



Charter

Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship and Opinion

Volume 56 2018-2019

Charter 2019

Gonzaga University's
Journal of Scholarship and Opinion

Volume 56
2018-19

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Charter submissions are evaluated and selected anonymously.

Charter staff would like to thank everyone who participated by submitting to the journal. Joanne Shiosaki, Kayla Cartelli, Elise Kuterbach, Sabrina Villanueva Avalos, and Laurie Arnold deserve our praise for facilitating an instructive and positive experience.

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Letter From The Editor

Dear reader,

When my team and I set out to create *Charter* six months ago, we kicked around several nebulous ideas of what to choose for this edition's theme. However, nothing really spoke to us the way previous themes had spoken to other *Charter* staffs. After a long time of this, I took a leap of faith and decided to open *Charter* to any and all submissions from the Gonzaga community. My hope was that this decision would allow authors to write on what truly interested them, to eradicate boundaries of theme, and to encourage submitters to take a deep dive into topics they may have previously visited.

The submissions we received far exceeded my hopes. They were engaging, informative, and incredibly expansive in their range of topics. Everything from sin, to the March for Our Lives, to horror movies was covered. Even more surprising, once we had chosen the pieces we wanted to publish, they fit neatly into some of the themes that we had considered for *Charter* early in the year. This allowed my staff and I to arrange the pieces by said themes, arranging the pieces into sections in the grander, open scheme of our journal. What you'll find here are these pieces arranged into the themes, Technology, Global Perspectives, Gender and Sexuality, and Political Outlooks to techno.

Overseeing this publication has been a labor of love. It has pushed me to question my ideas of what it means to be a scholar, a writer, and a Zag. Most of all, it has taught me the importance of challenging our own ideas, and being open to the thoughts of those around us.

My hope is that the 2019 edition of *Charter* serves as a capsule of the scholarly thoughts happening around our campus this year. I truly believe that this publication demonstrates how interesting the campus around us is. I

hope that you enjoy reading our publication as much as my team and I enjoyed making it.

Thank you for picking up our journal.



Maddy Walters
Editor-in-Chief

Technology

Technology and Sin

My first response to the word “technology” is to imagine some type of mechanical or electrical device like an automobile or a laptop. This is, of course, far too restrictive. Technologies vary enormously and over the last several years I find myself thinking about how I interact with technology and the consequences of those interactions.

The types of concerns I am now having can easily be seen in the case of money. Money is a technology. As detailed in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* by David Graeber¹, money has a long and complicated history. Personally, I like money. Having discretionary funds allows me to do things and have security I would not have otherwise. However, I think there are some obvious dangers. It is very easy to stop seeing money as a tool and start to see it as an end. I don’t want to earn money just for money’s sake. It would be wrong to neglect my relationships with family just so that I can work more and grow my bank account. These are problems and concerns that everyone is aware of. I think that this common example of how a technology can be a tool or a master can be seen in other, more complex, examples.

In *Present Shock*², Douglas Rushkoff discusses what he sees as a real danger of clocks and calendars. Clocks and calendars are very useful creations that have become a necessity in the modern world. Imagine trying to hold a college course without clocks or calendars. Though students might be happy about an ambiguous time for homework to be due, it would be extremely difficult to arrange a series of lectures for thirty students. I suppose it could be done, but it would most certainly be far less efficient. I like clocks and calendars, they allow me to do my work as a teacher efficiently. There are, as Rushkoff points out, dangers. Like money, clocks and calendars can be

¹ David Graeber. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011.

² Douglas Rushkoff. *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*. New York: Penguin Press, 2013.

useful tools or self-imposed masters. Though I’ve been guilty of chasing money in the past, I think I am more often guilty of being a slave to clocks and calendars. Instead of using these to help me organize things, I end up breaking my life up into little segments. These little segments then fill with tasks, which become To-Do lists that I feel obliged to complete. This is okay for work. Like my courses, organizing the tasks of my job can make it more efficient and make sure that things get done by deadlines. However, I often see this creeping into the rest of my life. Why have a schedule at all when I am not at work? I may have to note obligations like dental appointments, but my experience is that most people schedule their leisure and family time. When I do this, I don’t think it is good for me. I think it’s wrong to see, in any way, my time with family and friends as a task to be completed, or as something I want done efficiently. My best times with the people I care about are those where we are just with each other, talking about whatever comes up, and not noting the time.

The fact is, though, that most of my days are ruled by the clock. On a typical day I find myself, waking to an alarm, noting the time as I get ready, calculating by the dashboard clock when I’ll be getting to work, following the timed schedule at work, wondering if I’ll have time to prepare a lecture, and glancing at the computer clock as I type an article for Charter. I do not want it to be true, but I think that for many of my days I am a slave to the clock.

In both the case of money and clocks, I know how to properly use these as tools. I would never advocate for the elimination of money or clocks. The usefulness of these tools is unquestionable. What I need to do is challenge myself as to whether I am using them as a tool or following them as a slave.

For some technologies, however, I question whether their usefulness outweighs their dangers. Two examples of this are, for me, email and smartphones. Email is a useful tool and, like the clock, it greatly increases the efficiency of my work. In communicating with students, planning for meetings, or forwarding information, I strongly prefer email to communicating by paper or even phone. However, I think there are large costs that go with this. Unlike a note I would receive by post, emails put a demand on my response. I have often noted that if I don’t respond to an email within a day or two, the sender assumes that I am not going to respond, for

whatever reason. Why does this expectation exist? My mother and I exchange letters. When I write her, I spend the time to compose a one or two page letter, I seal it in an envelope, address and stamp it, and put it in the mailbox. There is no expectation about when and if I'll get a return letter. I don't even know when she'll receive it, much less when she'll read it. However, when I get an email, from any individual, I feel the need to give a quick response. Why have I given this emailer so much power? Again, emails are efficient and I am not arguing that they be eliminated, but I think, for me, there are many unconsidered consequences.

My issue with emails goes further. Considering the letters my mother and I exchange, I clearly see a loss of intimacy with emails. Going to the mailbox to find a letter from my mom is a pleasure. Discovering it, opening it, looking at, and reading her handwriting, has an intimacy that just does not exist in emails. I often see this estrangement that emails can bring at work. A few years ago, I began working with a person on campus on a long term project. The fact is that we could have completed all of the work through an exchange of emails with attachments. But, I deliberately decided not to do that. I asked to have face-to-face meetings every few months. I now know this person. In the tangential conversations that seem inevitable in face-to-face meetings, I learned a lot about them, and I believe that we have now started a friendship. Yes, the email-only exchange would have been more efficient. Sending emails back and forth with my mother would also be arguably more efficient. However, I don't want my relationships with friends and family to be efficient. To seek efficiency in a personal relationship would imply that there is a way to be with friends and family that is a waste of time. I disagree. An afternoon spent on the back porch with my wife and kids in which we "do nothing" is not a waste of time. It also can in no way be efficient. We have no tasks to complete, no agenda, and no deadlines.

I'm not sure that I have pet peeves, but smartphone use is probably a strong candidate. I find it difficult not to become irritated when someone I am in a conversation with stops to glance at their smartphone. Worse is when they start manipulating it while they are still pretending to be part of the conversation. My egomania is not the issue here. When I am talking to someone, I want to be fully in that conversation. I am not happy with myself when I want to

listen to the other person, but instead find my mind wandering or thinking about what I am going to say next, rather than focusing on what they are saying at the moment. Given that, why would I allow a device to interrupt my conversations? Even if it does not vibrate during a conversation, I think the smartphone is still a distraction. I believe that smartphone carriers are perpetually waiting for the phone to buzz. In every conversation and activity, some part of their brain is alert to the signal from somewhere else. I don't carry a smartphone because I want to be as fully engaged as possible in what I am doing. If I was waiting for a smartphone to buzz in my pocket, I would not be the attentive person I want to be.

I think emails and smartphones are bad for me. I appreciate the efficiencies they bring to life but I think the cost is too great. To the point, I think that they lead me to sin. C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*³ has led me to a simple definition of sin. Anything I do that separates me from another person is a sin. Emails and smartphones lead to my separation from the other. The loss of intimacy brought on by emails and the perpetual distraction of smartphones can easily lead me to not paying attention to people. Why would I do that?

In various discussions about this, I have heard two popular defenses of emails and smartphones. First, what if someone needs to contact me? Though I appreciate these as emergency tools, that is not what is typically occurring in the "needed" communication. I am a physics professor, not an on-call heart surgeon. People do not need to communicate with me right now. Secondly, I have heard it argued that these tools actually increase communication. I agree that these devices have put me into contact with more people more often. However, these are cold interactions that just do not have the intimacy of face-to-face conversations. Personally, I'd rather have fewer, though closer, relationships. (After my son got a Facebook account in his early teens, he almost immediately had over 100 "friends." Do we really want to count these as relationships?)

But I need to be careful. Maybe I'm just blaming technology for my own weaknesses. Arguably, I might be using technology as a scapegoat for my inability to make the connections with others that I want. There are many non-technological things that interfere with my relationships. Poor communication, spatial separation, age difference, and my being a total and complete jerk, all are non-

3 C.S. Lewis *The Great Divorce*. San Francisco: Harper Publishing, 2003.

technological barriers to my relationships. Perhaps technology is just another pretense, one of the many things I use to hide my shortcomings as a father, husband, and friend. I should think about this some more.

Understanding the Filter Bubble Phenomenon: How the Internet is Making Our Ideas Less Diverse and More Extreme

There is an invisible force corralling us into a space that we so desperately should be escaping. This is a space where we are constantly surrounded by the familiar, with our ideas rarely being challenged or qualified, making us less receptive to other ideas and perspectives. But aren't we able to choose the types of places, people, and ideas we are surrounded with? Wouldn't we be aware of such a force?

No. In fact, the online sphere cultivates this environment. Naturally, we bookmark our favorite sites and follow people who post content that we enjoy. This is part of the appeal of the internet, being able to create a world that caters to our wants and needs. However, this force is pushing us towards environments that foster the familiar. It is a collection of online algorithms that create spaces where user beliefs are consistently confirmed and rarely combated, encouraging less diverse and more extreme ideologies among internet users.

Your Personalized User Experience

Your online experience can be personalized in a multitude of ways, both manually and automatically. The manual options are intuitive, like choosing who to follow and what posts to like. However, a vast amount of the personalized experience is created through software algorithms. Essentially, whenever you use a search engine or social media site, the website records and analyzes your usage. Then, this information is analyzed to generate suggested searches and advertisements tailored to your preferences.

These algorithms are the very forces that push you towards familiar ideas and beliefs. This phenomenon is known as a "filter bubble," a term coined by Eli Pariser, digital technology guru. Essentially he defines

a filter bubble as a state of intellectual isolation that can result from personalized searches when an algorithm produces them. In his 2011 Ted Talk, he explains how “engines create a unique universe of information for each of us – what I’ve come to call a filter bubble – which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information”¹. One aspect of his definition that needs to be challenged is that the user exists in a state of intellectual isolation within a filter bubble. This claim fails to account for the rise of forums like Instagram and Twitter. These sites specifically allow users to join communities of people with similar ideologies, suggesting pages to follow based on preferences and browsing patterns. Rather than being alone in a filter bubble, the user exists in a community of like minded individuals. This aspect of community is an essential qualification to be made in understanding what constitutes a modern filter bubble.

This discrepancy in Pariser’s definition is accounted for in the alternate term “echo chamber.” Echo chamber is an older term that refers to the notion that beliefs are reinforced through repetition within a closed system². This is similar to the idea of a filter bubble as both terms introduce this phenomenon that beliefs are amplified when surrounded by similar beliefs. However, the term echo chamber is in tension with Pariser’s definition because echo chambers suggest that groups are isolated from other groups whereas filter bubbles suggest that an individual is isolated from other individuals. For the sake of clarity, a filter bubble should be understood as a space where an individual exists in a community of others with similar belief systems, in a state of ideological isolation from other groups.

Damaging and Damning

We have established that ideological bubbles are isolating, but why are they so dangerous? Don’t we want our content to reflect our preferences and beliefs? Of course we do, but the danger is in the way these filter bubbles drive us toward more extreme ideologies and farther from societal harmony. The most destructive effect

1 E. Pariser. “What the Internet knows about you.” *CNN News*. Published May 22, 2011. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/05/22/pariser.filter.bubble/index.html>.

2 “What is an Echo Chamber? - Definition from Techopedia.” *Techopedia*. (n.d.) <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/23423/echo-chamber>.

that filter bubbles have is in the way they repeatedly reinforce our current beliefs³. In a paper published in 2017, Rune Karlsen and his colleagues examine the role of confirmation bias in the filter bubble phenomenon, which is the tendency to interpret evidence in a way that confirms your current beliefs. Essentially, a user is guided into an online space in which their ideas, no matter how strong or weak initially, are consistently validated. The user’s beliefs are then less likely to evolve as new perspectives are encountered.

Filter bubbles encourage extremism in another, almost counterintuitive way. It is often believed that filter bubbles reduce our exposure to diverse content, however the opposite reigns true. In a 2015 experiment, Seth Flaxman and his colleagues from Oxford University analyzed the user browsing history of 50,000 American users. One prominent discovery they made was that online algorithms are responsible for providing the user “with greater exposure to opposing perspectives”⁴. This finding is important to note as increased exposure to opposing perspectives is another side effect of filter bubbles, however it does not necessarily correlate to a user adapting a more diverse ideology. Consider a conservative internet user who often encounters advertisements related to the conservative news outlet, FOX News. They receive these advertisements because they have demonstrated an interest in the types of content FOX News publishes based on their browsing patterns. They are very likely aware of the more liberal news outlet CNN and its opposing political affiliation, and they may even read CNN articles. However, their exposure to CNN does not increase the likelihood of them aligning with the ideas it portrays. In fact, their increased exposure could be encouraging a more extreme ideology.

Karlsen’s paper explores how exposure to diverse ideas can make ideologies more extreme rather than more diverse. This concept is described as disconfirmation bias, which occurs when ideas are reinforced through contradiction⁵. Disconfirmation bias is

3 R. Karlsen, K. Steen-Johnsen, D. Wollebæk, and B. Enjolras, “Echo Chamber and Trench Warfare Dynamics in Online Debates”. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(3) (2017): 257-273. doi:10.1177/0267323117695734.

4 S. Flaxman, S. Goel, and J. M. Rao. “Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption”. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1) (2016): 298-320. doi:10.1093/poq/nfw006.

5 R. Karlsen, K. Steen-Johnsen, D. Wollebæk, and B. Enjolras, “Echo Chamber and

amplified within filter bubbles for two reasons:

1. The user is strong and stubborn in their beliefs as a result of confirmation bias; and
2. The user encounters opposing perspectives often so disconfirmation bias transpires often.

So the danger in filter bubbles exists as a result of a user's inability to grow in their beliefs. Pushed into polarizing communities through computer algorithms, users become victim to the divisive nature of filter bubbles. So much so, that encountering diversity only amplifies their original beliefs. As a result of existing within a filter bubble, a user becomes unreceptive to new ideas and unwilling to evolve, creating an even larger divide between ideological groups within the online sphere.

Bursting Your Filter Bubble

Since the potential danger associated with filter bubbles is so imminent, why do they continue to exist? The primary reason is that large corporations, like Facebook and Google, have significant motivation to record and analyze your browsing data. In 2018, data is one of the most essential commodities because it provides corporations access to tools that allow them to incur your business. If a corporation can better understand your preferences, then they are more able to advertise in a way that caters to these preferences. The value of data collection and online algorithms in the corporate sector makes the filter bubble phenomenon one that will continue to grow as technology evolves. It is no longer a matter of how to rid of the filter bubble, but rather how to be conscious of its existence.

The proposed methods of addressing the filter bubble are rather inconclusive. One issue is that the existing software that supposedly combats filter bubbles is "designed with norms required by liberal or deliberative models of democracy in mind"⁶. This essentially means that the proposed solution approaches the issue from a very specific perspective, which serves to be advantageous to only some, not all users. This software is counterproductive as a solution and should be working to reduce the ideological divide

Trench Warfare Dynamics in Online Debates". *European Journal of Communication*, 32(3) (2017): 257-273. doi:10.1177/0267323117695734.

6 E. Bozdog and J. V. Hoven, "Breaking the filter bubble: Democracy and design". *Ethics and Information Technology*, 17(4) (2015): 249-265. doi:10.1007/s10676-015-9380-y.

between groups, not enforce it. In a paper published in 2015, researchers conclude that a solution could be developed, but it is dependent upon the designer being aware of different models of democracy in order to develop a pragmatic solution⁷. This conclusion is promising, however it proves to be idealistic in that it would be nearly impossible to develop a solution that benefits users of all ideologies.

The only way to prevent yourself from becoming entrapped in a filter bubble as of right now is awareness. The University of Illinois Library website suggests a few fixes, for example, removing your search history, turning off targeted ads, or using a VPN⁸. Although these suggestions might serve as temporary fixes, they fail to remove all algorithmically generated information from appearing. Furthermore, implementing little fixes might provide the illusion that you are safe from becoming engulfed in a filter bubble. Again, the most effective solution is awareness. Pay more attention to where your news comes from and what kind of online communities you are involved in. Seek out alternate perspectives and embrace opposition in your online content; it will help you learn and grow in your own beliefs.

7 Ibid.

8 "How to Burst Your Filter Bubble!". *Library Guides*, University of Illinois. Published September 20, 2018. <http://guides.library.illinois.edu/c.php?g=348478&tp=2347795>.

Updated Privacy Policy

I know I'm being watched
It's not a paranoia or speculation
The cameras, microphones,
we are passively living in a surveillance nation

How much do we want them to know?

I know I'm being watched
my complacency¹ leads to my frustration
Check in, GPS,
Google wants to know my location

How much can we trust them to know?

