. So I had to work, make money, send money back home for either my mom or my little brother because he was in school and he was struggling and he was young too in high school, so he needed me and that's what I did. I pretty much paid bills revolving every single month for them, and it takes a toll. It's like you want



to be focused on your studies but on the other hand you get so tired going to work, going to classes the next day that you just don't have the mental focus or concentration to really obtain those high grades. My grades weren't mediocre but it wasn't to the point where I myself could say I was really proud of them. So that was that huge disadvantage because I was overworking myself and my family needed money.

Yolanda's excerpt is a prime example of the financial hardships that first-generation college students endure, and how they're forced to react and help ease the financial pain during their time in school. Finding a way to balance schoolwork with work schedules is another obstacle that these students face. When placed in this type of situation, students find that they have to arrange their schedule to fit around their other obligations outside of the classroom.

Other challenges included familial pressure, meaning the pressure to succeed and validate their immigrant parents' sacrifices. Many participants feel pressure to do well in school and push themselves towards success in order to show their family that they appreciate the sacrifices they've made so that they could attend college. Remembering their family's sacrifices for them acted as a motivator throughout pressures to receive and maintain good grades. Nate mentioned his personal experience of familial pressure to succeed, taking into consideration his parents' sacrifices and work throughout the years:

I always feel like I have to be on top of my game. And maybe it's because I know that my parents worked so hard to get to where they were when I was born and how they basically raised me until now ... I just think that the idea of this whole immigration process and starting from not necessarily the bottom, but close to it, and then working their way up in a matter of short lifetime. I kind of have that familial pressure.

As Nate's comment shows, not only are these students in school for their own personal gain and academic goals, but they acknowledge that they wouldn't be in college without the sacrifices their relatives have made for them. As Nate mentions, this serves as a reminder in the back of his

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mind as he goes through his day-to-day activities. One participant even mentioned that when she's feeling tired after a long day of studying and would like to take a nap, she musters the strength to stay awake so that she can do more with her time, adding that she'd feel guilty if she avoided schoolwork.

In discussing the challenges and obligations the participants felt, the conversation diverged slightly into comparing the different experiences between first-generation college students with immigrant parents versus non-first-generation students who can trace their family history in the United States. All participants acknowledged that their identities as first-generation college students with immigrant parents differentiated them from their other peers in some way. These differences ranged from these students having a more global and cultural perspective than their peers, devoting their time to other tasks and obligations than their peers, encountering different struggles throughout college, different access to resources, and different sources of motivation. Emma mentioned the occasional frustration she felt through exchanges with some of her peers:

A lot of the people that are surrounding you are very privileged and sometimes act very entitled to what it is that they have. And it's frustrating to be around that and want to tell them like "Hey, you don't understand how lucky you are and you're just blowing off school. You don't understand how much your parents are paying for your education." So it's hard to not judge people when you're in this situation. But then you remind yourself, hey, everyone comes from different backgrounds and they start with different circumstances and things in their lives. So whenever they meet an obstacle, whatever they're equipped with mentally and physically is different, and so in their minds that paper or midterm is like the worst thing in their world because mentally they aren't equipped with the things we are equipped with. That's their worst enemy and for us finances are worse, so it's hard not to judge them.

In some exchanges with peers, students like Emma become aware of their different backgrounds and upbringings, and how this contributes to different college experiences from their peers. Realizing these

differences can lead to a sense of frustration, but overall this realization reinforces the idea that first-generation college students with immigrant parents have unique college experiences and stories that deserve to be heard. Emma's insight references various challenges that first-generation college students face, such as financial worries. She also mentions the different playing fields that these students are on, simply because of their different backgrounds. Also, they have different ideas of what designates a "problem," which isn't to say that non-first-generation students don't experience financial troubles as well, but for first-generation college students these challenges and frustrations are extremely prevalent throughout their entire educational career. Emma also discussed disparate economic stability and career safety nets between first-generation students and non-first-generation students. She explained that first-generation students typically lack financial and career cushions, whereas other students might have parents who own family businesses, or have established careers which their children can use as a backup plan after college. "That safety net, I think a lot of first gens don't have. For them it's like 'if this doesn't work out and I take that leap of faith and I fall, I've fallen into a net.' Where it's like if we fall, we break a bone or two," she said.

Leo also talked about slight differences these students might encounter. He mentioned that first-generation students who have part-time jobs are usually saving up to pay for rent or cover a portion of their tuition, whereas their peers might not have that financial obligation and can spend their money elsewhere. He also noted that non-first-generation students have mentorship and guidance unlike first-generation students. Nate, on the other hand, addressed the distinction between first-generation college students with immigrant parents in comparison to first-generation students established in the United States:

You can have a student who's from America saying, "Yeah I grew up here and my parents didn't go to college so when I started preparing for college it was kind of like I went in head first." And then you can have a student on the other side who is with immigrant parents and they say, "I agree with you, but it's a little bit different because my parents didn't grow up here, they didn't even understand what college really was until they got here."

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Here, Nate addresses how a first-generation student with immigrant parents has slightly different experiences from first-generation students whose families have a long history in the United States. Not only do students like Nate enter college head first with little to no familial guidance, but also since his parents are immigrants, they had to learn about college in the United States and all that it entails. This sets his schooling experience apart from first-generation students alone. In both subtle and large ways, their stories and experiences are distinctly different from their non-first-generation peers, and even from their first-generation peers who can trace their lineage in the United States. All of these messages reveal that throughout college, first-generation students with immigrant parents experience different challenges that make them aware of how their student identity differentiates them from their peers.

### Parental Influences in Students' Education

In relation to this study's research question, participants explained their immigrant parents' influences and involvement in their college education, and noted how frequently they talk to their parents about college life. Participants' relationships with their parents was a main topic of discussion. Overall, most participants acknowledged how their parents' identities as immigrants factored into their identities as first-generation college students. Their parents' experiences as immigrants manifested itself into their educational lives in different ways. Nate went as far back as elementary school, and explained how he became aware of his parents' culture during elementary "cultural days." He remembers his mom showing up to class and preparing Russian food. These cultural influences that presented themselves early on in Nate's childhood, still impact him today in college. He attributes his multicultural, global perspective on contemporary world issues, to his parents' experiences as immigrants. For Nate, this global perspective he has acquired from his parents' immigration history, has impacted class discussions he has in college.

Isabel, on the other hand, said that as the first in her family to go to a four-year college, she finds herself interested in taking classes that relate to her family's culture and countries of origin. "We're starting a new journey in our lineage in the U.S., so I always have that constant re-

minder in my head. We're living in this country now, but we weren't, our family wasn't before," she said. Now in her third year of college, Isabel felt inclined to take Latin American classes in order to learn more about the places her parents are from. In addition, she also joined her college's Latina cultural club and student organization. Participants addressed their connection to their parents' culture and how their parents' immigration experiences have influenced their academic pursuits. They also communicated about the clear link between their college experiences and their parents' immigration experiences.

When discussing how often participants communicate with their parents about college life and experiences, frequency in communication varied across the board. Amber and Leo admitted to rarely speaking to their parents about college, while Emma and Yolanda said almost never. Isabel said she speaks to her parents about her college life once a day, and Nate said twice a week. When participants speak to their parents about their college experiences, different topics of discussion arise. Most participants only spoke to their parents about their general day-to-day experiences, such as how they're doing in school and if they're alright. Other common topics of discussion with parents included finances, grades, and status of part-time jobs. Only a couple of participants said they talk to their parents about specific things they're learning in class or assignments they're working on.

In addition to revealing parents' influences in the participants' education, and frequency in parental communication, data also revealed how participants communicate about their parents' immigration. Participants talked about their parents' ties to their culture and how their parents' immigration influences their goals as first-generation students. Yolanda acknowledged the hardships her mother endured in her seven attempts to escape Vietnam during the fall of Saigon. Her mother was captured six times during her attempts, and put in jail. She eventually fled on a Vietnamese boat with refugees:

She came here with the purpose of trying to have a better life for her children and the truth is that she has provided. The hardships, adversities that she's gone through in this country and having her children grow and earn an education that she would have never been able to, to her that's something of

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an accomplishment ... I thank her for providing me the opportunity despite all the arguments, the heartaches, and the adversity.

When reflecting on their parents' immigration experiences, participants like Yolanda feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the hardships her mother endured in order to provide her with opportunities that weren't available to her mother in Vietnam. Data shows that many of the participants' parents associated the United States with opportunity and the potential for success. Similarly, Leo expressed his thanks to his parents in our discussion:

My parents wanted what's best for me and this is what they saw as the solution and they went through with it. Dropping everything behind, everything about your home, everything that's familiar to you about your home country you're leaving behind for your child. That's why I'm so determined to do well in college because I want to make sure that, hey, your sacrifices weren't for nothing and I want to prove that to you by getting a degree and getting a good job too and finally being able to repay them for all that they've given me.

Leo's personal account emphasizes his appreciation of the sacrifices his parents made for him. His parents' journey as immigrants was fueled by the hope and promise that in the United States; their children could thrive and succeed. Taking into consideration the sacrifices they made for him, and the personal challenges they encountered when leaving their home countries, Leo now wants to repay his parents by obtaining his degree and securing a job. This further shows how first-generation college students with immigrant parents have specific collegiate goals and post-graduation goals that are formed with their parents' immigration experiences in mind. Overall, the participants explained their parents' influence in their academic lives, their average communicative exchanges about college, and how their parents' immigration connects to their identities and experiences as first-generation college students.

## Discussion

### Implications

Research from this study reveals how first-generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about various aspects of their college experiences. It is crucial to learn more about these types of students' college experiences and challenges they encounter in order to hear their stories and ensure that their concerns are being addressed in higher education settings. As the data revealed, first-generation college students communicated about the independence and self-reliance they resort to when navigating through college, since this is an experience no one in their family has ever faced. Communication scholars and qualitative researchers alike need to pursue this area of study. By doing this, they can make sure that this community of students knows their stories are being heard, and that they truly aren't alone in their college careers. University administration also needs to explore these students' stories and take measures to help combat the fixable issues they encounter, and foster a campus climate that encourages first-generation college students to grow and prosper despite setbacks. The results and findings of this research reveal the personalized, multifaceted, and intricate experiences that first-generation college students with immigrant parents face when they embark on their college journeys. This study shows how we can raise awareness about the unique experiences of various sub-populations of college students, given their personal, familial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By using this research as a tool to create positive change through direct, and tangible responses, these students can be encouraged to come forward and communicate about their experiences.

### Limitations

Although this study provides insight on first-generation college students with immigrant parents, and the corresponding communication implications, this study still has many limitations, which need to be addressed. Data was obtained through convenience sampling and one-on-one interviews with six individuals from October to November in 2016. This

time frame is a limitation on its own. Given more time to collect data and interview more participants would strengthen this study and provide even more perspectives. In addition, most of the participants were female, which didn't allow for equal representation of genders. All participants attended colleges in Northern California, within an urban city set in a liberal and progressive setting. This study could be strengthened by interviewing a variety of students from different geographic locations, and places associated with different sociopolitical ideas. Future researchers can keep these limitations in mind as they expand upon the results presented here.

### Future Directions

When conducting research on how first-generation college students communicate about their experiences, researchers should be aware that this is a massive area for future research, and that every student's college experience is different. As first-generation college students with immigrant parents show, there are many sub-communities within the general population of college students. Researchers can expand upon this study by branching off from this topic in new directions. Possible future areas of study include interviewing students at different educational stages, meaning interviewing incoming first-generation freshmen, current college students, and alumni. These different points in students' education could lend itself to the revelation of different experiences, and it would be an interesting comparative study to see how people communicate about being a first-generation student prior to attending college, during, and afterwards. This study can also be expanded upon by interviewing both first-generation college students, and their immigrant parents. While this study focused on how first-generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences, future researchers can also take the alternative route in their studies. For example, future researchers can interview immigrant parents with children in college, and explore these parents' stories of immigration and how they discussed college with their children. Such a future study would expand upon this study by bringing the other party into the conversation. These are just some possible routes future researchers can take when expanding upon this topic.



## Conclusion

Whenever I find myself overwhelmed by my various responsibilities and academic obligations, I remind myself why I'm doing this, and I envision graduation day. I'm privileged to be where I am. I'm acutely aware of the sacrifices both of my parents have made and continue to make, in order for me to pursue my college education. Personally, it's an honor and blessing to attend college, especially considering that this is an experience denied to so many. When writing this paper, I was reminded of the culmination of efforts and sacrifices that my parents make in order for me to have this shot at graduating from college. When I receive my diploma, it will be as if my entire family is receiving a diploma with me. This is a collective effort, something that couldn't have happened without my relatives' support, and without my mother immigrating into this country.

This study sought to understand how first-generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences. I used qualitative methods and the phenomenological approach to explore shared collegiate experiences among this population of students. Research in this study introduced three major themes: (1) Mentorship and Guidance; (2) Challenges and Obligations; and (3) Parental Influences in Students' Education. Participants in this study revealed personal experiences they've encountered in college, addressed their identities as first-generation students, and explained how their parents' identities as immigrants has influenced their lives. These participants have shown how they communicate about the phenomenon of their experiences as first-generation college students with immigrant parents.

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# SARAH FREI

## The Underlying Foundations of Political Identity and its Interaction with Opinion Media



*Sarah Frei, class of 2017, graduated  
with a degree in Media Studies with  
minors in Film Studies and Design.*

## WRITER'S COMMENTS

During the 2016 elections I was fortunate to take a class called “Politics and the Media.” It was a place where I could follow the elections in a classroom setting and look critically at how the media covers candidates, as well as how political campaigns utilize their relationship with the media and the public. It also became a place where we could ask daunting questions like, “How have we become so politically and ideologically divided to the point that we ignore facts in order to remain supportive of our political team?” This paper is a result of that question, inspired by a TED talk given by Jonathan Haidt, a moral psychologist who says that if we look at political difference as a matter of moral preference, we might be able to find common ground in a political environment that often feels hostile and unsympathetic. This paper compares his and other psychologists’ findings to the left–right divide defined by opinion bloggers, journalists, and pundits in the media, and suggests that political views might not be defined by one’s understanding of fact, but rather one’s moral preference and cognitive functions, giving us a nuanced, but better understanding of our political environment.

—Sarah Frei

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

It was Fall 2016. Donald Trump had just been elected president. Our class was studying news, politics, and democracy. Explaining the election and predicting the democratic consequences of the increasingly bitter divisions between ‘red’ and ‘blue’ political realities was challenging for even the most seasoned media scholars. While many people simply chose a side, Sarah wanted to understand these differences, to see if they were indeed irreconcilable, and to analyze what role(s) media were playing in our polarization. Her search led her from moral philosophy and political neuroscience, to *The Federalist* blog and the *New York Times*, as she sought to organize and think through different pundits’ explanations for the election results, and what their explanations suggested about how different ‘sides’ think. Her project offers no easy answers, but it moves us a step forward in unpacking the complexity, and increasing the empathy, of our difficult political moment.

—Bernadette Barker-Plummer, Department of Media Studies

### Abstract

This paper explains the left-right divide using Moral Foundations Theory and System Justification Theory to analyze pundit explanations of the *Identity Left*, *Coastal Elites*, *Alt-Right*, and *White Working Class* in the media. In applying moral and psychological characterizations to these political identities this paper concludes that political discourse is more nuanced and complicated than simple cognitive functions or moral foundations. Instead, moral and psychological categorizations can be used to understand political identities as complex differences in moral preference or psychological processing rather than a difference in one's ability to understand fact. This way of thinking can be approached as a way of understanding political divisiveness with curiosity—as opposed to hostility—in hopes of making political discourse less divisive and more productive.

## The Underlying Foundations of Political Identity and its Interaction with Opinion Media

*“America is not natural. Natural is tribal. We’re fighting against thousands of years of human behavior and history to create something that no one’s ever done—that’s what’s exceptional about America. This ain’t easy; it’s an incredible thing.”*

—Jon Stewart

ON NOVEMBER 17<sup>TH</sup>, 2016, a little over one week after Donald Trump won the presidential election, Jon Stewart was interviewed by Charlie Rose on CBS. Stewart, who after 16 years left his political talk/news show *The Daily Show*, was asked about his reaction to the election. What he said is right—this isn’t easy. It is almost impossible for a country of more than 300 million people to come to a mutual conclusion about our future—to agree on topics such as immigration, same-sex marriage, abortion, international trade, or taxes. To do this would go against our innate tendency to dispute, argue, and justify our opinions. We all think we are right and the other side is wrong, and we often do not budge on our positions.

But is it really unnatural to function as a democracy? The answer to that might call for a longer discussion of philosophical concepts that deserves a paper of its own. In some ways, the moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt would agree with Stewart. He would say that we have evolved to be morally driven creatures, constantly making judgements and criticisms as to what we believe is right and wrong. This has allowed us to organize into complex communities and societies and progress in ways that no other animal has before. But we’re going to disagree, whether on economic policy, immigration, or women’s rights, and there will never be a simple yes and no. Like Stewart said, “This ain’t easy; it’s an incredible thing.”

In modern society it makes sense to hit roadblocks when it is time to make vital decisions about our future, like the most recent election. This year the roadblock (or rather the divide that separates Democrats from Republicans) seems wider and deeper than ever. Pew Research Center did a survey in 2014 called “Political Polarization in the American Public,” which found that the partisan divide between Republicans and

Democrats is at its deepest and most extensive than in the last two decades. The report further finds that the overall share of Americans stating consistently conservative or consistently liberal views has doubled from 10% to 21%, causing ideological overlap between the two parties to shrink more and more. On top of a shrinking overlap, Republicans and Democrats are more likely now than before to say that the other party is a threat to the well-being of the country. The most politically polarized are also the most politically engaged: “amplifying the voices that are the least willing to see the parties meet each other halfway” (“Political Polarization”).

Why do Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, feel so strongly that they are right, and the other side is wrong? Jonathan Haidt recently said in a conversation with TED Curator Chris Anderson, “Each side is right about certain things, and then it goes blind to other things.” Why? Why are we becoming more righteous in our beliefs and less open to hearing others? We’ve become so separated that this is no longer a matter of difference in opinion, but a polarization of teams who call each other immoral, evil monsters. We become so loyal to our teams that we even deny basic facts to be true. Though we are formed to make judgments and be critical of one another for good reason—why are we at this point, and how did we get here? After this election many are angry, afraid, and confused. Now is a more important time than ever to try to understand each other and all of our conflicting political identities. Whatever previous conceptions of the left and right we had before this election, we need to toss it out, listen to each other, and start on a new foot.

The major question this paper looks to answer is how to rationalize the widening divide between Democrats and Republicans—what are its underlying foundations, psychologically and morally, and how do the pundits in the media explain it? To answer this question this paper uses various perspectives to review and define underlying reasons for the strong ideological partisanship between Republicans and Democrats. The two primary academic perspectives are that of moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt and that of social psychologist John Jost. Haidt’s research has developed the Moral Foundations Theory, which proposes that human moral motivation varies based on five innate moral foundations based on ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity. John Jost’s

research has developed System Justification Theory, the idea that conservatism is not moral, but a motivated social cognition (a means of accepting or rejecting new information such as change, disruption, or ambiguity). This paper compares their findings to the left-right divide defined by opinion bloggers, journalists, and pundits who might be more widely read and visible to the general public. The academic conclusions are then mapped on to the pundit conclusions in an attempt to identify how the academic theories might be playing out in current political discourse. It is hypothesized that pundits and opinion bloggers would have a much more nuanced view of the political divide, and though this was found to be true, the academic explanations served a useful purpose as well. They helped identify where these arguments might be a difference in moral preference or psychological processing rather than a difference in understanding of fact. Though pundits can identify the specific content of political differences, moral and psychological reasons can inform us in ways that allow us to step back from the nitty-gritty of politics so that we can appreciate differences rather than demonize them.

In reading various left- and right-wing journalists and pundits, it is evident that in the realm of modern political identities, it is not enough to veil opposing sides under Democrats and Republicans or liberal and conservative. Whereas social and moral psychologists separate the political divide between the two, it is important, too, to discuss the many nuances in modern-day politics. Pundits from both left, right, and moderate media are discussing the *Identity Left*, *Coastal Elites*, *Alt-Right*, and *White Working Class*. These identities are founded on their basis in education, cultural identity, social class, and economic class. Some of them are more moral in tone and others are more psychological, but exactly what they say about Haidt's five moral foundations and Jost's motivated social cognitions are a matter that needs to be discussed more comprehensively.

## Background Reading

### Moral Foundations Theory

Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham introduce Moral Foundations Theory in their paper titled "When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals May not Recognize." The



theory proposes that there are five psychological systems that provide the foundation for the world's moralities. These foundations are *harm/care*, *fairness/reciprocity*, *ingroup/loyalty*, *authority/respect*, and *purity/sanctity*. These foundations were concluded by:

Examin[ing] several comprehensive theories of morality and values as well as lists of human universals and a description of the social lives of chimpanzees to try to identify the intuitions and automatic emotional reactions that appear widely across cultures, along with the social functions for which these intuitions and emotions may have evolved . . . Each system is akin to a kind of taste bud, producing affective reactions of liking or disliking when certain patterns are perceived in the social world. (Haidt and Graham 104)

For example, harm/care is based on the brain's evolved sensitivity to signs of suffering in offspring; fairness/reciprocity comes from the cooperation found in primate species that has "led to the evolution of a suite of emotions that motivate reciprocal altruism, including anger, guilt, and gratitude"; ingroup/loyalty has developed from having kin-based groups in which "strong social emotions related to recognizing, trusting, and cooperating with members of one's co-residing ingroup while being wary and distrustful of members of other groups"; authority/respect comes from a long history of living in hierarchy-based groups in which "dominant males and females get certain perquisites but are also expected to provide certain protections or services"; and purity/sanctity developed when humans began eating meat and formed the ability to feel disgust, but "disgust goes beyond such contaminant-related issues and supports a set of virtues and vices linked to bodily activities in general, and religious activities in particular" (Haidt and Graham 104–106).

Further research through an online survey of about 1,600 people led Haidt and Graham to posit that liberals' moralities are founded on the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, while conservatives' moralities are based on all five. They argue that liberals often do not understand conservatives because they do not recognize that harm/care only makes up one-fifth of their morality, unlike half of theirs. According to Haidt and Graham, having the ability to identify these differences

in moralities allows us to step back and look at opposing arguments with curiosity instead of hostility. In doing so, they argue, we will be able to make conversations about morality, politics, and religion more common and civil.

Haidt and Graham reference theories of anthropology in their work as well, citing cultural anthropologist and psychologist Richard Shweder's ideas that there are three widespread moral ethics that are based on different ontological presumptions. The first is the *ethic of autonomy* which the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations fall under, and posits that the moral world is made up exclusively of individual human beings, and that moral choices should protect the will of the individual. The second moral ethic is the *ethic of community*, which the ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect foundations fall under, and states that the world is made up of institutions, families, tribes, and other groups. Moral choices under the ethic of community should protect the will of the standing identity, history, and reputation of the community and institutions. The third moral ethic is the *ethic of divinity*, which the purity/sanctity foundation falls under and is based on the ontological idea that God or gods exists, and human beings are made up of the soul and spirit of God or gods. Under the ethic of divinity, moral regulation should protect the soul and spirit of the human body. These kinds of moral decisions are based around sexuality, food, and religious law. The three varying moral ethics were derived from an empirical analysis of moral discourse in India and the United States and later Brazil and the United States, which compare the two cultures and determine that secular Westerners in the United States have a narrower moral domain like that of the ethic of autonomy, whereas other groups in the global South utilized the other two or all three moral ethics. These broad-based anthropological analyses further suggest the notion that varying ideologies might be due to varying moral foundations.

Much divisiveness between liberals and conservatives is that liberals do not see conservatives as moral thinkers. They do not recognize conservatives as having moral reasons for their beliefs because they do not match with liberal moral priorities. Leading studies and theories in moral/political psychology were shaped in the 60s and 70s in some of the most liberal cities in the United States: Berkeley, California, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. These psychologists in turn are labeling con-

servative thinking as a motivated social cognition to respond to fear and anxiety over change, disruption and ambiguity. These belief systems are not moral, rather ways to justify preserving the status quo and inequality between groups. Psychologist John Jost in particular, emphasizes these theories of conservatism as a motivated social cognition.

### Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition

Jost et al. theorize in the paper, “Political Ideology as Motivated Social Cognition,” that conservative political identities are a motivated social cognition stemming from a resistance to change as a justification for inequality. To make their argument, Jost et al. compiled a collection of “observable empirical regularities that link specific psychological motives and processes (as independent variables) to particular ideological or political contents (as dependent variables)” (Jost et al. 344). They reviewed 88 studies performed in 22 different countries, and used several major theories that make a connection between social cognition and political ideologies. Their research combines personal, existential/epistemic, and ideological rationalization based motives in social psychology. These theories include Right-wing Authoritarianism; Intolerance of Ambiguity; Mental Rigidity, Dogmatism, and Closed-Mindedness; the Theory of Ideo-Affective Polarity; the Dynamic Theory of Conservatism as Uncertainty Avoidance; Lay Epistemic Theory, Regulatory Focus Theory; Terror Management Theory; Social Dominance Theory; and Systems Justification Theory. Using these theories Jost et al. determined that conservatives are more likely to be motivated by death anxiety, system instability, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, need for structure, fear of threat and loss. Conservatives rank low on openness to experience, uncertainty tolerance, integrative complexity, and self-esteem.

To understand what they mean by “motivated social cognition,” Jost et al. define the difference between *directional and nondirectional motives*. Directional motives “reflect the desire to reach a specific conclusion,” such as the self is worthy or valuable or that Republican leaders are benevolent and moral (Jost et al. 340). Nondirectional motives, on the other hand, reflect the desire to reach a belief or understanding despite its content. Nondirectional motives could include the need to know, the need for nonspecific closure, or the fear of invalidity. Both directional

and nondirectional motives are believed to affect belief formation in the ways we expose ourselves to and process information. Jost et al. state, “The possibility that we consider in this article is that a kind of matching process takes place whereby people adopt ideological belief systems (such as conservatism, Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)) that are most likely to satisfy their psychological needs and motives (such as needs for order, structure, and closure and the avoidance of uncertainty or threat)” (Jost et al. 340).

Jost et al. define conservatism using various historical and social contexts. They cite dictionary definitions of conservatism such as “‘the disposition and tendency to preserve what is established; opposition to change’ and ‘the disposition in politics to maintain the existing order’” (Jost et al. 342). They cite a social science encyclopedia defining conservatism as “an attitude of opposition to disruptive change in the social, economic, legal, religious, political, or cultural order.” Other definitions refer to a “preference for inequality,” stating, “the left favors greater equality, while the right sees society as inevitably hierarchical” (Jost et al. 343). This hierarchy can be thought of as Haidt’s definition of authority/respect, where conservatives are more likely to prefer hierarchical structure wherein certain people take dominant positions in society while others entrust them with protections and services. These two core definitions of fear of change and preference for inequality are central to Jost et al.’s understanding of conservatism as a motivated social cognition.

### Neuroscientific Evidence

An additional study was conducted by John Jost and David Amodio in 2012 that used neuroscientific evidence to suggest that the neurocognitive styles of conservatives are different than that of liberals. In their paper, “Political ideology as motivated social cognition: Behavioral and neuroscientific evidence” Jost and Amodio reference studies that suggest right-wing orientation is associated with “greater neural sensitivity to threat and larger amygdala volume, as well as less sensitivity to response conflict and smaller anterior cingulate volume” (Jost and Amodio 55).

In their research, Jost and Amodio focus on the physiological volumes of areas of the limbic system of the brain, which controls parts of

the brain that have to do with emotions, survival instincts, and memory. The amygdala is an almond-shaped component that is located in both the left and right temporal lobe. The amygdala functions as a part of the physiological and behavioral response to threat, and tells us when to feel scared, sad, happy, etc. The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is associated with conflict monitoring, or taking in new and unexpected information. The right dlPFC (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) region of the brain is associated with withdrawal motivation, negative affect, and response inhibition. By looking at the volumes and activity of these structures, Jost and Amodio are able to compare political orientation with the physiological makeup of the brain.

Political neuroscience (or neuropolitics) is a fairly new area of study of which little is known, but Jost and Amodio state, “By linking ideological processes to physiological substrates, researchers may be in a better position to refine their behavioral models of political psychology” (59). Initial research has aimed to map neural activity onto various political responses by monitoring brain activity when participants read political statements of varying levels of ideological content, extremity, and abstraction. Participants varied in their own self-identified political orientation and were asked to read the statements and indicate their level of agreement. Zamboni et al. who conducted the study found that despite participants’ individual political orientations, the processing of conservative statements showed more activity in the right dlPFC region of the brain. This region of the brain is associated with withdrawal motivation, negative affect, and response inhibition. Although this study could have multiple interpretations, there is evidence that conservative ideologies are consistent with brain activity that is associated with responding to damaging/threatening stimuli, which could be consistent with response to threat or disgust stimuli that Jost has theorized to be correlated with conservative motivations.

Building on this research, “Amodio et al. (2007) investigated left-right ideological differences in epistemic processes, as instantiated in relatively low-level neurocognitive functioning, by linking individual differences in political orientation to an important aspect of self-regulation known as *conflict monitoring* (or ‘performance monitoring’)” (Jost and Amodio 5). What Amodio studied was participants’ ability to react when asked to change their information processing using a “Go/No-

Go task.” They hypothesized that “differences in the cognitive styles of liberals and conservatives might reflect basic differences in information processing mechanisms, such as those involved in conflict monitoring—a neurocognitive process for detecting discrepancies between response tendencies and one’s higher-level intentions” (Jost and Amodio 5). In other words, Amodio et al. hypothesized that liberals and conservatives have different neurocognitive styles, shown by their ability to process conflict:

In the Go/No-Go task used by Amodio et al. (2007), participants must quickly respond to a frequently presented ‘Go’ stimulus (e.g., the letter ‘W’), so that the Go response becomes habitual. However, on a small proportion of trials, a ‘No-Go’ stimulus appears (e.g., the letter ‘M’), signaling that one’s habitual response should be withheld. (Jost and Amodio)

These participants had rated themselves on a political scale ranging from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative.”

Participants who identified as liberal performed more accurately on the No-Go trials of the task compared to conservative participants. What Amodio et al. found was greater activity in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), which has been linked to neurocognitive functions of conflict monitoring. The results of the trial supports their hypothesis that political orientation might be linked to basic neurocognitive processes for processing new information, meaning that liberals and conservatives differ in their ability to react to changes in their environment. Although it cannot be assumed that there is a causal relationship between the brain and behaviors, it is worth noting that this study is one of the first to compare ideological differences in processing styles of the brain without incorporating an explicitly ideological component. Rather, Amodio designed the study to identify the neurocognitive processes that might influence ideological differences.

### Additional Thoughts

A 2014 article in *Mother Jones* written by Chris Mooney reports on a recent consensus of political scientists and political psychologists who agree that “liberals and conservatives disagree about politics in part because they are different people at the level of personality, psychology, and even traits like physiology and genetics” (Mooney). This evidence comes from an “Open Peer Commentary” in the journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* following a recent study by John Hibbing that argues that political conservatives have a “negativity bias,” meaning they are more attuned to and respond more to negative stimuli in their environments. This is similar to John Jost’s arguments that political conservatism is a motivated social cognition responding to fear of change and justification for inequality. Jost, in fact, is one of the 23 out of 26 psychologists and political scientists to agree with Hibbing and his argument. This consensus is a big deal for this field of study—it means that it is widely accepted that there is a fundamental difference in the behaviors and functions of political conservatives and liberals. Jost’s response in the journal states, “There is by now evidence from a variety of laboratories around the world using a variety of methodological techniques leading to the *virtually inescapable* conclusion that the cognitive-motivational styles of leftists and rightists are quite different” (Mooney). Although this is an argument that has more or less triumphed, Mooney goes on to say that there is still a lot of work to be done. He ends the article reminding readers that we still operate in a political world, and hopefully with new information we might be able to find new ways of acting in politics and reaching bipartisan agreements.

Scientific research about political identities and political divisiveness, like all things, should be taken with a grain of salt. Scientific evidence cannot be useful without application in the real world. Although it cannot answer every question in social and political science, one can look at this research as a macro lens through which we answer these questions. One might view the above findings through a microlens which we can apply to current politics. What are political pundits and opinion bloggers talking about? *Who* are they talking about? And why? In looking at what they say about current and emerging political identities, the framework set up by Haidt and Jost will then be able to help us better understand their meanings and implications.

