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WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

**Celebrating Student Writing  
Across the Curriculum**

**Prize Winners 2019-2020**

TWENTIETH ANNUAL EDITION



# Introduction

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Now in its 20th year of publication, *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum* publishes undergraduate student writing in a range of disciplines. On the pages of this magazine, we celebrate student achievement in writing and showcase exemplary written work from across William Paterson University.

The student writing featured here represents difference in writing. Some entries are thoroughly researched and deftly worded, others provide analytical exploration or make a compelling argument, and still others are imaginatively creative or superbly designed and arranged. Nurtured by our faculty, the student writers celebrated in this issue have worked hard to develop their best writing.

For this contest, William Paterson faculty nominate student writing from across a wide range of courses. Whether a written work is nominated for its creativity, insights, analysis, or well-crafted prose, each entry was outstanding enough to prompt a nomination from a professor. Each year, a panel of volunteer judges from across the William Paterson faculty select up to ten winners for publication in *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum*.

This year's winners represent various majors: history, anthropology, music, and psychology, to name a few. The excellent writing featured here represents both upper- and lower-division courses, demonstrating that great writing comes from everywhere and anyone. Regardless of the course for which they were initially written, all of these student essays provide us with insights into their topics and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of their writers.

*Celebrating Student Writing* would not be possible without the continued support of those who are integral to its success. Thanks to our faculty who participate in the judging, and spend hours reviewing and discussing entries. Thank you to Associate Provost Sandra Hill for continued support of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which publishes this magazine. And our thanks to the many faculty who support student writing every day in their classrooms and who nominate the best of what they see to this contest. Most of all, thank you to the students who are willing to share their work – without your commitment we would be denied this wonderful opportunity to celebrate your writing.

Write on.

*Liane Robertson, Associate Professor of English and Director, Writing Across the Curriculum*

For more information about the Celebrating Student Writing contest, refer to the back page of this magazine or visit our web site <http://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/writing-across-the-curriculum.dot>



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# “DON’T LET YOUR MEMES BE DREAMS!”: How the Alt-Right Uses Memes to Build and Further Their Dangerous Reach Online

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*Dillon Keenan*

**Course:** Anthropology Senior Seminar (ANTH 4900)

**Professor:** Maria Kromidas, Anthropology

**Student:** Dillon Keenan

**Essay:** “DON’T LET YOUR MEMES BE DREAMS!”: How the Alt-Right Uses Memes to Build and Further Their Dangerous Reach Online

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## **Assignment:**

Students in this course wrote a thesis, an endeavor intended as the culmination of their undergraduate education and representative of their political, professional, and personal interests in the broad, interesting and diverse field of anthropology. They chose a topic that aligned with the broad course theme and were required to conduct research that was

empirically based. The length of the thesis was 12-15 pages, or longer if warranted, and was to be developed as a conversation between scholarly literature and primary source material on the chosen topic. The thesis was also designed to be suitable for use as a writing sample for graduate school applications or for employers asking for evidence of writing abilities.

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## **Abstract**

For younger generations today, memes are essential components of communication and relaying humor, ideas, and other thoughts. In America, where hate groups are increasing in tandem with the presidency of Donald Trump, a new loosely connected white nationalist hate group known as the Alt-Right has been emerging over the past few years. On popular social media sites such as Reddit, and popular right-wing subreddits such as r/The\_Donald, the Alt-Right has been using the power of memes to strengthen their online communities by spreading their white nationalist messages and ideologies through memes, posts, and comments where avenues of more extreme

Alt-Right and Far-Right recruitment can occur.

## **Keywords**

Alt-Right, irony, online communities, memes, recruitment

## **A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing**

Three years ago, on May 13th, 2017, there was a rally in Boston where a few hundred people from the Far-Right were exercising their right to free speech. These individuals are white nationalists (people who want a whites-only ethno-state), bigoted racists, and align their beliefs very closely to Neo-Nazis, if they’re not Neo-Nazis already. In addition to the various well-

established hate groups present in the Boston rally, such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, there is another hate group that sticks out like a sore thumb and doesn't have a defined name. This hate group is almost entirely filled with young people, ranging from teenagers to people in their early 20s, and at first glance doesn't seem to be a hate group at all. There is not a confederate flag, shaved head, or swastika in sight. Instead, they are covered in heavy references to internet culture and memes, shouting slogans like *'Normies Out!'* and waving green flags from a made-up land called 'Kekistan', dedicated to a Frog named 'Kek', who was reincarnated as 'Pepe', who they "worship".

Confused? I would be too. This is not the typical look of a hate group, however, this *is* still a hate group filled with white nationalists, white supremacists, and Neo-Nazis. This is just a tiny example of what the Alt-Right can look like. The Alt-Right is an umbrella term for a large, leaderless and loose collection of people (mainly young white males) from the Far-Right, who support white supremacy, implicit and explicit racism, anti-Semitism, male superiority, and many more bigoted ideologies. What sets the Alt-Right apart from other 'regular' white nationalist hate groups is their emphasis on using references to internet culture and memes to disguise and further their ideologies, using these tools to communicate with other Alt-Right members online, and recruit new people.

Now that we know that online communication is essential for the Alt-Right, the next question should be, 'Where do they communicate online?'. You would think that the answer is simple; that the Alt-Right, like many Far-Right groups, communicate with each other within the darker corners of the internet; where they cannot be accidentally found by a casual user. That blanket statement is not entirely true though. Yes, more extreme Alt-Right and Far-Right people would be within the darkest corners of the web and unobtainable to the casual user; but as I've found, a lot of Alt-Right and Far-Right communities exist in fairly easy to reach places

in popular sites on the internet. This is where a curious young user can possibly find them, and where Alt-Right users can post Alt-Right memes to a large audience and get away with it. Memes play such an important role in these Alt-Right online communities; where a user can post a hate-filled meme (often covered in sarcasm and irony) and fellow users can react to it, like it, and comment on it. The constant communication and social satisfaction from posting and commenting on memes strengthens the bonds that the Alt-Right users have to the Alt-Right community and vice versa.

'So the Alt-Right are white nationalists and they exist online in easy to reach, fairly active communities. So why can't they just be shut down?'. Well, it's not that easy. Like I said before, members of the Alt-Right cover themselves in references to internet culture and memes to confuse outsiders into figuring out what their true message is. They do that deliberately; make no mistake their message is pure hatred. Thinking back to the Boston rally, the group of Alt-Right members looked out of place with their memes and inside jokes, even though they were surrounded by fellow white nationalists. The Alt-Right uses memes not only as a cover, but as a shroud and a shield to deflect any attempts to be labeled as white nationalists. It makes sense then that conversations from one Alt-Right member to another are deeply coded (members even have their own unique words) and are soaked in sarcasm, memes, and inside jokes and references. With the Alt-Right's deliberate tactics of using lingo, memes and irony to spread their message without taking heavy criticisms, this makes it hard for a popular website to justify shutting down these communities.

As a 22 year old, I grew up around memes. Memes, internet references – that's a big part of how people my age communicate. But at the same time, memes are abstract representations of our abstract world and are practically impossible to describe as just *one* thing. So to see that the Alt-Right has used this abstraction to create an invincibility shield around them and their

ideologies, while also using it to increase their numbers is disheartening and scary. America does *not* have a defense for these Alt-Right and Far-Right memes and their real life effects. That is why when I was asked to choose any research topic I wanted I chose this one. My goal is to find a not so simple answer to the seemingly simple question 'What do memes do for the Alt-Right?'. According to my research: memes help build and strengthen Alt-Right online communities by appealing to a user's emotion and humor as well as facilitating the creation of the community's own language. The Alt-Right also uses memes and irony as a cover and a weapon, using them to outmaneuver opponents and spread their message further. Finally, memes help recruit like-minded users into the Alt-Right community.

### **The Elephant in the Room**

A few months after the Far-Right Boston rally, the 'Unite the Right' rally took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. For those who don't know, the Unite the Right rally was a rally event created by white supremacist groups, Neo-Nazis, the Alt-Right, and other Far-Right groups to protest the removal of the Robert E. Lee Confederate Statue (which was erected in 1924 during the Jim Crow Era). This rally was advertised in Alt-Right and Far-Right online communities everywhere and is one of the worst displays of white nationalism and bigoted hatred in recent American history. On the night of August 11th, about 250 members of the Alt-Right, wearing white polos and khakis, marched down Charlottesville with Tiki torches shouting Nazi slogans like "Blood and soil" and "Jews will not replace us". The next day, August 12th, hundreds of white nationalists, Alt-Right and Far-Right members marched in Charlottesville with swastikas and Pepe faces aplenty. Civil Rights members, Charlottesville residents and church goers (who were all counter-protesting against these hate groups) were beaten, punched, and hit with clubs. The rally ended with a 20-year-old Far-Right white

nationalist plowing his car into counter protestors, killing a woman and injuring 19 others; overall there were at least 33 counter-protestor injuries.

"For the fourth year in a row, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that tracks hate groups – found a 30 percent increase in U.S hate groups over the past four years and a 7 percent increase in hate groups in 2018 alone," (Fadel 2019). Hate groups and other forms of hatred have always been present in American history, and to hear that these groups are increasing drastically is demoralizing; but to someone like me, who has been paying attention to white nationalist hate groups and the general trends of hatred over the past few years, it's not surprising.

White nationalists and other Far-Right hate groups have always been vying to be normalized and legitimized in mainstream society; that way, they can spread their hate-filled messages and ideologies to as many people as possible, which can have long lasting effects in both public policy and public opinion. Unfortunately, Far-Right messaging and ideology has slowly been creeping into mainstream society with the advent of social media and our current political landscape. In order to talk about how Far-Right messaging has been seeping into mainstream consciousness, I have to address the "elephant" in the room; Donald Trump.

When the Southern Poverty Law Center analyzed their findings on the increase of hate groups from 2015 to their current number in 2019, they cited "President Trump, his administration, right-wing media outlets, and the ease of spreading hate on social media platforms for the alarming increase" (Fadel 2019). There is no denying that over the past four years the 'Overton Window' or the "general conception of what is considered acceptable public discourse" (Crawford 2019) has shifted quite considerably to the right. As Trump's election and his far right rhetoric on immigration, Islamophobia, sexism and racism has

shifted the 'window' to the right, it makes sense to why these Far-Right groups such as the Alt-Right have come out of the woodwork and are becoming even more prominent in the public sphere on the news<sup>2</sup>. Now Trump is not the only reason as to why Far-Right messaging and ideology is becoming normalized; another big reason that the SPLC mentions is the increased spreading of hate online, and that is what I seek to address with my research on memes.

In order to do that, though, I need to explain what a 'meme' is for those who don't know. Like I said before, a meme is essential to people my age. We use memes to communicate, relay humor, and make sense of a world that doesn't make sense. A 'meme' can be a verb, adjective, or noun; it can be anything you want it to be, but in short, "memes are 'small cultural units of transmission'" (Crawford 2019, 1) that transmit anything from point A to point B. Memes are an extremely efficient and quick way to transmit a thought, feeling, or emotion. By quick, I mean the process of understanding a meme, forming your opinion on it, and sharing it, only takes a few seconds. This process can become dangerous though if it were in the wrong hands like the Alt-Right's. The Alt-Right could use memes and the meme's advantage of transmitting information in seconds to spread hate-filled messages and ideologies through them.

### **The Road Less Traveled**

You would think that with such a niche topic, the Alt-Right and how they use memes to their advantage wouldn't have a lot of research dedicated to it. Thankfully though, there are a few scholars who have taken this road less traveled and have produced excellent pieces of eye-opening and important literature. Justin Ward has made important findings in the connections of how the rules of Reddit can enable communities like r/The\_Donald to have posts that connect back to white nationalist hate and Far-Right conspiracy theories, making Reddit a recruiting ground for the Alt-Right (Ward 2018). Jason Wilson not only

did research on what makes the Alt-Right different from other white nationalist hate groups, but also on how the Alt-Right can use irony and Poe's Law online to stick to their white nationalist positions without having to claim them; shielding them from heavy criticism. (Wilson 2017)

Blyth Crawford's M.A. Thesis from King's College London about how memes can become vessels of propaganda which manipulate and strengthen online communities as well as how Far-Right online communities such as 8chan (a social media site with Far Right ties) can influence acts of terrorism is an excellent piece of literature that really stuck in my mind and provided the lens through which I viewed my research (Crawford 2019). Finally, Ryan Switzer's M.A. Thesis from Central European University details how the Alt-Right operates online using shitposts, 'humor' and "lulz" to recruit new members (Switzer 2019).

With all this amazing and thought-provoking scholarship detailing the Alt-Right's connection to Reddit, how they weaponized irony and how they strengthen community, I wanted to analyze and combine these ideas to show directly how everything correlated and to show how prevalent these happenings were on Reddit communities.

### **The Wild Wild West**

You would think that members of the Alt-Right and Far-Right are in the darkest corners of the internet, but that is not always true. As you will see, my research takes place on a very popular social media site called Reddit. Reddit is the 5th most viewed site in the U.S. and the 13th most in the world. Believe it or not, Reddit is actually more popular than Twitter as it has more users, and those users are more active on the site. When you first enter Reddit you are greeted to a "front page" of the day's most popular posts such as articles, memes, and many more pieces of information from a multitude of different communities on the site. Posts become more popular when you 'upvote' them.

An 'upvote' is very similar to a 'like' on Facebook, however, Reddit also has a dislike button or a 'downvote' that users can use if they don't like the post. Just like other popular social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, the comment sections below the posts are where the majority of the communication goes down. Like the name says, the comment section is where you can find users reacting to memes, articles, etc. and commenting on them in any way, shape or form. These comments can then be liked by other users, who can then comment back. This creates a series of informal conversations involving hundreds and/or thousands of different users, both actively commenting and silently onlooking. For Reddit, when a user 'upvotes' a comment, it's called a 'point'.

Instead of Reddit administrators or 'admins' controlling the rules for the entire site like other social media sites do, Reddit strives for user independence and self-government meaning that every individual community on Reddit (also known as 'subreddits') are autonomous communities free to make their own rules. These subreddits are shown on Reddit as "r/...", the 'r' referring to 'Reddit' and the '/' referring to 'subreddit'. Subreddits are run by moderators or 'mods' who enforce the rules of an individual subreddit. While being a part of these subreddits who are free to make their own rules can be a great experience and a direct way to make a user feel heard; these laissez-faire policies can sometimes make Reddit feel like the 'Wild West' where there are very few enforced rules, which can encourage hate subreddits to pop up.

Over the years, Reddit has been a host to a number of hate communities. Following the Unite The Right rally and other hate crimes and mass shootings, Reddit admins have been banning (or permanently deleting) these hate subreddits and the mods that controlled them. While many of the most infamous hate subreddits have been banned, like r/KKK, r/coontown and r/FatPeopleHate, there are still subreddits who feature hate content very similar to these. r/

The\_Donald, r/averageredditor, and r/Bruhfunny are the three such subreddits that display similar kinds of hatred that I conducted research on.

r/The\_Donald is by far the largest right-wing subreddit on the site. It currently has at least 793 *thousand* members, and while it's ranked the 393rd most popular subreddit, it's ranked 29th in posts per day, and 16th in comments per day, making r/The\_Donald a *very* active subreddit despite its size (Subredditstats 2020). While a lot of r/The\_Donald consists of content such as posts, memes, and shitposts (memes that contain very minimal effort to produce) that do nothing but praise Trump, there is also a lot of content dedicated to hatred. In addition to being the largest ring-wing community, r/The\_Donald is also the largest hub for Alt-Right and Far-Right activity throughout its history; posting content that is racist, misogynistic, Islamophobic, etc. while also pushing various Far-Right conspiracy theories such as Pizzagate, 'white genocide' and The Las Vegas Shooter not being real. Something that's important to note is r/The\_Donald has recently been quarantined (no relation to the pandemic). When a subreddit gets quarantined, it's basically halfway to a ban by the admins; Subreddits are quarantined by the admins for any number of highly offensive and/or upsetting content that users repeatedly report. When a subreddit gets quarantined, there are multiple warnings before entering the community and you need an account in order to view the content. Following the Unite The Right rally, several moderators were banned and r/The\_Donald was no longer allowed to be on the 'front page'. The ongoing conflict between r/The\_Donald mods and Reddit admins came to a head when r/The\_Donald was quarantined following members and mods sending threats to public figures and police associated with the 2019 Oregon State Republican Walkouts (Robertson 2019).

r/Bruhfunny is another quarantined subreddit that I conducted research on. This community has around 20k members and is purely dedicated to users posting

racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and other hateful memes; the more hateful the content is, the more it gets upvoted. A community like this is most likely home to many members of the Alt-Right and other Far-Right groups who display their hateful content for the thousands of members to view. Another community that I conducted research on is r/averageredditor. Unlike the other two subreddits, r/averageredditor has around 44k members and is not quarantined, so their content can be viewed by anyone. What's interesting about this community is that it's filled with a 50/50 mix of regular posting and Alt-Right shitposting, making this place a hotspot for Alt-Right recruitment activity.

While conducting my research, I always made sure that I was in incognito mode on google to prevent any tracing of my web history. I set up an appropriately named secondary email and Reddit account that reflected my research. Occasionally, while lurking on these Alt-Right subreddits and looking up Far-Right conspiracy theories, I typed "I am an anthropologist, don't worry" in google to make sure that the FBI and NSA agents watching me knew I was all good. In addition to this, I made sure to use a VPN (Virtual Private Network) that would make it harder for anyone trying to find my personal information. That is why I set up secondary accounts, not only because I don't want white nationalist type searches associated with me, but also because I didn't want anyone who might've been looking to have access to my personal accounts and information. Even on popular sites such as Reddit, your personal information is susceptible to being stolen and doxxed, or being put online for all to see, if you're not being careful.

It's not every day that a researcher would want to spend hours and hours looking at Alt-Right and Far-Right hate content, but that is what I did for my research. I have always been interested in these social and political problems plaguing our society. Like I said before, to see the rise of Far-Right communities, not only in America but the whole world, is disheartening

but I want to try to understand why all this is happening which is why I'm so interested in it. Like many users of these subreddits and members of the Alt-Right, I am a young white cis-male, but other than that, I share nothing else in common with them. Every day, after lurking and looking at Alt-right content, I had to depersonalize and detach to cope with the things I was seeing. From these users, I am on the complete opposite end of the spectrum; I believe in a society where everyone is equal; I believe in racial equality, feminism, and freedom of all gender and sexual expressions. I believe in equal rights and I believe that America has systematically discriminated against and disadvantaged non-white peoples since its founding and continues to do so. I believe that America refuses to acknowledge the horrors it committed in the past by acting like everything is okay in the present. If me and an Alt-Right member were in the same room, it probably wouldn't be a cordial conversation.

### A Deep Dive

Like any online tight-knit community, inside jokes and references are vital in user communication. The difference between normal online communities and Alt-Right ones however is that these jokes and references are often referring to white nationalist and other hateful ideas. "Meme Magic is REAL. Let the tendies hit the floor. DONALD J. TRUMP WON. How does it feel centipedes? The God Emperor said that we would get tired of winning. ARE YOU TIRED OF WINNING YET?". With over 66.7k upvotes, this is the top post on the r/The\_Donald subreddit; and while this not your standard definition of a meme per say (in fact it's more of a victory speech with ominous undertones), this post is meme-centric for sure as it's filled with Alt-Right language and messaging. Before we get into the language though let's talk about the emotion. This posts bleeds confidence and passion, and while it sounds ominous and militaristic to me, the users on this subreddit obviously feel what's being said, as many comments reiterate passionate congratulations to

Trump. This emotion is what gets users to like the post, comment back and return, building the online community. Now let's talk about the Alt-Right language. Just like 'Normies Out!' was shouted by Alt-Right members in Boston, Alt-Right language acts as a tool to oust and reject others while also strengthening themselves. 'Normies' are anyone who isn't the Alt-Right.

'Meme magic' are the first words that are said in this post and they represent a very important Alt-Right idea. Meme magic refers to the idea that memes can break through internet culture and have real-life consequences. In Alt-Right communities, meme magic is a big part of what put Trump in the White House, and without meme magic, he wouldn't be there. Centipede is a term of endearment used to describe a fellow hardcore Trump supporter. God Emperor is a name given to Trump and is drenched in satire; it's often used in context to make it seem like those using the term actually worship him and wouldn't mind if he was an emperor. As we enter the comment section below, we find two users engaging in a "humorous" conversation about Hillary Clinton. Any of user's usernames who I cited during this research have been changed to protect their identities. With user 'fusnagfla' suggesting Clinton didn't do a final speech after losing because, "You wouldn't expect a woman to give a speech while drunk and seizing, would you?" – 1.1k points, to which the user 'campingintents' replied, "They should have rolled her out and let her Magikarp on stage." – 669 points (Magikarp is a fish Pokémon who just flops around). These two comments are engaging in the anti-feminist stereotype that women are controlled by emotion, while also suggesting Clinton should have a seizure on the floor. This isn't funny, but to r/The\_Donald it is, as the comments are appealing to a user's emotion of misogyny and hating Clinton.