I know I'm being watched
But I accepted the terms and conditions
What did I expect
I let my social media become an addiction²

How much do they already know?

1 Seounmi Youn. "Teenagers' Perceptions of Online Privacy and Coping Behaviors: A Risk-Benefit Appraisal Approach." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 49, no. 1 (March 2005): 86-110. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4901pass:[_]6.

2 Janarthanan Balakrishnan, and Mark D. Griffiths. "Social Media Addiction: What Is the Role of Content in YouTube?" *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 6, no. 3 (2017): 364-77. doi:10.1556/2006.6.2017.058.

Blue light, white lies, do they really mean it when they apologize³
For selling my data
They're selling my life
Privacy policies
More like a logical fallacy
To make me think my information is safe
But really your security is just click bait
They're selling my life
Privacy policies
More like a logical fallacy
To make me think my information is safe
But really your security is just click bait

3 Kevin Granville. "Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: What You Need to Know as Fallout Widens." *The New York Times*. March 19, 2018. Accessed November 30, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-cambridge-analytica-explained.html>.

Global Perspectives

What Accent?

I was running late. I missed every single bus that could take me on time to my friend Charis' party. But technology always presents solutions to help us during these situations, so Uber came to my mind. With the reputation of getting a ride faster and cheaper than a regular cab, I thought I don't have a lot to lose (financially at least) if I give it a try. I waited not very patiently for 5 minutes, and my ride was there. I get in and start to wrestle with the gigantic bag I am carrying. Few seconds in and I felt as if I am on what seemed to be an interview of some sort. I answered all the basic information questions, accompanied by recurring background noises coming from my paper bag. I finally settled down, and took a deep breath as my bag's sound subsided. A long pause of quietness passed by, and I thought it is going to last...until the driver suddenly asked: "I can hear an accent, where are you from?"

I started thinking, what is an Accent to an English Native Speaker? After all, I was speaking English to the Uber driver, why did he call my way of speaking the language an 'Accent'? It could be simply defined as speaking English in a non-familiar way to a native speaker. Not mispronouncing the words but just pronouncing them in a slightly different way than they are used to hear? Basically our 'Phonetics': the branch of linguistic that studies speech sounds (Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, n.d.) were different. But if nothing from this past definition makes sense to others, then the history behind it would. Pilus in her journal study Exploring ESL Learners' Attitudes Towards English Accents, discussed how the global spread of English resulted in having many varieties of how English is spoken¹. When someone hears a different variety than what they are used to, they consider it foreign to their own, and describe it as an accent. In a more detailed and

1 Z Pilus. "Exploring esl learner's attitude towards English accents". *World Applied Sciences Journal* 21. 143-152. DOI 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2013.21.s1t1.2148

organized description, English is categorized into three: native language (those who speak English as a mother tongue), second language (those who speak English from countries that were colonized mainly by America or Britain), and foreign language (those who speak English coming from countries where English is not used as a main language). But in a very fast paced society, people have no time to learn the background of English variation. Therefore, the accurate categorization plays little role, and so we ended up with two main categories: Native English Speakers, and Non-Native English Speakers, or as my Uber driver referred to it, speaking English with an *Accent*.

English is my second language and my native is Arabic. After being asked about my *Accent*, I took a step back to reflect on my journey of learning English. The first memory that came to my mind was the opening theme of Sesame Street playing on channel two back in 1995. Saudi TV at that time had Channel one: with all the news and Arabic shows, and Channel two: with all the English shows². Both Channels would close at 10 pm, giving the entire house a peace of mind that today's parents can no longer dream of with 24/7 TV and Internet. On Channel two we watched Sesame Street, America's Funniest Home Videos, Inspector Gadget, Full House, Crystal Maze, and Mr. Bean. That list includes American and British shows. But to us, they were all English shows. I realized that growing up we never distinguished that there was a difference in how English is spoken on these shows. However, looking back now, I see that it was a mixture of different *Accents* that we actually never heard. Even after starting school and taking English classes from first grade, I still did not hear the difference. A huge part of the reason to why is because my knowledge of the language itself was still developing, and I did not understand the language to begin with, let alone tell the various ways of how it is spoken.

In the study that Pilus³ conducted on ESL learner's attitudes towards English accents, one of the findings was that Malaysian ESL students rated the accent of a speaker from England higher than the one from America, as their reason was British English is

2 M. Mirza. (November 17, 2015). 11 TV shows from the 90's all who grew up in Saudi will relate to. Retrieved from <https://destinationksa.com/11-tv-shows-from-the-90s-all-who-grew-up-in-saudi-will-relate-to/>

3 Z Pilus. (2013). "Exploring esl learner's attitude towards English accents". *World Applied Sciences Journal* 21. 143-152. DOI 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2013.21.s1t1.2148

more correct in pronunciation, and it easier to understand. A British person says Water, while an American says 'Warer'. The fact that the word is spelled with the letter 'T' but replaced with an 'R' while pronouncing, creating a confusion for the ESL students. That same example build a reputation about the correctness of the British English Accent in comparison to the American. That reputation traveled the region to the Middle East, where we also could not quite understand why is it a 'Warer'?

It would be unrealistic to select one English Accent to be the only universal *Accent* to teach an ESL student. By selecting one Native Accent, we would be nominating one *Accent* as a *norm*. "If a native accent is a norm, then it is treated as a goal that must acquire. On the other hand, if it is regarded as a model accent, the native accent only provides the basis for English pronunciation preventing the non-native varieties from being too diverged from each other and from native standard varieties which can reduce intelligibility. This allows learners the freedom to approximate the native accent depending on their needs and contexts"⁴.

In school we had British English books and American English books that were rotated to us throughout the years without us really knowing the source of the book and that there IS a difference. One year we would say Curtains, the other we would say Drapes. Then suddenly we point at a Lorry on the street, and few years after it became a Truck. We did not tell words apart as different English Accents, we thought they were synonyms and using both is absolutely fine.

The interesting revelation for me came later in life when I had to use my mixed up English words in the States, and ended up with either being corrected after a long process of me using a British term then giving a lengthy description of what it is, until finally the other person would get what I am asking for and gives me the American word, "oh you mean the elevator?...you go in that direction". Or I was told that they did not know what I was asking about.

So how can these variation be solved to create no conflict? Simply starting where the learning begins, at the school. When a school nominates an English language curriculum they should keep

⁴ Ibid.

in mind the learning process of an ESL student. When the focus is the mobility and durability on a universal level, the American English would be the number one candidate in choice. Social media alone opened up doors for a faster communication, and in the entertainment business the States is a leader, being the country with worldwide spread movies, TV shows, musicians, and YouTube content that put the eyes of the world on the American culture. However, it is very important to incorporate the other English *Accents* as well. "When exposing learners to multiple accents of English, teachers play an important role in introducing their learners to the sociolinguistics reality of English use around the world, different varieties of English, and ELF communication"⁵. It would be existential to bring to the attention of an ESL student that other Accents exist as well. Not only mentioning the fact, but we would also need to train them to recognize the differences. They might not want to master all different variations, but decoding the secrets of each accents builds bridges between ESL speakers and all the other countries. It would help in creating a successful communication method, and people would be able to connect on a deeper level. For a native English speaker of any English Accent, I bet they would admire and enjoy that a fellow ESL speaker knows a certain term that is specifically used in that English Accent and not the other ones, as it express the ESL's devotion to speak a cultures' Accent and reach out to its' people.

It is a blessing to learn a language in the modern day. Just by looking at the resources available, the ability to connect with native speakers and access to various content online. It has never been easier. But there was a time prior to this technological advancement when we relied primarily on TV, and when we finally had more than just two channels. We began to have channels that were dedicated to broadcasting American shows. Naturally the *Accent* started to sink it more than the other variations. I significantly remember a time in high school when I could not understand a British show that well, as I thought that the American English is easier to speak, unlike the ESL students in Malaysia thought. Sung⁶ suggested that one way of

⁵ M.C. Sung. (November 11, 2014). "Exposing learners to global Englishes in ELT: some suggestions". *ELT Journal*, Volume 69, Issue 2, 1 April 2015, Pages 198-201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccu064>

⁶ Ibid.

learning about the different English variations is by keeping a listening journal with material that is motivating and does not require a huge comprehension of background information. Students can record their reflection, and keep track of new words while listening to recorded conversations of various L1 speaker. It is an interactive, fun, and useful method. It is an 'authentic' material that an ESL student can relate to, and enjoy listening to. Which brings us to this learning age influenced by social media. TV was the introductory step to social media expansion, but today the younger generations wake up on various English Accents all presented to them on a one click access platform like YouTube. The nature of recording daily vlog, which are basically a person's video diary of their day, opened the world to many English speakers from different countries. Viewers would watch native English speakers from the States, UK, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

Nativeness of an English teacher can play a role in determining their teaching future. There is the misconception that a native English speaker is a better English teacher, "...employers often believe that native speakers make for better language teachers. For example, approximately 60% of American English language programme administrators and 72% of British administrators indicated in surveys that the primary factor considered when hiring new teachers is nativeness"⁷. The question remains, in general is it necessary to be a native speaker of a language to be able to teach it efficiently? Mike is a proof of a 'no' answer to that question. I have known Mike for five years, since he started his Arabic teaching YouTube channel: Arabic Mike. He is a Native British English Speaker, and his passion for Arabic started in school. Mike's level progressed as he made more lessons and shared them online. Today, Mike's viewers are mostly Arabic Native speakers. They are usually impressed by how well he can speak a difficult language like Arabic. They learn from him the British Accent, as he is able to connect with them by teaching them English while using their Native language, Arabic. Great stories like Mike's create a wonderful example of how one of the best traits about a Non-Native Language Teacher is, being

⁷ L Ballard and P. Winke (September 23, 2018). *Students attitudes towards English teachers accents: the interplay of accent familiarity, comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.21832/j.ctt1xp3wcc.11>

a Non-Native Speaker of the language they teach.

In conclusion, the various English *Accents* will always remain dominant in their respective countries, but to an ESL student all accents matter and it is difficult to select a favorite. There is no one golden rule to follow in order to teach an ESL student about those variations, but it is good to keep their minds open to all the possible ways they can speak the English language. Methods are continuously updating and are open to creativity. But the best ones are those that consider informing students about the existence of many English Accents, exposing them to English material from different countries, and asking them to reflect on it in a journal, or even a discussion. Allowing students to figure out the differences is the best way for them to build bridges and connect with different cultures. In terms of teaching, there should be no preference of a Native English Speaking Teacher over a Non-Native English Speaking Teacher. The traits each possess are valuable in their own ways, but the Non-Native English Speaking Teacher does have the advantage of connecting to the Native Language of the student they teach. After all, learning and teaching a language is all about the ability to connect to those who speak it. Connection is what makes us human. Personally, I speak English and I don't think that my accent falls in any of the variations out there. Although I am completely capable of imitating the American Accent if I wanted to, I see no need to adjust my way of talking as long as I pronounce words correctly. In future Uber rides, I will preserve my exotic accent as much as possible in hope that soon there will be a choice of 'no conversation please' request on the app. Until that happens, if I am questioned again about my accent, I will simply ask with surprise: "What *accent*?"

To Travel or not to Travel?

The opportunity to discover yourself,¹

to discover the world around you.

The ability to live out your wildest dreams,

to boldly go where no man has gone before.²

The chance to adventure,

to find the unknown.

The capability to learn,

to gain knowledge of this collective home we share.

The search of new friends and new people,

to meet people that will change your life.

The new journey,

to see the world.³

¹ “10 Benefits to Studying Abroad | Study Abroad Guide.” *International Student*. 2018. Accessed November 21, 2018.

² Gary Martin. “To Boldly Go Where No Man Has Gone Before’ - the Meaning and Origin of This Phrase.” *Phrasefinder*. Accessed November 21, 2018.

³ Tamar Shulsinger. “The Unexpected Ways Studying Abroad Benefits Your Education.” *Cyberbullying in the Workplace*. October 31, 2017. Accessed November 21, 2018.

English as an Ideological Force: A Postcolonial Analysis of a Student’s Experiences with Gonzaga-in -Zambezi

A few months ago, in the summer of 2018, I along with twenty other students and three faculty and staff members from Gonzaga University traveled to Zambia through CLP’s study abroad program, Gonzaga-in-Zambezi. Gonzaga and St. Fatima Catholic Parish in Zambezi, a town in the Northwestern province of Zambia, have maintained a long-standing relationship for years. Every summer students offer classes on computers, business and leadership, and health. I was a part of a fourth team, the education team, that spent their week-days at Chileña, a secondary school in the Balovale district of Zambezi. As we got to know people in the community, we were included in masses, a wedding, a choir competition, dinners, celebrations, soccer games, excursions, hospital and orphanage visits, etc. I struggled through language and cultural barriers as I met and developed relationships with a variety of people. After studying postcolonial theory, I can now understand clearly how my own individual struggles merely represent a part of a greater system. Thus, the application of postcolonial criticism to my experiences in Zambezi, serves as a useful tool in revealing manifestations of cultural colonization evident in a variety of my interactions and observations.

Every morning I walked into the grade eight class, the students in their uniforms stood up from their desks and said, “Good morning Madam.” I would reply, “Good morning, how are you?” to which they replied, “We are fine and how are you?” I would then reply that I was fine and that they could sit and clear off their tables. I would pass out their journals and we would likely begin with a song. Lois Tyson defines cultural colonization as “the inculcation of a British system of government and education, British

culture, and British values that denigrate the culture, morals, and even physical appearance of formerly subjugated peoples”¹. I saw this inculcation of the British system in the British styled classes, the professional and formal appearance of teachers and students, and the switch to English instruction in higher classes. As I stood in front of my assigned grade eight class each day, crammed with sixty-four students ranging from twelve to eighteen with a variety of English competencies, I was taken aback by how respectful the class was and how trusting students seemed to be of me, a young and western stranger. Regardless of the thoughts circulating in my head, I fell into a bliss amidst the fun of teaching and working with such energetic students.

Such bliss was interrupted as I found it impossible to ignore the significance of grade nine students skipping their class to join mine. I worried that the younger kids who were leaning into the classroom windows, giggling and trying to get my attention, were distracting “my” students, and missing out on their own class. I also was curious to find that the teachers whose classroom I was in would leave the room and refrain from giving me constructive feedback, even when I asked. The disruption my presence created on the Chileña grounds as well as the materializing acceptance of my disruptive presence, disturbed me. I seemed to hold some sort of reliability and authority whether I intended to or not. Furthermore, I was deeply concerned with my own (perhaps subconscious and perhaps not), participation in accepting this image of myself through the way I taught English.

The role the English language plays at Chileña serves as the main subject of my exploration. In Tyson’s discussion of colonialist ideology and postcolonial identity, she says, “English, in addition to the local languages they may use at home, is an indication of the residual effect of colonial domination on their cultures”². While there are seven regional languages, as well as over seventy other languages and dialects in Zambia, English has served as their national language since their independence from Britain in 1964. Chileña teachers instruct in Lunda, one of the regional languages of Zambezi until grade five, when teachers switch to English full-time. Despite knowing that I was ill-equipped to teach at Chileña, it was

1 Lois Tyson. “Critical Theory Today.” *Routledge*, 2015.

2 Ibid.

not until my interactions with a grade eight teacher that I reflected on my presence there. I had heard from fellow Gonzaga students about how great some of the teachers they met were; this teacher, and I do not remember her name, was new to the school. Though she spoke English fluently, I had a difficult time communicating with her due partly to an unfamiliar (to me) blend of Zambian British speech and cultural differences, but mostly due to our conflicting goals. She smiled at me as I explained that we had been sent by the principal to teach her section of English for an hour and half each day. I took notes vigorously as we watched her teach first, in attempt to pick up on her phrasing and how she structured the class; this way I could utilize familiar techniques for the students.

Nevertheless, the grade eight teacher’s apparent hesitance with our presence in her classroom failed to echo my understanding of past interactions with teachers at Chileña. At first, she seemed to expect us to teach grammar. While I did not quite understand how this was to be a mutually beneficial partnership, I knew that my instruction on grammar would not assist in achieving such a goal considering what I suppose are a few fairly subtle inadequacies, such as my lack of fluency in Lunda, Zambian culture, knowledge of the school and its mission, and lack of schooling on teaching in general, much less on teaching English grammar. While she eventually agreed that we could implement our storytelling curriculum, each day our time was continuously cut short; some days we only had twenty minutes, while other days we did not get to teach at all. This deviation from what seemed to be the understanding of Gonzaga student’s relationship with Chileña prompted confusion from our education team. Upon further reflection, this grade eight teacher’s focus was likely on what was best for her class and best for her as a newer teacher at that school. Furthermore, English is a significant aspect of the exams that her students would have to take to get into grade nine. Three weeks of our untrained gallivanting in her classroom certainly would not aide her students in passing. The best I could do in English instruction would be to create a space for mutual learning and two-way sharing of varying cultures, languages, and experiences.

The short length of my stay in Zambezi, as well as my unavoidably eurocentric education in the United States as a native English speaker, serves as the lens through which I subconsciously

make these post-visit observations. If postcolonial criticism aims “to understand the operations – politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically – of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies,” such criticism requires us to look closely at “the ideological forces that, on the one hand, pressed the colonized to internalize the colonizers’ values and, on the other hand, promoted the resistance of colonized peoples against their oppressors, a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself”³. In order to offer a sincere reflection informed by postcolonialism, it is essential that I think about the things that surprised me and seek to understand why observations prompted such a response. Tyson importantly notes the existence of an age-old resistance that destabilizes eurocentric thinking as well as the dominant western narrative on African history and culture. For example, while I can inquire as to why the other members of the Education team and I talked about our love for the students whose “English was excellent!”, I should also look at how that reveals my own participation in the privileging of the English language. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon notes, “every colonized people...finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation...the colonized is elevated about his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle”⁴. Did my praising of the English language subconsciously contribute to the devaluing of my students’ first language(s) while simultaneously raising the status of my own language? For many, English itself is a sign of education in the country. The language is found far more in bigger cities and less so in more isolated rural villages. The Zambian government has evaluated, as have many other countries, the use of their colonizer’s language, post-colonization. What role should the language serve in the education system? How should it be taught and when? Ultimately, Zambia decided upon teaching and enhancing regional languages in primary school and then English in higher levels.