## Methods

The research that follows is the findings from a contextual analysis of 15 opinion articles from over the past year looking at various bloggers' and pundits' opinions about the left and right. The purpose of this was to gain an understanding of how non-academic experts in politics view political divisiveness and how they might explain left and right motivations. These articles were found on left, right, and moderate media platforms, primarily the *New York Times*, *Salon*, *Harvard Business Times*, *Roll Call*, *The Daily Caller*, *Breitbart*, and *The Federalist* blog. The purpose of choosing a variety of politically oriented media sources was to collect a wide range of political identities as well as to examine the similarities and differences between them. Do right-leaning platforms give different answers than left? Do they use the same terminology when talking about the other side or introduce new terminology? Do they try to psychologically or morally understand the opposing side, or not at all? Are they critical or understanding of opponents?

Key characteristics were identified by pundits on both sides. After an initial reading of all 15 articles, they were divided based on whether the publications in which they were published might lean left or right. From there, the articles were further divided by topic. Four political identities were identified as the most frequently discussed: the *Identity Left*, *Coastal Elites*, *Alt-Right*, and *White Working Class*. The following findings are divided by those four identities, and within each section is a comparison of the left and right media in which they are discussed.

## Findings And Analysis

### Identity Liberalism

Bloggers and pundits from both left and right-wing platforms have begun to discuss the end of what they call "identity liberalism." Identity liberalism is a portion of progressive Democrats whose main focus is on issues of social and cultural inequality. This includes issues such as diversity in schools and the workplace, LGBTQ rights, or police brutality. And though many left-wing pundits praise identity liberals for their triumphs in these areas, they are critical of their tendency to lose focus on other class-based political concerns. Mark Lilla wrote in an opinion article for



the *New York Times*,

The fixation on diversity in our schools and in the press has produced a generation of liberals and progressives narcissistically unaware of conditions outside their self-defined groups, and indifferent to the task of reaching out to Americans in every walk of life ... By the time they reach college many assume that diversity discourse exhausts political discourse, and have shockingly little to say about such perennial questions as class, war, the economy, and the common good.

Other pundits like Conor Lynch of *Salon* agree—we need to overcome pure identity liberalism and focus on economic issues. He argues that we have pushed diversity without considering more systematic economic change. Lynch says, “Not that [identity liberalism] is too preoccupied with promoting diversity or ending all forms of discrimination—there is really no disagreement on the left that these are vitally important goals—but that these efforts and achievements are often used to mask or divert attention from the deeper structural problems of our economic and political systems.”

For Lynch and Lilla, this is a problem for Democrats, especially after a defeat in the presidential election that has left Republicans in control of all three branches of government. Liberals can no longer say they have done their job by succeeding in areas of diversity. Lilla says that in order to move forward, we must end our interest in identity politics and refocus on political commonalities that no longer pit liberals against conservatives. He criticizes the media’s argument that the election was a “whitelash” against people of color in response to the two terms with President Obama that brought many diversity issues to the forefront of politics. This argument, to Lilla, is only further separating Democrats and Republicans, “absolv[ing] liberals of not recognizing how their own obsession with diversity has encouraged white, rural, religious Americans to think of themselves as a disadvantaged group whose identity is being threatened or ignored.” To Lilla, this response to the election is to ignore why Trump got elected in the first place: rural, white, middle-class Americans feel ignored by mainstream politics. Moving forward, he calls for a “post-identity liberalism” that looks at the more common, class-based

social and economic issues, and not just the issues of the marginalized (as important as they may be).

Columbia University professor of law Katherine Franke disagrees with Lilla's criticisms of identity liberals. She calls his post-identity liberalism "a liberalism of white supremacy . . . that figures the lives and interests of white men as the neutral, unmarked terrain around which a politics of 'common interest' can and should be built." To forget identity liberalism would be to normalize the white male-centered politics that is structurally not working for women, people of color, and other marginalized communities.

Right-wing pundits categorize identity liberals in a similar light to Lilla and Lynch—concerned with social and cultural equality to the extent that they lose sight of other, possibly more widely approachable political concerns. These pundits make the same observations that identity liberalism is less class-based and more identity-based, and in turn this might reject Republican or even moderate support. One article in particular, "For Democrats, Identity Politics Trumps Economic Populism," in the *Daily Caller*, observes Hillary Clinton's identity-based campaign gaining more popularity than Bernie Sanders' economic "break up the big banks" campaign. In the opinion piece Scott Greer calls identity liberals "absurd," calling out Clinton for basing her entire campaign on some of their issues. He refers to a question she asked at a rally, "If we broke up the big banks tomorrow ... would that end racism? Would that end sexism?" Other articles categorize identity liberals with political correctness and criticize it for "alienat[ing] much of the country" (Pollak).

The explanations of identity liberals given in these opinion articles fall under Haidt's "ethic of autonomy," which says that the moral world is made entirely of individuals, and all moral choices must respect the will of the individual. These moral foundations are the fairness/reciprocity and harm/care principles. The identity liberal's concerns for social and cultural equality promote the rights of minorities that might be marginalized and unspoken for and therefore fall under this category quite seamlessly.

Social psychologist John Jost might categorize identity liberals as the opposite of conservatives—as having a greater cognitive tolerance for change, ambiguity, and uncertainty. It is difficult to say for sure how identity liberalism would be defined through a social psychological lens,

though, as Jost has done less work to define liberals other than being the opposite of conservatives. But on this basis, it seems as though the identity liberals would be more able to process these cognitive abilities that Jost has found conservatives to reject.

Based on how left-wing pundits criticize identity liberalism, Haidt would categorize disputes *within* the Democratic party between identity liberals and post-identity liberals as an ingroup/loyalty foundation. While some Democrats such as Hillary Clinton based her campaign on identity, others like Bernie Sanders based his on the economy. It seems that the Identity Left is straying away from the group and finding its own purpose in minority rights. By the fact that Clinton lost on this strategy while Trump won on his economic messages, some left-wing pundits like Lilla and Lynch are calling identity liberals to return their loyalty to the original, class-based political equality. Others like Franke disagree and call Lilla's post-identity liberalism a way of normalizing the structure of politics that serves predominantly white males. Although moral foundational differences within parties is something Haidt has not talked about or theorized, it seems that levels of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity might vary within political parties, in this case between identity liberals and non-identity liberals. If Haidt's foundations worked on levels of high and low, identity liberals might rank higher on the harm/care or fairness/reciprocity principles than post-identity liberals.

### Alt-Right

Many pundits have talked about the rise of the alt-right in the weeks following the election. Numerous political observers recognize that the alt-right is somewhat of a resistance to identity liberalism, wherein progressive liberals are making white people identify more and more with the privileges that come with their whiteness. This recognition, according to one right-wing account on the *Federalist* blog says that this kind of rhetoric causes people to feel tribal. In the article David Marcus says, "White people do not face the same kinds of systemic discrimination that people of color do. But progressives are doing a very good job of convincing white people that they do." Marcus argues that privilege theory (i.e., how privilege education is taught in schools) is causing conservatives to respond negatively by believing that their race is being singled out and undermined. He says,

“The shift to the privilege model had an unintended consequence that is abetting white supremacy.” Cue the rise of the alt-right.

The alt-right started as internet “trolls” posting provocative, often extremely racist, pro-white comments on chat rooms and various other platforms, and are now being recognized as a more serious group that many are beginning to fear is a legitimized coalition of neo-Nazis. Their group is now represented more “officially” under Richard Spencer and his National Policy Institute. The alt-right has been called anti-establishment, white nationalist, and white supremacist. They “seek to unite people around the proposition that, as Mr. Spencer put it, ‘Race is real, race matters, and race is the foundation of identity’ ” (Caldwell). At the National Policy Institute’s event in November 2016, a scattered half-dozen men raised their hands in Nazi salutes when Spencer said “Hail, Trump! Hail, our people! Hail, victory!”

Moderate and left-wing pundits are trying to understand this movement and the implications it might have. Christopher Caldwell of the *New York Times* responds to Trump’s election, saying “This could mean a political climate in which reservations about such multiculturalist policies as affirmative action are voiced more strenuously. It could mean a rise in racial conflict and a platform for alarming movements like Mr. Spencer’s.” He goes on to say that many of the members of Spencer’s National Policy Institute *are* racist; in some respects, whether in their policy beliefs in stop-and-frisk or repatriating immigrants, or in their biological beliefs that whites are fundamentally different than people of color. He says, “most people in this part of the alt-right think whites either ought to have a nation or constitute one already” (Caldwell). What is truly interesting about Caldwell’s findings is, as hard as it may be to understand the alt-right, he believes it is not an opposition toward something that America has lost, rather it is an opposition to something that many alt-righters believe America *is*. He says, “These people are not nostalgic. They may not even be conservatives. For them, multiculturalism is not an affront to traditional notions of society, as it would have been in the Reagan era. It is society.”

The alt-right is also frequently defined by their anti-establishment beliefs. The most commonly referenced right-wing account for the alt-right comes from *Breitbart*, the online news source that many attribute to enabling and normalizing the alt-right. They published an article titled “An

Establishment Conservative's Guide To The Alt-Right" written by Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos, which is an in-depth summary of who the alt-right is and what they believe. An interesting section in their article is that titled "Natural Conservatives" which cites Jonathan Haidt's findings about the *conservative instinct*, which "includes a preference for homogeneity over diversity, for stability over change, and for hierarchy and order over radical egalitarianism" (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos). The natural conservative, to Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, differs greatly from whom they call the "establishment Republican." The "establishment Republican ... with their overriding belief in the glory of the free market, might be moved to tear down a cathedral and replace it with a strip mall if it made economic sense ... " but to them, "Such an act would horrify a natural conservative." This same belief goes with immigration and other policies that prove economically lucrative. To the natural conservative (i.e., the alt-right, according to this logic), this simply goes against their natural tendency. Bokhari and Yiannopoulos go on to refer to the natural conservative as valuing culture instead of economic efficiency, saying, "Their perfect society does not necessarily produce a soaring GDP, but it does produce symphonies, basilicas and Old Masters."

There is disagreement in defining who and what the alt-right is. It is significant that the Yiannopoulos and Bokhari piece, one of the most frequently mentioned when talking about the alt-right, solidly defines the alt-right under Haidt's conservative instinct. Under this notion, the alt-right holds Haidt's definition of conservatives under the five moral foundations as well, tending to value all three ethics—autonomy, community, and divinity. What is hard to do with the foundations in this case, though, is differentiate what the alt-right calls the "establishment conservative" from the "natural conservative." Jost's work might prove helpful in defining conservatism as a cognitive response to change and ambiguity, in the possibility that establishment conservatives might be more lenient when it comes to change (say, when there is economic benefit to change), as opposed to the natural/alt-right conservative. As with identity liberals and non-identity liberals, the same kind of varying levels in foundation or cognitive ability might be happening between establishment and traditional conservatives, where the alt-right might rank higher in ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect, or even higher in ambiguity intolerance or fear of change as opposed to establishment Republicans.

## Working Class Whites

Pundits have explained the political divide as a matter of economic dissatisfaction from the white working class, most commonly defined as working white Americans without a 4-year college degree (Walsh). According to Joan Walsh's article in *The Nation* from September 2016 "Can Democrats Win Back White Working-Class Voters?," the white working class has "demoniz[ed] Democrats as the party that coddles minorities, taking jobs and tax dollars from whites and giving them to people of color." In Joan C. Williams' *Harvard Business Review* article "What So Many People Don't Get About the U.S. Working Class," she reminds readers that working class whites are *not* the poor—they are the middle 50 percent income earners; they resent the poor for taking their tax dollars; and they cannot and should not be reduced to racists. An important point Williams makes is that though the working white class tends to resent the poor, they admire the rich. It's how they elected someone like Donald Trump to be our president. Williams asks,

Why the difference? For one thing, most blue-collar workers have little direct contact with the rich outside of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. But professionals order them around every day. The dream is not to become upper-middle-class, with its different food, family, and friendship patterns; the dream is to live in your own class milieu, where you feel comfortable—just with more money.

She explains this difference as a matter of *class culture*. A difference in how the white working class perceives upper-middle class Democrats, or what some pundits are calling "coastal elites."

David Masciotra defines coastal elites in his *Salon* article as "an all-encompassing term for any educated professional who lives in a major city in California or along the Eastern seaboard." Right-wing pundits are especially critical of coastal elites because to Republicans, coastal elite Democrats misunderstand them entirely. In 2016 Michael Koolidge wrote a response in *TheFederalist.com* to many assumptions coastal elites make about the white working class:

As someone who speaks with politically minded people all over Illinois, southern Wisconsin, and eastern Iowa on the radio (12 counties in my listening area that went for Obama in 2012 went to Trump in 2016) every day for going on ten straight years, I think I'm dialed into the zeitgeist of towns like this a bit more than a 25-year-old beat reporter from the *Washington Post* three years out of Princeton who spent one Saturday at a diner.

He is critical of college-educated writers (though he is college educated, too) at left-leaning newspapers who try to make their own interpretations of the "flyover" states and the class culture that lies within, who simplify WWC to the lot of failures who were not successful enough to make it in the big cities. He says this is not just a simplification, it is flat out wrong and offensive. He asks, "We're uneducated? Who do you think runs our schools and hospitals?" He is also critical of the pundits who assume the WWC is sick of income inequality, stating, "it's not the corporate greed or the high salaries and wealth accumulation that bothers us, it's corporate welfare and cronyism. We pay a great deal of attention to our tax money and where it goes." He repeats the point that Walsh and Williams make, that much of what the WWC want is not income equality (Koolidge states, admiring the rich, "I'm happy for my neighbor"), but for their income to stop supporting the poor who, to the WWC, should not be rewarded for not working as hard. Koolidge also argues that the WWC does not deny climate change (he and his wife have fuel-efficient cars and shop locally), nor are they a flock of racists. He says, "People don't like being lectured to, which is one of the reasons so many find political correctness so unappealing." He urges liberals to stop lecturing about privilege and climate change and instead focus on content of character.

The important takeaways from pundits on both the left and right are that working class whites are not poor failures who could not make it in the big city. They are the 50 percent income earners of America who have largely been ignored by identity liberals who, to the WWC, are taking hard earned tax dollars and giving it to people of color and other poor people who have not worked for it. Williams sums up the goals of the white working class as wanting "steady, stable, full-time jobs that de-

liver a solid middle-class life to the 75 percent of Americans who don't have a college degree. Trump promises that. I doubt he'll deliver, but at least he understands what they need."

The pundit definitions of the white working class resemble a majority of what Haidt calls Republicans according to the five moral foundations (harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, purity/sanctity). The most obvious similarities lie in the "ethic of community" foundations, ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect. These foundations place moral value on the needs of the community, protecting the will of the standing identity, history, and reputation of the community and institutions. To the WWC, their identity is based on hard work, taking what you earn, not taking handouts from the government, and supporting the community with what you have. Koolidge is very adamant that people live in rural towns instead of cities not because they are dumb, but because they value the feeling of "community and belonging ... They like the schools here, and the pride and sense of identity (think high school sports mascots) that come with living in a town that's not merely a satellite of a giant city." Jost might call this preference for small community a cognitive response to fear of change or ambiguity intolerance. For Koolidge and many other people in his town it is likely they have lived in small towns their whole lives. To the WWC, community takes a great deal of precedence over what liberals might mistake for being "'stuck' here because he or she 'scored poorly on tests' or 'has bad work habits'" (Koolidge).

Harm/care and fairness/reciprocity are at play here, too, though not in the same way as liberals. As these are ethics of autonomy they place moral value on the rights of the individual. Whereas for liberals (who are categorized by Haidt under *only* these two foundations) place this moral on every facet of politics—social, cultural, economic—the white working class place it in tandem with their ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect foundations as well. They recognize the rights of the individual but in combination with the rights of the white working class members of their group. Like the pundits say, this is not to call them racist, but to acknowledge that their political needs are much more complicated. In Haidt's words this complication would be a differing set of moral preferences.



## Coastal Elites

Some “coastal elites” are attempting to take back the term and use it to criticize the working class whites who have given them the name. David Masciotra writes in *Salon* that the term is not anti-elitist—it’s anti-intellectual—pointing out the irony in hearing so many establishment Republicans speak out against the elite when they themselves are powerful multi-millionaires. He says it is not the multi-millionaires that rural Americans hate: it’s the middle-class intellectuals. He criticizes the rural white working class for rejecting such facts surrounding climate change and immigration:

It has become painful to participate in political discourse, because rather than arguing over different interpretations of historical fact and statistical data, the disputes revolve around the denial of truth. Climate change is not real, even though almost one hundred percent of credentialed scientists accept its existence, because the experts are part of the anti-American elite. Undocumented immigrants comprise a mere 3.5 percent of the American population, but reality is meaningless when the “real America” is angry over the invasion of Mexicans “bringing drugs” and “taking our jobs.”

In an opinion article on *Roll Call*, Patrick Thornton’s “I’m a Coastal Elite from the Midwest: The Real Bubble is Rural America” argues that all of the pundits talking about Democrats needing to better understand the white working class really have it backwards. To Thornton, the WWC needs to get over their hatred for the coastal “intellectuals” and “see more of America.” He says:

We, as a culture, have to stop infantilizing and deifying rural and white working class Americans. Their experience is not more of a real American experience than anyone else’s, but when we say that it is, we give people a pass from seeing and understanding more of their country.

Thornton reflects on his own upbringing, not knowing a gay person until

his first year in college: “That was when I realized that not supporting gay marriage meant to actively deny rights to someone I knew personally.” He argues that rural Americans need to leave their predominantly white, Christian towns and meet people of different races, classes, and sexual identities: “They need to shake hands with a Muslim, or talk soccer with a middle aged lesbian, or attend a lecture by a female business executive” (Thornton).

It’s an interesting argument against Koolidge, who is denying that rural WWC are racist or deny climate change. And the two arguments are indeed looking at two different things. While Masciotra and Thornton are arguing that the white working class is rejecting the intellectualism that makes up most of the coasts, and the Democratic party, Koolidge is saying it’s not about the intellectual stuff—we know the facts, we just want our economy to work for the middle class and not just the top and bottom. WWC aren’t racist or denying climate change, Koolidge argues, they just have different priorities.

This kind of difference in priorities sounds again a lot like Haidt’s moral foundations. Where Masciotra and Thornton, writing for left media, argue that the white working class needs to see more of America and understand the fact that not all Mexicans are rapists and not all Muslims are terrorists, using more ethics of autonomy (fairness/reciprocity and harm/care), Koolidge, writing for right media, might be displaying more of the ethics of community (ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect) by saying they need to focus on the economic needs of the white working class rather than the needs of minorities. It’s equally important to point out the impact these writers’ environments might have on their moral opinions. Masciotra and Thornton might live in more urban areas, where their daily lives are more diverse, and therefore their political opinions reflect the needs of this environment. Koolidge probably does not see a lot of diversity in his day-to-day life, and therefore might have political beliefs that reflect the predominantly white community he lives in.

## Discussion

When defined by social and moral psychologists, political pundits and opinion bloggers, the political divide is complicated, complex, and nuanced. By observing theories given by John Jost and Jonathan Haidt and

comparing them to commonly discussed terms in the media, *identity liberal*, *alt-right*, *coastal elite*, and *white working class*, it is noticeable that in order to properly define these political identities you need more than Haidt's five foundations and Jost's motivated social cognitions. Identity liberals fall under Haidt's harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, which says moral choices express the will of the individual. Jost might define them as opposite to conservatives, having a more open attitude to change and ambiguity. But how does one explain the criticisms of identity liberals for being too set on areas of diversity, inclusion, and LGBT rights, rather than more broad-based economic concerns? These criticisms come from liberals, so how do they differ in Haidt's framework? Is it a matter of identity liberals ranking higher on fairness/reciprocity and harm/care than non-identity liberals? How does Jost or Haidt differentiate the right from the alt-right? Bokhari and Yiannopoulos reference Haidt's conservative instinct toward stability over change and hierarchy and order over radical egalitarianism, calling this "natural conservative" the alt-right, but how does that compare to the "establishment conservative," who might be more open to change when there is an economic advantage? These answers are much more unclear, and suggest that Haidt and Jost's definitions of political identity need to be understood as a spectrum rather than universal and rigid. Varying levels of social cognitive abilities and moral preferences might be better able to explain other complex liberal and conservative identities than those discussed here, such as "cosmopolitan Republican elites vs. evangelical Tea Partiers, global trade advocates on Wall Street vs. blue collar protectionists, middle-class pro-life Catholics in San Francisco and white supremacists in Alabama" (Barker-Plummer).

It is important to note that *identity liberal*, *alt-right*, *coastal elite*, and *white working class* only make up a fraction of the variety of political identities that exist. The four chosen for this study just happen to be the four most talked about in the 15 articles chosen from the past year, and even within these four identities there are other fragmented identities, varying in levels of Haidt or Jost's characteristics. There are 32 possible outcomes when you expand Haidt's five moral foundations to having a high and low value, and 150+ if you were to add a medium value. This complexity is more like what we see in our politics, where reducing identities to red/blue teams not only undermines the complexity of politics, but causes us to cling to our groups in ways that blind us to the ideas of others.

Haidt's and Jost's dimensions allow us to understand political identities as complex differences in moral preference or psychological processing rather than a difference in one's ability to understand fact. With this understanding, then, we can refrain from having discussions in which we believe throwing facts and figures will change someone's mind, dismissing those who disagree with us as "dumb" or "blind," and instead use conversation to ask *why* one disagrees with us, not *with what facts*. Understanding moral and psychological frameworks allows us to step back from the complexities of various political arguments and identities and focus on appreciating differences rather than demonizing them. If we can achieve that, we might be better equipped to have civil conversations about not only politics, but morality, religion, and other highly disputed topics.

When it really comes down to people's preferences, attitudes, and moral leanings, we cannot simplify each other to red and blue, or what Jon Stewart calls "tribal." Like he says, "America is not natural." To act in this sense would be using more time dividing ourselves rather than finding common ground. If democracy gives power to the people, finding this common ground might be in our best interest.

Haidt says in his book *The Righteous Mind*: "I yearn for a world in which competing ideologies are kept in balance, systems of accountability keep us all from getting away with too much, and fewer people believe that righteous ends justify violent means. Not a very romantic wish, but one that we might actually achieve" (xiii). Matters of political difference, as absurd as we may find others' to be, do not make the other side the devil. In the game of politics it is easy to section ourselves into teams, but in doing so we are robbing ourselves a chance to find common ground. By acknowledging that our differences do not make this a matter of good and evil, rather a difference in moral preference or cognitive functions, we might begin to adjust the way we work in politics so the needs of everyone, not just the loudest team, can be heard.

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# MICHELLE GATESY

## The Modern Rom: Literature, Culture, and Identity



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graduated magna cum laude  
with a degree in English and a minor in  
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### WRITER'S COMMENTS

Originally, this article was my senior thesis. It grew out of a shorter paper I wrote in Dr. Garcia Lopez's course on Literature of Migration, which she encouraged me to consider expanding into a full-length thesis paper, and then to consider submitting to *Writing for a Real World*. I approached my thesis fully aware that the type of scholarly work I wanted did not exist. Critical writings on Romani literature simply did not exist anywhere that I turned to—but I did quickly encounter hundreds of cross-discipline articles on the violence, crime, and poverty often attached to "Gypsies." This was, to say the very least, extremely disappointing and disheartening (despite not being surprising). However, after the process of editing and re-working this version's manuscript, I am proud to attach my name to the finished product: a concrete example of what I wish had existed for my original essay.

—Michelle Gatesy

### INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

In "The Modern Rom: Literature, Culture, and Identity," Michelle Gatesy delivers an important scholarly intervention as she thoughtfully argues for the integration of Romani works of literature within the broader field of literary study. Simultaneously, she envisions a Romani Studies that purposefully centers Romani perspectives in the reclamation and re-telling of Romani history. As she demonstrates, the "Gypsy" trope and its stereotypes have dominated public consciousness as well as academic terrains, while sanctioning violence against Romani people and erasure of their histories. Thus, Michelle examines how two contemporary Romani poets use poetry as subversive resistance to the cultural and linguistic silences rendered by popular narratives. Examining Jimmy Story's "New Rom" (1998) and Gregory Dufunia Kwiek's "I am the Common Rom" (2008), alongside expansive historical context, she examines the methods each poet uses to enact a structure and poetics that resituates narrator/audience dynamics, creating a complex interpretation of modern Romani identity.

—Christina Garcia Lopez, Department of English



## The Modern Rom: Literature, Culture, and Identity

FOR BEING MEMBERS OF A SOCIETY obsessed with creation and consumption, it seems that the vast majority of us seldom pause to reflect upon our relationship with the media we interact with. Serious critical engagement with media is scarce, and for better or for worse, the result is that it wields a virtually unmatched influence in curating the accepted social culture(s) and values. However, those of us who also happen to be members of misrepresented, marginalized groups are offered very little opportunity to engage—critically or otherwise—with topical media that acts as a reflection of our own lived experiences.

The experience that inspired me to write this article was recent, and, hopefully, will serve to make this media-driven phenomenon seem less abstract. Simply put: I have never had the privilege of exposure to any media that so much as implied an acknowledgment of my ethnic identity as a Romani Gypsy. The closest “representation” that I grew up with was a certain Gypsy character, in a certain animated movie, who acted as a symbol of many of the stereotypical attitudes and assumptions about Romani Gypsies. This character dresses in gaudy, flowy clothing, wears hooped earrings to match the colorful scarf in her hair, and dances barefoot in the streets for pocket change. The only Gypsies I saw on television were either victims of hate crimes, or lauded as dirty, violent criminals.

“Gypsy,” a pejorative term frequently used to justify violence and discrimination against Roma, has become such a dominant trope within popular discourse and culture that it completely eclipses any challenge to the connotations. Gadže (our term for non-Roma, pronounced GAH-dze) have put forth a truly outstanding effort to ensure that everyone know what a Gypsy is while simultaneously removing Roma from the conversation. The effectiveness of these efforts are palpable. This article may very well have never come to fruition if this were not the case—if I were not compelled by the trauma of being forcibly removed from conversations about my own identity.

I struggle to describe the amount of impact this had on my relationship with my ancestry. How can I possibly explain the hurt caused by decades of a pervasive sense of invisibility, erasure, and having my story

told by someone uninterested in the material consequences of their willful, or otherwise ignorant, usage of a blatant stereotype as a dramatic trope? How can I give words to the experience of having to refer to such a stereotype in order to communicate my identity to others? How can I draw out the complexities of this cycle of erasure?

However, in the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest, this cycle was abruptly, albeit briefly, broken. Pápai Joci, a Hungarian Romani musician, was the first Romani person to perform in the history of the popular musical competition. The lyrics of his single, “Origo,” acted as a direct acknowledgement of my identity and the unique type of cultural trauma and pain that Roma experience. For brevity’s sake I will spare my readers the rest of the details, but I strongly recommend watching the recorded performance online and perhaps the music video as well. The symbolism in the music video in particular is extremely relevant to this article.

The power that this three-minute performance held, and still holds, over me is the driving force behind this article. My objective is to not only contribute to emerging Romani counternarratives and push back against the “Gypsy” narrative that Joci interrupts, but to also critically examine the ways in which Roma interact with literature in the English literary realm. Furthermore, I intend to shed light on the relationship dynamics between this literary realm and Roma, as well as the methodologies Romani writers employ to create a head-on confrontation with the erasure and resultant generational trauma inflicted by those pre-existing narratives about Roma.

For these objectives, I will rely upon the analysis and criticism of two contemporary Romani poets’ responses to the concept of a Romani counternarrative, as well as how they confront, resist, and engage with the “Gypsy” precedent. Gregory Dufunia Kwiek’s “I am the Common Rom” and Jimmy Story’s “New Rom,” are two such poems that address the complex nature of modern Romanipen (“Romani-ness”).

Kwiek wastes no time in establishing and maintaining a bitter, and at times, sarcastic foundation for his biting commentary on the “common Rom” lifestyle. His sharp humor is direct, and is interwoven with loaded references to the history of violence and oppression that ripples through contemporary Romani lives. The poem requires its readers to have a significant amount of cultural and social knowledge in order for its meaning to be fully grasped, and raises probing questions about the

identity of the poem's speaker, as well as who, exactly, is being addressed.

Story, on the other hand, offers a more somber look at the Roma through his poetic language. Though much of the thematic content that Kwiek brings to the table is similarly contained within the verses of "New Rom," at least in terms of historical and cultural reference points, Story handles both the historical and modern destruction of Romani culture with a decidedly more delicate hand. The poem embraces many traditional conventions of Western poetics as it offers its readers a rare and intimate glimpse of the struggle that is modern Romani identity. Echoes of often overlooked centuries of Romani pain and suffering are eloquently traced through the stanzas, and they, too, are interspersed with nods to the "Gypsy" trope.

Through an in-depth analysis and close reading of both "I am the Common Rom" and "New Rom," my article will explore methods that Kwiek and Story utilize in order to create a new interpretation of Romani identity that is separate and distinct from that of gadže (mis)conceptions. However, before I delve deeply into my analysis and criticism, it would be remiss to not first offer a brief overview of Romani identity and culture.

### A Note Concerning the Term "Gypsy"

There is an important note that must be made before I begin to describe the history of the word "Gypsy," as well as the history of the "Gypsy" figure as a literary trope. The word "Gypsy" has survived centuries of iterations of persecution, and as such, is considered by many Roma to be an ethnic slur. Although I use "Gypsy" and "Romani" as interchangeable terms in this article, the language we use is always political, especially so with the language used to describe injustice and marginalization. The word "Gypsy" not only connotes unsavory racism, but also has been directly used as a tool to inflict centuries of pain and suffering to Roma, as well as a tool to justify genocide. Nevertheless, there are also many of us that refer to ourselves as Gypsies, whether for simplicity, clarity, or even a sense of reclamation. With this information in mind, I strongly caution gadže against reflexively referring to Roma as Gypsies.

## Romani History

Contextualizing Romani history presents no shortage of serious challenges. For readers approaching Roma from an academic perspective for the first time, discerning truth from a myth is often a far more complicated process than it may first appear. As Romani scholars have gradually begun to chip away at the barriers preventing our narratives from existing within the public domain, we have begun to carve out a more prominent niche in academic discourse. Researchers seeking to unearth the truth about “Gypsies” have enjoyed a recent uptick in interest in Romani studies, as well as a general curiosity about “Gypsies.” As a result, missing links that have evaded researchers for decades are now beginning to emerge, and those links directly challenge many of the farcical claims that had previously ruled over Romani narratives.

Although the racist caricatures that still dominate popular conceptions of Romani “Gypsies” go so far as to deny our existence as people with a culture and history, “in reality, the Roma people date back to as early as 250 BCE. They migrated from India and settled across Europe” (Grygierowska 562). The specific date is based on linguistic research that traces the journey of the Roma from North-Central India to Europe. This mass migration is believed to have taken place at some point between 1000 and 1025 CE (Warnke 338).

Currently, these findings are the most complete account (as well as the most plausible theory) of where Roma may have originated. However, the exact reasons for the mass migration are still under debate. Popular theories range from famine, war, slavery, climate change, and beyond. Whatever the reasons may have been, the fact stands that there is substantial, multi-disciplinary evidence that supports the claim that the Roma originated from North-Central India. In fact, in 2016, the Modi administration in India formally recognized the Roma as an Indian diaspora group. This symbolic gesture was a critical tipping point for the effort to increase formal acknowledgement of the Romani diaspora, particularly in our efforts towards fighting the mindset that accuses “Gypsies” of having no true homeland to speak of.

## Gadže Romani

The origins of the word “Gypsy” are more readily evident than the origins of Roma themselves. Widely read Romani scholar, Ian Hancock, explains that “because they [Roma] arrived in Europe from the East, they were thought by the first Europeans to be from Turkey or Nubia or Egypt ... and they were called, among other things, Egyptians or ‘Gyptians’” (Hancock 13). This is, perhaps, one of the more plausible explanations for why “Gypsy” was designated as the gadže term of choice to document and describe Romani populations. Although this Egyptian origin theory is evidently a tall tale, it has nonetheless persisted through generations and further suppressed our true history.

This account of the term’s origin is also a case-in-point example of how gadže assert their hegemonic dominance to use the “Gypsy” trope to suit their own purposes, and settle their own curiosities about the exotic Other—although, I imagine that those curiosities cannot possibly have been more than skin deep, seeing as such an absurd story is still widely and uncritically embraced. While “Gypsy” may have been an honest mistake some hundreds and thousands of years ago, we now have evidence across disciplines that conclusively prove that Roma do not, in fact, come from Egypt. In spite of this, and the continued efforts of writers and scholars, the “Gyptian” or “Gypsy” reigns supreme in popular vernacular.