Further down the comment section there is another popular comment, "DON'T LET YOUR MEMES BE DREAMS!!! PRAISE BE TO KEK!! LONG LIVE PEPE!!!" –

137 points. This comment is actually a popular meme magic mantra. We also see this user praising Kek and Pepe, two flagship Alt-Right symbols which are "worshipped" to the point where an outsider doesn't know if they're being ironically or seriously worshipped. I just want to remind you that we are only one post into this subreddit and we are knee deep in Alt-Right lingo. The Alt-Right using and creating lingo strengthens the online community drastically. Since the lingo is usually referring to memes and sarcastic references, you have to be in on the joke. When Alt-Right members create new lingo, it soon starts to be used by others in the community who also want to be in on the joke, making it easier to distinguish more hardcore members from those who aren't and oust others who are not in the community.

The #2 post on r/The\_Donald is a meme. Having 34.4k upvotes, the meme titled "Press F to Pay Respect" shows a picture of a gravestone marked, "To honor all who served, MEME WAR 2015-2016" on top of a picture of Pepe sadly saluting "the fallen". To an outside user who might stumble upon this meme, it makes no sense. But to this subreddit, this meme appeals to both the community's emotions and their humor. 'Press F to Pay Respect' is actually a common internet joke originating from and still used in gaming communities, but the 'Meme War' is not. The Meme War is the precursor to 'meme magic'. It's a widely held belief by the Alt-Right that during the 2016 campaign, there was a battle going on (unbeknownst to the general public) where the Alt-Right turned Pepe into a hate symbol, battled the left with memes to support Donald Trump, and won. In addition to this post being 'funny' to the users, it's supposed to elicit a response of ironic empathy for those who 'fought' and happiness for winning the war. The third most popular r/The\_Donald post is a meme of a doctored photo. This meme shows Hillary Clinton embracing the late Senator Robert Byrd next to the doctored photo of Byrd in a KKK outfit<sup>1</sup>. Doctored and faked photos are commonly passed around Alt-Right

and Far-Right communities for the purpose of spreading misinformation and manipulating the strong feelings users have when seeing them. When scrolling through memes and shitposts on r/The\_Donald, I must have seen this photo four or five times.

So far, we've seen memes, posts, and comments on r/The\_Donald appeal to the users emotion and humor; and while we've seen Alt-Right lingo which is evident of Alt-Right presence, there hasn't really been any overt hatred equivalent to white nationalism that we see from the Alt-Right. Well, I'm about to change that. Like I said before, all online communities are brought together by a common interest, goal, and/or ideology; the Alt-Right's is one of hatred and white nationalism and r/The\_Donald is the largest hub for them. The sixth most popular post on r/The\_Donald is a meme titled "Your Face When you realize America has been saved" (in response to Trump winning the election). It has 18.4k upvotes, and depicts Pepe in American Flag colors smiling. While Pepe is the main symbol of the Alt-Right, the actual hatred of the users gets revealed in the comments below. A deleted user comments, "Now we deal with Soros. The Clintons are his puppets, taking him down will save the world. Let's get to it pedes!" – 42 points (pedes is a shortening of centipedes), to which the user 'Pwnedgula' says, "MEGA (Make Earth Great Again) – Take down God's hated enemy, the demon possessed Soros and the Illuminati" – 23 points. This false idea that Jewish people run the world and are to blame for the world's problems is an old and well-known Anti-Semitic conspiracy theory and ideology most commonly peddled by Neo-Nazis.

It gets even worse in another post. The post is just a meme of Pepe, with the poster saying 'Every upvote = 1 prayer'; it seems relatively innocent so far, no blatant white nationalism just yet; that is, however, until you get to the comments. The comments quickly devolve into racist speech making fun of the stigma of African Americans, their stereotypical need for social

programs, and their supposed lack of spelling ability. The comment saying '[Pepe] is a good boi' turns into users commenting "WE NEED MORE MONEY FOR THEM SOCIAL PROGRAMS."-15 points, "Heez wuz doin duh lawwwwwwwdz wurkz!" – 25 points, "Goinn church erryday spreadin da word of JESUS" – 26 points. This is pure racist hate speech commonly seen in many Far-Right sites that users who liked and commented found funny and relatable, as it appealed to their racist feelings on African Americans.

r/The\_Donald is not the only subreddit that harbors these Alt-Right comments filled with white nationalism and other forms of hatred. The third most popular post on r/averageredditor is a meme of Bernie Sanders suspending his campaign. The top comment is from a user named 'guitar14' saying, "I guess you could call his story...my struggle" – 286 points to where 'battleship17' comments, "He should write a book" – 53 points. This is a joke to Mein Kampf (the English translation is 'My Struggle'), an extremely anti-Semitic book written by Adolf Hitler, and the fact that Sanders is Jewish is supposed to make this funny. It shows that these users use humor to cover their blatant anti-Semitism, which you would need if you were to think that this was funny.

Finally, r/Bruhfunny contains racist comments in its top post. The shitpost features a teenager with a facial deformity about to have surgery on top of a screenshot of someone using the r-word slur towards mentally disabled people. The top comments underneath this meme devolve immediately into racist comments like from user 'forkmanll3' who responds to someone who says 'I'm black' by saying, "Shut up n\*\*\*. Most white girls actually don't engage in bestiality." – 87 points. This commenter just compared black people to animals and got 87 likes for it. Memes, posts and comments are building community by bringing like-minded people together to conversate and engage in hatred, bigotry, and white nationalism, and from a small sample size of just three subreddits, we see how

bad this problem can be.

### The Best Defense is a Good Offense

Thinking back to the Boston Rally during the beginning of the paper, remember the green flag from a made up land called Kekistan dedicated to a frog that the Alt-Right was waving around? Does that image still confuse you? Well it's about time I cleared that up, as it's essential to how the Alt-Right are able to say and post the things that they do and get away with it. You should be familiar with Pepe the Frog by now, the main symbol for online Alt-Right and Far-Right communities; but what you might not be familiar with is 'Kek' and the cult that revolves around him.

The word 'Kek' first originated in online gaming communities as a replacement for 'LOL' but has since been taken by the Alt-Right. Kek is the Egyptian god of chaos and darkness, and coincidentally is a Frog. Therefore, according to the Alt-Right, since Pepe is a frog and Kek is an ancient Egyptian Frog, Pepe is the reincarnation of Kek. Crazy and utterly insane, I know, but you have to understand that the whole reason for this cult existing is that there is no reason. It exists because it can. Just like memes today can often have no meaning whatsoever but can still transmit humor and messages, the Kek Cult/Religion has no meaning for its existence, but it still brings the Alt-Right community together. It strengthens the shield and the weapon of dispelling opponents by adding more irony and confusion, and by disguising the hateful messaging within the "meaningless memes" to be more palatable. In fact, when 'kek' was labeled as an Alt-Right term and rejected by gaming communities, the followers of the Kek religion started calling themselves 'Kekistanis' or 'Kekfugees' from the land of Kekistan, again strengthening their community as well as using a crass play on words regarding the European refugee crisis. Followers of this religion/cult go so far into it, that from an outsider perspective it's impossible to know whether or not they're ironically or seriously worshipping this frog.

That fine line of knowing whether someone is being serious only gets muddier online, where people can literally say anything they want and you don't know if they're being truthful or not. This online ambiguity is actually an "internet law" (or a rule that applies to all spaces of the web) called Poe's Law. Poe's Law states that unless something online is *explicitly* labeled as satire or a joke, it can be taken in any possible way (Wilson 2017). The Alt-Right uses Poe's Law very much to their advantage, where they can post the most bigoted and derogatory memes and jokes without having to admit their ideological positions on Jewish people, 'race' and other issues. Using Poe's Law, the Alt-Right 'weaponizes irony and humor' which "allows [them] to disclaim a real commitment to far-right ideas while still espousing them" (Wilson 2017), hence the weapon and shield. That is why when looking on Reddit at hate-filled memes and comments shrouded in sarcasm, it becomes hard to decipher what is being said or transmitted, especially if you're not familiar with the community or it's language. Any attempt by a user on the 'left' to call out an Alt-Right members racist bullshit in these spaces results in them getting made fun of or doxxed, and if an Alt-Right member does respond, they can simply say, "It's a joke" and get away with it. That's scary. The moderators can also delete the 'left's' comment, as they often break their own rules if it's to their benefit.

This internet law is not lost on Andrew Anglin, Neo-Nazi and founder of *The Daily Stormer*, one of the most popular and infamous Neo-Nazi sites. Andrew Anglin also created the *Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right*, which is a guide that teaches eventual members of the Alt-Right into the language they should be using online, and has been influential in radicalizing and assimilating Far-Right individuals into the Alt-Right. In his guide, Anglin sees Reddit as a "fertile breeding ground" (Ward 2018) for the Alt-Right and urges the eventual members that their racial slurs should come across as 'half-joking' in order to appeal to the mainstream and not get banned. With this strategy,

“arguments for the supremacy of the white race are presented through humor and memes outrageous enough to maintain plausible deniability (Switzer 2019, 2).

This law is not lost on two prominent members of the Alt-Right either: Richard Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos. Spencer, who led a Nazi salute in D.C. in support of the newly elected Trump, said, “it was done in a spirit of irony and exuberance” (Wilson 2017). Spencer knew how important the purpose of humor could be in the effectiveness of furthering the Alt-Right’s message when he created the term ‘Alt-Right’; “If I wanted to create a movement that was a [Heil Hitler] white nationalist [movement], I would have done that. But I didn’t because I recognized that this is a total nonstarter” (Switzer 2019). Milo Yiannopoulos uses irony as a weapon too. When asked if the Alt-Right are bigots he responded with, “Are they actually bigots? No more than death metal devotees in the 80s were actually Satanists” (Beauchamp 2017). In fact, Milo is a great example of how an Alt-Right message covered in sarcasm, memes, and humor goes mainstream. For example, Milo refers to Trump as “Daddy” and lays out everything he says in sexual innuendos and sarcasm. By doing this he can simultaneously dispel people who say he’s an Alt-Right Nazi while still spreading Alt-Right rhetoric everywhere he can.

R/averageredditor’s top post is a meme of a screenshot from a comment thread that says, “I Hate Rap Music”. Scroll down to the comments and you see user ‘BCE-ANIME’ saying, “That sort of based, I also hate n\*\*\*\* music, and am alright with gook music, but the good shit is death metal.” To which user ‘leftistsfreakinsuck’ replies, “death metal is anti-Christian tho. Best is moonman rap and old german music.” To someone just scrolling by, this again makes no sense, but this is in fact covered in Alt-Right lingo and references. Based is a term of endearment (taken from rap culture) to mean ‘one who is true to their Far-Right

beliefs’ and gook is a derogatory name for Southeast Asians. Moonman rap is an Alt-Right meme reference as well, referencing a McDonald’s commercial in the 80s where the Moon Man looks like he’s wearing a KKK hood, and moonman rap according to the Anti-Defamation League is “violent or racist rap songs using computer generated voices.” (ADL Hate Symbols Database). At first, death metal doesn’t seem to be referencing to anything, but as we’ve seen from Milo, even Alt-Right members talking about death metal is a reference. Now that this conversation is deciphered, you can see all the hatred and racism these two little comments display. However, this post and the users who commented on it are still on Reddit with no consequences; why is that? Well, as we’ve seen, the Alt-Right weaponizes irony, humor and language to throw off opponents. Racial slurs and other hate speech is presented in a “half joking” ironic context; so if a Reddit admin was to look at this subreddit or this post would they delete it and ban the users? I’d say no, because at the end of the day, although I believe that these are two Alt-Right members “humorously” communicating in an Alt-right safe-space subreddit and spreading their message, it’s hard for an admin to justify banning them not only from a structural standpoint (subreddits are autonomous communities and create their own rules) but also because the irony and Alt-Right references cloud the true message that is being presented.

### **Bottomless Pit**

As much as Reddit is a place where people can learn and share an abundance of information, it’s also a place where misinformation and lies can flourish. I bet you’ve heard the age-old internet phrase, “If it’s on the internet, it has to be true”. This phrase is meant to be taken as a joke, but many people online take it seriously; only taking in the information they want to hear, even if it’s lies. Like any other social media news site like Facebook and Twitter, Reddit has many communities that have closed themselves off to any

information that challenges their own beliefs; creating closed-minded communities where users spread misinformation to fellow users. A community spreading misinformation among its users strengthens the community; creating a scenario where the users think the misinformation is actually *correct* and everyone else is wrong. While this might not seem dangerous at first, it has dangerous effects as it creates avenues for more extreme communities such as the Alt-Right and other Far-Right groups to intercept and recruit impressionable users into more radical ideologies. *r/The\_Donald* is one of these communities where this can happen.

Like I said before, with 793 *thousand* members, *r/The\_Donald* is the largest hub for Alt-Right and Far-Right activity throughout its history and as we've seen there's plenty of Alt-Right lingo on the subreddit. As subreddits like *r/coontown* (one of the most racist subreddits to ever exist on the site) have been banned for displaying extremely racist content, *r/The\_Donald* still stands strong despite showing similar content and language (Ward 2018). In addition, newly banned hate subreddits could flee to relative safety on *r/The\_Donald* to spread their messages further. Now I am not calling all *r/The\_Donald* users Alt-Right members, but what I am doing is calling *r/The\_Donald* a large recruiting ground for these hateful ideologies. These users believe in the words of Donald Trump. They believe Trump when he says that all mainstream news (besides Fox News) is fake, and they believe him when he peddles conspiracy theories and unfound stories. Therefore, it's not a stretch for users to believe more extreme conspiracy theories. In addition, the plethora of memes and shitposts on the subreddit shows that the userbase is primarily younger, not older. So, by dedicating themselves to Donald Trump and words he says, young vulnerable users of this closed-minded community are targets of recruitment by the Alt-Right.

'So how do Alt-Right communities recruit these persuadable young members?' Well the unfortunate

answer is that it's not that hard. In addition to *r/The\_Donald* members being in a closed-minded community, their guards are also down. All memes, shitposts and comments are agreed upon; they confirm their biases and because of Poe's Law, even when their ideas are confronted, users can just play it off as joking around. A member of the Alt-Right doesn't have to physically interact with a user to recruit them, instead, all the Alt-Right needs to do is post memes, shitposts and comments that can be linked back to more extreme ideologies such as white nationalism and other kinds of hatred; and *r/The\_Donald* has many examples of that. This is where an impressionable user can begin to descend down the Alt-Right rabbit hole.

The first example I'd like to bring up is about the Unite the Right Rally. As previously mentioned, this horrific rally event was created by white supremacists, Neo-Nazis, and other Alt-Right and Far-Right hate groups and was advertised in Far-Right communities all over the web. Well, *r/The\_Donald* also advertised it; "Unite the Right in Charlottesville Next Week!" the post reads with 3,803 upvotes and a 93% upvote rating (a relatively high rating on *r/The\_Donald*). This shows the connection that some members of the subreddit had to other Alt-Right and Far-Right outlets. Another post that can be linked back to white nationalism is a shitpost titled, "Can You See the Agenda" – 8,799 upvotes. This post depicts a collection of eight magazines from Time and National Geographic whose covers either have to do with racial integration, white people not having children, or gender. This post originally first appeared on a white nationalist WordPress.

Scrolling down to the comments, you not only see users all agreeing with each other that globalism and racial integration is destroying Western culture, but there are also various mentions to the Kalergi Plan, a Far-Right and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory which describes how "dark forces are conspiring to gradually exterminate the white race by encouraging mass

immigration, low fertility, miscegenation, and abortion” (Word 2018). r/The\_Donald posts, memes and comments that are about white nationalism or any other kind of hate for that matter can expose thousands of malleable people to this hatred. After all, these users see r/The\_Donald as a trusted source for information and might be unable to see the bigotry behind these posts and memes (that are often covered in irony and ‘humor’) because they might not necessarily disagree with the sentiments of the message. They might be inclined after seeing this post to look up the Kalergi Plan for themselves (using closed-minded sources that disregard information they disagree with) and believe these Alt-Right and Far-Right conspiracy theories. Now that is a slippery slope.

Continuing further down this slippery slope, I’d like to mention how being on subreddits such as r/The\_Donald can create a ‘filter-bubble’ (Crawford 2019) of similar Alt-Right content based on Reddit’s algorithms, which can recommend similar subreddits to you. For any frequent user on r/The\_Donald, Reddit’s algorithms also recommend other subreddits with similar content to it, giving users even more of a chance to expose themselves to Alt-Right ideologies and becoming more radicalized. I have noticed this ‘filter-bubble’ to be true at least in my experience on Reddit, where the account I used for my thesis was only subscribed to two subreddits, r/The\_Donald and r/TheNewRight, but in my feed I would get recommendations for r/AltRightUK and r/AltRightChristian. r/AltRightChristian is a very dangerous recommendation as it also targets young white Christian males and shows them the “hypocritical leftist thinking”, telling them (literally on the front page of the subreddit) “It’s OK to be White”. It is extremely common for the Alt-Right to recruit new members by appealing to their isolation and loneliness in this way, often telling them “it’s okay to be white” which is only a façade to get them to believe white supremacist conspiracy theories such

as ‘white genocide’ (same thing as the Kalergi Plan) as a narrative of how the Western world has left behind young white males, creating a white male vs. everybody else in the world struggle. Posts and memes from r/The\_Donald and similar subreddits are strategies that the Alt-Right uses as a first step for users to begin the bottomless pit journey of Alt-Rightism.

Finally, I’d like to finish off by mentioning how subreddits like r/The\_Donald can have recommendations to other websites that link to far more dangerous places. Ever since moderators on r/The\_Donald have started to get banned for sending threats, they created a new website, TheDonald.win, where they are the ones in control, and they advertise it very heavily on r/The\_Donald. This website allows people to post whatever they want, even blatant Alt-Right messaging, which can recruit TheDonald members further into Alt-Right ideologies. Another recommendation comes from r/TheRedPill, a subreddit dedicated to people who have “awoken” from the mainstream lies and have seen the world “as it truly is”. This subreddit deserves a thesis of its own and represents many Far-Right ideas combined together such as misogyny, white nationalism, and anti-Semitism. The reason why I am bringing this up is because one of the first external links on the subreddit is Trp.red, which is the community’s own personal site. Trp.red is a true hate site where Alt-Right and Far-Right memes, posts and comment threads are posted without fear or hesitation, where you can find truly vile posts, and where some users most likely belong to the KKK and the Neo-Nazis. Mind you, if I was a curious young user looking for similar content, this would only take me a few minutes to find.

### **This One’s for You**

The Alt-Right uses memes in a way in which they were never meant to be used. In the late capitalist society that we live in today, the younger generations are staring directly at increasing wealth inequality,

stagnant wages, few job prospects, and a lifetime of debt. The youth also know what has become very obvious in today's world: the rich are getting richer, the middle class is disappearing, and the poor are getting poorer. Younger generations feel like they've been left behind, and rightfully so. Memes are a way for the youth to make sense of a world that has stopped making sense for them. That is why memes can contain as much meaning as you want them to contain; and that is why memes can be whatever you want them to be. However, I don't think anyone wanted them to be hijacked by the Alt-Right to be used to strengthen their communities by appealing to their humor and emotion, to be used as a shield and a weapon so they can't be challenged online, and to be used to recruit new members by appealing to their loneliness and isolation.

America and the rest of the world does not have a response to how the Alt-Right and other Far-Right groups are weaponizing memes, but something still needs to be done. We saw what happened in Charlottesville when these Alt-Right and Far-Right groups came together in real life; the results were horrible. Although these communities are once again scattered and loose, it's not a matter of *if* something like this will happen again, but *when* it will happen. If Alt-Right recruitment happens on Reddit, you have to be sure that it also happens on Facebook, Twitter, and many more social media sites and forums.

If I could offer any advice after doing all this research and looking at all this blatant hate, I would say that in order to target the Alt-Right and its increasing danger to the world, you need to target how they recruit their members. Perhaps programs that spread awareness of Alt-Right recruitment or where that recruitment can happen will get those who are prone to being recruited to watch out and not believe the Far-Right conspiracies. I would also use this advice for the basis of any future research conducted on the Alt-Right and memes, where we can look at different ways to combat

this problem of recruitment, and try to find as many methods as we can to how and where the Alt-Right recruits.

When my family members asked me about what I was doing my thesis on, I said, "memes, the Alt-Right, and Reddit.", to which they nodded their heads to act like they knew what I was talking about and changed the conversation. Words like 'memes' and 'Alt-Right' are abstract words, and to try to convince someone who knows very little about internet culture the real-life dangers that lie within it can be hard. Hopefully, with the work I presented in this paper, I am able to clarify this abstract problem and make these real-life dangers seem more tangible.

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## Appendices

### Alt-Right Terms Used:

Meme Magic – A belief that memes can break through internet culture and have real-life consequences, such as Donald Trump winning the presidency.

Centipedes – A name given to hardcore Trump supporters by fellow hardcore Trump supporters.

God Emperor – A name the Alt-Right uses to refer to Trump.

Pepe – A cartoon first created in 2005 by Matt Furie. This cartoon was not used as a hate message until 2016, where it became the flagship symbol of the Alt-Right and other Far-Right online hate groups.