Similarly, other formerly colonized countries such as Kenya, have been forced to make decisions regarding English’ role in education. In Ngugi, Liyong, and Owuor-Anyumba’s essay “On the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Frantz Fanon. “Black Skin, White Masks.” NY: Grove, 1967.

Abolition of the English Department,” reflecting upon English in the University of Nairobi’s department of literature and language, they say, “just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture”⁵. Many formerly colonized nations have embraced the language of their colonizing country, to utilize the global platform that may provide the nation, but are simultaneously subverting English as the center to which other languages and literatures may be added. Instead, these authors propose a centering, for that university, of Kenya, East Africa, and Africa, to which English and other things may be added as they are relevant to that center⁶. Such a direct rejection of the English language as central to their education system merely represents one way in which people have resisted and continue to resist ceaseless attempts of colonization in contemporary culture.

A similar resistance was put into place through the shift in English in the education system in Zambia over the years, through the emphasized value of students’ first languages in their early years. In his discussion of Derrida’s idea of “presence” and the ambivalence of colonial cultural texts, Homi Bhabha describes “it is the effect of uncertainty that afflicts the discourse of power, an uncertainty that estranges the familiar symbol of English ‘national’ authority and emerges from its colonial appropriation as the sign of its difference”⁷. Thus, in a formerly colonized country, those formerly colonized can embrace the multiplicity of identities in order to produce texts of exciting and diverse experiences that do not ignore the history of such resistance. With what Bhabha calls “hybridity” lies the possibility of prolific texts, covering complex, conflicting, and challenging perspectives, that all contribute to the resistance of cultural colonization. Chinua Achebe refers to words as “tools of possible redress.” Language at Chileña plays a significant role in how the school participates in redressing overlooked regional and tribal

⁵ Liyong Ngugi, and Owuor-Anyumba. “On the Abolition of the English Department.” *W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.*, 2010, 2nd ed. pp. 1995-2000.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Homi K. Bhabha. “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, “Race,” *Writing, and Difference*.

languages by Britain, the west, and “post”-colonial Zambia itself due to internalized colonization. Therefore, the way in which I interacted with the students first language while teaching English was vital.

I realize now that I neglected to understand the significance of raising the students’ first language(s) status as an English teacher. One day, while failing to provide adequate answers to some grade nine students’ grammar homework questions, I asked them to teach me some Lunda. Afterwards, I went into my grade six class and displayed what I had learned. My grade six class erupted with a never seen before (by me) energy at the chance to correct me. I am embarrassed to admit now that was the only time I explicitly provided the students any opportunity to teach me. It was the only environment I created with my position of power, in which I was the one vulnerable to making mistakes while simultaneously raising the linguistic status of Lunda. This is something I failed to prioritize and should have more intentionally thought about beforehand. I was nervous to teach and uncomfortable with my power status. Thus, I concealed my discomfort by slipping into my perceived role as a western native English speaker, someone who knows better. While I was upset with this image and knew it was not truthfully accurate, in many ways I embraced it and hid behind it. Ultimately, a postcolonial lens reveals my own participation in perpetuating the privileging of the English language at Chileña.

Overall, manifestations of cultural colonization, evident in many of my interactions and observations at Chileña, are revealed through the lens of postcolonial criticism along with my own contribution to privileging the English language. There are numerous interactions and reflections I am unable to include due to space.

As I continue to reflect on these experiences as well as share with others, it is essential that I choose wisely the things I say and in the process hopefully I shift my subconscious to avoid slipping into using language and thinking of countries and provinces, cities, and villages in the African continent as “the other world.” This requires constant self-checks, self-questioning, and ultimately a distrust to some extent of my own viewpoint and initial responses to things. While this may sound extreme and like it will require a whole lot of effort, that is correct. Because while people live with

double-consciousness, internalized colonization, unhomeliness, and for post-colonial women, double colonization, to name a few psychological effects of colonization on those colonized. It seems fairly appropriate that those who have been in power, who continue to control a dominating narrative of formerly colonized countries in Africa, should be asked to merely think about what they are saying and how it may contribute to a continued cultural colonization of numerous countries and peoples.

Gender and Sexuality

Gothic, Ghostly Lesbians and Sapphics: The Horror of Disrupting Heteronormativity

The 1940 film adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel *Rebecca* was directed by Alfred Hitchcock and produced by David Selznick. This film is known as being Hitchcock's first American film and, to a lesser extent, his only film about female homosexuality. While the film's main characters—the second Mrs. de Winters, portrayed by Joan Fontaine, and Maxim de Winter, portrayed by Laurence Olivier—are in a heterosexual marriage and the main conflict centers around the maintaining of their marriage, the primary antagonists are two women—Rebecca, who makes no appearance throughout the film, and Mrs. Danvers, portrayed by Judith Anderson—both of whom elicit the theme of sexual deviancy. This sexual deviancy, while initially portrayed as adultery, extends farther, as both Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are coded as lesbian or bisexual women. Because of this, and because this film was made during the era of the Motion Picture Production Code, same-sex attraction to women must be both villainized and punished as their sexuality proves threatening to the established heteronormativity. The villainizing of these women turns them into ghostly figures which threaten to drive the married couple apart, and only in their deaths can heterosexuality prevail.

Before discussing the female homosexuality in the film, the Motion Picture Production Code's views toward homosexuality must be addressed. The Code was established in 1930 (though not fully implemented until 1934) and contained many restrictions for films portraying crime, sex, vulgarity, costume, religion, nationality, or other subjects that were considered immoral. While not condemning homosexuality specifically, the Code does

prevent the use of “sex perversion”, and it does not explain what that would refer to. However, it was common knowledge that sex perversion referred to anything from incest to adultery to homosexuality¹. While the Code didn't outright prohibit the use of these “perversions” in the film, the film must instead give some sort of punishment to the film characters who participated in those acts lest the film not be allowed to be shown to American audiences. The film *Rebecca* focuses on the idea of sex perversion, though it can be hard to figure out what of these various “perversions” the film deals with specifically, especially since the “perversion” of adultery is one of the major themes of the film.

During production of the film, the current head of the Production Code Administration (PCA), Joseph Breen, sent a letter to Selznick regarding content that was in conflict with the Code, much of which was in regards to sex perversion. Although, interestingly, “Breen mentions both Rebecca's illicit affair with her cousin Favell and her pregnancy in his third point, he separates and reserves the phrase *sex perversion* for his second comment. Breen must, therefore, mean something else by the phrase than heterosexual infidelity or incest”². This point is further articulated in a letter sent months later: “it will be essential that there be no suggestion whatever of a perverted relationship between Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca. If any possible hint of this creeps into this scene, we will of course not be able to approve the picture. Specifically, we have in mind Mrs. Danvers' description of Rebecca's physical attributes, her handling of the various garments, particularly the night gown”³. In the case of *Rebecca*, “sex perversion” almost definitely referred to homosexual relationships. It was obvious to the filmmakers that the lesbian subtext would be apparent in the film, and thus they threatened to shut it down. However, in *not* shutting the film down, it is likely that Breen and other members of the PCA believed that Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers got justice for their “perversions”. Regardless, the homosexuality of the two characters was obvious even during the film's production nearly eighty years ago, and in

¹ Rhona J. Berenstein. “Adaptation, Censorship, and Audiences of Questionable Type: Lesbian Sightings in ‘Rebecca’ (1940) and ‘The Uninvited’ (1944).” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1998, pp. 16-37.

² Ibid.

³ Joseph Breen. Received by David Selznick, 25 Sept. 1939.

leaving it in, the filmmakers created an ambiguous lesbian film.

Even though Breen and the PCA recognize lesbian subtexts in the film, these subtexts still must be found, addressed, and analyzed. In ambiguous lesbian films, lesbian subtexts vary in the way they are shown and depicted. For example, ambiguous lesbian films might:

“titillate their viewers with hints of lesbianism between the two principal characters, thus allowing lesbian spectators to see the two women as lovers while providing heterosexual viewers with reassurance that the characters could be just friends. In this way, they offer their audience the voyeuristic satisfaction of seeing two beautiful women interacting in sexually provocative ways on the screen without overtly challenging heterosexist norms.”⁴

However, *Rebecca* provides a difficulty in this approach, as the title character never makes an appearance in the film, and therefore such interactions do not and cannot happen on screen. There are a few scenes that depict interactions between two women, though their “sexual provocativeness” is not something that can be addressed before first addressing the lesbian subtext inherent in the two antagonists’ mannerisms and descriptions. These antagonists are Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers.

The evidence provided would paint *Rebecca* as an “ambiguous lesbian film,” which exists to sell intimate relationships between women as friendships or homosocial relationships with no existence of romantic or sexual interactions between the two women⁵. Further, many ambiguous lesbian films, especially older ones, would be depicted in a continuum, “ranging from those that portray mother-daughter, sister, and female friendship relationships and contain no homoerotic implications, to portrayals of women’s friendships with some suggestion of a homoerotic attraction, to ambiguous lesbian representations, and finally extending to openly lesbian films”⁶. This is important to note when we consider that Mrs. Danvers is often read as a motherly figure to Rebecca, especially in the context of the original 1938 novel, where, for example, she has

4 Karen Hollinger. “Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1998, pp. 3-17.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

known Rebecca at least since the latter was twelve. Further, many film theorists have read both her and Rebecca as motherly figures toward the second Mrs. de Winter, looming over her and threatening to ruin her marriage in the same way many threatening mothers disapprove of the heroine’s feelings for the hero in Hitchcock films. While not inherently incorrect readings, the existence of these readings show how ambiguous lesbian films can get away with lesbian subtext while still appealing to heterosexual audiences. At the same time, it fulfills the desire heterosexual audiences to not have to read characters as lesbian.

Because the lesbian and bisexual women in *Rebecca* are both feminine, their sexuality can be seen as even more ambiguous, even though Rebecca is more feminine than Mrs. Danvers. While both characters portray some masculine traits, their appearances are conventionally feminine, allowing for them to be read as either lesbians, bisexuals, or heterosexuals. Even though Mrs. Danvers is less feminine than Rebecca, the *Mrs.* of her name implies a marriage to a man, another symbol of conventional femininity and heterosexuality. This use of feminine lesbians, also known as “femmes”, further allows for one of three responses:

- 1) making the female lead a femme, which allows both heterosexual and lesbian responses/identifications;
- 2) focusing on the exchange of female looks that can be variously read as erotic (especially when the looking turns into a love scene) or “just friendly” and
- 3) referring ambiguously and allusively to what may or may not be lesbianism and/or lesbianism lifestyles.⁷

Considering this, *Rebecca* falls into all three of the following responses: Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are able to be read as heterosexual (and are, presumably, heterosexual at first glance even in the context of the film), their interactions range from platonic to mother/daughter to romantic, and their apparent female homosexuality is ambiguous enough that it’s easy to write over, much like the way it was written over by the PCA.

Looking at *Rebecca* through the lens of lesbian theory would reveal a reading of Mrs. Danvers as a lesbian in love with the late

7 Christine Holmlund. “When Is a Lesbian Not a Lesbian?: The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film.” *Camera Obscura*, no. 25/26, 1991, pp. 144-180.

Rebecca. This reading is most obvious when Mrs. Danvers takes the second Mrs. de Winter into Rebecca's bedroom, wherein she shows off Rebecca's clothes—including her underwear—and lovingly caresses and admires them. During this scene, she also reenacts moments of Rebecca's life while forcing the second Mrs. de Winter into the role of a surrogate Rebecca. Outside of the obvious implications, her actions, "removing the coat from Rebecca's wardrobe, can be read as a humorous form of outing"⁸. It is further important to note that while this scene does exist in the original novel, the way Mrs. Danvers admires Rebecca's underclothes is not present⁹. Even though the novel is not the same as the film, it is the original source material, and the characterization of both Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca helps to shape their characterization in the film—what Hitchcock decides to put in the film and what he decides to change is relevant in determining his intended message. Evidence pointing to Rebecca being a lesbian or bisexual woman is also present in both the film and the novel.

While it is not immediately obvious that Rebecca reciprocated Mrs. Danvers's feelings, Maxim's own words about her imply that she might have had decidedly non-heterosexual feelings and tendencies. According to Maxim, "I never had a moment's happiness with her. She was incapable of love or tenderness or decency"¹⁰, a statement which could imply, at the very least that she was incapable of love towards men or that she was incapable of love past sex. He goes on to describe when he "found out about her... She stood there, laughing...and told me all about herself. Everything. Things I'll never tell a living soul. I wanted to kill her"¹¹. Here, it becomes unclear as to what it was that Rebecca admitted to him, for he does admit to Rebecca's infidelity in her affair with Jack Favell, so that could not have been this secret. Instead, as Berenstein argues, these things that Maxim would "never tell a living soul" are her homosexuality and her love for other women. This would also explain his desire to kill her, out of rage for having been misled about

8 Rhona J. Berenstein. "Adaptation, Censorship, and Audiences of Questionable Type: Lesbian Sightings in 'Rebecca' (1940) and 'The Uninvited' (1944)." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1998, pp. 16-37.

9 Daphne Du Maurier. *Rebecca*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1938.

10 *Rebecca*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, performances by Laurence Olivier, Joan Fontaine, and Judith Anderson, Selznick International Pictures, 1940.

11 *Ibid.*

her feelings for him, as well as lesbophobia.

Regarding Rebecca's infidelity with Favell, it is likely that this relationship was no more serious than her relationship with Maxim. The biggest reason for this is, when Favell insists that Mrs. Danvers admit the truth about him and Rebecca, she says, "She had a right to amuse herself, didn't she? Love was a game to her, only a game. It made her laugh, I tell you. She used to sit in her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you", insisting over and over again that the affair couldn't have been true¹². Though Mrs. Danvers' fond memories of Rebecca could be affecting her testimony, she does seem to have more of an intimate relationship with Rebecca than Maxim had. Moreover, Rebecca's relationship with Favell did not result in a pregnancy—instead, she had cancer. Because she had such a disease and because her carnal relationship with Favell never resulted in pregnancy, this can be implied as a metaphor for sterility, which is another association of homosexuality at the time. Rebecca could not have children, something that was stereotypically attributed to lesbianism. It is also important to note that, in the original novel, Mrs. Danvers also says that Rebecca couldn't have had an affair with Favell because "[s]he despised all men. She was above all that"¹³. This line was not included in the film, which is likely because one of the most common stereotypes of lesbians is that they hate men. A woman despising men (either on a romantic and sexual level or on a platonic level) would be an obvious hint that the woman is a lesbian. By keeping the possibility that she could be attracted to men, especially given her relationship with Favell. Although, the attraction to men does not discount the possibility of her attraction to women.

It cannot be specifically said whether or not Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are lesbians or bisexual women. For this reason, in the context of this essay, both characters will be referred to as sapphics, a term which refers to any woman who is sexually or romantically attracted to women, whether she be a lesbian, bisexual, or otherwise not heterosexual. While both women are constructed in film with relationships with men (Mrs. Danvers with her "Mrs." prefix and Rebecca with both her husband and her male lover), their presence

12 *Ibid.*

13 Daphne Du Maurier. *Rebecca*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1938.

is overall defined by their interactions with each other and with the second Mrs. de Winter, further emphasizing that, whatever sexuality they may have, in the context of the film, they prioritize women over men.

Now, given the sapphic traits present in both Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca—who may or may not have been a couple in the context of the film—the reasoning behind such present traits must be examined. Because lesbian subtext was so heavily regulated during this time, and because the film was almost shut down several times due to this, one must wonder why these themes existed in the first place. First, we must examine the idea of Gothic films and literature, especially those of the era. It was incredibly common for Gothic texts during the early twentieth century to play with the established models of sex, class and race. This is exceedingly present in *Rebecca*, wherein a lower class woman gets the opportunity to marry an upper-class man and adopt an upper-class role, and the audience sees how difficult it is for her and how she may not be suited for this class jump. While this may have been a common theme of Gothic texts prior to the twentieth century, those during the twentieth century deal much more with gender roles and sexuality. The marginalized identities are often depicted as unsettling, often in the form of ghosts or other uncanny events, while major identities, especially traditional gender and sexual roles, must be overtly visible lest the hidden threat of marginalized identities overtake them¹⁴. These examples of disrupting gender roles and heteronormativity are evident in the sapphic characters of Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers. Further, both characters act as ghostly figures in the second Mrs. de Winter's life—Rebecca in a more literal sense, as a dead woman whose presence in her former house is still felt, and Mrs. Danvers as a woman so haunted by her lost love that she is almost possessed both by the grief and with quasi-supernatural powers.

Given the ghostliness of Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers, we must consider why this is the way lesbians are portrayed not just in this film but in several Gothic films of the era. Besides Rebecca, one well-known Gothic horror that is also an ambiguous lesbian film is

14 Dennis Denisoff. "Where the Boys Are: Daphne du Maurier and the Masculine Art of Unremarkability." *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850-1950*, 2004, pp. 121-153.