Outrageous claims about the origins of the Roma still remain in widespread circulation as gadže stubbornly cling to a false sense of security in the “Gypsy” lie. Sensationalized, romanticized, and especially in the colorful case of “prehistoric troglodytes,” decidedly racist accounts of the so-called mysterious “Gypsies” are a dime in a dozen in both popular and academic literary canons (Hancock 9). It seems as if the novelty of a mysterious and exotic Other is simply too alluring for Western society to fully let go of. I would very much like to believe that this is due to the human difficulty of breaking old habits, especially when those habits have, unquestioningly and uncritically, been accepted over the course of a lifetime. However I (along with many other Romani scholars) suspect that there may be far more ghoulish forces at work.

While considering the “Gypsy” trope, we might also consider the historical context of its transformation from a descriptive to a pejorative term. While the history of this phenomenon is murky at best (as is often

the case with all things relating to Romani history), what is generally agreed upon are the types of stories, peoples, and behaviors associated with “Gypsies.” On a surface level reading, these associations may appear to be contained within the world of children’s media and literature, as Karolina Grygierowska suggests. As an example, Shel Silverstein’s poem, “The Gypsies are Coming,” later changed to “The Goonies are Coming,” showcases the antiquated belief that “Gypsies” steal (or, as in the poem, purchase with pocket-change) gadže children.

Now, the trope has grown up out of the toy box, and into everyday lexicon—enabling the dehumanization and justifications of violence against “Gypsies.” Grygierowska states, “[The word] ‘gypsy’ elicits various popularized and unrealistic representations of the Romani people: from Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, Esmeralda and the Gypsy Fools, to stereotypical fortune-telling old women with crystal balls in wooden caravans, to thieving and manipulating con-artists” (561). When we have been cheated, we can be said to have been “Gypped”; when we encounter someone with a love for travel, they may claim to possess a “Gypsy Soul”; when Halloween rolls around in the United States, we can be sure to find heavy-handed and sexualized “Gypsy” costumes in the ever-deplorable “ethnic” section of costume shops, etc. The meaning of the term “Gypsy” has evolved throughout its existence, and unfortunately, despite the supposed “Gypsy” wandering soul trait, this trope is here to stay for the time being.

I am deeply troubled by this reality as I hope is plainly evident by this point of the article. Many of the connotations of the word actively deny and rob Roma of our true human qualities. Moreover, there is a real concern about the effect that the prevalence of the “Gypsy” trope has on gadže that have never encountered a Romani person in the flesh. This concern is amalgamated by the alarming percentage of the population of the United States that accept the idea that “Gypsy” is nothing more than a term for a tacky Halloween costume, and speaks volumes to just how deeply the “Gypsy” has burrowed itself into Western society.

Apart from the dregs of seasonal Halloween shops and Disney movies, we can pin some blame on gadže scholars of Romani history and culture for the widespread perpetuation of the trope. For the sake of fetishization and orientalism, much of the scholarly work that has been done in the “Gypsy history” arena has been imprudently accepted as gospel

truth. As one scholar quips: “Students of Gypsy history . . . have clung tenaciously to the ambiguity of the Gypsies’ lineage, as though the mystery of their origin were crucial to the role they played in the imaginations of scholars, writers, and readers alike” (Nord 21). It is not as if Romani history is a great mystery, lost forever to time and travel. As I have already established, there are a great many scholars and researchers (both Roma and gadže) that have devoted themselves to accurately trace and document the lived experiences along with the cultural and social histories of the Roma. However, once a precedent has been set, it is incredibly difficult to remove and replace—more so the case when the challenges and counter-narratives are almost exclusively supplied from within the minority group whose marginalization is at stake.

### Erasure and Reclamation

Understandably, there is a great deal of frustration within the Romani diaspora about the difficulties we have in asserting counternarratives that are true to our lives and histories, and many Romani writers base the heart of their writings around those frustrations. Gregor Dufunia Kwiek’s “I am the Common Rom” presents a particularly interesting case of one Romani writer’s resistance to the “Gypsy” trope.

Kwiek’s poem quickly establishes the narrator as a “common Rom,” as it were, but complicates the reader’s perception of who exactly is being addressed. The narrator appears to turn aside to address a second reader, between the lines:

Hello, I’m the common Rom.  
Some fool told me to reveal to *gadže* that I’m a Rom, and stand up—  
(I don’t think this guy was a Rom).

(Kwiek 3-5)

Here, the narrator acknowledges the “Gypsy” trope, as well as the discriminatory attitudes that accompany it. He demonstrates a hesitation to reveal to gadže that he is Romani, ostensibly, because he is aware of the prejudice attitudes surrounding gadže perceptions of “Gypsies.” However, the driving forces behind those violent anti-Romani tendencies are

invisible to the gadže (the “guy”) referenced in this interaction.

The nature of the structure of this interaction does not quite make the intended audience’s demographics clear to the reader. I favor the reading that interprets the narrator as making a point to gadže audiences about their (general) widespread ignorance of the dangers posed to Roma who actively resist racism in everyday interactions. I am sure that there are gadže that will read this article, and wonder why Roma do not “fix” these attitudes. This reaction, in my opinion, is a key indicator that the person in question may not yet fully grasp the relational power dynamics between Roma and gadže. For this reason, I favor my reading of Kwiek’s narrator “turning away” from the main audience, comprised of both Roma and gadže, and towards a more intimate one of Roma that requires no explanation from the narrator for its intended meaning. This stanza of Kwiek’s poem fits neatly within my speculation on why some gadže insist that Roma be responsible for “fixing” prejudicial attitudes. This interpretation highlights these circumstances, as well as draws attention to the pervasiveness of the “Gypsy” trope amongst gadže—in spite of their comparative ignorance of the violence that “Gypsies” must contend with.

The oppression that Roma endure is not solely limited to gadže perpetrators. Intra-community politics and infighting, as unfortunately the case with many other marginalized groups, is not at all uncommon within the diaspora. There are complex issues of privilege within Romani communities that still exist in the fallout of (what many of us presume to be) the dismantling of a caste system that may have existed during our time spent in North-Central India. For example, while I do reference the scholarship of Hancock multiple times in this article, I am quite critical of his role as a Romani scholar. He is light-skinned, financially stable, (presumably) heterosexual, cisgender, etc. I have yet to read an essay of his—of which he has single-handedly written over 400, if we are not counting any of his other academic contributions—where he acknowledges his position of relative privilege in the discipline, and how it has undoubtedly contributed to his status as one of the most well-read and well-respected contemporary Romani scholars.

This is yet another socio-cultural nuance that will fly over the heads of most gadže, and perhaps even some Romani, readers. In Kwiek’s poem, the narrator declares:



Hello, I'm the common Rom.  
 How dare you say my vitsa\* were once slaves?  
 Maybe yours were, but certainly not mine.  
 Maybe those slaves were the really trashy Gypsies

*\* Romani ethnic subgroup; clan*

(9-12)

This stanza builds upon the already-established ignorance that the narrator harbors about his own identity: the narrator is shocked and insulted at the “accusation” that he is descended from former slaves. For Roma in the United States in particular, the likelihood of this “accusation” being true is significantly high, as it is believed that the majority of American Romani families (at least those families that have been in the United States for several generations) are originally descended from slaves that were uprooted and forcibly transported to the country during the chattel slavery era. For Roma that have come to the United States more recently from Europe—one or two generations—it is more likely that the Rom has ancestry tied to formerly enslaved European Roma. Unfortunately, as this narrator demonstrates, there is still a degree of shame in acknowledging the unique history of Romani trauma.

The narrator vehemently denies that his ancestors were slaves, and even turns the “accusation” back on his accuser, suggesting that the accuser’s vista were “the really trashy Gypsies” that had been enslaved. The subtle implication in this accusation is that it was only “really trashy” “Gypsies” had been enslaved, and thus, perhaps somehow deserving of their enslavement. Generally, the most vulnerable and most severely marginalized amongst Romani populations are direct descendants of the formerly enslaved, and this rhetorical maneuver by the narrator carries more than a hint of malice. There is a certain amount of privilege that accompanies such an accusation, and coupled with the caustic tone of the narrator, it appears that Kwiek is commenting on this circumstance of privilege. Clearly the audience is not at all intended to take the narrator’s accusations at face value, but rather, intended to be critical of the political climate that engenders and enables privilege—even within the Romani diaspora.

As the poem unfolds the narrator references (and, to an extent, repro-

duces) stereotypical traits associated with being “Gypsy,” but also pushes against them with allusions to histories that caused Roma to be forever haunted by our undeserved reputation. For instance, on a surface-level reading, the following lines may serve as a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the dismal literacy rates amongst Romani populations:

Hello, I’m the common Rom.  
Education? Are you joking?  
We can’t change—it’s in our blood.  
We will always be stupid Rom

(Kwiek 15-18)

A simplistic reading of those lines may suggest that Roma ourselves often “fulfill” the stereotypes that allow gadže to grossly discriminate against us. After all, according to a November 2016 survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), it is true that around fifty percent of European Roma between the ages of six and twenty-four do not attend school (FRA 3). But if we delve deeper into the significance of a Romani writer to broach this subject in the context of a poem that discusses the social injustices faced by Roma, a different interpretation rises to the surface. Truly, “We will always be stupid Rom,” when over eighty percent of Roma surveyed by the FRA live below their respective country’s poverty threshold; when the only lands that Roma can afford to live on are dilapidated ghettos, miles away from any schools; when Roma are routinely refused enrollment in quality, accredited schools and must instead attend “special” schools that do not offer the same level of intellectual rigor as mainstream classrooms. In short, what Kwiek insinuates in this stanza is that Romani illiteracy is rarely, if ever, a deliberate choice made in an attempt to preserve “Gypsy” lifestyle and culture. Rather, it is the so-called self-fulfilling prophecy of being an illiterate Rom that continues to feed into these oppressive forces of anti-Romani sentiment in society. It is easy for gadže to see an illiterate “Gypsy” and assume that their illiteracy is an immutable part of their “Gypsy” identity—it is not so easy to confront the underlying causes for the marginalization that created that illiteracy.

## “Gypsies” in Gadže Writings

I want to be explicit in saying that I am not interested in doing a critical deconstruction of the racist tropes that gadže are responsible for creating and reproducing. Many Romani academics have come before me and put forth an admirable effort for that cause, and I highly recommend spending time with their writings. However, dissecting at least one example of the damage that this trope has doled out is necessary in order for Kwiek’s commentary on gadže “authority” to be comprehensible and fully realized.

As it has become painstakingly obvious, Romani identity has a long history of being appropriated, bastardized, and otherwise flagrantly disrespected by the professional academic world. One of the most notable and notorious examples of this is Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann’s 1787 dissertation, *Die Zigeuner (The Gypsy)*. For centuries, this document was regarded and handled as the authoritative text about Romani culture and customs. So influential was Grellmann’s dissertation that it was even cited in the drafting process of laws and policies concerning the education, healthcare, and other state and/or public services specifically for Roma. This was in spite of Grellman’s fierce and unapologetic racist attitudes towards Gypsies. Grellman writes that Roma are a “people with a childish way of thinking ... guided more by sense than reason,” and “exceedingly prone to anger and other violent emotions,” amongst other condemnations (66). Even if this impact is not immediately obvious to gadže, the fact that such a document was so readily embraced and regarded as authoritative and subjective enough to shape government policy speaks truth to the extent to which anti-Romani sentiment is embedded within society.

Due to the unchallenged acceptance of this genre of academic work, Roma have been left out of those facets of society that mold its citizens into well-adjusted, well-rounded individuals that fully participate in (and contribute to) all that their world has to offer. To reiterate: these vile tropes are created, reproduced, and perpetuated by gadže; serve to encourage and justify both outright violence and more subtle acts of prejudice against Roma; have been widely accepted as legitimate scholarship over the course of several centuries; and have created a treacherous environment for those of us attempting to push back and resist them.

### Inherited Trauma and Collective Memory

In light of the horrific violence and poverty cycles facilitated by the “Gypsy” trope, there is a visceral sense of urgency that accompanies literature that advocates for and/or proposes a counternarrative. One of the essential components of this initiative is the reclamation and re-telling of (true) Romani history. As has already been discussed, gadže have gone to great efforts (see *Die Zigeuner*) to assert their own versions of Romani history, effectively bolstering the pre-existing prejudicial attitudes about Roma. Thus, the motivation to assimilate, driven by the impact of these caricatures, has experienced a resounding success rate. Many Roma themselves are taught—too often, by their own families—a historical narrative so embellished and obfuscated by gadže that it is almost unrecognizable when placed side-by-side with the truth.

This is a common experience, unique to Roma, because we have not been allowed to be involved in the creation of our own historical narrative(s). The cultural erasure that coerced assimilation means that popular narrative is all that many of us have as a point of reference. This, too, is one of the lasting effects of gadže curating the narrative about what it means to be Romani. There is an all-too-familiar ignorance that many Roma have about their own familial and ethnic histories, even in this modern age with technologies that facilitate tracing an individual’s lineage.

### The Damage the “Gypsy” Did

When I say that Roma have been prevented from supplying alternative narratives in the first place, truly, I say it without any exaggeration. The “Gypsy” trope is a serious threat to the continued survival of Romani history and culture as it encourages and justifies further decimation of an already corroded culture. This is due to the violent attacks against our humanity: we have endured multiple attempted genocides, centuries of slavery in multiple countries and continents (both in Europe and in the Americas), and still continue to suffer violence and discrimination across borders as seen in the 2016 FRA report.

As it turns out, when there have been substantial attempts to eradicate an entire ethnic people and their culture(s), there is a considerable

loss that those culture(s) experience. For those of us in the United States, our histories exist under truly extraordinary circumstances. Ian Hancock points out that American Roma in particular have quite a unique relationship to Romani history: “While an American Rom can tell you that his family came from Russia or Serbia, that is usually where the story stops” (PEN Introduction 13). It is not at all uncommon for a Rom living in the United States to only be able to trace their family back (via immigration records, if they are so lucky) as far as the early-mid 1940s—only one or two generations, for obvious reasons.

Furthermore, it is also not unheard of for American Roma to not have any documented family history at all, especially if the family fled their country of origin to escape the Holocaust. The intergenerational cultural trauma that results from this, as well as the effects of those cultural losses, is compounded by the violence that the “Gypsy” trope enforces. There are a number of my fellow Roma who disagree with my take on this and may believe me to be exaggerating the impact as a rhetorical flourish. However, I must insist that the assertion that this trope continues to play no role whatsoever in the systematic dehumanization and destruction of Romani culture and history is completely unfounded. One needs only to turn to the profound grief and longing in Romani literature, as Romani writers struggle to make sense of that loss, to observe its impact.

### The Modern Rom

Not only is there the literal and symbolic cultural deaths that Romani writers must grapple with, but there is also the ever persistent distribution of the “Gypsy” figure that directly hinders Roma seeking to reclaim and reinvent their identity as Gypsies, as it were. As Kwiek’s “Common Rom” expresses the modern struggle of reconciling the “Gypsy” and the Rom, so too does Jimmy Story’s “New Rom” address a different perspective. While Kwiek’s poetics are concerned with the sweeping erasure of Romani narratives within our own communities and families, Story’s poem adopts a more individualistic approach. The narrator poses the hypothetical question:

kaski san? "Who are we,  
 Roma without Romanes  
 who must read/our own history  
 in another tongue,  
 .....  
 across maps of imagination  
 trying to recreate  
 the lost structure  
 of our soul?

(Story 1–11)

This is an extremely relevant question to ponder, especially as a Rom living during a period of time when the number of native speakers of our language (Romanes) is plummeting. Undoubtedly, as language so often is a principal carrier of culture, this pushes Romani voices even further into the margins—forcing even more of us to derive meaning from stories that do not reflect the identities of the peoples they claim to represent, and further suppressing the efforts to create a counternarrative.

In a manner of speaking, Story's narrator articulates a perspective that sees the "soul" of Romani culture as being lost in a cross-cultural, cross-historical translation. For Roma, there is a never-ending search for narratives that accurately reflect a distinct, recognizably Romani identity. After all, we are not the ones setting the precedent in the narratives that currently exist. The "Gypsy" figure created by gadže does not leave any room for us to reclaim the space in which Roma are able to exist authentically, and overpowers most all meaningful attempts to do so. It is because of the pervasiveness of anti-Romani sentiment (a phenomenon so widespread to the point where it is virtually invisible to those unaffected by it: why do so few Americans know what "Romani" means, while being very familiar with what "Gypsy" means?) that the "Gypsy" forces Romani histories to be unreliably written "in another tongue," from which we must unreliably "recreate / the lost structure / of our soul[s]." For American Roma, many of us are, quite literally, "Roma without Romanes."

Roma that have immigrated (or, rather, fled) to the United States frequently decide not to pass on their cultural and linguistic knowledge to younger generations out of (understandable) fear of the violent persecu-

tion experienced collectively by Roma over the centuries, and in more recent memory, the Holocaust. For some families, that cultural knowledge never even had an opportunity to be passed on: all the members of the family with that knowledge were victims of genocide. Story's narrator points towards the effect of the cultural shifts that these silences create:

If we learn Romanes  
 from books and not  
 our mother's breast  
 it is only because  
 the long cloak of assimilation  
 the rubber stamp of jackboots  
 and the mask of shame  
 almost destroyed  
 the butterfly's fragile wings

(23–31)

The “long cloak of assimilation” and “the rubber stamp of jackboots” are direct references to the cultural knowledge that has been destroyed by genocide. There is nothing inherently wrong with learning Romanes from books, as opposed to family members, and of course learning to speak one's ancestral language can be a powerful way to solidify ethnic identity. However, it cannot be denied that there are substantive consequences that result from divorcing a language from its culture of origin. As I have stated, language is so often a carrier of culture, and when it is removed from its cultural context(s), there is a loss of cultural identity that accompanies it. It is in this way, as Story's poem demonstrates, that Romani identity becomes all the more lost in translation.

The shift in identity born out of the aftermath of genocide is a heartbreakingly prominent theme within Romani literature. In the face of a global society that has both tacitly and explicitly altered the meaning of ethnic Romani identity, Romani writers have made strides towards reclaiming and re-writing Romani history. In Story's poem, the narrator speaks to the reality that many Roma face when restoring their identities as Roma, in light of the destruction of the Holocaust:

If we reconstruct history  
 from dust and ashes  
 it is because this dust  
 came from our own feet  
 and the ashes from our bones

(39–43)

This poem showcases a complex relationship dynamic between the narrator and reader, and vice versa. Story's narrator repeatedly implicates himself within the "we," where "we" is the population that must "reconstruct history / from dust and ashes"—the post-genocide, modern Roma. The "we" also includes the reader, should they happen to be Romani, but simultaneously excludes the non-Romani reader that does not have that direct connection to the history. The relationship contained within the "we" is entirely contingent on the reader's position in reference to Romani socio-cultural histories. Thus, in the "we" that Story involves in some way within each stanza, he explicitly frames the poem's intended Roma addressees. In this stanza, which closes the poem, Story is also demonstrating how Romani poetics are able to grant the poet the ability to make highly specific references to collective trauma, while still holding *gadže* at arm's length.

These lines about the histories that "came from our own feet / ... from our bones" can be interpreted quite literally: Holocaust narratives that explicitly center Roma are, literally, built upon the dust and ashes, of the feet and the bones, of those yet unnamed, undiscovered, unknown victims. The poem's corporeal imagery elicits a powerful emotional response within readers that are able to directly engage with the poem's historical references, but even so, the entire depth of the intended effect is not wholly lost on those without that direct connection. This powerful, moving effect builds itself upon the poignant sense of loss that is intimately interwoven with modern Romani identity. If we are to turn away from the "Gypsy" trope in our search for a more authentic common identity, the dearth of narratives created and curated by Roma means that all there is for us to extract meaning from are—truly—"the ashes from our bones."



## Work to Be Done

For people with any significant amount of social power, hardly any effort is required to regard the exotic, the Other, and the “Gypsy,” as illegitimate. This is a tried and true recipe for ensuring that marginalized populations will never be accepted into (or even simply acknowledged) by mainstream social culture(s). In addressing this, and in creating a plan of action to balance the playing field, I find myself being far less concerned with the absorption of Romani literature into the mainstream, but very much concerned with the fact that the academy has been able to disregard an entire system of culturally specific knowledge for as long as it has.

As a Rom, I am keenly aware that my very existence in academia, in and of itself, is a form of subversive resistance. This has become more and more impossible to ignore as I have traversed through the course of the research for this article, as it has been necessary for me to rely entirely upon myself to do the intellectual legwork, without the privilege of referencing other scholars or talking over my ideas with an established professional familiar with my specific area of academic interest. All throughout the process of creating this article, my searching and researching continued to bump against the same dead-ends, as well as a great deal of writings by gadže academics (see *Die Zigeuner*) that were similarly unhelpful. I continue to be sorely disappointed (and disgusted) by this injustice.

While I do believe that Romani literature still has yet to receive its due time in the limelight, as a scholar, I am somewhat skeptical of those that would argue that Romani literature has some inherent quality that is especially original or especially unique within the wider field of literary study. I am extremely wary of the specter of exoticism that haunts nearly every ethnic studies department, and worry that perhaps we have confined ourselves within far too narrow of a category, if we consider Romani literature as being in the category of “ethnic” literature. After all, the specific qualities of the two poems that I have explored in this article are certainly translatable across other disciplines, other ethnicities, etc. I do not want Romani literature to fall prey to the double-bind of colonialism, nor do I want literature about Roma/Romani-related subjects, and/or literature written by Roma ourselves, considered “too exotic” to be considered legitimate and worthy scholarship, or our literature to be

seen as too similar to other “ethnic literature” that has been more widely embraced by the Anglophonic literary canon.

In my opinion, it is this very commensurability that demonstrates the inherent usefulness and value of studying Romani literature within a specifically Romani context. Imagine the insights and intellectual gains that students of literature stand to benefit from, if only Romani-authored and Romani-centric played a larger role in our literary diets! For instance, I imagine that learning to recognize parallels between the poetic and literary conventions of mainstream literatures and (comparatively) unfamiliar literary territory surely would yield an even stronger crop of well-equipped and well-rounded literary scholars. In short, it is specifically because those conventions in Romani literature are translatable to other genres that the promise of a vast range of utility for various tasks and studies (that may not even be readily apparent!) exist. One of the primary roles of the academy is to create and cultivate complex cultural resources, and truly, Romani literature offers exactly that.

As scholars, we must ask ourselves difficult questions about whose voices are prioritized and permitted to exist, and at whose expense the privilege of prioritization come from. As Ian Hancock once quipped in an interview with *Teaching Tolerance* magazine: “When you ask people what they know about Gypsies ... it will be based on what they have read, not whom they’ve interacted with. So when you talk about Roma ... nobody can make that human connection.” As it currently stands, there are a precious few alternative messages that confront and challenge the limiting narrative that “Gypsy” entails. In turn, the “Gypsy” trope then grows large enough to become a reflection of the cultural attitudes of the societies that Roma are members of, and the “Gypsy” relentlessly latches onto the minds of both gadže and Gypsy alike. When Roma are unable to see positive representations of themselves within the media that they consume, they are then forced to make the decision to either accept and embrace the “Gypsy,” as Kwiek’s facetious “Common Rom” narrator demonstrates, or enter the fray and struggle with the realization that their society’s conception of who they are is ultimately irreconcilable with their own self-image, as does Story’s “New Rom.” If our goal as scholars of literature is to challenge the circumstances that stifle voices from the margins and allow injustice and inequality to continue to exist, then the inherent value of a counternarrative becomes crystal clear.

While there is clearly still work to be done, there are glimmers of hope on the horizon. While conducting her research for her most recent publication on Romani literature, Dr. Paola Toninato, an associate research fellow at the Warwick School of Modern Languages and Cultures, observed significant changes to cultural attitudes towards literacy, education, and self-advocacy within the general Romani diaspora. She believes that the changes she observed within the communities she worked in were indicative of a promising future for Romani counternarratives.

More and more often, Romani writers are using poetry to resist the “Gypsy” stereotype: “For an increasing number of Romani authors, poetry is a way to break this vicious circle. Through writing, they home to lay the basis for a constructive encounter with the members of the majority group” (Toninato 100). In order to lay the foundation for substantive social and political changes, there must first be a “constructive encounter” established as a baseline. Reproducing and further amplifying the same tired rhetoric about Roma is insufficient, and threatens to counter the progress that has only just begun to unfold.

However we approach this dilemma, I am hoping it has become plainly evident that the present literary circumstances for Roma are indicative of a much larger problem. I want to stress that I am not advocating for Romani representation “for its own sake.” Rather, I am advocating for the care and creation of a far more robust Romani literary canon, as a means of taking direct action in response to the violence and oppressions we face. The fundamental issue at hand with the “Gypsy” trope is that it does not allow space for a human depiction of Roma, and bulldozes any opportunity for a counternarrative to exist. This absence of humanistic literary representation justifies and contributes to the absence of humanistic attitudes towards Roma in a global context. This suppression cannot be permitted to continue, especially if our end goal is to bring about meaningful and lasting change for Romani circumstances.

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# VIVIEN GLOCKER

## The Role of Insulin in Co-Occurring Depression and Diabetes



*Vivien Glocker is currently studying  
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University of Basel, Switzerland.*

## WRITER'S COMMENTS

My passion for the human being as a whole—body and mind—led me to consider new perspectives on diabetes. Fascinated by the biopsychological interconnections of phenomena in humans, I strive to tackle potentially relevant links between our psychological and physical wellbeing. During my research about the rising incidence of co-occurring depression and diabetes, I discovered potential reciprocal influences. The contrast between absolute insulin deficiency—a shortage or lack of insulin production due to the autoimmune destruction of beta cells in the pancreas—in type 1 diabetes, and relative insulin deficiency—a decreased insulin sensitivity or insulin resistance despite enough, or even excessive, insulin production—in type 2 diabetes led me to examine the role of insulin beyond the scope of metabolism. In particular, I analyzed effects of insulin on neurotransmitters—chemicals the brain uses for communication, such as dopamine—and their relevance in depression. I hope this paper inspires affected individuals, doctors, and researchers to develop optimized holistic treatments and prevention methods based on interdisciplinary and biopsychological approaches.

—*Vivien Glocker*

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

Vivien Glocker is passionate about connections between biology and psychology. In this paper, she focuses on interactions between diabetes and depression. Explaining the complex networks of cause and effect for either diabetes or depression is challenging in itself, and topics related to each of these disorders have provided rich material for past term papers in Biological Psychology classes. In this paper, however, Vivien takes the reader through both disorders, explaining connections at multiple levels, and she provides a thorough exploration of what is known from past research and what remains to be studied. This synthesis is compelling reading for scientists and practitioners, and, at the same time, Vivien does surprisingly well at making complex topics approachable for a general audience.

—*Ed Munnich, Department of Psychology*

### Abstract

My main hypothesis is that insulin may be a key element in co-occurring depression and diabetes by not only regulating homeostatic glucose mechanisms in the bloodstream, but also influencing dopamine release, which might be linked to depression. This still-developing fused scientific area is relevant in terms of finding biopsychological mechanisms which are linked to the pathogenesis of both depression and diabetes. Furthermore, a combined psychological and physiological treatment may reduce or even prevent the rising incidence of co-occurring depression and diabetes.

*Keywords:* co-occurring depression and diabetes, diabetes burnout, insulin deficiency (type 1 diabetes), insulin-like growth factor, neurotransmitter, dopamine



## The Role of Insulin in Co-Occurring Depression and Diabetes

DEPRESSION AND DIABETES ARE MAJOR GLOBAL HEALTH PROBLEMS. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence demonstrating that diabetes is likely to increase the risk for depression (Nouwen et al., 2004; Pan et al., 2010; as cited in Fisher, Chan, Nan, Sartorius, & Oldenburg, 2012). According to the World Health Organization, by 2020, depression may likely be the second top disorder in Disability Adjusted Life Years (Fisher et al., 2012). Moreover, people with diabetes are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop depression than people without diabetes (Nash, 2014). The Diabetes Atlas of the *International Diabetes Federation* estimates an increase of diabetic cases to 552 million worldwide by 2030 (Whiting et al. (2011, as cited in Fisher et al., 2012). Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes are related to alterations of the central nervous system, including differences observable in brain imaging, increased risk of neurodegenerative disease, and increased occurrence of depression (Kleinridders et al., 2015).

Being diagnosed with a disease, such as diabetes, usually causes psychological distress or discomfort. An unexpected diagnosis with lifelong insulin dependency may induce temporary depression. Type 1 diabetes not only requires lifelong dependency on insulin but it also requires continuous blood glucose level adjustments. Understanding diabetes-linked depression is crucial to ending the vicious cycle of suboptimal diabetes control and depression which often leads to decreased motivation for self-management. McMullen and Sigurdson (2014) created a depression–diabetes and antidepressant–insulin analogy and define both diabetes and depression as lifelong medical conditions requiring medication (McMullen & Sigurdson, 2014).

What might be a link between the biological mechanism in diabetes and the biopsychological phenomenon of depression? This paper addresses the biopsychological basis of the high co-occurrence of diabetes and depression, how decreased insulin signaling alters dopamine release, and how dopamine release is relevant in depression. I analyze how depression (in addition to diabetes distress and psychological insulin resistance) affects diabetes on the psychological level, and how altered insulin supply and insulin sensitivity in diabetes influence dopa-

mine release in depression.

Insulin regulates neuronal signaling and brain plasticity, potentially increasing the effect the small neurotransmitter, dopamine, has in the brain (Kleinridders et al., 2015; Kolb, Whishaw, & Teskey, 2016). Dopamine release could be relevant in mood disorders such as depression because it causes feelings of reward and pleasure (Kolb et al., 2016).

In addition to the *physiological* effects of insulin, *psychological* insulin resistance (PIR) may occur. Psychological insulin resistance is the refusal to use insulin among individuals with diabetes (Schwartz, 2014). While physiological insulin resistance results in type 2 diabetes, psychological insulin resistance can result from this metabolic disease. In addition, diabetes distress and depression may have different effects on diabetes management. Furthermore, HbA1c, a biomarker indicating three-month average blood glucose levels, may be influenced not only by medication but also by emotions (Nash, 2014).

### Co-Occurrence of Depression and Diabetes

The co-occurrence of diabetes and depression may indicate shared obstacles. In fact, Fisher et al. (2012) found that depression and diabetes have common biological, cultural, psychological, and socioeconomic factors that affect each other (Fisher et al., 2012). Furthermore, Fisher et al. (2012) emphasized that depression and diabetes should be treated together with an emphasis on self-management. Regarding biological factors, Fisher et al. stated that depression can induce the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) and other hormonal processes. Thus, dysregulation of neurotransmitters involved in depression could influence the pathogenesis of metabolic disorders. Therefore, a vicious cycle of psychological and physical negative effects may develop. Fisher et al. (2012) claimed that antidepressants may negatively influence diabetic treatment by their metabolic effects, and that diabetes treatment (such as blood glucose monitoring, insulin injections, and dietary limits) may induce negative feelings which reinforce depression symptoms (Fisher et al., 2012). Morris, Vickers, Gluckman, Gilmour, and Affara (2009) suggested that maternal deprivation, an environmental factor *in utero*, induces epigenetic changes such as gene expression through histone modification and DNA methylation (Morris, Vickers, Gluckman, Gilmour, & Affara,

2009; as cited in Fisher et al., 2012). In addition, Reagan, Grillo, and Piroli (2008) found that adult animals who experienced maternal deprivation during early stages of development express an overactivity of the HPA when being under stress or consuming a high fat diet (Regan, Grillo, & Piroli, 2008; as cited in Fisher et al., 2012). In the slow acting pathway of the stress response involving the HPA, insulin is inhibited by the steroid cortisol, a glucocorticoid (Kolb et al., 2016). Thus, glucose release by the liver is increased, leading to higher blood glucose levels (Kolb et al., 2016). In addition, cortisol stops the production of growth hormone, and therefore may also inhibit insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1) (Kolb et al., 2016). Reagan et al. (2008) found that levels of cortisol and IGF are altered in participants with diabetes or metabolic syndrome (Reagan et al., 2008; as cited in Fisher et al., 2012). Together these findings suggest bidirectional effects between depression and diabetes by way of stress responses including HPA, cortisol, IGF, and insulin.

