

Writing

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WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

**Celebrating Student Writing  
Across the Curriculum**

**Prize Winners 2021-2022**

**TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL EDITION**



# Introduction

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Now in its 22nd year of publication, *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum* publishes undergraduate student writing from many disciplines. This magazine offers a space to celebrate student achievement in writing and to highlight exemplary written work from across William Paterson University.

On these pages, diversity in writing is celebrated. 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. Writing is often mistakenly assumed to be merely a skill that, once learned, can be applied formulaically for any situation. But effective writers, such as the ones featured here, know that continuous development of one's writing knowledge and practice is the way to becoming better at it. Today's employers report that a key attribute they seek in an employee is the ability to write clearly and effectively, which makes the writing our students engage in increasingly important. Nurtured by our faculty, the student writers featured within this issue have worked hard to understand and develop writing most suited to its occasion.

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 has first intrigued a faculty member and earned a nomination. After the submission deadline, a panel of judges from across the William Paterson faculty gathers to discuss and consider each entry, and the winners are selected for publication in *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum*.

This year's winners represent a wide range of majors: psychology, anthropology, literature, art history, and more.

The excellent writing featured here represents upper division courses from various disciplines and lower division courses in general education, 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. Thank you to Associate Provost Sandra Hill for continued support of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which publishes this magazine. Special thanks to Wartyna Davis, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose vision and assistance in all initiatives of the Writing Across the Curriculum program are vital. And finally, 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, and 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.

*Chris Salerno*  
*Professor of English*  
*Director, Writing Across the Curriculum*

For more information about the *Celebrating Student Writing* contest, refer to the back page of this magazine or visit: <https://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/wac/index.html>



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*Note: Student entries are reprinted as submitted, with  
original content that has been formatted to fit this  
magazine.*

# Junot Diaz and Yunior: The Mirror of an Author

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*Amanda Bush*

**Course:** Introduction to Literary Theory

**Professor:** Rosa Soto

**Student:** Amanda Bush

**Essay:** *Junot Diaz and Yunior: The Mirror of an Author*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to incorporate lessons learned about Feminism, Feminist Theory or Gender Studies (misogyny, Patriarchy,

privilege and “Male Gaze”) onto an examination of the novel *Drown* by Junot Diaz.

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Many sources call the character of Yunior in the novel *Drown* a semi-biographical mirror of author Junot Diaz as their stories are not the same in exact detail, but Yunior’s experiences seem to reflect and follow a similar course of Diaz’s own experiences. This makes sense, as writers are often told to write about what they know. When considering the strong examples of Yunior’s misogynistic behavior and objectification of women though, one would hope that these behaviors do not mirror the beliefs and actions of Diaz. However, in 2019 a situation arose in which Junot Diaz was accused of not only sexual misconduct, but misogynistic and abusive behaviors as well. This paper will explore how Yunior’s misogynistic and patriarchal views allow us a glimpse into the mind of Junot Diaz and how he views the world around him.

First, let us discuss the most glaring account of misogyny we have seen in the novel thus far, which would be in the chapter titled “How to Date a Brown girl, Black girl, White girl, or Halfie”. Throughout

this entire chapter, Yunior imparts to the reader his expectations of the behavior of women based on a variety of factors, a sort of “rule set” he lives by if you will. Some examples are these, “A local girl may have hips and a thick ass but she won’t be quick about letting you touch... A white girl might just give it up right then. Don’t stop her.” (147) or “Order everything in your busted-up Spanish. Let her correct you if she’s Latina and amaze her if she’s black.” (145) These are only two examples of ways in which Yunior sees these women through the lens of what Feminist theory calls the “male gaze”. This theory purports that often in media men are portrayed as the subject with women portrayed as the object, often as a sort of sexual object to fulfill the pleasures of the man or protagonist.

This brings us into another important Feminist theory which we can use to analyze the behaviors of Yunior which is called “Objectification”. Objectification takes the male gaze one step further, describing the treatment and degradation of women into the status

of an object. One significant example of objectification of women is in arranged marriages with a dowry. One type of dowry is a form of payment to the bride's family in the form of livestock or other items, which can be seen as objectification because one way of looking at this transaction is the sale of a woman by her family to her future husband. This is just one example of how a woman may be objectified in the real world.

This set of rules which Yunior is telling the reader is only one way in which we have seen him objectify women thus far, another example is in the chapter "Boyfriend", when Yunior discusses the relationship going-ons of a couple who live below him. "I would listen to them going at it and I would be like, Damn, ain't nothing more shabby than those farewell fucks. I know. Me and Loretta had enough of those to go around. Difference was, we never talked the way these two would." (Diaz, 113) In this instance, not only can we see that Yunior objectifies his former girlfriend Loretta, as they seem to have been mainly sexual partners as opposed to romantic partners, but he also objectifies the couple who live below him. By intruding on their personal intimate moments, Yunior is relegating this couple to the role of sex objects and entertainment.

What makes these chapters all the more expressive as examples of misogyny is the fact that Yunior can also be extremely manipulative. For example, in the chapter "Boyfriend", after the couple finally breaks up, Yunior uses information which he has learned from eavesdropping the couple finally breaks up, Yunior uses information which he has learned from eavesdropping on their conversations and escapades to manipulate Girlfriend into spending time with him. As a matter of fact, Yunior is extremely blatant with the reader that he is attempting to manipulate Girlfriend into spending time with him, "One night I got the cojones to ask her up for café, which was mighty manipulative of me. She hadn't had much human contact the whole month, except with the delivery guy from the Japanese restaurant, a Colombian dude I always said hi to, so

what the hell was she going to say? No?" (Diaz, 115) As we progress further through the chapter, it becomes evident that this coffee date was not merely to help the woman cheer up from her break-up, Yunior was hoping for something out of the interaction, which is a common theme among men who strongly align with patriarchal values. Often there is a secondary motive behind the supposed kind acts that they perform, most frequently as a means of obtaining sexual favors or sexual acts.

One thing to consider on the other side of the page is that misogyny is not the only form of sexism portrayed in this novel thus far. We have also seen scenes which were influenced by Machismo culture and the ways in which it has affected Yunior. Just one example is in the chapter "Drown" where we learn about a sexual encounter between Yunior and Beto. Yunior had such terror of being "found out" that he told the reader, "Mostly I stayed down in the basement, terrified that I would end up abnormal, a fucking pato, but he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything." (Diaz, 104) This scene in particular can also be viewed through the lens of Queer theory, as Machismo culture is a topic which can be analyzed from multiple different, and combined perspectives. This is because Machismo culture is a type of culture which frowns on homosexuality based on the idea of what a man "should" be and how they should behave. This culture promotes a traditional standard of patriarchy in which the man is the strong dominant leader, and the woman is the docile subservient caregiver.

So far, we have discussed ways in which Yunior has perpetuated patriarchal and misogynistic views, but how does this relate to author Junot Diaz? In May of 2018, news broke that writer Zinzi Clemmons was alleging that Diaz had used his position of power as a guest speaker, whom she invited to a conference, to forcibly kiss her without her consent. Though this seems to be the most damaging accusation raised against Diaz, after Clemmons came out with her story, several

other women came out with stories alleging that Diaz had exhibited misogynistic and abusive behavior towards them as well. To be clear, the following accusations may not necessarily be illegal as much as uncomfortable and clearly misogynistic. In another instance, a woman alleges that Diaz shouted “Rape!” at her as a method of point proving after a disagreement. In the final incident that we will discuss here, Diaz allegedly manipulated a woman into sleeping with him by promising to help her with her writing career. This final example is especially poignant because it depicts Diaz’s (alleged) manipulative actions, strikingly similar to the example of Yunior and Girlfriend.

Shortly before the first allegation by Zinzi Clemmons, Diaz released an article in which he revealed that he was raped as a child by someone who he claims to have trusted completely. In this incident, we find another striking similarity between Yunior and Diaz. Though not everyone may consider what Yunior went through as rape, he was clearly violated by someone whom he trusted with his whole being. Even after the incident Yunior continued to maintain contact with the person who violated him because he was so important to him.

In reference to this shocking article in which Diaz exposed his sexual assault, it is important to consider every angle explored. Though it is never a good idea to

question a survivor of sexual assault, there were many whisperings at the time circling through the writing and publishing communities theorizing that the timing of the release of this article was suspect. Many speculated or even alleged that perhaps Diaz released this article at this specific time to ease the blow of the allegations against him or to manipulate the emotions of his fans in order to gain support. This is all just alleged and not proven fact, but if that is the case, it would show an extremely emotionally manipulative side to Diaz which would even surpass the manipulation we have seen Yunior exuding.

All of these examples, when further analyzing the work of Diaz on *Drown*, as well as the allegations leveraged against Diaz lead to a conclusion that Yunior seems to be a mirror for how Diaz views the world. Specifically, the machismo culture which Diaz explores in *Drown* seems to be the lens through which he sees the world. He seems to be still influenced by it as well, as is evident in the ways he has allegedly treated women in the past. When considering the mantra “Write about what you know”, Diaz has definitely presented quite the show.

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# Metamorphosis-Metaphysics-Physics

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*Eden Moreno*

**Course:** Senior Thesis Project, Photography B.F.A.

**Professor:** Ashley Gerst

**Student:** Eden Moreno

**Essay:** *Metamorphosis-Metaphysics-Physics*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to complete a research paper for their B.F.A. Senior Thesis Project course. In addition to the research paper, students

completed a visual arts based thesis in the medium of their choice (Eden's is Photography).