Dracula's Daughter, wherein the title character is a vampire who preys exclusively on young women. Given the sexual nature of vampires and their feedings, the character Marya (portrayed by Gloria Holden) is read as a lesbian, both currently and at the film's release, something that was even noted by the Production Code Administration. Both *Dracula's Daughter* and *Rebecca* have established a pattern of Gothic horror films which portray lesbians as supernatural, undead creatures. This is not unusual—the use of horror as a medium of depicting marginalized sexualities and genders has a history: "the subgeneric tropes of the unseen, the ghost and the haunted house, match the marginal position of homosexuality in dominant culture. Portraying lesbians as ghosts in Hollywood movies is, then, directly linked to cultural attitudes and anxieties about homosexuality. The lesbian is a paradoxical figure; she is an invisible—yet representable—threat"¹⁵. Both Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are sapphic women who take up the trait of ghostly figures.

Rebecca is perhaps the more obvious ghostly figure of the two. Her belongings still remain in the house, especially in her former bedroom, which has stayed preserved by Mrs. Danvers as a sort of shrine. To double down on her presence, nearly everything she owned—specifically her linens—was monogrammed with an R as a reminder of who had once been the mistress of Manderley. Further, Maxim is so haunted by his late wife that she affects nearly every aspect of his marriage with the new Mrs. de Winter. For the first three-quarters of the film, he becomes distant or irritable not just at mentions of Rebecca but at allusions to her as well—for example, when the second Mrs. de Winter explains how she's never been afraid of drowning, Maxim gets silent and walks away from her, as she had unwittingly referred to the way Maxim had claimed Rebecca had died. Maxim had hated Rebecca so much that he cannot physically or emotionally tolerate mention of her. This is reminiscent of the way many monsters in classic horror films are portrayed: as mentioned earlier, Rebecca has been portrayed as both unnatural and (quite literally) diseased. In having a "privileged relationship with death", she is reminiscent of class ghosts and

15 Rhona J. Berenstein. "Adaptation, Censorship, and Audiences of Questionable Type: Lesbian Sightings in 'Rebecca' (1940) and 'The Uninvited' (1944)." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1998, pp. 16-37.

vampires¹⁶. Despite being dead, Rebecca's presence is so strong that both Maxim and the second Mrs. de Winter are haunted by her. The second Mrs. de Winter's fear of her instills an interesting sort of fear, as this is not a woman she had ever known, though that is the force of the dead woman's power over Manderley.

Even while Mrs. Danvers is alive, she possesses some eerie qualities that make her reasonably ghostly as well. She often appears silently and suddenly, scaring the second Mrs. de Winter with her sudden presence. In the original novel, she is portrayed as having "a skull's face, parchment-white, set on a skeleton's frame"¹⁷, very clearly reminiscent of an undead monster. Further, she is a quiet woman who cares only for Rebecca—so much so that she tries to convince the second Mrs. de Winter to kill herself and nearly succeeds in doing so, amplifying the threat of death to the horror movie heroine. In a way, Mrs. Danvers is the physical body to Rebecca's spirit—one could even read her as the conduit speaking Rebecca's will. While both Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca are portrayed as sapphic monsters, this concept is not exclusive to them or other lesbians, but it is also present in the portrayal of gay men.

The theme of presenting gay men as monsters is not unusual and is something that Hitchcock has shown in other films. One of the most prominent examples is *Rope*, wherein the two murderers—Brandon, portrayed by John Dall, and Phillip, portrayed by Farley Granger—are very clearly coded as a gay couple: they share an apartment (and presumably a bedroom), they are relatively effeminate, especially compared to their masculine and heterosexual counterpart Rupert (portrayed by James Stewart). The murder that they commit together is often considered to be a metaphor for sex. The two men are also perceived as murderers *because* of their homosexuality—"[t]here must have been something deep inside you [Brandon] from the very start that let you do this thing. But there's always been something deep inside me that would never let me do it"¹⁸. In the context of the film, the only differences between Rupert and Brandon (besides age) is that Rupert is a heterosexual and Brandon is a homosexual, and it is that difference that drives

Brandon to be a murderer.

The murderous gay man is also present in another film of Hitchcock's: *Murder!*. The murderer is Handel Fane, portrayed by Esme Percy, who is a crossdresser. He is almost exclusively seen in-film dressed in women's clothes. The concept of crossdressing is both very common in LGBT culture, especially among gay men dressing as women, and it is depicted as a stereotype of gay men. Given that *Murder!* was released in 1930, it is likely that crossdressing was one of the most well-known stereotypes of gay men, making Handel a crossdresser was an easy way to code him as gay. It is important to note, though, that Handel was presumably in love with Diana Baring (portrayed by Norah Baring)—although, Handel also framed her for the murder he committed. Despite an attraction to a woman, the stereotypical depictions of Handel as a gay man are almost powerful enough to overwrite any canonical heterosexual feelings.

Neither *Murder!* nor *Rope* are Gothic films like *Rebecca*, although the example of homosexual murderers is present in all three. This also establishes a pattern in Hitchcock films, wherein the murderer is a homosexual who is often portrayed as evil because of their sexuality. Further, each film shows the gay murderer threatening to unravel existing heterosexual bonds. In *Murder!*, Handel's supposed love for Diana is threatened by himself when he nearly gets her executed for murder and when he ultimately kills himself while in drag. In *Rebecca*, Mrs. Danvers (and Rebecca, although Mrs. Danvers is the woman who attempts murder on two different occasions) threatens the marriage between Maxim and the second Mrs. de Winter by undermining the second Mrs. de Winter's autonomy and sanity, eventually both trying to kill her and burning down Manderley, the symbol of the de Winter marriage, which leads to her own death. In *Rope*, Brandon and Phillip exist as a couple that murders a man who is in a heterosexual relationship with a woman (although Brandon does attempt to create a new heterosexual relationship from this, but his attempts are not taken seriously by either the film or the characters).

The important aspect of these films is that the threats to heteronormativity are always punished—Handel, Rebecca, and Mrs. Danvers are all dead by the end of their respective films, and Brandon and Phillip are both implied to be arrested and prosecuted for their

16 Ibid.

17 Daphne Du Maurier. *Rebecca*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1938.

18 *Rope*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, performances by James Stewart, John Dall, and Farley Granger, Transatlantic Pictures, 1948.

murder. This could be a response to limitations enacted by the Code, wherein any depiction of actions that are otherwise restricted by the Code must also include a punishment of these actions. However, even if the Code were not in place, this act of killing off or prosecuting the homosexual characters for their homosexuality could still exist. The homosexual characters are, first and foremost, the villains. They are murderers. And yet, one character—Rebecca—is not a murderer and does not commit any literal crime, but she is killed.

Rebecca's crime of infidelity and implied sapphism is punished with death (accidental in film, murder in novel). While her death does, in a way, give her more power in that she exists as a ghostly figure in the new de Winter couple's marriage, she is still punished. And yet, in the novel, the man who murdered her gets no punishment. Interestingly enough, in the original novel, Mrs. Danvers does *not* die—her death was added to the film, and that addition was most certainly dictated by the Code given her intense undertones of lesbianism. The Code was often much more strict with regards of lesbianism as opposed to male homosexuality, because the gay man “was perceived as a failure, the lesbian was seen as a threat”¹⁹. Both her and Rebecca's deaths in the film are because of their sapphism, not for any other reason, especially since they both die by accident—Rebecca by slipping and hitting her head, Mrs. Danvers by being crushed by burning debris. Their sapphism is inherently the biggest threat to heteronormativity and to the de Winter marriage. Even the second Mrs. de Winter is not safe from their threats of dismantling her marriage—in fact, the greatest threat to their marriage is the fear that she will become a lesbian too.

The threats associated with homosexuality, especially with lesbianism, are that they will break up the heterosexual marriage and that they will convert heterosexual women to lesbians. Maxim is very concerned about the latter, as he frequently insists that the second Mrs. de Winter does not mimic Rebecca: first, before they are even married, Maxim makes her promise to “never wear black satin or pearls or to be thirty-six years old”²⁰, despite her expressing

19 David M. Lugowski. “Queering the (New) Deal: Lesbian and Gay Representation and the Depression-Era Cultural Politics of Hollywood's Production Code.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1999, pp. 3-35.

20 *Rebecca*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, performances by Laurence Olivier, Joan Fontaine, and Judith Anderson, Selznick International Pictures, 1940.

that doing so is something she desires for herself. Because Maxim associates those traits with Rebecca, he also associates them with Rebecca's sapphism, and he shuts the second Mrs. de Winter down so she does not have the same feelings. While Maxim is worried that his new wife will become like Rebecca, and thus become a lesbian (or at least a woman who will prefer women over men), the second Mrs. de Winter is worried that she could never live up to Rebecca and that she would lose her husband. The existence of Rebecca as a ghostly threat affects how both Maxim and the second Mrs. de Winter interact with each other, though her sapphism is the greater threat to Maxim (and later to the second Mrs. de Winter). Mrs. Danvers also serves as a ghostly figure who threatens to convert the second Mrs. de Winter to lesbianism.

When Mrs. Danvers and the second Mrs. de Winter are in Rebecca's former bedroom, the talk is almost exclusively about Rebecca. If there is any mention of Maxim, it is *his* relation to her, not vice versa, despite his picture being prominently displayed on Rebecca's vanity. By ignoring Maxim, Mrs. Danvers is establishing to the second Mrs. de Winter that her life does not need to revolve around her husband and that it can, in fact, revolve around a woman like Mrs. Danvers's. While no physically erotic depictions take place, Mrs. Danvers is very clearly eroticizing her lost love Rebecca and attempting to get the second Mrs. de Winter to do the same. Mrs. Danvers caresses Rebecca's clothes and has the second Mrs. de Winter feel them as well, pressing the fabric against the second Mrs. de Winter's face. This is the only scene where she is not undermining the second Mrs. de Winter or trying to get her to be like Rebecca: this scene instead depicts a woman mourning over the woman she loved and expressing her love to someone else. However, this scene is very clearly shot to be shown as threatening—this is a someone obsessed with a dead woman, someone who violates the second Mrs. de Winter's bodily autonomy when she rubs Rebecca's clothes on her face. The second Mrs. de Winter is visibly uncomfortable and tense during the entire interaction. She knows how Mrs. Danvers feels, and she does not wish to be a part of it; she even attempts to flee from terror, especially when Mrs. Danvers suggests that Rebecca “come[s] back here to Manderley, watch[es]

you and Mr. de Winter together”²¹.

The second Mrs. de Winter’s biggest struggle in her new marriage—other than the ghostly presence of Rebecca—is figuring out how to navigate being the perfect wife not just in general, but in the sense that she is now the mistress of Manderley. She has jumped to a much higher class than one she had ever experienced before, and with that comes a new set of responsibilities and expectations. Upon entering Manderley, her best attempt at becoming this perfect wife is to learn by example—Mrs. Danvers frequently informs the second Mrs. de Winter of how Rebecca would run the house, how she would act. The second Mrs. de Winter struggles with herself if she must live up to Rebecca’s reputation, or if she must remain true to herself. In deciding whether or not she wants to act like Rebecca, she is instead dealing with a sort of sexual conflict, wherein she is unsure if she is attracted to Maxim or if she should act on lesbian desires. The most glaring example of this is when she wears the same costume as Rebecca had. In physically mimicking Rebecca, she is experimenting and adopting a persona that she otherwise would not have. While she had not known at the time that the costume was Rebecca’s, she did take the advice from Mrs. Danvers—this could be read as a lesbian attempting to “convert” a heterosexual woman to lesbianism, another stereotype of both lesbians and gay men. When all Mrs. Danvers’s efforts fail, and when she learns that Rebecca might have had a male lover, she destroys Manderley in an effort to wipe away any remnants of the heterosexual marriage. In doing this, she dies and all of Rebecca’s possessions are destroyed, ironically achieving the opposite of what she wanted: the remains of sapphism are burned away, and the heterosexual couple has won.

The lesbian threat is persistent in *Rebecca* and is not a theme that is unique to Hitchcock or even to lesbians. Instead, homosexual threats were incredibly common during the era of the Production Code and even afterwards. Yet villainizing lesbians was more common and more expected. While gay men were often portrayed as murderers, they did experience few portrayals that are more comic in nature—one example, also by Hitchcock, is the characters of Charters and Caldicott (portrayed by Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne, respectively) in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). These two men travel together, sleep in the same bed, and share clothes, though their

21 Ibid.

primary role in the film is comic relief. However, comical depictions of lesbians, especially during this era, were rarer. Instead, lesbianism was viewed as a much more visible threat. While disrupting gender roles is threatening enough to heteronormativity, it is considerably more threatening when the person disrupting these roles is a woman, as lesbianism “provide[s] an alternative to the patriarchal heterosexual couple and challenge female dependence on men for romantic and sexual fulfillment”²². Thus, lesbianism had to be portrayed as what it was: a horror, with the sapphics in *Rebecca* being ghosts who watch over the heterosexual couple as a consistent threat.

22 Karen Hollinger. “Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1998, pp. 3-17.

Effects of Violence Against Women in the Media

The average youth in America will witness 200,000 acts of violence on television before they turn 18, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians¹. This excludes the exposure to violence young people experience through other forms of media; including the internet, magazines, video games and social networks. Much of the violence portrayed in the media is aimed towards women—more specifically, the domination of women through physical and sexual violence. With the progression and evolution of media technology up until the present, there has been an upsurge in the explicitness of this violence against women.

Whereas in the past, husbands and their wives would not be seen in the same bed together on screen, today women are shown brutally raped and murdered by men in the media. The prevalence of this violence against women in the media has serious implications on the beliefs of young people, specifically young boys and the men they grow into. To help remedy this pressing issue plaguing the well-being of our society, we must understand that violence against women in the media can lead to an increase in aggressive thoughts and behaviors in boys and men surrounding the physical and sexual domination of women.

Before delving into the effects media violence against women has on boys in society, it is important to recognize and analyze the depictions of violence against women which are commonly portrayed in the media. Typical portrayals of this violence range from extreme physical and sexual abuse to more subtle implications which may only hint at a man's dominance over a subordinate woman. The extreme physical and sexual violence is certainly more distinct in its potential to cause problems in the attitudes and behaviors of boys, but the

¹ American Academy of Family Physicians. (2016).

more subtle portrayals of male domination over women in the media may strike some as too insignificant to be of the serious consequent. In both cases, however, there is an underlying yet reinforced set of attitudes and beliefs which both normalize and in many cases promote this acceptance of violence against women. Not only that, but this normalization of violence serves the mechanism of desensitization to the inherently cruel and inhumane practices and attitudes targeted towards women in the media.

To elaborate on the emotional desensitization of boys and men towards violence against women in the media, it is necessary to look deeper into the effects exposure to this violence has on the emotional responses and beliefs of boys. To explore this, Lee, Hust, and Zhang wrote an article explaining some of the reasons this desensitization occurs along with some of the effects it has on the belief systems of boys. They say, "Repeated exposure to sexually violent movies decreased men's depression and anxiety associated with the films, their rating of the offensiveness of the movie content, and their perceived sympathy toward female victims but at the same time it increased their enjoyment level"². Through this explanation, it is clear that when exposed to violent media content against women, men became desensitized by experiencing less depression and emotional unease when viewing the content, feeling less sympathy towards women, and distancing themselves from the pain and suffering the women would theoretically be experiencing. They even found enjoyment in viewing the violence. These responses are utterly unnatural in regards to how responsible, moral individuals in our society should be thinking. There is no doubting that these skewed belief systems about how women should be treated by men have a tangible negative effect on the behaviors of boys and men who consume this media violence. A more specific facet of this emotional desensitization is the occurrence and normalization of rape myths in society. According to Capella, Hill, Rapp, and Kees, rape myths are beliefs among members (especially men) of society which maintain that women enjoy being sexually assaulted and that they are in fact partially to blame for these violent acts³.

² Moon J. Lee, Hust, Stacey, & Zhang, Lingling. "Effects of violence against women in popular crime dramas on viewers' attitudes related to sexual violence." *Mass Communication & Society*, 14, 25–44.

³ Ibid.

Violence against women in the media contributes to this emotional mediation of violence men often experience in regards to the morality and social acceptability of rape. Capella et al. go on to say that, “According to the rape myth, rapists assume little or no personal responsibility for their aggressive actions”⁴. Again, this shows that violence against women in the media emotionally and morally distances men from the inherent wrong of rape and violence towards women in other forms. Rape myths are just one aspect of the complex belief system modern media indoctrinates into boys and men through depictions of violence against women. Another attitude violence against women in the media imbues within the belief systems of boys and men in society is the more broad, yet equally crucial idea that men are simply more powerful and more dominant than women—that women are and rightfully should be subordinate and inferior to men. This power differential is perhaps the most subtle, yet influential belief instilled within those who frequently view media violence against women. There are frequent advertisements on television showing muscular men dominating and overpowering unnaturally beautiful, yet weak women. Depictions of sexual assault, rape, and even the minor sexism shown through jokes and side comments in comedy films and shows imply an underlying belief that men are and should be dominant over women. This inevitably plays a key role in the treatment women receive from men in society today.

After recognizing the negative effects violence against women in the media has on systems of males in society, it is crucial to look at the implications this violence has on the actions and behaviors of boys and men. Certainly, it is the desensitization to violence and the beliefs about the acceptability of violence against women that greatly influence the behavior of boys and men. Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, and Eron describe in more detail why boys are influenced so heavily by media violence. Huesmann et al. first references the well-known Albert Bandura Bobo Doll study in which it was proven that children imitate what they observe around them, especially the violent actions of those around them. In this study, it is important to note that the children viewed the aggression of adults through a screen much like young boys

⁴ Ibid.

currently do through television viewing and smartphones. Huesmann et al. concluded that, “Observation of specific aggressive behaviors around them increases children’s likelihood of behaving in exactly that way”⁵. This idea is just the underlying basis about childhood behavior and psychology, which led him to his following conclusions. He provides that, “As the child grows older, the social scripts acquired through observation of family, peers, community, and the mass media become more complex, abstracted, and automatic in their invocation”⁶. So, as boys age, their observations of the surrounding world dictate their social beliefs, values, and actions. This means that the violence against women boys consume in the media likely results in increased violent behaviors and thoughts targeted at women.