### **Diabetes-Induced Depression vs. Diabetes Burnout**

It is important to distinguish the symptoms of depression and diabetes burnout. Major depression is defined as a mood disorder characterized by prolonged feelings of low self-worth and guilt, abnormal eating habits, sleep disturbance, slowed behavior, and thoughts of suicide (Kolb et al., 2016). It can result in a negative attitude towards non-diabetes life events as well (Nash, 2014). Conversely, diabetes burnout or distress related to diabetes occurs when a diabetic individual perceives self-management of their chronic disease as an insurmountable obstacle (Nash, 2014). It can also include fear of hypoglycemia or the needles used to test blood glucose values or inject insulin (Hamilton, 1995).

### **Psychological Insulin Resistance**

Individuals with type 2 diabetes may have psychological insulin resistance (PIR) as well as physiological insulin resistance. Psychological insulin resistance is the opposition to using insulin among diabetics and healthcare providers (Schwartz, 2014). Negative attitudes towards insulin therapy are based on misconceptions about insulin as harmful, the fear of using needles to inject insulin, and notions about the complexity of

insulin treatment (Schwartz, 2014). Holmes-Truscott, Skinner, Pouwer, and Speight (2016) examined PIR in individuals with type 2 diabetes who primarily used oral hypoglycemic medications. Participants were asked regarding beliefs of diabetes treatment, negative insulin therapy appraisals, depression, anxiety, and diabetes distress. Holmes-Truscott et al. (2016) concluded that diabetes distress, including concerns regarding treatment, were the main indicators for PIR and that general beliefs about diabetes medications, anxiety, or depression did not significantly affect PIR. However, Holmes-Truscott et al. (2016) did not consider HbA1c and other objective biomarkers and did not examine the psychological reactions of people with diabetes to actual insulin uptake. Like Holmes-Truscott et al. (2016), Bahrmann et al. (2014) suggested that depression does not significantly affect PIR and thus insulin therapy (Bahrmann et al., 2014). In addition, Bahrmann et al. (2014) found that patients already on insulin therapy had lower PIR scores than insulin-naïve patients (individuals not yet in treatment). Holmes-Truscott et al. (2016) studied patients with an average age of 57 years, while Bahrmann et al. (2014) used geriatric patients with an average age of 82.8 years. Furthermore, the diabetes duration of Holmes-Truscott et al.'s study was approximately five years shorter than that of Bahrmann et al. (2014). In contrast to Holmes-Truscott et al., Bahrmann et al. did not explicitly state whether the primary treatment of the participants was an oral hypoglycemic agent nor if the participants had type 1 or type 2 diabetes, though the latter seems likely. Moreover, the number of participants of Holmes-Truscott et al.'s study was almost five times greater than that of Bahrmann et al.'s study which may give Holmes-Truscott et al.'s conclusions greater credibility. Nevertheless, unlike Holmes-Truscott et al., Bahrmann et al. included patients on insulin therapy as well as insulin-naïve patients. Overall, the study of Holmes-Truscott et al. (2016) and the one of Bahrmann et al. (2014) complement each other.

### **Insulin Deficiency and Resistance in Diabetes**

Insulin functions as a peptide hormone in the body and as a peptide neurotransmitter in the brain (Kolb et al., 2016). Insulin regulates glucose homeostasis by decreasing blood glucose levels to enable insulin transport from the blood stream into cells which convert glucose into energy. In diabetes, lack of insulin or insulin resistance leads to hyperglycemia.

Type 1 diabetes is linked to insulin deficiency due to the autoimmune destruction of insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas. Whereas type 2 diabetes is caused by insulin resistance due to obesity and epigenetic factors such as lack of physical exercise and a high-carbohydrate diet. Insulin resistance is a form of downregulation; indicating that insulin receptors become less sensitive due to high levels of secreted insulin (Kolb et al., 2016). Incretins are secreted after meals and stimulate insulin secretion (Ahrén, 2012). The two incretin hormones, glucose-dependent insulinotropic peptide (GIP) and glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1), play a role in the upregulation of insulin secretion in insulin resistance (Ahrén, 2012). In type 2 diabetes, the incretin effect is defective (Kim and Egan, 2008).

### The Role of Insulin-like Growth Factor I in Depression

The insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1) is a neurotrophic factor which promotes growth, survival, and differentiation of neurons (Farlex, 2017; Kolb et al., 2016). High levels of IGF-1 activate the insulin receptors and thus IGF has similar effects as insulin (Farlex, 2017). Insulin and IGF-1 are crucial for regulating developmental and cognitive functions in the central nervous system (Haghir, Rezaee, Sankian, Kheradmand, & Hami, 2013). Haghir et al. (2013) examined the effects of maternal type 1 diabetes on insulin receptor (InsR) and IGF-1 receptor (IGF-1R) expression in the developing rat cerebellum; they found a significant upregulation of IGF-1R and InsR in the cerebellum of the offspring of diabetic mothers. Diabetic rat newborns had significant downregulated levels of mRNA expression and protein levels of IGF-1R and InsR in the cerebellum. Haghir et al. (2013) state that insulin treatment eliminated these changes indicating that diabetes significantly downregulates InsR and IGF-1R in the developing cerebellum. Decreased sensitivity of InsR and IGF-1R in diabetics might in turn be linked to depression. A study by Van Varsseveld et al. (2015) found that IGF-1 concentration decreases while the prevalence of depression increases with rising age, suggesting that changes in the serum insulin-like growth factor 1 are associated with late life depression. Van Varsseveld et al. (2015) also studied the potential link between low IGF-1 concentration and minor and major depression over three years, and found that IGF-1 may not be relevant in predicting

the development of depression in the elderly; however, cautioned that the role of IGF-1 in current depression should not be underestimated.

### **The Link Between Insulin, Dopamine Release, and Depression**

According to Stouffer et al. (2015), insulin affects action potential-dependent dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens in the basal ganglia, caudate, and putamen in the dopaminergic activating system of the central nervous system. In addition, it was found that striatal cholinergic interneurons with insulin receptors are relevant in this mechanism (Stouffer et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Finan and Smith (2013), suggested that dysregulation of the mesolimbic dopaminergic pathway might be an underlying basis for depression (Finan & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, Kolb et al. (2016) stated that loss of dopamine is related to muscle rigidity and dyskinesia in Parkinson's disease, and thus dopamine agents might relieve symptoms of depression. Based on preliminary evidence, Leentjens (2011) suggested treating depression in Parkinson's disease with dopamine agents. Despite a potential discrepancy regarding the effects of depression and dopamine release in Parkinson's disease in comparison with that of diabetes, this correlation between dopamine loss and depression might suggest similar effects related to diabetes and depression. However, Leentjens (2011) pointed out that a dopaminergic therapy may have potential disadvantages.

Interestingly, Kleinridders et al. (2015) postulated that altered dopamine clearance may be the crucial element connecting insulin resistance to behavioral disorders such as depression. Kleinridders et al. (2015) demonstrated that NIRKO mice, mice with a brain specific knockout of the insulin receptor, exhibit increased levels of dopamine-degrading enzymes monoamine oxidase (MAO) A and B, inducing increased rate of dopamine clearance and decreased dopamine activation in the striatum and nucleus accumbens in the mesolimbic pathway. Other research teams found that deep brain stimulation of the nucleus accumbens decreased depression symptoms in 50% of patients (Bewernick, B. H. et al., 2010). Furthermore, Kleinridders et al. (2015) suggested that insulin directly downregulates MAO A and B in neurons and MAO A in glial

cells. Moreover, the half-life of dopamine in the striatum is smaller in people with depression as well as in NIRKO mice (Laasonen-Balk, T. et al., 1999; as cited in Kleinridders et al., 2015). Subsequently, Kleinridders et al. (2015) concluded that NIRKO mice develop depressive symptoms as a direct result of loss of insulin action in neurons and glia, which can be treated with MAO inhibitors and the tricyclic antidepressant imipramine. Conversely, Kleinridders et al. stated that insulin signaling in the brain functions not primarily as a survival criterion in neurons, but rather optimizes brain activity. In sum, Kleinridders et al. (2015) pointed to a potential connection between insulin resistance and depression, noting that insulin resistance in the brain leads to mitochondrial and dopaminergic dysfunction (Kleinridders et al., 2015). In addition to the dopaminergic pathway, the serotonergic pathway may be relevant for depression because MAO A and B degrade serotonin as well as dopamine (Bortolato et al. 2008; as cited in Kleinridders et al., 2015).

### Future Investigation on Co-Occurring Depression and Diabetes

The physiological and psychological effects from insulin may be crucial in developing treatments for insulin resistance in type 2 diabetes and also in eliminating psychological insulin resistance, which would improve both blood glucose values and diabetes distress. Diabetics with depression would benefit especially from a combined physiological and psychological treatment approach. Reducing PIR is likely to improve adherence and compliance to diabetes treatment. Hence, education and encouragement of diabetes self-management should be implemented to reduce PIR. In addition, differences in the occurrence rates of PIR in type 2 and type 1 diabetics need to be assessed. My hypothesis is that PIR may be lower or even absent in type 1 diabetics since insulin treatment is the only option.

Further investigation regarding the occurrence rates of depression in type 1 versus type 2 diabetes could indicate whether lack of insulin or insulin resistance and obesity may correlate more strongly with depression. If type 2 diabetes is more common with depression, then the role of weight gain may be of greater relevance. In this case, research regarding the pathogenesis of type 2 diabetes, the connection between

obesity and insulin resistance, and the effects of pre-existing depression on the HPA needs to be conducted. Moreover, a differentiation should be made between untreated depression and treated depression and their effects on diabetes. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to the potential side effects of antidepressant medications (such as weight gain) that may trigger type 2 diabetes in individuals with a pre-existing high risk (Kolb et al., 2016). The ultimate question is whether diabetes or depression is first diagnosed and if there are more diabetics with depression or more depressed individuals with diabetes. The role of insulin in depression might indicate that insulin is essential for maintaining blood glucose homeostasis and also affects mood changes. Hence, physiological health states might influence mental and emotional wellbeing, just as our psychological state is linked to health.

Two more speculative biological relationships requiring investigation are (1) the role of serotonin in the degradation of MAO A and B and the pathogenesis of depression, and (2) if IGF-1 levels increase with decreasing HbA1c in diabetes control.

Further research is needed to determine whether systematic insulin resistance and brain insulin resistance occur simultaneously or independently. After all, increased occurrence of depression and diabetes can result from insulin resistance (Kleinridders et al., 2015). Thus, improving insulin sensitivity by upregulation of insulin receptors may be crucial to not only ameliorate blood sugar values but also depression symptoms. In sum, depression associated with decreased dopamine release might be due to insulin resistance or a lack of insulin in diabetes. Consequently, the missing link between depression and diabetes might be the effect of insulin signaling the release of dopamine. The common psychological and biological factors between depression and diabetes, as well as growing evidence of reciprocal influences between the two disorders, may provide clues to prevent or even reduce the rising incidence of co-occurring depression and diabetes.



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# KRISTEN HENDERSON

For the Sons or Daughters?:  
Contextualizing Differential  
Interpretations of La Malinche



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is a third year International Studies  
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### WRITER'S COMMENTS

My interest in the La Malinche archetype was piqued in my Intro to Chicana Lit class by the modern reclamation of the archetype by a number of insightful Chicana feminist writers and artists. I was drawn to the idea of comparing patriarchal interpretations of La Malinche with feminist interpretations. Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* arose in my research as a natural text for comparison, due to its position as a foundational text in the Mexican canon and its reputation as an examination of the Mexican psyche. When choosing a feminist interpretation of La Malinche, Carmen Tafolla's "La Malinche" was one of many excellent pieces which attempted to redefine the archetype. The text's outsize impact in comparison to its simplicity stood out to me. What most captured me was how Tafolla's nuanced and human Malinche defiantly opposes Paz's one-dimensional patriarchal figurehead.

—Kristen Henderson

### INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

In "For the Sons or Daughters? Contextualizing Differential Interpretations of La Malinche," Kristen Henderson considers the lasting power of archetypes in popular imagination, even as they cross national borders. She examines how cultural and political contexts framing their interpretation impact conveyed meanings, such that archetypes become one site of struggle over gender and nation. Kristen traces an evolution in literary representation of La Malinche ("mother of mestizos"), the Indigenous translator and guide "gifted" to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. In analyzing Octavio Paz's 1950 essay "The Sons of La Malinche," she argues Paz uses this figure's resonance to reinforce a masculinist nationalism that subordinates women's sexuality as profane. Connecting the masculinism of Mexican nationalism to that of Chicano ethno-nationalism, Kristen conducts a close reading of Carmen Tafolla's 1978 poem "La Malinche," demonstrating how Chicana feminists re-read this archetype as a figure of female subjectivity with agency, while critiquing colonialism and patriarchy.

—Christina Garcia Lopez, Department of English

## For the Sons or Daughters?: Contextualizing Differential Interpretations of La Malinche

**L**A MALINCHE, also known as Doña Marina or Malintzin Tenepal, has remained an enduring symbol of Mexican culture and identity throughout history; similar to the importance of the Biblical Eve in some cultures (McBride–Limaye 143). Despite her permanence, relatively little verifiable information on her exists; historians remain unclear on her name, birthplace, and specific role in the conquest. The most reliable source of her role comes from Bernal Díaz del Castillo's written accounts. It is generally accepted that La Malinche acted as a translator for Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) and his men during the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, and later married him and bore his child—the first mestizo (Cypess 16). She has evolved into an archetype that appears frequently across Mexican and Chicana art and literature. La Malinche's role has been interpreted differently across texts, characterized variously as a victim of Spanish conquistadors, a traitor to her people, or as the mother of all Mestizos. This essay asks how has the archetype of La Malinche evolved from mid-century Mexican literature to Chicana feminist representations. Contrasting Octavio Paz's 1950 essay "The Sons of La Malinche" from *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and Carmen Tafolla's poem "La Malinche," originally published in the 1978 collection *Canto al Pueblo: Anthology of Experiences*, this paper contextualizes interpretations of La Malinche in order to argue that representations of the archetype reflect specific social contexts and perspectives. A number of secondary sources inform La Malinche's evolution, including a breadth of work from Chicana feminists and literary critics.

Contextualizing *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is key to understanding "The Sons of La Malinche." The overarching theme of the work is an analysis of the Mexican psyche through an examination of Mexican history and culture. Despite his criticism of Mexico's foreign ties and Mexicans who embrace other cultures, Paz wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude* while on a posting in France with the Mexican Foreign Service. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* was first published in Mexico in 1950 (Hurtado 39). In the intervening years, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* has faced both widespread acclaim and criticism. Despite Paz's controversial stances on Mexican identity many

criticize as anecdotal, the book is considered a classic work of Mexican literature (Stanton 210).

"The Sons of La Malinche" is based on a Freudian analysis of the Mexican battle cry "*¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada!*" Paz bases his argument on the idea that Mexicans revile being descended of Cortés and La Malinche; he further argues that civil conflict in Mexico, like the Mexican Revolution, can be explained by the shame Mexicans feel over the founding of their race through what some view as a violation of La Malinche (Hurtado 44). Paz believed "The Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal .... The strange permanence of Cortés and La Malinche in the Mexican's imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures; they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved." Critics of the essay, like National Autonomous University of Mexico professor Guillermo Hurtado, often assert that "many of the characteristics [Paz] attributes to Mexicans are more likely a projection of his own personal history ... his version of Mexican history is literary, subjective, and lacking of historical rigor" (50).

Paz directly defines his interpretation of La Malinche, whom he most frequently refers to as "the Chingada" in "The Sons of La Malinche": "The Chingada is the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived." For Paz, La Malinche only represents Mexico's shameful past as a symbol of the conquest and a victim of colonization. Pilar Godayol of the University of Vic Barcelona believes Paz feels that as long as Mexicans embrace the archetype, they will "remain orphaned, drifting through the labyrinth of solitude alluded to in the title of his book" (67).

Despite the title of the essay being "The Sons of La Malinche," Paz only specifically mentions La Malinche a few times. Rather, much of the essay is devoted to analysis of the effects on the Mexican psyche ostensibly wrought by La Malinche's betrayal. Taken as a whole, it is difficult to classify the essay collection. Danielle Lamb of the University of Alberta remarks, "*The Labyrinth of Solitude* perplexes both readers and critics who seek to pinpoint it as history, philosophy, psychology or art" (282). The style of the essay is informal prose, structured more similarly to a manifesto due to its aggressive tone than a serious scientific analysis. In "The Sons of La Malinche," Paz's confident tone and generalizations about the Mexicans are laced with literary and historical references. Jesús Chavarría characterizes the effect of this lyricism in his piece "A Brief Inquiry into

Octavio Paz' *Laberinto of Mexicanidad*," saying, "*The Labyrinth of Solitude* is the work of a poet. The curious work is a highly lyrical, subjective, and metaphysical prose issuing from a poetic vision. It is art" (383). In this way, the collection has evolved into being regarded as more symbolically relevant than canonical.

Additionally, Paz extrapolates the condition of La Malinche onto his interpretations of women. Women in "The Sons of La Malinche" are implied to be foreigners in their own culture. Paz soliloquizes on the Mexican psyche primarily using male pronouns, taking care to separate women from his analysis, saying, "Woman is another being who lives apart and is therefore an enigmatic figure ... Woman is a living symbol of the strangeness of the universe ... What does she think? Or does she think? Does she truly have feelings? Is she the same as we are?" (Paz). This passage exemplifies how Paz's personal theories about womanhood may have informed his interpretation of La Malinche as a shameful figure.

Feminist critique of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* has focused on Paz's exclusion of La Malinche's agency. Paz asserts, "[La Malinche's] passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides ... in her sex ... she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is no one" (Paz). In response, Danielle Lamb notes, "Paz refuses to grant *La Malinche* agency, or even credit her with any foresight or intelligence" (286). Consistently throughout the work, La Malinche is characterized only as being important due to the violation of her sexuality and her role as mother; this meshes with other aspects of Mexican culture, specifically, the emphasis on mother figures. In her examination of the importance of La Malinche as a maternal figure, Sandra Messinger Cypess, professor of Latin American Literature at the University of Maryland, writes: "research indicates that in Mexico, more than any other country, women in the specialized role as mother figures have dominated the myths of nationality and cultural identity" (15). This in part explains Paz's particularly scalding evaluation of La Malinche. Additionally, Paz directly contrasts La Malinche with the primary symbol of ideal Mexican motherhood, La Virgen de Guadalupe, writing, "In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgin Mother, the Chingada is the violated Mother" (Paz). This hyperfocus on the mother falls in line with Cypess' assessment that mother figures are often prominent symbols of Mexican culture, and therefore contextualizes Paz's

heavy-handed criticism of La Malinche's sexual role.

Cypess further wonders about the former aspect of La Malinche's characterization in works like *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, musing: "given that [La Malinche] was a multi-dimensional individual who performed in a variety of capacities, why is [she] often only known (and criticized) for her sexual role?" (15). To this point, Paz never mentions that La Malinche was, first, a translator. Paz uses reductive gendered language to refer to La Malinche pejoratively as "La Chingada," "the violated mother," "Nothingness," and as previously mentioned, labels "passivity" as her defining personality trait. Paz, like other male writers who have focused on La Malinche, refuses to look beyond La Malinche's sexual role.

In response to reductive interpretations of La Malinche, Chicana feminists have worked to convey a more nuanced characterization of the national symbol. In the 1960s, as the Chicano Movement was fighting against racism for Chicanos, Chicanas felt excluded from the conversation. The roles of women in the Chicano Movement were limited. As Mary Louise Pratt of New York University summarizes, "Like all modern nationalisms, ethnic or otherwise, the Chicano movement was masculinist in its conception and tended to unreflectively reproduce the subordination of women" (861). Or, as prominent Chicana feminist writer Cherríe Moraga less formally put it, Chicanas had three roles in the Movement: "feeding, fighting, and fucking" (de Alba 48). Relegated to feeding or reproducing Chicano revolutionaries, Chicana feminists felt frustrated, but their concerns were received poorly by the Movement. In a symbolic twist, Chicanas who wanted their interests included in the goals of the Movement were labeled as divisive Malinchistas: "They were called men-haters and agringadas and sell-outs because, in seeking equality with men and personal liberation for themselves as women, they were accused of putting the individual before the culture" (de Alba 48).

The 1969 publication of the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, a foundational document of the Chicano movement, inspired Chicana feminist action. The androcentric overtones of the plan frustrated Chicanas. The document outlines the goals of the Movement, but failed to include any mention of the role of women. Instead, it used primarily male language such as "Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come to and who struggles against the foreigner 'gaba-cho'" (de Alba 48). Chicanas resisted their erasure in the movement, and



many turned to artistic and literary expression to vent their frustration and make their mark. Part of this creative movement concerned the reclamation of female national symbols, including La Malinche. Rather than viewing La Malinche as a traitor or stripping her of her agency, Chicana author Norma Alarcón writes, Chicana feminists recast the archetype as a “cultural paradigm of the situation of contemporary Chicanas” (73).

One such example of this redefinition is Carmen Tafolla’s poem “La Malinche,” which was first published in 1978. The poem re-appropriates La Malinche from an oft-overlooked perspective: La Malinche’s own point of view. The poem’s opening line refers to a foundational work in the Chicano literary canon, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez’s 1967 poem “Yo Soy Joaquin/I am Joaquin” (Pratt 868). Unlike “Yo Soy Joaquin,” however, “La Malinche” is a staunchly Chicana feminist piece. As Pratt clarifies, “By invoking and challenging this landmark text, Tafolla identifies her poem as an analogous foundational project, but this time for a specifically female subject and perhaps a Chicana nationalism” (867). Tafolla’s “La Malinche” and Chicana feminist works like it consciously work to rewrite female roles that have previously been ignored in a patriarchal system.

Tafolla’s poem presents a rereading of La Malinche’s history in the format of a poem. Tafolla interprets La Malinche as an active participant in her own fate, rather than as a passive bystander. The last stanza in particular defiantly recasts La Malinche:

But Chingada I was not.  
     Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor.  
 For I was not a traitor to myself  
     I saw a dream  
         and I reached it  
             Another world ....  
                             la raza.  
                                     la raaaaaaaaa-zaaaaaaaa ...  
                                     (Tafolla 38)

This stanza seems to directly challenge Paz’s classification of La Malinche, by borrowing the specific language Paz uses: “Chingada,” “tricked,” and “screwed.” Significantly, the poem shifts the blame for the conquest of the Aztec empire from La Malinche to her family, saying:

Of noble ancestry, for whatever that means,  
I was sold into slavery by MY ROYAL FAMILY—so  
that my brother could get my inheritance (Tafolla)

In this passage, it is made clear that Tafolla is alluding to the culpability of La Malinche's family for the downfall of the Aztec Empire due to them selling her into slavery. The capitalization of "MY ROYAL FAMILY" emphasizes the betrayal La Malinche experienced at the hands of her family. This contrasts with Paz's interpretation of the conquest, which sees La Malinche as the traitor who betrayed her nation.

In "La Malinche," Tafolla challenges the idea that La Malinche was tricked or forced against her role, writing, "My homeland aches within me / (but I saw *another*)" (Tafolla). This suggests that La Malinche knew she would be the mother of a new race, and so she sacrificed her homeland to create Mexico. Pilar Goyadol recognizes Tafolla's recharacterization of La Malinche, writing: "Unlike Paz, who also describes La Malinche as a founding mother, Tafolla implies that she acted with a specific purpose, hence she makes her a historical strategist" (69). Chicana feminists were among the first to suggest La Malinche was an active participant in the formation of a new race, *la raza*.

Mary Louise Pratt theorizes that La Malinche's clear vision of a new world is interpreted as such in Chicana feminist work as a symbol of patriarchal resistance. "What [La Malinche] saw in her dream was another world—a genuine New World—distinct from the patriarchal and militaristic realities of both Aztec and Spanish societies" (869). This is consistent with other clear anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist messages in Chicana readings of La Malinche. In the case of Tafolla's poem, lines 13–15 read:

And *you* came  
My dear Hernán Cortés, to share your 'civilization'—  
to play god.

The use of quotations with the word "civilization" suggests that Tafolla is criticizing European civilization and colonialism through La Malinche. In her critical introduction to *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*, Amanda Nolacea Harris argues anti-colonial themes are inherent to the

La Malinche myth, writing: “La Malinche has forced us to critically analyze the interaction and interdependence of race, class and gender. She demands that we decolonize all facets of her legacy and disassemble and reconstruct the concepts of nation, community, subjectivity, and social activism” (Harris ix). This connection between La Malinche and social justice issues is demonstrated in Tafolla’s poem through the anti-patriarchal and anti-colonialist themes.

Frankly, Paz’s essay and Tafolla’s poem share very few similarities. The essay, written in the 1940s in Spanish for a Mexican audience, bears little resemblance to Tafolla’s poem, written in the 1970s in English for a Chicana audience. Stylistically, Paz’s essay is a far longer piece of prose, spanning an entire chapter. Tafolla’s poem is 13 stanzas, which range from 2 to 10 lines in length. However, Norma Alarcón argues there are similarities in content, writing:

In Tafolla’s poem [Malinche] goes on to assert that she submitted to the Spaniard Cortés because she envisioned a new race; she wanted to be the founder of a people. There are echoes of Paz ... in Tafolla’s view, yet she differs by making [Malinche] a woman possessed of clear-sighted intentionality, thus avoiding attributions of vengeance. (73)

Therefore, the main similarity between the content of Paz and Tafolla’s work is the idea of historical revision: both works seek to interpret La Malinche’s submission to Cortés in different ways. For Paz, it is a narrative of shame and betrayal. For Tafolla, the narrative is about empowerment and agency in the face of injustice.

Women are often erased from history, and the contributions of European men are emphasized. La Malinche challenges this as an indigenous woman whose role in Mexican culture and history cannot be erased, and instead lives on in differential interpretations. To quote Norma Alarcón, “This intertextual debate between men and women raises the following question implicitly: does [La Malinche] belong to the sons or daughters?” (76). Whether depicted in scholarship as a traitor or strategist, La Malinche continues to capture the interest of scholars and artists. Pilar Goyadol explains this fascination, opining, “La Malinche is a feminine translation myth that must be brought to the forefront, because it is rich,

#### INTERPRETATIONS OF LA MALINCHE

complex, unfinished, serial, multiple, and irreducible” (74). La Malinche remains an important Mexican archetype, and in the wake of the Chicano movement, has begun to be recast in the popular imagination. Her significant evolution in representation from Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s earliest records of her existence to current art and scholarship has underlined her importance as a symbol.

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# KATHARINE HONG

Identity Politics are a Trick(ster)y Thing:  
SNL, Parody, and Performance  
of Race and Gender



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## WRITER'S COMMENTS

2017 was the year that *Saturday Night Live* was absolutely unstoppable—from the gloriously silly David S. Pumpkins to Melissa McCarthy's brilliant portrayal of White House Press Secretary (at the time) Sean "Spicy" Spicer, the forty-second season of NBC's iconic sketch comedy series was undeniably one that will be critically discussed for years to come. But while the show has brought laughter and entertainment to the homes of millions since 1975, has it really harnessed the parody's power as a tool of social criticism to its full potential? Through this paper, I sought to uncover what conditions create the most effective parody. I first contextualized the concept of parody, focusing on its traditional manifestation of trickster-like energy, and how it can be used to expose societal problems before moving into analyzing *Saturday Night Live*'s use of parody, specifically in relation to challenging gender as performance, drawing on three randomly selected episodes as case studies.

—Katharine Hong

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

How can parody be deployed for social critique? What can its circulation in media tell us about the conditions that make such critique visible, legible, and impactful? These are the questions Katharine Hong explores in this thoughtful, thorough, and historically situated study. Using analytical frameworks from performance studies, feminist theory, and critical race studies, Katharine explores the utility of parody as a tool for social critique and importantly, for the production of alternative imaginaries. What makes this study unique is Katharine's insistence that we focus on the conditions of parody's existence, rather than simply content. Focusing specifically on the racial and gendered domains of critique, she examines three episodes of *Saturday Night Live*. Katharine ultimately argues that while SNL is celebrated for its biting political criticism in the contemporary moment, it fails to challenge institutional discourses that shore up racial and gendered performances within mainstream media. Katharine's work is an excellent example of media scholarship, positioning her as a promising scholar and pop cultural critic.

—Inna Arzumanova, *Media Studies Department*

## Identity Politics are a Trick(ster)y Thing: Parody, and the Performance of Race and Gender

### Introduction

WHEN CONSIDERING the power of parody as a tool of social criticism (Clark & Motto, 1973), and agent of subversion (Butler, 1998), an important question arises: if parody can reveal flaws, mistakes, idiocies, and absurdities in individual people, as well as in schools of expression, philosophical systems and even entire societies and cultures (Kiremidjian, 1969), then what are the conditions under which parody is most effective? Throughout this paper, I attempt to answer this fundamental question. First, I contextualize the concept of parody, specifically focusing on its manifestation of “trickster-like energy,” and how it can be used to expose societal problems and contradictions. Next, I describe Judith Butler’s (1988; 1990) theory of gender as a social construction and Michel Foucault’s (1980; 1995) theory of disciplinary power, before outlining how parody can be used as a tool to subvert those oppressive powers. I also examine some of the criticisms of parody and satire, as well as assess the current social/political television landscape, specifically focusing on *The Chappelle Show* and *Inside Amy Schumer*. Once the scene is set, I discuss *Saturday Night Live*, and analyze its use of parody in relation to challenging gender as performance. Using three randomly selected episodes as case studies, I will argue that if the nature of parody and tricksterism is to use repetition as a means to identify, critique, and challenge oppressive institutions of society, then *Saturday Night Live*, save for one outlying exceptional sketch, does not employ parody in a way that challenges gender as an institutionalized construction.

### What is Parody?

In Japanese folklore, stories depict *kitsune*, or foxes, as sneaky, mischievous and cunning creatures that possess magical abilities. Many tales warn of the nimble fox, who is known to play tricks on overly proud samurai, greedy merchants, and boastful commoners (Casal, 1959). The *kitsune*, with its prankster-like nature and dual-existence between the spirit and



physical world, is what is known around the world as a “Trickster” (Hyde, 1998). The mythological figure leads a life of perpetual in-betweenness, bridging the gap between humans and the gods. From Prometheus of Ancient Greece to Peeves, the poltergeist of Hogwarts castle, Tricksters all have one thing in common: their ability to become the unexpected hero. Although these boundary-crossers spend most of their time relishing in violating social order and disrupting normal rules, Tricksters are also known for denouncing the status quo, undoing hierarchies and challenging oppressive circumstances.

Although mere mortals can only dream of possessing the mysterious power of a Trickster, that does not stop them from attempting to channel and appropriate their remarkable energy. It is through this simulacrum of spirit, that humans have manifested and discovered their own brand of tricksterism: innovation. One form in which that power is embodied is through satire. Like Tricksters, satire functions as a catalyst for social change and action (Clark & Motto, 1973). To do so, it employs an arsenal of weapons such as irony, paradox, antithesis, obscenity, violence, vividness, and exaggeration to expose the shortcomings and follies of its targeted person, institution, or work of art (Highet, 1962). Although satire can be humorous, its main objective is to administer constructive social criticism, with the aim of implementing tangible change. The earliest example of satire in human history was found in Egyptian writing, at the onset of the second millennium, BCE (Sutton, 1993). “The Satire of the Trades,” as it was known, is a piece of ancient literature that chronicles various trades at the time in an exaggeratedly negative light, as well as exalts the perceived superiority of the professional scribe.

In his book, *The Anatomy of Satire*, Scottish-American academic, Gilbert Arthur Highet (1962) describes three different forms of satire. The first is through monologues, in which the author often appears personally, either speaking in her own person, or behind a mask. Through the delivery, she states her view of the issue at hand, cites examples, and lambasts her opponents before introducing her own opinion to the public (Highet, 1962). The second type of satire is the narrative form, in which the satirist does not appear personally at all. Rather, she uses a story or fictional account to critique some perceived ill in society. The final form is parody, in which the author wears a mask, and “shoots at a man with the weapon of his own form” (Kire-

midjian, 1969, p. 234). Parody first begins with imitation, an intricate marriage between careful recreation and complete alienation (Denith, 2000). From there, the parody must establish some jarring incongruity between form and content (Hutcheon, 1985). Last, through repetition, something should be revealed about the original work's basic character. It is this revelation of flaws, mistakes, and absurdities that compelled G. D. Kiremidjian (1969) to postulate that parody is "perhaps the most effective of all satirical devices."