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## Introduction

A

"The id, ego, and superego are Freud's representation of the three structures of the mind. The id is the primal urges, primitive needs, and uncivilized passion we are born with. The superego is the 'moral' part of the mind that internalizes and embodies parental and societal values. The ego is the mediator between the two that attempts to balance primitive drives and socialized morality." (O'Leary, 2007). Artists work with all of the three structures of the mind. Photography is a mainly instinctual medium to work with. Plans can be made as much as possible with sets, makeup, and posing the model but the main drive of the work comes from capturing the right moment that encapsulates the prime moment in which everything works symbiotically. Even subconsciously, choices will be made based on life experiences and exposure by other media as well. However, it is the conscious choices that become the perfect balance between the intuitive

moments versus the premeditated ones. There can be a main focus or area of what kind of work chosen to be made but it all has to do with your history and what you desire to see out into the world. This intent drives the artist to create connections from the unconscious to the conscious and manages to bond the elements of a piece. Influences from your community to personal experiences affect an artist's work consciously or subconsciously.

B

"A Poet's Ontological Metamorphosis in Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and "The Poet"

Though Emerson makes no mention of the word "metamorphosis" within "Self-Reliance," from "Self-Reliance" to "The Poet" he makes subtle syntactic transformations that announce his inquiry into the state of the human. The less-common definition of metamorphosis must be considered here; otherwise, Emerson's syntactic shift will not clearly exhibit the relationship of the two lectures. The Oxford English

Dictionary defines the prefix “meta” as meaning “permutation,” and the stem “morphosis” as “configuration.”<sup>11</sup> Put together, the two words mean a permutation of a configuration. A permutation necessitates the idea of arrangement, and when applied to the act of drafting, writing, and rewriting, implies a rearrangement of an earlier draft. Compare the permutation from “Self-Reliance” to “The Poet.”

He says of “Self-Reliance”: [A poet] learn[s] to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet, he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. (“SR,” p. 259). And of “The Poet”: Every man should be so much an artist that he could report in conversation what had befallen him. Yet, in our experience, the rays or appulses (an event in space when two celestial bodies appear closer to each other than normal with respect to a third party observer) have sufficient force to arrive at the senses, but not enough to reach the quick, and compel the reproduction of themselves in speech.” (Sanders, 2018).

Having this in mind, art can be used as a platform for the consciousness. The more one will continue to grow as a person the more the art continues to transform as a whole. The moment that there’s a spark or a shift between new work and old work there’s always a transition from one to the other. It’s almost as if it was a record of life reflected through visual art. The topic and concepts can be related to personal life. And when portraits are taken of other people it can be the aspects of them, and how one can wish to become those same aspects. There is a kind of beauty in introspection, it allows one to know themselves and by doing so creating deeper meaning in the work. This self reliance is the conscious aspect that is being brought out from my work after the fact of creation. When the work becomes solidified so do the concepts in my mind, it’s as if once concrete only then will it bring action into my life.



**Edén Moreno, Whole “New” World, 2021**

Once viewing life authentically, it becomes a whole new world.

The main difference between artificial and individual work is intent. There is a purpose within personal work, this truth is what separates art that deals with marketing or branding or other work that is impersonal. Everyone has a perspective in this world that gives universal themes in which people can relate to and comprehend when viewing work that talks on humane topics. It also allows a conversation to occur when viewing work with others as a collective. This connection through the work also can shift dialog and create a change in society as well, it has the potential to be more than just a photograph.

## C

The connection from oneself to others is immensely important. In order to grow deeper as a person it is important to share information of life to others and have it reciprocated. Relation and disagreement from others allows people to understand who they are fundamentally as people. That is how one can begin to form opinions and allow themselves to understand the psychology of being. Once past the topic of how one wants to exist in the public it then moves on to focusing thoroughly with oneself. This is a continuous thought process that in time can cause real life action.



**Frederick Glasier, Portrait of Loie Fuller, 1902**

Queer dance Loie Fuller fully expresses the progress and change she made within dancing in her time by creating new methods and ways to express herself through dancing and technical aspects of lighting and staging for her to evolve the craft that was taboo at the time.

Looking through a queer perspective, the main topic that occurs is one's identity and how it can change not only the person but the life that occurs around them over time. This Metamorphosis is the development of oneself and society around them through action and rebellion to old traditions and discriminatory setbacks.

In the past many queer people have struggled within their own biological families, and some were even kicked out of their homes for simply being who they are; This also happens in present day and these people resort to their community in these so called "chosen families" or "haus". This is where Ballroom comes into play. In the 80's there was a surge in this community due to breaking 'traditional family values' where people were kicked out of the house and forced to create their own unconventional families. With this in mind, there is no such thing as being a 'freak' or too wild, in fact it's actually encouraged. Depicted in the picture above is a prime example of what to expect to see at a ball. Although not everyone had to be in

a house to be in the community it is still a welcoming environment, free of judgement. Similarly to my work, their expressiveness and personalities shine through the photo. Through this perspective, ideas of the taboo, pushing boundaries, truth, vibrancy, drama, introspection, and societal advocacy is talked about.



**Michael Lavine Club Kids at Limelight, 1992**

(Clockwise from left) Julie Jewels, Waltpaper, DJ Keoki, Sacred Boy, Bjork, Lil Keni, Keda, Reigh Volraire. The energy exuded by these people are unlike anyone else. Their authenticity shines through the image and screams out in positive vibrancy.

As you can see in the images below Diane Arbus is entering backstage to see the behind the scenes of drag queens getting ready to perform.



Diane Arbus, Female Impersonator holding long gloves, Hempstead, L.I. 1959 (left). Three Female Impersonators, NYC, a photograph by Diane Arbus on gelatin silver print from 1962 (right).

People like them and others in our community are rarely pushed to the side and ignored in the media because we are found unconventional and out of the norm. We are out of the norm and that's what makes us so special, our differences are the same thing that brings us together as a community. We strive for individuality and that is what I want inherent throughout my work. However In Arbus' work she depicts these people as these 'freaks' which is quite the opposite. Her other work essentially took advantage of people for their differences like twins or wildly tattooed people, or even circus performers. Although her work was striking it took life and humanity from each person being photographed. Arbus had a melancholic

viewpoint of the world around her and it directly affected her work. Somehow her work seemed more black and white than most, sucking out all of the color and realness that images like Nan Goldin would have expressed. Her work filled with life and beauty shines brighter than Arbus' could.

Arbus had a sort of dull outlook on life, although she had this fixation on the odd people of this world the way she presents it seems as though she is marginalizing these people more than they already are. There is a sort of separation between these people and 'normalized society', She takes this contrast to express the tension between the two. However, it feels as though she is othering these people by depicting them as freaks. Especially drag queens, who are larger than life people, and in her photographs appear as serious, one note characters. She poses them and constricts them from even moving freely. When comparing Arbus' and Goldin's work it is blatant how these people were just used for the sake of being 'bizarre', and only being used for shock factor in Arbus' photos.

When taking a look at Goldin's candid photographs, it is apparent that these two people who are getting ready in drag are viewed in a much different light. From their natural poses, to the angle of the image. It's not posed, like Arbus' work. Goldin tried to show the people as they were not the way that the photographer wanted others to see them. Golden is taking pictures in these queens' space, and Arbus took over their space and told them how to act.



It is obvious these two artists were from different time periods, the stigma from their time is reflected in how they portray these people. “The aggregate shift in public attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual minorities in recent decades reflects at least two processes at work. First, older generations of heterosexuals, among whom attitudes toward sexual minorities are predominantly negative, are gradually being replaced by younger generations with more positive attitudes. Second, within generational cohorts, many individual heterosexuals’ attitudes are becoming more positive over time” (Herek and McLemore, 2013). The difference in the generations of these artists shows how their perception of these people are reflected in these pieces. There is a specific stigma surrounding queer people subjecting them into a box that makes them appear as freaks. This is what Diane Arbus feeds off of in order to use these people’s stories instead of allowing them to express their narrative.

Next, we can see the lives of queer people, these drag queens are getting ready for an outing. The free motion of these people in contrast to other work feels effortless and real. No one is posed, and are simply in action. It also says a lot that these photographs are in color rather than black and white. It feels as though we are transported into this space with them rather than looking at a black and white photograph which



feels artificial. Truth speaks volumes, and some artists revolve their entire work around that, whether it be photography, literature, or even music.



Catherine Opie is another artist that mainly worked to expose the truth. In this piece she focused on the topic of “masks” and how we are formed to believe in falsalities because they are instilled in us at a young age. By expressing so she made a compare and contrast styled piece with these two film photographs. The left is supposed to depict the truth and direct rawness we try to hide and the right is what we show to the world. Covered up and something we are not. Not only does this speak to the previous artist by critiquing societies outdated traditions, but it also can be seen

through a queer lens by talking about how in order to follow these dated traditions we have to wear a mask whether we like it or not. Not everyone follows this belief system however, Artists like Arca are not afraid to show their truth regardless of other's opinions.