Based - a term of endearment (taken from rap culture) and changed to mean 'one who is true to their Far-Right beliefs'.

Gook – A racist and derogatory name for Southeast Asians

Moonman Rap - violent or racist rap songs using computer generated voices.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is important to mention that Byrd was actually a KKK member, but only in the 1940's, which he has since apologized repeatedly for, and "according to him" he only joined because the KKK was anti-communist.

This is a side note that I wanted to include in my background but didn't want to make my background too long:

<sup>2</sup>For those who have a problem with me connecting Donald Trump to Far-Right messaging, I'll hand the mic over to David Duke, the former leader of the KKK, who said during the Unite The Right rally that, "[the rally] represents a turning point for the people of this country. We are determined to take our country back; we're going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That's what we believed in, that's why we voted for

him." (NBC News 2017). Then I'll hand the mic over to Richard Spencer, an extreme racist, white supremacist, prominent member of the Alt-Right, and creator of the term 'alt-right'. In an interview with The Atlantic, Spencer says, "Trump definitely energized the Alt-Right – because we have this connection with him, we can inflect his policies." (Lombroso 2016). It's also no secret that Trump's closest adviser Stephen Miller has had hundreds of exposed emails that regurgitate white nationalist literature. Going back to the Charlottesville Rally, Trump initially refused to condemn the white nationalists and Neo-Nazis, saying there was 'very fine people on both sides'. Paraphrasing the words of John Oliver, 'Nazis are a lot like cats; if they like you, you're probably feeding them'.

# On Exes

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## *Jennifer Merchant*

**Course:** Introduction to Creative Writing (ENG 2310)

**Professor:** Martha Witt, English

**Student:** Jennifer Merchant

**Essay:** On Exes

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### **Assignment:**

After a few weeks studying creative non-fiction, students were assigned to select one small writing assignment to expand into a full-fledged personal essay.

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*In the grand scheme of things, three years is a long time. I should take this for the opportunity that it is. I'm finally free, whether I like it or not. I've always had something to hold onto — pieces of him scattered conveniently around my bedroom for when I want to miss him — but that has never been what letting go is about. Letting go is about releasing yourself of something, not necessarily because you know it will be okay- but because you hope it will be. And that's enough to risk falling because at least when you do, you won't be waiting for him to help you get back up. In retrospect, these thoughts are easy but if I'm being honest, Andy was never too big on helping.*

I smoked pot for the first time when I was 14, and I fucking loved it. I still do, but with that came the personal justification that followed, “*I smoke weed, but I would never do drugs.*”

When I was 16, I took my first hit of Ecstasy. My boyfriend at the time had just revealed that he'd been

cheating on me with a girl from Glen Rock who looked like his dead ex-girlfriend, so he gave me two pills as his form of a consolation prize. He said it would make me feel happy since he couldn't anymore. He was right about both. On cue came, “*I've done E, but E's not a real drug. I would never actually snort anything.*”

When I was 17, it was whatever shit my friends and I could fuck around with from our prescription bottles or find in our parents' medicine cabinets. I could have popped the pills like I'd done before, but after watching my friends ritualize it — smashing them into dust with credit cards underneath crusty dollar bills and licking the powdery residue off the plastic magnetic strips like a stick of Fun Dip — I wanted to do that, too. I grabbed the “cleanest” dollar bill I had, more disgusted at the idea of putting cash up my nose that's passed through the hands of fuck knows how many people than the drug stuffed inside of it. “*Fine, but I will NEVER freebase. That's what scumbags do. That's*

*drug addicts do.*” And so, it fucking goes.

Plus, I wasn't a drug addict—not really. Not yet. I certainly had the fine makings of one, though: reckless, self-destructive, looking to fill a void. I wish I believed in God; sometimes I think I might if it wasn't so cool to be an Atheist in high school, and then maybe I could have avoided this whole thing altogether. I was baptized, communed, confirmed; hell, I was even a confirmation sponsor, although admittedly only to pad my college applications. N.A. asks that you “*surrender your lack of control to your Higher Power so It may restore you to sanity.*” My sanity left the building along with my control well before I had met Andy, but I didn't have a Higher Power. I didn't have someone to “restore my sanity,” so once I hit the third step, it was pretty much a wash. It seemed like one more thing I just wasn't quite qualified for but at least drugs were all-inclusive since, apparently, I was insane.

I met Andy our freshman year of college. He liked the way I said ‘chocolate’ and ‘coffee,’ that I knew about cars, and I listened to Trap music. One night, he invited me to his dorm to watch a movie. I put on *Dazed and Confused*- that's when he said he “knew.”

“I don't have *girlfriends*,” the sheer amount of disgust in his voice as he said the word “girlfriend” made me actually believe him, “but you're different. You're special. You'd fit in so well back home.”

He did have an incredible way to making me feel special.

I'm not a ‘fixer’ by nature, although I do tend to attract the broken. Birds of a feather, I guess. It didn't matter anyway; I loved Andy for who he was from the beginning, so it took a lot for him to do something that shocked me.

We got high together at school pretty regularly- smoked weed on the train tracks and sniffed Percocet off the top of our University — provided laminate dressers — you know, normal college kid shit.

I never really heard of “blues” until I went to Pennsylvania. They were less than a tenth of the size of a Perc, but what they lacked in size they made up in strength and they did it without any bullshit acetaminophen ripping your stomach up. At thirty bucks a pop they were no joke, but we were young, and in love, and it's not like we were getting sick or stealing shit. That would come later.

“Babe, I just smoked a blue with Luto.”

I'd met Luto a couple of times. He was a scumbag, but he was our dealer, so I let him flirt with me. If Andy didn't like it, he never said anything. The truth is, he knew what I was doing, and he probably loved me more for it.

“Wait, smoked? Like you laced a blunt?” I knew what he meant, though.

“Nah, babe, it was on tinfoil. You just-”

“Ew, dude. You freebased?”

“Yes!” I could hear him smiling through the phone. I couldn't tell if it was from the drugs or from the relief of not having to explain to me what freebasing is. He loved having such a “cool” girlfriend, and I loved being one. “You heard of it before?”

“I saw it on *True Life*.”

I like to think that there was never a point where I thought I could change Andy. I've never been dumb or self-inflated enough to think that my mere presence in a person's life could be enough to change who someone is. That didn't stop me from still hoping that he would change, though. Or even better, the two of us could change together.

I knew that our relationship was over once I started hoping for anything.

Not even in the worst of it- and it got fucking bad- did I ever blame Andy for anything. The way I always figured, I was never drug-shy to begin with; we were cut from the same cloth, so blaming him for the fact

that by the time we'd broken up I'd dropped out of college, weighed 89lbs and had a mean opiate addiction never crossed my mind. No way — I made my own decisions and I take responsibility for them. Still, he had me, 100%, all of me, until he decided he either didn't want me anymore or he did something too fucked up for me to reasonably forgive.

But there was one thing I couldn't stand about Andy, and that was when he lied to me. Together, we lied to everyone: my friends, his friends — it didn't matter who, if there was anything to be gained then lying was our default. Shit, even if there wasn't, our truth had become too bleak — too disgusting for any casual conversation worth having that wasn't with someone similarly afflicted. The only people I thought we didn't lie to was each other. The only people we weren't *supposed* to lie to was each other. Once that happened, we couldn't be 'us' anymore, or at least not the same way.

Now to his credit, Andy was a good liar — a convenient quality to have when you're a synthetic dopehead- but I was a *great* liar. You know what they say about bullshitting bullshitters, and all that?

See, a good liar knows that it's all about the details, and no, I'm not talking about being able to replay a whole story, frame by frame. I'm talking about the stupid details — the inconsequential shit. A good liar tells you where they were last night by recapping their entire commute. A great liar is aware you know how to navigate, but what you don't know is about the fucking asshole with Connecticut license plates that cut you off; now you're talking about out-of-state drivers and how 208 has always been fucked at that time of night.

A good liar is sympathetic in his lies — he's just as upset as you are that your little brother's XBOX controllers got swiped, if not more upset. A great liar is empathetic in her lies — she's not as upset as you are because why would she be? She had nothing to do with it, but she does know how you feel because something similar happened to her roommate last

year—didn't she tell you? Back to those stupid details, to a new conversation, because a great liar knows that the most manipulative shit ever is actually being "genuine" with people. See, actively trying to manipulate people is easily caught by anyone with high enough emotional intelligence, is ignored by anyone who isn't emotionally or materially vulnerable or is circumvented by anyone who has simply decided that they've had enough of you. That's why kindness can be the most corrosive form of manipulation; people let their guard down and they end up anchoring their self and social identities way more to your opinions than someone inherently defensive and emotionally susceptible would. If I'm the source of your pain and fear, eventually you will fight back or run away- you won't want to believe me anymore. But if I'm a source of your happiness and your security, why would you run?

It was the end of August, and we were into our third year as a couple. I wasn't working, just taking a few courses at the community college to keep my parents at bay while I lived at home and to hopefully distract them from the fact that I'd evolved into a functioning drug addict over the course of that summer. I hadn't spoken to Andy in almost a week, which is basically like a month when you're long-distance. Then, we finally did speak-- some stupid fight over going to Myrtle Beach with his friends and using the money I'd just made from a garage sale to fund us getting down there. We always fought whenever one of us had money.

I didn't want to go to Myrtle Beach. Sure, I liked his friends fine enough, but I didn't like who Andy was when he was with them. Dan was the only one that I didn't like out of obligation. He and his girlfriend, Sheena, were the closest to normal that I'd met in Wilkes-Barre. Dan liked to get high, but Sheena was a nursing student, so it all had to be done in secret, sometimes with her as close as the next room over. Dan looked so nervous the first time Andy pulled me

into his guest bathroom to burn a blue with them, hesitating to meet my gaze as he raised the broken-down Bic to his mouth to inhale the smoke boiling off the sheet of Reynold's wrap in his hand.

"Sheena can't know about this." Dan spoke to me directly, the icy translucence of his crystal blue eyes imitating tears as he reiterated, "She can't ever know about this, Jen. It will ruin us."

"Don't worry, man, Jen's not like that. Right, babe?" Andy replied, pulling me onto his lap.

"You're a good boyfriend, Dan. Your relationship is none of my business."

Andy pinched my side in approval as he pulled the Listerine Breath Strip container from the breast pocket of his flannel and fished a pill out for us. He handed me the straw as he unfolded a piece of tinfoil from the billfold of his wallet while he set us up. I readied myself to give the straw back to him — the first hit was always his — but I was met with a confused look.

"First hit's yours, babe."

I guess in that moment, he wanted to feel like he was a good boyfriend, too.

I didn't want to spend a week sneaking around Sheena so I could go off with our boyfriends to freebase in the bathroom. I don't know why. I just wanted to sit on the beach together, rest my head on Andy's shoulder and feel safe.

I went with my Mom to my Aunt's out in East Hampton instead. I hoped Andy would decide to come with me, but I knew better than to expect anything. Andy always did what he wanted, so when I didn't hear from him for three days, I assumed he went to Myrtle.

On the morning of the fourth day, my phone rang.

"Hello?"

"So, you haven't been wondering where the fuck I've been?"

"I thought you were in Myrtle."

"Nah, never made it down."

"Then where the fuck you been, Andy?"

"Jail."

"Why?"

"Fuckin' bullshit, dude- some warrant. Luto burned Quacks for almost a G, so he had to file a police report or somethin' to get his money back — I guess he mentioned my name, somewhere. Who knows? I was driving down Plymouth — you know, near where we saw that guy driving with the fucking cow in his front seat and you lost your shit? Anyway, next thing I hear is whoop-whoop. Looked behind me, dude, fucking lights flashing — handcuffed, county, bullshit." The way he said it like it was normal — I even didn't know what to say or where to start, but he wasn't done, "And where have you been? Bangin' fuckin' Hamptons bros? Not a single text or call from you in three days. My girlfriend, everybody!"

"I'm at my Aunt's house, Andy, where I said I would be. Jesus. Last I heard, you were on your way to South Carolina."

His tone switched back to normal, "Ah, yeah — never made it down. Dan and I went to grab a few on the way until —" and all I'm thinking is, is this kid seriously about to tell me this fucking story again? Like it tracked so well the first time around? And since when was Quacks going?

"I got it." But I knew better than to take Andy's word alone.

"So yeah, Mary scooped Dan from the police station. Thank god, Dude, Sheena would have lost her shit. I had to wait it out for my dad, meanwhile you can't even send a fuckin' text. And why? Because you thought I was in South Carolina? Fuckin' lame, Dude."

And that's when I officially stopped giving a shit. Andy cared more about protecting Dan's relationship than

he did about inflicting damage onto his own, because I was the cool girlfriend and that meant his relationship was always supposed to be safe.

I could feel Andy's lies as he spit them like a perfectly rehearsed script, and I was fucking over it. Be a *great* liar, for fuck's sake, or at least try to be so I know there's some part of you left that still cares enough to try for me at all. I hung up the phone and did the only thing I could think of and called Quacks.

Quacks graduated two years before Andy and I would have, and he started making decent money right on out of school. His name was John, which I called him that until he told me he actually preferred Quacks — it was some play on his last name or some shit. Hardly anyone I'd met in Pennsylvania went by their government names. Quacks was always down to get high; he knew how to multitask it with being a functioning adult in a way that I used to envy. It took a few tries to convince Quacks to answer my calls — he probably thought it was Andy from my phone. After a solid few minutes of him telling me I was dating a piece of shit, he told me what happened.

Andy didn't have the money to pick up and go to Myrtle, so he hit up Quacks to make a quick play. Quacks only copped in bulk, so he assumed Andy just wanted the five or six from the top of his cut. Quacks was at his parents' in Allentown, so he sent a money order to a CVS in Kingston. The plan was for Andy to drop his cop on his way down south since he'd have to drive past his exit anyway, but Quacks hadn't heard from him since he said he was on his way to Luto's. An hour passed and Andy's phone was off — Quacks was going to try mine, but Andy had told him we were fighting when they spoke earlier. When he tried calling again, his number was blocked so he filed a police report when he woke up the next morning for \$1,200.

Police stopped him for speeding near Plymouth Ave just outside of Wilkes-Barre. He didn't have any money on him; he didn't have any drugs, either.

He didn't just lie to me, he lied to do drugs *without* me. I don't know which one made me sadder. I loved getting high, but I always loved Andy more. Andy didn't know how to love me when he was sober. I prefer to think that he loved me on his own before our relationship turned into hours spent in silent withdrawals, waiting to get high, followed by 2-12 hours of the perfect romance. I hate thinking our relationship couldn't have existed without drugs, but I couldn't recognize it anymore with drugs, either. You know, I probably would have forgiven him, too—if he had told me the truth. Not because I was the cool girlfriend. Just because I loved him. But he was lying to me just like he would lie to anyone else: badly.

That's when I realized I wasn't special anymore.

# Speaking in Electric Tongues

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*Ethan Flynn*

**Course:** Rock Music Diversity & Justice (MUSI 3180)

**Professor:** Stephen Marcone, Music

**Student:** Ethan Flynn

**Essay:** Speaking in Electric Tongues

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## **Assignment:**

Students wrote a book report on *The History of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs*, by Greil Marcus, explaining the author's definition of rock 'n' roll and detailing how two of the songs from the book's list fit that definition. Students then developed their own definition of

rock 'n' roll and suggested five recordings they see as representative, explaining their choices.

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If popular music is a wheat field, then rock is the sun in the sky and the rain falling from the cloud that allows it to grow. The rock star is the farmer who is awoken by the sun rise in the window. Rock is the universe. It is everything. The long, riotous night, the hangover in the bright morning, the lover lying in the sheets, the resignation of loneliness, the feeling of getting what you want, the feeling of wanting to die. It has encompassed all music and changed popular culture more so than any other form or medium of art. No film has changed the way the average person experiences the world like "Blowin in the Wind" has. No painting has served as the backdrop for a wild party or a terrifying heartbreak like "September" or "Simple Twist of Fate" have. Rock is the human experience, plain and simple. It has absorbed everything about everything, and has become everything.

Greil Marcus says as much in his book, *The History of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs*. Towards the beginning of the book, before he reveals and explains his rather unique list, he attempts to define what rock really is, given how elusive and slippery the term has become over the decades. He says, "Rock 'n' Roll may be most of all a language that, it declares, can say anything: divine all truths, reveal all mysteries, and escape all restrictions" (Marcus 10).

Let's explore this. What is a language? It's simply a way to communicate. No matter how it is communicated, whether through Spanish, a hand motion, a scream, or a glare and a stillness in your face. You have something you need or want to get across. Or you have nothing to get across. Either way, you use whatever language is at your disposal and whatever language suits your moment to communicate, and that's it. Does language

have rules? Certainly. Can they be broken? Absolutely. Are languages defined and singular? Yes, but can they be mixed and matched whenever you feel like it? Of course they can.

So, let's apply rock to all these truths. Is rock a communication? Absolutely it is. It's a transfer of a million or a handful of ideas. It's a communication of, "I distorted the guitar because that's the way I like it to sound," and "my lyrics express my struggles with addiction and this is my way of working through that." It's a communication of where somebody came from, where they want to go, who they are and who they want to be, their loves and heartbreaks, their highs and lows. Again, rock is the human experience on record, so of course it is a communication. It's a communication of experience.

Does rock, like a language, have some rules? It definitely does. Reaching outside of the realm of rock, music has a certain amount of rules that are generally practiced, especially popular music. Generally, your song will have functional harmony that pleases the ear, everyone will be playing and singing in the same key and tempo, the vocal will sit on top of the mix, your song probably won't go over five minutes, etc. Most artists follow these rules, whether or not they think of them as rules to follow. Rather, as a collective society, we've decided that these are the things we like. Just as we've done with language. Generally, your sentence will have a subject and a verb. You want to speak clearly and concisely, and not try to confuse whoever is listening to you. You don't want to ramble, you want to finish your thought and allow the other to speak after you. In writing, you break up your thoughts with punctuation and indentation. Each thought follows the last and leads into the next.

These are the general rules that most people follow, because it makes communication straightforward and effective. However, can these rules be broken? Very easily.

"... Iasdiasdudf dog sky :'.."

I could just do that, and that is still technically language and communication, it just doesn't make any sense. Or it could make sense to somebody. This is the same communicative practice as Captain Beefheart making his musicians play out of time and out of key with each other, as he barks beat poetry about fish over the top of their cacophony. It's a deliberate breaking of the rules. It's just another way to communicate that less people will understand.

And if rock is English, for example, can it be blended with Latin, which could be baroque music? Languages are blended all of the time. 'Alma mater' is a Latin phrase that originally translates to 'nourishing mother,' but in English now means the university that you attended. This is the same communicative practice as The Beatles writing "She's Leaving Home" in the way they did, or Bob Dylan reaching into the depths of American history and recontextualizing roots music. It's a blending of communication.

Simply put, Griel Marcus was absolutely correct in his definition of rock music. It operates like a language in every way. It's a communication that has rules, but if the rules are broken or bended, it doesn't cease to be what it is. In so many words, rock can be whatever it wants to be.

Illustrating this point, are two tunes from Macrus's ten song list that could be called rock 'n' roll, but couldn't be more different: The Brains' "Money Changes Everything" and Etta James's "All I Could Do Was Cry". Listening to them back to back is a case study in how rock really is anything and everything. Etta James sings in a trained, incredible vibrato; Tom Gray sings in an off-key, gruff snarl. The arrangement on the Etta James is subtle, refined, and spacious; The Brains' tune is blown out and unchanging. The Etta James tune is full of harmonic color and interest; "Money Changes Everything", off the top of my head, had five chords maybe. Still, they are bound by intent, just as someone

speaking in a slow drawl versus someone speaking quickly and energetically are different, but they are both communicating.

To further the idea that rock is the communication of the human experience, to find five songs that express this idea, I wrote my five first answers to the question, what is rock? I came up with:

- Rock is rebellion. It is the individual blazing forward with nothing but belief in the endeavor. I represent this with Bob Dylan's live recording of "Like a Rolling Stone" off of *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 4*. Here is the sound of a man being booed and jeered by the crowd that came to see him, simply for playing electric with a full band. Rather than bending to their will, he instructs his band to play it louder than they ever had before.

- Rock is despair. It expresses the pit of human sorrow. I represent this with Xiu Xiu's harrowing tune, "Ian Curtis Wishlist". This is the sound of wanting to kill yourself.

- Rock is romance. It puts forward the vulnerability of gazing into someone's eyes and baring your heart. I represent this with Van Morrison's live recording of "Cyprus Avenue" off of *It's Too Late to Stop Now*. This is the sound of the ultimate joy: being completely vulnerable with someone and trusting your head on their shoulder, your hand in theirs.

- Rock is incredibly complex. It can be as thematically and compositionally in depth and it wants to be. I represent this with Joanna Newsom's 16 minute opus, "Only Skin". Complex doesn't even begin to describe how lyrically, harmonically, and melodically dense and free-flowing this piece is. There is enough to unpack and analyze in this song to spend three months on.

- Rock is blunt. It can choose to hold no pretense and not hold any blemish back. I represent this with the furious "Shit Luck" by Modest Mouse.