It is believed that art of parody originated in Ancient Greece, since the etymology of the word comes from the Greek words, *para* (meaning "besides") and *ode* (meaning "song"). Together, *para-ode*, literally means "beside songs" (Denith, 2000). The original parodies were songs that were sung *beside* the principal ones, providing them with both epic harmonies and consonant counterparts. Some modern examples of parodies include *Spaceballs* (a parody of *Star Wars*), "Ebay Song" by Weird Al Yankovic (a parody of the Backstreet Boys classic, "I Want It That Way") and the fake news site, The Onion (a parody of "real" news sites like The Huffington Post). Another example, illustrated in Kate Kenny's (2009) essay, "The Performative Surprise: Parody, Documentary, and Critique," is Comedy Central's animated television show, *South Park*, which "frequently mocks, satirizes and undermines official institutions." In the episode "Gnomes," a huge chain restaurant moves into the town titled Harbucks, an extremely thinly veiled rendering of the global fast-coffee conglomerate, Starbucks. In the show, we see "Harbucks" cold-heartedly buy out a local coffee shop, as well as aggressively market a new type of cappuccino with extremely high levels of sugar and caffeine, called "Kiddycinno," which is targeted towards children. Besides the name, Harbucks' aesthetic remains just close enough to that of Starbucks' to ensure that the audience never forgets who they are parodying. Throughout the episode, *South Park* continues to unabatedly satirize Starbucks' seeming lack of morals and conscience, and habit of driving smaller, independent cafes and companies out of business. By "defamiliarizing the mundane," *South Park* uses parody and humor to blast Starbucks' business practices and morals open to questions and criticism.

## Using Parody

As the oldest form of social study, satire is an immensely useful source when attempting to understand how a society functions. Because of satire's analytic nature, it can provide some of the most astute and perceptive insights into a community's collective psyche (Rosenburg, 1960). Satire holds no bars, constantly attempting to peer under the hood of society's inner workings, free of the burdening expectation of solutions. That is the beauty of satire—while its job is to expose problems and contradictions, it has no obligation whatsoever to solve them. Even the great philosopher Plato recognized the power of satire: when prompted for literature to better understand Athenian society, he would recommend the satirical plays by the playwright Aristophanes.

Satire, therefore, is an essential part of political life; because it facilitates creativity and fosters constructive thought experiments. What would happen if “x” happened? If “y”? Satire and parody utilize humor as a way to open our eyes and imagine a vast world of alternatives (Kenny, 2009). They enable us to look at aspects of society that we take for granted in new and interesting ways. For example, in Jonathan Swift's now infamous 1729 satire, *A Modest Proposal*, Swift deftly critiques the British Imperial system by carefully imitating its style and prose. He describes what he calls the “Irish problem,” and calmly and rationally proposes that the especially poor Irish sell their “surplus” children to their British landlords for a nice supper. He shocks readers by going into great detail about possible culinary preparation styles for the children, and the precise financial details of such an exchange. His steady and logical presentation provides the perfect platform for him Swift to assiduously critique the heartless attitudes towards the poor, as well as British policy towards the Irish in general.

## Power and Parody and the Power of Parody

Can parody really be considered an effective form of social critique? What kind of power does satire hold, if any? According to the prominent American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler, parody not only reveals and accentuates the tenuous nature of what we take for granted, but also

uncovers certain truths about the patterns of society's framework through its fundamentally repetitive nature (Hutcheon, 1985). Butler asserts that even seemingly inflexible and immovable institutions, such as the performance of gender, can be skewed through repetition. According to Butler, many "concrete facts of science" are actually less contingent on scientific verities, and are based on repeated executions. In Butler's theory of Performativity, factors of gender, like ideals of femininity and masculinity, are not ingrained biological principles but rather, repeated projections of stylization of the body. Over time and much repetition, this system of behaviors can congeal and melt into a mold that appears to have an almost natural substance. Ultimately, we forget that these alien operations are not, in fact, inherent biological reflexes and what Butler proposes is that with each repeated cycle of performance, also comes a potential to revise our parts, and perhaps even subvert them.

### Using Parody to Explore Gender and Race

In Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, she explores the crucial relationship between parody and political change. She first begins by questioning life's "fundamental truths," such as the so-called "biological" differences between men and women, and the perceived naturalness of femininity and masculinity. She explains that we learn these gendered notions from social scripts, and thus, gender itself is a perfected, rehearsed act. The gendered scripts we receive and enact are steeped in historical knowledge and lived experiences; they have been used for generations before us, and will remain here long after our lifetimes. In this way, our own bodies are nothing more than physical lumps of clay for which the script will mold. We do not have the freedom to choose our scripts, or our gender performance—when we are first handed our script at birth, our life-long performance has already been determined. We are given the toolbox that has been crafted for thousands of years on how a girl "should" perform, what a black man "should" look like, who a lesbian "should" be. We have already been assigned a limited number of "costumes" to choose from, and prescribed a specific set of moving parts including, "actions, speech utterances, gestures and representations, dress codes and behaviors" (Butler, 1990) which, analogous to Frankenstein's monster, adds up to a working body of either feminine or masculine identity.

But what are these scripts that dictate our very livelihood? Where did they come from? Why do we follow them in the first place? According to French philosopher and social theorist, Michel Foucault, these scripts are manifestations of power and a means of social discipline (Foucault, 1995). He recalls back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a new phenomenon emerged, one where power was now characterized by a series of “highly specific procedural techniques, completely novel instruments and quite different apparatuses.” In this time, sovereign power, with their armies and militia, was seen as too directly oppressive; he proposed a new power—which he called disciplinary power—that would replace armed militants in favor of having members of society function as disciplinary forces. There would be no need for crude tools or primitive methods like weapons or physical violence. Instead, control would be wielded by constant surveillance—the panopticon: “Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its own weight will end by internalizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself” (Foucault, 1995). To demonstrate what he theorized: imagine if a gay man starts to perform outside of his prescribed script of masculinity (i.e., heterosexuality); who needs a cop or government official to force a change in behavior when the systemic and institutional shaming and judgment from society, friends, and family could work just as well? Thus, a dangerous recipe for control is concocted and served: one part scripts dictating behavior and one part disciplinary power, of which each person became the enforcer. Over time, and after countless repetitions of performance, the scripts of gender, race, and so on started to feel instinctual; we began to believe that the scripts given to us were inherent to our identity. Who would we be without our scripts? How would we make sense of the world? We submit to the scripts because they have become so normal to us and we cannot imagine a life without them. We rely on others to follow their designated scripts to keep society running in the way we expect and we then ensure others keep to the script, through our gaze, and constantly surveil those around us to make sure that they are also playing by the rules, and shame those who fail to conform.

One way to subvert the fundamentally oppressive nature of disciplinary power is to shift its despotic forces into a tool that can be used to challenge the oppressor (Butler, 1998). Ingrained institutions such as gender are not insurmountable; they can be subverted by acts such as challenging the scripts to the

furthest extent. We must fully understand how sex and gender are not “givens,” but rather “observable aspects of the exercise of particular forms of power” (Butler, 1998) if we are ever to gain autonomy. This is why it is of the utmost importance to challenge the notions that we believe are innate in our biology, like the categories of male and female. Once you have destroyed your reliance on your script, you can begin to experiment with other scripts and move seamlessly through the framework of gender construction with the freedom to be endlessly creative.

Engaging in drag is one of many ways one can subvert the scripts of disciplinary power and expose the true performative nature of gender. Since there is no genuine or authentic basis of gender identity, that mold can be disrupted, broken, resisted, and altered all together to raise some real “gender trouble.” For example, when a man parodies the “opposite” gender as a woman, the reality of the gender dichotomy dives into crisis. Is a man wearing women’s clothing just a man in a costume, or has he become feminine, despite his male body? The instability of the relationship between sex and gender is brought to the surface, and it becomes apparent that our notions of gender hold no real basis, and have been ‘naturalized’ through a process of normalization (Butler, 1998). Drag is such an important form of parody because it exposes the gender binary for what it really is—a script that relies on repetition and disciplinary control, lacking any real or substantial truth.

### Critiques of Parody

Some critiques of parody have included claims that the genre is “parasitic” and “derivative” (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 4). On one hand, some consider parody as a threat to intellectual property due to its fundamental basis in mimicry. For example, is there enough of a difference between *South Park*’s “Harbucks” and the actual company, Starbucks, to avoid a copyright violation? Although parody is now protected under Fair Use, which “permits limited use of copyrighted material without acquiring permission from the rights holders” (Aufderheide, 2011), there are a few critics that still have their doubts. In addition, some regard parody as “ideologically shifty,” and condemn it as the lowest brow of culture and art. They believe that parody offers nothing of importance, other than a feeble attempt at critique of the original work. In addition, Butler warns that utilizing the repetitive nature of parody can be somewhat risky—

“the danger of parodic repetitions being subsumed by ‘the power one opposes’ and becoming an ‘instrument of ‘it’ is always present” (Butler, 1990). Much like how Butler uses parody to flip institutions like race and gender upside down, she warns that sometimes, a parody’s message can be appropriated by others for unintended purposes. For example, in 2016, the Pepe the Frog meme became a symbol of the Alt-Right political movement against the explicit wishes of its author. What had started as an innocent comic turned meme quickly morphed into an emblem of hate and intolerance.

In another critique of parody, some question the effectiveness of the genre. Does parody really function as a platform for confronting social discourse and providing constructive commentary? Or is it just a way for discontented subordinates to “let off steam?” According to the Safety Valve Theory (SVT), parody runs the risk of behaving as an institutionalized outlet for the aggrieved to “safely” act out their aggravation (Scott, 1990). Although safety valves act as a mechanism to reduce tension in society and seem to function as agents of liberty, they actually serve as a tool of conservative forces. The “masters” of society carefully calculates the maximum degree of repression their subordinates can tolerate and they adjust accordingly, implementing a safety valve just short of the flashpoint. By relieving pressure, the flow of society can continue to run normally. What is assumed (by both the ruling class and safety valve theorists) is that if the swell of pressure is ignored and not relieved, the tension and strain from a discontented and resentful subservient class will build until there is some sort of explosive revolt.

One example of using a safety valve as a mechanism of social control can be observed in Carnivals and Upside-Down festivals of early modern Europe (Scott, 1990). During the Feast of Fools, peasants would celebrate in excessive drinking and dancing. A Bishop of the Fools would be elected and the “normal rules” of order and morality were disputed and mocked. After an orgy of food and debauchery, the peasants would return to their obedient and subservient lives. But what the peasants did not know, was that these “rituals of rebellion” were in fact sanctioned by the lords and monarchies of the time to provide a space for controlled, safe release of the tension.

Some critics of the SVT have pointed out that the theory is completely dependent on the assumption that subordinates do not need direct, tangi-

ble aggression, and that fantasy and rituals (such as the Upside-Down festival) supply the subordinate class with sufficient satisfaction (Scott, 2000). However, studies now suggest that when subjects are thwarted unjustly, they experience “little or no reduction in the level of their frustration and anger unless they are able to directly injure the frustrating agent.”

Assuming that the SVT is correct, and oppressed people do need an outlet for safe expression in order to maintain complacency, one of the fears of using parody as an instrument of resistance is that it might function as a type of safety valve. Is parody only protected by the government because it yields the illusion of opposition and criticism (Meyer, 2000), without any tangible harm?

### Parody Checklist

In order to adequately evaluate the effectiveness and quality of a parody, it is important to be cognizant of the hallmarks that make parody successful. First, a parody must describe “a painful or absurd situation, or a foolish or wicked person or group, as vividly as possible” (Highet, 1962, p. 19). An effective parody accentuates and makes light of a specific societal ill. Therefore, the writer must portray what their readers have not yet seen or understood; she must work under the assumption that most people are purblind, insensitive or perhaps “anaesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation” (Highet, 1962). Thus, the depictions of the parody must be as detailed and evocative as possible. The author must impel the audience to see her truth, or at least the part of the truth that they habitually ignore or take for granted.

Secondly, a parody must make the audience laugh (Butler, 1999). At its core, behind all of the self-important social critique and subversion of disciplinary power, parody is a form of comedy. If it is not funny, it is not doing its job. Laughter is vital to the effectiveness of parody, because laughter extracts all of the “fear and piety” that might be occupying the body in relation to a specific discourse or topic (Kenny, 2009). It enables us to relax around power, and can make a foreign object or concept seem more familiar, and thus more available for investigation.

Lastly, parody must involve spectacle. In order for parody to work, it must take whatever it is that it is trying to accentuate, and thrust it



into the spotlight to be displayed and critiqued (Kenny, 2009). For example, in Butler's (1988) description of drag, the performance of gender and the challenging of the institution is overt, noticeable, and cannot be ignored. A successful parody displays its parodic object up high, and is "held to be seen, exposed, and ridiculed."

### Comparable Parodies

Since I will be assessing *Saturday Night Live's* use of satire to critique the institution of gender, I have provided some context of the current television landscape. I will be focusing on two shows of similar formats (predominantly sketch comedies), that attempt to use the nature of parody to yield constructive social/political commentary about the constructions of race and gender.

### The Chappelle Show

In the hit sketch television show, *The Chappelle Show*, stand-up comedian Dave Chappelle constantly sought to challenge cultural, social, and political sensibilities in the context of race as a social construct (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009). His consistent and energetic engagement with topical issues such as identity politics and racial representation gave him his golden ticket to a niche with a fiercely loyal fan base. The show, much like the comic, found a home with both the "Afrocentricism of the black hip-hop intelligentsia" as well as the "skater/slacker/stoner ethos of suburban life." This unique duality afforded him the role of the trickster, allowing him to simultaneously speak both to and for Gen X and Gen Y subcultures, as well as to both the black and white audience members.

One of his strongest parodies, commenting on racial authenticity and multiracial identity, was in the sketch "The Racial Draft." In this sketch, Chappelle comments that "[Americans] are all mixed up ... genetically," and he decides that "We have got to start arguing about who is what ... we need to have a draft." Parodying the trademark style of professional sports drafts such as that of the NFL or NBA, one by one, representatives from various racial and ethnic groups come forward, and

select from famous athletes, entertainers and social figures to “officially” join their racial “team.” For example, Tiger Woods is picked up by the African Americans, Lenny Kravitz goes to the Jews, and the Wu-Tang Clan ends up with the Asians. In “The Racial Draft,” Chappelle mobilizes racial stereotypes in a spectacle that is both shocking and humorous; he expertly interweaves complex social theory into popular culture within the performance of race, racial identity, identity politics, and racial representation.

However, when *The Chappelle Show* abruptly ended in 2006, Chappelle addressed the dangers that are inherent in comedy that is racially, culturally, socially, and politically charged: Was his show exploding racial stereotypes, or merely reinforcing them? “I felt like it had gotten me in touch with my inner ‘coon’... When that [white] guy laughed, I felt like, man, they got me,” he remarked in an interview. It was this feeling of powerlessness and complicity in creating a comedic discourse that could (and was) appropriated and mobilized in unintended ways that eventually compelled him to cancel the show.

### Inside Amy Schumer

Through Amy Schumer’s sketch TV show, *Inside Amy Schumer*, the stand-up comedian aims to skewer the double standards of modern society while keeping the audience laughing (Renshaw, 2015). Week by week, Schumer takes aim at a different social topic, such as equal pay, gender inequality, double standards, reproductive rights, sexist stereotypes, and Julia Louis Dreyfus’ “last fuckable day” (Sciortino, 2015). In a late night comedy landscape that is ruled by males, Schumer offers a fresh, unique point of view, producing sketches that put gender tricksterism at the forefront. For example, with her “12 Angry Men Inside Amy Schumer” sketch, she parodies the 1957 film, *12 Angry Men*, to eviscerate unfair double standards as well as the omnipresent patriarchal arrogance that governs media. Excluding a certain part where the jurors debate on whether a teenager should be sentenced to death, the sketch follows the general plot of the original, now with the old men debating whether Schumer is attractive. As the discussion continues, many of the jurors dissolve into puddles of their own insecurities, as Schumer skillfully satirizes male rage, and the male gaze.

## The Refresher

In summary, satire and parody are essential elements of a thriving, political life (Kenny, 2009). They function as powerful tools when it comes to constructive social criticism (Clark & Motto, 1973), confronting public discourse (Rosenberg, 1960), and exposing problems and contradictions. Parody can reveal the flaws, mistakes, idiocies and absurdities in individual people, as well as schools of expression, philosophical systems and even entire societies and cultures (Kiremidjian, 1969) through repetition at a critical distance, marking differences rather than similarities (Hutcheon, 1985). In addition, parody can be used to subvert the oppressive forces of disciplinary power, by appropriating and flipping their rigid, prescribed scripts of gender and race (Butler, 1988). Some critiques of parody as a genre include ideological shiftiness, threats to the ownership of intellectual property (Hutcheon, 1985), and the possibility of parody as a safety valve (Meyer, 2000). In conjunction with SNL, some of the comparable television programming on the air in terms of style and content include *The Chappelle Show* and *Inside Amy Schumer*. For the duration of this paper, I will build on these ideas and ask what role parody plays in SNL's performance of gender. Does SNL use parody as a way to subvert these ideological institutions, or do they perpetuate them? How has SNL's gender tricksterism (or lack thereof) metamorphosed over the last forty-two years?

## Methodology

Since it would be impossible within the scope of this project to watch all 817 broadcasted episodes of *Saturday Night Live*, I tried to be as holistic as I could be when selecting my three case studies. I divided the 42 seasons into three factions (episodes 1-15, 16-30, 31-42), and then used a random number generator to pick the season. From there, I used the same generator to choose the episode number. I repeated this process for each faction. It was important to make this procedure truly random in order to achieve the most holistic account possible of *Saturday Night Live*'s lifespan—or, as holistic as one can accomplish through three epi-

sodes, having reviewed only .00037% SNL's total content. Through this random selection process, I picked episodes 3.12 with host O.J. Simpson, 17.3 with host Kirstie Alley, and 42.4 with host Tom Hanks. After watching and assessing all three episodes, I will analyze each of them through the lens of gender performance (as constructed through the theories of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault), and then evaluate their effectiveness (or lack thereof) using the trickster nature of parody, before finally answering the question: How does *Saturday Night Live* use the nature parody/tricksterism to challenge the performance of gender?

### Background

"There is no single media institution that embodies every element of the cultural, technological, political, and aesthetic evolutions embedded in the history of television. However, *Saturday Night Live* comes as close as any program does" (Marx, N., Sienkiewicz, M., & Becker, R, 2003). *Saturday Night Live*, or SNL, debuted in October 1975, under the name NBC's *Saturday Night*. Since then, the American late-night live television sketch comedy and variety show, created by Lorne Michaels and developed by Dick Ebersol, has had 42 seasons, 817 episodes, and has shot countless cast members into the stratosphere of Hollywood (Shales, 2002). At the onset of the show, Michaels was very conscious about creating something that was different from other television. He strove to develop a show for 30-year-olds, a demographic that he believed was being left in the dust in terms of television programming: "our reference points, our humor, reflect a lifestyle never aired on TV" (Day, 2012).

The show features an oscillation of live comedy sketches which tend to parody contemporary culture and politics, and is performed by a large, rotating cast comprised of both repertory "cast members" and novice "featured players" (Shales, 2002). Each episode is hosted by a celebrity guest—who delivers some sort of monologue at the beginning of the show, then continues to perform alongside the cast—and two live performances by a musical guest. If the host is also a musician, they might fill both slots. Each episode begins with a cold open, which eventually leads into one of the cast members breaking character and proclaiming, "Live from New York, it's Saturday Night!" The show format has been replicated and developed in several countries includ-

ing Brazil, Canada, Finland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Spain, each earning various levels of success. Throughout the last four decades, SNL has received a multitude of awards, including Primetime Emmys, Peabody Awards, etc. The show was inducted into the National Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame, and in 2007 was listed as one of *Time* magazine's "100 Best TV Shows of All-Time." As of 2012, SNL has received 156 Emmy nominations, the most received by any TV show in history (Shakes, 2002).

Throughout time, SNL has become the standard of sketch comedy and parody on TV. Each week, the audience is met with a barrage of brand new sketches and ideas that provide snapshots of American culture that span a variety of topics. SNL has proven to be the ideal venue in which to examine the intersections of television and critical theories such as race studies, gender studies, performance studies, political science, and literary criticism because the show has consistently and intentionally brought politics, pop culture, and social norms to the forefront of their program for the last 50 years.

### Criticism

In Amber Day and Ethan Thompson's 2012 essay, "Live From New York, It's the Fake News! *Saturday Night Live* and the (Non)Politics of Parody," the two criticize the show for its inability to provide "real" satire, which they define as "the ability to attack power and pass judgment on the powerful while doing so in a playful and entertaining way" (Day and Thompson, 2012, p. 170). According to them, while SNL has featured some counterculture and rebellious content, as well as provided a "good deal" of political humor over the years, the show is quite devoid of true satire. Their main criticism is directed towards the segment, "Weekend Update," SNL's "in house news parody." They point out that in order for the segment to maintain the show's brand identity as the "hip," non-threatening site for topical humor and new comic voices, "Weekend Update" has had to exorcise itself of any shred of real satire.

In the season finale of his new podcast, "Revisionist History," journalist, author, and speaker Malcolm Gladwell denounced SNL's use of satire for similar reasons. In the episode, entitled "The Satire Paradox," Gladwell provides his own succinct definition of effective satire:

“Satire works best when the satirist has the courage not just to go for the joke.” This is in response to Tina Fey’s impersonation and parodies of Sarah Palin during the 2008 election. For Gladwell, although a fan of Fey, says that her parody of the then vice-presidential candidate, focused too much on trying to be humorous, rather than actually critiquing Palin’s policies or lack of experience, thus making for a very weak and ineffective satire. In a clip with Fey and David Letterman, Fey describes her parody as “goofing” on Palin, and Gladwell is in disbelief: “Goof! Like the role of the satirist is to sit on the front porch and crack wise. Why doesn’t Tina Fey just come out and admit that her satire is completely toothless?” He then goes on to chastise SNL and Fey for inviting Palin to appear as a guest on the show:

[Then] they let Sarah Palin in on the joke. And they dress them up in identical red outfits because that’s even funnier. And what are you left with? You’re left with one of the most charming and winning and hilarious comics of her generation letting her charisma wash over her ostensible target, disarming us, disarming Sarah Palin. Sure, we laughed, but it’s kind of heartbreaking, isn’t it?

Gladwell’s fear of humanizing a dangerous political candidate through comedy echoes Will Ferrell’s theory of normalizing George W. Bush in 2000. In an interview, he said that he believed he “helped elect George W. Bush because his portrayal was more fun than Darrell Hammond’s Al Gore” (Guerrasio, 2015). Gladwell ends with this appraisal of the state of SNL’s use of satire, and foreshadows what happened in this past election: “SNL has taken out its dentures and is sipping the political situation through a straw. Lord help us if some other even more frightening and even less qualified political figure comes along.”

### Methodology

Again, I will be assessing the following *Saturday Night Live* episodes for gender performance and the use of satire/parody to analyze “How has *Saturday Night Live* used parody and tricksterism to subvert the social constructions of gender?”

### Episodes

Season 3: Episode 12  
Host: OJ Simpson  
Date: February 25, 1978  
Musical guest: Ashford and Simpson

Season 17: Episode 3  
Host: Kirstie Alley  
Date: October 12, 1991  
Musical guest: Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Season 42: Episode 4  
Host: Tom Hanks  
Date: October 22, 2016  
Musical guest: Lady Gaga

I will also be using the following sets of questions to analyze individual sketches.

Count: Men v. Women?  
What "truths" are assumed? What is to be understood to get the joke?  
Is there any aspect of shaming?  
Characteristics of men and women?  
Clothing worn?  
Personality/function of characters?  
Who is portrayed in a favorable way?  
Who/what is being made fun of?  
Does it channel oppressive situations? Does it challenge the status quo?  
Does it enact innovation?

For the female cast members, the performances of gender throughout these three episodes fluctuated greatly. For the men, their roles remained pretty consistent throughout the episodes. Their gender is almost never the premise of a joke or sketch, and overall, the men have more lines than the women (more apparent in the first two episodes). For the first two episodes, the men are slightly predatory towards the women in terms of sexual language and advances; this tapers off completely by the third episode. For female members of the cast, the first and last episodes

are like night and day. During the first episode, almost all screen time for women included some sort of sexual joke—either an advance, or a shaming mechanism at their expense. In the second episode, the role of women starts to improve: their lines have more variety (not all about sex), and the sketch entitled “It’s Pat,” questions the very nature of gender as a social construct. In the last and most recent episode, women play three dimensional characters, and none of them are explicitly objectified as sex objects. The women in this season have agency—they can make their own decisions, and do not depend on the men for help.

### SNL Season 3, Episode 12: O.J. Simpson (1978)

Throughout the entirety of the first episode, only one female character, Roseanne Roseannadanna (played by Gilda Radner), was not objectified or referred to in a sexual manner. For example, in the Weekend Update segment, when Bill Murray gives Woody Allen life advice, he at one point looks to Jane Curtin, the female news anchor, and off-handedly “confirms” with her that she is “shacked up” with Woody Allen. A few seconds later, in the same Weekend Update segment, we cut to Lorraine Newman, the “first woman reporter to set foot in an all male professional football team’s locker room.” In said locker room, is a half naked (and then later fully naked) O.J. Simpson, and Newman, a small white woman half his size and height. Throughout the segment, the ongoing joke is that she wants to have sex with him. She says things like “I don’t know much about football, but I know that I like what I see,” while glancing at his “exposed” penis. In “Mandingo 2,” a sketch based off of the movie *Mandingo*, a white woman and a black man in drag (they needed a black woman, but had none in the cast) serve as sexual objects to be “taken” by the men. Lastly, in the sketch entitled, “Animal Kingdom,” the male host of a show about animals having sex, brings on a woman who, at the onset of the video, is identified as an adult dancer. The woman is wearing head-to-toe skin-tight cheetah print and drapes herself sexually over the couch where the show is filmed. While the man spits jokes at the camera, she is nothing more than a physical body, not adding anything of comedic significance. Her role is to be the body that receives the barrage of sexual jokes and innuendoes made by the host. The joke is that as an



adult dancer (or sex worker), she should be titillated by all things sex, even videos of frogs procreating. At the end, the male host grabs her and they dance together as the music fades out.

The women on this episode of *Saturday Night* experienced a phenomenon and inequality that all female comedians encounter at some point in their career. Since their “womanhood” prevents them from being directly aggressive with their humor, “funny women have to achieve a delicate balance projecting enough vulnerability to be non-threatening,” they must rely on sexual jokes in order to be heard (Gilbert, 2004). The humor stems exclusively from the shock value reaped from hearing vulgar content from “pure” white women, and by reinforcing the emphasis of their body, reduces their potential “threat” to the fragile, male ego.

The “Animal Kingdom” sketch is the personification of Susan Bordo’s theory of mind/body dualism—in Western society, gender is constructed as opposites—men are associated with the mind, and women with the body (Bordo, 1993). This ideology functions as a form of social control—if a woman is synonymous with the body, then one has no choice but to sexually objectify her, for that’s the only way she can exist. This can be observed in SNL, where the male host (representing the brain) shoots off zingers and obscure facts at the camera, while the woman (the body) stays silent, and functions as an accessory to the male, only existing as a sexual object due to the nature of her gender.

This episode aired in 1978 during the Jimmy Carter administration, right after the second wave of feminism in the 60s. In conjunction with the civil rights movement at the time, the focus of this era was on intersectional feminism in the workplace, sexuality, family, and reproductive rights (Covington, 2015). Feminists redefined women as a social class, and began dialogues about how identity politics, race, class, and gender oppression are all related.

In a time of increased female empowerment, the inclusion of women on TV by itself was not enough to subvert and challenge gender roles. In order to really critique the construction of gender, one must use the tools of the oppressive forces and appropriate them to use against the hegemonic force of disciplinary power. At no point in this episode did SNL use parody to challenge the performance of gender. In fact, by under-utilizing their talented female cast members by assigning them to roles as sex ob-

jects with no real lines, they only further perpetuate the role of women as bodies, open to sexual objectification (Bordo, 1993). If the nature of parody and tricksterism is to use repetition as a means to identify and critique some part of society (Kiremidjian, 1969), and challenge oppressive situations (Hyde, 1998), then this episode of SNL fails to utilize these tools. Instead of a mirror that reflects back an image highlighting a social ill, SNL only exemplifies the oppressive, rigid scripts that have been given to women as sexual objects for male consumption. Not only does SNL fail to employ parody as an attack on gender, they inadvertently operate as a tool to further perpetuate disciplinary power over female bodies.

### SNL Season 17, Episode 3: Kirstie Alley (1991)

The second episode I will analyze was hosted by Kirstie Alley and premiered thirteen years after the O.J. Simpson episode. This episode does not show a dramatic difference in the performance of gender in men and women. For a large majority of the show, the sketches take on a more directly violent and violating undertone, dressed up and normalized under the mask of comedy. There were two separate Anita Hill v. Clarence Thomas bits: one as a sketch in the cold open, and again during Weekend Update, as a monologue by Chris Rock. Although performed in different formats, the two pieces rely on the same punchline: Clarence Thomas is the victim, and Anita Hill is nothing more than an evil temptress, standing between a monumental moment and a black man. In the cold open, the jury, led by Joe Biden asks Thomas about how he went about “courting” Hill. “Did she know that you were her boss? ... How did you ask her for a date?” They express their confusion and even sympathies for him as he recounts his encounters with Hill. One man on the jury even proposes that he corner her on a boat next time saying, “then it’s really hard for them to get away.” Later, in Weekend Update, Rock expresses a few of the same sentiments: “Couldn’t Thomas have picked a better looking girl to throw away his career on?” and “The only thing Clarence Thomas is guilty of is using bad pickup lines.” He even goes as far as to say, “[Thomas] is going to lose his chance to be on the Supreme Court and he didn’t even sleep with her—that is the real tragedy.” Later, this mentality of women functioning as sexual objects at the whim of men is reflected in the sketch, “Il Cantore.” The premise is that the Italian restaurant is operated by over-

eager and highly sexual men. The night starts out innocently when Kirstie and her husband sit down for dinner, and a few of the waiters start to kiss her on the cheek. The sketch picks up steam quickly, with Kirstie being reduced to a piece of meat; the cast members lick her entire face, grab and look down her shirt, touch her with their penises, and at one point, Adam Sandler fully motorboats her. Throughout the entire scene, Alley has to tolerate their over familiarity, and at the end, defends them when her husband puts his foot down.

This sketch paints a portrait of the perpetuation of rape culture. For Western society, the lines between rape/non-consensual sex and healthy, heterosexual relationships have been dangerously blurred, to the point that the image of heterosexual intercourse is based on a model of rape and sexuality (Herman, 1989). This avoidance of putting sole blame and responsibility on the rapists/perpetrators can lead to implying that the victim is responsible for their own victimization. Simply by having a female body, since their identity is their physical form, women are seen as seductresses, “flaunting” their figures to lure men (Bordo, 1993). Even if women reject the sexual advances of men, they are ridiculed and shamed for being “teases.” This is dangerous rhetoric because women, being taught that their bodies exist for male pleasure, begin to internalize this misogyny and will often blame themselves for sexual assault. In addition, through these images and dialogues, men are being conditioned to see women’s bodies as theirs for the taking, and learn that this type of treatment is acceptable.

Although 95% of this episode relies on gender-based stereotypes and the objectification of women, one sketch seeks to challenge gender as a construction. The sketch is called “It’s Pat,” featuring an overweight, extremely androgynous person. The joke is that everyone who interacts with Pat tries to uncover their gender by asking a series of questions, such as, “which parent are you more like,” or “when do you want to start a family?” Each time, Pat responds with a vague, ambiguous answer, like, “I’m a perfect mix of both parents,” or “I have to find a special someone first!” Each time the inquirers are “foiled” from “uncovering” Pat’s gender identity, much to the chagrin of both those on stage and in the audience (apparent from their audible groans). In a world where everything is so heavily gendered, from colors, to soap smells, to models of cars, the idea of someone existing outside of those scripts is absurd. These rigid,

inflexible codes for existence are vital to the way society works, which is why people work constantly to ensure that those around them are also following these codes (Foucault, 1995). To make sense of the world, we need to be able to neatly categorize everything. This is precisely why Pat's non-conformity frustrates the audience so much as they have no clue how to interact with someone that exists outside of gender, and that makes them uncomfortable.

This episode aired in 1991, right in the middle of George H.W. Bush's administration, and at the start of third-wave feminism. Feminists of this time sought to redefine the term, but never found a cohesive structure, thus creating a movement of individual and personal politics (American Racial History Timeline, 2012). Women began to reclaim and subvert the scripts that had been used to oppress them, eschewing victimization, redefining feminine beauty for themselves (rather than for the male gaze), and appropriating derogatory terms such as "slut" and "bitch" through the use of mimicry. With the rise of online technology, it was also possible to exist in a space where boundaries and scripts held less power, due to the disembodied nature of cyberspace. Women and men alike could use the web as their virtual playground to cross and explode gender boundaries, in a way that encouraged experimentation and creative thought.