To elaborate on this idea, Huesmann et al. also touch on the idea of desensitization and how “lack of a negative emotional response to observing violence also indicates a flat response to planning violence or thinking about violence”⁷. Thus, proactive-instrumental aggressive acts become easier to commit. He is saying here that the emotional desensitization boys and men experience towards violence in the media makes planning acts of violence less emotionally and morally turbulent for the boys, and subsequently, these aggressive actions become easier to carry out. Furthermore, it is shown through this article that the long-term effects of this media violence only occurs in young children, with short-term effects taking place for older teenagers and adults. These truths clearly show how crucial it is for boys to censor the types of media they consume, especially that which revolves around violence against women.

Despite the clear and pressing evidence about how media violence against women affects the aggressive thoughts and behaviors of boys and men, it is important to recognize that there are actions and environmental, genetic, and demographic factors which likely influence the actions and beliefs of boys. In fact, Huesmann et

⁵ L. Rowell Huesmann, Jessica Moise-Titus, Cheryl-Lynn Podolski, and Leonard D. Eron, (2003). “Longitudinal relations between children’s exposure to TV violence and their aggressive and violent behavior in young adulthood: 1977–1992.” *Developmental Psychology*, 39, 201-221.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

al. provides this rebuttal in his own article, stating that “Most researchers of aggression agree that severe aggressive and violent behavior seldom occurs unless there is a convergence of multiple predisposing and precipitating factors such as neurophysiological abnormalities, poor child rearing, socioeconomic deprivation, poor peer relations, attitudes and beliefs supporting aggression, drug and alcohol abuse, frustration and provocation, and other factors”⁸. In essence, he is saying that factors outside that of media violence can affect the aggressive behaviors and beliefs of boys. These factors include the economic status of a child, their familial situation (abusive parents, single-parent household, etc., drug use in the family, or their diagnosed mental state.

Additionally, there are some who argue that it is the reinforcement of a belief from society itself which proliferates this violence by men against women. This argument centers upon the idea that the stereotypes around how men should act in order to be socially accepted are what truly drive the aggressive thoughts and behaviors by men towards women. Moreover, this beliefs and that it is the attitudes of our society which are at fault for the aggressive beliefs behaviors of men against women. This viewpoint certainly holds merit, and it is likely that it is external factors, the already present societal pressures, and the current violent media content together which contribute to the negative effects on boys and men we are seeing in society.

After diving into the ways in which the media influences the beliefs and behaviors of boys and men in society through violence against women, it is clear that this is a multifaceted yet important issue. In order to help remedy this pressing issue plaguing the well-being of our society, we must understand that violence against women in the media can lead to an increase in aggressive thoughts and behaviors in boys and men surrounding the physical and sexual domination of women. This violence against women in the media leads to a desensitization towards violence against women in general, making it more socially acceptable in the eyes of boys and men and more easily committed because of a lack of moral conflict. This violence also leads to the creation of rape myths in society, and it emphasizes a power play between men and women in which men must be superior and dominant. Finally, scientific evidence clearly

⁸ Ibid.

supports the truth that young boys tend to imitate the violence and aggression they see, causing higher rates of physical violence and aggression among men.

As tragic and disheartening as this information may sound, there is still great hope for our society in the way of making positive leaps towards establishing a community of men who empower women and recognize the negative effects media violence against women has on their attitudes and behaviors. We are currently making considerable societal changes through raising awareness of this serious issue. The media is a double-edged sword: it can do great harm but also great good in society. It is our responsibility to use the media in positive, transformative ways to empower and unify both men and women. In the end, it is only through cooperation and determination that we will see tangible change in how women are treated and thought of by men in society.

#METOO IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: Addressing Narratives of Sexual Violence within Religious Texts

Today individuals are forced to confront issues such as sexual violence, in ways they have not had to before, due to current social movements such as the #MeToo movement. Within this movement, individuals who have experienced sexual violence have posted #MeToo on social media to show the prevalence of sexual assault within society. While this movement is recent, the sexual violence faced by women within society is not. Stories dating back thousands of years and within religious texts, show that sexual violence was just as pervasive then as it is now. Given the social changes that have occurred throughout these centuries regarding women's position in society, violence against women has not been a top priority within religious dialogues. Therefore, examining the #MeToo stories of individuals within the Torah is necessary to address this violence. Through the examination of the stories of Tamar, Lot's daughters, and biblical law pertaining to sexual violence, it is evident that an understanding of how sexual violence shaped their stories is necessary to create a framework to move forward today.

Sexual violence was used to maintain patriarchal control over women's bodies and establish women's subordination to men, as highlighted in the story of Tamar. Ruth Everhart analyzes the experience of Tamar in her article "The Bible's #MeToo Stories" to uncover the ways in which sexual violence affects the person. Sharing how Tamar is raped by her half-brother, where he forces her into his room and then violently assaults her she says, "This is what rape victims face: being powerless in the face of power, being silenced no matter how eloquently they may speak, and being covered with contempt that is not deserved."¹ This silence, powerlessness, and contempt

¹ Ruth Everhart. "The Bible's #MeToo Stories." *The Christian Century*, Aug 01, 2018, 22-25, <https://search.proquest.com/>

shows the way in which victims continue to face consequences for violence against their person, even after facing the initial violence. The continuation of consequences for victims exemplifies the way in which sexual violence is used as a tool in the construction of gender hierarchies. Sexual violence works to take control of women's physical bodies, while the product of this violence places them in a continued place of subordination. Amar's disgust with his sister-in-law after he raped her, works to show how her body was taken and then her person was demeaned. This process works to regulate women's bodies and place them in the control of men. Rachel Harris analyzes this regulation of women's bodies in "Introduction Sex, Violence, Motherhood and Modesty: Controlling the Jewish Woman and Her Body." She says, "... I have come to understand that control lies at the center of any discussion of a Jewish woman's body."² This control is then used as a means of maintaining women's subordination to men. Therefore, sexual violence was used as a means of maintaining gender hierarchies within religious narratives.

This hierarchy that is maintained through sexual violence also shows the placement of women as subordinate to men within the Hebrew Scripture, as highlighted in the story of Lot's daughters' rape. In this narrative Lot offers his daughters to the violent men who came to his door and indicates that this offer is for the protection of the men within the house.³ Judith Plaskow analyzes this narrative in her article "Violence Against Women" and she says, "While a later Midrash will see Lot's offer as evidence that he was infected by the wickedness of Sodom and picture him as having been punished, the biblical text offers no explicit judgment on his behavior."⁴ The lack of judgement within biblical texts shows the value placed on women's lives as lesser within this society, as their father offered them over to be killed and raped, he saved the men

[docview/2078419335?accountid=1557](https://www.docview/2078419335?accountid=1557).

² Rachel S. Harris. "Introduction Sex, Violence, Motherhood and Modesty: Controlling the Jewish Woman and Her Body." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 23 (2012): 5-10. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed November 18, 2018).

³ Siman Vayera. *Midrash Tanchuma, 12, to Genesis 19: 4-5*. Found at https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Tanchuma%2C_Vayera.12.1?lang=bi&with=Sheets&lang2=en

⁴ Judith Plaskow, "Violence Against Women," *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008).

within the home. While the Midrash works to understand this violence as the result of sin in Sodom and Gomorrah, this fails to address the underlying assumption about women within biblical narratives. The presence of patriarchal control is emphasized in Robert Kawashima's article titled "Could a Woman say 'No' in Biblical Israel On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature", where he argues that Lot, "... exercised his legitimate paternal power of consent over virgin daughters."⁵ Given his analysis regarding the legal status of women within biblical narratives, why is it important to analyze these stories when women's status has changed significantly? Plaskow indicates that analyzing these stories, "...provides us with opportunities to look honestly at ourselves and the world we have created, to reflect on destructive patterns of human relating, and to ask how we might address and change them."⁶ Therefore as the story of Lot and his daughters illustrates the way in which women were devalued in relation to men, stories such as these are key to developing an understanding of human relations with the possibility of creating change.

To further develop an understanding of human relations and to create change, learning how rape was legally condoned in the context of war is necessary to understanding how sexual violence is used today. Ellens Harold explores the issue of rape as a weapon in her article, "Feminism and Religion: How Faiths View Women and Their Rights." She says, "Deuteronomy 21:10-14 prescribes the rites that ravaged young female war-captives must go through to become forced wives, spear-conquered inmates of ravaging Israelite forces."⁷ The language indicating that these women are to become wives, seems to overlook the reality of the captive woman as they are forced to lay with their new husbands. Harold continues to analyze this issue, as she explains the prohibition of selling the captives if the man is no longer satisfied.⁸ Rabbi Mark works to understand

5 Robert S. Kawashima. "Could a Woman Say "No" in Biblical Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature." *AJS Review* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1-22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41310646>.

6 Plaskow, "Violence Against Women".

7 J. Harold Ellens. *Feminism and Religion: How Faiths View Women and Their Rights*. Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016, p 50. Accessed November 17, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

8 Harold, *Feminism and Religion: How Faiths View Women and Their Rights*, p 50.

this ending as positive states, "Here, we find that the woman of Deuteronomy 21 is not just as a "thing" to be bartered or sold, but instead an individual deserving of dignity and respect because she is made in the image of God."⁹ While he intends to highlight the dignity of women, he overlooks the committed rape and invalidates the victim's perspective within society. Rather, modern readings of passages like these should work to understand the full historical experience of such women and form a new framework to move forward, not sugar coat the messages in search for a redeemable narrative.

While the captives of war were considered a legal subcategory of their own, understanding the legal structures affecting all women who were raped is necessary to create a more complete picture of the life of Jewish women within biblical times. While the rape of captives and the control of father's over daughters' consent is within legal code, rape in Israel was illegal only in terms of the lack of a male guardian's consent. As Robert Kawashima highlighted the legal powers of Lot over his daughters, he also outlines the legal structure for dealing with rape within Israel. Here he highlights that individuals were charged with rape if the victim cried out in a city or was in a field where they could not be heard, where if the victim did not cry out they were also considered guilty of fornication.¹⁰ This law determines that a woman is responsible for the violation of her own body by making her responsible for prosecution, depending on if she cried out. This law defines two key aspect of a woman's position within historical Israelite society. First, a woman's consent is not hers to give, but rather it belongs to her male guardian. Second, her value is located within her own self-protection, where if she is silent, she is guilty.

While these laws may appear disconnected from contemporary society, dilemmas such as the #MeToo movement have encouraged discussions regarding the treatment of victims and perpetrators of sexual assault. The New York Jewish Week featured

9 Rabbi Mark, "THE CAPTIVE WOMAN OF DEUTERONOMY 21: A NEW MESSIANIC PERSPECTIVE", Beit Hallel Messianic Congregation, *Rabbi Mark Blog*, 8/19/2018. <http://www.beithallelocala.org/blog/the-captive-woman-of-deuteronomy-21-a-new-messianic-perspective>

10 Kawashima, . "Could a Woman Say "No" in Biblical Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature".

an article written by Gary Rosenblatt titled, “What The Talmud Can Teach Us About The #MeToo Moment” where Rosenblatt works to summarize the arguments presented at a four-day conference regarding the #MeToo movement. In this article he emphasizes the importance of turning to the Torah and other ancient texts while grappling with modern dilemmas such as, “... the relevancy of unsubstantiated rumors; the responsibility of a bystander to speak up versus the prohibition of spreading lashon hara (gossip); whether someone should be punished even if he cannot be convicted in court...”¹¹ These questions place emphasis on ‘if something happened. While determining guilt is necessary within any legal structure, the fact that the conversation focused on what to do to if the violator may be guilty rather than how to support the victim, shows that this conversation needs to change. Mary L. Zamore in her article “Jewish Institutions, Not #MeToo Victims, Must Change The Status Quo,” emphasizes the need for institutional changes in addressing sexual violence as she says, “Rather than demanding that victims tell their narratives, the community must admit the other side of the story.”¹² This would work to shift the blame from a woman’s silence, as seen in religious law, to sexual violence as it affects women in society.

The story of Dinah and the debates regarding her circumstance, show that modern study has been more worried about the charge and less worried about the individual. Many articles and books have been published in the last few years debating whether or not she was raped or if she ran off. However, these debates have worked to change the conversation from how to deal with rape in today’s society, to if rape occurred. Phyllis Chesler analyzes Dinah’s story in her article, “The Rape of Dina: On the Torah Portion of Vayishlah” and comes to the conclusion,

Survivors are haunted by those who heard the screams but turned their backs; by those who blamed the victim and collaborated with the rapist/torturer/killer; by those who minimized, exaggerated or merely misunderstood what

11 Gary Rosenblatt, “What The Talmud Can Teach Us About The #MeToo Moment,” *New York Jewish Week*, February 21, 2018, <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/what-the-talmud-can-teach-us-about-the-metoo-moment/>

12 Mary L. Zamore, “Jewish Institutions, Not #MeToo Victims, Must Change The Status Quo,” *Scribe*, February 14, 2018, <https://forward.com/scribe/394371/jewish-institutions-not-metoo-victims-must-change-the-status-quo/>

rape or torture is about; and by those who preached, authoritatively, righteously, against revenge, but envisioned no justice.¹³

Her conclusion emphasizes the importance of listening to the victim and creating a world where they do not have to face violence. Phyllis Chesler continues by saying, “...we have an obligation to bring up our children so that they do not rape, and if raped, do not blame themselves. In turn, we must not blame or ostracize rape victims.”¹⁴ This means society needs to focus on how the victim is coping and how to support their rehabilitation, not how the perpetrator is dealt with.

Judaism has a unique position to change the narrative on how sexual assault is talked about and handled within today’s society. Just as Phyllis Chesler analyzed the importance of raising children to not rape, Plaskow indicates that it is not enough to ignore these texts.¹⁵ Confronting these texts is necessary to form a more inclusive Judaism. Rabbi Avi Killip emphasizes the importance of confronting these narratives by saying, “As a rabbi and lover of Torah, it is hard to resist the urge to soften this text ... Before we get there, we must sit with the pain. We should learn to feel hurt and even anger.”¹⁶ This confrontation is necessary to avoid sermons like those of previously mentioned Rabbi Mark, in which he sugar coated the message of the text, and used rhetoric focusing on ‘if something happened.’ The #MeToo movement, however, emphasizes there can no longer be an avoidance of these narratives and that change must happen.

Exploring these narratives and teaching the importance of consent may look different within distinct communities. However, a basic understanding in which individuals are taught that sexual violence and victim blaming are unacceptable must be considered an essential part of the education about women’s position within

13 Phyllis Chesler. “The Rape of Dina: On the Torah Portion of Vayishlah.” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 3 (2000): 232-248. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed November 18, 2018).

14 Chesler, “The Rape of Dina: On the Torah Portion of Vayishlah”, p 232-248.

15 Plaskow, “Violence Against Women”.

16 Rabbi Avi Killip, “The Torah needs a Trigger Warning,” *Hebrew College*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/seventyfacesoftorah/2018/08/the-torah-needs-a-trigger-warning/>

Judaism. Rabbi Shelley Kovar emphasizes the need for addressing sexual assault as she writes, “It would be interwoven into everyday life that raping any girl or woman is a sexual transgression against her will and status as an inviolable person... is inherently wrong regardless of her creed or ethnicity.”¹⁷ While this education seems to present an uncomfortable conversation, it is necessary to constructing a future in which sexual violence is less prevalent. In the era of #MeToo dialogue on the news and social media, a conversation premised upon consent is necessary to begin a reduction of sexual violence.

A thorough rereading of the stories of Tamar, Lot’s daughters, and laws regarding rape within the Hebrew Bible is necessary to confront sexual violence, especially as it continues to affect individuals today. Tamar’s story teaches us how sexual violence is used to maintain gender hierarchies, and the story of Lot’s daughters illustrates how women were positioned as lesser within these stories. Religious law concerning the treatment of rape, highlights the need for a new analysis on how we should support victims, as emphasized in Dinah’s story. These narratives cannot be avoided any longer. Just as the #MeToo movement asks us to listen to and confront these issues, scholars such as Plaskow, Chesler, Rabbi Avi Killip, and Rabbi Shelley Kovar emphasize the need to listen to narratives. The conversations that are produced by confronting these texts head on, listening to the victim in order to support their rehabilitation, and including conversations about consent in the education of children.

¹⁷ Rabbi Shelley Kovar Becker, “Sermon- Sexual Harassment.” Sermon, Old York Road Temple, Beth, October 1991.

What Are You Afraid Of? A Freudian Analysis of *It*

Stephen King’s popular novel, *It*, was remade in 2017 featuring an enhanced manifestation of fear and Freudian influence. While the references to Freud’s psychoanalysis are not necessarily explicit, any viewer can look closely and determine the ways in which Freud’s work plays out in the film. A Freudian reading of the 2017 adaptation of the movie *It* suggests that Pennywise acts as the polymorphously perverse id, which is reinforced by the consistent female imagery and phallic symbols throughout the movie as well as the nature of the attempts the monster makes to prey on children’s fear.