Nothing is held back here, it is just pure frustration, rage, anxiety, and a disappointment on all fronts. There is zero confusion or mystery here. What you hear is what you get.

Of course, there are many other things rock is and can be. It's historic, it's political, it's poetic, it's stupid, it's wasted, it's lame, it's hateful, it's starry-eyed, it's nostalgic, it's cold, it's lonely, it's flowery. But all of this pontification simply points back to the one major point, rock is whatever it wants to be, because it is as malleable as language is.

# Challenges Endured by Salvadoran Transwomen Seeking Asylum in the United States

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*Maria Biannet Perez*

**Course:** Introduction to Transgender Studies (ANTH/WGS 2800)

**Professor:** TJ Gundling, Anthropology

**Student:** Maria Biannet Perez

**Essay:** Challenges Endured by Salvadoran Transwomen Seeking Asylum in the United States

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## Introduction

Poverty, intolerance, lack of employment opportunities, housing insecurity, discrimination and violence have driven Salvadoran transwomen to seek asylum in the United States. In El Salvador, LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination, as well as gang and police violence, due to their sexual orientations and/or gender identities and expressions (Renteria, 2017). These unbearable life conditions have forced many transwomen to migrate and then pursue asylum. The migration process, from El Salvador to the U.S./ Mexican border, is arduous, costly, and dangerous. Additionally, the new immigration policy requiring Salvadoran refugees to apply for asylum in Guatemala and Honduras and getting denied before applying in the United States further complicating their application process. It also places them in a vulnerable position because Central American countries display high rates of hate-crimes against transwomen.

LGBTQ+ people are defenseless in El Salvador where entire city neighborhoods are controlled by gangs

that extort money at gunpoint, rape and murder to maintain control. Moreover, the Salvadoran legal system does not take action to protect them. A hate-crime law was passed on September 2015 which provided longer sentences for people convicted of murder inspired by hate based on the victim's sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, political affiliation or gender (Haugaard, 2018). However, this legislation is rarely enforced when transgender women, like Alexia Trujillo, are victims of hate-crimes. Alexia was brutally attacked by three men. The assault occurred early in the morning when she was walking to work. The perpetrators, who worked as security guards, insulted, beat and robbed her. Then, she tried to file a police report, but authorities refused to listen and forcefully removed her from the premises (Rosales, 2019). Alexia's is one of the many of transwomen who are ignored by the authorities in El Salvador.

## Background

Members of the LGBTQ+ community in El Salvador experience social prejudice on a regular basis. The country's influential Roman Catholic Church and most evangelical churches publicly condemn gay marriage as well as people who challenge deeply-rooted heteronormative expectations by expressing their gender in a manner that does not coincide with their sex assigned at birth. A 2013 survey by the U.S. based Pew Research Centre found nearly two thirds of Salvadorans believed society should not accept homosexuality. Intolerance in the socially conservative nation is an obstacle to change (Renteria, 2017 Rosales, 2019). This intolerance often leads to violence towards the LGBTQ+ community, especially transwomen.

According to Karla Avelar, transgender rights advocate and former director of Communicating and Training Transwomen (COMCAVIS), a Salvadoran based NGO that works in bringing visibility and dignity to the trans community, many transgender people have reported rape, extortion, kidnapping, and torture by the police as well (Comcavis Trans, n.d; Haugaard, 2018; Renteria, 2017). A wave of murders also puts El Salvador in the spotlight regarding the violence the LGBTQ+ community faces. It is a problem human rights activists blame on powerful street gangs and entrenched social prejudices (Renteria, 2017). This has created fear and distrust of the legal system amongst LGBTQ+ people, particularly transwomen.

In the first six months of 2019, Comcavis Trans recorded 44 cases of transgender people who were displaced internally due to targeted violence. At least 136 LGBTI Salvadorans have fled the country since 2012 seeking refuge in Europe and the United States (Barchfield, 2019; Renteria, 2017). Migrating to the United States is dangerous for transwomen because they are exposed to physical, verbal, and sexual abuse during their journey through Guatemala and Mexico, as a result of widespread violence against the LGBTQ+

community throughout Latin America (Renteria, 2017).

## Discussion

In the past, people were able to apply for asylum within a year of arriving, however, legislation revisions made in 2017 complicate the petition for asylum. The Trump administration has proposed, adjusted, or implemented a series of restrictive policies that have made the process increasingly arduous for asylum seekers and hindered their legal right to seek protection (Nelson & Habbach, 2019; Wamsley, 2019). Salvadoran migrants must first apply for and be denied asylum in Guatemala and Honduras in order to be considered eligible for asylum in the United States. A bid for asylum often becomes the sole means for people to escape the possibility of deadly violence because governments in the countries of origin lack the will or ability to protect LGBTQ+ people from violence (Nelson & Habbach, 2019).

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that LGBTQ+ people are one of the risk profiles for asylum seekers from El Salvador, acknowledging that these people may need international protection in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Amnesty International, 2017). Coming to the U.S. as a transgender person in order to escape persecution or mistreatment due to transgender status is considered by U.S. immigration policy to be a meritable reason to request asylum. However, being granted asylum can take years (Hadfield, 2019). For those who are deprived of effective access to legal counsel, detention by immigration authorities can be the start of a deportation process that will culminate in their return to their country of origin, directly back to the serious risks they were trying to escape (Amnesty International, 2017). The existing refugee crisis at the border, where thousands of asylum seekers await their hearings, places transwomen at a higher risk compared to many other refugees. They endure discrimination

and violence from other migrants and law enforcement officials in Mexico.

When taken into custody, transwomen experience derogatory treatment and discrimination from immigration officials. Also, they are held longer than other refugees in ICE detention centers. They were retained more than twice the average length of detainment of all refugees held in ICE custody during fiscal year 2017 (Hadfield, 2019). They also experience neglect and cruel treatment from immigration officers in detention centers. Many cases of neglect have ended tragically. Alejandra Barrera, a Salvadoran transwoman was held in the Cibola County Correctional Center, New Mexico for 20 months. She reported inadequate and unresponsive medical care at the detention center. Alejandra was released on September 6, 2019 (Amnesty International, 2019). The detention center where Alejandra was held is known as the transgender “pod” of detainment. Its rural location makes it very difficult for detainees to report assault or maltreatment or to seek legal protection (Hadfield, 2019). Like Alejandra, thousands of transwomen are trapped, waiting for their hearings, in detention centers exposed to ill-treatment, with no access to legal counsel, and pleading for medical help (Amnesty International, 2017; Amnesty International, 2019; Hadfield, 2019). Alejandra was one of the few fortunate individuals to be released and able to remain in the United States.

Unfortunately, not all transwomen are able to survive the precarious conditions to which they are exposed while they are held at ICE detention centers. On June 1, 2019, Johana Medina, a Salvadoran transwoman, died as a result of untreated health problems caused by complications with HIV/AIDS while detained by ICE (Higgins, 2019). Roxsana Hernández, a 33-year old transwoman, passed away on May 25, 2018 while in ICE custody after fleeing violence and discrimination in Honduras. Her cause of death was dehydration and complications related to HIV, symptoms that

were entirely preventable (Hadfield, 2019; Justice for Roxsana, 2018). The deaths of these transwomen seeking refugee in the United States expose the transwomen’s health needs are sometimes ignored in ICE detention centers.

Besides the discrimination and abuse they suffer, Salvadoran women face another obstacle when seeking asylum in the United States. They have to compile evidence to present in their court hearings to even be considered eligible to file for the asylum application process. Many of their cases in El Salvador have not been reported to local authorities for fear of retaliation. The few transwomen who attempted to report their cases were ignored like Alexia Trujillo after her attack. According to an analysis published by the American Bar Association, it is challenging for U.S. lawyers to represent LGBTQ+ asylum seekers fleeing El Salvador where Department of Homeland Security attorneys can argue there have been advances in the legal framework for LGBTI rights (Haugaard, 2018). However, El Salvador has failed to provide protection for transwomen by not enforcing the hate-crime law enacted in September 2015.

### **Conclusion**

The negligence on the part of the Salvadoran legal system has left transwomen vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination as well as hate crimes such as extortion, physical, verbal and sexual abuse from family members, gang members and law enforcement officials. The Salvadoran society has also failed to provide them with support and inclusion. There are several NGOs fighting for trans-people’s rights in El Salvador. However, it will take years to eradicate the long-entrenched prejudice, homophobia, and transphobia rooted in religious teachings that negatively influence Salvadorans’ views of LGBTQ+ people. Poverty, lack of employment opportunities, violence and rejection make living in El Salvador unbearable for transwomen. Their insufferable life conditions force them to leave their homes and

everything behind in order to start a new life in a place where they can be less vulnerable to persecution.

Dreams of a peaceful life give them the strength to embark on the 2260 mile walk in order to arrive at the U.S./Mexican border and request asylum. When they arrive, their dreams are shattered by the bureaucracy that fails to provide them with the protections they need as refugees. During the current refugee crisis, people are forced to wait months before obtaining a

court hearing and review of their cases. Transwomen, who are seeking asylum, are left unprotected from hate-driven physical and verbal abuse while they await their court hearings without even considering their extenuating circumstances. One possible solution could be to provide Transwomen fleeing discrimination and abuse from their home countries at least temporary entry to the United States and protection while awaiting a review of their cases.

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# Karl Marx

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## *Emma Gritsch*

**Course:** Social Science Honors Seminar I (SSH 2010)

**Professor:** Neil Kressel, Psychology, Social Science Honors

**Students:** Emma Gritsch

**Essay:** Karl Marx

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### **Assignment:**

Students needed to complete three 5-10 page essays on the writings of great classical thinkers in the social sciences. They had to choose three of the following theorists: Machiavelli, Smith, Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Veblen, Burke, Paine, Lippmann, Skinner, Freud, Ellis, Rogers, Maslow, Herzl, Lenin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Bernstein, Harris, or Boyer. The goal was to demonstrate

mastery of one or more aspects of the thinker's work. Students were permitted (but not required) to apply the thinker's ideas to historical or contemporary events. For their essays, students could not choose more than two theorists from a particular discipline; thus, they could not choose all psychologists, all sociologists, etc. Beyond this, students were free to choose their style and topic.

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German philosopher Karl Marx once wrote that "history calls those men the greatest who have ennobled themselves by working for the common good; experience acclaims as happiest the man who has made the greatest number of people happy" (Marx, 1925). While this is a wonderful sentiment, in practice, Marx's communist ideology has gone horribly wrong and been the source of millions of deaths across the world. Karl Marx had influential ideas about the class systems of countries and emphasized the injustices faced by the working class under the capitalist system. However, history has shown multiple times that communism, which is based off of Marx's ideas, is a dangerous ideology for a country to adopt. In this essay, I will discuss how, although Marxism as a theory is built on achieving equality and justice for all people in a society, it has several times been implemented in a

way that led to vicious dictatorship and the deaths of countless citizens.

Karl Marx was born on May 5th, 1818 in Trier, Prussia, which is now a part of Germany. Both of his parents were Jewish, although his father converted to Christianity a couple of years before Marx's birth. Marx came from a long line of rabbis, but his father chose to distance the family from its Jewish roots, likely in response to an 1815 law which excluded Jewish people from being considered a part of high society. Marx was baptized as a Lutheran. After attending high school, Marx began his studies at the University of Bonn, which was famous for its rebellious culture. He was imprisoned multiple times, and after two semesters, his father forced him to switch to the more conservative University of Berlin, where he studied philosophy and law. He joined a radical group on campus, the Young

Hegelians, who outwardly denounced the religious and political establishments they were living under. Marx and his wife moved to Paris where he worked as a journalist and became the editor of a newspaper. He struck up what would become a lifelong friendship with Friedrich Engels, who had contributed to the newspaper (“Karl Marx,” 2019).

Marx moved next to Brussels after being expelled from France. In Brussels, he was formally introduced to socialism by philosopher Moses Hess. By this time, Marx and Engels had worked on their first few written collaborations. In 1847, socialists in England who had been inspired by Marx’s writings invited him to a conference where they formed the Communist League. The next year, the League asked that Marx and Engels write a manifest for the communist party. Their manifesto, commonly called the Communist Manifesto, was published in 1848. After being expelled from Belgium, Marx returned to France with the expectation that a workers’ revolution was beginning, but he was deported from France. His home of Prussia also refused to let him live there, so Marx moved to London. In 1867, Marx published *Das Kapital*, in which he had further developed his theory of communism as an economic theory. Marx lived in London until his death on March 14th, 1883 (“Karl Marx,” 2019).

Marxism is the ideology that is based off of Marx’s theories, while communism is the political organization that was created based off his ideas. Marxism is founded on the idea that the history of the world is the history of the struggle between classes. Marxism was created in opposition to capitalism, which is the economic system where a free market reigns and where the means of production and distribution of products are privately owned (“Marxism,” n.d.). Even early in his career during his years as a journalist, Marx investigated German and, more broadly, European society and the injustices and corruption that the system of capitalism created in these societies among workers in the lower class. He believed that the only way European society

could change for the better was for it to be remade from the ground up (Ball & Dagger, n.d.).

According to Marxism, in a capitalist environment, all of society can be divided into two classes; the bourgeoisie, or the capitalist class, and the proletariat, or the working class. The bourgeoisie is the upper class which owns the means of production in the society, and members of the bourgeoisie are the employers of the working class. The working class in a capitalist society owns only their ability to work. The bourgeoisie use the workers’ labor to create products and are in control of the sale of these products. They then keep the surplus value of the products they sell, which is the amount of money left over from their profits after the working class employees are paid. In this system, the bourgeoisie are able to get wealthier over time as they continue to keep the surplus value for themselves, while the proletariat employees struggle to earn more money since they are paid the bare minimum wage by the bourgeoisie (“Marxism,” n.d.).

The main focus of Marxism, which is a socialist system, is that the power of production and distribution should be in the hands of the public rather than private citizens. It is built on the idea that the uprising of the proletariat class against the bourgeoisie is inevitable and has occurred throughout history:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (Marx & Engels, 1848)

Marx theorized that the first working class uprisings would occur in more developed countries before they occurred in less developed, poorer countries. He

envisioned a revolution of working class people taking over control from the bourgeoisie. At this point, the society becomes communist; this means that classes will no longer exist (Chambre & McLellan, 2019). The working class will take over the means of production and distribution of goods, along with other state institutions such as the courts and the police. According to Marx, after a revolution, the government of a country essentially becomes a dictatorship of the working class. However, this dictatorship only exists until the desire for a counterrevolution among the bourgeoisie passes. Now, the need for a state power disappears and the communist society can thrive. Marx chose to give few details about what he thought this newly communist society should look like going forward; he felt that it was not his place to determine how future societies should function and he left that up to the people living in them whenever the revolutions occurred. However, he maintained that the society's means of production should continue to be publicly owned, and that the society should ensure the protection of all people (Ball & Dagger, n.d.).

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor... has vanished;... after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs! (Marx, 1875)

In 1848, just before Marx and Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, multiple uprisings began in Europe. Although the uprisings were unsuccessful, the working class in Europe liked Marx's ideas and would remember them over the next few decades. The first successful proletariat revolution occurred in Russia; interestingly, Russia at this time

was not all that developed and it was not the country where Marx had expected the first revolution would take place. Its proletariat population was rather small and the country was mainly agricultural rather than industrial. The peasant population in Russia, who were used as laborers on the farms of wealthy nobles, were upset with the injustices they faced at the hands of the tsarist regime that was in power. In 1917, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party, led the revolution and became the leader of the new government of Russia. Lenin and the new government worked quickly to take over mills, mines, and factories, as well as to take over ownership of land that was privately owned by wealthy Russians and give it to peasants. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin took over his role as leader of the Soviet Union. Stalin believed that he was a genius and that he was the only person who could properly guide the country. In an effort to assert his power, and in order to dispose of the spies he was convinced were everywhere, Stalin began exiling and executing members of his own party as well as regular citizens of his country. Stalin also implemented the policy of collectivization of the Soviet Union's agriculture; in this brutal and rapid process, he forced millions of wealthier peasants off of their land and made them work on large collective farms. If the peasants refused to leave their land, they were either sent to forced labor camps or they were immediately shot dead. As a result of collectivization, in addition to being shot, many people starved or froze to death in the labor camps. A food shortage also tore through the Soviet Union at this time, which caused millions more deaths due to starvation and disease (Ball & Dagger, n.d.); historians estimate that the collectivization process resulted in the deaths of six to ten million people (Somin, 2017). The revolution and following deadly communist dictatorship seen in the Soviet Union was repeated in China beginning in the late 1940s. In the case of the Soviet Union, Stalin believed that he was an all-wise

person and that he was the only one who could properly guide the country. In 1949, Communists came to power and established the People's Republic of China. Leader Mao Zedong modified Marx's theory extensively, including in his practices a disastrous process similar to Stalin's collectivization called the Great Leap Forward which was marked by forced industrialization. In another similarity with Stalin, Mao believed that he was extremely wise and was the only person capable of saving China from poverty and bringing it into a prosperous future (Ball & Dagger, n.d.). The effects of Mao's changes to Marxism and to communist theory resulted in a famine that killed at least 45 million people; this was the single largest mass murder in history (Somin, 2017).

How did Marx's ideals of a society marked by equality and stability become twisted into a political movement that resulted in the deaths of millions of people? This is a question that has been debated many times. In my opinion, one contributing factor is the fact that communist leaders who lived after Marx's time were able to shape Marx's ideas into an ideology where they held an immense amount of power, and they used their power against their own citizens. Marx intentionally refrained from giving specific instructions for how a successful communist society should function after the necessary revolution had taken place. He trusted that the leaders of these future societies would figure out the most responsible and effective way to run their countries; instead, this gave the communist leaders the freedom to change the communist ideology in any way they wanted.

Stalin was able to warp Marx's words in order to support his belief that he was the only person capable of leading the Soviet Union. Mao in China had the same beliefs, and he also altered Marx's theory into an ideology that allowed him to hoard power over millions of his citizens who were starving and lived in poverty. However, the authoritarian personalities and horrific actions of the countries' leaders was not

the only reason that these communist governments resulted in the deaths of millions of people. Another main factor is that one of the core focuses of Marxism and communism is that most, if not all, of the means of production is under the control of the government of a country. According to Somin (2017), "Overall, the atrocities and failures of communism were the natural outcomes of an effort to establish a socialist economy in which all or nearly all production is controlled by the state." It is simply dangerous for a state to have complete control over its citizens. It can quickly turn into a society where freedoms of speech and religion and the right to own property are taken away in an effort to collectivize the society, and it can turn violent and deadly when citizens are reluctant to give up their rights. If this is combined with a ruthless leader who believes they hold the knowledge needed to move the country forward, the society can rapidly become disastrous:

Socialist revolutions, to be sure, have occurred throughout the world, but never where Marx's theory had predicted... On the contrary, socialism was forced on poor, so-called Third World countries. And those revolutions unwittingly condemned the masses to systemic poverty and political dictatorship. In practice, socialism absolutely failed to create the nonalienated, self-managed, and fully planned society. It failed to emancipate the masses and instead crushed them with statism, domination, and the terrifying abuse of state power. (Prychitko, n.d.)

Marxism and communism have been extremely controversial topics for over a century. Communism, the government system based off Marx's ideas, caused the deaths of as many as 100 million people through murder, disease, and widespread famine (Somin, 2017). Marx had good intentions overall; he envisioned a future where the means of production was owned by the public and where systemic injustices would disappear. His goal was to create a system where all

citizens enjoyed lives of stability and nobody was able to hoard wealth over others. However, the Communist leaders that ended up being in charge of these countries were merciless men who went to extreme lengths to force industrialization and collectivization on their citizens. The tendencies of these leaders had disastrous effects when coupled with the fact that

the essence of Marxism and communism is that the state holds vast power over its citizens. History has shown that, no matter how honorable Marx's ideas for a utopian socialist society were, communism, the ideology that Marxism spawned, is dangerous and simply does not work the way he dreamt it would.

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# American Media, the Public and the Holocaust: How Stories of the Genocide Were Downplayed, Hidden and Ignored

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**Course:** Historical Methods (HIST 2600)

**Professor:** David Koistinen, History

**Student:** Amanda Luskin

**Essay:** American Media, the Public and the Holocaust: How Stories of the Genocide Were Downplayed, Hidden and Ignored

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## **Assignment:**

In this research methods class, students pursue a topic of their own choosing, researching under the instructor's supervision, culminating in an essay that

involves considerable use of sources created during the period under study ("primary sources").