As you can see this is not just a 'lifestyle' that many

Nonbinary - Arca

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I do what I wanna do when I wanna do it  
 Bitch, I got the bags to prove it

Hips to move it around and make shapes, yes  
 Trim the waste off and the waist down, girl, it's lift  
 Off

It's French tips wrapped 'round a dick  
 Do you want a taste?  
 I don't give a fuck what you think  
 You don't know me  
 You might owe me

But, bitch, you'll never know me  
 Ask me how I got here  
 Bitch, I worked hard  
 Ask me about my luck  
 Yeah, I've been lucky  
 And I've been unlucky  
 It's both

Don't put your shit on me  
 Bitch, it's special, you can't sell no otherwise  
 That'd be a lie

Who do you think I am?  
 It's not about you, bitch, you're dealing with  
 I am special, I've got 'special shit'  
 There's no sell

Bitch, it's real on my side  
 Go ahead, speak for yourself  
 Go ahead, speak for yourself  
 Cast the first stone

If you wanna be a puppet  
 Better yet—  
 [Interlude]  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self, self-states  
 Move for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Speak for your self-states  
 Move for your self

I can be friendly or I can be fake  
 I can be real or I can lick a taste  
 What's it gonna take?  
 I can be sexy or I could be sad  
 Act bad just to be sweet

What a treat  
 It is to be  
 Nonbinary  
 Ma chérie  
 Tee-hee-hee  
 Bitch

so wrongly believe it is. This is our identity and it might be shocking to some but that's just something people need to get used to. As Arca explains in their song 'Nonbinary', They're sick and tired of being a so called puppet of society and are taking things into their own hands as to how they want to live their truth. They talk about how their life has treated them and that they have gained their status and platform

through hard work. I find that the highlighted section of the lyrics are a perfect example of how I like to express my work. Through my lens I like to show all the colorful people I come across who are special because they understand not to follow what they are being told regardless of societal backlash. We are not people you have to "deal with", there's no deal. Bitch, it's just real on my side".

Although under this impression we seem as though we are breaking boundaries, we are simply just living our lives. Some artists strive to create this same tension

with their work in order to solely shock people. Just as Marcel Duchamp was trying to do by creating this persona "Rose Selavy". He made this female alter ego in search to shock his audiences. His work consisted entirely of making puns with his work. In fact Rose Selavy is a play on words for Rose Se La Ve. Duchamp was the so-called Daddy of Dada, in which Dadaism embodies humor, whimsical nonsense, and satire content. And so, Rose Selavy was born. Although at the time it did shock people, I personally believe that this choice was actually very distasteful. He played on the fact that he had masculine features but still dressed as a woman, but your gender expression does not equal your gender identity. Transgender, nonbinary



Rose Selavy (MARcel Duchamp), 1920 Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris an DACS, London 2015  
 Here is Duchamp. As his double-entendre persona.

and other queer people come in many shapes, sizes, and colors and just because one has prominent features does not make them any less or more of their gender. This was not drag or him coming out as transgender. This was simply him dressing as a woman for the sole fact that it would shock people. It was not because he had any interest in the repercussions of trans/queer people or drag queens who live their daily lives in fear of what can happen to them from outright violence and hate crimes that happen on the streets (especially during that time and still today). Duchamp did it because he thought it was ironic, and knew that it would get attention from the art world and that is why I feel it is important to give genuine queer people a platform to share their story to others. People need to understand that we are not doing this for shock value, fame, or anything else besides our own integrity.

### III. Process

There are many different ways in which an artist will produce work. The multitude of factors all depend on the person and can often change over time. For me I work in a trickle down approach, meaning, I start with an idea and then have it evolve as the work is being created. The main influences to my work include music mainly and also film/television shows. The type of film & music that drives the work is similar in energy when compared to the work I create. Once the media is digested then the idea or image usually pops up in my mind, or an aspect of the style sticks to me and I go from there. Sometimes an image is conjured in my mind from a lyric or a scene in a show or movie, or even a combo of the two. Another thing that drives the work is fashion/makeup, clothing can inspire me as well. There could be just a piece of an outfit that can inspire an entire photoshoot, or an eye look that will drive me to a certain destination. Once the image is in my mind, the concept is formed, or the style is chosen, the next step is to chase after it now.

The idea is to follow after the elements to create the right photo. When it comes to photographing people,

the subjects are usually myself or my friends. In that case when we collaborate they are more than happy to do anything I ask in order to get the right image, no matter the props, or costumes, or setting of the photoshoot. More recently there were images where one of my models was covered in fake blood for a Halloween shoot. There was another where eccentric outfits were asked to be worn in public and they still helped out. Since the people that I work with are mainly queer they understand the topics that is being talked about, and have even experienced the same concepts aswell, which makes it more personal. As you can see in the images to come, in these contact sheets you can see that the majority of the time the combination of ideas and elements feel very natural although might seem out of the ordinary.

Any visual elements incorporated into the work is the majority of the time calculated in

my photography. In the fashion aspect of things, I tend to work with less mainstream clothing designs to enhance the extravagance of the pictures. I also fluctuate in between dramatic, over the top clothing and more sharp looking, sophisticated looks. In terms of make-up I also go with either glamorous looks or creative fantastical looks. In regards to the setting of the photo if I shoot outdoors there is either a small set design element I like to incorporate that harmonizes with the model and their outfit. Usually there are elements I like to experiment with from photoshoot to photoshoot but still relates to the overall theme. With lighting in an image, there are two ways I like to create an image. It's with either Bulb lighting or natural sunlight, however the choice is made depending on the atmosphere of the work. Once these components are all planned out then as the model begins to express different movements and poses, then the pictures can become a bit more intuitive in the sense of capturing their spontaneity.

My models are usually of my close friends and mostly self portraits, however currently I'm expanding to

widen my range. I try and shoot majority of queer people to give representation and a platform for those who need it. The more personal and creative I can get with the people I collaborate with the better I feel the image turns out.



Working with film and in the darkroom allowed for more mature work to come out of my photography. Depending on the concept of the work I would usually work with my dslr in order to photograph. It was something more accessible previously and currently I have access to the darkroom with the university which is helping me view photography in a new way which is particular. Before working with film I would use photoshop frequently in order to experiment and create different atmospheres for the images. Above you can see scans of my negatives from my most recent work. These types of photos rely on more concentration towards the elements within the photo like clothing and makeup with a more natural setting, and also being unaltered. There are different aspects in which I do alter the photos as well. If I try to create an image based in fantasy then I would heavily alter the image, or if I would even use a different lense to achieve that look.

Photography was the main focus for passion growing up. Ever since I was younger I was always drawn to creating art, it felt effortless. As I continued to grow up, I have learned how powerful creating art work

was. It was easier to create work at a fast pace rather than drawing or painting, or even sculpture. Not only did it help me understand myself but allowed others to view the world in my perspective. Over the years it allowed for my personality to continue to evolve and morph into who I am today. Another reason for pursuit in photography was because it was faster to create content and over the years, the process of creating a photo has been more enjoyable. Taking the time to create an image has allowed for the process to feel more like art and a craft rather than just taking a photo. Conceptually, the content has become increasingly more important for myself and feels like the work is more important for others to see and connect to as well.

#### IV. Conclusion

In closing, It is seen that art can act as a catharsis for the self. It is affected by all things around the artists, and can even change the way the art is being made, or even viewed. But it can even be a form of realization, capturing something you have not yet realized, or experienced yet, that can spark true action in everyday scenarios. It can be a dreamscape perspective that one feels as though unattainable, however it can be reached. This polarity that art gives is the sole reason why it causes change. The contrast that one sees in the art work can cause material change, and also transcendental change.

This therapeutic artform has helped previous artists such as Nan Goldin, it has distanced artists from reality negatively by catapulting them into their own dystopia like Diane Arbus. For Catherine Opie it has helped her and others realize the truth in the world around them. Even for Micheal Levine we got to see the documentary of the lifestyle and community of others. One way or another we can see the reflection of the world one lives in, the mind of the artist through a lens, and even how one wants to actively change the world. In the queer lens, it can give representation to those

can't necessarily obtain it while also showing the humanity that is in all of us.

Within my own work, these options to what work can act as is all possible. As well as creating the sense of community that some of these artists have also achieved. The bare truth is that humanity and intention is the main source to what drives the work. Shedding light to experiences, allowing a reflection

of your ego in a photograph, and being able to see another side of something is the powersource to art. Consciously or unconsciously, the artist is a truth seeker and truth finder that metamorphoses the viewer and themselves.

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# The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason by Sam Harris

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*Esma Senman*

**Course:** Honors Seminar in the Social Sciences III

**Professor:** Neil Kressel

**Student:** Esma Senman

**Essay:** *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason by Sam Harris*

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## **Assignment:**

The assignment involved writing two book reviews of books selected from a list of several dozen works offering social scientific or philosophical perspectives on contemporary religion. The goal of the seminar as a whole was to examine a selected social phenomenon

from a variety of social scientific perspectives; this semester the seminar focused on religion and religious conflict. Esma reviewed, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris.

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The End of Faith describes the detrimental role of religion in our society today. Sam Harris argues that religion is counterproductive to the advancement of our societies due to both moderate and extreme followers of dogmatic religions. Fundamentalists and extremists are the cause of terror, violence, or intolerance in the name of religion. However, moderate religious people make up the population that is allowing religion to survive in a world that is growing more secular. Throughout the book, Harris describes how rationality in this secular world can no longer make excuses for the survival of religion.

Harris's overall problems with dogmatic religions include allowing for a belief system that requires no evidence, which is harmful to society as beliefs affect actions, which affect other people. Harris takes belief

and the power it yields extremely seriously, and one should, for "every belief is a fount of action in potentia" (Harris, 2004, p. 44). I agree that a person's "personal" beliefs dictate their actions so that beliefs are no longer personal.

Another reason to be critical of these religions is that many claim to communicate the will of God, which has led to violence. Aside from being harmful to people, these religions often contradict modern scientific findings and evidence which is more obviously counterproductive to the progression of our society. He argues that people's beliefs have geopolitical consequences, such as the formation of the state of Israel, proving that dogmatic beliefs still have power outside of one's head or home.