Throughout the film, the antagonist, Pennywise¹ acts as what Freud refers to as the id. The idea of the id comes from Freud’s theory of personality, in which each human being is composed of an id, an ego, and a superego (Ciasullo). The theory relies on a person’s ability to control oneself, with the id representing a lack of control and the superego representing control and acknowledgement of social norms. Lois Tyson, in her textbook titled *Critical Theory Today*, cleanly outlines the motivations of the id when she writes that it is “devoted solely to the gratification of prohibited desires of all kinds – desire for power, for sex, for amusement, for food – without an eye to consequences” (25). One can see Pennywise as symbolic of the id when looking specifically at his actions. Throughout the movie, Pennywise is solely governed by his urges, acting and causing harm regardless of the consequences. His ultimate desire is to scare and harm the children, so he can feed off of their fear. This thread exists throughout the film, and can be seen most prominently when he is interacting

¹ Throughout this paper, I will refer to *It* as Pennywise to avoid confusion. However, the reader is meant to know that whenever I am referring to Pennywise I am referring to *It* as a whole, in all forms, not just when *It* is acting as a clown.

with the children, such as when he bites off Georgie's arm or when he is taunting Eddie when the group first enters Neibolt house. Regardless of the figure Pennywise inhabits – the clown², the leper, Beverly's father, Georgie – he is consistently driven by his urges and desires. This is unaffected by any rational, moral obligations or conception of consequences – he simply perpetuates harm because he wants to. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge Freud's theory of psychosexual development, in which it is stated that "all children are polymorphously perverse – that is, their libido (sexual energy) is directed at all things, even objects that adults would consider perverse" (Ciasullo, PowerPoint/Lecture). Although Pennywise appears to be an adult in stature and physical characteristics, his embodiment as the id makes him come across as inherently child-like. A viewer can see this polymorphously perverse nature in the film when acknowledging that Pennywise's libido is ultimately directed at this group of children, which adults would surely consider as perverse. One can gather that Pennywise gains immense pleasure when scaring children, which, Freud would argue, is inherently sexual in nature. This is reinforced by the repeating female imagery and phallic symbols that often either conjure Pennywise's presence or occur when he is interacting with the children.

One of the arguably more disturbing scenes in the film that highlights Pennywise's polymorphously perverse nature as the id occurs when the only girl in the self-proclaimed Loser's Club, Beverly, is in her bathroom at home. Beverly is standing over her sink when she begins to hear the voices of children coming from the drain. Beverly peers down the drain, but unable to see anything, grabs the tape measure and inserts it into the drain. The imagery present here demonstrates that the tape measure is acting as a phallic symbol as it is penetrating the drain, while the drain, a tubular structure with a hole at the surface, acts as female imagery (See Figure A). When Beverly realizes that the depth of the drain goes beyond even what the tape measure can account for, she begins

² If space had permitted it, I would have added an additional paragraph in this paper about each of Pennywise's forms and how they relate to the uncanny. The clown, in particular, feels uncanny to the viewer, due to his extended forehead, offset eyes and pupils, and voice. This is evident from the beginning, such as when Pennywise and Georgie are conversing, and Georgie is wary because something is not quite right, or is uncanny, about the clown.

to pull it out, and is greeted by clumps of hair and blood gathering on the end of the object. It is then that strands of hair erupt violently from the sink and wrap themselves around Beverly's hands and neck, pulling her towards the drain (See Figure B). As she is struggling to free herself, a fountain of blood comes flowing out of the sink, covering Beverly and the entire bathroom (See Figure C). This image, of the strands of hair trapping Beverly with blood gushing out of the sink, can be explicitly seen in Freudian terms as a reference to birth. The hair, wrapping itself around Beverly's body, is a reference to the umbilical chord wrapping around a child's neck in the bloody process of giving birth. While Pennywise is not physically present in this scene, the viewer gathers that by inserting the tape measure into the drain, Beverly has conjured him. This, in turn, is Pennywise's attempt to instill fear and harm Beverly. It could further be argued that this is Pennywise's attempt to pull Beverly back towards her own personal id, back towards childhood and the point of entering the world, when you are only governed by your urges and not by reason. Pennywise's polymorphously perverse nature is evident in this scene when looking at the circumstances that caused him to act; he cannot control himself when Beverly inserts the tape measure into the drain and therefore his sexual aggression erupts. Additionally, this instance of the blood erupting out of the drain, could also be a nod to Beverly's introduction to puberty and the impending presence of female sexuality. There are several moments throughout the film in which Beverly's maturing is hinted at, particularly when she is buying tampons preemptively at the store or when her father sexualizes her and asks if she is "still his little girl" (*It*, Film). Therefore, the eruption of blood out of the sink could be interpreted as Beverly's fear of menstruation and the contingent symbolic transition into adulthood. Pennywise's polymorphously perverse nature could also be accounted for in this interpretation, as he would be seen as preying upon the girl's burgeoning sexuality.

An additional scene in *It* that highlights Pennywise's embodiment of the polymorphously perverse id occurs near the end of the film, when the Loser's Club is trying to rescue Beverly. As she awakens in the center of the underground system and Pennywise's lair, Beverly immediately recognizes the large mountain of lost items and children, which is phallic in shape (See Figure D). Pennywise appears and grabs Beverly, and begins to unhinge his jaws. The film

focuses almost solely on Pennywise during this moment, and the viewer sees the inside of Pennywise's mouth as his entire face peels back to reveal a mouth full of teeth that distinctly resembles a vagina (See Figure E). This moment literally paralyzes Beverly with fear, as her eyes go white and she goes into a catatonic state. Pennywise, in this scene, acts instinctively to capture Beverly and traumatize her by forcing her to look into his mouth, arguably a sexual organ. As the id, Pennywise is in an infantile state, which, in Freudian terms, means that he is in the oral stage. This would mean that his primary form of pleasure comes from his mouth, which is how he feeds on Beverly's fear (Ciasullo, Handout). Therefore, this scene demonstrates Pennywise's polymorphously perverse nature and his fixation on oral pleasure. Following this instance, the remainder of the Loser's Club descends down the well in order to rescue Beverly. They explore a tubular system of tunnels, a nod to female anatomy, in order to find the center of the lair. After breaking her out of the trance, and a proceeding trail of events that involves Bill killing Georgie's manifestation and Pennywise holding Bill away from his friends, a fight breaks out between the Loser's Club and Pennywise. The boys try to defeat the violent clown with chains, bats, a nail gun, and a crow bar, amongst other things. However, it is ultimately Beverly who is able to destroy him. Pennywise had opened his mouth, laughing at the children and the damage he had caused, when Beverly appears and shoves a large spear down Pennywise's open mouth and into his throat (See Figure F).³ The sword, a phallic object, ultimately destroys Pennywise by being inserted into his vagina-like throat. It is arguable that this is the act that undoes him because it breaks him out of the oral stage and forces him several stages ahead with a reference to the genital stage. Pennywise cannot mature through the stages that quickly without shattering and losing his ultimate sense of existence, which relies on him being able to act as the id and revolve around his urges.

³ The fact that Beverly is the one who disarms Pennywise is particularly interesting given the gender dynamics within the film. It is arguable that the boys are more afraid of Pennywise because of their male anatomy, and the threat of castration Pennywise poses. Beverly, however, has no castration anxiety, because, in Freud's terms, she has already been castrated. She does not have anything to lose in the way the boys do, making her the one who is able to overcome her fear and defeat Pennywise.

Although a Freudian reading of *It* is particularly evident, it is also very possible to do a psychoanalytic feminist reading of this film in convergence with Freud's ideas, focusing on Beverly's agency. On a personal level for Beverly, outside of the horror she's enduring with Pennywise, she is able to free herself from the consistent threat of sexual abuse presented by her father. Additionally, when looking at the second half of the film, a similar thread emerges, as Beverly is the only one who is truly able to disarm or destroy Pennywise both times in the Neibolt house. Yet, while a feminist reading renders Beverly's actions as a reversal of the stereotypical boy-saves-girl trope, it is crucial to recognize that Beverly is only able to disarm and destroy Pennywise with the spear, an inherently phallic-shaped object. She is able to disarm and destroy evil, but only in the confines of patriarchy, where the phallus still holds the ultimate power.

Figure A:



Figure B:

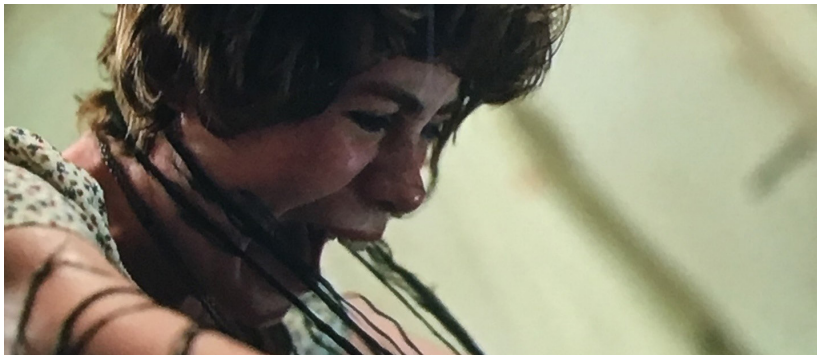


Figure C:



Figure D:



Figure E:



Figure F:



A Discussion of Unconventional Sexuality in Robert Browning's Poetry

While it is not only a necessity for life but also an intrinsic human desire, sex is marked as an unsavory, awkward, and private topic unfit for casual discussion. The secrecy and censorship associated with sex heightens its effective stimulation, enhancing its power over our conduct and marking surrounding conversations as lewd and tasteless yet insatiably provocative. While discourse on sex and sexuality is perpetually of interest, the Victorian Era in particular is frequently characterized as a period of moral rigidity that silenced discussions of taboo topics, especially sex. From the social and political upheaval that is characteristic of the nineteenth century arose a new, dominant bourgeoisie class and with it the emergence of a “new order of puritan control and repression.”¹ In consequence of the surge of industry, men and women’s roles “became more sharply defined than at any time in history,” generating the idea of separate spheres relying upon men and women’s inherent characteristics to define their segregation. Men populated the public sphere while women were confined to the domestic.² Marriage reinforced these fixed gender roles, uniting husband and wife as one person under law and requiring the woman to consolidate her individuality and exist within the personhood of her husband³. Accompanying this tightly bound family unit was an element of secrecy and silence regarding the issue of sex, adhering to the moralistic anxieties of the period.

¹ Jan Marsh, “Sexuality in the 19th Century,” Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/sex-and-sexuality-19th-century>.

² Katherine Hughes, “Gender Roles in the 19th Century,” *British Library: Discovering Literature: Romantics & Victorians*, 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>.

³ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: A Facsimile of the First Edition of 1765-1769*, vol. 4 (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, [1765-69] 1979), 433.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault explains that “sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home,” in which it was considered purely as a means of reproduction rather than act of pleasure with the married couple modeling this normative silence on the issue. All casual discussions of sex and sexuality were driven out and repressed. However, Foucault points out an important hypocrisy of Victorian society that accommodated “illegitimate sexualities” by creating a space permitting discourse on sex, free from the confinements of traditional morality. These spaces legitimized the investigation and discussions of sex through proper discourses including law and medicine.⁴ The Victorians also smuggled discussion of sexuality into a range of mediums and forms of expression—this repressed hypocrisy having particular prominence in literature and poetry.

As opposed to Victorian novels with a focus on realism, many viewed poetry as a mode of transcendence. In 1851, Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff recommended women read poetry because “it sublimes the soul by lifting it above the present to the contemplation of eternal beauty.” Alternatively, reading novels was considered too “pernicious” for a female audience.⁵ While this guidance conforms to the stereotypically confined gender roles of the era, Isobel Armstrong asserts that rather than residing in a transcendent world, Victorian poetry “marks an extraordinarily self-conscious moment of awareness in history,” as it contributed to larger social conversations by placing the material world in the center of history.⁶ Victorian poetry, in turn, could function as a space for these investigations of unconventional or taboo sexual desire and the exposition, or rather the manipulation, of gender confinements. Throughout his career, Robert Browning explored these shadowed rooms housing the obscene and raunchy yet realistic side of the Victorians through the liberated medium of poetry. His poems entangle sex and violence as a performance of dramatized mimetic realism, exposing the complicated gender codes existing behind the closed doors of

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3-4.

⁵ Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, *Thoughts on Self Culture* (Boston: WM Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1851), 410-11.

⁶ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.

nineteenth century marriage. In particular, his strategic use of the dramatic monologue allows Browning to develop the voice of a character in a protected space to experiment with more controversial topics and taboo ideas. His willingness to artfully and unapologetically showcase this discourse on sex manifests the power of language to transcend normative order and provoke social change, earning the poet the power to write history.

Published in his collection *Men and Women* in 1855, “A Woman’s Last Word” unmask the shaded domestic politics and gendered power struggle through lyricizing the lovers’ quarrel. Immediately, Browning establishes a sense of irony regarding the authenticity of the poem and its speaker. He writes this dramatic monologue from the perspective of an unidentified woman speaking to a man. While the active speaker and participant in the piece is female, she is ventriloquized by Browning, introducing a peculiar interplay of dominance and manipulation of speech from the outset. This intentional choice of dramatic monologue “embodies the structural problems of power in its form,” situating the poem in the center of this political combat within marriage.⁷ The first line of the poem—“Let’s contend no more, Love,”—indicates an argument, as the woman silences the man and dictates the circumstance by holding her “love” both physically between two commas and emotionally by her assertive speech.⁸ Browning then, introduces a sense of danger and potential violence into the arena of the marital bedroom. The speaker first asks, “What so wild as words are?” and then goes on to compare herself and her lover to a pair of fighting birds: “Hawk on bough!”⁹ The qualification of the words as “wild” underscores the dangerousness and unpredictability of these words and their consequences, indicating the volatile mood existing within the bonds of marriage. Additionally, comparison of the lovers to birds of prey and the stressed, hard ending of “Hawk” introduces a more sinister tone to the poem, alluding to the gladiatorial sparring that lies behind the façade of a happy union. However, the female speaker’s dominant role shifts in the sixth stanza, as she makes odd commands of her lover: “Be a god and hold me...Be a man and fold

7 Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 283.

8 Robert Browning, “A Woman’s Last Word,” *Poem Hunter*, [1855] 2001, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-woman-s-last-word/>.

9 Ibid.

me.”¹⁰ In these lines, the woman performs her expected submissive role in the relationship, asking to be held and folded into the arms of her lover—pleading for restraint from her power. In spite of her desire to be controlled, she subversively commands her partner to assume the role of a god and a man, putting his masculinity and expected sovereignty into question. In the final stanza of the poem, the woman expresses her anticipated emotional incontinence and sorrow but explains that she must bury it “Out of sight” from her lover.¹¹ She is capable of packaging her emotions and manipulating her gender code to her advantage while simultaneously conforming to them. Through his crafty underscoring of the tensions within this relationship, Browning sets the scene for more promiscuous behavior between the lovers.

Browning interweaves suggestive, somewhat erotic language amongst this power-play to expose the inner workings of true Victorian romance. Restricted to the domestic sphere and the home, Victorian women “were assumed to desire marriage because it allowed them to become mothers rather than to pursue sexual or emotional satisfaction,” contributing to their conceived ignorance on the matter.¹² However, Browning subtly and strategically alludes to sex to deliberately frustrate the reader in the same way the woman frustrates her lover. The woman requests that the couple “Hush and hide the talking, / Cheek on cheek!”¹³ The onomatopoeic use of “hush” paired with the suggestion that they silence their fighting and rather lie together “cheek on cheek” introduces a seductive, flirtatious tone to the scene implying that this conversation takes place as pillow-talk in the seclusion and privacy of the bedroom. Then, the speaker incorporates biblical language—“serpent’s tooth,” “apple reddens,” “lose our Edens”—to frame their sexual relationship.¹⁴ The allusion to the Garden of Eden implies the fall or loss of innocence while the phallic undertones of the serpent and erotic connotation of the ripening apple slyly codes a sexual feeling within this verbal dispute, circumventing the female expectation to not know or speak about sex. Nearing the end of the monologue,

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Hughes, “Gender Roles.”

13 Browning, “A Woman’s Last Word.”

14 Ibid.

the woman promises that she will lay her “flesh and spirit” in her lover’s hands.¹⁵ While the use of “flesh” acts as a sensual reminder for a woman’s physical skin and body, it is anchored to the Victorian law that bound a woman and her independence to her husband, truly uniting the two as one. Joining in marriage secured the woman as the man’s property and induced her silence, hence the title of the work, “A Woman’s Last Word,” represents this stripping of speech and loss of personhood associated with the nineteenth century wife.¹⁶ Through this entanglement of sex with complex gender performances, Browning reveals the nuances of Victorian marriage and the concealed combat that ensues, allowing his poetry to function as a vehicle to drive controversial, unsavory conversations about sex.

Browning’s choice to employ the dramatic monologue to cunningly explore the world of sexuality and lewd desire allows him the freedom to expose this impure Victorian reality without slipping into a promiscuous role himself. In his earlier poem “My Last Duchess,” Browning writes from the perspective of the Duke of Ferrara, a psychologically troubled character that possesses lustful, illicit tendencies that provide a glimpse into the shadowed territory of Victorian pornography.¹⁷ By developing the character of the Duke through his monologue, Browning is capable of achieving a “conscious historicity” without requiring an autobiographical or literal reading but rather “a fantastic mimicry and faking of realism.”¹⁸ In his initial description of the realistic painting of his late-wife, the Duke notes that the artist’s “hands / Worked busily a day,” allowing him to capture the “depth and passion of its earnest glance.”¹⁹ The suggestion of busily working hands possesses an inappropriately coded sexual connotation that allowed the artist to capture the authenticity of the flirtatious Duchess, “looking as if she were alive,” and extraordinary verisimilitude in his painting,

15 Ibid.

16 Rhian Williams, “Victorian Poetry and Domestic Politics,” Class Lecture, *Victorian Literature at the University of Glasgow*, Glasgow, Scotland, October 10, 2018.

17 Marsh, “Sexuality in the 19th Century.”

18 Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 289.

