



# CHARTER

Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship and Opinion  
Volume 57 — 2019-2020

# VAR · I · A · TION

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“The fact of varying in condition, character, degree, or other quality; the fact of undergoing modification or alteration, especially within certain limits”

*(Oxford English Dictionary)*

## LA VARIATION

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“Changement”

*(l'Académie Française)*

## LA VARIACIÓN

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“Acción y efecto de variar”

*(Real Academia Española)*

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Emily Klein

**Assistant Editor**

Sam Louie

**Copy Editor**

Peter Jonas

**Graphic Designer**

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Kaeli Flores

**Advisor**

Dr. Dave Oosterhuis

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502 E. Boone Ave.  
Spokane, WA 99258

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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Dear reader,

Thank you for picking up this book. There are a lot of books to choose from these days, so it means a lot to us that—of all the books in the world—you decided to read this one today.

I promise it won't disappoint.

While this may be Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship and Opinion, I want to begin by telling you a story.

When I started planning this year's edition, I had three concepts in mind: accessibility, tradition, and innovation. I wanted to create a platform for members of the Gonzaga community to share the work they're excited about. I hoped to welcome pieces from all disciplines on a variety of topics.

At the same time, this is the 57th edition of *Charter*. Our book needed to stand on its own and as a member of a longstanding legacy. One of the most definitive aspects of *Charter* is that it's traditionally centered around a specific theme. Our choice of theme could bridge the gap between accessibility and tradition, but only if we chose carefully. We needed to do something different while also creating something cohesive.

In other words, we needed to do something innovative.

I'm a firm believer that scholastic writing has the potential to excite and inspire, not just to inform. This excitement is rooted in the variety of topics that can be written about and the multiple ways they can be presented.

In other words, variety is the spice of scholarship.

It is also, as the old saying goes, the spice of life. This isn't just because variety makes life more interesting. Variety instills an appreciation for difference in us. It can make us more open-minded, more empathetic, and more aware of the realities of the world around us. If we fail to appreciate the merits of variation, we do more than condemn ourselves to homogeneity: we facilitate the erasure of differences in perspective, in experience, and in identity. When we allow this kind of erasure, it's easier to turn a blind eye.

Given its importance to our work and to our world, Variation became the theme for the 57th edition of *Charter*. Variation quite literally binds every piece in this collection together, creating a physical expression of how there can be unity in diversity. This book includes pieces written in a variety of forms about a variety of topics, including the importance of variation itself. In this journal you'll find personal narratives, essays, and lyrical arguments. You'll experience variation as you read about it.

I hope you enjoy this experience as much as my staff and I enjoyed making it possible.

Cheers,

Emily Klein



Editor-in-Chief

# VARIATION IN PRACTICE

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GEORGIA VEVERKA

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## NARRATIVE MEDICINE: THE ROLE OF HUMANITIES IN CLINICAL PRACTICE\*

\*THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM A LONGER PIECE

After we receive a nephrectomy, the removal of one of our kidneys, our remaining kidney will grow in size to fill the functional space left behind by its companion. This process is termed vicarious hypertrophy, the enlargement of one organ to compensate for the failure of another due to a functional, allied relationship between the two. This phenomenon of vicarious reciprocity is not merely physiological; it is what makes us human. Our unique inclination to exhibit empathy, the root of our vicarious emotions, encourages us to personally understand the emotional responses of others. In this way, empathy allows one to feel and take on the emotions of another, just as the hypertrophic organ can take on the stress of its functional counterpart. While our empathetic abilities are largely developed through social relationships, we also glean a necessary part of our capacity for empathy through the humanities—the pursuit of understanding what it means to be human. It is through art, literature, and storytelling that we can develop our capability to comprehend the experiences of another and to imagine them as our own. Narrative, in particular, holds the power to “reveal the depth, subtlety, and complexity of another person’s moral world” as it is through stories we learn how to develop empathy for people who may seem different from ourselves (Montello 3).

As the very marrow of our humanity, empathy provides an essential supplement to life. It helps us find meaning and direction and passion in our own lives as well as allowing us to understand and recognize the same for another. As the caretakers and protectors of life, physicians and healthcare professionals need to be truly empathetic. To listen carefully, to observe critically, to respond with appropriate concern, and to treat with compassion—the necessary tasks of the physician are at the hands of empathy. Without an authentic appreciation for the human that is the patient, the person sitting with vulnerability, fear, worry, and trust, a physician threatens the true essence of healthcare. And herein lies the problem: we cannot fully understand everyone’s unique circumstances. We simply cannot fathom a history we have not lived.

However, the humanities offer an unparalleled solution. Narratives provided by literature challenge us to experience another life’s point-of-view, to reside vicariously in a reality fundamentally different from our own. Because “the novelist is able to capture and describe persons in all their complexities and shades of meanings,” the reader may practice perceiving, internalizing, and understanding the condition of another, broadening their empathetic capacity (Boudreau and Fuks 332). In a recent psychology experiment, researchers Evan Kidd and Emanuel Castano argue that literary fiction “facilitates empathy by inducing

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“As the very marrow of our humanity, empathy provides an essential supplement to life”

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readers to take ‘an active writerly role’ in understanding the mental lives of the characters.” They explain how brain networks involved in making sense of other minds are strongly activated when people read literary depictions of other people (Haslam). Through the active process of grappling with a character’s relationship and interaction with their world, we can build our capacity for empathy by working to interpret their

emotional responses in the context of our own. The practice of relating our experiences to those of a literary character and finding a common ground between two distinct narratives allows us to understand our humanity on a more nuanced, dynamic level.

In this age of rapid technological advancement, daily life is accompanied by an overwhelming sense of rush and haste that threatens our inclination to slow down, listen, and practice empathy. And despite their duty to care, healthcare professionals are not immune to the consequences of this unprecedented rate of change. The stress induced by the demand to solve the problem and treat the sickness has misdirected the focus of medicine away from the human, and “there are widespread complaints that physicians treat patients as cases or bearers of diseases rather than as individuals who are ill” (Boudreau and Fuks 322). The solution to redirect the focus of healthcare back to the human lies in the humanities themselves. Studying the humanities and narrative opens our eyes to the ways we are vulnerable, feeble, and finite; the very components of human nature that medicine has come to combat. But rather than resisting these weaknesses innate to us all, medical professionals must practice “[contemplating] the unfixables in our life, the decline we will unavoidably face” (Gawande 46). Doctors need to learn not just how to treat patients, but how to sit with them in solidarity, listen, and actually hear them. “A scientifically competent medicine alone cannot help a patient grapple with the loss of health or find meaning in suffering,” rather the doctor has to be there to hear the patient’s narratives, their expressions of grief, and not only listen but also discover meaning in their language, their hesitations, and their feedback (Charon). While the practicality of science provides a necessary basis for

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“Studying the humanities and narrative opens our eyes to the ways we are vulnerable, feeble, and finite...”

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healthcare, it fails to account for the complicated facets of what it means to be truly healthy. The humanities, like a second kidney, must continue to grow more prominently in the medical world, bearing the weight of the complexities of what it means to be a healthy person, and compensate for the vital need for empathy in healthcare.

While the medical humanities have developed over centuries—stories of illness, disease and suffering, patient and physician narratives alike—the field of Narrative Medicine only began to gain momentum in the late 20th century. Rita Charon, an experienced physician as well as literary scholar, spearheaded the Narrative Medicine movement at Columbia University in 2000. She proposed that narrative could function as a “model for humane and effective medical practice” that utilizes the skills developed in close-reading and reflective writing practices to foster higher quality relationships between the physician and the patient, self, colleagues, and greater society (Charon). She argues that through adopting a narrative competence, so to speak, we can bridge the gap between physicians and patients. This would allow for less intimidating and more personal conversations within the discourse of public health. In response to Charon’s work, several medical schools and undergraduate programs—including those at the University of Rochester and Baylor University—integrated medical humanities and bioethics departments and programs into their curriculum. This encourages students to practice the reflective and critical thinking skills required in the humanities to provide a foundation for their approach to healthcare as future physicians.

Despite the recently developed regard for the medical humanities and narrative as a useful supplement to healthcare, “for the vast majority of premedical and pre-health professions students, exposure to the liberal arts is often perceived as far less significant than coursework in the basic sciences” (Barron 476). Much of the focus and research relevant to studies in the medical humanities aim to establish a foundation in the humanities as equally necessary to one in science, asserting that “if medicine is ‘person-centered,’ then what could be more relevant to the

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“These inquiries work to disentangle our working understanding of healthcare and the tension between the trajectories of how it is and how it ought to advance”

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practice of medicine than learning about the nature of persons?” and that “we learn about the nature of sick persons through the medium of the medical humanities” (Barron 477). While these questions intend to demonstrate the need to reevaluate medical education and encourage more time and energy spent on contemplating the human condition, I became curious to explore the immediate, practical, and intrinsic clinical applications of narrative and the humanities. Apart from asking more philosophical questions about the nature of humanity, I wanted to examine how healthcare professionals actively use the humanities in practice, how they perceive the relevance of narrative, their understanding of the patient-physician relationship, and whether there is, in fact, the means to incorporate humanities-based skills into medicine. These inquiries work to disentangle our working understanding of healthcare and the tension between the trajectories of how it is and how it ought to advance.

While curriculum in the medical humanities and regard for the practice of Narrative Medicine is growing more prominent in medical education, healthcare training, and clinical ethics, its implementation into practice requires more routine thoughtfulness and deliberate questioning of the way our healthcare system functions. In studying the role of the humanities in clinical practice and examining the value of narrative in medicine, more questions arise regarding the nature of medicine and its priorities. Using these humanities-based skills to question the way we approach healthcare requires us to slow down and take a step back to attempt to understand how we ought to define health in the first place. Is there a discrepancy between the physician’s and the patient’s idea of what healthy means? If so, how can we work



to reconcile those differences? How does the physician's narrative differ from the patient's narrative, and how can we coordinate the two? How can we slow down the pace of medicine to match the pace of the patient?

Healthcare professionals ought to begin asking these sorts of questions before they enter into their work so that they may create their own foundation for ethical, thoughtful, empathetic, and careful medical practice. These questions prompted by a humanities-focused thought process will naturally facilitate a more holistic approach to healthcare executed by professionals trained to value the person and the humanity behind the illness. Dr. Judy Swanson, Internal Medicine Specialist and Assistant Clinical Dean for The University of Washington School of Medicine-Gonzaga University Regional Health Partnership, asserts that doctors with a "fundamental background in the humanities make the best physicians because they have a holistic approach" as opposed to a narrowed focus on the "numbers" and the science. Physicians with a mind for the humanities can slow down, evaluate each patient and their narrative, think critically about their circumstances, act empathetically towards the patient's situation, and, in turn, treat them effectively. It may also encourage doctors to consider their competence with notions of health equity and cultural literacy as they approach a greater range of medical cases. The humanities and narrative may exist quietly behind the scientific mask of medicine, but once we can reveal the inherent value and truth behind people's narratives—the stories that define our identities—the humanity in healthcare will expose itself, bestowing more acute meaning and renewed purpose onto medical practice.

*"I lost myself in the very properties of their minds: for the moment at least I actually became them, whoever they should be, so that when I detached myself from them at the end of a half-hour of intense concentration over some illness which was affecting them, it was as though I were reawakened from a sleep."*

—William Carlos Williams

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KAYLEE BOSSE

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## YOGA IN UNLIKELY PLACES: WHAT I LEARNED PRACTICING IN A LULULEMON VERSUS A CATHEDRAL

A childhood memory of enchantment with store displays and soft, cinnamon-sugar pretzels during special mall excursions resurfaced upon entering Lululemon for free Saturday morning yoga. Though pretzels were absent, the warm scent of cinnamon sugar had a thawing effect on all who entered. Tensed from the cold, their expressions shifted to soft smiles as they exchanged greetings with fellow yogis. As class commenced, it felt a bit like attending a Catholic Mass as a non-denominational Christian: slight unease while partaking in hazily familiar ritual. To supplement my ballet training, I had been to a few yoga classes in the past and vaguely remembered the names and sequences of poses but had to match the movements of the muscular and heavily tattooed man practicing expertly to my right. Despite my need for visual guidance, I found myself retreating inward. This was a new sensation as years of ballet had bred a habit of comparing myself to my peers. Though ballet is also an inward, individual art, a pre-professional ballet dancer is constantly in competition with others for jobs and teachers' favor. As a result, a ballet dancer often has one eye on their own journey and another on their peers' progression. This is something that often happens subconsciously, making it a difficult habit to break.

Surprisingly, the beat-heavy music usually used to

compel shoppers to impulse buy was kept on, yet the class sank deeper into repose with each warrior series. Was this relaxation in a retail environment countercultural, especially given the fact that "the aim of yoga is to eliminate the control that material nature exerts over the human spirit?" (Miller 1). Glancing up at the instructor quickly, I noticed a group of homeless people shivering in the crisp autumn air outside the storefront. Realization hit: this class was free, so technically these homeless people could have attended. However, the choice to hold class in a pricey store develops interesting tensions. Not everyone can afford \$128 leggings, and high-quality retailers have the reputation of being judgmental places. This contributes to the intimidating nature of the venue, despite likely good intentions of holding class in a place that most know and can easily travel to. Yoga is about noticing and accepting differences, yet the venue, however innocuous it may have seemed, undermined this premise. It is interesting to note that the first yogis were encouraged to take a vow of poverty to further their practice (Miller 2). Yet the decision to have class in Lululemon further entrenched modern yoga as an elite, white, \$80 million-dollar industry.

My thought was interrupted by the instructor prompting the class to let go of doubt, fear, and anything else holding us back in life. How could I think about myself when there were people in dire need right outside the tall shop windows? As the warmth in my limbs deepened with

every stretch, so did my thoughts.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which had been taught in my Strategies for Dance Instruction class, came to mind. These homeless peoples' basic needs of safety, belonging, and esteem were not being met, so they were not afforded the opportunity to focus on furthering their lives in other

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“Yoga is about  
noticing and  
accepting  
differences...”

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areas, such as self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization as doing what one was “born to do” (McLeod). One that is restricted from self-actualization is often restless. The irony is that the homeless would arguably benefit from a yoga practice as the chronic stress of survival takes a huge toll on the mental health of the displaced community, yet even free classes are inaccessible. In between bites of post-class eight-dollar Pumpkin Harvest toast and sips of Malabar tea at a coffee shop best described as “bougie,” twinges of guilt bubbled in my stomach. Was it okay to participate in and even enjoy stereotypically upper middle-class, white activities if they made me happy and were not directly harming anyone? Or does doing so contribute to the marginalization of minorities? How could I bring awareness and foster discussion of these types of issues? I gazed dolefully into my teacup.

A day later, I found myself lying on a borrowed hot-pink yoga mat in an aisle amongst wooden pews, gazing up at the cold stone ceiling of St. John’s Cathedral. A joyful din echoed through the sanctuary as mothers in Target leggings helped shepherd their young children into position, single men grunted as they contorted into downward dog, and startlingly flexible elderly ladies chatted amongst themselves. As the teacher threw in a few jokes while prompting several series of brutal planks and squats, students exchanged pained smiles and encouraging words instead of retreating inward. The instructor wore a mic and walked about, dropping verbal cues instead of visual ones. As a relatively inexperienced yogi/college student craving a meditative mental break and stretch like the one from yesterday’s class, this challenged my expectations. However, I felt a connection to fellow community members that was not present the previous day. Instead of glancing briefly at the instructor to check my technique before closing my eyes again, I watched those in front of me, helping those behind me. Hearing the instructor’s guidance but not able to see her, I wondered, “Is this what encounters with God are like?” At that moment, a cloud moved, and I watched golden-hour light pour in through the glass.

When I finally caught a glimpse of the instructor, I

noticed that she had on a colorful, albeit unusual-looking headband and was carrying a singing bowl. The same uncomfortable gut twinge resurfaced. Was this cultural imperialism/appropriation, or was she just being herself, wearing what was comfortable and made her happy? Or, was this ensemble an honest attempt at fostering an interfaith/intercultural experience? Thus, the questioning began.

The setting of the class had interesting implications, especially recalling the church’s history of denying the body I had recently learned about in my Dance History class. The Church’s distaste for the body and movement was brought about by the barbaric spectacles of Roman theater, which lowered theater and dance in the eyes of Christians. These art forms were then associated with pagan worship, which did not help their case. A similar attitude carried over to the Middle Ages, during which the mind and spirit were superior to the body as they were eternal. These opinions continue to color people’s perceptions of dance and the body today. With this in mind, was the very act of moving one’s body in a church rebellious? Because the times and places people dance are determined by societal attitudes toward the body, does the ability to do yoga in a church indicate a generally more positive perception of the body in America (or at least Spokane) nowadays?