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The media decides what news is important and what stories and events people should prioritize. The average reader does not have time to read a newspaper, such as *The New York Times*, from cover to cover everyday. If a newspaper was picked up in America between the years of 1942 to 1945, it would be hard for the reader to learn that a massacre was taking place just across the ocean. The media, especially *The New York Times*, which was known as America's most influential paper at the time, treated the story of the extermination of the Jews in Europe as something their readers should not prioritize. Instead, while millions of Jews were being forced on trains east to their death, this important paper was burying the stories about the Holocaust in the back of its pages. When the stories did actually appear in the front, the wrong details were prioritized. These stories about the extermination of the Jews were also overshadowed by stories of the war itself. The events of World War II merited being the top

story on most days and the American people deserved to be updated on what was happening. However, that does not mean the papers should have completely overshadowed the stories pertaining to the Nazis' Final Solution. Today, most people see the atrocity of what we now know as the Holocaust to be one of the most important events in all of history. It may seem to Americans in the 21st Century that the facts of the Holocaust were not accessible to the media prior to the Ally forces liberating the camps. That was not the case. There was an immense amount of credible information, including some from eyewitnesses, released between 1942 to 1945. Local papers also had this information that was released to its regional audiences, and in some cases these smaller outlets did a better job of organizing their work. However, in both local papers and *The New York Times*, it was easy to see that these stories were secondary news due to their placement in the papers and the amount of

space they took up. When the information was reported, especially around 1944 when the reporting actually became better, the information was met with an apathetic, anti-Semitic audience, which did not help or entice the media to make the stories about the Jews their top headlines. Overall, the media, specifically *The New York Times*, made the extermination of close to six million Jews secondary news to the developments in the war while also downplaying and prioritizing the wrong details. Their inadequate coverage, along with anti-Semitism, caused the entire country to remain apathetic about the topic.

The United States State Department and President of the World Jewish Congress Rabbi and Dr. Stephen Wise were informed of what was happening to Europe's Jews in August of 1942. The state department was skeptical of the information and did not want to release it to the public before it was confirmed.<sup>1</sup> Wise ended up respecting the wishes of the state department and did not go public with the information right away.<sup>2</sup> Both parties ended up sitting on this important information for three months. During those three months, thousands of Jews were being murdered daily. In August 1942 alone, more than 400 thousand were murdered.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the state department confirmed what was happening to Europe's Jews and allowed Wise to hold a press conference to alert the media on November 24, 1942.<sup>4</sup> He informed the country that by that point, two million Jews had already been murdered and that the Nazis had an "extermination campaign," that would murder the remaining four million.<sup>5</sup> The next day, *The New York Times* and local papers began reporting on Wise's press conference. However, it was easy to see that the news was not seen by the members of the media as the most urgent thing for Americans to learn about. The stories were even difficult to find due to their small sizes and poor placements.

It is hard to believe there would be a bigger story than the confirmation by the American Government that

two million people have been murdered for no reason. However, the day after Wise's press conference, the front page of *The New York Times*, was dominated by stories of the war. It just so happened that important developments in the war coincided with Wise's announcement. On November 23, 1942, the Times reported that the Allies were gaining control both in Stalingrad and Tunisia,<sup>6</sup> and these war developments still dominated the headlines two days later. On November 25, the first story about the extermination of the Jews did not appear until page ten. The story about Stalingrad and Tunisia did not take up the entire first page and *The New York Times* would have had room for both the story about these important war updates and the slaughtering of European Jewry on page one. Instead, *The New York Times* filled their first page with other stories, including one about the troops eating Thanksgiving dinner in the Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

If the readers continued flipping through *The New York*

<sup>1</sup> David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941- 1945* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> "Nazi Plan to Kill All Jews Confirmed," *History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 15, 2019. <https://newspapers.ushmm.org/events/nazi-plan-to-kill-all-jews-confirmed>

<sup>3</sup> "August 1942," *Holocaust Chronology of 1942*, Jewish Virtual Library: A project of Aice, accessed November 19, 2019. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/holocaust-chronology-of-1942>

<sup>4</sup> "Stephen S Wise (1874-1949)," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 15, 2019. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/stephen-s-wise-18741949>

<sup>5</sup> "Americans Learn About the Final Solution," *Americans and the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 15, 2019. <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main>

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Daniell, "Nazis Grip on Stalingrad Broken: 15,000 Slain as Soviet Push Gains; Brisk Fighting Spreads in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1942, 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Two Thanksgivings For Pacific Troops," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1942, 1.

*Times* past the war stories and advertisements, on page ten, they would have found an article focused on Henrich Himmler, leader of the SS, and his program to kill Polish Jews. This story greatly downplayed the information that was released by Wise the day before. The headline of the article was, "Himmler Program Kills Polish Jews Slaughter of 250,000 in Plan to Wipe Out Half in the Country This Year."<sup>8</sup> This headline and article only had information on Polish Jews while the Nazis' Final Solution reached far beyond Polish Jews. Although a majority of the killing did happen in the six death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland, it was not only Polish Jews that were being sent to the death camps. Jews from all over Europe were being forced into cattle cars and sent East. Besides the death camps, there were also other people perishing in concentration camps and ghettos throughout all of Nazi-occupied Europe. Wise included all of Europe, not just Poland, in his press conference, so *The New York Times* had access to the correct information. The paper made the decision to initially leave it out. They also told their readers that 250 thousand were murdered, which was the number of Polish Jews that died up to that point,<sup>9</sup> but once again, only represents the Polish Jews and not the remaining 1.7 million that were murdered from other European countries. While Polish Jews were suffering greatly, it was an injustice to the others suffering in Nazi-occupied Europe to not mention them in their opening lines on the topic. Along with only focusing on Polish Jews, a lot of the article also focused on Himmler, a person that was not very well known in America until after the war. Besides not being well known, it was also an injustice to the victims that *The New York Times* put the focus on the perpetrator over the victims. Wise also gave more information to the media about what the Nazis were doing with the victims' remains, which at that point was more important news than including the man behind the program.

Directly under the long story about Polish Jews and

Himmler was actually a well formatted, but much smaller article about Wise and his press conference. Even the headline was less than half the size of the first one and read "Wise Gets Confirmation: Checks with State Department on Nazis' 'Extermination Campaign.'" The section on page ten devoted to Europe's Jews was written backwards. News stories should be written by stating the most important information in the lead, followed by a different angle that is more specific to make the story unique from other news outlets. Since every member of the media had the same information from Wise, *The New York Times* chose to make their angle on Poland and Himmler. *The New York Times* put their unique angle first followed by the most important information. If the readers made it past reading just about Polish Jews, they would have found correct information reading, "about half the estimated four million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe have been slain in an 'Extermination Campaign.'"<sup>10</sup> All the information released by *The New York Times* on November 25, 1942 was correct, just in the complete wrong order. Day one after receiving the information, *The New York Times* was already failing the victims. The reporting then got worse before finally getting better.

Local papers also released stories about Wise's press conference the day after it took place and although they did not make the first page, the articles were ordered in ways that made more sense than *The New York Times*. It is not possible to find the exact page numbers that these stories appeared on. Even without knowing the exact page number the stories appeared on, the articles included locally were very short, but were at least well stacked. One paper that had a short,

<sup>8</sup> "Himmler Program Kills Polish Jews: Slaughter of 250,000 in Plan to Wipe Out Half in Country This Year," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1942, 10.

<sup>9</sup> "Himmler Program Kills Polish Jews," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1942, 10.

<sup>10</sup> James MacDonald, "Wise Gets Confirmation," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1942, 10.

but correct article was the *Endicott Daily Bulletin* in Endicott, New York. They titled their article, “Nazi Plan to Kill All Jews,” and gave the numbers of those murdered by that point. It also discussed in the opening paragraph how the Nazis planned to murder four million.<sup>11</sup> The most important part of this headline and opening paragraph was that it included all Jews. Following the most important information being included in the top, the paper then went into an explanation of who Wise was and how he was a credible source. The different angle they took was by concluding the article with information about Nazi doctors that were experimenting on Jews and how the Germans were offering 50 Reichmarks for any Jew turned over to authorities.<sup>12</sup> *The Pawtucket Times* in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, headlined their story, “Dr. Wise Cites Jew Murders.”<sup>13</sup> It had almost the exact same information as *The New York Times*, but ordered it the correct way. Their first paragraph was almost verbatim to the most important information *The New York Times* buried reading, “approximately half the estimated 4,000,000 Jews in Nazi- occupied Europe had been slain in an ‘Extermination Campaign.’” Their unique angle also included all Jews. Their subtitle read, “Leader Declares Nazi Process Corpses for Soap Fats.”<sup>14</sup> This was important extra information to show how cruel the Nazis were. This story did also have a small section on how the Jewish population was being affected in Poland specifically. However, this section only takes up three lines out of 35. It was only put in to narrow the numbers down to give an example instead of making it seem as if the massacre was only happening in Poland. They did also discuss the perpetrators, by mentioning Hitler, but did not make Hitler the main focus the way *The New York Times* did with Himmler. All that was said about Hitler was, “Hitler ordered the extermination of all Jews in Nazi ruled Europe in 1942,”<sup>15</sup> which was straight to the point and factual. Not including Hitler’s name in the headline made the focus on Wise and the victims.

The news that was released in November of 1942 was met not only with poor media attention, but also with an apathetic audience that was backed by an immense amount of anti- Semitism. Hate against the Jews was seen in different forms, some including statistics collected by the media, acts of violence and letters. A poll taken by *Fortune* in November of 1942 asked factory workers, “which of the following groups would you least like to see move into your neighborhood?” While the highest percentage did answer Negroes, Jews came in second at 42 percent.<sup>16</sup> A poll in January of 1943 also found that 48 percent of Americans said they believe the information about the extermination of the Jews was true.<sup>17</sup> There is a good chance the other 52 percent did not believe the facts being released about the extermination of Europe’s Jews due to their anti- Semitism and negative views of Jews. Jews were also the target of a lot of violence throughout the war. There were many instances of

<sup>11</sup> “Nazi Plan To Kill All Jews,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, November 25, 1942. Accessed from “Public Reports of Murder” *Americans and the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed December 4, 2019. <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main>

<sup>12</sup> “Nazi Plan To Kill All Jews,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, November 25, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> “Dr. Wise Cites Jew Murders: Leader Declares Nazi Process Corpses for Soap Fats,” *The Pawtucket Times*, November 25, 1942, accessed from “Public Reports of Murder,” *Americans and The Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed December 19, 2019. <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main>

<sup>14</sup> “Dr. Wise Cites Jew Murders,” *The Pawtucket Times*, November 25, 1942.

<sup>15</sup> “Dr. Wise Cites Jew Murders,” *The Pawtucket Times*, November 25, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti- Semitism in America*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 131-132.

<sup>17</sup> “We Will Never Die Pageant: Preparing for the Pageant,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 15, 2019. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-we-will-never-die-pageant>

Jewish cemeteries being vandalized, synagogues being damaged<sup>18</sup> and Jews being physically attacked. In November 1943, a 12- year- old student at a Catholic school in Brooklyn attacked a four- year- old Jewish boy and stated that his teacher said they were allowed to beat up Jews.<sup>19</sup> In 1944 when reporting from the media got better, it was obvious that still no one cared about the news that was now being correctly ordered and even prominently placed. In 1944, when thousands of Hungarian Jews were being sent to Auschwitz a day, one American wrote a letter to congress stating, "I see from the papers that 200,000 Refugee Jews in Hungary will not live through the next few weeks. Thats too Dam bad what in the Hell do we care about the Jews in Hungary."<sup>20</sup> These acts of anti- Semitism show why not many cared when the information came out and was confirmed and as no one continued to care as the war went on.

The fact the readers were anti- Semetic and that half the population did not even believe the extermination was happening played a big part in the stories of the Jews being put in the back of the papers. Although papers are supposed to remain unbiased, journalism is still a business and news outlets need to make money to stay running. The only way papers can do that is by circulating and selling a large quantity of their content. The best way to sell large quantities is to have interesting headlines that catch the average person's eye. If all newspaper's top headlines were about a subject the readers did not care about, they would have been less likely to pick up and purchase the papers, therefore the paper would make less money. Throughout 1942, *The New York Times* printed 139 stories pertaining to what was happening to the Jews of Europe with only nine appearing on the first page. The number of overall stories went up to 186 in 1943, but the amount of front- page stories went down to seven. By 1944 there were 12 front- page stories and 197 overall.<sup>21</sup> While these numbers show that a large number of stories were being printed, only a small

number were deemed front page news and prioritized. When stories were actually printed on the front page, they were sometimes very deceiving. An article titled, "Foe put Nurseries Inside Death Camp," started on page one on November 13, 1944 and was about the largest concentration camp in the Netherlands. The first 15 lines that did appear on page one were stuck in the bottom right- hand corner and in no way told the full story of what took place in the camp. The writer of the article, James MacDonald, painted a picture of a place that he did call a concentration camp, but made the camp sound like it was a nice environment to live in, especially for children. MacDonald, described it by saying, "Newly bricked buildings line the streets. There are nurseries and playgrounds, flower beds here and there."<sup>22</sup> If a reader just read that section on page one, they would think that what was being called a death camp was not an accurate name for the camp and that it was a pleasant place for people to live. This could have caused people to believe the Jews were overreacting to what was happening and believe the information released even less. If the reader flipped to page three, they then would have learned that the camp was built in 1941 and opened in 1942. Only then, if this mundane information held the reader's attention, would they learn about all the atrocities that took place in the camp. It was not important that the American audience knew the history of the camp. What Americans needed to know was how the prisoners being kept there were being starved, shot and their bodies burned in two giant ovens. If

<sup>18</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment*, 10

<sup>19</sup> Dinnerstein, *Anti- Semitism in America*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment*, 12

<sup>21</sup> Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 4.

<sup>22</sup> James MacDonald, " For Put Nurseries Inside Death Camps: Fairy- Tale Settings to Amuse Children of Internees are Found at Holland Prison," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1944, 1, 3.

MacDonald felt it was necessary for the readers to know the history of the camp, it should have been put at the very end of the article. Once again, *The New York Times* printed an article written backwards. Page one should have featured the atrocities, while the deceiving pleasant description should not have been included at all. The Nazis were excellent at deception and did things such as put flower beds in their camps so the victims would think the camps were a nice place and could not resist until it was too late. As for visuals, the most important one was the two ovens. If the readers did not turn to page three to finish the article, they would think the Nazi camps were filled with nice housing and flower beds. It is important for a writer to paint a picture of what they see so the reader can visualize it. However, the scene MacDonald had readers visualize on page one did a great injustice to those that perished and suffered at that camp.

When 1944 hit, the media's coverage actually improved. It was then the fault of the public for being bystanders from this point on. By this time, some eyewitnesses found their way out of the camps with the goal to report to the United States and Great Britain about the horrors they endured and saw in hopes that these strong world powers would do something to stop the massacre. Some media outlets can be commended for devoting space in their papers and magazines to these stories. One outlet was *Collier's* magazine, which featured a story by Jan Karski, a member of the Polish underground. Karski went into the Belzec Extermination Camp in Nazi-occupied Poland undercover as an Estonian guard sometime before 1944. Karski wrote a book about his experience in both the underground and at Belzec titled *Story of a Secret State*, and an excerpt of it appeared in *Collier's* about a month before the book was released. The excerpt was about his day in Belzec and the killings he witnessed. It goes into gruesome details of Karski seeing a large number of Jews locked in a train filled with Quicklime, which burned off their flesh. He vividly described the screams of the victims and how traumatizing the experience

was to witness.<sup>23</sup> *Collier's* did a great job devoting space to Karski's story along with picking a powerful and a very important excerpt for their audience to learn about. This well written, accurate article from an eyewitness still caused no outrage or even much public attention.

As 1944 continued on, camps began being liberated by the Allies. This gave the ally armies and journalists the chance to see the conditions of these camps first hand and describe what they saw to their home countries. The Majdanek Concentration and Extermination Camp, near Lublin, Poland, was the first major camp to be liberated. The Red Army entered the gates of Majdanek on the night of July 23, 1944.<sup>24</sup> Following liberation, the Polish Committee of National Liberation invited foreign correspondents to Majandek to see first hand what took place there. The New York Times sent correspondent W.H. Lawrence to get the story. Lawrence arrived at Majdanek about a month following liberation and his story about the camp appeared on page one of *The New York Times* on August 30, 1944. He describes Majdanek as "the most terrible place on the face of the earth."<sup>25</sup> This impactful description appeared on page one. The information he received at that time from Polish authorities was that 1.5 million perished at the camp. This estimate was high and it was discovered later that the actual number of deaths at Majdanek was actually 360 thousand.<sup>26</sup> However, although it was

<sup>23</sup> Jan Karski, "Polish Death Camp," *Collier's*, October 14, 1944, in *America Views the Holocaust 1933-1945: A Brief Documentary History*, ed. Robert Abzug, (Boston:Bedford/St. Martin, 1999),190.

<sup>24</sup> "Liberation of Nazi Camps," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 15, 2019.<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/liberation-of-nazi-camps>

<sup>25</sup> W.H. Lawrence, "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp: Victims Put at 1,500,000 in Huge Death Factory of Gas Chambers and Crematories," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1944,1.

<sup>26</sup> "Majdanek," Yad Vashem, accessed December 12, 2019. [https://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%2006622.pdf](https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%2006622.pdf)

100 percent correct and needed to be confirmed, it was still important for him to relay this information he received to the American audience. The number was even included in his title unlike when the information was confirmed in 1942 and their readers had to read many lines before learning that two million perished by that point. Although the number was off, Lawrence had accurate information by describing what he saw such as the emaciated corpses in mass graves with decomposing bodies and valuables left behind by those who perished, such as shoes and luggage.<sup>27</sup> He also had the opportunity to speak to a German survivor who saw the killing process first-hand which was important inside information to obtain along with the post liberation visuals. Lawrence states in the article, "After inspection of Majdanek, I am now prepared to accept any story of German atrocities, no matter how savage, cruel and depraved."<sup>28</sup> This was a very important quote to include in the article. Lawrence was a credible correspondent with America's most trusted newspaper, and to hear him say that he would accept all the stories of the Nazis' atrocities while there were still many that did not believe them was powerful and important. It took until 1944, but The New York Times finally printed a well organized and written article on page one of their paper. This story was in no way deceiving and really gave the reader knowledge of how horrific these camps were and the harsh treatment prisoners faced there.

It would seem that an American journalist seeing first hand what had happened in a camp in Nazi-occupied territory, describing it so vividly and as the most terrible place in the world would catch America's attention and make them care. However, not much changed following the release of these articles and the media and public failed the victims in these final months. As stated earlier, there were only 12 front page stories on the subject in The New York Times in 1944, so although the articles were well written, they were still for the most part buried in the back of the paper.

Since Majdanek was the first major extermination and concentration camp to be liberated, the killing was still continuing in other camps. Auschwitz, the biggest concentration and extermination camp where the most people ended up being murdered, was not liberated until January 27, 1945, and thousands of Hungarian Jews were being transported there everyday until November, 1944 when Himmler finally order the SS to stop extermination,<sup>29</sup> three months after Lawrence's story was printed. America remained silent in these final months, and just as in 1942, hearing that millions of people died and were still dying changed nothing.

It took many years after the war for Americans to begin caring about what happened to the Jews of Europe. Once all the camps were liberated, it became old news. There were stories about the Nuremberg Trials when they were going on,<sup>30</sup> however, nothing about the victims or survivors and their stories. In probably the most famous Holocaust memoir, *Night*, Elie Wiesel discusses how ten years post the liberation of Buchenwald, he "realized that the world forgets quickly."<sup>31</sup> However, some time after books such as *Night*, which was published in English a little more than 15 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, began surfacing, people began to However, some time after books such as *Night*, which was published in English a little more than 15 years after the liberation of

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence, "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp," *The New York Times*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence, "Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in Camp," *The New York Times*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> "1944 Key Dates," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 25, 2019. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/1944-key-dates>

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen McLaughlin, "20 of 21 Nazis Claim Innocence as Nuremberg Trial Is Concluded," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1946.

<sup>31</sup> Elie Wiesel, preface to *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel, (New York: New York: Hill and Wang, 2006) xii.

Auschwitz,<sup>32</sup> began surfacing, people began to care more and reflect about what happened. Wiesel's *Night* stayed on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 80 weeks.<sup>33</sup> Other books, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, piqued people's interest in learning more about what the Jews of Europe went through. Now those books are required readings at many schools across the country. The Holocaust is also one of the most written about subject in works of fiction, which have also become bestsellers, and is very prevalent in Hollywood. The American government also acknowledges it. In 2019, the U.S. Congress declared May 2nd as "Day of Remembrance" to commemorate the Holocaust.<sup>34</sup> As for the media, they now cover important Holocaust related dates. Every year on January 27 in Oświęcim, Poland, a ceremony is held for the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. This event is filled with reporters from all over the world, including major American outlets. Newspapers and magazines also hold interviews with survivors and take the time to report stories about them as they pass away. America's failure to help Europe's Jews when they

needed it most, is a dark part of American history, and is still going on today. Americans are letting down victims of current genocides throughout the world. At this moment, there are genocides happening in places such as Sudan and Syria, and most Americans do not bother to know about it or if they do, do not care. When people think of the Holocaust, they say "never again," but never again is happening and once again, Americans are failing the victims.

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Donadio, "The Story of 'Night,'" *The New York Times*, January 20, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/20/books/review/Donadio-t.html>

<sup>33</sup> Donadio, "The Story of 'Night,'" *The New York Times*.

<sup>34</sup> "Day of Remembrance", *Remembering Survivors and Victims*, United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed November 25, 2019. <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/days-of-remembrance>

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen McLaughlin, "20 of 21 Nazis Claim Innocence as Nuremberg Trial Is Concluded," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1946.