In a cultural period where the construction of gender was being shattered in mainstream culture, in order to be on par, SNL would have to use parody in an innovative way. Overall, in this episode, SNL failed to use parody to criticize or identify flaws in the performance of gender. Similarly to the previous episode, SNL actually perpetuated many of the oppressive scripts and roles of gender and acted as an agent of disciplinary power, instead of challenging those institutions. Through the two Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas sketches and the "Il Cantore" sketch, SNL uses repetition to reinforce the notions of normative heterosexuality and the rendering of women as sexual objects.

Again, just one sketch did manage to embody the spirit of parody and tricksterism, utilizing repetition as a means to identify and critique some part of society (Kiremidjian, 1969), and challenging oppressive situations (Hyde, 1998). "It's Pat" appropriates the repetition of gender performance as a tool to expose gender as a construct. By creating a character who does not follow any of the existing scripts for either gen-

der, SNL proves to its audience that gender is not something a person inherently is, but rather, a sequence of rehearsed acts (Butler, 1998). As Pat continues not to perform any recognizable behaviors of femininity or masculinity, it becomes abundantly clear that gender is a verb, rather than a noun, something that is done, rather than is. Through the questions Pat's coworkers ask, SNL highlights some of the disciplinary tools gender employs, such as clothing, the age that someone wants to start a family, gifts, and of course, names. Pat's complete lack of gender qualifiers accentuates an important aspect of the social construction theory: "If you examine what knowledges we are drawing upon when we make this observation, regarding anatomy of the person, or the way the clothes are worn', then it becomes apparent that this is all knowledge that has been 'naturalized' through a process of normalization" (Foucault, 1995). Similarly, because gender is not a fact, and the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, without those acts there would be no gender at all, as exemplified through Pat.

There is also one more aspect of "It's Pat" that subtly identifies and critiques an aspect of society—the audience's reactions to Pat's lack of conformity. Each time a cast member fails to elicit a hint to "what gender" Pat may identify as, the audience is disappointed. What this sketch does so well is draw attention to the fact that we, the audience members, are active agents of disciplinary power. Like Foucault described, our monitoring of Pat and need for them to follow a script of gender (or any script for that matter) is not directly and actively oppressive as that of a military marching in and forcing Pat to perform a gender—rather, it is passive yet effective. Revisiting the parody checklist, "It's Pat" hits every note as a "a painful and absurd situation" (Highet, 1962), and is painted in the characterization of a person existing outside the binaries of gender. The writers at SNL wish for the audience to see their truth that gender is not inherent or biological, but is a performance. In addition, the parody makes us laugh (Butler, 1999). The jokes about gender being a construct, and Pat having a gender neutral response at the ready to every question their coworkers throw at them ("Can you start a family at 60?" / "Well, I need a special someone first!"), makes us relax around the deconstruction of power. Laughter makes us feel non-threatened, which allows meaningful critique to go down smoothly. Lastly, Pat's non-gendered body is a spectacle. Their refusal to conform is no doubt the

sole focus of the sketch, despite the other people on stage. Gender as a social construct is held up to be seen and exposed (Kenny, 2009), and basks in the literal spotlight.

### SNL Season 42, Episode 4: Tom Hanks (2016)

The third episode I examined, with host Tom Hanks, premiered fifteen years after the one with Kirstie Alley, and the differences in the performance of gender are staggering. For the men, they no longer act sexually aggressive towards the women, instead, treating them as cast members on equal footing, a dynamic not apparent in the previous two episodes. As for the women, the characters they play now are fully three dimensional, with feelings and attributes that are not based on the fact that they occupy a female body and are not overtly objectified or treated as sex objects. In fact, the only time that a woman's sexuality is addressed is during Leslie Jones' interview during Weekend Update, where she appears as herself and talks about her nude pictures that were leaked a few weeks prior. Although she is portrayed as a sexual being, the difference between this depiction and those of the past, is that she is not objectified. She makes fun of herself and her sexuality is defined through her terms, unlike when it is forced upon Alley in "Il Cantore." This difference in agency is clearly observed through her final statement: "the only person who can hack me, is me." One could argue, however, that Jones' agency and sexual aggressiveness is not a step forward for the performativity of race on SNL, since it could be a perpetuation of the racist stereotype of black women being hypersexual (Gilbert, 2004) and instinctual animals (Bordo, 1993).

Later in the episode, during a sketch called "Girls' Halloween," we follow three girl friends through their Halloween night. At first, stereotypical performances of gender are enacted: we watch as the girls carefully apply their makeup and talk about how cute they are going to look. As the sketch progresses, we see their night get messier and messier, as the girls get drunk and emotional. They start to behave in ways that are shocking for a woman—at one point one of the girls throws up on a pizza, and in the following moments, the posse verbally harasses the owner of the pizza joint.

This episode aired not long ago, when the entertainment atmosphere

was rife with suspense over the upcoming election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. This is a time known as the fourth-wave of feminism, where gender politics are starting to move back into the space of public discourse (Chow, 2016). In a post 9/11 society where the lines between the physical and digital worlds are almost nonexistent, discussions about oppression and injustice can transcend time and space like never before.

With critiques of gender as an institution more widely accepted than ever across the globe, it would not be hard or controversial for SNL to use parody to add to the discussion. In fact, if done well, it would almost certainly be celebrated and shared on the internet, where “likes” and “views” are the new currency. Yet, none came. Although this episode was devoid of female objectification and featured sketches that starred three-dimensional female characters, the episode was quite devoid of true, explicit gender-based satire. Following “It’s Pat,” this episode’s closest semblance of a critique of gender, “Girl’s Halloween,” fell flat. In the beginning, there were some glimmers of potentially useful social commentary—the preparations, the costumes, the makeup—can all be interpreted as ways we monitor female bodies to be more “presentable” (Bordo, 1993). But the subversion is where things begin to become unclear: as the night goes on, the women begin to fall apart (mostly because of alcohol). Their drunk selves care less about what they look like (their costumes are in shambles, high heels come off), how they treat one another (they yell at each other, and get upset about things that they had previously said didn’t anger them when sober), and what they eat (the girls end up at a pizza shop). But what are we to take these acts of drunkenness and disorder as? Are they subverting their scripts as females, or are they perpetuating them? Are they saying that alcohol enables one to slip out of the grasps of disciplinary power because of lack of comprehension and the nature of being impaired? Is there even a message about gender at all? Perhaps what “Girls Halloween” suffers from, is what Malcolm Gladwell pointed out in his critique of Tina Fey—its humor (Gladwell, 2016). Undoubtedly, the sketch is funny. Between the fast cuts between their expectations while getting ready, the reality of their actual night, and the hilarious comedic chops of seasoned SNL cast members, its effectiveness as an example of humor is unquestioned. But to quote Gladwell, the piece is “toothless”—it focuses so much on being funny, it forgets that it is a parody, and does not explicitly critique or highlight any aspects of society.

### Behind the Scenes

One important factor to keep in mind when evaluating SNL's performances of gender, is to consider who is in the writing room—who is creating the content? This is always a vital component to analyzing a work and it would be an understatement to say that the writing process plays a role in what is seen on screen. In Robert J. Thompson and Gary Burns' 1990 book, *Making Television: Authorship and the Production of Process*, they stress the importance of understanding the television production process, to better answer the question: "Who within the production organization is most responsible for the content of the final product?" Through their study of twelve prime-time television directors, they discover that the writers and producers of the show yield the most power, even more than the director. This is because writers both consciously and unconsciously influence the content of the shows, and the values that eventually emerge in the end are a direct result of their influence (Thompson, p. 161). In regards to SNL and its writing team, the first episode's writing team was comprised of fifteen members: twelve male writers and three female writers, with a male heading the team, giving it a 20% female staff. In season seventeen, the writing team was headed by, and consisted of two female writers, and fifteen male ones (a 12% female staff). In the past season, 42, there were three head writers, with one of them being female. The writing team is substantially larger than the seasons of the other two episodes, with eight female writers, and 21 male writers (a 28% female staff). Although female writers are still disproportionately outnumbered by male writers in the most recent season, it is over double the percent of that of the second episode I analyzed. Although there are other external factors, like the progression of women's rights in both society and in comedy, it would be negligent to ignore the correlation between an increase in female writers and the presence of more three-dimensional female roles.

### Conclusion

Judith Butler argues that if norms (such as the hallmarks of gender, like femininity and masculinity) are performative and hold institutional power by being reiterated over time, then parodic acts form a critical role



in disrupting, subverting, and altering the performance. When Pat, an individual that exists outside of the binaries of gender, uses their non-gendered body to expose the notions of gender as performative, rather than innate, *Saturday Night Live* shines as an exemplar of parody and tricksterism. By means of imitation and repetition, Pat holds the construction of gender at a distance, for the audience to examine and critique, and perhaps even imagine a world where gender is not dictated by scripts. However, Pat is just one diamond in the rough that is the other 30+ sketches performed in the three episodes that I analyzed. Overall, especially in the first two episodes, not only did SNL not use their platform as a parody show to critique or challenge the construct of gender, they were active agents of disciplinary power, reinforcing dangerous heteronormative performances, such as objectifying women, and rape culture. In other performances, such as those in the most recent episodes, although women were not treated as sexual objects, there was no biting social commentary on gender that truly makes a parody exactly that—a parody. If the nature of parody and tricksterism is to use repetition as a means to identify and critique some part of society and challenge oppressive situations, then SNL (save for one exceptional outlier) does not employ parody to challenge gender as an institutionalized construction. Looking forward, in order to truly be a parodic format, SNL, in the spirit of Malcolm Gladwell, must learn to confidently provide criticisms of society and grow some teeth.

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# LEISHA ISHIKAWA

## Leaving Behind the Binary: Embracing Gender on a Spectrum



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## WRITER'S COMMENTS

In this thesis I focus on the experiences, perspectives, and struggles that gender non-binary identifying individuals have shared with me through qualitative interviews. It is important that I make mention of my own identity, a cisgender female, and acknowledge that I am not a direct member of the non-binary community, but an ally. As a sociological researcher and writer, I am applying my own interpretations and analyses to each participant's personal accounts. This work comes from a place of deep empathy and urgency for action in breaking down harmful stigmas and stereotypes of those who do not align with the gender binary—that is, male or female in Western society. I argue that the popularized understanding of gender non-conformity has often been associated with a transgender metanarrative that still focuses on the binary transitioning of a man to woman or vice versa. Thus, non-binary identities are made invisible and invalid because they do not identify at opposite ends of the spectrum. With limited previous research on non-binary identities available, I hope to shed light on what it means to be non-binary in a society that insists on only two options.

—*Leisha Ishikawa*

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

In this beautifully written piece of sociological research, Leisha Ishikawa adds nuance and depth to our understanding of the experience of young individuals who transcend gender polarization by forging non-binary gender identities for themselves as queer, con-conforming, all-gender, non-binary, demi-boy, and myriad other non-cisgender denotations. Rather than lumping them together under the “trans umbrella,” as is often the case, Leisha is careful to uncover and examine their variation and unique experiences and trajectories. For example, aware that gender identity is often viewed from a culturally Western lens, she makes a point of analyzing the ecologically specific upbringing of each respondent, and how it impacted the gender identity formation of each. She also adds a uniquely modern spin to her analysis by examining the ways in which technology and social media—universally brought up by all of her respondents—have played a role in their emerging non-binary gender identities and their comfort with these identities. These elements bring invaluable texture and detail to our understandings of how the gender spectrum works in modern life.

—*Kimberly Richman, Department of Sociology*

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## Abstract

My research explored non-binary gender identity among individuals of the non-binary community in the San Francisco Bay Area. I obtained six participants who shared their perceptions and experiences of maneuvering Western culture's hegemonic gender binary system. Despite non-binary gender being considered a relatively new term, many different cultures throughout history have embraced the existence of more than two genders and gender roles functioning on a spectrum. Over the last decade, studies of transgender people have shifted away from essentialist and pathological notions of gender, and recognition of gender plurality has grown. However, gender identities outside of the binary of male and female have received little sociological investigation. This thesis investigated the experiences of gender non-conforming and non-binary identifying individuals in developing their identities and considered how they may be able to negotiate traditional gender norms and expand the limited Western conceptualization of gender.

*Keywords:* gender, gender identity, gender expression, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender queer, gender binary, trans umbrella

## Leaving Behind the Binary: Embracing Gender on a Spectrum

### Introduction

THE PURPOSE of this study was to gain insight into how contemporary non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals develop their gender identities within a Western context that enforces and reinforces a gender binary. Previous research has suggested that gender expression and identities have been fluid and existed in various forms, in many cultures, throughout history (West and Zimmerman 1987; Roughgarden 2004; Meyer-Bahlburg 2010). However, Western society has long maintained a dichotomization of gender—male or female—which is being challenged in more modern times. Current sociological literature is lacking personal accounts of non-binary and gender non-conforming people that critically analyze gender as a social construct and how it is used as a tool of oppression (Young 2004). Although there is literature surrounding gender and how it has been constructed by society rather than an inherent attribute of individuals, there is little on how gender non-conforming and non-binary individuals fit into the puzzle of “doing” gender (West and Zimmerman 1987; Jaggi 2011). Previous research has also primarily focused on trans people as key informants for investigating gender identity and gender as a social construct (Sanger 2008; Iantaffi and Bockting 2011; Ferguson 2016). These materials have yet to fully consider other gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary and have tended to be gathered from white, middle-class individuals who discuss gender separate from, and without relation to, other intersecting social identities such as sexuality, race, and socioeconomic status (de Vries 2012).

In their publication “Doing Gender,” West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is not something that one *is*, but something that someone *does*—a performance. They believed that an individual’s performance of gender also served to reinforce the gender binary and therefore, perpetuates gender inequality in society. Their claims opened theoretical debate about gender categories and whether it is possible to transcend or transform the existing notions of gender. Some theorists proposed a

revisionist approach in which gender could be “undone” (Deutsch 2007; Risman 1998; Risman 2009). West and Zimmerman (2009) responded that it is impossible to undo gender, but possible for it to be “redone.” If gender can be reproduced and reworked as a result of “doing gender,” non-binary individuals who perform gender non-conformity and challenge traditional gender roles may offer an opportunity to examine how gender lines can be blurred or even deconstructed.

### Literature Review

Since the mid-nineteenth century there have been reports in medical literatures of people who have desired to live as though they were of the opposite gender and/or expressed discomfort with their anatomical sex designation and related roles. Despite the existence of these human behaviors and characteristics since ancient times and across many cultures, erasure of the diversity of gender expression and identity has occurred over time (Meyer-Bahlburg 2010). Terms and diagnoses such as “homosexuality” and “gender identity disorder” were developed to pathologize and deem same-sex sexuality and binary gender non-conformity as acts of sexual perversion, social deviance, and were ethically objectionable until the 1950s. In 1952, the first sex-reassignment surgery was performed and in 1957 John William Money “studied the sexual consciousness about disorders of sex development and advocated the concept of gender” (Koh 2012:1) Within the most recent DSM-5 released in 2012, the diagnostic name of gender identity disorder was removed and replaced with “gender dysphoria,” a medical designation that aims to relieve stigma and respect the validity of transgender identity and gender non-conformation (Meyer-Bahlburg 2010).

Gender identity is not universal; some cultures around the world do not conceive of gender as real or fixed or even have terminologies to suggest its existence. In North American and Western European traditions, gender is very much a reality in people’s everyday lives and great preoccupation is placed on the centrality of gender to one’s self-concept and social identity. West and Zimmerman (1987:126) stated, “In Western societies, the accepted cultural perspective on gender views women and men as naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being.” For Western cultures, gender has become defined by a heterogeneous, binary

ideal of female and male bodies' outward appearances. This issue that people must realize their identity in terms of gender has become sensationalized in media and essential in ideology (Roughgarden 2004). Westbrook and Schilt (2013) analyze "gender attribution" and the process in which we categorize and determine other's gender from assumptions of biological characteristics and physical appearance.

Western culture's preoccupation with gender being fixed to one's identity has led to a "rigid bifurcation" and characterization of Western identity as focused on binaries such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and so on (Bulbek 1997). This tends to suggest that a person's sex, sexuality, gender, and gender identity are congruent and consistent for the rest of their life. Judith Lorber notes that:

The components of gender are the sex category assigned at birth on the basis of the appearance of the genitalia; gender identity; gendered sexual orientation; marital and procreative status; a gendered personality structure; gender beliefs and attitudes; gender displays; and work and family roles (2000:79).

Thus, these biological and social components do not always align with one side of the gender binary divide or the other. Gender identities are even more complex as they intersect with other social categories such as race, ethnicity, and social class to yield multi-faceted self-definitions (Wood and Eagly 2015). The University of California, Berkeley's Gender Equity Resource Center (2013) provides definitions distinguishing gender identity and gender expression as being respectively invisible and visible to others. Gender identity is an individual's internal sense of gender which may not be the same as the one assigned at birth and gender expression is the way in which a person expresses their gender identity through clothing, behavior, posture, mannerisms, speech, and many other patterns of behavior (University of California, Berkeley 2013).

West and Zimmerman (1987) pioneered a distinct social understanding of gender as something that could be accomplished over time and dependent upon social situations, external to the individual. There are also significant bodies of literature that have explored the "undoing" and "redoing" of gender (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007). These theoretical frameworks call for a deliberate departure from the gender binary that

has rejected and often violently punished gender nonconformity (Meyer-Bahlburg 2010). West and Zimmerman (1987) have argued that “gender is not so much undone as redone through shifts in the accountability structures that sustain gender in interaction,” as quoted by Connell’s (2010:31) empirical study of the workplace experiences of trans people in developing gender norms and hierarchies. Connell’s (2010) study provides evidence that “transgender persons are not only able to transcend conventional notions about how one goes about doing gender in their daily interactions,” but alter expected norms and roles associated with gender (Connell 2010; Mirandé 2016). However, trans people can find themselves in a double-bind where conforming to the gender binary and sexual norms leads to validation by mainstream U.S. society, but could diminish psychological well-being (Sanger 2008).

It is often observed that trans people occupy unique positions and insights from which alternatives can be offered to the current gender binary system. They are believed to challenge the gender binary and diversify existing approaches to masculinity and femininity. Ferguson (2016), a non-binary identifying person themselves, theorizes a “transgender meta-narrative” in which they argue mainstream media and discourse cements a singular version of trans subjectivity in line with the gender binary.

## Methods

My research explored the ways in which non-binary and gender non-conforming identifying individuals have developed their gender identities in Western cultural contexts and whether this impacts the way they disclose or conceal their identities with others. I also wanted to know how dominant gender norms associated with stereotypes of masculinity and femininity impact their gender expression. I was interested in learning how informants first discovered non-binary gender identities and what their experiences were like in beginning to identify internally and publicly as such. Another point of interest was learning how non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals discover, create, and share new terminologies for gender identity and how the internet and social media has expedited these processes.

A total of six people participated in the interviews, all of which were conducted in March 2017 in San Francisco. Individuals identified

themselves by a wide variety of terminologies including “gender non-conforming, non-binary, queer, all-gender,” etc. Their ages ranged from twenty to twenty-four years old and they were all residents of Northern California. The participants were informed about the study through various channels of communication and by snowball sampling from different contacts. The snowball sampling method allows the researcher to reach members of a population through previously identified group members. Henry (1992) recommends this method for populations whose members are difficult to reach, often because they do not wish to be identified. By reaching out to personal connections, referrals from participants, and making open calls to the public, I conducted four one-on-one interviews and one two-person interview where the subjects were partners. Those who wished to participate and consented to an interview were put in contact with me through email, Facebook, phone calls, or text messaging. An imperative connection was made when I reached out to a former fellow resident advisor on Facebook who is a part of the non-binary community and has many friends who identify as such as well. They messaged their friends and peers and explained my project and their relation to me, which in result may have allowed me an advantage in developing trust and rapport with the agreeing participants beforehand. I also reached out to classmates and peers who I knew either identified as such or had connections with larger gender alliances and the non-binary community.

The interviews were semi-structured in that I utilized an interview guide (see Appendix) and referred to it occasionally to prompt specific topics and questions imperative to my research question. These pre-determined questions assisted consistency and efficiency on my part through each conversation, but were flexible enough to allow each participant to answer openly and broadly. Many of the questions were followed up by impromptu remarks, clarifications, and follow-up questions that I believed could expand on the informant’s notions and explanations. As presumed, there were many differences between participants’ experiences and viewpoints; many of the questions were very personal and subject to interpretation and nonverbal cues. The interviews were conducted in-person versus over the phone to ensure confidentiality, to build trust and rapport with each participant. The semi-private locations where the interviews took place also played a role in the level of com-

fortability between the participants and me. Two of the interviews were conducted at local coffee shops in areas that were not being frequented by other patrons or passersby. The remaining three interviews were conducted at a local university campus in smaller, private conference rooms or secluded common areas.

## Findings

While all my respondents self-identified or previously identified as gender non-binary, their narratives were not the same. There was great diversity in their familial and ecological upbringings, the level of social support they received from their family and peers, as well as how they developed and learned their own gender identity, and many other nuanced particularities. Therefore, I first provide silhouettes of each of my participants using their preferred pseudonyms to highlight each of their unique personas. Next, I address the core themes and patterns that participants shared in terms of their experiences within Western society and how they understand and interact with the gender binary system. These themes are directly related to how society reinforces the dichotomy of male and female genders, and stigmatizes those who do not fall into these two categories. The findings also showcase how the non-binary participants perceived themselves and believed others perceive them within the existing framework—and because of developing conceptions of transgender identity—as still fitting into the binary system.

## My Respondents

George is a twenty-two-year-old hairstylist who grew up in Sonoma, California, for most of their life and currently resides there after moving a couple times for primary school as well as higher education. Aside from working in the salon, George currently works at a non-profit organization in Santa Rosa that aims to mentor and provide support for LGBTQ+ youth. George prefers they/them/their, and very recently he/him/his pronouns for self-identification and to be referred to by others. They mentioned that pronouns are not very problematic, especially when meeting new people, but they are more concerned with avoiding the wrong pronouns or being misgendered. Since a very young age,

George knew that they felt more on the “masculine” side and that they took great interests in sports, adventures, and getting down and dirty with the rest of the boys (George 2017).

Similar to the experience of many of the other respondents, George faced rejection, invalidation, and ostracization by their primary school peers because they believed George was different and odd. Being assigned female at birth, George was held to a variety of social expectations and roles that associated their body with what society deemed necessary to align with femininity rather than masculinity. It was not until turning eighteen and attending college for a period of time that George finally felt safe enough to explore and discover what gender expression, identity, and euphoria really were. By browsing the internet and finding online communities for trans and non-binary folk to connect, as well as meeting other queer and gender non-conforming people in person, George began to better understand certain terminologies and unique ways of identifying which they never had exposure to before. This became an opportunity to figure out their own gender identity: transmasculine, gender queer, non-binary, and demiboy (George 2017).

Kai is a twenty-year-old performing arts major and physics minor at a private university in San Francisco. He grew up and was raised primarily in Brazil, but spent three years as a child living in New York and a year in Australia. He still feels very connected to his Brazilian culture, family, and ancestors who have lived there for over six generations, but also feels comfortable and accustomed to the U.S. and Western society and culture. Since moving to San Francisco, Kai has experienced what it is like to live and work on his own, whereas in Brazil his family could support him financially and it was not necessary to make money on his own. These new responsibilities and freedoms, alongside higher education and being in a new progressive environment, has given way to Kai's greater autonomy in discovering himself and being the person he wants to be. This is not to characterize his journey, by any means, as an easy one (Kai 2017).

Before Kai started identifying with male pronouns about a year ago, he was raised to believe that gender was inherent and binary and embedded in his Brazilian culture and language. Because he was deemed to have a female body at birth and visually categorized as such by others, he always struggled with the fact that he never felt female or feminine



on the inside. As it is impossible for Kai to use gender-neutral pronouns in Brazil, he was thrilled to be able to experiment with they/them/their as soon as he moved to San Francisco. He quickly realized that even though this new ambiguous way of identifying and referring to himself was much better than “she,” it still was not enough. It wasn’t until using “he” and “him” that Kai was able to feel genuine validation and euphoria about his gender identity. At the same time, Kai feels femininity is still very much a part of himself and by no means feels that he falls on one side of the spectrum or the other (Kai 2017).

Jean and Bev are partners and both identify as gender queer, non-binary, and prefer they/them/their pronouns. Bev attends a private university in San Francisco and Jean has recently graduated from the same institution and is in the process of applying to graduate schools. Despite their similar perceptions towards gender identity and rebuking of gender conformity, their backgrounds and cultural upbringings are quite nuanced and different. Bev, a twenty-one year old who grew up in Ryebrook, New York (a fairly upper-class Jewish suburb) had little contact with LGBTQ+ folk through elementary, middle, and high school. Their decision to move to San Francisco was based on the city’s reputation of being “gay-friendly” and on being an opportunity to meet other LGBTQ+ people. On the other hand, Jean grew up in the Bay Area, specifically on the East Side of San Jose. Jean characterized their urban upbringing as being uniquely accepting of burgeoning ideas for expanding the notion of gender, where many of their peers (even throughout middle school and high school) were already coming out as non-binary and gender queer. Bev attended a small public school and maintained a modest group of friends throughout. Jean began their primary education at a private, Catholic, same-sex institution and later attended a larger public high school. Jean noted that many, if not all, of their friends also identified as transgender or non-binary and highlighted that they would often have conversations about their gender identity, sharing with each other new terminologies and experiences. They acknowledged that they were fortunate for the opportunity to communicate early on about their gender identity with others but that it is not an experience others often have (Jean and Bev 2017).

A community that both Jean and Bev found and took refuge in early on in their self- discovery was that of the online trans and non-binary

community on Tumblr, a social media blogging site. They both expressed that Tumblr was, and is, the best gateway for learning more about gender identity through the diverse experiences of people nationwide and around the world. Today, Bev and Jean find great support from their partnership, while also working towards being more active in the trans and non-binary community. Amongst their friends, peers, and others, they continue to educate and create awareness about their unique and valid experiences (Jean and Bev 2017).

Spencer is a twenty-four-year-old second year law school student in San Francisco who also completed their undergraduate degree in the city as a sociology major and legal studies minor. They are originally from Brawley, California, a very rural town and agricultural hub. They explained that their hometown is characterized by high unemployment, high substance abuse rates, great wealth inequality and nepotism amongst farming families, as well as very conservative notions of gender and sexuality. Spencer's family fell strongly into the conservative stereotype, as they were not supportive of unorthodox expressions of gender or sexuality, especially from their own kin (Spencer 2017).

Spencer was assigned female at birth (currently identifies as "AFAB") and was pressured, specifically by their mother, to avoid deviating from what others would consider normal for a teenage girl to do. Therefore, wearing dresses to church on Sundays, rather than chained, gothic accessories, was obligatory. Spencer explained that gender was not really an issue growing up, being that they did not feel problematic in considering themselves a cisfemale. They believed the reason for this was that they were more focused on their sexuality, identifying as a lesbian at an early age, because it was much more apparent in social dynamics and in media portrayals of what was normal and what was not. It was not until their first year of college that they began to question their gender as they had their sexuality because of the courses they were taking in sociology and meeting new people who were identifying outside of the gender binary. Five years since exploring their gender identity further, Spencer currently introduces themselves to others as genderqueer trans non-binary. Spencer's positionality as a white, financially privileged, law student, intersecting with their marginalized gender and sexual identity, has allowed them a unique opportunity to inform others in the legal field about trans and gender non-conforming identities as well as influence colleagues to ad-

vocate for protective legislation and policies. Spencer aspires to be a public or private defender one day and is passionate about all-gender equity through law and the criminal justice system (Spencer 2017).

Seth is a twenty-two-year-old fine art student in their final semester at a private university in San Francisco, who has really appreciated their liberal education (preferred pronouns: they, them, their). They have taken many classes exploring gender and sexuality cross-culturally, and its dynamics and construction in Western society. They had the opportunity to compare their experience of gender expression and gender norms between their hometown of Oahu, Hawai'i, to those in the Bay Area since moving to San Francisco. Despite growing up in a fairly accepting area, in a very accepting family, and with a supportive group of friends, they faced the stark experience of transferring between three different high schools due to each administration's inability to accept their openly queer identity. They noted that despite being in Hawai'i, a fairly liberal and progressive state, being a minority in a big group of people anywhere is difficult and unaffirming. There is a queer and trans community in Hawai'i but nothing of the same educational magnitude and presence as in San Francisco (Seth 2017).

Seth explained that moving to the city really sparked their motivation to meet new people and express themselves through new channels such as social media and the adult industry. They also went through a phase of exploring hyper-femininity but really struggled with presenting gender in this way. Seth does not regret their exploration of stereotypical femininity (i.e., manicures, grooming the body, dressing as a sexual object, and appealing to a male audience) and used their platforms to discuss feminism. Seth sees themselves as someone who is still in the gray area and finds comfort in androgyny. Through the mixture of "feminine and masculine" traits they have embodied and explored, they believe it is only under Western culture's framework that these traits fall neatly on opposite sides of a spectrum. Seth denounces this false system and believes in just being fluid rather than dichotomizing gender (Seth 2017).

### Early Life, Family Dynamic, and Ecological Specificity

Each interviewee was raised in a unique environment: one from a very small East Coast town, three from Northern and Southern California, one from South America, and one from a Pacific island. All participants

currently live in Northern California, and four out of five participants live in San Francisco. All mentioned that moving from their hometowns and other locations to the Bay Area was not by chance and has been formative in developing their identities and being able to meet other queer and LGBTQ+ people. Bev explains, “Definitely a big part of the reason why I moved here from New York was because of San Francisco’s reputation of being a really gay friendly city. Just because I did come from a really small town and didn’t know a lot of LGBT people at all” (2017:2). Similarly, Spencer expressed the same motivations for moving: “I just really wanted something the complete opposite from what I had for 18 years ... San Francisco, at least in my mind as an eighteen-year-old from Brawley, CA, it was the gayest, queerest city you could possibly go to. So that was kind of the big draw” (2017:2). In contrast, Jean attributes many of their experiences and conversations in exploring their gender identity early on to having grown up and living in the Bay Area. They explain: “I am really lucky to have been able to have those conversations, like, face to face with people and I do think it is because I grew up in the Bay Area. I think in a lot of other places people are not having those conversations at that age unless it is like explicitly only over the internet” (2017:2).

Not only did location impact the ways in which participants began to explore themselves, but their early life and upbringing also had tremendous effects on how their gender identity developed. Spencer and Bev both hardly had any exposure to others growing up who were questioning their gender or sexuality and they both admitted that this was a factor in delaying their gender exploration and identification. Most participants expressed that their parents are involved in their lives to a certain extent, but their understanding of their specific experiences as gender non-conforming people is lacking. George shared: “My parents still definitely struggle with using my [preferred] name and pronouns and it’s been over two years since I came out to them, so it’s definitely not easy with them...” George also stated that, “they also have this emotional attachment to this idea that they’ve had of me and who I was and it’s hard for them to let go of that” (2017:4). None of the participants expressed that their family was completely supportive of their gender identity or sufficiently knowledgeable about concepts of gender identity and gender fluidity, or what it means to be outside of the gender binary.

Five of six participants expressed that they faced bullying, microag-

gressions, and avoidance from their peers while growing up and going to school. Kai had experienced these very early on and recalls, “When I was five years old there was one time when I did something that was very boyish and a guy was like, ‘You can’t do that, because only boys can do that,’ and so I said, ‘Well then, I want to be a boy’” (2017:2). Seth experienced institutional discrimination, having moved high schools three different times. Seth conveys the following experience:

I had a friend whose mom was head of the PTA, and he would say that the PTA was talking about me, because I’m like the weird gay kid. I’m like that’s so crazy, and I remember one time the headmaster called me in one day and told me they don’t care what I do but just don’t do it here because it reflects badly on the school (2017:2).

This experience occurred when Seth was still living in Hawai’i and they reflected on the contrasting cultural perspectives of the two locations in this light:

I feel like here [in San Francisco] people understand androgyny and non-binarism a lot more and that’s just because there’s a lot more educational resources specifically on that. In Hawai’i, there’s a lot of native, cultural education, things that you are not going to necessarily get here (2017:3).