We then transitioned into a standing tree pose, the instructor quipping that we should be pressing the knee of our working leg back so much that we get “butt dimples” much like those of ballerinas. Trying not to giggle, I shared an amused glance with my friend before turning back around. Was the mention of butts in church slightly sacrilegious? What about the position of our hands in a praying gesture that was not used for prayer? All this physical and mental exertion was making me warm, tempting me to take off my sweater to reveal a sports bra. But is taking one’s

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“...was the very act of moving one’s body in a church rebellious?”

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shirt off in church, an ornate cathedral no less, even remotely okay?

Despite all these questions, I do think that a free yoga class is a clever way to get people into church. An interesting dichotomy exists here: while free yoga can bring people into church, yoga has been shown to subtly change one's beliefs over time, leading many yogis to identify as "spiritual but not religious." The general increase in religious "nones" due to many factors of modern society means that churches are empty, but yoga centers are full (Brown 659). Additionally, Christianity and yoga are often at odds as yoga is perceived as a pagan activity despite its focus on spirituality. Many are uncomfortable with the spirituality aspect of yoga, so they problematically try and Christianize it (Brown 659).

At the end of the day, Dr. Ishwar V. Basavaraddi, Director of Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, says that "Yoga does not adhere to any religion, belief system or community; it has always been approached as a technology for inner well-being. Anyone who practices yoga with involvement can reap its benefits, irrespective of one's faith, ethnicity or culture" ("MEA: Statements"). Our instructor expressed a similar sentiment in a comment she made toward the end of class when we were in triangle pose. She told us how some people had made negative comments on the Yoga at the Cathedral Facebook event and commented something along the lines of, "we're just making shapes and providing a docking space for people to ground themselves and relax so they can go out and spread love to the world." This idea of nourishing the mind, body, and spirit has been ingrained in my thoughts throughout my four years of Jesuit education, and I believe in its importance. Though I still have many questions and concerns surrounding the modern practice of yoga, I can say that I enjoy it for a combined exercise and mental break (such multitasking even in the act of relaxing is quite telling of the effects of capitalism, but I won't go into that). By replenishing myself through yoga, I can go out into the world and be a better Christian. This time though, I must say that yoga ironically made my head hurt!

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## WHY I AM NOT GOING TO TRUST MAPS

Maps—the word conjures to mind ancient crackling parchment with dragons and sea monsters decorating blank spaces, with mysterious symbols marking buried treasure, with ornate drawings in the margins. With misrepresentations of place, or terrifying accuracy of space, they never are able to capture the soul of a physical site: in a sense, outdated but useful. Maps today, especially in digital format, are essential to direct one to a location, but fall short in replacing experience and describing history.

For instance, take a map of the entire world: flat and stretched out, it is therefore inevitably imprecise, as our world is not flat. The most commonly used map of the world, the Mercator map (Stockton), informs perceptions of the shapes of continents and countries, yet distorts those closer to the poles (Stewart 590). Greenland gives the impression it nearly exceeds Africa in size yet, in reality, Africa is about fourteen times its size. A quarter of the landmasses seems to be Canada and Russia, but they are only about a twentieth. Alaska looks like it rivals Brazil, Australia is actually about the size of the United States, and Scandinavian countries seem to be larger than India (Taylor). Globes too are imperfect, as they are manufactured by mounting a flat map onto a sphere (Stewart 590). Having these untruths misinform our conceptions of the reality of how the world looks and operates is detrimental; we often associate size with power and importance. For example, viewing European countries as larger than they are reinforces this conscious or unconscious sense

of superiority, which we should be actively trying to combat. No one country is more important than another.

The Mercator map of the world also gives little information about any of the places, other than their geographic location regarding other locations. I look at my home, where I grew up, and can't exactly pinpoint it on a map of the world. Moving to a map of the United States, I have a closer idea, but my finger on the page (or screen) still covers a much larger distance than looking at a map of California. The more specific the region becomes the better I can tell you where my house is. But, you still don't understand where I am from. Maybe if you've been there, or nearby, but only witnessing my hometown from a drawn or digitized bird's-eye view doesn't let you feel the sun two hundred and seventy eight days a year, listen to the shouts and giggles of children in the street, see neighbors gift neighbors with baked treats and their time. You lose the history and the culture and the sensations and the emotions and the perspectives and the traditions and the attentions and the dreams and the fears and the wildlife and the memory and the imagination: the layers of my home, absent from a two-dimensional paper (or digital) representation. This is true of anywhere; tell me you're from the Seattle area, and I'll nod blankly. But say you're from a heavily-wooded town, melancholic, cloudy, and full of colorful characters, then I have a much-improved picture.

Historically, too, maps have been a source of conflict and discord. White American settlers from the East gradually encroaching on Western land altered the ownership of land through maps (Fisher). A line here indicates that a newcomer owns a place, erasing the memory and tradition of the indigenous people who endured there for centuries before. And the map had dominance over reality, as it has the ability to invent a new truth, bending places and people's perceptions to its will. The same follows for Africa.

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“Historically, too, maps have been a source of conflict and discord.”

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European countries carved up the continent on a map, ignoring the customs and societies of the people already inhabiting the space, then enforced their rule and greed for power on the very land itself, a legacy still felt today (Griffiths). Even now maps are not without issues: Israelis and Palestinians have struggled over possession of Palestine for over fifty years (Beauchamp), unable to compromise over an immensely complicated problem. One that, at its core, is about borders and trust. Many lines of the maps we use today were created through violence and subjugation. While there may be no quarrel with these borders today, the history can't be ignored or denied as it is a foundation for many modern countries. We cannot blindly trust these maps to accurately illustrate the entirety of a place.

Consider instead the deep map, which is an endless multimedia tool depicting the narratives of time, culture, society, events, inhabitants, discoveries, and connections, “inseparable from the contours and rhythms of everyday life” (Bodenhamer 3). A deep map is an unstable and constantly changing conversation about a place. Not a literal depiction of location, deep maps instead are a metaphor or exploration of perspectives or some other conception that depicts a certain reality of a place. They hold new insights into people and their perceptions of their environment, acknowledging “how engaged human agents build spatially framed identities and aspirations out of imagination and memory” (Bodenhamer 3). One can learn from all types of maps, but only deep maps have the capacity to fully immerse one into the space through a variety of media. There should be questions when viewing a deep map, confusion on why something is the way it is, to further discussion and therefore understanding.

In contrast, thin maps, another term for maps similar to the Mercator map, are static, unchanging statements. However, we will still heavily rely on thin maps to help direct us to location because of their “focus and concern for precision and accuracy,” as we are often lost in spaces (Harris 30). Digital maps greatly enhance this specific functionality of maps, yet are classified as thin maps because their function is exactly the same as physical maps. Despite this need, we should never rely on thin maps to

tell us anything more about a place than where it is—certainly not how it is or was, why it is, who it is, when it is. I won't trust thin maps for this very reason. We must discern the stories and histories that form place in order to fully appreciate and understand place, just as learning our ancestors' stories is important. The layers of place are deeper than they appear; we owe it to past, present and future generations to let them into the light.

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## TRANS BODIES, TRANS SELVES: TRANS THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AND ITS LESSONS EMBODIED

Though we do not always wish to admit it, bodies bear stories. They bear the stories of lives lived and how we've spent our days; whether these days were joyful — told through the hike-scraped knees and the stretch marks noting growth and the deep lines of laughter on faces — or painful — borne in marks of injury, scars of harm and struggle, or in ongoing trauma — the bodies we bear carry trinkets to remember the journey. We tell our own stories through how we present our bodies, fashioning them through styles of hair, different colors, and art marked upon skin. There comes a line, though, in our ownership of our bodies' stories and in the narratives we write in them. Many find tension within Christian traditions: how deep does this autonomy of ownership run, and how could this ownership possibly fit within a theological framework that understands the human body to be an element of divine creation?

The trans experience is one that often challenges traditional ideas of mind-body dualism and calls into question what it means for us as humans to be embodied beings in a way that is uniquely rooted in journeys of transition. Though medical and surgical intervention<sup>1</sup> are not components of every

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1 Medical and surgical transition for transgender people can include a broad range of intervention options. The most common component of medical transition is Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), in which patients are prescribed either estrogen (for transfeminine individuals) or testosterone (for transmasculine individuals) to induce

individual's transition journey, they are a relevant consideration in the lives of many trans people and how they relate to their bodies. Whether or not a trans person experiences a dissonance between their "given" body and their internal image of self, trans bodies often face discord with the cultural expectations put upon them by outside observers. What does it mean to "be" a woman, or for one's body to "be" a man's body? And what if we choose to transgress these perceived boundaries?

Though these questions at first only seem applicable to trans experiences of faith and embodiment, they address wider questions that can be applicable to lives across the spectrums of faith, experience, and denomination. To access the fullness of these lessons and applications, though, may require non-trans individuals to engage in practices of humility and empathy. Not only does this require centering a narrative and experience historically marginalized (and often traumatized) in Christian spaces, but also a fundamental shift in perspective in order to see the world from a trans perspective. Theologies of Creation and how humans are situated within and alongside it have the potential to speak to the broader role of how we as humans are intended to engage with the world in a physically manifest manner; when trans experiences challenge and complicate the previous ways of approaching bodily theology in the context of God's Creation and intention for humanity, they open up the possibility of new understanding for all through the lens of their daily lives.

### TRANS THEOLOGY

To understand the embodied nature of humanity as lived through the experiences of trans people, we must also examine how trans people engage with and view themselves within Christian scripture. Though it has been used to brutalize and traumatize queer people of all backgrounds, it also carries the potential for healing and ultimate liberation for queer people

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a gradual chemical change of the body. Surgical transition options may include mastectomy and/or hysterectomy for transmasculine individuals, breast augmentation and/or facial feminization surgery for transfeminine individuals, or "bottom surgery" or genital reassignment for individuals of all genders.



of faith; in developing a theology of the body directly rooted in their lived experiences, trans Christians have transformed what it means to live out lives of faith through their openness and authenticity. Trans faith is lived out daily not just in how trans folk navigate the world, but within the very site of their bodies themselves.

In this framework, trans people are invited to engage in an explicit and tangible act of creation not against God, but alongside God as co-creators. Traditionalist rebuttals to trans identity and the desire to medically transition commonly return to some form of the statement “God doesn’t make mistakes,” which may make sense in a rigid framework that views Creation as static and complete, but this is problematized when viewed in a system of ongoing and co-creative Genesis (Callahan). The bounds of this calling to make within the world exceed any one text. However, it can best be understood by first examining the creation narratives of Genesis. In Genesis 1, the creation of humankind begins with, “So God created humanity in God’s own image,” creating them to be undoubtedly Good in that image (Genesis 1:27). What is this image humanity is made in, though? As God has no mortal body to reflect, trans theologians look to what humanity is called to be as a reflection of this image; Avery Smith suggests that humanity is called in this to “reflect God in the world,” and with this to reflect God’s nature as Creator as creators ourselves (Smith). Humans were given dominion over Creation, including themselves, and asked to create good fruit in their own acts of creativity. The invitation for trans folk, then, is perhaps the most intimate form of co-creation, as they undertake building the task of creation: “to take up the task of subduing the earth to make it fruitful within their own bodies”(Starchild). The site of this connection with divine intention is within their bodies

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“...trans people are invited to engage in an explicit and tangible act of creation not against God, but alongside God as co-creators.”

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themselves, as this is the site of their invitation to continue the work of Genesis.

Though sin is certainly a part of the narrative as we consider human experiences in scriptural context after the fall of Adam and Eve, it is not located in the action of transition, trans Christians argue, for it is the work of the self that seeks to move towards the original connection and “rightness” of Genesis. Indeed, the opposite is true. Transition, for trans people, is a development of Good in the world, for “in seeing that the relationship between their persons and their bodies is incongruent,” trans individuals pursuing transition — whether social, hormonal, or surgical — are working “to create a congruency where one didn’t exist before” (Starchild). Here, it is not only an act of continuing God’s creation of their individual self, but also an act of slowly returning to the peace and joy known to the first people formed by God’s hands. Creativity in action is a means of counteracting destruction and separation from God, and the focus to develop this means of congruence actively closes the gap created in the sense of separation. The dysphoria experienced by trans people as they are denied their ownership of their identity alienates them from community and from the ability to engage Creation in the way they are intended, an alienation that “keeps them from serving God to the best of their ability”(Starchild). This barrier to serving God in their fullest capacity is seen to be incompatible with the larger image of who God is and what God wants for the people of Creation, because any system that prefers for trans people to live in dysphoria rather than in the full openness of who they are invited to be does not see the greater picture that they are being called to serve. To deny the work of trans hands or to support their silence in communities of faith, in this view, is to deny God’s plan for God’s people.

A popular motif that seems to arise consistently throughout discussions and communities of trans Christians online is the image of the doubting apostle, Thomas, examining the scars of the risen Christ — the perfect scars of a perfectly resurrected Body. In this piece of scripture, Thomas is told of

Christ's resurrection but instead of joy, Thomas responds, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." When he finally encounters Christ directly, he is invited to investigate the scars left by Christ's crucifixion, where he is told "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:24-29). Fr. Shay Kearns, a priest of the Old Catholic Church, recounts his encounter of this very story in his seminary studies as the site of his own personal transformation of faith and as the first time he ever found himself, as a trans man, able to see himself in the scriptures that he read. He describes a tangible resonance with Christ in this passage, asking, "What is it that makes people believe I am who I say I am?" (*Queer Theology*, 6:17). Trans peoples' bodies are under constant investigation, through both physical observation and through ongoing and rather invasive questioning. People, even strangers, feel entitled to ask about the validity of one's transness through questions of medical transition — questions of scars. Have they had "the surgery" yet? Is she really a woman? People seek to poke and prod and confirm a person's identity through asking about genitals and hormones and top surgery scars in a way that is often exhausting to trans people who have to field others' doubt in their validity daily. "Can they simply believe that I am a man," Fr. Shay asks, "because that's what I say I am?" (*Queer Theology*, 6:17).

In this, trans people's bodies, like Christ's own body in the resurrection, become sites of doubt and questioning for the world. From the countless images that have been produced depicting the moment of Thomas's investigation, many trans men and trans masculine people see their own bodies reflected in their top surgery (mastectomy) scars, particularly in Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. In this image, Christ's wounded side sits just as top surgery scars would, with Thomas's hand probing its edge while other disciples look on. In an image intended to parallel Caravaggio's painting, Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin replaced the wounded Jesus with the image of a transgender man whose top surgery scars are being examined.

Here, Jesus's body is a site of suspicion and doubt in its

very resurrection; Thomas will not believe that it is Him, truly present, until he examines the very scars marking the death of Christ's body now returned. Christ's presence is linked to His body, for in being fully human He is also fully embodied. Likewise, the man in Wallin's photograph is embodied in flesh that is a site of doubt in its maleness and transition. Like many trans masculine folks, the subject of the photo here must bear the physical marks of transition — something which can be highly personal — in order for others to believe that he is who and what he says that he is. His scars mark transgression against the expectation for bodies to be static and constant as they are, never changing in such drastic ways, just as the wounds of Christ mark a transgression against death in the form of resurrection.

The very nature of Christ's wounds, too, give hope and joy to trans Christians in their subversion of what would otherwise be considered perfection. In human culture, scars are so often marks of physical brokenness, imperfection, and a marring of what might otherwise be Good. And yet, in the marks borne by Christ's resurrected body, the scars and "imperfections" and wounds of a mortal life are made holy and sacred. This is a promise that has potential to be good news for many, even beyond trans theology. However, there is a unique message in this that seems to resonate with trans Christians. One trans Christian framed this message as so: "Bearing the scars of our past, we are vindicated; perfect and Divine"(Blair Bitch Project). In this, the scars of transition and surgery are transformed from sites of shame, brokenness, or imperfection into sites of celebration, newness, and divine partnership. These would-be imperfections and the bodily brokenness carried in scars are redeemed from their negative association in the world and are made Good in Christ, where they become reminders of personal journey, self-creation, and relationship to self, others, and God. In this narrative, trans folk can find redemption as, "scarred and glorious, the resurrected Christ is our promised future" (Blair Bitch Project).

Ultimately, the common thread through each of these examples are tied together with a fundamental idea; in the beautiful diversity they bring to humanity and in the lessons they

embody within their very lives about where humanity sits within the span of Creation, trans people are both the recipients and bearers of unique divine gifts in the world. The trans experience, though carrying a deep knowledge of the meaning of oppression and violence, is accompanied by unique opportunities to engage with the divine that are not otherwise possible, all while serving as an example of the creative nature gifted to humans in God's own image.