<sup>36</sup> Elie Wiesel, preface to *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel, (New York: New York: Hill and Wang, 2006) xii.

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# Statistical Findings

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*Alyssa Arendt*

**Course:** Data Analysis (SOC 3020)

**Professor:** Jennifer Di Noia, Sociology and Criminal Justice

**Student:** Alyssa Arendt

**Essay:** Statistical Findings

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## **Assignment:**

Using the GSS 2002 subset B file, find and interpret Pearson's  $r$  and  $r$ -squared for the association between respondents' years of education (educ) (the independent variable) and number of children (chlds) (the dependent variable). What happens to the  $r$ -squared when you add the variables number of brothers and sisters (sibs) and respondents' age when their first child was born (agekdbrn)? What do

the standardized regression coefficients tell you about these independent variables (which is the strongest predictor of respondents' number of children [educ, sibs, or agekdbrn])? The next strongest? The next after that? How is each independent variable related to the dependent variable (is the relationship positive or negative)?

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The variables educ (respondents' years of education) and chlds (number of children) do appear to be related. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) =  $-.231$  and the  $p$ -value is  $.000$ . This indicates that the relationship is negative and of weak strength. We can conclude that as the highest year of school completed increases, the number of children one has decreases. The  $r$ -squared value tells us that 5.3% of the variation in respondents' number of children is explained by highest year of school completed. When we add the variables sibs (number of brother and sisters) and agekdbrn (respondents' age when their first child was born), the  $r$ -square value increases to  $.09$ , indicating that 9% of the variation in the respondents' number of children is explained by these three variables. The standardized regression coefficients

reveal that agekdbrn (beta weight =  $-.216$ ) is the strongest predictor of chlds, followed by sibs (beta weight =  $.110$ ) and then educ (beta weight =  $-.088$ ). All three variables are statistically significant. We can conclude that as the respondents' age when their first child was born decreases, the number of brothers and sisters the respondent has increases, and highest year of education decreases, then the number of children the respondent has will increase.

# Knowing Who We Are

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*Tekoa Criddell*

**Course:** Humanities Honor Seminar IV (HUMH 2020)

**Professor:** John Peterman, Humanities Honors

**Student:** Tekoa Criddell

**Essay:** Knowing Who We Are

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## **Assignment:**

Students were to approach this essay by making sense of and connecting five books read in the second half of the course: *King Lear*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Trial*, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Students were told their ideas need

not agree with any experts but should be clearly explained using supporting evidence from the texts and from outside sources if desired.

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There are some who would say that the purpose of one's life is to find out who you are. However, is any person objective enough to really know that for themselves? It could be argued that you can only know yourself in relation to other people, that only through your actions towards other people or through their perception of you can your true self be determined. But this means that your identity would be wrapped up in other people, which could be just as much of a detriment as a help. In the books we have read in the second half of this semester, especially as we creep toward the modern era, are characters that seem to be much more flawed and uncertain in their convictions and life choices. For instance, Odysseus despite all his many flaws, was still the hero of the story and remained so for the entirety. He was depressed at times, but his overall goal was never really challenged. Starting from *King Lear*, where our protagonist begins as the most powerful man in the land and whose loss of his title,

family, and subjects has a severe psychological toll on him, but may have opened his eyes to who he really is. Stephen Dedalus, from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a character who, unlike some of the others, we follow throughout his entire life so far. Does this fact and his subsequent violent swings of character, from frequent user of prostitutes to staunch religious scholar and beyond, make him more of a fleshed-out character? Does this search for who he is seem more complete as we reach the end of his story? Perhaps what makes these epic heroes seem more secure in who they are is because most of them are fully grown and have a few adventures under their belts before we even meet them. *In To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay, our main character for much of the beginning, seems to be content with her identity and position in life, or at least has made peace with it. But does her constant presence stunt the growth of the personal selves of every other person in the household? In *The Trial*, Joseph K thinks he has a pretty

good grasp on who he is, but similarly to King Lear when he loses the things he finds pivotal to his identity, it begins to shatter. The Reader from *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* starts off with not just an ambiguous identity, in real life he does not really exist at all. In the beginning chapters, he could literally be anyone. However, over the course of the story and the adventures he goes on, he starts to make decisions for himself, taking risks and forging a new identity. He becomes someone who does not passively let life wash over him, only taking slight risks in the comfort of books he does not read as joyously as he could, but really making something of himself. All these books to one degree or another deal with the complex question of the self: who am I? What do I want? It is questions like these that have plagued humankind for probably as long as we have had the wherewithal to think of it, and it probably always will. How these different authors, and by proxy their protagonists, deal with this question says not only a lot about the narrative but also the author and time period it was written in.

King Lear starts off as a self-assured king who is trying to do the right thing but is blinded by his own pride to see the great mistake he is making. His flaw is his inability to know himself, as his daughter Regan, who professed to love him but is really plotting against him, says in the first act: "Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself." (I.i.300). As we continue through his journey, we find that self-knowledge is certainly possible, but perhaps not worth it at the point we find him at the end of the play. Goneril and Regan call him a fool behind his back because everyone knows that he loved Cordelia the best, and that she loved him, but due to his impromptu interrogation and her lack of response he declares she doesn't love him and essentially banishes her. When she comes back for him and tries to save him despite all he's done and said to her, he knows that she truly loved him, but it only makes the pain of her dying all the more devastating. When he believes the false pretensions

of love Goneril and Regan spout about loving him, he also believes that like Cordelia they will respect him and care for him in his old age, giving him the respect he believes he deserves despite giving up his kingdom to his daughters. When he meets the rude awakening that this is not the case, and starts to understand that neither his daughters nor their servants treat him like the king anymore, he is even shocked at his own actions in response: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I.IV.215). In Act 3, a storm rages and Lear is caught up in it. He rages at the thunder and rain and is clearly from his own admission losing grip on his sanity. Yet there are pockets of lucidity that go to show how much this experience has humbled him. Lear seems to recognize that nature is not one of subjects, something he can have control over, and he as a king can be caught in a thunderstorm just as any of the commoners in his realm. He even laments in this Act that he did not do more during his reign to help the downtrodden, now that he finds himself one of them. Clearly the identity that was most influential in Lear's life was that of being King, even more than being a father. Now that he no longer has that power, he comes to realize just how tenuous his self-esteem and respect in the kingdom was, and that there is not much separating him from the peasants and such. He calls himself a slave, and a "poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man" something he would never have referred to himself as in Act 1. The other characters also have their struggles with identity. Edgar by necessity must give up who he is to survive and puts on the persona of a crazy person to escape his own father. Edmund is very clear on who he is from the start, he knows he is a bastard and will do anything to rise above this title and surpass his brother. He is self-aware enough to know the struggles his bastard status puts on him, but perhaps not enough to know how much of his scheming was based on the simple need to feel loved and appreciated by someone, as is reflected by some of his dying words as Goneril and Regan died for him: "Yet Edmund was beloved." (V.3.238). Edmund unlike

Lear knows exactly who he is, his evil nature, who his friends and enemies are, and yet he still dies. King Lear gains his self-knowledge too late, after he has already lost everything, and Edmund knew all along who he was, and still lost; in *King Lear* knowing yourself is not enough, you must also know what to do with that fact, and figure it out before your time is up.

Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a character that unlike the others we get a pretty full picture of throughout his life until he makes the decision to leave Ireland as a young adult. His inability to get a grasp on who he is or who he wants to be is greatly impacted by his environment. His relationship to his family, Irish nationality, and Catholic faith make this soul-searching particularly hard for him, as oftentimes he must choose between what he wants and what these external influences are telling him. This can be seen from very early on in the plot, where Stephen is initially very hesitant to go to the strict Clongowes Wood College, so far away from his family. Yet, eventually he finds his place and comes to be content there with the other boys, despite the institution being so religious, something he bristles on later in life. When he comes home for Christmas dinner he faces the harsh reality the unrest in Ireland is having in his own family, and perhaps this formative experience shapes his later disinterest in the politics of Ireland and his willingness to leave despite how many youths were pressured to stay and fight for their freedom. Later, his father causes some money troubles which results in the family having to move to Dublin, where Stephen goes to Belvedere for school, and begins to use his life-long fascination with writing as a creative outlet. However, this also causes another crisis of faith, where he completely abandons his strict Catholic upbringing and participates in many sexual sins that are clearly forbidden, mostly visiting prostitutes. Some people, especially those that are not religious or like to rebel against the status quo, may feel that Stephen is finally coming into his own at this

point. However, is this accurate? After all, in Chapter 2, Stephen only comes across and eventually has relations with the first prostitute because he realizes the empty gesture of giving gifts to his family, and that he still does not connect to them. It is likely this lack of familial connection in tandem with his natural base sexual urges that cause him to continue wallowing in sin, not some self-reflection leading to epiphany. Even when later in the story, after he has gotten over his uber religious faze and acknowledges that recognition of beauty and sensuality is necessary when he sees the beautiful girl wading in the water, he does not seem to go back to his almost hedonistic practices earlier. He instead directs these physical impulses into his imaginative writing process. As he comes to this conclusion, he has almost come to the end of this journey and has come to a place where we as the reader can say he has some grasp on who he is. What gets him to this point seems to be the experience of going through two extremes, and then also the scholarly college experience that he figures out is not for him. Many people seem to find themselves or their purpose through other people. This does not seem to be the case for Dedalus. In the last chapter, Stephen wishes to be free like the birds he sees in the sky above him, and only by separating himself from his family, country, religion, and even the friends he meets in university who support him and philosophical ideas. Only when he casts all these things aside and crafts his own pair of wings -like his namesake Daedalus- can he ever truly be free to be and do what he wants. It seems Stephen, and by extension Joyce, feel that to be an artist is a generally separate experience: that one must be in exile to do it properly, and to his credit Joyce did actually do that. However, just as Joyce left Ireland but was still clearly slavishly connected to it, writing books about it and having a map of Dublin on his floor- Stephen does not seem to be fully leaving Ireland behind either. He rejects the aspects of the community he does not want to embrace: the religion, his family, patriotism- but he states that through his books he

wants to forge the “uncreated conscience” of his race, to give a voice to the people that have made him who he is. In that way, he will immortalize the people he knew and the experiences that shaped him as a person, causing them to be forever entangled in himself.

The characters in *To The Lighthouse* may be a comment on how we create our own identities, for better or for worse. Mrs. Ramsay seems to have crafted her own self-image through being a homemaker and having an influence on everyone’s lives. This can be seen in her smothering of James, not wanting him to be upset or disappointed, even if it is unlikely he will be able to go to the Lighthouse. She assuages her husband Mr. Ramsay’s blatant insecurities and covers over his bluntness to the children. This does not just apply to her family, however. She tries to play matchmaker with family friends two times, and one time it actually works. Mrs. Ramsay wants Lily to marry William Bankes, who is successful and who she thinks will be a good match, but even though they get along, this does not come about. She does, however, succeed with Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, who get engaged that day. She even manages to soften up the prickly Charles Tansley, who seems to derive his persona by the inferiority complex fabricated from a life of low income. After Mrs. Ramsay dies in the Time Passes section of the story, seeing how the family has coped without the all-encompassing influence of Mrs. Ramsay gives us an insight on who they are. Mr. Ramsay is perhaps the most glaring example on someone who has placed all his self worth on one attribute in his life. Similar to Joseph K’s banking job and King Lear’s royal position, when one feels that they are only important or worth anything because of the title they have, they are constantly fearful of losing it or not being the best at it. Mr. Ramsay from the very beginning of the book is constantly questioning his merits as a philosopher, periodically looking to his wife for confirmation of his talent and of her love for

him. She graciously gives him both, which perhaps feeds this vicious cycle more than helps it. After Mrs. Ramsay is dead and he is on vacation with his family and Lily, he looks to her for sympathy and she cannot, or will not, give him the same reaction his wife did. This perhaps finally gives him the necessary push to self-reflect on his action and come to terms with the person he has become. When after all these years, the boat finally makes it to the Lighthouse and James gets what he wanted, Mr. Ramsay also finally reconciles with his son and daughter. Lily is a character that appears in both the beginning and ending sections of the book, and she seems to be looking for herself as well. She wants to be an artist, yet she cannot finish a painting. She is greatly distressed by Charles Tansley’s assertions that women cannot create art, perhaps not only because of the sexist comment but because if she truly cannot be an artist, then what is she? The Lighthouse has many characters that have put titles on who they are for themselves and then slid into these “off the rack” identities. Mrs. Ramsay the housewife, is seemingly content with her role, as she holds much control and influence over the household. Mr. Ramsay the philosopher is constantly under stress to live up to the title he has given himself, to be the best, he does not consider that he has other things he should take just as seriously as part of his identity: namely being a father. Lily the artist struggles with this label and the one of her being a woman until the very end, when she finally finishes the painting of Mrs. Ramsay she started all those years ago, proving to herself the validity of her artist identity and being at peace with Mrs. Ramsay’s wife and mother role that Lily never connected to and possibly resented. The answer to how to find one’s self except for Mrs. Ramsay seems to be separating yourself from what you find comfortable, to expand your surroundings, and be around people that challenge you.

The characters in *The Trial* live a in semi-dystopia, which could be compared to the bleak lack of individu-

alism found in 1984, so the concept of self is purposely chipped away throughout the course of the narrative. Joseph K is an upper-class man with a respectable job, and that is how he defines himself as a person. Especially toward the beginning of the book, it would seem that other aspects of the self that people might take into account, such as kindness, respect for people (especially lower-class women) and interest in the socio-political climate of where you live are not something Joseph K prioritizes. Perhaps his inflated view of himself gave him a false sense of security, that he could not have something like this happen to him, because he is important. Only when he is “arrested” by the Court and begins his trial does this fragile self-image start to crumble, and he is faced with the destruction of all that makes him, himself. This dissolution can even be seen in his name. He goes from Joseph K, respected banker, to K, man willingly killed in a ditch in the middle of nowhere. Kafka seems to be making a statement about how large institutions like the Court can be so pervasive in their influence and tactics, that they can make it so that eventually you don’t even exist. They can take away any material thing you own or title you have, so you must have more to you that they cannot take away. Tactics the Court uses are like many totalitarian governments: having no respect for personal property, rights or freedoms, lack of respect for the accused, not informing the public, and overall not treating their subjects like human beings. K’s arrogance, stubbornness, and anger can make him not the most likeable main character in a story, but when we get glimpses of this person, especially when he becomes more and more frustrated with the Court and his elusive trial, we know that he is a real person with a personality. He makes decisions, not always the best ones, regarding women and trusting them even when he really shouldn’t. He sends his niece gifts that she is so touched by she sends his uncle up to help him although he puts no effort into sending the gifts whatsoever, delegating the task to his assistant. Joseph

K is more than just a bank clerk, but after the Cathedral scene in which he is told about the futility of trying to find compassion or even common decency in a system like this, it wears on him. Seeing him slowly devolve into someone who has accepted his fate, who ends up dying alone “like a dog” is made so much sadder because you know that at one point he had an identity beyond this.

If *On a Winter’s Night a Traveller* tells the story of the Reader, and in a way it catalogues his journey to becoming a different kind of self. Postmodernism posited a new idea, that your identity as a person was always changing and the Reader shows how one’s “self” is fluid, and how you can choose over time to become a different kind of person and be constructed by the events and people around you. There is no doubt that the Reader at the beginning of the story and at the end are very different people. Boring and indecisive, the Reader at the beginning is so bland he could literally be a self-insert character. He could without incident become anyone who is actually reading the book; in fact, he would not even have to be a he, he is so vague. This was clearly intentional on the part of the author to set up the story, but even when we are given more details about him and his life, he is no heroic protagonist. He, by the author’s own admission, is not the type to take risks or expect too much from life, for fear of being disappointed. He only takes the chance on books because he figures even if he is let down it will not be devastating. Given this description, you would think that eventually he would give up on his wild book chase, given that he is disappointed multiple times by the stories he finds, never able to come to a satisfying conclusion. This Reader seems like the type to at some time cut his losses and read one of those other books he hasn’t gotten to. This is where we reach how other characters can shape who we become as people. Ludmilla is the woman he meets at the bookstore trying to find the rest of the first story, and her interest in this, as well as

his interest in her, spurs him onward through this quest. Most of the time it is not advised to change who you are for a romantic partner, but in this case, it seems to allow the Reader a way to engage with reading that he never thought of before. With Ludmilla, he regains the sense of wonder for where a story might take you, and how important it is to appreciate that. He tracks down book manufacturers, professors of obscure languages, travels to find these books, even though he knows at some point the story will likely not be finished. He is insecure about his ability to even talk to Ludmilla at the beginning and is greatly disheartened when he finds out she gave him a different phone number. At the very end of the book, he simply decides that his story will end with him marrying Ludmilla, and that is what he gets. She seems to be the main factor in this great change of character. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* seems to be saying that our identities are flexible, that we can change them through our actions at any time, and that some people may need a little push from others. The Enlightenment idea that may have permeated the other stories to some extent is that you the individual create yourself, like unformed clay laid out in front of you that you must shape through sheer force of will and intellect. The newer postmodern idea Calvino brings up focuses much more on how our culture and the people around us shape who we are, sometimes much more than we would expect.

Can anybody tell me who I am? Depending on who you ask, this question can have a lot of answers. *King Lear* has characters who discover for themselves, usually to their own detriment, the makeup of their souls. It is not enough for them to know who they are; they must work on themselves and not live in denial for any of that soul-searching to be worth it. In *Portrait*, Stephen goes through many changes in lifestyle as he matures, and yet the base fascination with language and writing never leaves him. Parts of us that are so formative, like Stephen's art and home, never leave us

no matter how far away we go. Only when Stephen nurtures this part of his identity by leaving the shackles of Ireland behind him does he have the possibility to truly know himself. In *To the Lighthouse*, characters grapple with the "selves" they make for themselves, and how to live up to their own expectations. In this story, you choose who you become, but this choice is not always easy, such as the case of ever insecure Mr. Ramsay, or creatively stunted Lily. In order to be a fully realized person, you must not only choose a title, you must follow through on all of them, not just the ones you like at the time. *The Trial* is set in place where your identity does not matter to the Court, nothing does except the Law, which is elusive. Joseph K's elitist attitude and persona stem from his job security and rank, but when that leaves him all he is left with is himself: arrogant, sometimes angry, bad with women, but a person nonetheless. His descent into losing all of this is the great tragedy of the story. The Reader of *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* is bland and uninteresting, but over the course of the story makes himself into the protagonist you want to see. Unlike some of the other stories, you can not only choose who you are, you can alter it midway through your life, and these changes are often influenced by other people. To be yourself is one of the great challenges when you are living in a world that often congratulates people for being anything but. Knowing yourself is even harder, and most people cannot look at themselves objectively enough to find out. However, if you do, you may be able to prevent a tragedy, reconcile with your son at a lighthouse, save your life, or change yourself entirely to become better than you once were.

# The Ideological Monster: Horror's Social Purpose

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**Professor:** Laura Di Summa-Knoop, Philosophy

**Student:** Elise Johnson

**Essay:** The Ideological Monster: Horror's Social Purpose

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## **Assignment:**

The students were asked to submit a 3000 words+ research paper introducing at least three additional sources. Before submitting the paper, they had to

submit an annotated bibliography. Topics were chosen by the students.

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I knew that monsters were far more gentle and more desirable than the monsters living inside “nice people.” And I think accepting that you are a monster gives you the leeway to not behave like one. When you deny being a monster, you behave like one.

– Guillermo del Toro

A genre that has frightened audiences for over a century, horror films have seen immense popularity in spite – or because – of the ghastly ordeal audiences endure, with numerous films finding critical and commercial success. Yet many have found this fondness of horror unlikely considering the negative emotions the genre conjures up. Why would a person willingly submit themselves to films that incite fear, repugnance, and dread? This long-sought question has been asked and answered in many different ways by many different philosophers, some examining the issue from a cognitivist perspective, an expressivist standpoint, or from some other theory. While Noël

Carroll centers his evaluation of horror's draw on the monster, claiming that our curiosity around beings that defy cultural categories fuels our pleasure, Berys Gaut takes the position that there is no paradox and we can enjoy a negative emotion when we disvalue the object of that emotion. Both of these theories are persuasive, and in fact both may be applicable to different horror movies, as I doubt that there is merely one theory of horror that can account for its considerable diversity. Nonetheless, I do find these two theories to be lacking. Horror can do so much more than entertain, and I contend that audiences continue to flock to horror because of its application to the real world. These monsters can represent the real-life injustices of our world, with the genre being wielded as a way to reveal their monstrous nature. Of course not all of horror's monsters are representations of injustice, and indeed some films frame their monsters as historically marginalized groups, thereby maintaining systems of oppression. Some films may also just be campy, blood-

splattering fun with little to no intentional social message endorsed by the writer or director. But there are many works of horror this theory applies to, works that audiences respond to and enjoy. Moreover, this depiction of monstrosity can play an important role in addressing and eliminating these systems, as horror can encourage critical self-reflection in the audience. Thus, we can enjoy horror because of its role in mitigating real-life injustice, and this often-overlooked genre can encourage a monumental change in a society's moral imagination.