### **Educational Background**

It is important to mention that five out of six of my participants were currently enrolled in or had graduated from higher education institutions. One had completed some college, but most recently had finished cosmetology school. Due to my convenience and snowball sampling method, it was easier to get into contact with fellow university students, which impacted the level of randomness in my sample. Many participants were educated and well-read in gender and sexuality studies as many of them had taken courses involving such topics to also further their own self-discovery. George, for example, expressed:

There was a lot of gender and queer theory that I had no exposure to before and I think it is often times that in more academic settings like college that that kind of stuff comes up or that you learn that information because they don't teach you about that in grade school (2017:2).

Spencer also realized that their gender did not align with who they were when they were taking a sociology course as an undergraduate (2017:4). Seth expressed that they felt they learned most about gender as a concept from school, saying, "in all of my core classes I took something related to gender studies" (2017:7).

When referring to their socioeconomic status in relation to their educational experience, all participants were aware of their privilege in receiving higher education as well as their high enough economic standing to have done so. Some participants did also highlight that a large portion of trans and non-binary people face socioeconomic disparities and other social inequities because of institutionalized discrimination. Seth reflects on this: "I am very privileged to have enough financial backing going to this school and in this area whereas the homeless trans teen rates are so high" (2017:2).

Each person was articulate in not only addressing their individual situations and experiences, but also in analyzing and questioning macro-level institutions, cultures, and norms. Seth went as far as saying, "Who decided shaving body hair is feminine? Oh right, it was neoliberalism because companies wanted to make money from selling razors" (2017:4). They were all very familiar with what the "gender binary" is and provided their own insights as to how this has come about in Western society. Spencer expressed the ways in which they believe the gender binary should influence law and legislation as well as the criminal justice system:

Until we start changing the law, until we are in congress, until we are in our state congress, state house, and actively making legislation for protections, making inclusive health care, altering all of these systems that put people in boxes and then exclude and erase the identities of others (2017:9).

### Advantages of Technology, Limitations of Language

All respondents shared that they felt they were a part of a generation who has access to technologies and media that were not necessarily available to their parents' generation or prior. They all expressed great appreciation for the fact that they can go online and access websites, blogs, forums, social media channels, and other internet sites that gather people from all walks of life and put them into virtual communication with one another. All participants had positive experiences with the things that they shared, learned, and adopted from those they chatted with online. Kai was very appreciative of his experience with the online community as he stated, "YouTube and Tumblr have saved my life ... If the internet didn't exist, I would still be identifying as female" (2017:8).

All participants mentioned Tumblr as being one of the best online communities to interact with other trans or non-binary folk, safely and anonymously. Other internet sites such as DeviantArt, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook were utilized in sharing experiences and new ways of identifying. Some even found trans or non-binary communities from random searches on the websites or through artistic postings. Prominent social media websites that are still used by participants include Tumblr, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

The development of new terminologies and expansion of language was largely made possible by the internet and different social media sites. All participants felt that in contrast to their virtual interactions, their everyday lives felt limited in the way common language allowed them to communicate to other people who they were. All explained that finding the words and rhetoric to describe their non-binary identity was especially difficult when trying to communicate with people who were unfamiliar with gender concepts and expressions, or gender non-conforming communities.

Jean learned about non-binary gender identities mainly through communicating with friends and by browsing the internet. With knowledgeable peers to turn to as well as their accessibility to browse the internet aided the level of comfort and normality around their gender development and self-identification. However, Jean also expressed that later in life they found difficulties broaching the topic with people outside of their community, especially while attending college. Jean and Bev discuss

their dilemma regarding how they have difficulty expressing themselves to new or unfamiliar people:

Jean: We don't really have the words for it. When people don't have that vocabulary and our vocabulary is stuff we had to come up with on our own, it's hard to have that conversation when you don't have the words and you don't have the structure to have it in.

Bev: Cause that's even why I consider myself non-binary and that's it, for a really long time I was trying to find better terminology to talk about my specific gender experience and there are none and I don't know. It's really hard to explain to people that don't think about gender like that. And the best we can do, is say, "Well, that's how I feel inside!" (2017:8).

Kai's experience of Brazilian culture and language intertwined with binary gender ideologies undermined any opportunity to express himself neutrally, as neither female nor male. He grew up speaking Portuguese and explained that Latin languages are extremely gendered where specific words are deemed either masculine or feminine (e.g., *amigas* or *amigos*, differentiating female friends and male friends)—"That itself already creates a complete binary in a very solid truth that there are only two obvious genders" (Kai 2017:4). Even in the English language, with gender neutral pronouns such as *they* or *them*, people are much more accustomed to addressing someone with *she* or *her*, *he* or *him*, even when meeting for the very first time. How we communicate and what words we use reflexively influences the way we assign gender to others and identify gender of ourselves.

Terminology is always changing and rapidly expanding, especially in the non-binary community, because people are realizing that rhetoric is powerful in shaping and understanding their lived experiences. In Seth's opinion, "terminology in the gender non-conforming community is so nonlinear and ever-evolving, it's so hard to keep up with. It's just a way to express yourself, and they are all kind of synonyms for just not identifying with one of those two extremes [male or female]" (2017:5). Spencer learned while working at the Transgender Law Center that "even the trans



communities have these conversations about how do we define this? How do we define sex? How do we define gender identity, gender expression? These conversations are still happening and not all the time consistent within the communities themselves” (2017:11). All participants agreed on the notion that institutions and dominant groups should not have the definitive agency to classify people. People and communities should have the agency to determine their own labels, identities, and terminologies.

### Dysphoria and Cultural Invalidation

Three participants expressed that they experienced social dysphoria, generally described as feeling displeased by not being recognized for their authentic identities or being misgendered by others. Jean noted, “I still get misgendered all the time by different people that I interact with, and even with those people, I am pretty open and adamant about who I am” (2017:4). George explained that they had a history of being wary of meeting people and stated, “people are not going to either believe that my identity is real or they will think that I am kind of silly or deluding myself” (2017:1). One participant stated that they also felt physical dysphoria in which they see their body as not aligning with who they feel they are. Kai illustrated this traumatic experience: “Literally my body is the materialization of invalidation, everywhere I went there was no break ... everywhere I was female, however feeling male” (2017:2). Seth rather realized they didn’t experience much physical dysphoria after working for some time as a model in the adult industry:

I had made this kind of branding for myself that was very feminine and I was kind of stuck in that branding. I was happy that I had a social media following, people are finding me attractive, I’m feeling attractive in my femininity. But then it was again that kind of looking for validation of my gender identity. I felt self-confidence, but it was just purely binary masculinity or femininity. ‘Cause I still felt like I had to be one or the other (2017:3).

Participants who both experienced and did not experience dysphoria explained that when they share their non-binary gender identity with other

people, they feel they are not being taken seriously or that their experiences are invalid. They unanimously reiterated that Western society and culture limits gender to two options—cisgender male or female. George and Kai shared experiences from when they were younger of desperately wanting to play soccer or video games with other boys but facing rejection because they were thought of as not being good enough because they were “girls.” George recalls:

I just remember having a significant amount of discomfort about being in sort of like a feminine role and not really feeling like I fit in with groups of girls, and like wanting to fit in with groups of boys but they were like, “You’re a girl; you can’t play soccer” (2017:1).

George admitted that even as an individual who outwardly identifies with and expresses characteristics of what people might consider or expect of a boy, they had bad experiences with toxic masculinity. George experiences pressure to present stereotypical masculinity in order to be acknowledged as valid by the rest of society, especially from other cisgender men (2017:6).

It is also significant to note that three participants expressed that they live with mental illnesses and one participant mentioned that they meet with a psychologist every week. Pathologizing gender is something to be completely avoided; however, experiencing dysphoria should not be taken lightly as it is a serious and negative feeling of unease and can be associated with depression, anxiety, and agitation. A participant followed up their disclosure of mental illness by stating, “It’s super invalidating to live in a society that doesn’t acknowledge that you exist or acknowledge that you are a worthwhile human being” (George 2017:2).

### “Trans Umbrella”

George explains:

I feel like genderqueer almost partially falls under the umbrella of transgender. I would say that I primarily identify as transgender and then if I was going to get into specifics I

would say transmasculine, gender queer, and non-binary, and maybe demiboy. But trans sort of sums it up if I don't want to get into detail (2017:6).

The majority of participants used the term “trans umbrella” and stated that non-binary identities could fall somewhere under it to some extent. Kai, someone who currently identifies as trans and publicly as transmasculine, stated that he likes the connotation of trans as he “identifies with a different gender than the one [he] was given at birth” (Kai 2017:9). Others expressed that on some level they identify with being “trans” because of the Western binary framework and for ease of other people’s understanding of their identity. For example, Jean noted, “I do identify as trans just because I think that it is an easy shorthand because when I say I am transgender, people understand” (Jean 2017:6). Many prefaced their identities with “genderqueer” or “gender non-binary” before stating “transgender” or “trans” to give the notion that they did not align with the binary understanding of trans (i.e., trans man/male/masculine or trans woman/female/feminine). Bev was one participant who explicitly stated that non-binary was a modifier for their trans identity and that it was also a shorthand to mean that they did not align with either cis-male or cis-female, nor with the gender binary (Jean and Bev 2017:7). Jean reiterated that even though a clear majority of people they meet identify as trans, it is dangerous to start referring to everyone as trans because there are nuances to how people identify based on their experiences (Jean and Bev 2017:7).

### **Educating Others and Encouraging Advocacy**

All participants expressed that they felt an obligation to continuously educate their family, friends, and peers about their gender identity not only for themselves but also for the progression of a movement toward greater understanding of gender on a spectrum. George, an active trans youth advocate and mentor, noted that if they were to change anything about the way Western society understands and influences gender, it would be to change the way we treat and raise kids by allowing them to develop and discover who they truly are on their own rather than immediately gendering them upon birth. George comments, “The idea that

you can know anybody's gender just by looking at them is so messed up and needs to shift" (George 2017:9). Spencer, a law student highly involved in their graduate school's internal affairs, has been outspoken and passionate about advocating for trans and non-binary rights. They explained the impact they feel they have made with other law students:

I was talking to a friend last night and she was like, "You have opened up my eyes to this community that I would never have interacted with. And now every single time that I step into the office that I intern at, I think of the trans and non-binary community when I make active decisions when it comes to law and what I am doing" (Spencer 2017:10).

Jean reflected on their impact within their college community and remembered that they were motivated by the idea that they might be the only trans person that a peer might engage with. They stated, "Just me existing as a non-binary person is already forcing people to engage with me in a way that they might not engage with people otherwise, so that kind of fortunately and unfortunately forces me to be an ambassador for my community" (2017:12). Similar to these sentiments, Seth expressed a variety of ways that they feel they must educate others while acknowledging, "I'm not an educator, and it's important to note that it's not anyone's job to educate other people." They also explained that bearing the responsibility of being knowledgeable and outspoken all the time is "very emotionally exhausting" (2017:7).

### Analysis and Discussion

The experiences of non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender queer, trans, and all people existing on the spectrum, are diverse and have many intersecting social identities. It is necessary to consider the unique narratives of trans and non-binary people as distinct, yet sometimes overlapping in order to move away from the popularized notion that one must transition from man to woman or vice versa. My research participants have had limited opportunities to break out of this transgender metanarrative and binary understanding of gender, as well as cisnormative and heteronormative social and cultural expectations and

norms (Iantaffi and Bockting 2011). Cisnormativity and heteronormativity pertain to society's dominant perspectives in which individuals by nature or by choice conform to the gender and sexuality expectations of society that are gender normative and straight (University of California, Berkeley 2013). In result of my findings, I analyze the ways that participants developed their gender identities in social relation with others, the ways in which they are validated and invalidated by society, and deduce why modern generations can negotiate and advocate their gender legitimacy more readily compared to older generations in the Western context.

### Gender Determination and the Reflexive Self

Westbrook and Schilt (2013) termed the social process of “determining gender” as authenticating another person's gender identity through social interaction. Meaning that when people engaging, they are presenting information that others then use to place them into gender categories. All participants explained that whether through face-to-face interactions, social media and other online forums, or overarching societal norms and stereotypes, they felt that others were constantly gendering them while they were trying to figure gender out for themselves. Spencer mentioned that it is natural that “you want to talk to other people about [gender] too and it gives you a kind of nuance understanding of things and kind of a vocabulary to talk about these things” (2017:5). George said, “If I had never met another trans person who was like open and willing to talk to me about stuff, who knows where I'd be” (2017:4). Kai describes his experience adjusting to he and him pronouns and hearing others refer to him as such in stating:

The first time I heard he/him, it was kind of a weird feeling, and I felt like I was going to go back to they, but then the more I started hearing it, the more I started feeling like oh my god that is me, that is me. (2017:3)

### The “Double Bind”

The double bind that transgender and gender non-conforming people experience is the dilemma between being perceived and perceiving oneself as inhabiting a unique position to identify and expand the gender binary, but in consequence to doing so, may experience violence, harassment, and further stigmatization due to societal norms (Sanger 2008). My participants faced this double bind like trans folk in that they see and understand themselves as defying the gender binary, but must also function and communicate within the current gender framework. Here is Jean’s take on maneuvering this dilemma:

I’m not going to be telling people that it’s bad to identify with a gender because that’s just the framework that we’re working in. I think that is really important to keep in mind when having these conversations, that people are not bad for having masculine or feminine identities or for having gender or for presenting themselves in a certain way, but I don’t think those things are real outside of this context. (2017:10)

The bind may also be that non-binary people feel great responsibility to educate others on gender as a social construct and feel that they must always be social justice advocates for their community.

### A Generational Difference

Through the increase of technology and online communications, younger people have the ability to communicate across the world with curiosity and ease. Compared to older generations, younger ones are more likely to have access to computers, websites, applications, and social media outlets that share ideas and messages with others quickly and vividly. Bev clearly summarized this point:

I think because we have the internet and people our age and of our generation are much more proficient at using the internet, the information that has traveled and the way that information travels has been perpetuating these newer terms.

And I think it is harder for the older generation to connect with those terms or to want to identify with those terms, just because the community is so different. (2017:11)

Participants explained that their non-binary identities are not necessarily new ways of being or feeling, but newly coined and recognized by the larger public. When people share new terms and ways of identifying online or in person, others can adopt and adapt such to describe their own experience. Participants believed that younger people are also more open to new concepts and expanding their vocabulary. George reflected, “There’s definitely a movement toward legitimizing new identities and there’s a movement toward being open about our identities” (2017:10).

## Conclusion

Non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals understand and interact with the gender binary through diverse social, cultural, and physical experiences. Participants’ early life and familial upbringings were imperative to the certain norms and expectations they learned as association with female and male genders, but to some degree knew for themselves that these weren’t their own truths. In the Western context, they were continually faced with rules and regulations as to how they should and should not perform masculinity or femininity. Most faced internalized invalidation and uneasiness about not fitting in with their peers, yet finding solace in their individuality and potential for unique self-expression as they discovered their non-binary identities. Their educational backgrounds and access to technology shaped the ways in which they could learn about gender and sexuality concepts as well as discuss with others about gender existing on a spectrum.

Unfortunately, non-binary people seem to face a double bind like trans folk in that transcending the gender binary seems in reach and feasible individually and within queer communities, but when facing society at large their capacity to express themselves becomes limited in the current framework. Based upon my findings, participant’s non-binary, trans, and other gender identities are valid and their individual experiences are diverse and heterogeneous. My research only skims the surface in revealing non-binary issues and complexities in expanding the notion of gen-

#### EMBRACING GENDER ON A SPECTRUM

der in Western cultures and around the world. Thus, there is much need for greater non-binary and gender non-conforming visibility in academic literature and future gender studies.



## Appendix. Questions Used in Interview

### Interview Guide

1. Please begin by introducing yourself:
  - a. Your name, age, pronouns
  - b. race/ethnicity ID, class
  - c. education, occupation previously and currently
  - d. religion
  - e. gender, gender identity
  - f. sexual orientation, relationship status
  - g. anything else you would like to share
2. Where did you grow up? What was it like? Did you enjoy living there? Feel accepted?
3. How long have you lived in the San Francisco Bay Area?
4. Can you tell me about some experiences growing up in \_\_\_\_\_ that you believe have shaped the way you identify?
  - a. Elementary/middle/high school
  - b. Family
  - c. Friends
5. Please describe the way you like to present yourself to others and or the way you like to be recognized by others.
6. Who do you disclose your identity with most often?
  - a. Are you a part of any type of organizations? If so, what are they called?
7. When do you feel the most comfortable being who you truly are?
  - a. Was there ever a time you did not feel comfortable?
8. Can you tell me about the time you first identified as \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., non-binary)?
  - a. When, where, how, what emotions, who was there?
  - b. How did you learn about this identity?
  - c. Do you know other people who also identify similarly?

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9. If at all, how do you think the internet/media has shaped your identity?
  - a. If any, what was your experience like learning more about gender online? Blogs?
10. Have you ever identified or identify with the term “transgender”?
  - a. What does this term mean, signify, or connote to you?
  - b. How would you feel if someone referred to you as such?
11. What factors do you believe influence the way you do/do not identify with the term “transgender”?
12. How do other people most often refer to your identity? How does your family refer to you? Friends? Partner(s)?
13. How do you feel the rest of society perceives your identity?
  - a. Does this matter to you?
  - b. How would you describe yourself to a stranger?
14. What would you change about the way Western society understands gender?
15. How do you think you perform or manifest “gender”? Or do you?
16. In your opinion, how might your unique identity expand the way Western society understands gender?
17. Do you believe that we need “gender” or any type of categories?
18. Do you think that more people in the future will begin to identify as non-binary, gender queer, gender fluid, etc.?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. What factors may impact this?
19. Do you think gender non-conforming identities are a part of a generational movement?

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# ELEANOR O. SAMMONS

## Transgenerational Inheritance: The Effects of Trauma



*Eleanor Sammons, class of 2018, is  
pursuing a degree in Psychology.*

## WRITER'S COMMENTS

Knowledge of a genetic predisposition can change the way one interacts with their environment. To positively influence potential outcomes, one may choose a preventive path. For this literature review, I decided to explore the current research on the relationship between epigenetics and trauma, more specifically, the transference of small genetic changes that occur as a result of trauma, across generations to whom trauma exposure has not occurred. The challenge was to comprehensively evaluate the findings of several complex studies in respect to each other, keeping within the scope of the assignment. The effort was well worth it. Understanding the transgenerational inheritance of these effects can help determine how epigenetic changes are passed across generations, and how predisposition may alter stress response, promoting immune dysregulation, hormonal imbalance, depression, or PTSD in offspring. Eventually, a better understanding of this complex interaction may lead to better methods of prevention and treatment.

—*Eleanor O. Sammons*

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

In Writing in Psychology, many topics pertinent to the field of Psychology come up in an exploratory manner as we broadly discuss ideas and issues that are often considered controversial as well as current and relevant to contemporary college students. Epigenetics and trauma was one such issue. I was extremely delighted when Eleanor Sammons informed me shortly after that particular class discussion that she had chosen to write her final literature review assignment on epigenetics. "Transgenerational Inheritance: The Effects of Trauma" presents a thorough and thoughtfully written overview and analysis of six peer-reviewed studies on the molecular epigenetic effects of traumatic experiences on trauma survivors and their offspring. Eleanor addresses the methods used and the results of the studies to create an holistic picture that answers the question: how does the study of the transgenerational inheritance of the effects of trauma help determine how epigenetic changes are passed across generations to gain a better understanding of how epigenetics affects predisposition to altered stress response in offspring?

—*Lisa Biesemeyer, Dept. of Rhetoric and Language  
and Dept. of Psychology*

### Abstract

The psychological and behavioral effects of early stress and trauma associated with PTSD are widely studied; however, new evidence shows that these effects may leave an epigenetic trail of markings on a molecular level. DNA methylation occurring due to these stressors may be passed transgenerationally, so that the offspring of those exposed to trauma are predisposed to certain physiological and psychological differences that may make them more susceptible to hormonal imbalance, immune dysregulation, depression, and PTSD. In the following literature review, these effects in animal and human studies will be explored, in addition to explaining some of the genetic underpinnings that are better understood.

*Keywords:* epigenetics, methylation, depression, transgenerational effects, PTSD

## Transgenerational Inheritance: The Effects of Trauma

THE STUDY OF TRANSGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE of genes associated with the effects of trauma is a new field that has garnered recent interest and media attention. Separating the facts from misrepresentations that have been littered throughout mass media is imperative to understanding the true nature of this relationship. The epigenetic nature of the development of psychological disorders is better understood with evidence gleaned from the study of the human genome, and subsequently, how genetic changes occur in response to environmental stimuli. Along this vein, recent findings suggest that traumatic occurrences can create distinct genetic changes that are passed down to following generations, thereby predisposing offspring to psychological disorders that mimic the same effects caused by the actual trauma to which they were never exposed. Therefore, the study of the transgenerational inheritance of these effects of trauma can help determine how epigenetic changes are passed across generations, in order to better understand how epigenetics affects predisposition to altered stress response in offspring, allowing for better methods of prevention and treatment.

### Epigenetics

The study of epigenetics involves the consideration of how environmental factors interact with genetics, in order to affect physiological, psychological, developmental, and behavioral outcomes. For example, environmental stressors ranging from toxic pollutants to maternal separation can interact with one's genetic make-up, influencing the activation of certain genes. Experience, in essence, has an impact on the expression of genes. Although this phenomenon is understudied in mammals thus far, there is mounting evidence that traumatic experience can also have an impact on genetic expression in the offspring of those who have been traumatized, even impacting successive generations. In distinguishing the effects that have been caused by genetic precursors left over from traumas of previous generations from those caused directly by environmental triggers in the context of the present generation, great care must be taken. Through



the study of DNA methylation and small non-coding RNAs (sncRNAs), some of the nuances of these interactions are beginning to be teased out.

### Animal Studies

For instance, in a murine study by Franklin et al. (2010) pups were separated from their mothers during the first two weeks of their lives, and subsequently reared otherwise normally, in order to gauge the effects. These mice (MSUS) were separated from mothers in an unpredictable pattern so that they did not become habituated to an expected separation. The resulting depressive behavioral symptoms that were expected in maturity, as assessed by a forced-swim test (designed to assess depressive symptoms by measuring the amount of time spent floating helplessly, as opposed to trying to escape) were then observed (Franklin et al., 2010). Epigenetic changes to the MSUS genome were also observed, which included methylation of several genes—particularly within the male germline (Franklin et al., 2010). MSUS male mice and control males were then bred with wild-type female mice, and second-generation offspring (F2) were then reared normally and genetically tested (Franklin et al., 2010). Finally, a third generation (F3) of mice were bred from wild-type females, and either the F2 MSUS males, or control males, and were genetically assessed (Franklin et al., 2010).

Data from this study suggests that changes in methylation occur in response to early life stressors and are transmitted across generations in a sex-dependent way, through the male germline (Franklin et al., 2010). This methylation correlates significantly with increased depressive behavior during adverse environmental stimulus, witnessed in forced-swim testing (Franklin et al., 2010). These changes were observed throughout three successive generations, were reversible in the F2 MSUS mice by using antidepressants, and may begin to explain the genetic nature of psychopathology—perhaps even beyond depression predisposition, since the behaviors that occur in response to the forced-swim test (e.g., impulsivity or lack of response to danger) may also relate to personality and mood disorders, and to attentional disorders (Franklin et al., 2010).

Further evidence of genetic transmission through an alternative path can be found in a recent study by Gapp et al. (2014) using the same MSUS model in which maternal separation stress was evoked. Resultant

symptoms were measured in 1) a forced-swim test, 2) an elevated maze designed to test the natural fear-reaction to open spaces, 3) a light-dark box task designed to test the natural aversion to bright light (Gapp et al., 2014). Semen samples were then removed from the animals, analyzed for changes in sncRNA, then inseminated into adult wild-type females in the same succession as in the Franklin et al. (2010) study to create F2 and F3 generations (Gapp et al., 2014). Changes to RNA were discovered in blood and semen samples, as well as in the sampled hippocampal and hypothalamic tissue (key areas of stress response in the mammalian brain) of the MSUS mice. Additionally, RNA changes were noted in the behavior of the MSUS as well as the F2 and F3 progeny of these mice, raised under normative conditions. Gapp et al. (2014) posited that considering the analysis found no upregulation in the RNA sampled from the F2 and F3 progeny, behavioral changes akin to those found in MSUS mice were still consistently observed (more time floating in forced-swim test, reduced avoidance and fear in the light-box task and maze); DNA methylation may be responsible for the genetic transmission of these predispositions. Taken together, these studies point to two novel ways in which traumatic effects can create transgenerational genetic predispositions to psychological disorders involving depression, reduced inhibition and attention, and impulsivity.

### **Mechanics: How does this work?**

The idea that stress affects development is nothing new. Hormones are understood to direct the development of animals in utero, and throughout the course of development. Therefore, to understand the effects that trauma and stress have on genetic development, studying the impact stress has on hormonal response may be a reasonable place to start. In fact, the impact of hormonal changes on development, particularly those occurring during times of stress, is well documented. For example, in a 2012 controlled experiment by Goerlich, Nätt, Elfving, Macdonald, and Jensen, young chickens were forced into social isolation during the first three weeks of life to induce early-life stress, which resulted in a dulled corticosterone response. However, Goerlich et al. (2012) found that these effects were not limited to the stress-induced chickens, but were also found within their later offspring, again showing transgenerational

effects. Similar to the (Gapp et al., 2014) study, the chickens exposed to early isolation produced offspring demonstrating effects to trauma that were sex-specific, and had been passed down from the stress-induced generation particularly to the males in the second generation (Goerlich et al., 2012). The dulled response, as it was suggested in this case, may have resulted in an improved capacity for coping; however, it is unknown if this effect may also have a negative impact (Gorlich et al., 2012). It may even be the case that a diminished corticosterone response could be responsible for some of the reduced inhibition and fear observed in the MSUS, F2, and F3 mice in the two aforementioned studies. Although Franklin et al. (2010) and Gapp et al. (2014) did not test for hormonal response in murine samples, these effects are difficult to surmise; such results may show how diminished corticosterone response could be a negative outcome.

Inhibition and fear are two responses mainly controlled by the endocrine system along the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and therefore mediated by glucocorticoid hormones (such as the corticosterone in mice or chickens, or cortisol in humans), are important to species survival. Dysregulation along the HPA axis, found in psychopathology such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), can either cause excessive release of these hormones (hypercortisolism), or decreased release (hypocortisolism) as an adaptive response to the perceived constant threat (Schechter et al., 2015). The direction of this dysregulation depends upon the nature of the traumatic event. For example, if PTSD follows a single traumatic event—such as a natural disaster—hypercortisolism is more likely; however, in the case of repeated traumatic events—as in the case of domestic violence—hypocortisolism is the more likely adaptive effect (Schechter et al., 2015). Meaning that the hormonal regulation that guides fear and inhibition responses is adaptive in nature according to the environment over the course of a lifetime.

Moreover, the way in which genetics influence the variability of these responses represents a deeper mechanism of evolution. A study by Sipahi et al. (2014) attempted to explain these observed differences in the context of susceptibility and resilience to trauma by assessing DNA methylation in association with PTSD using publicly available genomes sampled from numerous species. To further understand the mechanisms behind epigenetics, Sipahi et al. (2014) hypothesized that resilience to

traumatic stress or predisposition to PTSD, two opposing phenotypes that appear to be led by methylation of DNA, are mediated by a CpG dinucleotide. This dinucleotide, a building block for DNA and site at which methylation occurs, has the capacity to ignite gene expression and essentially *turn on genes*. Sipahi et al. (2014) found 203 PTSD-associated CpG sites that were highly conserved across mammalian species (less than 7% of which were unique to humans) despite specialization. Of the sites, 73% were found in the last common ancestor of humans and orangutans and 93% were present in the last ancestor common amongst humans and chimpanzees. Sipahi et al. (2014), found that many of these sites occur within genes involved in immune response. These findings may suggest an evolutionary advantage to the epigenetic regulation of responses to traumatic stress, and a relationship between PTSD and immune dysfunction, as immune dysregulation is a common finding in individuals who have a history of PTSD (Sipahi et al., 2014). It may be that PTSD is highly genetically conserved *because* it causes these epigenetic changes in survivors of severe trauma. Quite simply, epigenetic changes cannot occur in those who are exposed to trauma and do not survive. So, although resiliency to traumatic stress may be the more evolutionarily desired trait, susceptibility to PTSD can be passed throughout generations through this process of methylation if great care is not taken to avoid triggering traumatic stress.

### Human Studies

Clearly, there are complex genetic and evolutionary underpinnings at work. However, to understand this epigenetic process in greater depth, it is as important to explore the *nurture* portion of the scenario, as it is the *nature* of this relationship. The environmental contexts in which these interactions take place also have an impact on the outcomes, and so must be explored in order to disentangle the differing variables. Two recent studies by Schechter et al. (2015) and Yehuda et al. (2016) attempt to do exactly this. Schechter et al. (2015) studied the impact that maternal interpersonal violence-related PTSD (IPV-PTSD) had on offspring in an effort to understand the relationship between IPV-PTSD in relation to the HPA axis through the study of parenting stress and the NR3C1 glucocorticoid receptor gene. Schechter et al. (2014) hypothesized that

methylation of this gene would predict IPV-PTSD severity and parenting stress, with less methylation of NR3C1 correlating with less systemic cortisol circulation due to the adaptive effect of hypocortisolism, but increased IPV-PTSD severity and parenting stress. Because this chronic-type IPV-PTSD is related to decreased cortisol and HPA activity as a protective response, decreased medial prefrontal cortical (mPFC) activity was expected (Schechter et al., 2014).

This study's participants included 45 mothers and their children between the ages 12–42 months, sampled from a population of women seeking help or shelter after domestic abuse (Schechter et al., 2014). After an interview assessment and self-report questionnaire, the participants engaged in a protocol known as the *Modified Crowell Procedure* (in which children were exposed to a clown and loud playthings), and separation-stress followed by reunion (Schechter et al., 2014). Saliva and DNA samples measuring cortisol were taken from mothers and children before enacting this protocol, and again at 30- and 60-minute intervals immediately following (Schechter et al., 2014). Questioning during functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), designed to elicit emotional reaction, was administered in the following two- to four-week period (Schechter et al., 2014). Results of this study indicate a negative association between IPV-PTSD and methylation of the glucocorticoid promoter region of NR3C1, demonstrating that repeated trauma can lead to decreased methylation as opposed to the increased methylation that is found in those exposed to a singular traumatic event (Schechter et al., 2014). Findings also suggest an inverse association between IPV-PTSD and areas of the prefrontal cortex that are responsible for regulating emotional responses along the HPA axis, resulting in decreased activity in prefrontal cortices of the brain, namely: the ventral medial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC), and the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC) (Schechter et al., 2014). A positive association was observed between IPV-PTSD and parenting stress (Schechter et al., 2014). These findings are an important piece of a complex puzzle, and suggest that the direction of the effect on methylation is at least partially dependent on the type of trauma that occurs (be it a singular event, or reoccurring); however, the effects of parental trauma in either case, on the environment of the offspring are virtually the same. Greater stress, in relation to parenting, is a characteristic of

mothers with IPV-PTSD, and can have a negative impact on maternal sensitivity (Schechter et al., 2014).

In order to explore the relationship between methylation and PTSD characteristic to those who were exposed to trauma as a singular event, Yehuda et al. (2016) studied the intergenerational effects of Holocaust exposure on the FKBP5 gene. This gene, a regulator of glucocorticoid receptors decreases binding of these steroids to their receptors—in effect, eliminating their ability to reach the nucleus (Yehuda et al., 2016). FKBP5 expression is often altered in individuals with PTSD or major depression (Yehuda et al., 2016). In this study, 32 Holocaust-survivor parents (F0) and 22 of their non-Holocaust-exposed offspring (F1) were assessed in clinical interviews and by self-report questionnaires before blood and saliva samples were collected (Yehuda et al., 2016). Analysis was conducted and compared with that of a demographically matched control group of eight parents and nine offspring who were not survivors of the Holocaust (Yehuda et al., 2016). Changes in the methylation of the FKBP5 gene were found in both F0 and F1 groups; however, the changes observed differed in direction (Yehuda et al., 2016). The F0 group showed signs of greater methylation (by 10%), while the F1 offspring showed decreased methylation (by 7.7%) when compared to control subjects (Yehuda et al., 2016). Presently, it is difficult to be certain that the decrease in methylation observed in the F1 sample in this study results strictly from the epigenetic effects of parental Holocaust trauma, without confounding effects of possible trauma from abuse. Yehuda et al. (2016) stated that parental trauma is linked to an increased prevalence in child abuse that, if the results from Schechter et al. (2014) are considered, would explain the decreased methylation due to the experience of chronic traumatic abuse. However, it is unlikely that this would be the case for all participants in this study, and data from these studies instead suggest an epigenetic route.