19 Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess,” *Poetry Foundation*, [1842] 2001, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768/my-last-duchess>.

reflecting Browning’s use of mimetic realism throughout the poem.²⁰ Additionally, the Duke keeps the painting curtained off for himself, implying both his need for absolute control and ownership and that the image of his late-Duchess may be overtly sexual—too lewd for the public eye. However, the Duke takes pride in the implicitly obscene painting, beginning his speech by announcing: “That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall...I call / That piece a wonder” to then detail the expertise of the artist that executed the most precise details of the woman including the “spot / of joy” on her cheek.²¹ The sense of fascination and pleasure the Duke experiences from this sexualized portrait suggests a certain vulgarity of temperament and potential pornographic tendencies. While the Duke goes on to explain the circumstances that renders the painting a sinful and haunting reminder of his paranoid psyche and fixated obsessions, he still cherishes the portrait’s salacious content, demonstrating his insatiable desire for decadence. Browning’s character development of the Duke and his unconventional, erotic desire functions as a window into Victorian’s hidden sexuality, dramatically miming the unspoken appetite for sex.

Through the protected guise of the dramatic monologue, Browning also elucidates the lurking sin and violence inherent to marriage as a representation of Victorian domestic politics. Throughout “My Last Duchess,” Browning exercises the entanglement of sex, violence, and aesthetics by describing an eerie, sexualized circumstance through beautiful language and structure—iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets. After admiring the extraordinarily realistic portrait of the Duchess, the Duke describes her troubling, natural sexuality: “She had a heart...too soon made glad...her looks went everywhere,” noting her thoughtless dispense of love, admiration, and even his “gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name,” exhibiting his frustration by her sexual freedom.²² The Duke explains that his compulsion to control his wife exceeded his patience, leading him to “[give] commands; / Then all smiles stopped together. / There she stands as if alive.”²³ The rigid structure of these lines in addition to their blunt punctuation supply a sense of

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

rhythmic urgency reflecting the Duke's obsessive desire to author his wife. The lines indicate that he must combat her natural sexuality and frivolousness with dominance and abuse, characterizing the Duchess as a victim of male desire to fix female sexuality. Holly Furneaux notes this male ideal of female purity and its "[enshrinement of] a sexual double-standard" which exhibited itself in legislature that punished women far more severely than men for sexual promiscuity.²⁴ These legislative acts reflect Victorian society's refusal to casually discuss sex, but rather the preferred notion "that sex be inscribed...in an ordered system of knowledge" causing Victorians to view it as a suspicious, dark secret that each person carried with them.²⁵ Hence, the Duke's desire to restrain his wife's sexuality despite his own pornographic vices mimics Victorian society's domestic politics and its aim to silence overt discussions of sex as well as hide them away in alternative mediums—art, medicine, law—in which they may be subjected to a regulated discourse.

While Browning's lends an implicit focus to the discussion of underlying sexual tension in the two latter poems, "Porphyria's Lover" describes an overtly erotic scene incorporating unconcealed female sexuality, which Browning casts as beautiful and natural rather than obscene. In contrast to "A Woman's Last Word" and "My Last Duchess," titles referring vaguely to some female character, "Porphyria's Lover" indicates a specific woman whose name defines her male counterpart, putting him in a passive position relative to his lover at the onset of the poem. This active female role lingers throughout the first half of the poem: "When glided in Porphyria... she shut the cold out...and made the cheerless grate / Blaze up." She enters the scene ethereally and domestically as she gracefully secures the cottage from the storm and creates a comfortable atmosphere for herself and her lover, conforming to the domestic expectations of Victorian women. However, Porphyria quickly becomes more seductive as she "Withdrew the dripping cloak...untied / Her hat and let her damp hair fall, /...[and] put my arm about her waist."²⁶ Throughout this slow, progressive stripping, the man in the poem

24 Holly Furneaux, "Victorian Sexualities," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 10 (2011), 768.

25 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 69.

26 Robert Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," *Poetry Foundation*, [1855] 2001, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46313/porphyrias-lover>.

remains passive, watching Porphyria perform the active role and even control his own movements to place him in a romantic position, reversing the common gender expectations of a dominant male figure and the submissive female. Additionally, the actions of untying and falling contribute to a sense of loosened or corrupted social boundaries, in which this erotic display can be appreciated and enjoyed. These gentle yet assertive actions add to Porphyria's seduction as she exposes her "smooth white shoulder bare" and whispers into her lover's ear, becoming a statuesque prototype of female sexuality and male desire.²⁷ While Browning builds this dramatic monologue from an unconventional display of unrestrained female sexuality, he then disrupts this beautifully romantic scene with sheer violence, embracing the desire for further sensation.

While Browning initially engages with Porphyria's natural sexuality as beautiful, it is suddenly reprimanded as the poem enters the man's thought process, transitioning into a case study of a disturbed working mind. The impressionistic moment of the poem and the man's startling and eerie yet seamless murder of Porphyria, Browning's invented prototype of female sexuality, provides an interesting commentary on Victorian domestic relationships and outward silencing of promiscuity. The violent scene begins with the reversal of power relationships, as the man confuses love with total possession, noting that "Porphyria worshiped me...she was mine, mine," placing the active female character under the control of the man and rehashing his custody of her.²⁸ Once the man feels confident in his dominance and ownership, he strangles Porphyria with "all her hair," the same hair that she let fall in her earlier seductive showcase.²⁹ The man's murder of his lover, using her own flesh as the weapon, implies not only that he needed to kill her to gain control, take ownership, and do away with impurity in the domestic arena but also the threat that one's own sexuality imposes on oneself. He describes her lifeless head that "this time my shoulder bore...the smiling little rosy head," indicating the now fixed dependence and innocence that he secured of his lover by killing her erotic behavior.³⁰ Despite his sinful act, the man also doges divine

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

punishment explaining, that “God has not yet said a word!”³¹ In this unapologetically amoral piece, Browning dramatizes the Victorian depiction of women as dead, lacking agency, and dependent on men to secure their virtue and apprehend their immoral behavior in response to the impending “moral panic” over prostitution and the corresponding fear of “visible female freedom from social control”³² However, the sincerity of this dramatic interplay comes into question with Browning’s use of this disturbing and grotesquely violent scene, prompting the consideration of the authenticity of these rigidly gendered moral concerns and their unsettlingly corruptive repercussions.

Browning’s strategically subversive employment of the dramatic monologue, using it as an instrument to compose a necessary conversation regarding the dynamic between sex and violence, testifies to his role as an influential word-smith. The historical notion of Victorian sexual repression and prohibition marks those who dared to speak about it as intentional transgressors. Foucault argues that, “a person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.”³³ And Browning’s poems do just that—his poetry redirects Victorian’s disdainful attitudes about sex toward an important contemplation over the violent consequences of silencing natural sexuality. In particular, he exposes the troubling violence inflicted upon women resulting from pent-up male desire. While these controversial poems manifest an intriguing social problem paradigmatic to the nineteenth century, his ideas hold an acute pertinence today, as news and tabloids are littered with ideas surrounding rape-culture, personal testimonies regarding sexual violence, and calls to eliminate sexual harassment. Browning’s fearless scrutiny of the relationship between sex and violence imposes a necessary questioning of our sexual repression and its considerable repercussions on a functioning society, deeming his poetry and its transcendent nature a crucial vehicle for the discussion and instigation for social revision.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Marsh, “Sexuality in the 19th Century.”

³³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 6.

High Schoolers Find Their Voices in the March for Our Lives

What Happened?

When I walked out on National Walkout day on April 20th, 2018, I skipped my classes because I thought my presence could make a difference in gun legislation that would protect against school shootings. What I didn't know was if my chanting "Call your reps!" would actually



change someone's vote. National Walkout Day and March for Our Lives (MFOL) were student-led protests that took place in early 2018. Yet, at the time many of my peers, including myself, could not vote for the change we were calling for. In

researching this topic, I wanted to know if we were unique in our struggle as disenfranchised activists or if we were simply another cycle of history. MFOL echoes much of the student activism seen during the desegregation movements from the 1950s and 60s, but the new technologies we see today allows for an increased reach through social media use and therefore a greater unity among protestors. In preparation for the midterm elections, MFOL utilized their social media momentum to run the "Vote for Our Lives" campaign. The 2018 midterm saw drastically increased voter turnout compared to prior years, and this momentum seen in voters, along with common sense gun reform passed in Washington, proves that we, young activists, can help overcome the silence on gun violence in our country.

A Historical Repeat

The Parkland students are the main leaders of the movement because of their personal connection and

proximity to what the movement is about. This personal motivation draws close parallels to historical student protests during the 1960s as black students protested for equality in education. African American students became strong advocates for integration, and as the larger civil rights movements died down, the students found even more momentum for their cause. As scholar John Rury explains in his article "An End of Innocence:"

"African American secondary students became considerably more active as the decade wore on, and less accepting of the traditional goals of established civil rights organizations such as the NAACP."

These young activists were taking on more and more responsibility as it became clear they could only rely on themselves to create real change. They brought a sense of urgency to the issue and "embraced certain tenets of the emerging Black Power perspective, particularly black pride and community self-control"¹. Because these issues directly affected them, the students would not stop protesting until they got what they wanted.

This added responsibility that the African American student activists and the Parkland activists have undertaken is detrimental to their childhoods. Just as African American students could not ignore the poor conditions of their segregated schools, the Parkland activists can no longer ignore the gun violence they have been exposed to. However, even if one aspect of their childhood is destroyed, at least these victims have harnessed their story to change national policy. Parkland students, just as black students were during the civil rights movement, have "[become] potent actors in the national struggle for equality and self-determination" in their quest "of changing their high schools to meet the needs they felt were being ignored"². The Parkland students and students across the nation are no longer tolerant of the system that allows for the killing their classmates. They feel as though they are being neglected and instead of allowing the silence on the issue to continue, they have left their childhood innocence behind to pursue the change our

country needs.

¹ John L., Rury and Shirley Hill. "An End of Innocence: African-American High School Protest in the 1960s and 1970s." *History of Education*, vol. 42, no. 4, July 2013, pp. 486–508. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/0046760X.2013.819126.

² Ibid.

Strength in Followers

One of the modern day strengths of these protests is social media.

Often the administrations in charge of students are slow to respond to their demands, so they turn to social media which “[allows] students to listen to each other, demonstrate their solidarity with each other, and lead with each other through activism”³.



I know from when I attended my school walkout, all of the organization was done digitally either through group messaging or social media accounts. Not only that, but after the walkout was over, it continued to live on for a few days through social media posts.

This pattern of social media allowing a movement to ripple for longer than it is actually active allows for more people to get involved even after the actual march or walkout is done. Adam Gismondi and Laura Osteen, in their article “Student Activism in the Technology Age,” call this ripple effect on social media “the public use of iterative processes to achieve shared language and develop goals.” Not only does social media now allow for MFOL to take advantage of this extended ripple period, but it is also strengthened by the individual stories that are shared tangentially. Using social media to reach out to voters has been successful in the past. These types of online campaigns work by leveraging an online following to create social pressure to encourage people to vote⁴. This also helps the movement evolve “to suit the needs and demands of the activists”⁵. To keep their momentum going, MFOL evolved into a “get out the vote” campaign to take advantage of their following and the ripple effect to continue to share their story about gun violence.

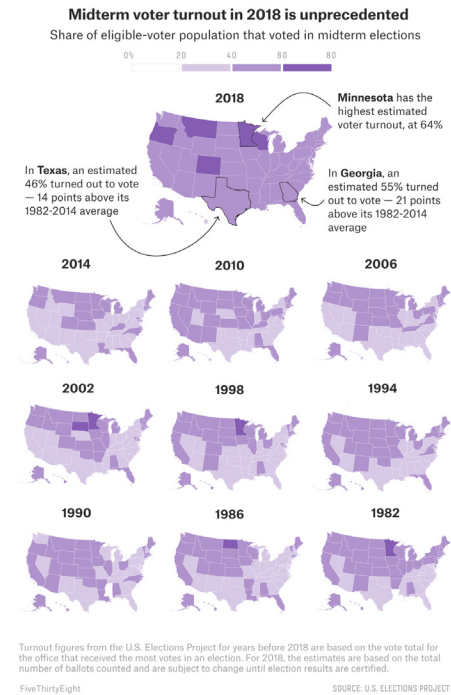
3 Adam Gismondi, and Laura Osteen. “Student Activism in the Technology Age.” *New Directions for Student Leadership*, vol. 2017, no. 153, Spring 2017, pp. 63–74. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/yl.20230.

4 Katherine Haenschen. “Social Pressure on Social Media: Using Facebook Status Updates to Increase Voter Turnout.” *Journal of Communication*, vol. 66, no. 4, Aug. 2016, pp. 542–563. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/jcom.12236.

5 Gismondi

MFOL is using social media to get voters out and to draw

young people in. MFOL hopes to “build a sense of community between young people all over the country who see each other participating on social media” in the #TurnOutTuesday campaign⁶. March for Our Lives leaders are focused on getting a high voter turnout and continue to emphasize how gun reform does not have to be a partisan issue. They are interested in supporting gun reform regardless of which side the candidate leans. One of the field strategists for MFOL said “When people tell us that their vote doesn’t matter or their vote won’t make a difference, we tell them that it will. We tell them that your vote will



save a life”⁷. MFOL activists continue to embrace their inability to vote by telling those who can what issues matter most and why their vote is important.

I Voted, Did You?

Coming right off of March for Our Lives and National Walkout day, many students had high hopes while adults remained skeptical. Following the march, John Cassidy, writing for the *New Yorker*, talks about how at the time there was little optimism that the movement would go anywhere in the Republican-controlled government. However, this lack of faith seen directly following the march has now been shattered by a Democratic takeover of the House, and with that same momentum, Washington voters passed Initiative 1639, which was common sense gun reform passing with

6 Lauren Holter. “March For Our Lives’ #TurnoutTuesday Midterm Campaign Gives You A Weekly Plan To Get Involved.” *Bustle*, 26 Sept. 2018

7 Ibid.

60% of the votes⁸. Some of this success can be attributed to the high voter turnout seen in the midterms⁹.

Now many of my peers who participated last year have graduated from high school and, like me, voted in the midterms. It felt good to check yes on I-1639 and to hear that I was part of an ambitious large wave of voters. I would say we are only seeing the beginning of a ripple effect high school activists have started, and the legacy of these student activists will continue to live alongside the student activists of the past. The blue wave we see today is only a preview of what is to come. I know that if this new batch of representatives continues to fail the students, the young activists we have empowered this year won't let their issues be ignored.

8 Joseph O'Sullivan. "Washington State Voters Approved New Gun Regulations in I-1639. Here's What the Law Will Do." *The Seattle Times*, The Seattle Times Company, 8 Nov. 2018

9 Rachel Dottle, et al. "The 2018 Midterms, In 4 Charts." *FiveThirtyEight*, 13 Nov. 2018

Why I'm Against Kaepernick's Nike Ad

To kick off its new advertisement campaign in early September 2018, Nike aired the monumental, yet controversial, ad featuring football star-turned activist Colin Kaepernick. Colin Kaepernick is an inspiring activist: putting his football career in limbo for the greater cause of standing up for injustice – that is, by kneeling. Nike is a \$24 billion company that exploits its workers and has cases of gender-based discrimination in the workforce.¹ While there are benefits to Kaepernick signing with Nike for this ad campaign, it all in all covers up the fact that while Nike promotes stories of inspiration and fighting for justice, they do not actually practice what it preaches. Nike is profiting off of Kaepernick's call for justice just as the company itself is profiting off of classism, racism, and sexism. As Journalist Dave Zirin claims, "Nike has used the image of rebellion to sell its gear, while stripping that rebellion of all its content."²

Kaepernick should be an inspiration. By kneeling during the national anthem for an NFL football game, he used his platform to address racism and police brutality against African Americans. It was a small, silent protest that caused huge waves across the nation and even potentially costed him his profession for the time being. Kaepernick even voiced, "I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right."³ For Kaepernick, it is bigger than football – it is about racial injustice and systemic racism in the United States. Today, he has yet to be signed, and the question is of whether it is because of his politicization or because of his dwindling

1 Ben Carrington and Jules Boykoff, "Is Colin Kaepernick's Nike Deal Activism – or Just Capitalism?" *The Guardian* (Sep. 6, 2018),

2 Ibid.

3 John Branch, "The Awakening of Colin Kaepernick" *The New York Times* (Sep. 7, 2017),

performance during his last season. This does not mean he has stopped working: he tirelessly supports grassroots organizations through donations and has founded the Know Your Rights foundation for children in order to raise awareness on “higher education, self-empowerment, and instruction to properly interact with law enforcement.”⁴ He has found empowerment through activism and, through this, has found ways to empower vulnerable youth.

Since Kaepernick is an inspiration and potentially one of the most influential political athletes of the times, it makes perfect sense for Nike to use him and his story for the thirty-year anniversary of the “just do it” slogan ad-campaign. Journalist Jelani Cobb even notes that Nike’s goal is to “sell inspiration.”⁵ Nike’s intent is not to overturn the racist system that embodies America and the globe, because that would actually hurt their company; their goal is to profit off of Kaepernick’s work, but then turn around and perpetuate injustice. The company has a history of labor rights violations in 300 of their factories across 40 countries.⁶ This is in addition to allegations of a sexist work environment. However, by having Kaepernick as the face of this ad, it moves the attention from its exploitive and discriminatory practices to activism. Consumers will see Nike as an ethical company that supports racial justice and equality, when in fact their practices tell another story. Moreover, months after the advertising campaign’s commencement, Nike has reported significant increases in profits: revenue and net income increased ten percent by December of 2018 and while shares slid immediately following the ad, they have since risen about seven percent.⁷ Nike is able to profit off of selling inspiration and progressive values, while simultaneously profiting off of workers’ rights violations.