#### TOOLS OF EXAMINATION: TRANSPOSING MARGINALIZED EXPERIENCE TO LIBERATORY THEOLOGY

To understand a transgender theology of the body, first it is necessary to step back and understand the position of trans theology and queer theology as approaches inherently linked to these identities' histories of marginalization, and particularly the direct and indirect role of church structures in this marginalization. The manner in which these unique experiences of marginalization shape the outlook of a group's theological worldview can appear in many forms across a diverse range of experiences, but each can also lend vital tools to one another in order to collectively move towards liberation. Engaging in this dialogue, particularly with more established fields of liberation and marginalized theologies, provides critical structure for emerging or lesser-known systems of theology to engage with wider populations. Through examining systems of liberation theology that stem out of black and feminist perspectives, the phenomena of trans theology's root in lived trans experience can be highlighted through the ways it parallels other marginalized theologies.

Perhaps the most simple mode of weeding out unhelpful and harmful ideologies lies in the question that these theologies often ask to gauge the fruit that can come from a theoretical approach — does this theology bring life to those that are hearing it? Or, does this theology do harm? The language used in each approach might vary slightly, but the root concern is there in the

intentional centering of certain marginalized well-beings:

A focus for a theology then is the dominant interest, passion, and concern, the unifying theme, that holds the whole of it together is a coherent vision... Like the lens that draws rays of light to a center, but without blocking any of their light, so too a centering concern of a theology should organize and unify theological data thematically, but without negating the legitimate concerns represented by other and lesser problems. (qtd. in Johnson 18).

This “center of gravity” that holds tight to a priori options for centering marginalized experiences, then, is what we seek to move forward in producing frameworks of theory that begin the work towards healing. In feminist theologies, this central value is in theological frameworks that seek the fundamental human flourishing of women — all women — particularly in (but not limited to) restructuring the systems of power historically aligned against women's practice of freedom. As Elizabeth Johnson frames it, the search for human flourishing focuses faith within the context of “myriad sufferings resulting from women's being demeaned in theory and practice” that have historically operated in direct contradiction to the goodness and dignity inherent to women's conception of their own human dignity (Johnson 18). Similarly, in its own search

for life-giving work, black liberation theology asks the question, “What does the Christian gospel have to say to the powerless black men whose existence is threatened daily by the insidious tentacles of white power?” (Cone 32). Christianity was first brought to black folks through systems of white colonialism and oppression, so it must also be able to prove that it is able to be redeemed from this history as a weapon

against black community and identity. Before all else, these theologies must first prove that they have something of value to offer regarding the experiences of marginalized peoples, and then, through critical evaluation and application of lived experience, they may transform into works applicable to the difficult effort of building liberation-oriented practices.

As a system of theology that speaks to the experience of a people whose bodies have been historical targets for violence and neglect, black liberation theology lifts up the nature of black bodies as something to be glorified as a gift from God. Blackness, though devalued and stigmatized by society, is “a special creation of God” given value inherently through the fact that it is loved by God” (Cone 52). Within the context of a world that regularly teaches the black community to internalize the hatred of blackness and black identity, acting towards oneself in love and embrace of blackness as this gift of God is inherently subversive of the definitions of blackness handed down by white society. This love and embrace of black bodies as a Good gift, then, is a radical and revolutionary act of transformation of the self from an “It” in the eyes of white society to an equal and active advocate of love coupled in justice (Cone 53). Fully embracing the gift of blackness requires fully recognizing the dignity that one deserves to be addressed with; in refusing to accept becoming an “It,” the black individual practices both love for themselves and for their neighbor, confronting white society in their reduction and exploitation of black worth.

Understanding the goals of liberation theologies allows for additional dimensions of nuance when determining which additional values align with the overarching mission, and which tools would be most effective. Knowledge that is sourced from the very lives of marginalized people can be adapted to also address the needs of other identities who may experience similar struggles, even if manifested in very different ways. Drawing connections between one experience and another can serve to strengthen bonds of solidarity as it relates to building resilience and demanding no less than full freedom from states of oppression.

## TRANSLATION OF EXPERIENCE ACROSS LENSES

To extend the new-found meaning and Good found in the body that is made tangible in the expressions of trans lives into lessons accessible to those who do not share in trans experiences of embodiment, we must also engage in a practice of relinquishing our own theological and social lens, even if only for a short period of time. Though it is easy to cling to a dominant lens of understanding, particularly if it is the only lens that one has consciously known, possessing the freedom to alter our perspective—even temporarily—to seek an understanding offered by another context has the potential to grant us new knowledge from and appreciation for those operating from an inherently different perspective. Without allowing ourselves this freedom to travel across perspective and lens, we risk missing fundamental elements of others’ experiences — religious, cultural, or otherwise — that then keep us from potential spaces for empathy, understanding, or personal growth.

What happens when barriers in this sort of experiential exchange are not acknowledged can be seen in James V. Spickard’s work where it examines the many approaches (and mis-approaches) Western sociologists and academics have made in their attempts to pin down the nature of indigenous Native traditions — in this case, those of the Navajo people. When the positions that we approach our work from are not taken into account, the assumptions or frameworks that we naturally settle into as part of our process also go unquestioned. Sometimes, these assumptions then find their way into the fruits of our examinations, even if they might distort the actual findings; in Spickard’s text, too, he addresses the backgrounds of different sociological writers as they seep into the work they produce. He notes how the Western Christian background of some writers, when unchallenged or acknowledged, ultimately leads to their work attempting to fit Native American ritual and tradition into the confines of a Western Christian understanding of religious ritual, even though the two are not necessarily compatible as a result of differing structures upholding the traditions. Here, he uses the example of Gladys Reichard’s work detailing the

symbolism and ritual in Navajo tradition, noting her “latent Christian origin” in her scheme of interpretation (Spickard 187). As a result of her unaddressed positionality, Reichard, likely unconsciously, seeks to fit Navajo practice into a Christian understanding of cohesive theology and structured form. Spickard describes Reichard’s approach as stating an explicitly different content across the two practices, but Reichard writes as though Navajo religion possesses a “parallel idea-centered form” equivalent to that of Christian practice (Spickard 187). Without seeking an alteration of lens, it is highly possible that the external works misconstrue Navajo ritual as something that it is not in an effort to grasp at its unfamiliar structure of practice.

To escape the missteps of holding our own framework too tightly, we must take active steps to understand exactly what lens to use in its place, which requires us to be able to pursue understanding of a practice outside our default. In the case of the Navajo rituals examined in Spickard’s work, the most vital shift in lens is that which is applied to the purpose of ritual. In the specific healing practices addressed in this work, there is not a “magic” working outside the patient to miraculously heal, but instead a situation within a culturally significant narrative “about an originally perfect world that has decayed, then been restored to its pristine significance” (Spickard 192). The patient is brought through the story’s state of decay along with their illness, and gradually brought back into the ritual renewal of the world’s original perfection. As the ritual restores the world, even if just within the span of the ritual itself, the patient is brought into a restoration of their health. This idea of the ritual return to perfection, though perhaps applicable to the method of other practices, is not a conscious element of Western traditions, and thus requires a foray into this task of lens-traveling in order to set aside assumptions that might muddy the waters of understanding this ritual.

## UNDERSTANDING TRANS THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACT

As we move to use these methodologies to find a deeper understanding of what is to be discovered in the everyday, lived theologies of transgender Christians, it is certainly important to note that each and every person carries a vastly different experience of their transness throughout their lives. It is precisely in this diversity of expression and creation and discovery that the transformative potential of trans theology lies. Each person, in their embrace of who they are called to be, marks a unique act of co-creation alongside the work of God, and in each act of creation emerges an invitation for others to join in creation, too. This transformation happens not just in the heart of someone who comes to embrace a new way of being, but also in the relationships around them and in the visibility to others that communicates a new means of engaging with Creation.

## TRANS THEOLOGY AS A LIBERATING THEOLOGY

Just as we examined in feminist and black liberation methodologies earlier, trans theology and the theology surrounding trans bodies offers a diversity of means to pursue questions regarding the holiness of marginalized peoples, including the sacredness of historically exploited and traumatized bodies, and what it means for these experiences of oppression to be brought into the center and lifted up in an act of liberation. What does it mean for a trans-specific bodily theology to be life-giving? Particularly if they were raised in a practice of faith, most trans people have been exposed to toxic theologies, either directly or incidentally, that claim their identity is a corruption of the body or the mind. These theologies enact precisely the opposite of the human flourishing we mean to seek out; toxic theologies do not serve to bring healing or peace, but instead produce bad fruits of isolation, self-loathing, and, often, separation from God and practice of faith. Good fruits, then, come when trans individuals are granted liberation from the shame and suppression so often pressed upon them. In a theology of co-creativity, trans people — and all people, in their example — must be free to engage with

the abundance of Creation to be God's reflected image upon the earth.

In this pursuit of liberation, the first good fruits are born in the mere acceptance of who one is called to be in creative partnership with God and begin moving that partnership towards congruence in both spirit and body. Just as trans individuals are called into creative partnership with God in the active transformation of themselves into congruence between spirit and world, Cone describes that, for the black man, "to respond to God's love in faith means that he accepts as truth the new image of himself revealed in Jesus Christ. He knows that the definition of himself defined by white society is inconsistent with the newly found image disclosed in Christ" (Cone 52-53). Though a materially different form of addressing misalignment, both of these experiences — transgender and black — point to a greater image of liberation in Christ and the redeeming nature of God. Experiences of marginalization produce the misinformed definition of each individual that is then internalized in forms like shame, frustration, self-loathing, or self-doubt, but the nature of redemptive messages present in queer theologies and in black liberation theology serve to do more than just break away from shame. Liberation theologies not only free individuals and communities from the "inconsistencies" Cone described that exist between the external world and one's internal self, but they also inspire a new restructuring of the world we inhabit.

In regards to this apparent incongruence between what is now and what is called to become, the nature of ritual described in Spickard's work— in which the space created allows for a return to a pre-corruption or a perfect state of the world—can also highlight unique perspectives to the nature of

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“...they also  
inspire a new  
restructuring  
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transition. As ritual is manifest in the act and relationship of the Navajo practice, "they reinstate the world's original perfection... They reorder a disordered universe" (Spickard 191). Through this practice, those engaged in the ritual are brought into narratives that acknowledge the current state of corruption or decay of the world, but they are also engaged in the progression of the world as it returns to its original state of peace. Though they most certainly appear very different in means of ritual, this act of return to the "original world" is also present in trans theologies addressing the process and significance of transition in a religious context. Going back decades, some framed transition as a tangible example of a journey seeking return to the "rightness" of Eden. The incongruence of dysphoria and early trans experiences is not a failure marked by the gap between what one is and what one "should be" as marked by society, but instead it is an invitation into reconciliation with one's body and an alienated True Self. The undertaking of transition begins this reconciliation, but even more so, in the movement towards the previously alienated True Self, trans people are "fulfilling the mandate of Genesis" and returning to a previously known state of peace (Starchild). In loosening the hold that things like grief or isolation or hurt and raising up trans selves up in liberation, the process and "ritual" or transition becomes a symbolic and literal act moving towards the original human peace.

Each of these methods, though diverse in their application, serve the essential functions of reducing the suffering and struggling of trans folk as they try to navigate a society that is still often significantly hostile. More than that, though, these methods seek to find sources of unabashed queer joy, celebration, and peace. For a theology to be life-giving it does not only need to address the pains and trauma encountered in life's meetings with oppression, but it also seeks out the spaces to recognize and rejoice in victory. In a world that still harbors many hostilities towards trans folk, what marks success greater than the victory of perseverance that lies in joy and laughter in the face of darkness?

## ACCESSING TRANS THEOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF EMPATHY

Ultimately, it can be difficult to communicate what it “feels” like to be transgender to someone who has never and will never know this unique experience themselves; this gap in understanding, then, often becomes a barrier to resolving division and misunderstanding and instead inspires transphobia, traumatization, and numerous forms of brokenness. A first step in beginning to narrow this divide begins in the relational — if someone is going to begin bridging the distance, they will first need to be invited in to learn; if they are going to be invited in to learn, they must be given the tools of examination that will allow them to come closest to understanding.

Just as Reichard’s position approaching her work observing Navajo tradition as a Western Christian likely challenged her ability to fully witness the significance of the indigenous practice, so too can the relative position of a cisgender identity obscure one’s ability to look into the experiences of trans individuals (Spickard 187). This angle of approach to hearing the concerns of trans people can lead to a buffeting of ideas that is simply not an effective means of productive engagement, as the cisgender identity is still held in the center of personal discourse. Situations like these can produce feelings of defense, wherein it feels like their personal identity is being attacked as they attempt to enter into the space of discourse (Callahan). Instead, what is necessary is a practice in empathy by the outside observer; to more effectively grapple with the questions presented by transgender theologies, the “visitor” to the intellectual space of queer theology must, for a time, adopt the lenses utilized by trans people themselves. These lenses are informed by the nature of trans folks’ experiences of gender, as well as by a history of persecution and the structures of community that served to help them cope with the harsher realities. Though someone may understand gender as static or rigid, they would enter into a space where, at least for the sake of that time, gender could be fluid and playful, or perhaps even absent. This shift of perspective does not have to even begin in imagining others’ experiences of gender —

as, admittedly, that could be an intimidating and difficult first step into seeking understanding — but could instead begin in empathizing with experiences of rejection, hurt, or frustration. This creates a site that is much easier to imagine oneself in, if only because there are so many comparable ways in which we could imagine and relate to pain. As empathy is built up in this space, the greater the degree to which trans and cisgender folk can meet in an equal and respectful space.

Though it is certainly quite the understatement, there is a great deal more work to be done with regards to the liberation and safety of trans folk. There is something to be said about theologies of liberation that seek to accompany a people who have experienced so much of their own hurt at the direct hands of toxic theology. It creates a unique, if sometimes difficult, opportunity to navigate the limbo between the two and meet others where in it they may be struggling. Entire structures of now-corrupted power have latched onto the toxic theologies condemning the trans experience, but the methods and tools granted by queer theology also uniquely grant the ability to counter these scriptural monsters with a practice that seeks to celebrate the full flourishing of all people, joined in community and in celebration of the perseverance that is demonstrated every day.

As for where trans theology and its commentaries on the body meet and encounter the broader experiences of Christianity and the world, the tools provided in the sharing of lenses and adopting altered perspectives is only the beginning. These tools merely facilitate the ability to engage in a deeper manner, and the lessons questioned within one’s own heart bring the conversation from being about the “other” to being about the personal, intimate. Ideally, these tools would then grant the perspective to investigate the message of liberative theology wherever it may be found, and to see the greater community gifts embodied in how trans individuals approach acting as co-creators alongside the Creator themselves.

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## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Variation is inherent to the universe in the laws of probability, the statistical distribution of characteristics in populations, and the sensitive dynamics of nature. Variation also emerges in the differing opinions, the manifold religious beliefs, the breadth of cultural values, and the variety of aspirations held by humanity. Despite these vast differences, humanity is one. Issues of nationalism, senses of racial superiority, evidence of political oppression and domination, and the blatant disregard for the dignity of others in everyday interactions are forces threatening to uproot the oneness of humankind.

Far from the dichotomous thinking that poses variation and oneness as conflictual opposites is the verity that concepts of oneness and diversity, as with many other seemingly polar opposites, are instead complimentary. The resolution of conflicts of racial prejudice, gender discrimination, nationalism, and wealth inequality lies in a reframing of thought that both validates the right of the individual to hold beliefs and acknowledges the existence of an absolute Truth with which all humanity must strive to align their thinking and actions. Foundational to a constructive mindset, promoting peace and societal change is an understanding of unity in diversity.

Unity is neither uniformity or tolerance; unity is completeness through interdependence. It can be best understood through examples of orchestral instruments playing in harmony, animals and plants of ecological systems mutually-supporting the survival of the various creatures, or organs of the human body

collaborating to support a functioning human. Alone, a single instrument, animal, or organ has little meaning or capacity to express itself fully. When contextualized in a wider system that embraces the diversity and interdependence of all the elements present, each element finds its truest expression. The heart pumping blood would be useless if the lungs failed; only when all the organs of the body function in unison can the body survive. Likewise, humanity's spiritual progress is contingent on the acceptance of the unity of mankind. Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, exhorts humanity to be unified, writing, "Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body" (Bahá'u'lláh 40). Likewise, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, stated, "Be as one spirit, one soul, leaves of one tree, flowers of one garden, waves of one ocean" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Talk 10). The power and beauty of humanity rests in the individual's active participation in the creation of a unified and diverse society.

Just as the universe is not static and must change, human nature impels individuals and society to grow and develop technologically, ethically, and spiritually. The erection of a new world order characterized by unity in diversity and peace, as compared with the conflictual nature of the present world order, hinges most fundamentally on the active participation of the individual in society and our efforts to align our thoughts with the vision of a better world. It is evident, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, that "only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks). Spiritual progress entails advancing a morally-sound culture striving for unity, and its realization will redound to the capacity for honest and ethical practices of business and work that will allow humanity to advance technologically at a pace far beyond that of our present society.