### Limitations and Conclusions

Teasing the observed epigenetic effects from effects that are a direct result of behavior is a tricky business. One limitation of Franklin et al. (2010) is that while there were no obvious differences in maternal behavior, it is possible that the male pups were exposed to differences

in rearing in very subtle ways; Franklin et al. (2010) noted that changes in circadian rhythm or milk content could have resulted in a depressive effect on the mice. However, when considering the findings in Gapp et al. (2014), in which epigenetic differences in sncRNAs were found within the sperm of the F1 male pups, along with methylation in the genes of following generations, attribution of the observed changes to such subtle possibilities is likely to be inaccurate. Of course, the obvious limitation in these murine studies, and that of Goerlich et al. (2012) in a study using chickens shows us that in using animal studies, generalizability to humans is limited. There may be biological differences that are unaccounted for, and assumptions may be falsely made. However, Siphani et al. (2014) incorporated the study of primates (including humans), mice, chicken, and several other species, tracing the roots of PTSD associated CpG sites back to ancestors common to all; where methylation is involved, perhaps these species are not so differentiated as on the surface they seem. Finally, Schechter et al. (2015) and Yehuda et al. (2016) were limited by sample size. In future studies, larger samples and even longitudinal studies may be warranted.

In conclusion, while it is true that more studies are needed, the previous literature points to a strong relationship between trauma and epigenetics. It seems that methylation is a key component to the survival of traumatic effects across generations. Interestingly, these genetic footprints appear to have deep-rooted evolutionary origins that we are only beginning to understand. The sex-specific nature of these origins also requires further study to fully understand, but it is clear that at least on some level, sex-specific changes do occur. The fact that traumatic incidences or patterns of trauma can predispose offspring to a host of physiological and psychological changes is worth noting, and with better understanding it may be possible to prevent negative effects in decedents of trauma survivors by circumventing the environmental triggers that interact with the genetic line. Although it may be discouraging that the results of these studies show the lasting impact of trauma, even in those to whom trauma has not directly occurred, hope may be found in learning the genetic and molecular underpinnings in order to prevent and treat these effects when they do occur.

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# KIRSTIN THORDARSON

The Mirror of Nationhood:  
Female Depictions in Prints as Symbols  
of Meiji and Taishō Japan



*Kirstin Thordarson, class of 2017,  
graduated, summa cum laude,  
with a degree in Art History/  
Arts Management.*

## WRITER'S COMMENTS

The oft-cited phrase “all art is political” is perhaps most clearly exemplified by the art of Meiji and Taishō Japan. Recent scholarship has brought attention to the employment of art by the Japanese state as a form of cultural and political capital, and as a tool for their rapid ascension within the modernized geopolitical stage. It has become evident that Japan’s rapid transition from isolationism to major world power in under a century occurred not only by means of their expeditious industrialization and assertion of military and technological power, but also by the shrewd assertion of soft power typical of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism. As my fascination with Japan’s rapid political and cultural modernization, I noticed that much of what I read tended to focus on overt, public, and international displays of politicized art. This sparked my interest in examining the subtler function of art as a form of political expression within the Japanese population itself, as well as its role in the self-identification of this intensely shifting nation. I became interested in closely examining the depiction of women in Japanese prints in order to better understand their role as symbols of nationhood for internal audiences. “The Mirror of Nationhood” thus seeks to explore this particular sector of Japanese art as well as to express the importance of women in both real-life and artistic negotiations of political identity.

—Kirstin Thordarson

## INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

The course for which Kirstin developed this paper focused on modern Japanese art ca. 1850–1960. The class introduced students to a range of artistic media produced in relation to Japan’s rapid modernization during the Meiji period, focusing in particular on ideas of nation-building and the essential and pragmatic role of the visual arts in helping to foster a sense of modern cultural and political identity. The political ideologies of shifting gender roles were a key aspect of modernization during the Meiji period, and depictions of women in a variety of media and different cultural contexts were a central subject for the class. Kirstin’s paper is a creative synthesis of course materials and themes and her own research, adding a special USF touch by incorporating prints housed in the collection of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at the Legion of Honor into her argument.

—Karen Fraser, *Art History/Arts Management*

### Abstract

This paper will argue that the sociopolitical status of women, as depicted in prints made during the Meiji and Taishō periods, was representative of larger shifts in the cultural fabric of Japan. As such, these prints may be regarded as a kind of artistic mirror which perpetuates and reflects specific moments of Japan's self-perceived national identity, as projected onto the objectified bodies of women. Focusing on the role of women as symbols of both prevailing social norms and sexual morés, as well as of liberal undercurrents which subverted traditional values in the name of modernity, this paper will also explore the ways in which western influence has perpetuated ways of looking which imbue women with an objectifying symbolism of national identity.

## The Mirror of Nationhood: Female Depictions in Prints as Symbols of Meiji and Taishō Japan

### Introduction

WITHIN A SPAN of just fifty-eight years, from 1868 to 1926, Japan experienced a series of major political, economic, and social changes at a rate unparalleled in the nation's history.<sup>1</sup> Japan had maintained a strict isolationist policy from 1633 to 1853, which had left the nation at a considerable technological and cultural gap when it officially reopened its ports after Admiral Matthew C. Perry's second expedition to Japan in 1854.<sup>2</sup> Thus the last decades of the Edo period (1603–1868) in Japan were marked by a fascination with the new influx of Western influence, which would ultimately spark an intense cultural shift during the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō periods (1912–1926). It is precisely the unusual circumstances brought about by this stark delineation—between centuries of near total detachment brought to an end by sudden and complete re-entry to a newly industrialized world—that make the periods following the end of Japanese isolationism so enticing for art historical study.

Major points of interaction between Meiji Japan and the West have received a significant amount of attention, specifically regarding the West's exoticization of Japan through *japonisme*, and Japan's outward projection of a new cultural and political identity.<sup>3</sup> Scholarship on international expositions such as the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition and the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair has elucidated the political goals of artistic production during the Meiji period, especially focusing on Japan's international relations during a period obsessed with establishing and parading national identity on the geopolitical stage. The 1893 Chicago Exposition may be characterized as a moment of Japanese assertion in its ability to appropriate Western practices at a time when the West-

1 Sara Cody, Kumiko Dio, and Martha Jane McClintock. *Japan Goes to the World's Fairs: Japanese Art at the Great Expositions in Europe and the United States, 1867–1904* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2005).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

ern was inextricably linked with the modern.<sup>4</sup> It was the first exposition in which Japan displayed works of fine art, which was largely due to a campaign organized by the Japanese government to establish Western methods for producing and evaluating art. The word *bijutsu* (fine art) only entered the Japanese lexicon approximately twenty years prior, after Japan's participation in the Vienna World's Fair of 1873, indicating the previous discrepancy in artistic hierarchies between Japan and the West.<sup>5</sup> Carol Ann Christ states that by the time of the 1904 World's Fair, "With colonial and exhibitionary language, [Japan] used Chinese art and territory to achieve the last two prerequisites for nation status: conservation of an ancient cultural heritage and a capacity for conquest," effectively serving to present itself as "the sole guardians of the art inheritance of Asia"<sup>6</sup> and a rising geopolitical power. Japan retained this position within the push towards a global modernism well into the Taishō period, when Japan had already emerged victorious from both the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars and had settled comfortably into its position as a Western-style colonial power.<sup>7</sup>

Yet this time of incredible geopolitical adaptation and self-assertion also necessitated that Japan go through several waves of internal negotiations in order to establish its own self-identity in accordance with these political shifts. This paper seeks to further explore the role of art in these cultural negotiations, as both a product and a perpetuation of these changes in ideology and self-perception. While the themes this paper explores may also function as an interpretive structure in examining a variety of media and subject matter during this time, it will specifically focus on depictions of women in prints made during the Meiji and Taishō periods. As prints were viewed by foreign audiences but consumed en masse domestically, they serve as an important point of examination in deepening our understanding of the self-identification of Japan. Further,

4 Satō Dōshin, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty* (Getty Research Institute, 2011), 116.

5 Cody et al., 74.

6 Carol Ann Christ, "The Sole Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia: Japan and China at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair." *Positions*, Winter 2000 8(3): (Duke University Press, 2000), 675–709.

7 Sharon A. Minichiello, "Greater Taishō: Japan 1900–1930" in *Taishō Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia, and Deco*, ed. Lorna Price and Letitia O'Connor, (Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2002), 9.

prints differed from other forms of artistic expression in that they were not typically considered to fit within the bounds of the “material arts” or “fine arts” categories enforced by international exhibitions and salons, and thus did not perform the explicitly political functions of forms of art which directly faced an international public.<sup>8</sup>

This paper’s focus on imagery of women is based on a theoretical framework expressed in Martin Myrone’s essay (to be discussed in greater detail in the following sections), “Prudery, Pornography, and the Victorian Nude (Or, what do we think the butler saw),” which examines a Victorian iteration of the male gaze occurring contemporaneously with Meiji Japan. This paper argues that this particular iteration of the male gaze was appropriated and reapplied within Japanese prints of female figures, and it further asserts that these Meiji- and Taishō-era depictions of women were representative of larger shifts in the cultural fabric of Japan. These prints may be regarded as a kind of artistic mirror which perpetuates and reflects specific moments of Japan’s self-perceived national identity, as projected onto the objectified bodies of women. Focusing on the role of women as symbols of both prevailing social norms and sexual morés, as well as of liberal undercurrents which subverted traditional values in the name of modernity, this paper will also explore the ways in which western influence has perpetuated ways of looking which imbue women with an objectifying symbolism of national identity.

### Meiji Japan

The Victorian Era in England, lasting from 1837 to 1902, coincided with the first portion of the Meiji period in Japan. The Victorian era is infamous for its “prudish, strict, [and] outdated” attitudes, with specific notoriety for its obsessive definition and condemnation of the sexually obscene.<sup>9</sup> Further, it often receives blame for normalizing the use of religious ideology for the suppression of sexuality throughout Western society.<sup>10</sup> The era saw the implementation of several official policies censoring sexually suggestive or pornographic material including the Va-

8 Satō, 66–67.

9 “Victorian, adj.2 and n.1”. OED Online. March 2017. (Oxford University Press).

10 Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian State of Mind*. (Yale University Press, 1957), 39–43.

grancy Act of 1824, the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876, and the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889, all of which were mobilized by the Society for the Suppression of Vice.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Myrone makes a counterintuitive argument for the sexual activity of the Victorian era, citing Michel Foucault's argument that sexuality is actually a "discourse" generated by images, words, and ethical and legal structures that seem to observe or describe it. In other words, the Victorians, in their obsessive analysis and repression of sexuality, were in reality highly engaged in this sexual discourse.<sup>12</sup> More pertinent to the purposes of this paper is the feminist critique of this theory, which argues that aestheticized, and therefore eroticized, depictions of the female body have been in constant production throughout history, but that the categorization of certain depictions as pornography was a "distinctly nineteenth century invention."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the increase of prudery in the West led to a corresponding increase in the fetishization and objectification of the female body, which encouraged the application of political ideology or religious/mythological narrative onto the bodies of women in order to render them artistically honorable and non-pornographic within the Victorian system of moral acceptability.

At the time of Western contact with Japan, this ideology would have been disseminated throughout Europe to an extent that would make possible the exposure of Meiji Japan to these self-contradicting attitudes toward sexual morality and the female body. Prior to the adoption of western conventions of looking, one of the largest bodies of female depictions in Japan were *shunga* prints, which depicted sexual acts in stark anatomical detail. However, the Meiji government began to introduce censorship legislation in 1872, which targeted prostitution and suppressed the dissemination of images deemed inappropriate as a part of the government's regime of Westernization.<sup>14</sup> Meiji Japan, which previously possessed a culture unabashed by nudity and sex, sought to por-

11 Martin Myrone, "Prudery, Pornography, and the Victorian Nude (Or, what do we think the butler saw?)" in *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, ed. Alison Smith (New York, Watson-Guipill Publications, 2002), 25–26.

12 Myrone, 28.

13 Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 34–48.

14 Rosalina Buckland, *Shunga in the Meiji Era: The End of a Tradition?* in *Japan Review* 26 Special Issue *Shunga* (2013), 260.

tray itself within the “refined sensibilities” of Victorian morality. Thus, throughout the Meiji period, the relative female agency seen in *shunga* prints was gradually displaced by the kind of aestheticized and idealized representations of the female body deemed acceptable within Western visual culture.<sup>15</sup>

Just as Victorian nudes can be “extracted from their ‘art’ context, and repackaged ... according to the desires of their user,”<sup>16</sup> so too was the body of the Japanese woman used to serve a wide variety of desired political ends. Indeed, the adoption of Western sexual norms resulted in the implementation of an objectifying gaze, born of the nineteenth century system of categorization for erotic images, which allowed for the projection of political ideology onto the bodies of women. During the Meiji period, production of prints featuring women depicted within these Western conventions of acceptability increased drastically. Such images of aestheticized female bodies were used to sell products and political ideologies alike (see Fig. 1). According to Jacqueline Berndt in her essay, “The Female Nude in Japanese Oil Painting and Posters”:

In modern Japan, paintings and posters were astonishingly close ... the task of advertising was assigned to well-crafted, costly lithographs which were often framed and hung like paintings; these pictures not only drew upon the new visual realism but also appropriated motifs from canonical art works ... both western-style paintings and posters functioned as media of exposure and disclosure, visualizing gender as well as nationality.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in the Meiji period, the Japanese became habituated to a method of looking which accommodates the objectification of women to communicate an ideology. The internalization of this mode of viewing the female body may be explained by certain top-down efforts to instate

15 Buckland, 273–74.

16 Myrone, 28.

17 Jacqueline Berndt, “The Female Nude in Japanese Oil Painting and Posters,” in *Performing Nation: Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880–1940*, ed. Doris Croissant, Catherine Vance Yeh, Joshua S. Mostow. In *Sinica Leidensia* vol. 91 (2008), 310.



Western ideals of fine art in a domestic context with the end goal of a more impressive performance in international expositions. For example, The National Exhibition of 1877 (*Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai*), which included the *bijutsukan*, points to the growth of Western modes of categorizing and interacting with art. Equally important to the “institutionalization of *bijutsu*,” was the role of the viewer in large scale exhibitions.<sup>18</sup> One of the goals of the Meiji government in hosting these exhibitions was to enlighten people by *ganshi no chikara* (power of vision), asking visitors to consider themselves “judges” responsible for carefully examining the art around them.<sup>19</sup> Thus by using what Toshiharu Omuka terms “governmental visual politics,” the Japanese populace was encouraged to view art as embodying not only aesthetic value, but also as carrying an intrinsic social or political statement.

Further, this phenomenon extends to include depictions of non-nude female bodies in Japanese prints. Myrone’s examination of Victorian nudes draws an interesting parallel to the objectification of both Japanese and Western women in the political exchanges of nineteenth century globalization. Norman Bryson’s essay “Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji Yōga” examines the unempowered role of women as a “medium of intra-male exchange” in political interactions within the “ballroom diplomacy” of the Rokumeikan, a modern building completed in 1883 to host state functions attended by foreign dignitaries.<sup>20</sup> Bryson argues that “the subject of Meiji modernization was resolutely male” and that depictions of women served not to valorize them as included members in the project of modernity, but rather as an iconography of cultural assimilation.<sup>21</sup> Bryson states that women in the Rokumeikan engaged in Western customs and dress not necessarily because it was the desire of Japanese men, but rather because it was the desire of the Western men hosted by the Japanese government. Thus, “by possessing what Western men desired, they could enter into the orbit of the West through identi-

18 Omuka Toshiharu, “The Emergence of a Mass Audience for Modern Art in Japan” in *Eye of the Beholder: Reception, Audience, and Practice of Modern Asian Art* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), ed. John Clark, Maurizio Peleggi, and T.K. Sabapathy, 97.

19 Omuka, 97.

20 Norman Bryson, “Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji Yōga” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 98.

21 Bryson, 116.

fication: in possessing the desire of the other, they could assimilate the Other to the order of the Same.”<sup>22</sup> Just as Myrone identifies in the case of Victorian depictions of Western female bodies, the bodies of Japanese women, both in reality and in images, were used as an objectified surface onto which the physical and political desires of men were projected. As expressed by Bryson:

What [women] acted out physically, through their transformed bodies, was an expression of the more important transformation that was supposed to be occurring in the hearts and minds of the men who would be masters of the modern world. What women expressed objectively, as spectacle, the men were to experience subjectively, as a style of consciousness. The men were modernity’s subjects, women its objects, satellites, mirrors.<sup>23</sup>

While Bryson’s essay focuses on painted depictions of women in the Yōga style, often exhibited in political contexts such as national and international exhibitions, this phenomenon also manifests clearly in prints of the imperial family.

In Toyohara Chikanobu’s (1838–1912) *kaika-e* print from 1888, *Plum Trees in Full Bloom, the Meiji Emperor, Empress, and Women of the Nobility*, the imperial cohort is depicted in Western dress using modern chemical inks introduced after the opening of Japanese ports to foreign trade (see Fig. 2). While depicted using traditional methods, and situated in a grove of cherry trees—a symbol of Japanese tradition and nationalism—the female body in this print has clearly become a visual conduit for the expression of modernity. The print was made two years after the Empress Shōken began to dress exclusively in Western clothing, which the emperor had begun to do over a decade prior in 1872.<sup>24</sup> It is tempting to make an overarching argument that the bodies of women who were attached to the codified practices of the Meiji government were also a symbol of the westernizing zeitgeist associated with Meiji Japan. To some extent,

22 Bryson, 98–99.

23 Bryson, 101.

24 Sally A. Hastings, “The Empress’ New Clothes and Japanese Women, 1868–1912”, *The Historian* 55, no. 4 (1993): 679.

this theory fits neatly into previous studies of national art, especially in the context of government-sponsored exhibition platforms and international exhibitions.

However, upon closer scrutiny of the greater body of artistic production during the Meiji era, this idea falls short of truth. In reality, despite the official promotion of western dress by the empress, the majority of Japanese women continued to wear kimono well into the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Further, the empress and her ladies continued to wear their Western garb even into the 1890s, when formerly ardent Westernizers became nationalist conservatives and condemned the sort of social intercourse between men and women associated with the peak usage of the *Rokumeikan*.<sup>26</sup> This friction between the top-down approach to cultural change as a form of soft power espoused by the Meiji government and the nation's cultural reality was reflected in the depiction of non-imperial women in prints, many of whom were still shown wearing the traditional Japanese kimono constructed out of industrially produced fabrics. Women not directly involved in the diplomatic projects of the Meiji government often fulfilled the role of “repositories of tradition” in a time of rapid modernization.<sup>27</sup> In many cases it was seen as the woman's role to safeguard traditional Japanese culture from being overridden by the rushing tide of Western influence.

Another print by Toyohara Chikanobu, made during the Russo–Japanese war, exemplifies this internal negotiation pertaining to the role of women which occurred within the Japanese population at large. Japan's victories in the Sino–Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) contributed to a growing nationalism and self-confidence in the ability of the nation to appropriate the military accoutrements of industrialization for their own colonial ends (see Fig. 3). During this time, the Confucian-based ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* (“Good wife, wise mother”) featured strongly in various forms of media produced in Japan. The *ryōsai kenbo* performed the dichotomous role of simultaneously protecting native culture and values from Western influence, while also motivating all nationals to contribute to the growing military ambitions of the fam-

25 Hastings, 678.

26 Hastings, 678.

27 Terry Satsuki Milhaupt, “Modernizing the Kimono” in *Kimono: A Modern History*, (Reaktion Books, 2014), 62.

ily-state.<sup>28</sup> Thus, although the bodies of imperial women were actively used as tools of political negotiation, forming a body of images espousing the diplomatic benefits of modernization *vis-à-vis* westernization, the bodies of women at large were at the same time used in a seemingly contradictory fashion. The anxiety experienced during this period of unprecedented social and political change was projected onto the bodies of women, who signified via their dress and their manners the hopes and fears of men living in a time of uncertain national identity. Japanese print artists in their adoption of Western conventions of depicting and viewing women engaged in both sides of this cultural dialogue, simultaneously espousing modernization and vouching for the preservation of tradition.

### Taishō Japan

Although the historical and political context of the Taishō era varied greatly from that of the Meiji era, the conventions in depicting women introduced during the Meiji act as a common thread between these two disparate moments in Japanese history. The Emperor Taishō reigned from 1912–1926 but historians often refer to the years bracketing his reign, from 1900–1930 as the “Greater Taishō” era.<sup>29</sup> Due to his poor health and alleged weakness of character, the Taishō emperor did not provide the same symbol of strength and leadership as did the Meiji emperor, and thus weakened the perception of the emperor as “manifest deity.”<sup>30</sup> During the time of his leadership, new domestic and international issues pushed Japan toward a conscious desire to rebalance the individual with the greater polity. On the geopolitical scale, the Taishō government was still dealing with unfavorable treaties established during the Meiji reign, and global banking crises added to Japan’s disenchantment with the West.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, a number of social movements emerged domestically, including the establishment of the Socialist–Democratic Party and the expansion of the electorate largely due to

28 Kathryn Marr, *Mirrors of Modernity, Repositories of Tradition: Conceptions of Japanese Feminine Beauty From the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Century*, (University of Canterbury, 2015), 66.

29 Minichiello, 9.

30 Ibid., 9.

31 Ibid., 10.

increased taxation following the Russo–Japanese war.<sup>32</sup> It is because of this general shift in social and political structures, marked by the appearance of numerous grassroots political movements that the era is often referred to as “Taishō democracy” or “Taishō liberalism.” However, much of Taishō political culture was a “race between reform and revolution” as proletarian political groups gained power and the government attempted to suppress them.<sup>33</sup> Further, the growing capitalist market led to a heavily skewed distribution of wealth following World War II.

The new affluent class in postwar Japan was manifested in its female symbol, the *modan gaaru* (modern girl), who was criticized for challenging the traditional role of women as a “repository of the past.”<sup>34</sup> The *modan gaaru*, or *moga* for short, wore the latest styles in western clothing and participated in an avant-garde café culture born out of Paris (see Fig. 4). While such cafés existed in Japan since 1911, the true “café era in Japan” was spurred by reconstruction following the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, resulting in a process of “massification” (*taishūka*) in which the number of cafés and waitresses rose dramatically as café culture became a mainstream phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> During this time, the café represented physical space in which the liberation of modern society was acted out. It symbolized the greater social shifts of its time, including the liberation of the *chōnin* from feudal hierarchy, of the intellect from Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, and of women in society at large and in their relationships with men (see Fig. 5).

The café was, on one hand, associated with the global influence and new freedoms of modernity, as customers indulged in Western customs, food, and drink, and waitresses gained financial and social independence previously only available to more educated classes. Yet, as the café era continued into the depression, the hierarchical power dynamics of café culture became more pronounced, as female waitresses were encouraged to flirt with customers for better compensation. Marxist critiques blame the tipping system of payment for the escalation of objectifying practices in

32 Ibid., 11

33 Ibid., 11.

34 Ibid., 13.

35 Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, “The Café: Contested Space of Modernity in Interwar Japan” in *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*, ed. Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, (Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 122.

cafés, in which the waitresses became proletarianized workers exploited by capitalist café owners.<sup>36</sup> By the end of 1920s, cafés and their association with *ero* (erotic) services, were widely regarded as the centers of decadence and social degeneracy and faced government regulations going into the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the Japanese continued to exploit women as they moved into the Fifteen Years War after 1931, forcefully “recruiting” “comfort women” to fill brothels near military camps.<sup>38</sup>

Although disparate from the Meiji era in its specific social and political elements of change, the Taishō era was also similar in certain ways. It was a time of intense self-examination and internal tumult, in which power structures already disturbed by the intense Westernization of the Meiji government continued to experience immense and rapid shifts. Internal negotiations took place between the individual in favor of liberal reform and establishment politics.

Again, one sees friction between the “official” top-down doctrine and the cultural reality in Japan expressed through the bodies of women. Yet the Taishō was distinguished by the process of “massification” which introduced new forms of mass media, including women’s magazines such as *Fujin Sekai*, *Fujokai*, *Shufu no Tomo*, and *Fujin Kurabu*, all of which began circulating in the first decades of the 20th century.<sup>39</sup> Although such magazines were often condemned by intellectuals of the political left and right for their conservatism and unrefined content, the magazines were in some capacities a mirror of the female experience at large in Taishō Japan. By feeding into consumerist culture, women’s magazines provided stories that would sell, and therefore must have been appealing on some level to the majority of Japanese women. While *ryūko kiji* (fashionable articles) instructed women on how to use their physical appearance as a marker of modernity, topics addressed in the family articles, practical articles, and confessional articles provide a window into the subtle ways in which the role of women began to shift during the 1910s and 1920s. Further, the popularity of such magazines implies the triumph of *taishū bunka* (mass

36 Ibid., 130.

37 Ibid., 132.

38 Minichiello, 131.

39 Barbara Hamill Sato, “An Alternate Informant: Middle-Class Women and Mass Magazines in 1920s Japan” in *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*, 137.

culture) over the *bunka* (culture), which was associated with upper class intellectuals and derives in part from elitist Meiji standards of ideal female comportment.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, these magazines also perpetuated the idea of women as carriers of national political identity. In her choice of dress and behavior the Taishō woman embodied one side or another in the cultural and political battleground of her time. Likewise, as prints and magazines are both forms of mass media, each one performs the role of mirror and catalyst of cultural changes. In reading women's magazines featuring printed illustrations and advertisements, women became conscious consumers of their own image, picking and choosing which elements of the dichotomous female role to attribute to themselves. As expressed in his essay, "Flowers of Taishō: Images of Women in Japanese Society and Art," Kendall Brown states:

Between these compelling opposites of radical modernity and reactionary tradition is a rich and passionate middle ground, where the styles and values of the *moga* and the good wife/wise mother mingle. This culturally composite woman was largely the product of a sophisticated capitalistic society, where ideology was not simply expressed through visual style, but could be wholly transformed into style as fashion.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, representations of women during the Taishō period parallel those of the Meiji in that the ideological gaze born of censorship persists within them. The appearance of the women in this print by Hiromitsu Nakazawa is therefore more than merely aesthetic (Fig. 5). Rather, this scene of a newly rebuilt post-earthquake city, featuring modern infrastructure and methods of transport, relies on the almost exclusively female figures occupying the street to situate it culturally. The foreground prominently features two *moga* juxtaposed with what appears to be a traditionally dressed mother and her child who wears western clothing. In this print the Nihonbashi street becomes a microcosm of Taishō Japan at large, as the bodies of women dressed in politically charged clothing weave around each other in a physical manifestation of Japan's internal struggle to find its new self-identity.

40 Sato, 135.

41 Kendall H. Brown, "Flowers of Taishō: Images of Women in Japanese Society and Art" in *Taishō Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia, and Deco*, 19.

Two Taishō-era prints (Figs. 6 and 7) feature women half-dressed in kimono, and gazing at their reflection in mirrors. Their composition is reminiscent of the western *toilette* genre in which a nude woman looks away from the viewer and into a mirror. These prints embody the Taishō iteration of the objectifying gaze that first introduced through the influence of Western sexual morality and visual culture. During a time of continued conflict over national identity, these two women seated before mirrors represent a self-conscious adoption of this Western form of looking, but also an internal gaze which reflects Japan's struggle to engage with global modernism. As women gained awareness of their role as symbols of their society at large, their gaze was directed inward. In the case of the Taishō era, despite her position of continued disenfranchisement in relation to men, the female was more directly included and possessed greater agency in the projects of modernity. As opposed to the Meiji period, when the female body became the passive symbol of political regime, the Taishō woman became the symbol of not only her society at large, but also her own battle for liberation.

### Conclusion

Printed media presents rich opportunity for examining the role of women in Japan's internal negotiations of national identity. Despite the extreme rapidity with which the nation underwent social and political changes, both domestically and internationally, women retained their role as key identifiers of nationhood. However, the many complexities in their role, as well as the nuances in their degree of agency and self-awareness as national symbols remain largely unexplored. In many cases the woman's body and her physical appearance were a medium of conducting a multifaceted dialogue between the body's possessor, the political goals of the men surrounding her, and the representations of other women she consumed. Thus, between each point in this dialogue there exists a negotiation within which the print is situated as a sort of mirror which perpetuates and reflects in a visual format specific moments of Japan's self-perceived national identity. Despite her disenfranchised position relative to men, the Japanese woman throughout the many upheavals of the Meiji and Taishō era played a subtly central role in determining the future of her nation.



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Appendix



Fig.1  
Iwaya Shōkai. *Tengu Tabako* Poster  
1900. 56.6 x 43.5cm. *Egakareta Meiji Nippon*, vol. 1, p.25



Fig. 2

Toyohara Chikanobu (1838–1912), *Plum Trees in Full Bloom, the Meiji Emperor, Empress and Women of the Nobility*. c. 1888.

355 x 700 mm (14 x 27.5625 in).

Achenbach Foundation. 1984.1.51



Fig. 3

Toyohara Chikanobu (1838–1912)

*A mother takes her son for a walk during the Russo-Japanese War.* c. 1904–1905

724 x 240 mm (28.5 x 9.4375 in.)

Achenbach Foundation, 1982.1.3



Fig. 4  
Kobayakawa Kiyoshi (1899–1948)  
*Tipsy* (Horoyoi), c. 1930  
No. 1 from the series *Styles of Contemporary Makeup*  
Woodblock print: ink and color on paper  
17.25 x 10.625 in.  
Honolulu Museum of Art  
Gift of Philip H. Roach, Jr., 2001 (26926)



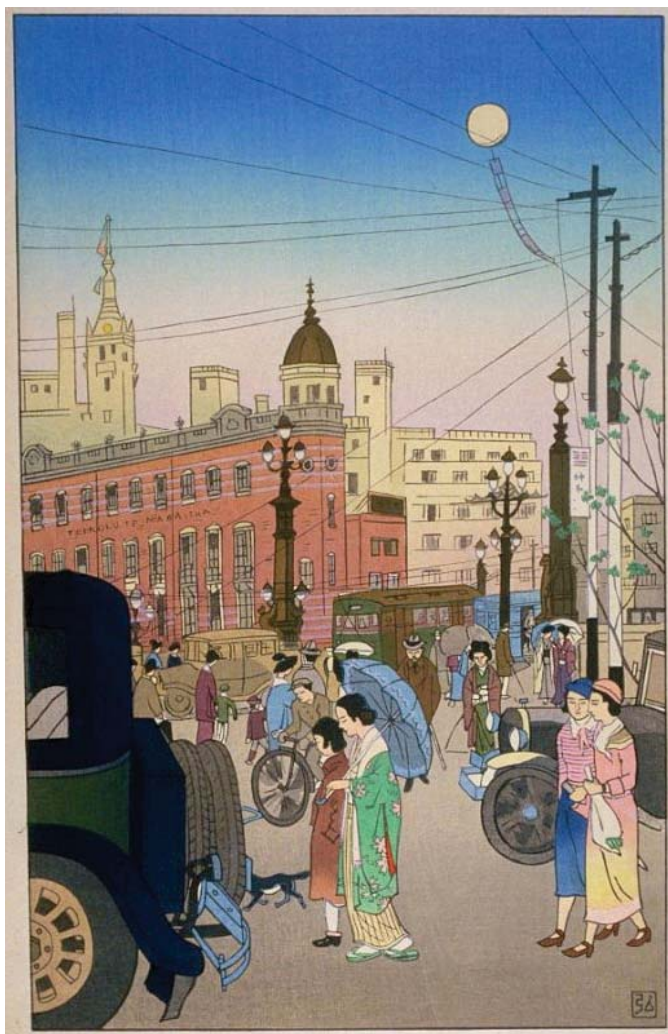


Fig. 5  
Hiromitsu Nakazawa (1874–1964).  
*Early Spring on the Nihon Bridge (Nihonbashi)* c. 1925.  
34 x 21.3 cm.  
Achenbach Foundation. 1998.120.26



Fig. 6  
Torii Kotondo (1900–1976).  
*Woman Kneeling Before a Mirror Stand*. c. 1920.  
409 x 263 mm (16.125 x 10.375 in.)  
Achenbach Foundation. 1963.30.3089





Fig. 7  
Insho Domoto (1891–1975)  
*Lady with a Red Lacquer Mirror Fixing Her Hair*. c. 1920.  
418 x 301 mm (16.4375 x 11.875 in.)  
Achenbach Foundation. 1963.30.3086

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