Because of religion, almost half of people in United States are creationists, which is threatening to our scientific knowledge and future exploration and findings. If the leaders of our country faced conversational pressures to provide reasonings behind their religious beliefs before being elected, I find that we would have a more rational, unbiased nation. We need to start acknowledging God as we acknowledge Zeus and be worried and very forward if any of our world leaders in various fields act by their belief of either entity. I feel that even acts of good taken by world leaders due to religious motivations should be replaced by ethical incentives outside of dogma.

Harris has a strong leaning against religion and does not dismiss its power in a person's life; it along with all other beliefs, determines feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. He believes that it does more to divide human beings than to unite, and to divide in fatal ways. With our technological advances, religion, and its tendencies to turn people radical, now have too much dangerous power and threaten the survival of humankind.

I've found that religion does more to divide human beings not only in separate religions but within one itself. People within a religion oftentimes compare one's religiousness to another and one's quantity or quality of practicing to another. It then goes on to divide people that are not of the same religion. Harris argues that respect for nonreligious people is contradictory to the teachings of many mainstream religions. I feel as though this is true as people of the Christian or Muslim faith believe that others that fall into certain categories will burn in hell. Therefore, I believe some people can be tolerant of others' religions, but may not truly respect it, as they believe it is certainly wrong.

Harris has strong negative views on people's freedom to believe what they want. He says that "the notion that every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants about God—is one of the principal

forces driving us toward the abyss" (Harris, 2004, p. 15). A prominent idea that he brings to light is the fact that we in the secular world do not respect people's opinions or beliefs on geography, engineering, history, or other concrete subjects just because they believe them. Rather, we seek reasons and evaluate them. However, religion is still surviving due to the notion that we must respect beliefs on the sole reason that they are believed. I find this idea to be true and relevant. Religion has an invisible bodyguard that prevents intolerance and criticism to the point that it is taboo and disrespectful.

Harris believes that faith in religion is not as demonized in current society as it should be due to two reasons 1. intellectuals such as Albert Einstein and Carl Jung who believed that a faithful man can be rational and 2. the Church in the West has been "politically hobbled" so that its old-fashioned, "Stone-Age" doctrines have been done away with.

This point is extremely relevant as there are many religions where certain rituals that would now be considered barbaric are no longer practiced, especially in the West. However, to pick and choose in a religion such as Islam that deems itself perfect, makes the religion illegitimate and obsolete. Due to this fundamental characteristics of Islam (perfection) as accepted by Muslims, disagreeing with a single verse in the Quran should raise alarm to any believer. At that point, a person should perhaps not label themselves as a follower of the religion, but a mere admirer of some of its teachings. This is due to how many mainstream religions claim that they are the will of God and that they are complete in guiding humanity. However, not considering the full message of a religion hides its shortcomings from society and allows it to continue to flourish in certain cultures. Therefore religious "moderates" threatens humanity, because they are the reason that these religions continue to flourish in societies that would otherwise criticize religious teachings in their entirety. They "betray faith and

reason equally”, as they do not “fully submit to God’s law” nor judge the ones that do.

I understand why Harris views religious moderates as hypocrites; they choose which aspects of religion to follow, but simultaneously believe that fundamentalists are correct in following every step and rule that religion requires of them. Therefore, religious moderation is not humanity becoming more reasonable, but rather becoming more lost in translations of a religion that they don’t fully believe is correct but are allowing to live on.

Harris uses a significant example to describe how religion is impossible to prove correct: if all of humanity woke up with no knowledge, what would we learn first? Certainly, learning how to grow food correctly and fix machinery correctly are provable. However, proving that Jesus was born of a virgin is not, nor would it be relevant to people. This example describes how humans can figure important, concrete things out, but something as abstract as human consciousness and spirituality can be entirely different than what we have today.

Harris makes many arguments that religion was a product of its time and of the knowledge the people of that time had. I believe this to be true and consider his example of chemistry replacing alchemy to be relevant and applicable. He does not belittle religions’ power to unite (and divide) people, but goes on to explain how religion is no longer necessary to reach that goal in the modern world. I agree and vouch for the notion that modern culture has a better chance of uniting people and allows room for the cherishing and accepting of other cultures than religion does.

Harris describes how Jihadists are not radical people but rather are the most devout followers of Islam. He supports this with verses that call for “war on the unbelievers”. With these verses, it is simple to follow the trail that many Muslim extremists take that lead to acts of terrorism. While many moderate Muslims

today separate themselves from these horrid acts, I find that they are among the groups of people that choose the positive and secularly beneficial aspects of Islam. However, I often see that many moderate Muslims take the more violent verses of the Quran as inapplicable to today, while still using positive verses. I find this to be subjective, and therefore contradictory, of the Islamic belief that the Quran is the perfect word of God.

Harris is not against meditation or working towards spirituality. He in fact accepts and highlights the wellbeing that can come out of a spiritual journey. It is interesting to find that he is not against all types of spirituality, rather just dogmatic principles. I find this to be important as human beings are remarkable and should honor that part of our beings that has been researched, especially the part of our brains that are wired for some sort of faith and belief.

Harris does not argue that humans must separate themselves from any sense of spirituality or sacredness, but rather embrace those things reasonably. He also explains that “we cannot live by reason alone”, but rather must accept the mysticism that is apparent in this universe that may not be scientifically explained. Approaching spirituality from a reasonable point of view is an attractive perspective as it accepts that there are remarkable things that exist in this world outside of what we concretely know. However, I find the reasonable portion of this mindset is in accepting that there is indeed sacredness and mysticism that can and should allow for a sense of spirituality in humans.

While humanity has explored and answered questions to many revolutionary topics such as germ theory and the atom, there is not yet a solid explanation to human consciousness and purpose. In turn, the survival of religion has been successful. This explanation to how and why religion is still thriving is valid. Many argue that religions were created in reaction to questions that humanity did not yet have answers for. This is evident in Greek mythology and many other religions

that described the patterns and behaviors of nature as the will of different gods. Furthermore, as humanity developed throughout the scientific, industrial, and technological revolutions, many of these religions were left behind in the pursuit and gaining of knowledge. Therefore, with the topic of human consciousness and purpose not yet fully answered or accepted, these religious explanations live on.

Harris argues that religious beliefs should not be any more respected or treated differently than any other beliefs in the world, meaning that if you believe that  $2+2=5$  with no supporting evidence, then people should not respect that. Furthermore, if you believe that “Muhammed ascended to heaven on a winged horse” without reasonable evidence, then people should not respect that either.

Harris is asking a very big favor of humanity to be intolerant of religious beliefs. This seems destructive; however, I understand his perspectives of how these religious beliefs do more bad than good, and that it is time for humans to let go of these Stone-Age beliefs just as Greek mythology was abandoned long ago. He believes that these mainstream religions have survived for far too long and hopes that people soon will look back on Christianity and Islam with an attitude that people today have towards Greek mythology.

I feel as though the very existence of other religions itself is a strong argument against religion. This idea is apparent in his wish for the future as it depicts just how many “failed” or forgotten religions there have been and that a single one being the “correct” one is very unlikely.

Harris compares Islam and Jainism, which is not a dogmatic religion. While both have opinions on the universe that are impossible to prove through science and reason, Islam and other dogmatic religions are more dangerous due to the belief that their books are the words of God. This strengthens his notion that belief leads to action as this belief has led to terrorism

and violence worldwide. This issue with religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam lies in how readers must interpret the text for themselves. This fact itself so obviously leads to misconstrued and varied interpretations of the same text that lead to both moderate and extreme points of view. Each person has had different experiences in their life which can lead to their interpretations of texts that can and have proven to be very dangerous. The agency that these religions allow is an argument against them.

A study conducted to gauge the opinion of suicide bombings in primarily Muslim countries merged the statistics of “rarely okay” and “never okay”, thus making it look like more are pacifists. While many argue that these countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa are more violent and target countries such as the United States due to economic and political conflicts, it is evident that other countries with similar experiences, such as some in South America, do not have the same opinions towards suicide bombings. These results are insightful and combat the claims that it is imperialism that is threatening Muslim countries and driving them to act out in violence. Furthermore, countries with similar poverty rates and issues as Middle Eastern countries do not produce suicide bombers. Therefore, we cannot categorize terrorism that originates from those countries as merely political, otherwise, there would be more suicide bombers from other countries.

Harris also criticizes liberals that condemn the Evangelical perspective but simultaneously are very tolerant of a diverse array of cultures and religions that call for violence. I agree with Harris’s viewpoint on how this is hypocritical. As he stated before, we need to get over our religious tolerance that has been built due to the religious moderates of today. It is because of them that we condemn extremism but allow religion to live on. However, the potential and played out violence of these religions must be brought to light. Religion across the board can no longer have any seat in a logical,

government or academic discussions.

He notes that our lasting reliance on religion is due to an incomplete understanding of ethics, just as we have an incomplete understanding of human consciousness. In turn, these metaphysical mysteries allow many to appoint their faith as the answers. However, as aforementioned, we look back on civilizations that used theology and mythology as the answers to the weather, natural occurrences, mental illnesses, and other topics that were not fully understood yet. Today, we know that these beliefs were simply put in place because of a lack of understanding. Therefore, we must adopt the same mindset and acknowledge that just because we do not yet have an answer for human consciousness, ethics, and similar areas, does not mean that it is due to supernatural intervention.