Individual spiritual progress takes the form of living a coherent life and advancing a two-fold moral purpose. Spiritual progress means we must have the humility to realize we are not born with a perfect set of qualities, but we must strive to be better. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "There are imperfections in every

human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Talk 39). In the spirit of change, we must not look at people for who they are, but what they can be through change instigated by personal volition; this applies especially when looking toward ourselves. To each person God has endowed capacities that must be nurtured and unleashed for the benefit to the world. In the same manner, for change to be possible, we must not look at the society that is, rather should we envision and learn of the society that can be. Looking at faults only breeds more faults and pessimism that prevents constructive and enthusiastic action from taking place.

The individual and society are not separate, but mutually-reinforcing. Culture shapes individual behaviors, and the aggregate set of individual behaviors influence culture. The two-fold moral purpose requires people “to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society” (Universal House of Justice “12 December 2011”) because, in serving society, one changes the reality of culture, making culture more conducive to personal growth. In serving others, we also develop capacities of leadership; grow in our virtues of exhibiting love, friendship, humility, and patience; and gain greater exposure to the various peoples of the world, allowing us to appreciate those of different backgrounds.

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“The individual and society are not separate, but mutually-reinforcing”

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Our human nature is a constant struggle—a persistent state variation—between expressing our nobler spiritual nature through service and worship, and resisting earthly desires and temptations that turn us away from what is truly profitable for us. Expressing our truest human nature through service to others

requires more than time dedicated to acts of service alone. Service is a lifestyle and a state of being only attainable through a consistent pattern of planning, action, study, and reflection on our actions. Through such a pattern of behavior, we must strive to adopt a humble posture of learning, knowing that, while our opinions are valid, we must be willing to constantly refine and advance our understanding as a collective civilization.

As a lifestyle, service also entails living within a community or neighborhood, deepening friendships through empowering and accompanying others on a path of service, and having the humility to realize that long-term change does not come overnight. Change requires time, but “Small steps, if they are regular and rapid, add up to a great distance travelled” (Universal House of Justice “Ridvan 2016”). While often social movements produce sudden results, the change is an uncovering of years of effort on the part of individuals advancing change. The beauty of social action is that it inevitably requires the unification of humanity. Through ceaselessly dedicating oneself to serving others, one advances society and learns to express their truest self.

Service should not be another aspect of a compartmentalized life. To live a life of service does not mean one needs to sacrifice prospects of a job or deny oneself opportunities afforded through hard work. Seeing work as worship and understanding the true significance of building bonds of friendship as laying the foundations of a unified society allows one to avoid leading double lives. When work, family, friendships, leisure activities, and all the other aspects of one’s life are centered around serving others, the conflict instigated by having to make dichotomous choices created by a compartmentalized life disappears. In essence, living life to its fullest entails embracing the diversity of things we do in a way that feels unifying and having the humility to realize change to one’s life and society will take time and sustained effort.

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## VARIATION IN LANGUAGE

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## AMERICAN POETS WRITING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust, commonly deemed as the greatest mass trauma of human history, is a prevalent subject in contemporary literature. There are a multitude of narratives available to the general public that serve as informational guides about the Holocaust. However, creative work concerning the Holocaust also exists and is often mixed in amongst the academic texts. This occasionally makes it difficult to discern what is objective truth and what is fictionalized. This issue is further complicated by a handful of American poets' writings about the Holocaust when they never experienced it. The trend of writing Holocaust poems, specifically amongst American confessionalism writers, raises important questions of ownership and ethical boundaries. Primarily, to what extent is it ethical and just for people write about an event they did not directly experience? Ultimately, it is important for modern writers to keep writing about the Holocaust, as we need to keep this history alive, but we have to be incredibly cautious with our treatment of the subject in order to prioritize truth and honor survivors. When considering poetry regarding the Holocaust, one must consider the ethical boundaries of writing about such horrific subject matter when the poet is so far removed from its horrors.

A recurring issue in all literature involving trauma is language's inability to convey the true extent of suffering. Thus, language does not feel sufficient when it comes to fully encapsulating the greatest horror of human history, the

Holocaust. Gloria Young, in her article titled, "The Moral Function of Remembering: American Holocaust Poetry," refers to writing about the Holocaust as dealing with "a subject matter that is unspeakable; language itself is inadequate, stretched to the breaking point, shattered into syllables, or collapsed into stuttering" (Young 62). Due to the nature of human communication and the extremity associated with the Holocaust, being unable to use language to describe what happened means there is virtually no other way to help people understand what one witnessed. Furthermore, not only does the Holocaust often feel indescribable, but the Holocaust can also seem inconceivable. Al Strangeways, in his article titled, "The Boot in the Face': The Problem of the Holocaust in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath," addresses the unreal nature of the Holocaust when he notes that it "assumed a mythic dimension because of its extremity and the difficulty of understanding it in human terms, due to the mechanical efficiency with which it was carried out, and the inconceivably large number of victims" (Strangeways 383). Tragically, these mythic proportions have resulted in the formation of a subset of people, often coined Holocaust deniers, who deem the Holocaust so inconceivable that they insist it never happened at all. It is not a far leap to assume that Holocaust deniers feed off the poetic liberties taken by poets who did not directly experience the Holocaust; these poets unknowingly give them embellished texts that deniers could hypothetically comb through to find discontinuities

that serve as evidence for their argument. Thus, writing about the Holocaust becomes nearly impossible. There are not words strong enough to carry the weight of what happened in the Holocaust and any use of less, with any poetic liberties taken, will serve as fuel for Holocaust deniers and pain for Holocaust survivors. In "After the End of the World':

...there is virtually  
no other way  
to help people  
understand what  
one witnessed."

Poetry and the Holocaust,” Jay Ladin summarizes this dilemma well when he deems Holocaust poetry as “a high-stakes act that commands, by poetic standards, an unusual degree of attention” (Ladin 2). Quality Holocaust poetry cannot be written quickly or carelessly. Rather, Holocaust poetry requires more attention than any other subject matter due to the seemingly unspeakable nature of the subject.

When one does endeavor to write a poem about the Holocaust, one runs the great risk of perpetuating clichés and misrepresenting reality. Ladin echoes this sentiment by asking if poetry can “represent the Holocaust at all, or do [the poems] simply propagate morally and culturally vitiating clichés?” (Ladin 2). If the latter is true, the poems that contain clichés are distorting the audience’s perception of what actually occurred, diluting the experience into a literary device that moves the poem forward. If someone did not directly experience the Holocaust, they aren’t capable of writing about the events in a way that does not soften the terrifying nature of a survivor or victim’s experience. That being said, it is common for the Holocaust to be the basis of a poem coming from a poet that had no direct tie whatsoever to the event. Ethically, this is questionable. To what extent can a poet take poetic liberties, such as embellishing details or imagining a scenario that is not based on historical evidence, before they cross the line between representation and misrepresentation? Joshua Jacobs dives into the ethics behind writing about the Holocaust in his work, “Mapping after the Holocaust: The ‘Atlases’ of Adrienne Rich and Gerhard Richter.” Jacobs notes that given “the Holocaust’s absolute alterity[,]” writing poetry on the subject “compels an ethically absolute responsibility to make faithful attempts at testimony” (Jacobs 1). While Jacobs makes a valuable point, his statement raises further questions of what it means to make a “faithful” attempt and to what extent people who were not present can provide testimony about the Holocaust. This is a pervasive issue with American poets whose country did not enter WWII until a few years after it started. Moreover, it is often said that the American public were generally unaware of what was occurring in the Holocaust. With

no direct witness and a lack of real-time experience, American poets often made up for this by projecting themselves into the trauma through their imagination. Cary Nelson, in his piece, “Teaching and Editing at World’s End: Collective Trauma and Individual Witness in American Holocaust Poetry,” further illustrates this when he notes that, in order to write about the Holocaust, some American poets “took on the burden of creating post-traumatic memory in themselves” (Nelson 222). This is unsettling for a number of reasons, but perhaps primarily because survivors of the Holocaust do not have the choice to accept or deny the trauma forced upon them. It is simply their lived reality.

Therefore, American poets writing about a trauma they did not experience can be extremely unsettling to not only the survivors but also to readers. A prime example of this is Sylvia Plath, especially her poem titled, “Daddy.” Plath, notorious for the nature of her suicide and her poems leading up to it, often used Holocaust imagery throughout her poems, seemingly to emphasize the height of the suffering she was experiencing. It is important to acknowledge that, as Ladin notes, Plath was “an American non-Jew with no autobiographical connection to the Holocaust” (Ladin 5). This is especially important to note in the context of “Daddy,” a poem in which she explores the relationship between herself and her father. While the poem ends with Plath mentally liberating herself from her father, it is crucial to recognize the literary devices and steps she takes to get to that point. Within “Daddy,” she writes:

I thought every German was you.  
And the language obscene  
  
An engine, an engine  
Chuffing me off like a Jew.  
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.  
I began to talk like a Jew.  
I think I may well be a Jew. (Plath, 6.4-7.5)

Plath’s decision to compare herself to a Jewish person in a

concentration camp is a particularly bold move which almost always projects a considerable amount of shock onto the reader, especially given Plath's lack of connection to the Holocaust. While insinuating that her father was like "every German" and comparing herself to a Jewish person very clearly communicates the power dynamics at play in the family, it feels incredibly distasteful to compare her personal struggles to the ostracization, persecution, and murder of six million people. It is also imperative to note that the group of Jewish people the Germans first victimized were Jewish Germans, thus abstractly removing Jewish Germans from their nationalities. Moreover, Plath's use of the word "Jews" throughout "Daddy" is deeply concerning given the way the term was used as a derogatory slur by some during the Holocaust and long after. Given how this would have been something Plath was aware of, her choice of diction furthers her agenda of victimizing herself. Additionally, the use of the phrase "every German" also implies that every German was involved in the genocide of the Jewish people rather than members of the Nazi party. Needless to say, Plath's use of the Holocaust in her poems affected the public's perception of her and her work. Strangeways commented on the public's reception of Plath's use of Holocaust imagery when he notes that "Plath's whole oeuvre is frequently and superficially viewed as somehow 'tainted' by the perceived egoism of her deployment of the Holocaust" in poems such as "Daddy" (Strangeways 370). While Strangeways refers to Plath's self-assurance as "perceived egoism," to utilize the greatest horror in human history as a metaphor requires a degree of egomania readers do not often encounter. Yet, it is worthwhile to further explore Plath's logic behind using Holocaust references and imagery. Strangeways, perhaps in defense of Plath and her evident egoism, identifies the motives behind Plath's choices as "her very 'real' sense of connection [...] with the events, and her desire to combine the public and the personal in order to shock and cut through the distancing 'doubletalk' she saw in contemporary conformist, cold war America" (Strangeways 375). While her real connection may be questionable given her identities, one can definitively say that Plath succeeded in igniting

shock in the general public.

While Plath and many others used the Holocaust as a metaphorical device to serve as a comparison to brutality, other American poets experimented with form and structure to create different kinds of Holocaust poems. Most remarkably, W.D. Snodgrass utilizes the dramatic monologue in his poem "Magda Goebbels (30 April 1945)." Anne Harding Woodworth, in her article titled, "Crafting Evil in W. D. Snodgrass's: The Fuehrer Bunker," describes Snodgrass's poem as "a nursery-rhyme poem in twelve stanzas" that is "an effective mismatch between poem and content" (Woodworth 245). While the disconnect is alarmingly apparent and effective in creating discomfort, the reader may question if writing about systemic murder in the Holocaust as a nursery rhyme is appropriate, especially given Snodgrass's lack of personal connection with the Holocaust. Prior to even reading the poem, the reader is given an ample amount of information: the poem will be from the perspective of Magda Goebbels, a close associate of Adolf Hitler's, on the day of Hitler's suicide. Snodgrass's poem begins with an important, informative epigraph that reads: "(After Dr. Haase gave them shots of morphine, Magda gave each child an ampule of potassium cyanide from a spoon.)" (Snodgrass 608). Given the epigraph, the reader is aware before they even start the poem that they are

about to read about the murder of children. Snodgrass's choice to give away the "plot" of the poem at the very beginning is a strategic one. It allows the reader to focus primarily on the language being used and the way the material is presented, rather than try to decipher what the poem is about. Throughout "Magda Goebbels (30 April 1945)," Snodgrass weaves a narrative that highlights the true horror of Magda's actions. In the

“...the reader may question if writing about systemic murder in the Holocaust as a nursery rhyme is appropriate...”

second and third stanza of the poem, Snodgrass writes:

This is the bed where you can rest  
In perfect silence, undistressed  
By noise or nightmares, as my breast  
Once held you soft but fast.

This is the Doctor who has brought  
Your needle with your special shot  
To quiet you; you won't get caught  
Off guard or unprepared.  
I am your nurse who'll comfort you;  
I nursed you, fed you till you grew  
Too big to feed; now you're all through  
Fretting or feeling scared. (Snodgrass 608)

Snodgrass's reveal to the reader that the children being poisoned are Magda's own, as indicated by her reference to breastfeeding them, is perhaps one of the most heartbreaking moments of the poem. Due to the fact that Magda killed her children on April 30th, 1945, this is a true historical event that is often overshadowed and forgotten in lieu of Hitler's suicide. Christian Oord, in his article titled, "A Most Unmotherly Act: Magda Goebbels, The First Lady of the Third Reich," further contextualizes the occurrence in noting that Magda was motivated by the ending of the Third Reich, not wanting her children to live "in a world without Hitler" (Oord). With this context, the reader may ask what Snodgrass's motivations were in writing this poem. The primary concern that appears is that Snodgrass is humanizing members of the Nazi party, specifically a woman who murdered her own six children. On one hand, humanizing members of the Nazi party serves as a reminder that the Nazis were real people capable of this evil. On the other hand, feeling any empathy or sympathy for a person who not only was a member of the Nazi party, in addition to murdering six children in devotion to Hitler, is near, if not completely, unbearable. Snodgrass's positioning of this emotional dilemma feels cruel to the reader. It is as if

Snodgrass is asking them to either sympathize with the Nazis or sit with the idea that a mother would kill her own children because she did not want to see a political reality that did not align with her own.

Writing about the Holocaust, especially as a non-spectator, has expectedly high stakes and dire consequences. It is not surprising to imagine that Holocaust survivors likely take great offense to poets capitalizing off a trauma they suffered through. This becomes especially painful when considering poets who created work to appear as if they had directly experienced the suffering, generalizing the horrors of the world for mass consumption. Leon Wieseltier, in his work titled, "In a Universe of Ghosts," informs the reader how Holocaust poetry transformed the lives of survivors. He notes that "they became reluctant to talk freely about what happened, to open wounds before strangers. They were right. The degradations of the camps had made them into a new kind of human being. They were the mutants of modern history" (Wieseltier). By stereotyping survivors and not truly understanding their pain or experiences, American writers have greatly discouraged survivors in relaying the narratives that could correct this. This vicious cycle is further complicated when considering the argument that the only people who truly experienced the Holocaust were the ones who died in it. Berel Lang, in his article titled, "On Poetry and Holocaust in 'Holocaust Poetry,'" describes this argument well: "...partly because of the limited knowledge that most victims had of the extent or detail of the Holocaust (even if they were in one of the death camps themselves), partly because of the limits to feeling or consciousness itself, it is not the Holocaust ... that its victims experienced" (B. Lang 324). While I am certain that some survivors would disagree with that sentiment, Lang's statement leads readers to question if anyone, then, could accurately write about the Holocaust if the only ones who have the power to are dead. Lang's statement, therefore, highlights the difficulties of representation and testimony in a post-Holocaust world.

If one accepts Lang's claim that the only people who could truly represent the Holocaust died within it, the question

of who has the right to deliver Holocaust narratives, whether their own or someone else's, arises. When looking specifically at American poets who did not directly experience the Holocaust, it seems as if, on the surface, that they would have no claim to any narrative or testimony whatsoever. On one hand, it could be argued that it is the responsibility of everyone alive today to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive through conversations and writing, regardless of whether they have a tie to the event or not. In "The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory," Jessica Lang asserts that the "Holocaust survivor depends on members of succeeding generations both to remember the past and to live anew, to relate to history that has not been directly experienced by them and, also, to create their own individual histories" (J. Lang 48). If we are to take this sentiment to be true, this means that American poets should keep writing about the Holocaust in order to not only honor survivors, but also to keep history from repeating itself by keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. On the other hand, it is permissible to argue that Americans have no stake in creating narratives that portray a lived reality they never occupied. In fact, their creative writing about the Holocaust can be viewed as damaging not only to the experiences of survivors, but also to the facts

of history. Nelson comments on this when he acknowledges the abundance of American Holocaust poetry, noting that "the underlying message seems to be that every American is equipped to write his or her own Holocaust poem, that Americans own any subject they wish, that a community entitled to Holocaust witness coincides with our national borders" (Nelson 240). Here, Nelson indicates to the reader that America's adoption of

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“...the question of who has the right to deliver Holocaust narratives, whether their own or someone else's, arises.”