However, there are benefits to this ad campaign. The campaign inspires youth to fight for a cause, and gives vulnerable youth a face to look up to. These are all important elements that we, as a society, should promote. Nonetheless, we should not

forget about Nike’s history. We need to be skeptical and critical of ad campaigns, such as this one, and not be afraid to dig deeper to find the real intentions behind the actions. Nike is not an ethical company. They do not promote equity and justice. They feed off of class struggle and poverty around the world in order to exploit its workers and employ cheap labor. They perpetuate sexism and hyper masculinity by allowing gender-based harassment and discrimination to take place in the workplace.

Marketing is one of capitalism’s greatest tools: it sells an idea to consumers who then buy that company’s product for the intangible value that it represents. It is a ploy to increase consumerism, distract consumers, and increase profits for producers. We must always be skeptical when we see an ad for racial justice coming from a company that depends on economic exploitation.

4 <https://knowyourrightscamp.com/about/>

5 Jelani Cobb, “Behind Nike’s Decision to Stand by Colin Kaepernick” *The New Yorker*, (Sept. 4, 2018),

6 Ben Carrington and Jules Boykoff.

7 Joe Williams, “Nike reports double-digit profit growth after Colin Kaepernick controversy” *Washington Examiner* (Dec. 20, 2018),

Defining American Exceptionalism

“God looks out for fools, drunks, and the United States.” These words, attributed to Otto von Bismarck, rather succinctly express the inherent tensions in beliefs about American exceptionalism and their corresponding critics. The intertwining definitions of American superiority and individuality are critiqued on several fronts, from constitutional law to international relations to public education. At the root of all these critiques is a discussion of American foundational history, contesting the supposed “immaculate conception” of a country that was “born free.” We must ask if an immaculate conception is necessary to be born free, and if equality is even a facet of freedom at all. In the presence of slavery, wealth inequalities, and genocide, America’s alleged original sin comes from the inherent inequalities present at America’s birth.¹ In these arguments, no one perspective is able to adequately criticize American exceptionalism in its entirety, causing them to not reach any kind of consensus, but to be in conflicting conversation with each other. Their arguments often purport to assert a harsh rejection of American exceptionalism, but their argument itself does not provide the support for their claim, but rather support of a more nuanced view of the subject. As historians and popular critics deconstruct this long dominant narrative of American history, the entire narrative of American history has become so fractured that barely any coherent understanding remains, but the conflicting natures of the major criticisms have failed to create any new narratives, deeply affecting the American public and politics.² Yet, analysis of the debate in its entirety reveal that in addition to being highly conflicting and collectively incoherent, the

¹ Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History*. 1. publ. as a Beacon paperback ed. Boston: Beacon Press (1971). 59.

² Eric Foner, *The New American History*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014. 210.

debate is largely not about whether or not American exceptionalism is true, but what it means.

While the term “American Exceptionalism” is used with the assumption of a common definition, writers imply different meanings, and this consequently changes the nature and validity of their criticisms. In a discussion of the of American mind, Jason Gilmore attempts to give a succinct definition of American exceptionalism: “American exceptionalism at its core is the idea that the United States is a singular, superior, and perhaps even God-favored country in the international community.”³ This definition offers an inclusive understanding of American exceptionalism, but the conjunction in this sentence should be “or” because of the complexities of the discussion surrounding American exceptionalism. Assuming that all arguments in favor of American exceptionalism assert all three of those qualities creates a straw man argument, as informed academics and opinion writers recognize the difficulty of holding all of those beliefs simultaneously with an adequate understanding of American history and politics. Generally, ideas of American exceptionalism can be divided into two overlapping but distinct categories: uniqueness and superiority. Arguments regarding the uniqueness of America discuss whether American exceptionalism is different than other countries’ exceptionalism and whether American political structure and culture is distinct from other countries historically, legally, and currently. Arguments regarding moral superiority are closely tied to uniqueness arguments, discussing what can be broadly called “City on a Hill” syndrome in the areas of current domestic politics, international policies, and historically. Focusing on arguments based in historical analysis, the dominant criticisms are that America’s original sins preclude her from being morally superior or that foundational American history is not unique. Online editorials, popular history, and academic writing collectively build the multilayered discussion and show its many implications.

Asking if American exceptionalism is in itself exceptional seems tangential but is an important and telling facet of American exceptionalism. Not only would the strength and pervasiveness of

³ Jason Gilmore, “American Exceptionalism in the American Mind: Presidential Discourse, National Identity, and U.S. Public Opinion,” *Communication Studies* 66, no. 3 (July, 2015): 301-320. doi:10.1080/10510974.2014.991044.

our belief be special, but our deep belief in our own exceptionalism may be proof of its existence. Contributing to the idea that American nationalism is different, American nationalism is rarely discussed in discussions of nationalism generally, as David A. Hollinger explains.⁴ In asserting that the United States should be considered in global studies of nationalism, Hollinger asserts a modest argument for American exceptionalism because comparatively, the United States has been remarkably stable, is still the most powerful nation in the world, is the only country to still use a constitution written in the 18th century, and “is the most successful nationalist project of all modern history,” as the result of “immigration, conquest, and enslavement-and-emancipation.”⁵ This view understands America as not particularly exceptional in any meaningful way but that American nationalism was remarkably successful, especially considering the unique challenges it faced. Appleby’s explanation of the rise of American exceptionalism bolsters this discussion of American exceptionalism as a nationalist project. She asserts that American exceptionalism arose because a national identity and national unity had to be created rather than inherited, thus characterizing “much of the bombast about America’s unique calling to nurture freedom for the entire human race . . . as rather nervous whistling in the dark or, more accurately, whistling through the graveyard of failed republics unable to secure the unity and solidarity that monarchies imposed.”⁶ While this may not excuse the results of American exceptionalism, as it was used to justify “the seizure of territory long occupied by Native Americans”⁷ and other atrocities, this undermines other’s portrayal of American exceptionalism as something knowingly created by elites conspiring to maintain their power. Rather, exceptionalism was initially conceived as more of a desperate attempt to have a more successful nationalist project than those who came before than a premeditated justification for genocide and oppression. This perspective could alter our understanding of American exceptionalism as exceptional,

4 David A. Hollinger, “Authority, Solidarity, and the Political Economy of Identity: The Case of the United States,” *Diacritics* 29, no. 4 (-12-01, 1999): 116-127. doi:10.1353/dia.1999.0030. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/9545>. 116.

5 Ibid. 117.

6 Joyce Oldham Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret C. Jacob. *Telling the Truth about History*. I. ed. ed. New York [u.a.]: Norton, 1994. 92-94.

7 Ibid. 115.

being successful in its success, but not necessarily in our confidence in it or the correctness of it. Considering American exceptionalism in contrast to other countries’ nationalism may not render it particularly special but illuminates the legitimate purposes of nationalism and the uses it provides to a country independent of the potential ill effects of it.

The most pervasive criticism of America and American exceptionalism is questioning the morality of America, particularly the morality and genuineness of the founding ideals and the context they arose in. While some question the moral validity of the Constitution, some only question its singularity, which ultimately buttresses the notion that the Constitution is morally valid and potentially superior. Arguments against American exceptionalism that center on the political structure pose their argument by criticizing the Constitution. While those arguing original sin focus on the founders themselves, some criticize the idea that the Constitution “was created by a single stroke, thanks to the genius of the founding fathers, regarded by many as legendary demi-gods.”⁸ Online editorials, reflecting public understanding, give a simplistic take on this, as Adranik Mgranyan did in an article for *The National Interest*, arguing that “once many countries tried to copy the American political system and enviously read the U.S. Constitution that had preserved intact for so long” before going on to assert that the checks and balances imbedded in the “antiquated” Constitution are the root cause of slow and sometimes dysfunctional American government.⁹ While this argument may be rather ignorant of the complexities of this discussion and the holes in its own logic, a similar argument occurs in academic circles as well, with more sound logic and credibility. Stephen Gaurdbaum of UCLA Law argues that the American onstitution is not exceptional because, since 1945, many countries now have similar frameworks.¹⁰ Yet, his argument implies that the United States constitution has only not been exceptional since 1945, meaning that for 158 years, it was exceptional. While it may be true that America’s constitution no

8 Andranik Migranyan, “The Myth of American Exceptionalism,” *The Center for the National Interest*, Accessed Apr 13, 2018

9 Ibid.

10 Stephen Gardbaun. “The Myth and the Reality of American Constitutional Exceptionalism,” *Michigan Law Review* 107, no. 3 (2008): 391-466

longer is unique in the grand scheme of global constitutions, its longevity and its role in the shaping of those other constitutions allow for maintaining American exceptionalism. This argument offers a critique only of a type of modern exceptionalism but maintains the exceptional nature of the original document in its historical context and value.

While some critique the uniqueness of the Constitution, others argue against American exceptionalism by undermining American superiority. Because the Constitution and other founding documents often are seen as providing the foundation of America's being the "city on the hill," those seeking to undermine the American superiority argument discuss the motives and contexts of those writings. An early critic of American exceptionalism, Henry Beard, argued that the Constitution and American foundations were simply created to preserve early wealthy elite power.¹¹ This method of deconstructing American exceptionalism was to find similarities between the dissatisfying and corrupt political present and American foundations. This argument does not point out glaring immoralities to completely undermine validity of the early ideals but to criticize American exceptionalism by discussing dissatisfying circumstances. This stance does not assert the hypocrisy of American immorality as others do. Rather, Beard viewed the American canon of political thought about "justice, truth, freedom, and religious tolerance" not as genuine, but as merely "smoke screens behind which the real reasons for seeking and using power were negotiated."¹² This rather cynical view of American political foundations indicates that contemporary social and political ills are to be expected in American political culture because the foundation of American society was created with impure motives and was not an "immaculate conception." In one of Zinn's many conflicting arguments against American moral superiority, he continues Beard's reasoning, arguing that the founders were creating a system meant to preserve the imbalances between white landed elites and women, slaves, Indians, and the poor, "creat[ing] the most effective system of national control devised in modern times."¹³ Zinn's argument,

¹¹ Appleby, 103.

¹² Ibid. 140.

¹³ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, New ed., [Nachdr.] ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. 59.

while arguing against American morality, still perversely maintains a belief in American individuality, if only for America being uniquely morally reprehensible. In this view, the founding documents never held moral commitment or validity, so when those ideals seem to be violated, those with power are not necessarily being hypocritical. For America to be hypocritical, the founding documents had to contain genuine expressions of ideals.

Accusing America of hypocrisy, however, makes the crimes appear worse but does not deny the uniqueness that Beard denies, and perhaps even supports it. The hypocrisy argument is a harsher criticism in many ways, but it does not consistently reject exceptionalism because it accepts the moral validity and transcendence of early American thought. While political and historical writings abound with arguments against the morality of America today at home and abroad, historical discussions against American moral superiority, particularly those that make the original sin argument, are implicit premises of nearly all of those arguments. They assert that not only does America have a morally reprehensible past, but she also is highly hypocritical. Arguments against exceptionalism imply the idea that the philosophical foundations of America were dishonestly applied and the consequent violence and oppression is worsened by its hypocrisy. The assertion of hypocrisy targets these arguments towards America, rather than just the global history full of oppression and violence. Thus, these arguments do not necessarily hinge upon the atrocities themselves but the hypocrisy of them. In another one of Zinn's arguments, he explains that the discussion of slavery and segregation has often been excluded from American narratives because that narrative coupled with praise of the founders "spoil[s] all estimates about democracy, freedom, and equality in this country."¹⁴ While slavery is obviously deplorable, its juxtaposition with the ideas espoused at the same time by elites exposes a different and deeper degree of horror. Similarly, rather than denouncing the founding ideas themselves because of political and social conditions in the United States, Appleby too argues that those conditions "mocked the high moral purposes embedded in that faith."¹⁵ Rather than arguing there is no morality in the purposes to begin with, this assessment

¹⁴ Howard Zinn. *The Politics of History*.

¹⁵ Appleby, *Telling the Truth about History*, 143.

condemns the prevailing political and social conditions in contrast with what they are supposed to be. This does not condemn the Constitution or founding ideals as immoral themselves. The history of American dissent supports the notion that American hypocrisy is the crucial aspect of the immorality of exceptionalism, as the American founding history and documents became crucial sources for later activists and reformers.¹⁶ Even the harshest criticisms and calls for change maintain the dignity of the Constitution and other pieces of the American political canon, supporting the argument that American political foundations were profound and transcendent of context. This entertains the idea that the people who wrote these ideals could be morally reprehensible, but their thoughts could still be godly, exceptional, and profoundly moral.

The debate that arose over a speech Obama gave in 2009 provides a microcosm that reveals certain complexities of the debate over American exceptionalism. The debate was played out in popular and academic discussion of a 2009 speech Barack Obama gave:

I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism . . . I think that we have a core set of values that are enshrined in our constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality, that, though imperfect, are exceptional.¹⁷

In place of any language specifically referencing America being unique or better in any meaningful way, Obama used the word “exceptional,” the meaning of which has clearly been disputed in a variety of contexts. The ensuing debate over this speech and other times Obama referenced American exceptionalism underscores the wide ranging implications of the debate over the exceptionalism of America’s exceptionalism. In the time between the speech and a 2010 article in *The Atlantic*, American conservatives used the speech as an opportunity to criticize Obama for not believing in American exceptionalism, but merely a “benign provincialism.”¹⁸ Prominent conservatives such as Jonah Goldberg, Dinesh D’Souza, and Monica

16 Ibid. 111.

17 “The Big Lie,” *The Atlantic* (Nov 9, 2010).

18 Ibid.

Crowley, criticized Obama for theoretically rejecting American exceptionalism, prompting Andrew Sullivan writing for the liberal *The Atlantic*, to call those conservative arguments “untruths” and argue that Obama’s full speech showed that he believes in American exceptionalism.¹⁹ Obama’s words require the conclusion either that out of all countries’ exceptionalisms’ America’s is the most accurate, therefore America is the best country, or that America may be superior to other countries in some ways but is not unique. As conservative critics pointed out, to say that all countries are exceptional is to undermine the idea that America is exceptional. In contrast, Obama’s words could also mean that while all countries believe that they are exceptional, America’s belief is the most correct. The many possibilities for what Obama’s words could have meant and the various criticisms raised afterwards reveal how the definition of American exceptionalism is what is truly being contested.

By 2017, *The Atlantic* published an article calling the same Obama speech a “diffident” handling of American exceptionalism.²⁰ The difference in political landscape and context profoundly changed the interpretation of the same words. In 2010, Obama’s presidency symbolically represented the achievement of the goal of American nationalism, which is largely to “incorporate individuals from a great variety of communities of descent on terms of considerable intimacy with a civic solidarity” and common identity into a society with “a deeply racist past.”²¹ The first black president provided proof that even in a country with such a long history of racism, those who have been so deeply oppressed can not only share the civic identity, but can share that identity to such an extent as to be president. Thus, for Obama to not be seen as truly American not only undermines his presidency, but it undermines a fairly noble aspect of the nationalist project and the black communities’ place in civic society. In contrast, by 2017, the meaning of American exceptionalism had been changed by Donald Trump’s “America

19 Ibid.

20 David Frum, “The Souring of American Exceptionalism.” *The Atlantic* (Jul 3, 2017). <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/07/the-sunset-of-american-exceptionalism/532548/>.

21 David A. Hollinger, *Authority, Solidarity, and the Political Economy of Identity: The Case of the United States*, 127.

First” policies. In this context, to affirm Obama’s belief in exceptionalism is to equate him to Trump. This change shows how the understanding of American exceptionalism in popular culture has more impact on its perception than the words themselves. This discussion also demonstrates how easily swayed, manipulated, and ignorant those writing popular American history can be. In discussing the same Obama speech, Paul Waldman writing for *AlterNet* deplores America for how often we are told we are exceptional, comparing America to other nations that he thinks are not so self-obsessed as to believe in their own exceptionalism.²² This directly contrasts to the far more credible Hollinger, whose work discusses the comparison of American nationalism to other, similar nationalism in other countries. In the context of 2017, the person who says the words American exceptionalism profoundly affects the American public’s view of the concept. This debate reveals that the contested issue in this is not actually whether someone believes in exceptionalism but what exceptionalism itself means. In a 2013 international relations journal article, Milos Hrnjaz and Milan Krstic argue that the incongruency between Obama’s assertion of exceptionalism and conservative’s disbelief in him arose because the meaning of exceptionalism is understood differently by all of them, and Obama’s argument and resulting policy action is the result of differing understandings of the concept.²³

As American exceptionalism has been deconstructed and denied in academic circles and in public opinion, the American narrative has been rejected in many ways. Ultimately, most of the critics of American exceptionalism seem to support one aspect of it, showing how complex the discussion is and revealing that the definition is being contested, not the truthfulness of the claim of American exceptionalism. While these deconstructions are valuable, lacking any coherent national narrative undoes the nobler goals of nationalism. There is no problem with having a complex and difficult to define national history. But we need a cohesive national history nonetheless. Building a new narrative requires that we find a common conception of American exceptionalism and the American

narrative. When we begin to create narratives instead of destroying them, the American identity will begin to be rebuilt.

22 Paul Waldman, “Why American Exceptionalism is a Dangerous Sham.” *AlterNet* (September 18, 6:25 AM GMT, 2013). <https://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/why-american-exceptionalism-dangerous-sham>.

23 Milos Hrnjaz and Milan Krstic, “Obama’s Dual Discourse on American Exceptionalism.” *Croatian International Relations Review* 21, no. 73 (Jan 1, 2015): 25-56.

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One of her top favorite things is handwritten letters and cards. She enjoys talking to people and getting to know them and their stories. She is always grateful and amazed by the kind people she crosses paths with in life. Among the list are our friends here on campus, at U.S. bank: Brandon, Jesse, Leslie, and R.J. who've always been very sweet and helpful to all students. Thank you!

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Originality is the essence of true scholarship.
Creativity is the soul of the true scholar.
-Nnamdi Azikiwe