Harris takes a very confident approach to his perspective on religions. He provides relevant passages from various religious texts and rather than arguing how the text itself is calling for violence, he focuses on how a violent interpretation of it is possible and probable. This approach to emphasize the potential outcomes, rather than the intended message makes for stronger arguments against religion.

Harris argues that to work towards and succeed in building a society in which we can find happiness, a civilization must rely on reason, not on religious tolerance or political correctness, for religion has allowed certainty to be unlinked from reason. I fully agree with the latter statement due to how religion is the only remaining phenomenon that is immune to criticism. A politician with Christian beliefs would not receive the same criticism that a politician who's revealed that she fully believes and acts on her beliefs in horoscopic astrology would. If government and world leaders in various fields received criticism and were pressured towards publicly explaining their religion beliefs, we would have a more rational society. Professional fields and government especially should no longer tolerate religious individuals, as I believe this would make for a more reasonable society.

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# An Analysis of Criminological Theories: Aggravated Assault

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*Lindsay Bishop*

**Course:** Criminology

**Professor:** Jason Silva

**Student:** Lindsay Bishop

**Essay:** *An Analysis of Criminological Theories: Aggravated Assault*

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## **Assignment:**

For this research paper, students were asked to choose a type of crime and use four criminological theories to explain why this crime may occur.

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There is no clear-cut answer as to why people commit crimes, however, there are multiple theories that attempt to explain possible reasons crimes are committed. This paper focuses on aggravated assault, defined by the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) as, “an unlawful attack by one person for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.” This type of assault is usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or other means to produce death or great bodily harm. Aggravated assault seems to be going up in the years, with an estimated 810,825 aggravated assaults in the United States in 2017 (FBI, 2018). Aggravated assaults are also reported more frequently than many of the other types of index crimes as well as one of the most serious crimes (Kayden, et al., 2019). There is no one theory that explains the reason why individuals engage in aggravated assault, and there are multiple theories that can be applied that could explain the potential reasonings or motivations behind

the crime. The four theories that are focused on this paper are general strain theory, differential association theory, social bond theory, and social disorganization theory.

Sociologist Robert Agnew developed general strain theory. He sees strain as an individual phenomenon, meaning that people of any class can feel stress and strain. This stress and strain then lead individuals to be more likely to engage in criminal activity. The greater the intensity and frequency of the strain, the greater the impact and the more likely it is to cause crime. Agnew suggests that criminal behavior is the result of negative affective states, such as anger, frustration, and adverse emotions that emerge in the wake of negative and destruction of social relationships. Anger is a critical component as it can increase perceptions of being wronged and therefore produces a desire for revenge. Agnew goes on to explain that violence and aggression may then seem justified if you feel you

have been wronged and are righteously angry. These negative affective states are produced by multiple different sources of strain. These states include failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positively valued stimuli, and the presentation of negative stimuli (Siegel, 2016).

When looking at general strain theory related to aggravated assault, there are multiple different ways to approach the situation. The main part of general strain theory that relates to this crime is anger, which is a central part of general strain theory. When anger occurs in response to strain, the probability of an individual engaging in deviant behavior increases. Piquero and Sealock conducted a study in 2000 in which they studied 150 youth probationers. They found that strain is measured as an indicator of physical and emotional abuse and exerts a positive effect on anger. Additionally, they found that anger is related to interpersonal aggression (Mazerolle, et al., 2003). Another study looked at homeless youth and their high levels of strain which are associated with high leveled or deviant behavior including theft, burglary, robbery, assault, aggravated assault, and substance abuse (Synder, et al., 2016). Using general strain theory, we can hypothesize that the strains in the individual's life may be the reason that they are engaging in this crime.

Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory suggests that criminal behavior is learned from our interactions with others. Sutherland believed that the greatest influence on deviant behavior and attitude development is people such as family and friends. In fact, research shows that children who grow up in homes where their parent's abuse alcohol are more likely to view drinking as being social and physically beneficial (Siegel, 2016). These associations are more intimate than other forms of communication such as movies or tv and thus outweighs the importance of any other communication. According to this theory, a person becomes a criminal when he or she perceives

more favorable than unfavorable consequences to violating the law. Additionally, Sutherland's theory states that individuals become violators when they are in contact with events, groups, or people that have definitions favorable toward criminal behavior and are isolated from forces that counter it (Siegel, 2016).

Researchers Veras and Davis (2015) conducted a theoretical proposal that aimed to better understand assault on college campuses. They used differential association theory to observe the extent that which peers can influence participants in assaultive behaviors. They developed a survey with about 50 questions that included a dependent variable that measures aggravated assault, and questions that measure favorable definitions, conventionality, peer attitudes, behaviors, and acceptance. To measure aggravated assault, participants would be asked if they had physically injured a person on campus over the past 12 months by punching them, kicking them, stomping them, striking them with an object, or pointing a gun or knife at them. They developed four hypotheses related to the impact of favorable definitions of crime, conventionality, peer associations, and acceptance perceived of assaultive behaviors. The first hypothesis they made was that students who hold favorable attitudes towards the use of assault and other deviant acts are more likely to physically assault another student. Next, they hypothesized that students who hold less conventional attitudes towards academic success will be more likely to assault another student. Another prediction they had was that students who associate with peers that hold favorable criminal attitudes or behaviors will be the most likely to partake in interpersonal violence on campus. Finally, their last hypothesis was that students who do not fear losing respect from their family, close peers, or associates will be more likely to physically assault another student. While there are some limitations to this survey, it would be a good start to developing a better understanding of aggravated assault on college

campuses. Using differential association theory, it could be suggested that student who were around others that engaged in aggravated assault, they may be more likely to have a favorable definition of the crime and thus engage in it themselves.

Social bond theory, developed by Travis Hirschi, suggests that the onset of criminality is because of weakening ties that bind people to society. This theory assumes that all individuals are potential law violators, but they keep control because they are afraid that illegal behavior will damage their relationships. Thus, without these ties or bonds or the lack of sensitivity and interest in others, a person is free to commit criminal acts. Hirschi also suggests that in the elements of society people vary in how they respond to conventional social rules and values. There are a few elements to this theory as well which include attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment is a person's sensitivity and interest in others. Without a sense of attachment, psychologists believe a person loses the ability to relate to the world and can become a psychopath. Commitment refers to the time, energy, and effort expended in normal lines of action, an example could be getting an education, and saving money for the future. This represents a person's willingness to accept and observe social norms. Next is involvement, which says that when people become involved in school, recreational activity, and family it deters them from partaking in criminal behavior. Finally, Hirschi states that the concept of belief is people who live in the same social setting and share common moral beliefs. If these beliefs are gone or weakened, individuals are then more likely to partake in antisocial or illegal acts (Siegel, 2016).

Researcher Amy Nemmetz wanted to know if there was a significant causal and negatively correlated relationship between students' school attachments, involvements, commitments, and beliefs and the likelihood of physical fighting at school. These variables are the key components of social bond theory. They

hypothesized that there is a significant difference in the number of physical fights at school between students who have these attachments, involvements, commitments, and beliefs versus students who do not have them. A quantitative causal-comparative design with a predictive correlational subcomponent was used and data was analyzed to determine the likelihood of being in a physical fight at school. Nemmetz found that there was a significant difference between the bonded and unbonded adolescence, with 15.6% of the unbonded students being involved in physical fights at school and 6.1% of the bonded students being involved in physical fights at school (Nemmtz, 2010). The students who were not involved in physical fights at school had a stronger attachment and bond to society that deterred them from engaging in these violent acts. Nemmtz study shows how important social bond theory is to deterring adolescent crime.

Social disorganization theory, developed by sociologists Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, was developed by looking at the city of Chicago. Social disorganization focuses on the conditions within the environment that affect crime rates. Areas that are disorganized are ones in which institutions of social control, including family, commercial establishments, and schools, have broken down and cannot carry out expected functions. There are a few indicators of social disorganization which include high unemployment, school dropout rates, deteriorated housing, low-income levels, and large numbers of single-parent homes. McKay and Shaw found the areas of Chicago that had high crime rates and came up with five concentric circles or zones of the city. The areas that had the highest crime were in the transitional city zones, these are poverty-ridden areas that suffer high rates of population turnover. Thus, those who remained were not capable of defending their neighborhood against criminal offenders. Additionally, in these areas, the changes in the population, the disintegration of cultures, diffusion of cultural standards, and gradual

industrialization of the areas led to a dissolution of neighborhood culture and organization (Siegel, 2016).

A study by Lena Bouffard and Lisa Muftic (2006), wanted to examine the impact of structural characteristics on violent offending in the upper Midwest. Their results were consistent with other studies, and they found that violent offenses were significantly associated with residential instability and family disruption. This would suggest that communities that are more unstable and experiencing higher levels of family disruption are less able to have formal and informal control over violent offending. Additionally, researchers found that criminal behavior is related to current neighborhood conditions, and there are structural forces that influence violent crime rates. An analysis of social disorganization in Arkansas found that there is a relationship between social disorganization and violent crime, and the relationship

was stronger and more significant at the city level rather than the county level. They studied four violent crimes including aggravated assault, simple assault, murder, and violent crime overall. However, the relationship between social disorganization and aggravated assault was the strongest (Barnes, 2018). These studies show the importance that the environment plays in causing or deterring crime rates, particularly with aggravated assault.

These four theories each explain potential motivations of aggravated assault, using the positivist school of thought. There are multiple sociological and psychological factors that can attempt to explain the offender's motivations, however, general strain theory, differential association theory, social bond theory, and social disorganization theory give the best insight into criminal motivations for aggravated assault.