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“...a credible source can easily be the descendants of those who suffered through the Holocaust.”

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Holocaust narratives is an unethical appropriation, given their removal from the subject matter they are pretending has stemmed from their own personal experiences. His tone and diction further indicate that he disagrees with this underlying assumption and suggests that this assumption is actually a source of great entitlement.

A reader can infer that the exception to Nelson's condemnation of Americans writing about the Holocaust would be second and third generation survivors. While they did not directly experience the Holocaust in the sense that they personally witnessed the concentration camps in operation, these people do have an intimate connection with the events that conspired. As more time passes between our current reality and the Holocaust, there are fewer living first-generation survivors of the Holocaust. That being said, when one aims to keep the Holocaust alive in memory and at the forefront of conversations, a credible source can easily be the descendants of those who suffered through the Holocaust. While it is not a direct testimony, it is the most accurate source of information being actively generated. Jessica Lang acknowledges the limitations of this when she writes, "[third generation Holocaust writers] mark a second transition, or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as Holocaust enters history, an indirect relation to the original eyewitness" (J. Lang, 46). Unfortunately, one cannot stop the passage of time and death is inevitable. The public has to cherish the older, direct witness narratives, and take the narratives relayed by the descendants of Holocaust survivors as the closest to truth they can get. It is imperative, at this juncture, to take a step back and remember what the objective of Holocaust poetry is and should be. One argument to be made is that "the



work of Holocaust poetry is to interfere with the resolution of atrocity into history, to prevent the Holocaust from collapsing into chronologies and catalogues, to keep the past painfully present and unaccounted for by the stylized boredom of well-oiled sentiments, endlessly iterated horrifying details, and moral clichés” (Ladin 12). Given this statement, combined with Jacobs’ earlier rhetoric concerning ethical responsibility, it seems that perhaps the true objective of Holocaust poetry is to keep the memory of it alive by making faithful attempts at testimony.

As more time passes since the Holocaust, the general public will interact with literature that concerns the subject matter at an increasingly diminishing rate. It is terribly important to remember the age-old sentiment that if one does not remember history, one is doomed to repeat it. Ladin makes a cautionary call to action by emphasizing the urgency of defining truth. He notes that “the historical and imaginative writings that have kept the Holocaust alive as a defining historical event have had an unintended side effect. The more the Holocaust is represented in language, the more conventionalized and clichéd [...] the language of Holocaust representation becomes” (Ladin 8). It is, therefore, the responsibility of the living to honor the dead in reading the most accurate testimonies of the Holocaust that are known, as well as not further perpetuating clichéd representations.

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## THE MASTER'S HOUSE THAT LANGUAGE BUILT

Is it possible, is it practical, is it effective to work within a system to disrupt the system and/or to fix the system? Audre Lorde gives the answer succinctly. "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," she wrote, asserting that the structures in place that enforce homogeneity of experience and identity in our society cannot also be employed to promote difference, variety, or change. But there seems to be a fundamental, almost ironic contradiction in that statement, because one of the most powerful tools that the master has utilized to build his house is language. Yet, language is also a method constantly employed to attempt to dismantle that same house. This strategy, if exercised using the same master's rules, could work to perpetuate the same underlying systems that it hopes to dismantle. But, I argue that language can be used a tool of liberation despite it being historically and actively used as a tool of oppression, but only if the rigidity with which it is traditionally applied is replaced by creativity and dynamic flexibility. Throughout history, language has been a weapon of erasure, used to control the narrative of whose identities have value and whose can be marginalized, rewritten, or dismissed. Language itself is a multi-faceted form of communication which we have traditionally employed through speech and writing, but its definition can also be expanded. I argue that expanding our use of language is critical if we are to use it to counteract the oppressive reality that it has been used to create. Otherwise, it will continue to be a tool of the master, perpetuating the problems we aim to solve.

We often take for granted the neutrality of language, and assume that we all have equal access to the practice of language. Therefore, we assume language is an unbiased tool and regularly dismiss evidence of the contrary. But, confronting the deeply rooted systems of oppression and erasure of culture and identity in our society requires addressing the central role that different uses of language have played in crafting and maintaining those systems. One of the most important examples of how oppressive and biased implementation of language has been dominant throughout history is dominant history. As Haunani-Kay Trask points out in her essay, “From a Native Daughter,” the very way in which history has been written works to erase particular identities and groups and draft a single-sided account of complex and fundamentally diverse past lives. Trask describes a dichotomy of written history and lived history of her culture, where one is widely accepted as true and the other as false. She says, “There was the world that we lived in—my ancestors, my family, and my people— and then there was the world historians described. This world, they had written, was the truth” (Trask 120). Trask emphasizes the value of a particular practice of language over another, which is evident not only in the history of the Hawaiian people but endless places affected by cultural imperialism. Throughout history, we have established a rank of the various versions of language, where written language is most highly ranked, while spoken language, performed language, even visual language are devalued and discounted. Any effort to “rewrite” (even that term speaks to how we understand what is truly historical and what is not) history, so as to include the embodied experiences and stories like the ones Trask’s culture shares, requires a re-ranking where different expressions of language are given the importance once only designated to written language.

There is also evidence of the at best limiting, at worst eliminating nature of language within colloquial or everyday uses of speech. Every word we use reinforces a value we hold for ourselves or our communities, which emphasizes how non-neutral the tool of language really is. bell hooks<sup>1</sup> digs into this point in

<sup>1</sup>Editor’s Note: Born Gloria Jean Watkins, she chose her pen name as a tribute to her great-grandmother and intentionally leaves it lowercase (Lee).

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“We as a society put an undue amount of faith in the truth communicated by the sublevels of language...”

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the introduction of her book, *Ain’t I A Woman*, as she discusses the erasure of the black female identity from the discourses about sexism and racism. She says, “the word men in fact refers only to white men, the word Negroes refers only to black men, and the word women only refers to white women” (hooks 7), which not only speaks to how specific uses of language force people into categories of identity, but also shows that even the potential inclusivity of those categories is negated purely through the use of specific words. Like Trask, hooks tries to communicate the ways in which language specifically operates within and as a function of the larger systems of imperialism, oppression, sexism, racism, etc., to help discern where value lies for a given society. We as a society put an undue amount of faith in the truth communicated by the sublevels of language, buying into the reality, for example, that men are white, Black people are men, women are white, and other subtle but dangerously impactful intricacies of everyday language. Because these systems are so ingrained into our use of language, it is much easier to overlook this particular tool of the master of white imperialist capitalist patriarchy and therefore much harder to start to dismantle them from within.

Despite its undeniable relationship to the history and continuation of imperialism, oppression, sexism, racism, etc., language cannot be taken out of the intersectional feminists’ arsenal. In fact, it is essential that language is used to undo the damage it has done. In an essay titled “Have We Got a Theory For You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand For ‘The Women’s Voice’” María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman discuss how giving voices to everyone is a critical part of establishing personal autonomy. Spelman writes, “Another reason for not divorcing life from the telling

of it or talking about it is that as humans our experiences are deeply influenced by what is said about them, by ourselves or powerful (as opposed to significant) others... We can't separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience" (Lugones & Spelman 573-74). Spelman explains why it is so important that language continue to be practiced and emphasized throughout the mission of intersectional feminism. The uses of language are at the core of our experiences of the world and of ourselves; the two cannot be separated. Throughout this essay, the authors advocate for a very specific kind of language—dialogue in pursuit of friendship. This implementation of language disrupts the rigid, limiting, dismissive structure that disallowed diversity, which is why it can be used to dismantle the house of oppression. Dialogue requires reciprocity and blurs the lines between insider and outsider, subject and object. It is still deeply intentional while allowing for ambiguity and difference, two things that traditional strategies of oppressive language erased.

In order to be able to celebrate the intersectional identities that have been systematically silenced by the strategic use of language and other tools of oppression, we have to communicate an openness for difference, ambiguity, and change. We have to communicate, without repeating the mistakes of the past. In her essay, Trask proposes a way to address this dilemma. She asks, "Did these historians know the language? Did they understand the chants? How long had they lived among our people? Whose stories had they heard?" proposing questions that address the diversity of ways that understanding can be reached—ways that were silenced by white historians writing history that was not their own (Trask 120). Lived experience, chanting and songs, stories shared in native tongue—these are all methods of language whose significance demands to be reestablished. Our use of language has been historically limited and socially damaging, but it is possible for it to still be a source of liberation. As Spelman, Lugones, and Trask all explain, liberation will come through a communal expansion and redefining of what qualifies as language and what counts for communication. Although the exercise of

language as an oppressor has become so deeply ingrained in our society, the tool is not limited to solely that function, and if used creatively, dynamically and in dialogue, it can become a tool to dismantle the house it built.

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BEN MCHORSE

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## ANDREW MARVELL'S CRITIQUE OF BRITISH SOCIETY FROM WITHIN

The mid-seventeenth century was a tumultuous time in England. A civil war was raging and the political and religious direction of society was in question. Much of the art of the time reflected the turbulence citizens faced. This includes Andrew Marvell's<sup>1</sup> poems, in which he quietly expressed his views on liberty. Despite his activism, Marvell only became famous for his poetry after he passed away and, because of this, his poems are still prominent in today's world (Black 974). Marvell's ability to quietly express his views in his poetry is exemplified in his piece "Bermudas." In the poem, English sailors sing about exploring the world. Although Marvell's poem seems to praise England's colonial endeavors as they discover bountiful land, the poem actually uses utopian themes of Eden to critique British society for being ungodly. Despite being written in the 17th century, Marvell's ideas remain applicable to modern world powers in the 21st century.

Marvell introduces a controversial question about British society by showing how their colonization destroys the purity of untouched land. At the start of the sailors' song, they mention the destination of their journey: "Unto an isle so long unknown, / And yet far kinder than our own?" (Marvell 7-8). While the final destination is an undiscovered island, the sailors ignore that the native Bermuda people inhabit the land with a godly lifestyle that has maintained purity on the island. The use of

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Andrew Marvell was a seventeenth-century English metaphysical poet. He was elected to Parliament in 1659 and held the office until his death in 1678 (*The Poetry Foundation*).

“far kinder” also exemplifies that places are more pure when uninhabited by people from the sailors’ country, which turns out to be England at the end of the poem. Marvell’s idea that England is not pure introduces the question of whether England should be colonizing at all, or if they should focus on improvement within their own society. If land is pure before they arrive, and is no longer holy once they leave, then it means that they cause the issues. Marvell argues that British society must understand the problems of ungodliness in their country, rather than trying to find purity in places around the world. The line, “and yet far kinder than our own?” is phrased as a question, displaying the logic England uses to justify its actions. The new islands may be incredibly nice, but in order to understand how uncontaminated the land is, England must ruin it with their sailors’ presence that symbolizes the vanity of English society.

Marvell connects English colonialism to religion to express how ungodly British society has become in the 17th century. The sailors sing about the safety of the islands they are searching for: “Safe from storms and prelates rage. / He gave us this eternal spring, / Which here enamels everything” (Marvell 12-14). The term “prelates rage” refers to an old English poem in which many citizens left England because religion was becoming over-imposed. The word “prelates” refers to a high-ranking government or religious official, which shows that Marvell is critiquing the leaders of England for the country’s corruption (*Oxford English Dictionary*

“Marvell’s idea that England is not pure introduces the question of whether England should be colonizing at all...”

1a). Marvell uses the historic reference in his poem to infer that citizens are running yet again due to the English Civil War, even though the people were unsuccessful in the previous attempt to escape as demonstrated by “prelates rage.” Instead of England bringing order and godliness, they bring selfish bureaucracy. The second and third lines paint the picture of the Bermudas as a

pure place that has yet to be touched by man. Marvell uses the utopian theme from the “eternal spring” (Marvell 13) to relate the Bermudas to the first Eden, again connecting England and its colonialism to Adam and Eve’s eternal sin. In this case, Britain is searching to escape sin and find a source of life, such as the “eternal spring,” rather than confronting it. The speaker’s use of “he gave” (Marvell 13) displays their narcissistic idea that they are God’s only nation, as he is deliberately rewarding them, but for what? In recent history, England had contributed very little to the world aside from civil unrest. However, Marvell still uses the concept of English purity to display their overabundance of pride in their government, who push colonialism rather than improvement within their own country. In reality, God may have made the “eternal spring” for the people of the Bermudas to reward them for their pure actions. Thus, Marvell suggests that God is punishing England by not giving them an “eternal spring,” as they use pride as an excuse to hurt other nations. Rather than fixing the political issues, the leaders search for more bounty.

Marvell continues to chastise England’s view on colonialism and religion through an analogy to Adam and Eve, which displays how England is the cause of sin in the world. The sailors continue to praise God in their song: “He makes the figs our mouths to meet, / And throws the melons at our feet; / But apples plant of such a price, / No tree could ever bear them twice” (Marvell 21-24). Marvell uses the long sentence to overwhelm the readers with the bounty and beauty of the island, giving the impression of the Bermudas as an Eden or utopia that is gifted to England when, in reality, it is a utopia because the English have yet to arrive and contaminate the island. The song also uses “He,” which refers to God and confirms the religious aspect of the poem. The twenty-third line begins with “But,” which acts as a transition point in the poem to help Marvell reveal his true argument to the audience. The use of apples alludes to the story of Adam and Eve and creates the image of the island

“...Marvell argues  
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sinful actions...”

as safe because there is no opportunity for England to sin. However, Marvell leaves the apples off the island to show that England has already sinned by justifying their colonial actions using their misconception about God rewarding them. Marvell displays how England may be the cause of eternal sins, as without the British presence in the colonies they cannot occur. This is exemplified as there are no apples, which represent sin, on the island before they arrive.

Marvell uses an aside in the poem to expose England's true motivation in colonization as they look for an Eden rather than constructing their own utopia on the island they already inhabit. The sailors continue to sing about the island: “He cast (of which we rather boast,) / The Gospel's pearl upon our coast, / And in these rocks for us did frame / A temple where to sound His name” (Marvell 29-32). Marvell begins to set up another large argument and the reader starts to understand England as a selfish and prideful nation. The aside acts as an isolation mechanism by which Marvell blatantly criticizes England for gloating with what they consider God's blessing to take land. He presents a juxtaposition of pride and glory, as Marvell argues that England has been living a lie by justifying sinful actions—such as the Civil War— using God. Marvell also uses the utopian landscape to display how God made this island a temple for the people of the Bermudas, not for England. It is also important to note what the English sailors do not mention: the island is most likely inhabited by Bermudan people. Marvell leaves this out to display how England considers itself the rightful owner of the world, thus contributing to inequality and its ungodly presence. As a royalist, Marvell supported Charles I and, in this section of the poem, the reader can begin to understand that he is unhappy with his country which entered a civil war.

Marvell reveals the subject of his poem at the end

to emphasize what he wants the audience to take away from his critique on British society. After the song ends, the narrator says, “Thus sung they, in the English boat” (Marvell 37). After spending the entire poem drawing the audience in, Marvell finally namedrops England, allowing the audience to realize how their country has been acting in the wrong as a selfish nation. This also leads to the question Marvell wants the audience to ask themselves: What are we doing in England? The audience will have realized their misconceptions about God and their country's justification for colonization, and Marvell likely hopes that his poem will motivate the people of England to fix their contaminated lifestyle. Throughout the poem, Marvell displays how England has an abundance of pride. He drives home the point that for England to have so much pride is dangerously selfish. Problems such as civil war occur on England's own island, yet the country continues to search for new islands to contaminate through the wrongful justification of colonialism as God's work.

Although Marvell's poem “Bermudas” was written in the mid 17th century, the argument it poses remains applicable to 21st century society. Many large countries—such as the United States, China, and Russia—scour the earth to find natural resources and solutions to problems such as climate change. By reading Marvell's poem, one can realize how these large countries often act hypocritically. Rather than fixing problems such as inequality in their own countries, these powerful nations have resorted to exporting their problems onto developing nations. World leaders have not found a solution to the problem of ungodly society. However, this is why poets like Marvell must continue to be read—so individuals may become aware of the lack of moral progression civilizations have made in the last four centuries. While Marvell and his colleagues do not offer a solution, they present a perspective that is lost in modern society.