Exactly which particular injustice a horror movie depicts and how it is represented varies from film to film, and there are different ways to analyze a film to deduce such answers. The approach taken in this paper is a feminist ideology critique, particularly that of Cynthia A. Freeland's "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films." Such a method examines a film's participation in an ideology, critiquing certain naturalized messages about gender the film presents (Freeland 205). This framework allows for an intersectional approach that also considers race, class, sexuality, and so on, the first of which being integral to this paper's analysis. In examining how the film portrays historically marginalized and dominant groups, we can ask questions regarding the representation of gender (and racial) roles and relations, the type of resolution presented, the hero, and the horrific monster (215). It is the latter's representation that will constitute this paper's analysis, though the importance of a marginalized protagonist proving victorious and defeating an ideological monster is a question for further consideration. This framework takes horror films as cultural texts or artifacts that function within a sociocultural context that is constantly changing (215). Horror films, like all art, embodies "the ideological circumstances of the moment that contains it," though audience readings from different contexts can produce different, even subversive, interpretations of the film and its contents (Sharrett 71). What is important in

this ideology critique is recognition of the reflective nature of film genres in that by virtue of the specific historical and sociocultural context in which they are produced and consumed, these films speak to those populations about issues within that context (Benshoff xiv). In horror, what is horrific "flows from the normal," from the ideological ideals of patriarchy, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression (Sharrett 61). Gaut and Carroll's theories do not adequately acknowledge these contexts and how they influence the construction of horror, its monsters, and our recognition of them, and thus this paper will prioritize films as such artifacts.

One horror film beloved by both fans and critics alike that has grounded itself in the injustice of American racism is Jordan Peele's *Get Out*. The film centers on Chris, a young black man who is invited by his white girlfriend Rose to her wealthy liberal parent's house upstate. As the weekend progresses and the racial microaggressions from the "well-intended" Armitages and co. begin to stack up, the film takes a turn to mad science when it is revealed that the family has been transplanting their brains into the bodies of black men and women. Throughout this fantastical twist the film remains deeply rooted to the very real racism black people continue to face in the United States, an oppression that has adapted and evolved over time. Though by no means to only horror film to discuss racism, *Get Out* provides an unflinching look at American racism in the era of "colorblindness," one that could not have been made in another period. Consider another acclaimed horror film that similarly deals with American racism albeit in a different era: *Night of the Living Dead*. Although the intention of writer and director George A. Romero to provide a social commentary on 1960s America is debated, the film was nonetheless groundbreaking in its portrayal of a calm, competent black man as its leading man Ben. The overt racial tension between Ben and the white characters, notably fearful Barbra and aggressive Harry,

is palpable, but nowhere is the racism of the 1960s more present than the final scenes of the movie. After surviving the horde of zombies, Ben is gunned down and thrown upon a bonfire by a posse of white men not unlike the lynch mobs and Ku Klux Klan that have targeted black people. The zombies are established as the monsters of this film from the beginning, but the closing scenes hint that there may be another, the mob of white men, lurking about. Both *Night of the Living Dead* and *Get Out* concern themselves with the racism of their eras, the latter's being more covert while explicitly setting up the white characters (and the racism they uphold) as the monsters throughout the course of the movie.

*Get Out's* monsters are quite literally wealthy liberal white people who appropriate black bodies for themselves yet cannot see the racism underlying their motivations. But more abstractly, the monster of the film is not only the individually racist members of the Armitage family, but the systemic American racism they help maintain. "Monster" here is defined as "a threatening force" or "a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty," the concept being extended from the individual wicked person to the wicked and threatening system of oppression that they perpetuate ("Monster"). Peele depicts this wilier twenty-first century racism through the subversion of common racist ideas, conventions, and stereotypes as well as the employment of images and ideological narratives that have shaped this particular injustice. The realistic, concrete, and rich characterization of Chris, a member of a vastly underrepresented group in mainstream cinema, written by a member of such group is certainly subversive, but it is the depiction of the film's monsters that will be considered here.

One way of subverting racist ideology is by drawing attention to its ideals and then writing them off, revealing them to be absurd, senseless, or even horrifying (Cunliffe, *Feminist Philosophy* 23-24). Much of the dialogue between Chris and Rose's family and

their friends consists of racial microaggressions that are so frequent during its runtime and so outlandish that not only is Chris made to feel uncomfortable, but the audience, too. Many examples of blatant sexualization and commodification of Chris and his body takes place during the party scene in which the Armitages' white guests insinuate Chris's sexual prowess, remark on their love of fellow black man Tiger Woods's athleticism, and proclaim that "Black is 'in fashion'" (Peele 92-95). Unbeknownst to Chris, these proclamations reveal their racist reasoning for stealing and inhabiting black bodies; to be as physically endowed, athletic, or "privileged" as black men and women in "post-racial" America, racist falsehoods propagated by contemporary racism. Even the "well-meaning" attempts to connect by father Dean, such as proudly noting that he would have voted for President Obama for a third term or his use of the word "thang," are cringe-inducing and depict the very real employment of such techniques by white people to mask their own discomfort and racism, foster false rapport with a black person, or minimize their privilege (Due 9). These problematic attitudes and behaviors are not depicted as acceptable and the racist idea that we live in a "post-racial" society is subsequently dismissed. This post-racial lie is explicitly referenced and even wielded by the villains in their attempts to dismiss the racist motivation underlying their subjugation of black people. During his mad scientist monologue, Dean attempts to assuage his "weird twisted sense of white guilt" by asserting that he sees Chris as superior and that is why black people are chosen and stolen (Peele 178n62). He cannot see his actions, nevermind himself, as racist. Similarly, Jim, whose brain is set to be implanted into Chris's body, asserts his "colorblindness," brushing off Chris's race and claiming that he doesn't care if Chris is "black, brown, green, purple... whatever" (147). This is simultaneously a privilege of white people to not have to ever factor their race into the equation as well as the racist lie that being colorblind in this sense is real, which it is decidedly not. In this film, the falsity of this statement

is more prominent than ever; how can this not be about race when only black people are stolen and subjugated by white people? These scenes reveal the true absurdity of such a belief and that it is not only the individuals who maintain this lie but the ideology that has constructed it that are at fault for antiblack violence.

Another way *Get Out* subverts racist ideology is by purposefully upending our expectations regarding racist ideas, directly invoking and then destabilizing them (Cunliffe, *Feminist Philosophy* 23-24, 25). Historically, black men have been depicted on film as monstrous, as with the infamous film *The Birth of a Nation*, which portrayed black men as sexual predators lusting after white women while Klansmen served as the film's heroes. Yet in *Get Out*, the monsters are white characters, the most of vicious of whom being white women. One of the most prominent racist conventions that continues to be used in pop culture today, the white savior trope involves a white character rescuing a nonwhite character or group from dire circumstances. *Get Out* appears to set up girlfriend Rose as this savior, designating her as an ally that both Chris and the audience can trust. From "defending" Chris from a racist police officer to expressing frustration at her family's racism, Rose is established as likeable and protective of Chris when in reality she is only a few steps ahead of both her boyfriend and the viewers (Peele 169n13, 171n23). This illusion comes crashing down when Rose reveals that she cannot give Chris the car keys and escape her family's clutches. This reveal is so shocking because, as Peele notes, "we are preconditioned to think movies don't let you remove the white savior trope... there's always one good white person" (178-9n64). This racist fallacy is one that is meant to comfort white audiences watching movies that deal with race, and we have come to expect this characterization of white characters. *Get Out* thus subverts not only this individual trope but audience expectations and the racist ideology that has cultivated them.

Racism itself is further established as *Get Out's*

monster with Peele's use of various images that have historically been associated with slavery and racism and that have been used to uphold this ideology. In his examination of the documentary *The Act of Killing*, Robert Sinnerbrink discusses the film's exploration historical and moral relativism, the use of "noble lies" in maintaining order and democracy, and the potential to destabilize society with the rewriting of history ("Gangster Film" 177). Yet director Joshua Oppenheimer does so in relation to the image, particularly that of the perpetrators of Indonesia's 1960s mass killings and the ideological economy of images that shaped their acts of killing and the repressive social consciousness that was subsequently established (175). This paper will borrow this concept of an ideological economy of images that has sustained a society founded on acts of political violence, with slavery and racism as an ideology serving as these acts and its images being exhibited in *Get Out*. The image of the buck, which connotes a strong male slave, is littered throughout the Armitage home, with decapitated deer heads adorning the walls (Peele 179n70). And it is ultimately one of these stuffed bucks that kills patriarch Dean as Chris impales him with its horns. This pejorative has been used to maintain a system racism in which black people are enslaved and abused, and its image is used to express the racism of the Armitage family as well as liberate Chris. His use of a chair's cotton stuffing to protect himself against hypnosis similarly takes a racist image of slavery and uses it to reference this dark history and its lingering effects today. What is essentially a slave auction as Chris's body is sold to the highest bidder is a shocking image to see framed in this time period, yet the importance of these references to slavery cannot be understated (177n56). Peele employs these images, images that recall and supported the racial violence upon which the United States has been built, in conjunction with images of modern racism in order to connect "the subtlest forms of microaggression to the most violent, unimaginable racial violence" (173-4n35).

Frequent microaggressions as well as images like that of a camera phone being used to reveal racial violence and contemporary racial subjugation's manifestation in the Sunken Place are shown alongside those that sustained slavery, this heavy symbolism showing the racist ideology of today to be just as devastating and monstrous (172-3n30).

Carroll might claim that in such films as *Get Out*, there is no monster because there is no categorical violation, the Armitages do not “def[y] standing conceptual schemas” (Carroll 278). Admittedly, I have also described the Armitages as villains in the sense that they are the antagonists opposing hero Chris, but the monster of the film is systemic racism. Carroll's definition of monster is quite narrow and more closely follows that of “an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure” or “one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character” (“Monster”). Certainly, this definition applies to that which defies categorization, as with the Universal Classic Monsters of the twentieth century, and it would be difficult to argue that the everyday racism exhibited by the Armitages is, unfortunately, out of the norm. Yet as previously stated, monsters can also be considered “a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty” or “a threatening force” (“Monster”). A monster need not be abnormal in order to be monstrous; it can simply be extraordinarily vicious and devastating. When we describe someone who has committed a crime so atrocious as a monster, it does not mean that we lack a category to ascribe to her. Rather, she committed such an injustice, an evil, that she is shockingly horrible. Similarly, a system that has subjugated, tortured, and murdered people of color, one that has enslaved black people and has continued their marginalization for centuries, has produced such horrific injustice that it can be defined, and thus visualized, as a monster. As a genre, horror allows viewers to “reframe true-life trauma on the screen as imaginary monsters and demons,” with *Get*

*Out* enabling them to visualize racism as an allegorical monster that can at last be defeated (Due 7). This progression of horror's monsters from literal creatures to more abstract thematic concepts is one that can be seen in numerous films of the “horror renaissance” of the 2010s and '20s, from *The Babadook*, which features a literal monster that is the mother's trauma and grief physicalized, to *Midsommar*, a film that lacks a physical monster but examines the construction of relationships both familial, platonic and romantic in American society. The horror of these movies does arise in part from the literal manifestations of systems of oppression, trauma, and so on, be it a top hat-wearing ghoul, a pagan cult, or a killer suburban family. But the horror also arises from what these monsters represent or what injustice or social concern they are grounded in, the recognition and analysis of which fueling audience's viewing pleasure.

By depicting an injustice as a monster, horror filmmakers do much more than entertain an audience; they can also play a role in countering that injustice by encouraging audiences to recognize, reflect upon, and then take action against systems of oppression. Building upon Miranda Fricker's conception of epistemic injustice, Zoë Cunliffe asserts in “Narrative Fiction and Epistemic Justice” that narrative fiction can provide epistemic correctives to both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, the former of which will be discussed here. In order to counter testimonial injustice, the social imagination itself must be transformed, as this is what generates, sustains, and adapts the identity stereotypes that feed negative identity prejudice and establish credibility deficits (Cunliffe, “Narrative Fiction” 170). One of the ways narrative fiction can combat this injustice is by stimulating a higher level of self- and other-awareness in the audience, allowing them to connect the prejudices in fiction that parallel those in everyday life. Since these socially conscious horror films feature such prejudices and injustices, horror fans can similarly gain

a better understanding of the struggles marginalized groups face (other-awareness) as well as an appreciation of their own positionality regarding such groups (self-awareness; 171). This can in turn translate into action against these injustices.

Horror films depicting injustices as monsters stimulate higher levels of other-awareness regarding systems of oppression, educating their viewers on that which does not marginalize the personally. *Get Out* encourages other-awareness in its unflinching examination of contemporary American racism, inciting the audience to recognize its systemic nature and the stereotypes that constrain how Chris is perceived by white individuals (172). Linking subtle microaggressions with devastating antiblack violence, the film forces the viewer to look at the system beneath these individual instances of racism. This is especially apparent in the final scene during which what appears to be a police cruiser approaches Chris as he looks upon a dying Rose. Chris's face falls as he raises his hands in surrender, Rose smirking from below, playing opossum. Regardless of the individual's view of police brutality, the audience agrees that the cops arriving threatens Chris's life, that "this situation right here gets him shot" (Peele 182n88). They *must* acknowledge that despite his innocence, a black man interacting with police places his life in danger more often than not. Moreover, there is a system of racism comprised of both subtle acts of antiblack sentiment and overt acts of violence, one that has resulted in the deaths of countless black Americans at the hands of law enforcement. *Get Out* affords viewers not personally affected by racism in the United States better awareness of how this system of oppression operates and its detrimental effect on black Americans, in turn increasing the likelihood of an individual looking for and recognizing this system in action (Cunliffe, "Narrative Fiction" 172). Even if a viewer does not experience racism or another particular form of oppression themselves, watching such horror films

can reframe these systems as monstrous and horrific, their frightening images acting as a form of aesthetic "shock therapy" that jolts the audience into recognition of oppression's real-life horrors (Sinnerbrink 173). The horrific images both illustrating the oppression itself and those characteristic of horror films establish the true monstrosity of such systems while providing information about historically marginalized groups that the viewer might not have been aware of previously, enabling them to recognize such prejudices in real life.

In its depiction of everyday injustices and prejudices, horror films, and narrative fiction in general, can also incite greater self-awareness in their audience, allowing for constructive self-examination of one own's role in systems of oppression. With *Get Out*, not only does the director reflect black Americans' most enduring fears and traumas, but he also "holds a mirror to the face of white society, particularly white liberals, who can identify their own problematic behaviors and attitudes" in those of the film's characters (Due 9). As white audience members observe the racist microaggressions, they are simultaneously encouraged to reflect upon their own perpetuation of harmful prejudices. The party scene is one that highlights this moral self-examination in action, calling on white viewers to consider this particular white, liberal way of treating race, the associated myth of a post-racial society, and whether or not they as individuals have perpetuated the same damaging stereotypes (Cunliffe, "Narrative Fiction" 172). A response to this scene that Peele often receives from white viewers is one of personal horror, realizing, "Oh my god, I feel like I have done this" (Peele 173-4n35). Horror films can function as an imaginative instrument of self-examination, confronting those who perpetuate prejudice, knowingly or not, with the damage their actions cause. Not only does can the audience critique the system of oppression itself and the traumatic violence of the past that continues to control the present, but their

complicity in such a system, as well (Sinnerbrink 173). This self-awareness then increases the likelihood that a person catches and corrects the prejudicial judgments they may be making, bringing constructive change out from the borders of fiction and into the real world (Cunliffe, "Narrative Fiction" 172).

Cunliffe also asserts that in virtue of their status as fiction, fictional narratives enjoy certain advantages in countering epistemic injustice over other more traditional or confrontational methods (176). As a genre, horror capitalizes on these advantages, actively engaging the viewer while being less likely to provoke of antagonism. One of these advantages is that it is often seen by those maintaining epistemic injustices, knowingly or unknowingly, as less hostile (176). More direct attempts to address epistemic justice are often met with hostility, and its intricacies such as implicit bias and microaggression are not universally well known or accepted. Although audience members are urged to examine systems of oppression and their role in preserving them, these films do so in such a way that the audience does not feel "called out" or attacked. Not only does their status as fiction somewhat shield horror films from resentment, but their genre does, as well. Historically, horror as a genre has been, despite its commercial success, viewed as less serious than others and subsequently written off. Horror films then may be in a better position to pose critiques against injustices as they would not be considered as aggressive as those included in, say, drama films. They can thus create a cinematic "safe space" of sorts in which systems of oppression and their perpetrators can be questioned and the individual's actions exposed to scrutiny (Sinnerbrink 176). For example, the common response of white viewers to *Get Out's* party scene, as detailed above, has not been one of personal offense but rather a more liberating, positive realization instead of a "crushing blow" (Peele 173-4n35). Horror audiences can thus learn of the consequences of their involvement in systems of oppression without feeling

personally attacked, in turn being more receptive to this criticism and willing to adjust their behavior and attitudes.

When consuming narrative fiction, the kind of involvement offered in its employment of the imagination is one that is uniquely compelling with emotional responses toward and on behalf of characters. These works are thus more likely to "live on in the imagination" than nonfictional narratives and contexts (Cunliffe, "Narrative Fiction" 178). Horror films provide an involvement that is even more compelling than those of other genres, its scenes producing often visceral reactions and heightened states of fear, anxiety, and relief. Scenes of terror often remain with the viewer well after the credits have rolled and can keep the film – and its epistemic correctives – at the forefront of the viewer's mind. These emotions can foster further engagement after watching the film in which the viewer discusses it with friends, read reviews and analyses of the work, and even rewatches the film with new knowledge of what is to come (178). Furthermore, the ability to show rather than tell when discussing complicated issues is an integral advantage of narrative fiction, horror films, and film itself. This feature prompts empathy, sympathy, and engagement of emotion in a way particular to fiction (177). Horror thus provides a unique opportunity for audience members, particularly historically marginalized persons, to "experience danger without a true cost, releasing tension and creating community against imaginary monsters" (Due 8). At times, horror derives its force from bringing the audience away from reality, but only so far as to provide an adequate buffer of sorts. The audience can feel terror without experiencing the horrific situation firsthand, allowing them to enjoy negative emotions. Yet even in the most outlandish of plots that are far removed from reality, the portrayal of a social injustice grounds the film in real life. Though the brain transplant procedure of *Get Out* is a work of fiction, the systemic racism of the film is not. Hence,

even if a film is unrealistic in many aspects, as horror films so frequently are, its examination of epistemic issues remains valid.

Since the earliest of storytelling traditions, monsters have been wielded as instruments of moral education, revealing a society's deepest fears while teaching its values of right and wrong. As a film genre, horror has frightened audiences for well over a century, creating iconic killers and creatures that have endured in sequel after blood-soaked sequel. Whilst entertaining audiences with tales of terror, some of the most renowned horror films have sought a more socially minded goal. As with all works of art, horror films can play an important role in the dissection and eventual elimination of systems of oppression, with these systems being portrayed as the monsters that they truly are. From *Get Out's* critique of racism's covert operation in American liberalism to *The Purge series'*

examination of political systems designed by and for the affluent and *Dawn of the Dead's* criticism of American consumerism and cultural apathy, horror films have proven themselves as an apt medium for social commentary. Horror is uniquely positioned to address issues of injustice while entertaining viewers, being able to magnify them in such a way that their monstrous nature, and even our own involvement in such systems, cannot be ignored. These films allow those marginalized by such injustices to feel seen and heard while providing an education on these injustices as well as an avenue of moral self-reflection for the audience. Real life is not without its monsters, even if they do not always appear as grotesque beings of unthinkable origins. Horror films bring them out of the darkness and shine a light on our own behavior, asking us to consider our own role in their creation and what actions we are willing to take in order to finally conquer them

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# Evaluating Patterns of Preserved and Impaired Memory in a Geriatric Patient Diagnosed with Disease of the Alzheimer's Type

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*Melanie A. Liptak*

**Course:** Clinical Science Thesis (CLSI 4700)

**Professor:** Bruce J. Diamond, Psychology

**Student:** Melanie A. Liptak

**Essay:** Evaluating Patterns of Preserved and Impaired Memory in a Geriatric Patient Diagnosed with Disease of the Alzheimer's Type

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## **Assignment:**

Students participate in the honors research experience, focusing on a topic they will investigate and write about in their thesis. Working closely with their professor in the Clinical Science Honors Program, students engage in a process of conceptualization,

goal-setting, conducting a literature review, and establishing a method section for their honors thesis.