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# The Effect of Personality Traits on the Preference for Online Shopping: The Moderating Roles of Brand Trust and Familiarity, Data Protection and Privacy Concerns, and Security Risks

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*Yasmeen Ghalyeh*

**Course:** Honors Thesis II

**Professor:** Mike Chao

**Students:** Yasmeen Ghalyeh

**Essay:** *The Effect of Personality Traits on the Preference for Online Shopping: The Moderating Roles of Brand Trust and Familiarity, Data Protection and Privacy Concerns, and Security Risks*

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## **Assignment:**

For this Honors Thesis, students were asked to write an Abstract, Introduction, Theoretical background &

hypothesis, Method, Results, and Conclusion for a topic of their choosing.

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## **Abstract**

Significant advancements in technology resulted in the transformation of many industries, including that of the retail industry, which it will continue to shape. Its effects can be observed as seen by businesses, big and small, that have expanded to include the addition of online shopping into their business models along with their traditional, brick-and-mortar stores. Understanding consumers through factors such as psychographics is a core component of marketing; thus, personality is one area of study that is of interest in this research in relation to online shopping and will be measured through the five-factor model (FFM) (Barnett, Pearson, Pearson, and Kellermanns, 2015).

## **Purpose/Value**

To examine the role consumer personality plays in

influencing preference for online shopping (POS), and the extent an individual's attitude towards technology (ATT) mediates this relationship. It also serves to analyze how other factors such as brand trust and familiarity, data protection and privacy concerns, and security risks moderate the relationship.

## **Method**

An online survey created through Qualtrics and distributed through Amazon MTurk.

## **Main Findings**

All three personality traits studied- openness to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism- were positively related to ATT, and ATT was found to be positively related to POS. Data protection and privacy concerns and security risks weaken the relationship between ATT and POS; however, brand trust and

familiarity did not strengthen it as hypothesized.

### **Managerial Implications**

To understand their consumer's characteristics and concerns for effective segmentation and target marketing.

### **Keywords**

Personality, Online Shopping, Brand Trust, Brand Familiarity, Data Protection and Privacy Concerns, Security Risks

## **I. Introduction**

Over time, technology has undergone major advancements that has revolutionized the lives of many individuals, the operational processes and structures of businesses, and overall, has transformed various industries- whether they have chosen to accept it or not. Individuals interact daily with many forms of technology (computers/laptops, smartphones, the internet) for many reasons related to school, jobs, communication, shopping, and more. Thus, illustrating technology's considerable impact on the environment, education, health, businesses, industries, and society. Due to this increase in usage, more and more businesses are beginning to integrate online shopping, a form of electronic commerce, into their business models, along with the traditional, in-person shopping. Meanwhile, others have completely shifted away from their brick-and-mortar stores. By characteristic, online shopping deals with e-commerce and allows for various offerings, both products and services, to be bought and sold online over the internet. Moreover, different types of e-commerce exist, and according to Khatwani (2016), there are six types: business-to-consumer, business-to-business, consumer-to-business, consumer-to-consumer, business-to-administration, and consumer-to-administration. However, this paper will specifically focus on the business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce business model to examine certain relationships between consumers, their preference for online shopping, and factors affecting it that are

important for businesses to account for.

As the usage of technology increases and the lines between online and in-store retail begin to diminish, companies are forced to compete and keep up with the trends while also keeping in mind the consumer. According to the work of Fullerton (1988), "most of our modern marketing practices began to develop much earlier than is commonly believed-- certainly before 1950, usually before 1930, and, especially in the British example, in important respects before 1850". Additionally, in his research related to the historical development of modern marketing in three major Western countries- the United States, Britain, and Germany- he argued that marketing underwent an evolution process far more complex than the current periodization scheme of production/product orientation era, sales orientation era, and the advent of marketing era (including its concept and the marketing mix) (Fullerton, 1988, p. 123). We believe that this may hold true as modern marketing has advanced tremendously.

One of the core teachings and fundamentals of marketing, both traditional and digital, is to place the consumer in the heart of the business by keeping their interests in mind when analyzing, formulating, and implementing strategies; in addition, some businesses champion a customer-centric business approach, aligning all internal business operations, processes, and structures around the consumer. Focusing on all aspects of the consumer through the consideration of geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral factors/characteristics during the marketing process [segmentation, target marketing (product, price, promotion, and place), and positioning] allows for the effective creation and communication of value to consumers, and the prevention of associated risks of not doing so. So, considering this, it is extremely beneficial to know whether the consumer that is being targeted prefers shopping online as a place of distribution (one of the 4 Ps of marketing), because in

the long term, understanding the consumer will generate profits for the business and differentiate it from competitors.

Additionally, due to technology's continuous growth, and its increased usage that does not seem like it will slow down any time soon, its adaptation and adoption are critical for almost every industry, including the retail industry with respect to online shopping. Those who do not implement technology, in turn, will see a large gap between their profits in comparison. However, risks consumers may be concerned about such as data protection and privacy concerns (Budak, Anić, and Rajh, 2013; Bandara, Fernando, and Akter, 2020), and perceived security risks (Kapoor and Singh, 2020) are always associated with the internet and online shopping. Moreover, other factors may be present that are also important such as the extent consumers' trust and familiarity with a brand influences shopping online.

The consumer is the focal point in marketing and in business in general; however, personality or individual differences and characteristics have not received much attention (in the context of IS literature), "a state affairs that is sometimes traced back to Huber's (1983) statements discouraging the study of cognitive style as a basis for decision support system (DSS) design" (Devaraj, Easley, and Crant, 2008). Information systems (IS), often understood as a socio-technical system (Hansen and Neumann, 2009) describe the incorporation and connection of people (the socio aspect) with technology (the technical aspect) as well as the information generated by both. Most research and investigations pertaining to individual differences and attitude towards technology involve IT (Agarwal and Prasad, 1999), IS (Devaraj et al. 2008), and augmented reality advertising (Srivastava et al., 2021), not technology in general. However, even then, as explained before, minimal attention is given to individual differences and characteristics in the context of IS, and these individual differences may not be taken in the context of personality such as the case in

the study done by Agarwal et al. (1999). Additionally, information systems (IS) and information technologies (IT) are more specified in comparison to technology in general, which is seen as more ambiguous and amorphous (Edison and Giessler, 2003); so, considering this all, "research on attitude towards general technology is sparse" (Edison et al., 2003) despite technology's universal impact.

"The information technology, psychology, education and marketing literatures provide a basis for hypothesising the existence of a range or distribution with the concept of attitude towards technology in general", from this, our research serves to add to current limited literature on consumers and their individual differences and characteristics with respect to their attitude towards technology in general. Overall, it goes beyond demographic factors (Lubis and Utara, 2018) studied in previous research, and examines and allows for the development and comprehensive understanding of consumers' psychographics, in particular personality, and how it can impact their preference for online shopping and incorporates the mediating effects of their attitude towards technology. Additionally, with online shopping, comes factors such as brand trust and familiarity, data protection and privacy concerns, as well as security risks that may influence one's preference; all these factors are discussed further in this research.

## II. Theoretical Background

The content of this section highlights our theoretical background. We first provide an introduction to online shopping and factors affecting consumer preferences towards this shopping method. Additionally, in this section, we present prior literature and research in the areas of personality and attitudes towards technology- relative to consumers- as well as factors affecting this relationship.

### A. Consumer Preference for Online Shopping

Traditional, brick-and-mortar stores with incumbent business models that involve operating solely in-

person often are challenged by competition, consumer expectations, and technological advancement leading many to move online to keep up with trends (Hänninen, Smedlund, & Mitronen, 2018). Industries constantly evolve as past business models can no longer sustain a business's survival in the complex, dynamic market that they operate within- especially when catalysts exist such as innovation, digitalization, and the overall digital revolution; thus, retail industries must meet this new demand through the addition of online shopping. "Online shopping is one of the technological innovations that has transformed the retail industry, by providing a platform for consumers and businesses to exchange products and services through the internet," but there are risks that come along with advantages (Singh & Rana, 2018).

Although conventional, in-person shopping still prevails, online shopping has become increasingly common over the years primarily due to the significant advancement of technology and the new range of benefits and advantages it provides. Individuals who shop over the internet gain the following advantages relative to traditional shopping: price, convenience, product availability, product variety, the ease in which one can have access to any product at the tip of their fingers in seconds, the ability to know all the specifics related to a product and alternatives available for comparisons, and the presence of coupons, deals, and sales ((Inks & Mayo, 2002); Khatwani, 2016, pp. 4-5). However, despite online shopping becoming increasingly common, with pros inevitably comes cons and disadvantages to be mindful of. Inks and Mayo (2002) conducted a study examining consumer preferences for online shopping and found that "consumers have substantive reservations about shopping online which may be adversely affecting the acceptance rate of this new channel". Prior findings state the following potential reasons for this: security risks, inability to touch and try products, shipping, privacy concerns, and lack of help for questions and concerns (Inks and May, 2002; Khatwani, 2016).

Considering all this, although online shopping and traditional shopping differ in certain aspects, both satisfy and fulfill the needs and wants of consumers.