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## VARIATION IN POLITICS

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## “TENDER” POLITICS

2019 was a historic year for women in politics. Not only was it the 100th anniversary of women having the right to vote in America;<sup>1</sup> following the 2018 midterm elections, more women than ever were sitting in Congress. Currently, 126 of the 535 members of Congress are women, and while this number breaks records, women only make up 23.6% of the Congressional body. Additionally, 47 of those women are women of color; again, the most ever in Congress (“Women in the U.S. Congress 2019”). It is within this historic context that President Trump’s annual State of the Union Address took place on February 5, 2019. Many congresswomen (primarily belonging to the Democratic party) wore white to the State of the Union Address (SOTU) in 2019 as a way to honor the women who came before them—wearing white was a celebration of suffrage as well as a way to be in solidarity with women everywhere. One hundred years ago during the fight for women’s voting rights, women wore white to communicate they were “not devilish Amazons set to destroy gender hierarchies... rather, suffragists sought to present as image of themselves as beautiful and skilled women who would bring civility to politics and cleanse the system of corruption” (Rabinovitch-Fox). White served to minimize the tension of women’s new involvement in the political sphere.

However, President Trump stirred controversy when he began listing statistics regarding women in the economy, as well as women in Congress. While the president attributed the recent statistical success of women to himself, the women in white—and many other Congress members—stood up, clapped, and

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s Note: The 19th Amendment passed June 4, 1919.

chanted, “USA!” President Trump intended to celebrate his own achievements, but these women ‘took’ that moment away from him when they decided to stand and celebrate women.

The public reacted immediately to the congresswomen in white and their supporters, keeping intact familiar political divides. Progressive women celebrated the anniversary of women’s suffrage and the record-breaking numbers of women in Congress. Conservative women, while acknowledging the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage as an important day, perceived the celebrations as an act of disrespect toward President Trump. Many stated that they felt the women who celebrated were not representative of women at all.

As a person who practices a feminist, liberation theology, I believe that the Kingdom of God is a political and social reality on earth in which there are no social hierarchies (Nolan 57-58). Feminist liberation theology follows a rhetorical criticism that largely reflects my viewpoint that God created all people equal and that the construction of gender is the result of a larger “social sin” that assigns gender norms and aims to put people into boxes. I do not feel that the congresswomen are unrepresentative of women—I see women championing other women; thus, I aim to understand why the congresswomen have been deemed unrepresentative of women.

I have sought to address and understand select negative responses to the women in white through an analysis of two Facebook posts, one from a public page bolstering conservative rhetoric, “Common Sense Soapbox,” and another coming from a personal account, Heather Genry Ellison. Additionally, I will analyze an article from *The National Review* entitled, “How about a Little John Paul II for the Women in White?,” written by Kathryn Jean Lopez. Significantly, these texts all draw on Christian rhetoric to support their condemnation of the congresswomen’s behavior. The influence of Christian rhetoric is crucial in understanding these reactions because women are drawing upon it to maintain and even bolster patriarchal power structures, including the policing of women’s behavior. I argue that the negative reactions of conservative, Christian groups of

women to the congresswomen who wore white to the 2019 State of the Union are the result of internalized ideologies of gender complementarity intersecting with racism.

The argument proceeds, first, with a review of three theoretical frameworks—complementarity, respectability politics, and intersectionality—each one a vital component in understanding the reactions. Then, I turn to the specific texts to show how they use both race as well as Christian rhetoric to create a strict definition of womanhood. The definition of womanhood the texts present, I argue, is then used against the congresswomen as means of shaming them for not conforming to it. I then call to attention the absence of policing both the behavior of the congressmen and of President Trump himself, an absence which ultimately functions to harm women. I conclude with a call to empathy for those who critique the women in white, in hopes that understanding the rhetoric behind their critiques will create space for human connection.

### COMPLEMENTARITY

Complementarity is a theory used in religious studies to discuss gender under the category of theological anthropology. In sum, complementarity teaches that men and women are created equally and purposed differently. It treats sex and gender as synonyms, contrary to recent social and cultural theories around sex and gender that distinguish between the two terms. Theologian Sarah Butler frames it in this manner: “human nature exists only in one or the other sex, in women or in men... [sex is] a personal mode of being in the world” (Butler 39). Additionally, complementarity theory argues that “sexual difference shapes one’s capacity to love and give life, it has profound relevance for personal identity and for the social order” (Butler 41). In this framework, men and women embody the world in inherently different ways which are necessary to the “social order,” and that “taking the personal meaning of sex seriously—for women and men both—is indispensable to the defense of the equal dignity of the sexes” (Butler 37). She delves deeply into the pope’s teachings on complementarity, which “[offer] a positive evaluation of

sexual difference-in-equality and therefore finds it possible to identify and celebrate the specific gifts and contributions women and men make to the human community not only as individuals but also precisely as members of their respective sex” (Butler 41). Butler concludes stating that these characteristic contributions of the sexes, “enrich human coexistence in the family and in society” (Butler 41). Therefore, Butler’s complementarity asserts that it is indeed possible to maintain this distinction between women and men without instating an implicit hierarchy.

However, complementarity theory has been largely critiqued by feminist theologians. One such theologian is Elizabeth Johnson, who argues that the Church’s (the Church as an institution, inclusive of the Catholic tradition and other Christian denominations) traditional dualistic view on sex promotes rhetoric of “separate but equal,” in which the very existence of a duality creates a hierarchy. The problem with the Church’s association of characteristically sexed behaviors or “virtues” is that many of these “virtues” are applied only to women, “they are the habits of the helper, the auxiliary, the handmaid, not that of the resistor of oppression let alone the self-actualizing, creative leader” (Johnson 54). By not applying the same virtues to men, the church simply reinstates the hierarchy of the sexes it claims to reject. Furthermore, Johnson argues that as much as the Church affirms the “separate but equal” anthropology, “the way these differences play out in the social sphere is historically conditioned” (Johnson 54). Essentially, the Church’s affirmation of equality of the sexes is empty because it cannot disembodied the historical conditions that created the patriarchal system that exists to keep women in their characteristically ‘feminine’ roles. Johnson promotes a

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“...the Church’s affirmation of equality of the sexes is empty because it cannot disembodied the historical conditions that created the patriarchal system...”

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“holistic egalitarian anthropology of partnership,” in which sex is not a predetermine for vocation or personal characteristics (Johnson). However, the church has yet to realize this anthropology, still embracing the “separate but equal” rhetoric of complementarity.

### RESPECTABILITY POLITICS

Respectability politics is a theory directly related to the lived-experiences of women of color. It suggests that women of color police their identities in order to be seen as respectable members of society (Gatson). It is the practice of adhering to dominant cultural norms because “if [women of color] practice their cultural identities through their speech, appearance, and overall deportment and behavior, they are deemed less intelligent and respectable” (Matos 89). While the theory was first used in the context of Black women’s liberation, it is now used to discuss and analyze the experiences of many people with marginalized identities.

### INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality theory, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>2</sup> in 1989, is “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups” (Crenshaw). Whereas social scientists have traditionally studied inequalities as isolated variables, intersectionality scholars Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana state that intersectionality aims to draw attention to and analyze the systemic interrelationships between systems of inequality, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and physical ability (Dill & Zambrana 1). Intersectional scholarship reaches beyond academic and intellectual spheres alone; that is to say the scholarship roots itself in the lived experiences of marginalized people. At the micro-level, intersectionality explains how the interconnectedness of systems of oppression create unique ranges of opportunity in individual lives; whereas at the macro-level, it exposes how structures of power are interwoven into societal

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s Note: Kimberlé Crenshaw spoke at Gonzaga University Feb. 28, 2019.

structure which then upkeep inequality. Intersectionality will help this paper analyze what happens in the texts pertaining to the intersectional identities of the congresswomen

### THE TEXTS

#### “THE COMMON SENSE SOAPBOX”

“The Common Sense Soapbox” is a Facebook page that bolsters rhetoric used by the far-right. Their post on February 7, 2019, following the State of the Union Address, points to the congresswomen in white and labels them “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” The post criticizes the congresswomen on their behavior during the State of the Union Address, primarily focusing on their ‘lack of respect’ for President Trump, as well as the Democratic party’s standard pro-choice stance. The post concludes with the statement “I care about women’s rights. After all, I am a woman; however, you in no way, shape, or form represent me and you most certainly do not speak for me.”

#### HEATHER GENRY ELLISON

Ellison’s post comes from her own personal Facebook page. The central theme of her post is how the congresswomen’s behavior “DOES NOT” make [them ladies], and focuses her argument on the matter of respecting leaders, as well as these nuanced groups: veterans, astronauts, and families who have lost loved ones. Her conclusion states that she is “truly embarrassed tonight by women... these women have gotten to this place in history only to be remembered for their protests and their wardrobes. They won’t be remembered for what they could have worked for and toward... a better country for us all.”

#### THE NATIONAL REVIEW

*The National Review’s* commentary is centered around the pro-life/pro-choice divide between parties. While at first the piece appears to be simply a pro-life blog post, a story about a woman’s life being changed on the doorsteps of Planned Parenthood, it quickly turns to political commentary. Lopez cites Pope John

Paul II's affirmation of women in the workplace, which states that women, "make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling," and moves on to her call for the congresswomen to stop contributing to our "miserable politics" and; "become trailblazers of a better politics," "lead a revolution of love," "reflect some of the moral convictions, too, of the suffragettes they sought to honor."

### DEFINITION OF WOMANHOOD

These texts call the definition of womanness directly into question. They cling to a limited idea of sex equality, as they critique women for their lack of "ladyness" and "grace." The "Common Sense Soapbox" states explicitly that the women in white "don't show grace or humility. [They are] women who refuse to show an ounce of respect toward the leader of the very country that they not only live in, but help to represent". Butler, in accordance with the Catholic Church's teaching of complementarity, would agree that grace defines the way in which women embody humanity. However, in Johnson's essay "Imaging God Embodying Christ: Women as a Sign of the Times," she discusses the nature of "papal feminism" which falls into alignment with complementarity. She says this frame of thinking idealizes women, creating discourses which result in ideologies of women being "too good" to engage in the public sphere. These discourses then result in a set of expected behaviors from women engaging in the public sphere and produce harsh critiques of the women in white when they do not perform according to this set of behaviors.

Additionally, in Ellison's Facebook post, she leads with, "sitting, laughing at the president, and refusing to give honor, respect and applause where it is deserved DOES NOT make you a lady... it makes you, or should make you, embarrassed". This discourse suggests that the women in white should be embarrassed of how they present themselves, as women, in relation to the male president. Without acknowledging the gender of President Trump as a man, these posts reinforce the ideologies around women shaped by the theory of complementarity— that

men are inherent "leaders" and women need to respect them. Johnson argues that complementarity theory is the result of the historical construction of gender and functions in a manner that harms women. Such harm can be seen through the use of this ideology to excuse the president's behavior—someone with 17+ accusations of sexual assault against him (Keneally)—and scrutinize the women in white. They are the ones being disrespectful, they should be embarrassed for not sitting silently, nor looking pleasant as the President uses the success of marginalized people to bolster his own ego.

The "Common Sense Soapbox's" Facebook post refers to the congresswomen as "wolves in sheep's clothing," while boasting a photo of the smiling congresswomen. This analogy implies that the Congresswomen do not have pure intentions— they wore white to mask their true motive, which, according to "Common Sense Soapbox," is killing newborns. As aforementioned, the congresswomen wore white to pay tribute to the suffragettes, who chose to wear white to demonstrate their purity. *The National Review* replicates the sentiment of the "Common Sense Soapbox"—Kathryn Jean Lopez writes about how the women in white need "a little John Paul II," the former Pope who affirmed the Catholic church's teaching of complementarity and who firmly upheld the Catholic Church's strong pro-life stance. The texts not only call into question the color of the women's clothing as associated with the century-old women's suffrage movement, but they make a contrast between the color they wear and their morality. The color white, especially in the Christian faith, is representative of grace, which the texts' authors make clear is a trait they believe the women in white lack. Lopez uses language such as "tender politics," and a "revolution of love," to describe how she believes these women should be leading. She says they "could contribute to our miserable politics," referring to the 2019 abortion laws passed in both Virginia and New York, or "become trailblazers of a better politics." The notion that these Congresswomen are intent on "killing newborns" is a far-fetched attempt to batter their support for women's access to reproductive healthcare. Here, the ideology of complementarity manifests

itself, as it teaches that motherhood is the defining characteristic of being a woman. In this frame of thought, a pro-choice stance is viewed as a betrayal of one's own human nature, in this case, motherhood.

Furthermore, these reactions cannot be taken into consideration without noting the intersectional identities of the women in question. As previously mentioned, Congress is more diverse than ever before; however, this does not signal an end to the patriarchal and racist structures of this nation. In her essay defending complementarity, Butler cites Rosemary Radford Ruether, who states that "any affirmation of difference means opposition and hierarchical relations of power and value" (Butler 36). Butler also draws from Johnson's position in her rebuttal:

The anthropology she recommends features "one human nature celebrated in an interdependence of multiple differences." In other words, she would include— along with sex— race, social condition, nationality, age, state of health, sexual preference, and cultural location as important differentiating factors ('anthropological constants') that shape a person's particular humanity and opportunity. According to her (Johnson) theory, sexual difference, while important, has no real primacy in defining a person's identity. (Butler 37)

This statement from Butler suggests that a person's biological sex must be their most prominent identity marker, giving little attention to the way all social identities intersect to create an individual's life-experiences. The Facebook posts become more alarming when accounting for the intersectional identities of the women in white. Not only do they shame and mock the congresswomen for their refusal to ascribe to hegemonic gender roles, but also enforce respectability politics by penalizing women of color for not acting in accordance with "professional" expectations.

The texts only acknowledge the gender of the congresswomen—the authors are upset because the

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“The  
congresswomen  
are unashamed  
of their cultural  
identities...”

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congresswomen are not behaving as women ought to behave. However, by isolating their reaction as one shaped by gender alone, the authors and many readers fail to acknowledge implicit biases present in their reaction. These reactions cannot be analyzed solely on the basis of gender, because these congresswomen, following intersectionality theory, experience oppression at the intersection of their identities. While the texts lead readers to believe their behavior is only an issue of gender, one must take into account the ways in which the congresswomen's intersectional identities shaped the authors' negative reactions. Madlock Gatison writes about Michelle Obama becoming First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) through the lens of the theory of respectability politics. She defines respectability as "culturally defined rules for Black women and other, marginalized people to follow in order to earn respect in White Eurocentric patriarchal/mainstream culture" (Gatison 102). The congresswomen are practicing what Patricia Hill-Collins calls "self-definition." She writes that, "the struggle of living two lives, one for 'them and one for ourselves' creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definitions within a context where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated" (Hill-Collins 99-100). Many of the women in white acted within this tension, "[replacing] controlling images with self-defined knowledge deemed personally important" (Hill-Collins 100). The congresswomen are unashamed of their cultural identities—they don hoop-earrings, red lipstick, and hijabs proudly, without even the slightest attempt of conforming to white standards of congressional appearances. This is the power of self-definition—women of color saying no to images and ideologies that function to control them, such as respectability politics. Contrary to what the politics of respectability would suggest—that these adornments communicate a lack of intelligence, economic privilege, and respectability—the congresswomen are proud to

embrace their cultural identities while at the same time embracing their identities as congresswomen. Their actions of self-definition are counter-hegemonic and, therefore, replace the controlling images of respectability politics. It becomes clear in the Facebook posts that these congresswomen broke the unstated rules in order for marginalized people to earn respect from, and therefore be considered ‘ladylike’ by, their white, male (and female) counterparts.

Moreover, I want to call to question the role of the women in the wolf/sheep metaphor. The “Common Sense Soapbox” asserts that the congresswomen are “wolves in sheep’s clothing”: Wolves are known for killing sheep— sheep are innocent animals, being preyed on by wolves. These women are seen as “wolves” because they are not embodying the “tender,” “humble,” and “respectful” nature of women. The metaphor leads to the conclusion that women should be more like sheep, and leave being wolf-like to men. This line of thought implies that it is acceptable for men to be ‘natural’ wolves, aggressive and preying on innocent sheep, and this leaves women striving to be ‘sheep-like.’ “Common Sense Soapbox” employs rhetoric that reinforces ideologies which suggest that women need to follow the rules and remain in passive roles in order to be respected in a patriarchal society. If women step outside the bounds set for them by normative cultural expectations, they become wolves, which pose a danger to the innocence of culture.

I also want to call into question the texts’ silence on the topic of men’s expected behavior. These texts focus exclusively on women’s behavior, which leaves the traits and behaviors of their male counterparts unaddressed. There is no call for President Trump to practice “tender politics” or to bring forth a “revolution of love,” after he openly called Congresswoman Ilhan Omar a terrorist. These posts put zero attention on male behavior at the State of the Union—the key to understanding the text is that there would not have been a negative reaction to the cheering had it not been a group of Democratic women who already chose to make a statement by wearing white. Men are not held to the same standard of pleasantry or compassion as women. The behavior of

congressmen is not policed in the same way as congresswomen. Furthermore, respectability politics demonstrate how behavioral expectations do not only differ on the basis of sex, but race as well. People of color have an additional set of expectations prescribed to them on the basis of their racial identity. The texts exclusively police the behavior of marginalized peoples, enforcing respectability politics and therefore failing to call attention to harmful behaviors present in non-marginalized Congress members.