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## **Abstract**

This research provides a better understanding of the nature of memory functioning in Alzheimer's Disease (AD), provides a tool for evaluating and evoking preserved memories, while examining the possible therapeutic effects associated with the "preferred song" phenomenon. The Musical, Autobiographical and History Assessment Scale (MAHAS) was administered to an Alzheimer's patient (DW) in order to evaluate her ability to recall musical, autobiographical and historical memories throughout her lifetime. Each respective section of the MAHAS initially consisted of an unstructured

assessment focusing on visual recognition of iconic images including people and events of each decade. Anticipating possible naming difficulty or anomia, a visually structured version of the assessment was administered if needed. The images, dates and events comprised in the autobiographical section were kindly provided by relatives of the participant. For the musical portion of the MAHAS, a 45-second excerpt of a chart-topping song from the years 1948 to 2019 was played via computer. Following the auditory component, the participant was presented with an opportunity to freely recall any Musically Evoked Autobiographical Memories (MEAMs) as well as state their degree of

preference for the artist and song. In doing this, it was possible to map out in which years and decades the participant exhibited preserved memories. Despite the onset of this disease, the DS was able to relay significant musical memories with an intensity and clarity that exceeded the memories retrieved via alternative recall techniques. Due to the degenerative nature of this disease, it would be both interesting and important to compare results in the later stages of the disease and to map out which years and specific events show preserved and impaired memories. This would help clinicians develop more effective treatment approaches.

Music is a uniquely human experience. No other earthly species is capable of the high-level cognition required to enjoy compositions consisting of intentionally arranged vocals and melodies (Shulkin & Raglan, 2014). Previous research has explored the reinforcing properties of music in healthy adult populations (Purnell-Webb & Speelman, 2008), school aged children (Rickard, Vasquez, Murphy, Gill & Touksati, 2010) and elderly adults (Degé, Kerkovious & Degé, 2018). However, there is minimal information on the preservation of musical memories in degenerative diseases like dementia. While there is ample evidence supporting the therapeutic effects of music on reducing aggressive behaviors and psychiatric symptoms in Alzheimer's Disease patients (Raglio et al., 2001), there is a lack of evidence with respect to whether prominent musical memories are retained despite the onset of the disease. A few studies have examined populations with deficits in autobiographical memory like individuals suffering from traumatic brain injuries (Baird, Samson & Baird, 2014) who may present with symptoms that parallel the experience of patients dealing with the onset of Alzheimer's Disease. Taking these attributes into consideration, this study was crafted to provide clarity regarding the resiliency of musical memories in a geriatric patient diagnosed with a disease of the Alzheimer's type. Overall, from a

research perspective, the study will also provide some guidance with respect to what type of memories remain most salient. This could help inform family and friends as well as therapists with respect to what types of interventions may or may not be effective in helping to improve the quality of this person's life.

## Literature Review

### Musical Memories

Researchers Baird and Samson (2014) conducted their study with the goal of investigating the link between preferred songs and music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs). While MEAMs have been thoroughly reported in healthy demographics, Baird and Samson sought to explore their significance in populations suffering from major neuropsychological disorders, such as acquired brain injuries (ABIs). Their study consisted of five patients (four males, one female) ranging in age from 25 to 60 years-old who suffered from severe ABI (three traumatic brain injuries and two hypoxic brain injuries). All cases showed anterograde memory impairment whether it consisted of verbal, visual or a combination of the two. All participants, except Case 4, showed signs of executive dysfunction and reduced speed of processing. As per the formal mood questionnaire, Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale, cases 4 and 5 exhibited mild to moderate mood symptoms. Controls were matched to each patient and consisted of spouses when applicable.

The aforementioned participants completed the experimental MEAM Task, along with the Autobiographical Memory Interview and other standard neuropsychological assessments. The MEAM Task consisted of a written questionnaire designed to assess familiarity and preference using a 5 point Likert-scale, and it evaluated whether the song evoked a memory with songs based upon fifty Billboard Chart Hot 100 "Number 1 songs of the year" from 1961 through 2010. Each patient was given the MEAM task

independently in which an excerpt ranging from 30 to 60 seconds was played at random. Subjects completed the questionnaire while listening to the song, but were given additional time if needed. Baird and Samson discovered that the frequency of MEAMs was similar for both patients (38- 74%) and matched controls (48- 71%), excluding Case 5. Perhaps the most intriguing finding of this study was that the two most severe ABI patients were still able to report MEAMs, despite the onset of their trauma. Researchers also found that highly familiar and highly liked songs evoked more memories amongst the participants. The study also compared patients and matched controls' reminiscence bump or temporal gradients of MEAMs. While this portion of the study could easily be influenced by personal interests or recency effects, it reinforces the notion that people tend to recall more memories from their youth than any other time period.

Jacobsen and colleagues (2015) delved deeply into the structural components of musical memory. As this area of research was previously understudied, this study aimed to explore the mechanisms underlying memories associated with song. The first portion of their study included a group of 32 normal, young subjects. While 17 participants had learned a musical instrument, none of the participants were ever at a professional level.

The second part of the study consisted of 20 patients with Alzheimer's disease and 34 healthy control subjects. In the first experiment, consisting of the 32 individuals, researchers performed a 7T functional magnetic resonance imaging study of the participants' brain responses to music excerpts that were unknown, recently known, and long-known. Jacobsen and colleagues (2015) implemented multivariate pattern classification to identify specific regions of the brain that encode long-term musical memory. In the second half of this study, researchers began by analyzing data from the caudal anterior cingulate cortex and ventral pre-supplementary motor area, and three distinct biomarkers for Alzheimer's disease in the 20 patients

and compared it to 34 healthy control subjects.

The first portion of this study concluded that the caudal anterior cingulate and ventral pre-supplementary motor area play crucial roles in the encoding of long-known, as compared with unknown and recently known music. As for the last part of the study, their analysis illustrated that the regions identified as encoding musical memory corresponded to areas that showed substantially minimal cortical atrophy as compared to the rest of the brain. Perhaps the most important finding from this study was that researchers observed amyloid- $\beta$ , a protein fragment in the form of sticky plaques in regions of interest. While this is expected in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease, their results suggest some degree of music memory preservation in affected individuals.

In their research, Cuddy and Duffin (2005) examined a case study in the hope to find a relationship between potential sparing of musical memory and recognition in Alzheimer's Disease. The single participant, referred to as "EN", was an 84 year-old woman with severe cognitive impairment and a probable Alzheimer's Disease diagnosis since 2000. Prior to the assessment, the patient had received a mini-mental status score of 8 out of 30. The results for this patient were within the normal or approximate normal range of scores for elderly controls. Modified for observation, The Familiarity Decision Test, Famous Melodies test and Distorted Tunes test were administered to EN in order to evaluate her musical recognition abilities. Each song was played via CD player while her responses were recorded by two assessment administrators. For familiar melodies, the individual sang along, often continuing after the song concluded.

Conversely, for unfamiliar tunes, she was not responsive at all. The participant responded to distorted melodies with facial expressions consisting of surprise, laughter, a frown or an exclamation, "oh, dear!". EN did not react in this way to the undistorted melodies. Lyrics to familiar songs spoken in a conversational voice without any rhythmic or pitch clues, also prompted EN to often sing

the tune that correctly accompanied the lyrics. The results of this research further strengthens the argument for the capability of preservation of long-term memories, specifically semantic in origin, found in the musical memories of Alzheimer's patients.

Irish et. al's (2006) objective was to explore the beneficial effects of music on patients suffering from mild cases of Alzheimer's Disease. This research used a convenience sample of 10 individuals with mild Alzheimer's symptoms and 10 normal functioning elderly adults. The researchers made note of the overlap in Mini- Mental State Examination scores, further emphasizing the Alzheimer's patients' early progression into the neurodegenerative disease.

Along with the Mini- Mental State Examination, screening consisted on the Clock- Drawing Test and the Geriatric Depression Scale. In an attempt to reduce primacy and recency effect bias, the order of music and silence conditions was intentionally balanced. Each patient was seen on two separate occasions at the same time, precisely a week apart for approximately 45 minutes each session. First, the trait subscale of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory was administered in order to measure the participants' predisposition to anxiety. Next, for the music condition of the experiment, the researcher began playing the 'Spring' movement from Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' on a loop to provide a background stimulus. The silence condition continued exactly as the music condition, however, with the obvious lack of music. Finally, the Sustained Attention to Response Task was administered to measure the current level of anxiety in each individual.

This study discovered a significant improvement in autobiographical memory recall for individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease with the addition of a musical background stimulus compared to silence. Irish and colleagues' final analysis reinforces the notion of the enhancing effect music has on autobiographical memories, specifically in Alzheimer's patients and

established that anxiety reduction may be a potential mechanism underlying this phenomenon. By implementing a non-pharmacologic treatment option, like music therapy, affected individuals are able to reap the needed benefits while avoiding adverse symptoms as experienced with medication.

A study conducted by Cuddy and colleagues' (2017) assessed the occurrence of the positivity effect in music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs) specifically in Alzheimer's disease patients. According to their research, the positivity effect was defined as a phenomenon in which older adults typically exhibit a general preference in attention and memory for positive over negative information. Participants were split into three age groups: 20 younger adults, 20 older adults and 20 adults with a probable Alzheimer's diagnosis. The length of formal music training ranged from 1 to 10 years amongst all participants. A minimum score of 28 out of 30 on the Mini-Mental State Examination was required for subjects to participate. Initially, a total of 24 mild to moderate AD patients were recruited and out of the total patients, 20 were able to provide at least one MEAM. All subjects were given the Positive and Negative Affective Schedule to rate their mood at the present moment. Afterward, the individuals were asked to listen to familiar song excerpts and describe any memories associated with them. Evidence showed that self-ratings generated the strongest evidence for the presence of a positivity effect. Compared to the younger adults in the study, MEAMs for both groups of older adults were self-rated as less specific, but more vivid, more positive and less negative.

The aim of Haj, Fasotti and Allain's (2012) study was to investigate the involuntary nature of musically evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs). They recruited 16 patients with a clinical diagnosis of probable Alzheimer's Disease from local retirement homes. The Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) scores of the subjects ranged from 21 to 26 points on

a 30 point scale. Additionally, both age and education levels were matched with those of a control group, consisting of 16 older adults with MMSE scores ranging from 27 to 30 points. The older adults' verbal abilities were then matched with those of 16 college students.

Participants were involved in two sessions, music and silence, one week apart. Half of the participants began with the silence condition while the other half began with the music condition. The silence session consisted of several executive tasks followed by a 2-minute silence then ending with a detailed description of an event from their life. The music session proceeded with the same protocol. However, at the end of the session, participants were given the option to listen to a song of their choice. After the conclusion of the song, the subjects were asked if they had experienced any memories during the music exposure and, if so, if they could describe it in detail.

Lastly, subjects were instructed to rate their current mood and the emotional content of their evoked memories on a five point scale. Memories evoked in the music condition were found to not only be retrieved faster, but were more specific and emotionally based. Thus, resulting in a larger impact on the participants' mood. These memories involved less executive processing, suggesting the fact that they are initiated by a perceptual cue.

### **Therapeutic Treatment**

Morton, Kershner and Siegel's (1990) study examined the effect of music on memory and attention through the use of a dichotic listening task. The participants consisted of 16 male children who showed roughly average scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). All participants were assessed on a dichotic listening task on two separate occasions. Half of the individuals were initially tested in the quiet condition. These sessions consisted of answering identification data in a quiet room. The other half of subjects were given the music condition in which they were

placed in a room, filling out the same identification data while listening to the first five minutes of Pink Floyd's "The Wall". The conditions were then reversed for the second set of trials. The dichotic digits test contained 24 trials of monosyllabic digits compressed into bursts of two pairs per second. The first session was used to familiarize the participants with the test format and to teach them how to properly complete both the identification data and response forms during the dichotic assessment. Each session tested for free report, directed left report, and directed right report. When directed to report on a specific ear, the assessment administrator initially pointed to it, then required the participant to touch the ear prior to the task. A three-way ANOVA was computed for the total number of correct digits reported in the free report condition. Independent variables consisted of order of music presentation, music exposure, and specific ear. Overall, the main effects for music exposure reveal an increase in total digits reported and a reduction in intrusion errors. The most important finding from this research revealed that music has beneficial effects on attention, memory and distractibility, all which are negatively impacted with the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Another prominent study assessed music therapy effectiveness in reducing behavioral and psychological symptoms in participants with dementia. Raglio and colleagues (2008) recruited 59 subjects from three nursing homes skilled in the care of patients with behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia. Individuals were selected met specific criteria: a diagnosis of dementia of the Alzheimer's type or vascular dementia according to the DSM IV, a Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) score equal to or lower than 22 out of 30, a Clinical Dementia Rating score equal to or higher than 2 out of 5, a NeuroPsychiatric Inventory total score equal to or higher than 12 out of 144 or nursing home admission lasting at least 6 months. After enrollment into the

study, subjects were randomly assigned to a control or experimental condition. The experimental group received 30 music therapy sessions over 16 weeks of treatment, while the control condition received entertainment activities or access to educational support. As of the 8th, 16th and 20th weeks, the NeuroPsychiatric Inventory total score significantly decreased in the experimental group. Specific behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia like delusions, agitation, anxiety, apathy, irritability, aberrant motor activity, and nighttime disturbances significantly improved. This study also showed that the experimental group showed improvements in the empathetic relationships and patients' active participation with the music therapy intervention.

Brotons and Kroger (2000) conducted research to investigate the deterioration of language skills in dementias like Alzheimer's. This study delved deeper into the association between self-expression and music therapy. The researchers recruited a total of 26 participants within compliance of the following criteria: residency in a facility specializing in Alzheimer's and other related disorders, possessing sufficient verbal ability to answer simple questions and comply with instructions, and attaining the written consent of the patient's guardian. Subjects participated in groups of two to four for 30 minutes twice a week, for a total of eight therapy sessions all together. Each condition, whether it was music or conversation, was administered in a block of four, providing 2 weeks per condition. Various topics, such as animals or flowers, were chosen for each session.

Participants in the conversational condition were provided with pictures and photographs to encourage discussion and reminisce during sessions. As for the musical condition, songs addressing each of the topics were sung to introduce and provide structure for a post-session discussion. The study demonstrated that speech content and fluency as assessed by the spontaneous speech subscale of the WAB were better

following music therapy than conversational sessions with therapists.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Patient DW is an 87-year-old woman who's Alzheimer's Disease diagnosis was probable since 2019. At the time of the study, she experienced mild behavioral and psychological symptoms related to dementia. DW currently struggles with lapses in memory, confusion with time and place, difficulty word finding, misplacing common objects and changes in mood and personality. While it is known that the severity of dementia can tend to fluctuate on a day-to-day basis, the subject was observed to have exacerbated symptoms, particularly regarding mood on the day of the assessment.

### **Work History**

DW initially began working at the age of 18 as an in-home child care provider. Shortly after, she began making television tubes in a factory-like environment. Once married, she took leave from the workforce and decided to stay at home to raise her children. It was not until 1966 that she returned to work in an embroidery factory until retirement in 1995 to care for her grandchild.

### **Academic History**

DW did not graduate from high school. However, she did complete a majority of her classes.

### **Medical History**

DW gave birth to her first daughter in 1955, her second daughter in 1959 and first and only son in 1965. DW is currently taking medications to alleviate some of the symptoms caused by the onset of Alzheimer's Disease. She currently resides in a memory care unit in a long term nursing home.

### **Music**

As her daughter reported, DW frequently filled the

house with some of her favorite tunes growing up. The Band, Def Leppard, Tony Bennet and Frank Sinatra are reportedly some of DW's preferred artists.

### **Materials and Procedure**

The Musical, Autobiographical and History Assessment Scale (MAHAS) (Please see Appendix A for full assessment) was administered to DW in order to evaluate her ability to recall musical, autobiographical and historical memories throughout the course of her lifetime. Each respective section will initially consist of an unstructured assessment focusing on visual recognition of iconic images including people and events of each decade and ultimately their significance. Anticipating possible anomia, a structured version of the assessment will be administered if needed.

The images, dates and events comprised in the autobiographical section were kindly provided by relatives of the participant. For the musical portion of the MAHAS, a 45-second excerpt of a chart topping song from the years 1948 to 2019 will be played via computer. The specific timeframe was selected based upon DW's age. She was born in 1933 and in 1948 she would have been 15 years old, making it quite likely that she would have significant knowledge of world events. Following the auditory component, DW had the option to freely recall any Musically Evoked Autobiographical Memories (MEAMs) as well as her degree of preference to the artist and song. This assessment can show memory gradients which can then be compared to a reminiscence bump of control subjects.

### **Results**

The administration of the MAHAS provided a technique to evaluate DW's most salient memories through well-known sounds and visuals. While all songs, to some degree, sounded familiar to the participant, she was only able to accurately match the decade in which she heard the tune for Ben E King's

1961 hit, "Stand By Me". This song specifically was met with the comment, "catchy". Other songs surfaced feelings of nostalgia, in which DW thought about "life and how fast it goes".

While listening to the Beatles' 1970 hit, "Let it Be", she was compelled to hum and sing along to the melody, which supports the notion of preserved implicit long-term memory. Her responses exhibited an increased accuracy in terms of visual recognition and context for historical images that would have been prominent throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Iconic events such as the moon landing and end of World War II evoked immediate responses in DW, showing evidence for preserved explicit memory. Conversely, showing an image of the more recent September 11th World Trade Center terrorist attacks resulted in no signs of familiarity.

The autobiographical portion of the MAHAS strongly indicated preserved semantic memory when identifying her daughter, nephew and herself. It was in this section that time periods were most frequently and accurately identified. Comparing DW's responses to a typical reminiscence bump, it appears that the initial peak during an individual's late-twenties/ early thirties is still present. However, shortly after continuing into later adulthood, there is an expectation of another peak during a person's fifties/ sixties. This recency trend tends to be significantly weakened in DW's case. More recent events seem to be negatively impacted due to the onset of an Alzheimer-like disease.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

DW's performance on the MAHAS complements the original hypothesis that preferred music can act as a vehicle to uncover memories and act as a therapeutic treatment option in a geriatric patient diagnosed with an Alzheimer's-like disease. Her results revealed a gradient of preserved memories across specific decades despite the onset of a degenerative disorder. DW's enthusiastic comments about familiar tunes

further strengthens the argument that memories can be intimately tied to music, and to some extent, can survive the progressive nature of dementia. The many sights and sounds of the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's were clearly solidified in the participant's long-term memory. Items from each of the three categories showed similar patterns surrounding the same epoch and therefore, resembled a standard reminiscence bump.

While administering the MAHAS, the overarching theme of nostalgia seemed to be heavily correlated with positive emotions and memories, something the subject was struggling with the day of the assessment. Although her ability to recognize and retrieve more recent songs and historical events proved to be profoundly impaired, seeing the familiar faces of relatives and even herself, appeared to lessen feelings of frustration and anxiety.

This research provides a new and innovative

assessment tool in which the clinician can conceptually map out a timeline of preserved and impaired memory. With the data and information derived using a noninvasive procedure, it is possible to systematically track the pattern of memory loss. The topic of preference became increasingly important during the process of this research as it became quite clear that there were significant connections between preserved memories and particular songs, historical events and relatives. It would be plausible in future research to assess memory across domains and over time in individuals exhibiting any type of memory disorder. The varied elements of the MAHAS can not only be used to determine in which time periods memories might persevere, but there are countless opportunities to evaluate implicit and explicit memory as well. The numerous applications of this tool can potentially have an impact on the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer's Disease and in treating other neurologic disorders as well.

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## Appendix A

### Historical, Autobiographical and Musical Assessment Scale

#### Music Portion

<i>Musical #1</i>								
This song sounds very familiar.								
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	In between	Agree	Strongly Agree				
What period of your life do you think about when you hear this song?								
Teens	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	
I like this song.								
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	In between	Agree	Strongly Agree				
What do you think about when you hear this song?								

<i>Musical #2</i>								
This song sounds very familiar.								
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	In between	Agree	Strongly Agree				
What period of your life do you think about when you hear this song?								
Teens	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	
I like this song.								
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	In between	Agree	Strongly Agree				
What do you think about when you hear this song?								

## Historical Portion

Historical #1



Do you know who this might be?

Yes

No

What was their occupation?

President

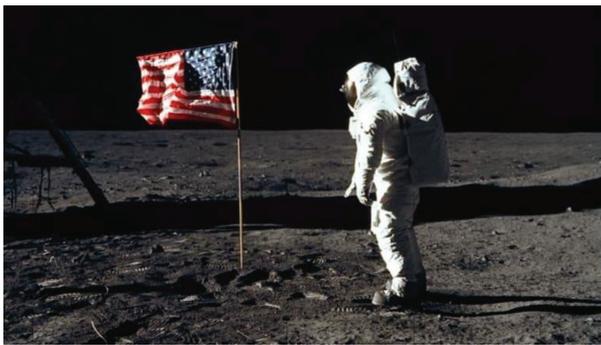
Actor

Musician

Activist

Lawyer

Historical #3



Do you know what this might be?

Yes

No

What event is happening in the picture above?

Moon Landing

Exploring the  
desert

Scuba diver

First person on  
Mars

America's first  
territory

## Autobiographical Portion:

Use pictures of events/ family members from  
Autobiographical Timeline

Autobiographical #1

Insert picture of relative here

Do you know who this might be?

Yes

No

Who are they to you?

Parent

Friend

Spouse

Child

Sibling

When was this picture taken?

1950s

1970s

1990s

2000s

2010s

# Attention Faculty:

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<https://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/writing-across-the-curriculum.html>

For additional information, please contact:

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