## **B. Personality and the Big 5 Personality Traits**

Since attracting consumers over the internet has gained a considerable amount of attention over the past few years, many businesses seek to better their processes by understanding consumers deeper through psychographic factors- a pivotal concept in marketing, both traditional and digital. Personality "comprises the pattern of characteristic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguishes one person from another and that persists over time and situations" (Phares and Chaplin, 1997). It is in short, defined by Deniz and Erciş (2008) as the "individual's response to particular situations". From this, we gather that the comprehensive definition of personality is that it refers to the mix of characteristics, qualities, and attributes that shape and reflect how an individual is perceived- distinguishing them from others- and influencing their perceptions, preferences, attitudes, cognitions, beliefs, opinions and, as a result, behavior. An individual's personality begins with an innate disposition and may be influenced over time by family, culture, the environment, etc.

The five-factor model, also known by its abbreviation, FFM, is a "theoretical approach to personality classification" that consists of dimensions known as the big 5 and has significantly impacted the study of personality (Devaraj et al., 2008, p. 94). Before the introduction of this comprehensive framework, "personality research was harshly criticized as being too disjointed and lacking a classification scheme or theoretical basis to help interpret findings on literally thousands of isolated personality traits"; thus, the FFM was claimed to be "the most useful taxonomy in personality research" (Barrick et al. 2001). There are billions of individuals on this earth who exhibit different personality traits, thus, conducting research involving personality was overwhelming and complex;

the FFM addresses these issues by categorizing personality into five broad dimensions/factors. Additionally, it was suggested by Devaraj et al. (2008), in their research related to the context of IS theories, that perhaps few integrate personality due to the lack of grounded theory “to guide a researcher in choosing which specific traits to include in a particular model”, which is why the Five-Factor Model is beneficial and will be used in our own research. The five-factor model consists of the following Big 5 personality traits: openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness.

### III. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses Development

#### A. Theoretical Framework

Present research on consumer preferences for online shopping examines characteristics of consumers such as demographic factors, attributes related to the products/services, and characteristics of online shopping itself such as ease of use, the provision of alternatives, convenience, etc. However, this paper serves to examine the effect of select personality traits from the Big 5- openness to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism- on the preference for online shopping while examining the mediating effects of attitude towards technology and the moderating roles of brand trust and familiarity, data protection and privacy concerns, as well as security risks.

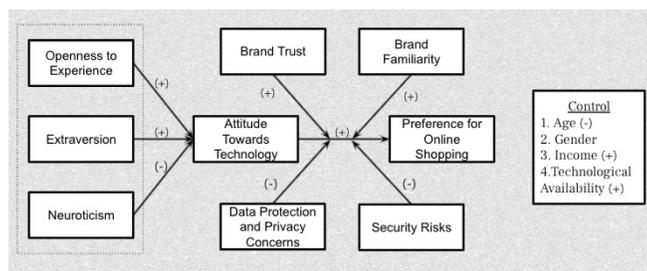


Figure 1: Hypotheses – Conceptual Framework

#### B. Research Hypotheses Development

##### *Openness to Experience and Attitude Towards Technology*

Openness to experience, also known as openness, refers to how open an individual is to try, learn, and experience new things that differ from what they are used to; those high in this dimension are more willing to experience different things and are known to be responsive and comfortable with change. On the other hand, those who are closed are often not willing to try new things that challenge the status quo, are inherently uncomfortable with change, and prefer stability in their lives (Devaraj et al., 2008). According to Islam, Rahman, and Hollebeek (2017), through their research of the literature, “people who are open (vs more closed) to experience tend to be more curious, imaginative, and flexible to seek new things and experiences (Madjar, 2008), acquire a broader set of interests and passions (Butt and Phillips, 2008), and engage in greater social media use (Correa et al., 2010; Jadin et al., 2013)”. From this and being that many social media companies are beginning to incorporate online shopping in their platforms, we suggest that those high in openness will have favorable attitudes towards technology.

Furthermore, it was suggested that “individuals high in openness are more likely to hold positive attitudes and cognitions toward accepting job-related technology in part because of their predisposition to embrace new approaches to work” and that the “burning desire to do varied things that is the core fact of openness to experience will influence their judgment about the utility of technology” (Devaraj et al., 2008). In a study done by Islam et al. (2017), where they surveyed a sample of 550 students, they proposed that openness to experience is positively associated with consumer engagement in the online brand community context and found that it was supported. Furthermore, previous research by Keeton (2008) argued that people high in this dimension would have a higher degree of

technology acceptance. Other prior research suggested these hypotheses to be partially supported. So, we infer that those high in the dimension of openness to experience will result in more favorable attitudes towards technology; while those low in this dimension, in turn, will exhibit less favorable attitudes.

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H1:** *Openness to experience is positively related to attitude towards technology.*

### ***Extraversion and Attitude Towards Technology***

The second dimension we will be studying in our research in relation to how they view technology and their preference for online shopping is extraversion- the degree to which someone is energetic and sociable. Those high in extraversion are social, active, and outgoing, value close and warm interpersonal relationships highly, and are very interactive. Additionally, individuals in this dimension are either known as extroverts (high in this dimension) vs. introverts (low in this dimension), or the extent to which an individual is characterized as more or less social or reserved. According to Ozbek et al. (2014), extraversion is defined as “the tendency to be sociable, fun-loving, and affectionate vs. retiring, somber, and reserved”.

Prior research suggested that people with a higher degree of extraversion would have a higher degree of technology acceptance (Keeton, 2008), and that extraversion is positively related to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in terms of perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), and behavioral intention to use (BITU) (Sevendsen et al., 2013). However, other research suggests conflicting findings that extraversion does not positively influence PU and PEOU (Ozbek et al., 2014) and that it is not positively related to IT system use, both actual and perceived (Barnett, Pearson, Pearson, and Kellermanns, 2015).

According to Islam et al. (2017), and his review of past literature, extroverts enjoy sharing information,

developing social contacts, and are known to heavily use the internet, social networks, and social apps; moreover, it was hypothesized by the authors in their study that extraversion will have a positive association with consumer engagement with respect to the online brand community context- which was supported. In our research, we believe that since extraverts tend to use the internet and social networks and apps, they may have a more positive overall outlook on technology.

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H2:** *Extraversion is positively related to attitude towards technology.*

### ***Neuroticism and Attitude Towards Technology***

The last dimension and factor of the Big 5 Model we believe is of importance is neuroticism, which is also the final independent variable. According to the literature, neuroticism refers to an individual's inclination to have negative emotions more frequently; they are more emotional and more vulnerable to psychological stress and are typically known to be very anxious/distressed, nervous, sad/depressed, and tense versus emotionally stable, calm, and even-tempered (Cantner, Goethner, and Silbereisen, 2016).

While conducting a review of the literature, conflicting results were found regarding the relationship between neuroticism and attitude towards technology. To begin, although prior research suggests that the relationship between neuroticism and technology is less clear, a positive relationship was found in a study related to neuroticism and the willingness of an individual to engage in buying and selling over the internet (McElroy et al., 2007). Additionally, in another study, the authors stated that “high levels of neuroticism had a higher propensity to use social services (chatting, seeking people etc.) on the internet”, and by examining neuroticism and its influence on PU and PEOU, they found that neuroticism negatively influences PU and not PEOU (Ozbek et al., 2014). Further, in relation to social aspects, research found that neurotic individuals

are more likely to be anxious and pressured in physical crowds and will use the internet as an escape from this and from loneliness (Butt and Phillips, 2008; Ryan and Xenos, 2011), and will also use the internet to be accepted and feel like they belong (Amiel and Sargent, 2004). So, this may be the case in their preferences of shopping methods. Lastly, according to Islam et al. (2017), neuroticism was found to be positively associated with consumer engagement online; thus, their attitudes to technology may be positive.

However, on the other hand, Barnett et al. (2015) conducted research on neuroticism and IT system use, actual and perceived, and hypothesized that a negative relationship existed, and it was supported. Moreover, it was found that there are no expectations for those high in neuroticism, also referred to as neurotic individuals, to look out for opportunities to learn new things (Payne et al., 2007). Thus, we infer, that those high in neuroticism may be more resistant to change and are less likely to intend to adopt and use technology in general, and that they may hold unfavorable attitudes towards technology as a result. In another study, Devaraj et al (2008, p. 97) concluded with respect to the workplace that “neurotic personalities are likely to view technological advances in their work as threatening and stressful, and to have generally negative thought processes when considering it”. So, those high in this dimension may be reserved in their use of technology and how they view it. Overall, we believe that neurotic individuals may have unfavorable attitudes towards technology, and will be more reserved in its use, since they have negative thought processes when considering technology.

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H3:** *Neuroticism is negatively related to attitude towards technology.*

Next, we move on to the mediating variable, attitude towards technology; these types of variables are known to mediate between the independent and

dependent variables.

### *Attitude Towards Technology and Preference for Online Shopping*

Despite the importance, increased usage, and vast impact of technology, the shortage of literature and research pertaining to individuals' attitudes towards it is surprising. One study done by Forrester Research on technology adoption in North America, focused on attitude among other factors and found that “attitude towards technology is a key factor influencing the adoption of a wide range of digital technologies, including computers, mobile phones and digital television” (Edison et al., 2003). Individuals frequently interact with technology and are being affected by it constantly. So, as a result attitudes form- which is one's tendency to feel a certain way about something, or how much they like or dislike something- and can be seen through their behavior towards it. The shift from shopping in person to online reflects the major change in technology over the years, and individuals can have favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards it that may come in to play and affect their preference for online shopping regardless of their personality. On one end, individuals may welcome technology and its uncertainty into their lives and daily routines and enjoy the challenge; meanwhile, others may be resistant to technology, are more reserved with its usage, and are uncomfortable with its change (Edison et al., 2003). This study examines the mediating effect of attitude towards technology on the relationship between a consumer's personality and their preference for online shopping. We hypothesize that one's personality influences whether they have a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards technology; additionally, we relate attitude towards technology to preference for online shopping.