Looking at the Facebook posts through the lenses of both intersectionality theory and respectability politics, the congresswomen are being publicly ridiculed not only for acting outside of the norms of gender, but also for defying the bounds of respectability. As seen through rhetoric of “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” these conservative authors believe that in stepping outside of gender and racial norms of respectability, women become a danger to society. These texts reveal the central flaw in complementarity theory—it results in discourse that ultimately harms women, especially women of color. This rhetoric gives strength to patriarchal systems of domination that serve to keep women in boxes—leaving power in the hands of men who need not be tender in their politics. The idealization of women that Johnson warns about is evident in each text’s attempt to draw attention to the “lack of ladyness” shown by the congresswomen in white. In the framework of complementarity theory, Johnson argues there is no true women’s liberation. Christian women only become liberated when they are able to leave the gender binary that dictates social norms. When applying Johnson’s thinking to the texts, the authors’ desire to cling to the notion of “papal feminism” is highlighted: men and women are equal, but they still must follow the behavioral norms set forth by millennium-old Church teachings. While claiming to be for “women’s rights” in these texts, authors simultaneously strengthen patriarchal power in the ways they discuss the “ladyness” of the congresswomen. These women chose to wear white to honor the suffragettes, who wore white a hundred years before. They did not wear white to disrespect the president—they wore white to represent

the strength and resilience of women in this nation, despite the patriarchal structures surrounding them.

As a Christian woman, this paper was important for me to write. While I hold many positions of privilege and power (white, Christian, upper-middle class), my identity has largely shaped my worldview and served as an inspiration to seek justice. My personal beliefs differ from the authors of the texts, but I did not approach this topic strictly aiming to tear down their beliefs. I set out on my criticism with the aim of understanding the ideological frameworks that are the basis for this type of rhetoric. I would like to extend an invitation to build greater empathy for those perpetuating internalized ideologies that further the oppression of others. Seeking to understand ideologies opposing equality complicates single-story narratives and creates space for compassion and connection; it practices transformative justice. This is a concept that comes from activist group GenerationFIVE, which “recognizes that oppression is at the root of all forms of harm, abuse, and assault. As a practice it therefore aims to address and confront those oppressions on all levels and treats this concept as an integral part to accountability and healing”(“Transformative Justice”). By recognizing the internalized oppression present in those who oppose equality, we confront the ways in which oppressed people often oppress other people. Recognizing this essential humanity is crucial in the pursuit of a just world.

In sum, my personal experiences within the institutional Church and with the women I surround myself with have shaped my standpoint. Some of them practice theologies similar to my own, while others practice their faith in a much more traditional approach. I wanted to understand the rhetoric that has many times led me to feel as though I don't belong in the Church, and to perhaps lay the stepping stones for other women who may feel the same way I do. Divisive rhetoric, as I have presented, is dangerous on a macro and a micro level; the application of rhetorical analysis and transformative justice help us to bridge the gap and pursue justice. I invite you into the conversation of “tender politics.”

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## THE LINK BETWEEN THE CIA AND ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM'S INFLUENCE ON THE COLD WAR

### CREATION OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

The National Intelligence Authority was formed on January 22, 1946, by President Harry S. Truman. The creation of the National Intelligence Authority included the formation of a group called the Central Intelligence Group, later known as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Today, the CIA's mission is to "preempt threats and further US national security objectives by collecting intelligence that matters, producing objective all-source analysis, conducting effective covert action as directed by the President, and safeguarding the secrets that help keep our Nation safe." The CIA was created to capture, collect, and analyze intelligence from foreign entities. For those who founded the CIA, the agency was intended to protect America from attacks and keep the homeland safe ("The Genesis of the CIA").

In July of 1947, the National Security Act established the CIA and defined its directives. During the time of its creation, the agency received broad objectives so that it would not be limited in its efforts to protect the nation. The agency's mission included five goals. First, the CIA was created to advise the National Security Council (NSC) on matters of national security. Second, the CIA should assist in the coordination with other departments of the



government in regards to the NSC. Third, the CIA handles all foreign intelligence data, as well as its interpretation, and fourth, it transmits the “service of the common concern. Finally, the vaguest of its tasks, the CIA is to “perform all other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting national security as NSC will from time to time direct” (“The Genesis of the CIA”). The CIA utilized its missions to affect the Cold War in various ways, the most notable being the exploitation of modern art.

### COLD WAR ERA

The United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) harbored animosity towards one another before the start of the Cold War. Their concerns with the other’s culture and governing style were long outspoken. Americans feared communism and the USSR’s perceived plan for world domination. On the other hand, the Soviet Union disapproved of the United States’ approach to foreign policy and refusal to recognize the USSR as a part of the international community. After World War II, the Soviet Union focused on expanding into Eastern Europe, which elicited fear in many Americans’ hearts, leading them to believe that the Soviets were attempting to control and spread communism throughout the world. Americans shifted their relationship with the Soviets into one of “containment.” George Kennan, an American diplomat, stated that the Soviet Union was a “political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the U.S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*” (“The Long Telegram”). In 1947, President Truman agreed, saying, “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation... by outside pressures” (“The Long Telegram”). During the Cold War, the mentality that America needed to promote democracy and enlighten those under Soviet influence gained traction. The CIA used unconventional methods to counteract communism by means of culture and art, ultimately contributing to American victory in the Cold War (“Cold War History”).

### AMERICAN ART AS A “WEAPON”

To fulfill their directives during the Cold War era, the CIA added modern art to their list of “weapons” against the threat of communism. During this era, the Soviets promoted the idea that America was a cultural wasteland, making communism attractive to many Western artists and intellectuals. To combat this allure, the U.S. State Department organized and funded an international exhibit called “Advancing American Art” in 1947 to show the world that American democracy powered creativity and cultural freedom. The “Advancing American Art” tour consisted of 79 oil paintings from a wide variety of several artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe, John Mann, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, that cost a total of \$49,000 (Setiwaldi). The tour was quite successful abroad. The president of Czechoslovakia, President Edvard Benes, even spent time gazing and commenting on the wide variety of paintings. However, back in America, many congressmen and President Truman made negative comments about the art. In fact, President Truman commented on the art stating, “if that is art, then I’m a Hottentot” (Loraditch). The president used the racial term “hottentot,” referring to the non-Bantu indigenous nomads of South Africa, to highlight his disdain for the art (Loraditch). One fascinating aspect of the art exhibit was that it included some featured artists who identified as left-leaning or somewhat affiliated with communist organizations. The tour was originally organized to depict America as an environment where freedom of expression promoted artistic creativity. However, the tour backfired, leaving famous paintings up for auction at largely discounted prices, resulting in America looking incompetent. The CIA was brought in to continue the effort with efficiency and anonymity (Saunders), saving America from international embarrassment.

For years, rumors circulated that the CIA had a role in the promotion of modern art during the Cold War. Some think that the CIA’s involvement in the art world is too far-fetched to be true. However, in its early stages, the CIA consisted of Harvard and Yale graduates who collected fine art and read worldly novels (Saunders). In comparison to McCarthyism and J. Edgar

Hoover's FBI, the CIA was a wonderland for intellectuals and art enthusiasts. For years, the idea that CIA agents could have been involved with the promotion of American art as propaganda was simply a rumor. However, a former case officer for the CIA, Donald Jameson, admitted that the Agency used this new wave of art, abstract expressionism, as an opportunity. Jameson said, "it was recognized that Abstract Expressionism was the kind of art that made Socialist Realism look even more stylized and more rigid and confined than it was. And that relationship was exploited in some of the exhibitions" (Saunders). The CIA recognized the incredible opportunity in front of them: utilize the Abstract Expressionism Movement to contrast American creativity against the cold, rigid constraints of communist Soviet culture. By highlighting the differences in the art forms, the CIA could anonymously show the world that America promoted freedom, while the Soviets sought control.

#### COMINFORM VS. CCF

During this period, the Soviet Union depicted the United States as a cultural black hole to persuade foreign citizens that communism was superior to democracy. In the same year as the National Security Act (1947), the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was founded by communists from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Italy, and France. Cominform's purpose was the organization of communist party members to fight against American-led imperialism and assist in the USSR's efforts to show the world communism's mission (Siegelbaum). In 1950, the CIA created the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in response to Cominform's objectives. The Congress for Cultural Freedom had offices in 35 countries and worked to promote numerous American artistic avenues. Similar to that of the Cominform, the CCF's mission was to highlight their nation's culture of innovation and inspiration. The CIA needed to ensure that its mission would be covert and classified. This being said, the CIA employed a "long leash" operation to guarantee that the CIA and the American government would not be implicated in the promotion of Western propaganda. Jameson explains how

important it was that "there wouldn't be any question of having to clear Jackson Pollock, for example... you had to use people who considered themselves one way or another to be closer to Moscow than to Washington" (Saunders). By using unwitting, left-leaning artists to do the CIA's bidding, there could be no feasibly drawn distinction between the two.

The CCF gave the CIA the opportunity to employ the "long leash" through the 35 offices and magazine the organization sponsored. In the 1950's, the CCF subsidized multiple exhibitions of abstract expressionism, including the most famous tour, "The New American Painting" (Setiwalidi). This specific tour visited major European cities. In 1958, "The New American Painting" tour was in Paris and scheduled to tour at the Tate Gallery in London. Unfortunately, abstract expressionism is costly to move around from exhibit to exhibit. "The New American Painting" tour's funding ran dry before the tour could move to London. In light of this hindrance, Julius Fleischmann, an American millionaire and art connoisseur, personally funded the last leg of the tour from Paris to London. The term "personally" is used loosely because the funds used for the exhibit were provided by the CIA. Fleischman was the president of an organization called the Farfield Foundation, which acted as an undisclosed means for the CIA to support the art. Like many other wealthy New Yorkers, Fleischmann was in the perfect place to assist the CIA. Fleischmann already sat on the board of the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, making

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"The term 'personally' is used loosely because the funds used for the exhibit were provided by the CIA."

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his donation to "The New American Painting" natural. A former CIA operative and executive secretary of the Museum of Modern Art, Tom Braden, explained the simplicities of setting up a foundation such as the Farfield Foundation: "We would go to somebody in New York who was a well-known rich person and we would say, 'we want to set up a foundation'" (Saunders). Braden continued to speak about how the

operatives would make the millionaire pledge to secrecy, publish a letterhead with his name on it, and establish a foundation. In the instance of the Farfield Foundation and “The New American Painting,” the Tate, the public, and the artists themselves did not have the slightest idea that the tour was being funded taxpayers’ dollars (Setiwalidi).

### SOCIALIST REALISM VS. ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

In comparison to the wild freedom that abstract expressionism highlighted, socialist realism was as controlled as Stalin’s government. In fact, socialist realism *was* controlled by Stalin’s government. The Soviet Congress of 1934 defined socialist realism as art residing within these five constraints: art relevant to the workers and understandable to them; scenes of everyday life of the people; in the representational sense of realism; supportive of the aims of the State and the Party (Siegelbaum). The last constraint is what tipped the art from borderline propaganda to blatant propaganda. It was forbidden to paint anything that portrayed the Soviet Union in a negative light, thus promoting a false optimism of life under Stalin. The CIA recognized that abstract expressionism was the exact opposite of social realism. Abstract expressionism was first and foremost, American. It was born in New York City and had an American attitude about it. The art was unapologetic, loud, and demanded attention, much like America. To emphasize the difference between the two paintings styles and the cultures they emerged from, take the paintings, *Builders of Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station* by Viktor Popkov and *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* by Jackson Pollock (Pyzik). *Builders of Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station* is a classic example of socialist realism. The painting portrays all of the individuals as strong, healthy, and well-fed, which suggests that communism and Stalin can provide for the masses. While their faces are stern, a sense of relatability is present (thus fulfilling one of Stalin’s criterion for art). In addition, the use of the realistic painting style makes the imagery seem more plausible and the message understandable from all education levels and ages.

In comparison to Popkov’s painting, Jackson Pollock’s painting is wild and ambiguous. As one of the most famous abstract expressionists, Jackson Pollock’s painting is a perfect example of the art form. Jackson Pollock exemplified the complexities of the CIA’s covert connection to the movement. He was born on a sheep farm in Wyoming and treated his paintings with free-flowing expression, hence the name “abstract expressionism,” which implies emotion rather than rigid art. As the name suggests, paintings in this style are abstract forms of emotions meant to portray feelings rather than concrete concepts. On the contrary, socialist realism only features concrete concepts that the masses can understand. Pollock also developed a new technique which consisted of dripping and pouring paint onto a canvas laid on the ground. Harold Rosenberg, an American art critic, called this type of painting “action painting,” describing it as a moment when the “canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act — rather than as space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture, but an event” (“The Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History”). The differences between socialist realism and abstract expressionism exposed the dissimilarities between Soviet and American cultures, which is exactly why the CIA harnessed the art’s power.

### THE CIA’S LASTING IMPACT

Today, Jackson Pollock and abstract expressionism are well known in the art world. Abstract expressionism was one of the first truly American art movements, putting New York City on the map as a capital of creativity. Unbeknownst to the public, the Abstract Expressionism Movement, a movement created by left-leaning artists, aided in winning the Cold War. Even though the CIA was not solely responsible for winning the war, the covert assistance they provided was unparalleled. Whether or not one agrees with the use of taxpayer dollars to fund an international art show, the impact that the tours and the CCF had on American and Soviet lives is still prevalent in artistic avenues today.

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PIVOTING INTO THE 21ST  
CENTURY: A MODERN  
FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF  
*FRIENDS*

VARIATION IN  
MEDIA

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Monica, Ross, Joey, Chandler, Phoebe, and Rachel were the first friends many young Americans had. Generations grew up learning about sex, love, friendship, and relationships from the misadventures of these conventionally attractive, white, twenty-somethings. Although *Friends* was an iconic staple of American viewing through the 90's and early 2000's, it promotes many problematic stereotypes regarding gender and sexuality, propagates the importance of the male gaze, and portrays women as commodities. Many of these problematic tropes can be seen in the pilot episode, "The One Where Monica Gets a Roommate." The demeaning tropes perpetuated by this iconic program worked to shape a young generation's early ideas surrounding gender roles and sexuality.

Women only exist to be looked at. This is the central idea in Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey argues the only function of women in cinema is to be eye candy, writing, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 62). The notion that women only exist on screen to fulfill the desires of men is exemplified in the scene where Rachel enters the pilot. After lamenting about his wife leaving him, Ross exclaims that he just wants to be married again. Upon speaking his desires, Rachel walks into the coffee shop in her

wedding dress, soaking wet. As the rest of the group lays eyes on her, Chandler utters, “And I just want a million dollars” (*Friends* S.1 Ep.1 3:29). This scene is dripping in patriarchal overtones. For starters, Rachel is introduced to the audience as a response to Ross’ desires. She is immediately objectified as she enters the scene, her only function to exist for Ross’ pleasure. Furthermore, presenting Rachel as soaking wet signifies her function as well: she is vulnerable while also subtly being presented as sexually available.

In her article, “Women on the Market,” Luce Irigaray explains that women function in a capitalistic system as products, on display for male pleasure: “wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men” (Irigaray 3). Irigaray explains how, through their objectification, women are commodified. She goes further to state that women can only fulfill three roles in a patriarchal capitalist system: mother, virgin, and prostitute. As Rachel enters the scene for the first time, she is on display to Ross as the virgin. The white wedding dress she wears presents her as pure and available, perpetuating Irigaray’s belief that “she is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange” (Irigaray 2). Furthermore, Chandler’s comment as Rachel walks in perpetuates the idea that Rachel is simply a commodity. After Ross speaks into existence his wish for a bride, Chandler attempts to speak into existence his wishes for wealth. In doing so, he directly compares Rachel’s existence to money, stripping her of her human qualities. Thus, she becomes nothing more than a product on the market, her character only existing for the desire of Ross.

In a later scene of the pilot, Ross, Joey, and Chandler are drinking beers in Ross’ new apartment. As the guys are talking, Ross laments that his ex-wife, Carol, has recently left him for a woman, and he declares that he “should have known [Carol] would become a lesbian” because she drank beer from the bottle. By making Carol a “lesbian,” the writers essentially took her off the market. Lesbians do not exist in the capitalist system,

as they have no use value to men. By taking Carol out of the system, Rachel becomes the primary object of Ross’ affection. Furthermore, by giving Ross the backstory of an ex-wife, it can be assumed that he is not a virgin; virginity in men is not perceived to be pure and desirable, as it is in women. Furthermore, because Carol is depicted as a lesbian, her affair is justified, as she did not leave Ross for a man. Had Carol left Ross for a man, the insinuation would have been that she, as his property, was “stolen”, and the rightful thing would be for Ross to take her back. Yet, leaving Ross for a woman perpetuates the idea that she has disappeared out of the system altogether.

While Carol’s portrayal as a lesbian is effective in taking her off the market, it is also problematic as it works to erase the existence of bisexuality. Carol and Ross were married for several years until Carol met Susan and decided to leave Ross for her. Instead of acknowledging the idea that Carol could have been genuinely attracted to Ross and Susan, the show insinuates that she was just unaware of her sexual preference towards women, and small instances where Carol subverted classic feminine gender norms, such as drinking beer from the can, are used to exemplify this notion. The show has a long history of bi-erasure, as noted in the lyrics of a song Phoebe sings later on in the series: “Sometimes men love women, sometimes men love men, and then there are bisexuals, though some say they’re just kidding themselves...” (*Friends* S.2 Ep.12 21:58). For the gendered market system to work, the show cannot acknowledge the existence of bisexuality. If a woman can have the ability to choose when she wants to be on the market, then she has the ability to take a portion of the power of consumerism away from the male.

In the same scene where Ross laments the failure of his marriage, Joey attempts to offer him some sage advice. Joey tells Ross that being single again is the best thing that could ever happen to him. In explaining his logic behind this notion, Joey compares women to ice cream, and tells Ross to “grab a spoon” (*Friends* S.1 Ep.1 11:48). Irigaray explains that the specificity of women does not matter to the consumer. On the contrary, women are reduced to the qualities of their sameness as “each

one looks exactly like every other. They all have the same phantom-like reality... in their role as crystals of that common substance, they are deemed to have value” (Irigaray 4). In Joey’s metaphor, women are reduced to ice cream, a treat to be consumed and enjoyed. He notes that women can come in different flavors, but it is not the difference in flavors that makes them worth anything. The excitement in the ice cream is in the male’s ability to sample all of it. Human traits are ignored as women are commodified, reduced to dessert. At the end of the episode, Ross asks Rachel out. After she leaves the room and Monica walks in, she asks Ross why he is smiling. He responds, “I just grabbed a spoon” (*Friends* S.1 Ep.1 22:00), alluding back to Joey’s sexist metaphor. While the series sets Ross and Rachel up as the ideal couple, it is important to note that Ross’ initial interest in Rachel was not due to any special qualities of hers, but simply by the fact that she was a woman available on the market, a pint of ice cream marked down for sale.

Not only does Joey’s metaphor exemplify the ways in which women are used on the market, but Joey himself showcases Irigaray’s theory of the homo-social. That is, Joey does not sleep with women because he cherishes them. He sleeps with them so that he can brag to his male friends about his sexual exploits. While Joey is known for this type of promiscuity, all the male characters in *Friends* display the same behavior. In the series finale, “The Last One: Parts 1 & 2,” Ross brags to his male friends about sleeping with Rachel, mere hours after the event took place, saying, “I’m not one to kiss and tell, but I’m also not one to have sex and shut up, we totally did it” (*Friends* S.10 Ep.17 5:09). Even though Ross and Rachel have a long and serious history, Ross is still quick to brag about sleeping with her to his friends. Despite being the mother of one of his children, Ross still sees Rachel as a commodity to

“...she was a woman available on the market, a pint of ice cream marked down for sale.”

possess. Furthermore, he devalues Rachel as a human being when he brags to their friends about sleeping with her, sharing private information about an intimate and vulnerable moment in her life without her giving him permission to do so. Ross embodies the homosocial triangle, as he cares more about the clout sleeping with Rachel will earn him than how Rachel might feel about sleeping with him. The real connection the male friends seek in sleeping with women is not in the relations they have with the women, but in the relationship they share with each other.

While there are both male and female lead characters on *Friends*, nobody is safe from the patriarchy. In the pilot episode, Monica goes on a date with “Paul the Wine Guy.” It is clear that Monica is interested in Paul, as she is very excited for their date. While at dinner, Paul discloses a personal story to Monica in which it is revealed he has been unable to “perform” in bed since his separation from his wife. Monica falls for his line, and the two have sex. Later, at work, Monica learns from a coworker that Paul was lying to her and he uses this pick up line to frequently get women into bed with him. Upon learning this, Monica feels used and is very distraught. Paul, it seems, is no better than Ross, Joey, and Chandler. The only thing the male characters care about when it comes to women is how they can get them to bed. When Monica shares her troubles with her friends, Joey laughs at her. “I can’t believe you didn’t know it was a line” (*Friends* S.1 Ep.1 17:26) he tells her. Joey’s insensitivity towards Monica’s painful experience shows how deep the commodification of women goes. Despite being friends for a long time, Joey is still unable to sympathize with Monica. He belittles her feelings, unable to see her as a human being.

For multiple generations of people, *Friends* has been a beloved television series. Through the misadventures of these twenty-something adults, young people around the world learned expectations for dating. Women were subtly taught that their concerns do not matter. They are commodities to be consumed by men. *Friends* teaches men that manipulating women is the best way to gain respect in an homo-social environment. Gender stereotypes run rampant in the program, where ongoing jokes

are made, accusing one of the main characters of being gay whenever they break their gender role. Furthermore, the use of LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> characters is only for the purpose of making jokes, or providing one of the main characters with a comical backstory of a failed marriage, without his ex-wife being available to him. The show overtly stereotypes and erases queer identities. Finally, it perpetuates the idea that women are commodities, only here to be used by men. Even the main female characters fall prey to commodification by powerful men throughout the series. The issues presented in the pilot episode are repeated throughout the entire series, as the women continue to be commodified, and the men are never critiqued for the ways in which they consume. Today, multiple generations of young adults have grown up watching this beloved program, yet the problematic elements of it have subtly worked to shape the way we view ourselves and others in a patriarchal dominated society.

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<sup>1</sup>Author's note: I purposely excluded the "B" in LGBTQ+ because in the ten seasons of *Friends* there is never any mention of bisexuality aside from Phoebe's song wherein she says they are "just kidding themselves." The show portrayed Lesbians (Carol and Susan), a Gay ice dancer (Phoebe's ex-husband who she tries to turn straight S.2 Ep.4), and Chandler's father is a Trans Woman, but her chosen pronouns are never used, and she is continually mocked by the main characters.



## TOLERATING HATRED: THE KKK IN SPOKANE

## ABSENCE OF VARIATION

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For many contemporary scholars, the term “Pacific Northwest Nativism” would evoke imagery of Native Americans. The diligent work of activists led to a modern society of young people who are not so quick to associate hatred and white supremacy with this region of the United States. Yet, less than one hundred years ago, the Ku Klux Klan, one of the nation’s most prominent hate groups, was not only very active in the Pacific Northwest, but also tolerated. Documents from local news sources indicate the level of acceptance residents of the region held for such egregious organizations, as well as efforts made by opposing locals to drive out hate from the region. The Klan has historically stood in the center of a debate between the contradictions of liberty as free speech and liberty as the freedom of safety. Through these documents, the history of this ongoing debate is examined.

In celebration of the eighth anniversary of the “New Klan” in 1925, the Ku Klux Klan decided to burn crosses throughout Spokane and the greater Spokane area. An event that would be deemed a “hate crime” by the media today was reported on rather jovially by *The Spokesman Review*. One reporter described the event by writing, “Each [cross] was made of lumber, then wrapped with burlap soaked in oil and sprinkled with gasoline to make the burning the more brilliant” (“Klan Observes Birthday”). The rhetoric this writer used to report on such an event is astounding. The horrific event was described as “brilliant,” leading readers to receive a positive connotation with the burning of crosses. The assumed readers of *The Spokesman*

*Review* in the 1920's would have been predominantly white, male citizens. This acceptance of hate in the region can be directly linked to the lack of diversity that existed (and still exists) in Spokane. Another article advertising the event in Spokane mentioned nothing of the damage and hate associated with the group. Instead, the reporter only mentions how one who is interested in attending might participate or witness the event, "Great crosses will flame at different parts of the city, within view of all the main highways. Practically every district will have a view of a fiery cross" ("Fiery Crosses Blaze"). Again, the event is described using positive diction, as the reporter calls the cross burning, "great."

Furthermore, none of the reports available on this event discussed the actions of the Klan as despicable or hateful. On the contrary, the event was described as blasé as a picnic in the park! This normalization of the press indicates what the environment around hate crimes and white supremacy was like in Spokane in the 1920's. Unlike views shared nearly nationwide today, 95 years ago, citizens of the Spokane area saw little to no harm in the actions of the Klan. This narrative of the Klan as acceptable is especially shocking when looking at these articles with a modern lens. Today, the press is not nearly as accepting of

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“...none of the reports available on this event discussed the actions of the Klan as despicable or hateful.”

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hate groups that are blatantly racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic. The modern take on these articles speak to the modern demographics of America and the exposure one has to diversity. In the 1920's, citizenship was limited for people of color, and opportunities for non-white Americans to make it to the Pacific Northwest were rare. The demographics of the area were astoundingly white. This does not justify the ways in which the Klan was normalized in the region, but it does partially explain why there was not

more outrage at the event.

The use of positive descriptions when writing about the Ku Klux Klan in Spokane is sickening. Spokane is an area that, like many suburban cities in the Pacific Northwest, has a dark history of mistreating its few non-white residents. The town's origins stem from the displacement of the people of the Spokane Tribe. Many historic districts of the town, such as the South Hill, have excluded African American residents from dwelling there. While one might wish to look back at the history of our town and say that we were not as bad as other parts of the country when it came to the toleration of racial injustice, the newspaper prints do not lie. Spokane was highly tolerant of evil and hateful acts, not only permitting the Klan's cross burnings on the grounds of free speech, but in encouraging others to attend the celebration, and reporting on it as if it were a regular community event.

Despite the disappointments many historians of the Pacific Northwest should feel in regards to Spokane's treatment of the Klan in the 1920's, other areas of the Pacific Northwest were able to see the Klan more accurately for what it was. In an excerpt from *The Confessions of An Imperial Klansman*, author Lem A. Dever acknowledges the atrocities committed by the Klan. Dever calls Oregon to action, writing, "Oregon should set the example for the Nation in dealing with this hideous evil. We need only to give active loyalty to the fundamental principles of justice and liberty" (Dever). The diction used here is much more critical of the Klan than anything written by *The Spokesman Review*. The description of the Klan as "hideous evil" paints a clear image to the reader of what the hate group really is. Furthermore, the excerpt calls attention to the importance of justice and liberty, contrasting these values with those of the Klan. This leaves the reader with the understanding that the Klan is not an organization to be celebrated. Furthermore, Dever calls on Oregonians to shun the Klan, "Proclaim to the world that Oregon will no longer endure the masked activities of an invisible government; that our people, loving liberty and justice for all people alike, has suppressed the evil which has caused so much trouble throughout the country" (Dever). This document calls out

the Klan as limiting liberty to Americans by working to promote hate. Dever also uses the word “evil” when describing the actions of the hate group, driving home the point that the Klan is not a valued member of the community, a direct contrast to what was connotated by the journalists in Spokane. It is important to note that Dever is addressing Oregon, which, like Spokane, is not historically renowned for its diversity. Dever’s presumed audience inhabits the same demographics of *The Spokesman Review*, yet he is speaking to them with an entirely different message. Dever’s ability to recognize the evil of the Klan goes to show that hatred can be recognized even in areas where diversity is not entirely prevalent, and that the diction of *The Spokesman Review* was harmful and cannot be justified by the ignorance and lack of diversity of the time.

While the Pacific Northwest has come a long way in nearly 95 years since many of these articles were published, some of the sentiments surrounding the Klan seem to remain. The merits of free speech were used to justify Klan activity in North Idaho for years. The plain language used in *The Spokesman Review* articles to describe Ku Klux Klan activity highlights the sentiments held by many in the region who had the privilege to tolerate hate spewed by the Klan. This toleration led the Klan to take up residency in areas of Eastern Washington and North Idaho, acting hatefully under the guise of free speech. Yet, the excerpt from *The Confessions of An Imperial Klansman* shows that not all parts of the Pacific Northwest are complacent when it comes to evil. The expert calls the Klan out for disrupting the liberties of all Americans, and makes a plea to Oregonians to flush the evil out of the region. Due to the sentiments and efforts of many progressive activists located in more diverse and populated pockets of the Pacific Northwest, ideals of nativism have evolved. The hateful eye of the Ku Klux Klan remains in the region, but it has been reduced in numbers and forced to hide away in the more conservative and rural pockets of the area. As we look to move forward, towards a more peaceful tomorrow, it is important that we do not forget that hatred remains hidden in pockets of our country, and pockets of our pasts. Spokane has a dark history

of toleration when it comes to the Klan, and if we are to move forward to a more progressive day, we must come to terms with this history, what it means for our region, and assess how we can do better in the future.

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## AUTHORS

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### LINDSEY ANDERSON

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Lindsey Anderson is a junior majoring in Political Science and English with a concentration in writing. She is minoring in History and Women's & Gender Studies.

### KAYLEE BOSSE

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Kaylee Bosse is a senior English Writing and Dance Pedagogy double major in the Honors Program from San Diego, California. She loves writing on her blog Big World Tiny Dancer each week (check it out at [bigworldtinydancer.com](http://bigworldtinydancer.com) or @bigworldtinydancer on Instagram) while eating dark chocolate and sipping tea.

### MEGAN O'HERRON

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Megan is a senior studying Journalism, Public Relations and Philosophy. In these disciplines and as the Editor-in-Chief of the 2020 *Spires* yearbook, she has enjoyed exploring the various ways to tell stories, through words, images, art and everything in between.

### ZOE JASPERS

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Zoe Jaspers [they/them] is a senior studying History and Religious Studies, where their primary focus is on topics of queer theology and queer religious history. They can often be found knitting in class, engaging in shenanigans of the highest caliber, and drinking perhaps a bit too much coffee.

## FISHER NG

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Fisher Ng is a sophomore Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mathematics student. His greatest aspiration is to find avenues of serving and empowering others to engage in community-building activities. Last summer, he lived in D.C. to learn how Bahá'í communities different from his native city of Portland are endeavoring to build unity by bringing together people of all races, classes, nationalities, and ages to build vibrant neighborhoods. The vision of a world free of animosity and estrangement in action deeply moved him, and it inspired him to engage in social discourse through writing. In his free time in Spokane, he supports a neighborhood children's class teaching children moral principles, facilitates a youth night space discussing how youth can embark on a life of service, and animates a Junior Youth Group that empowers middle schoolers to think about the forces of society shaping their lives and to overcome the negative forces through constructive acts of service. He also enjoys reading, hiking, scuba diving, writing, and having thoughtful conversations.

### SARAH KERSEY

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Sarah Kersey is an English major with a writing concentration, minoring in Women's & Gender Studies. She dreams of becoming a great chef, despite being a rat in a definitely rodent-phobic profession. She moved to Paris to follow her dream, and with the help of hapless garbage boy Linguini, she put her culinary skills to the test in the kitchen, but she had to stay in hiding at the same time, with hilarious consequences. Her life story gets a well-deserved 96% on *Rotten Tomatoes*, proving it to be superior to *Stuart Little's*.

### BEN MCHORSE

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Benjamin McHorse is a freshman at Gonzaga University studying Business Administration.

## GEORGIA VEVERKA

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Georgia Veverka is a senior English major and Pre-Med student. She spent the summer of 2019 researching Narrative Medicine and clinical applications of the humanities through the Morris Fellowship.

## SOPHIE HUNTER

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Sophie Hunter is a senior double majoring in Political Science and Economics. Her dream is to bridge her knowledge of politics and economics with the emerging technology industry. She plans to take her educational and professional experience on to graduate school to study policy, which in turn, she hopes to challenge and defend the ethics of emerging technologies.

## CAITLIN RELVAS

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Majoring in English and minoring in Dance, Caitlin Relvas is a first year student at Gonzaga from Southern California. She has previously been published in her high school's newspaper, *The Eagle Eye*, and the Orange County Cappies Facebook Page for high school theater reviews.

## VIRGINIA MONROE

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Virginia "Ginger" Monroe is a junior studying Communications Studies and Spanish, with minors in Solidarity and Social Justice; and Women's & Gender Studies. Ginger is passionate about advocating for others and sharing love with the world through words. She writes for the *Bulletin*, *Spires*, and her own blog, [justginge.com](http://justginge.com).

# CHARTER

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Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship and Opinion

Thank you to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni who supported the *Charter* staff in this year's endeavor to discuss the meaning of Variation. We express our gratitude and appreciation.

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