“Technology is a major enabler for today's innovative retail services” (Burke, 2002). In our research, consumer personality and attitude towards technology was examined, in this case, with respect to their

preference for online shopping; whereas other studies examined personality and technology acceptance (not necessarily attitude) with respect to mobile devices such as smartphones (Özbek et al. 2014; Sindermann, Riedl, and Montag, 2020), and augmented reality advertising (Srivastava, Dasgupta, Ray, Bala, and Chakraborty, 2021). We believe that favorable attitudes towards technology will result in a higher preference for online shopping being that they are comfortable with technology, and considering the study done by Forrester Research, attitude towards technology influences the adoption of a wide range of digital technologies that are conduits that must be utilized for online shopping. The more one has a favorable attitude towards technology, the more they would prefer to shop online.

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H4:** *Attitude towards technology is positively related to preference for online shopping.*

Now, we move on to the moderators which are known to strengthen or weaken the relationship between variables depending on the direction indicated in the hypothesis: variables that positively moderate, strengthens, meanwhile, those that negatively moderate, weakens relationships.

#### ***Brand Trust and Familiarity***

Brand plays a vital role as one of the intangible assets of an organization (Pappu and Quester, 2016). When purchasing online, multiple things are of importance to a consumer, and this section will focus on how trust and familiarity moderate the relationship between a consumer's attitude towards technology and their preference for online shopping. Trust barriers are inevitable when dealing with online shopping as there are risks to the consumers that will be discussed later, but if trust exists between a consumer and a brand then they are more likely to prefer to shopping online. "Brand trust is defined as the willingness of the average customer to rely on the brand's ability to perform its function" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). It has been

found that, with respect to numerous studies, "trust has a major impact on customers' online purchase intention and shopping decision" (Rasty, Mirghafoori, Ardekani, and Ajdari, 2020), and that "as customers often have little knowledge about the e-vendors, they have to deal with risks and uncertainty" (Sharma and Lijuan, 2014). When consumers intend to purchase a product or service and are faced with a brand they trust versus one they do not know much about, or do not trust, then they will be more likely to choose the brand they trust to satisfy their needs and wants.

Another, important variable that ties into this concept is brand familiarity, which is described as all the brand-related experiences that a consumer has accumulated over time, and is considered to be composed of both, the consumer's prior experience with the brand and the amount of brand exposure (Chen and Chang, 2015). In previous studies, brand familiarity has been identified as one of the major determinants of consumer online purchase behavior (Ha and Perks, 2005). Tying these two together, if an individual holds a favorable attitude towards technology and thus has a high preference for online shopping, the addition of trust and familiarity with a brand, will strengthen this relationship.

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H5:** *Trust in a brand positively moderates the positive relationship between attitude towards technology and the preference for online shopping.*

**H6:** *Brand familiarity positively moderates the positive relationship between attitude towards technology and the preference for online shopping.*

#### ***Data Protection and Privacy Concerns and Security Risks***

Earlier we stated how one of the main functions of marketing is to create and communicate value to the consumers which can be done through understanding demographic, psychographic, and behavioral factors. As technology continues to advance, so do the number of tools available for marketers to utilize, such as AI

and machine learning, that can be used to gather information on consumers- which can sometimes be personal being that these tools study an individual's habits based on their search criteria to steer information that would interest the user and increase chances of usage/purchase of products, or services.

Castañeda and Montoro (2007) illustrate data protection and privacy concerns online by defining it as “the Internet customer’s concern for controlling the acquisition and subsequent use of the information that is generated on him or acquired on the Internet”. Being that so much information is taken from individuals online, forming data, data protection is needed to manage and deal with issues related to privacy since concerns arise with how information is being managed, how it is being used, by who it is being used, and what it is used for. More specifically, the concerns are the following: “collection of personal data, control over the use of personal information by firms, and awareness of privacy practices and how personal data are used” (Malhotra, Kim, and Agarwal, 2004; Stewart and Segars, 2002). Additionally, consumers are afraid that both, their personal information, and preferences, may be shared without permission (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004).

Furthermore, perceived security risk is another important factor to consider with online shopping. Security risk “refers to concerns about monetary loss through using online payment systems” (Thakur and Srivastava, 2015). It is known to be a significant barrier hindering the growth of m-commerce, which is a “convenient way to shop, [and] it is also susceptible to un-authorized access to data and breaches in security” (Kapoor and Singh, 2020; Cozzarin and Dimitrov, 2016). M-commerce is a form of e-commerce, so we broaden this to include online shopping not just through wireless handheld devices. So, since privacy and security factors were found to have more of an effect on attitude towards online shopping than product factors, and are perceived as the main type of

risks, or barriers when shopping online, we believe this negatively affects preference for online shopping, and weakens the relationship mentioned in hypothesis 4 (Makhitha and Ngobeni, 2021; Dang and Pham, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018).

Therefore, we propose in short:

**H7:** *Data protection and privacy concerns negatively moderates the positive relationship between attitude towards technology and the preference for online shopping.*

**H8:** *Security risk negatively moderates the positive relationship between attitude towards technology and the preference for online shopping.*

## IV. Conclusion

### A. Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the role consumer personality plays in influencing preference for online shopping, and the extent an individual's attitude towards technology mediates this relationship. Moreover, it was taken a step further to examine and analyze how other factors, brand and technology-related, may moderate the relationship such as brand trust and familiarity, data protection and privacy concerns, and security risks. After conducting a literature review, we formulated 8 hypotheses to illustrate and better understand the relationship between these variables, and what factors affects one's preference for online shopping. To test these hypotheses, an online survey was created through Qualtrics and distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk to a total of 215 respondents. After data collection, factor analysis was performed, and regressions were run through IBM's SPSS software on each of the variables in the hypotheses.

Out of the 8 hypotheses, 5 of them were supported through analysis of the data, and they were the following: hypothesis 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8. Meanwhile, hypotheses 3, 5, and 6 were not supported. All three independent variables related to personality [openness

to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism] positively correlate with the mediating variable, attitude towards technology and the dependent variable [preference for online shopping], as attitude towards technology was found to be positively related to preference for online shopping. Meaning, the higher you are in those dimensions and the more favorable one's attitude is towards technology, the greater their preference will be for online shopping. The moderators, brand trust and brand familiarity, were both found to be positively related to preference for online shopping, so the hypotheses were partially correct; however, they were too strong to be moderating variables to be supported. Lastly, data protection and privacy concerns and security risks were proven to be moderators negatively affecting/weakening the positive relationship between attitude toward technology and the preference for online shopping.

### **B. Managerial Implications**

The benefits of this research to managers are vast. In marketing, both traditional and digital, and in business in general, it is extremely vital for a company to understand who their consumers are. This research adds on to the limited literature on consumer personality as it pertains to preference for online shopping and examines other important variables leaving behind important implications for managers. The first is that it further pushes the notion that managers should better understand their target market's characteristics, such as their demographics (age, gender, etc.), and psychographics (attitudes, personality, etc.). The reason why is that it proves to be useful for segmentation and effective targeting decisions.

Specific to this research, it is important and beneficial for marketers and managers to know whether the consumer they are targeting prefers shopping online, or not, as a place of distribution (one of the 4 Ps of marketing). From this research, managers should note that the more open, extroverted, and neurotic

their consumers are the more likely they would prefer online shopping. So, for example, if one's target market consisted of extroverts, providing an option to shop online will prove to be successful for the business. Additionally, those who have favorable attitudes towards technology will more likely prefer online shopping. Lastly, with the internet and online shopping, comes concerns and risks that consumers are paying mind to; managers should ensure that if an option to shop online is provided, they account for and reduce data protection and privacy concerns, as well as security risks.

### **C. Study Limitations and Future Research**

#### *Limitations*

With most research comes limitations, and this research had a few minor ones. First, only two semesters, approximately 8-9 months, was given to formulate and complete this research. Additionally, the respondents of the online survey were limited to individuals in the United States who had access to the internet. Lastly, responses were only quantitative, meaning closed-answer questions that did not allow, or give respondents the opportunity to elaborate and share their thoughts and opinions like qualitative, open-ended questions would have.

#### *Future Research*

This research study opens the door for future research by others. First, with respect to the moderators, brand trust and brand familiarity, although hypotheses 5 and 6 were not supported, it is our belief that this is simply because they were too strong to be moderating variables. For future research, one should examine these two as independent variables to examine whether they would affect one's preference for online shopping. To conclude, this research focused on only three of the five dimensions of the Five Factor Model (FFM), also known as the Big 5, and they were openness to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism. Future researchers can add on to this research by including the other two dimensions, conscientiousness

and agreeableness; thus, completing all aspects related to this research.

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# Book Review: Bertrand Russell “Why I Am Not a Christian”

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*Christian Ortiz*

**Course:** Psychology of Religion

**Professor:** Neil Kressel

**Student:** Christian Ortiz

**Essay:** Book Review: Bertrand Russell “Why I Am Not a Christian”

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## **Assignment:**

The assignment asked students to write two book reviews of books chosen from a list of several dozen works offering social scientific or philosophical perspectives on contemporary religion. The goal of the seminar as a whole was to examine a selected

social phenomenon from a variety of social scientific perspectives; this semester the seminar focused on religion and religious conflict. Christian reviewed, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, by Bertrand Russell.

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As a practicing Christian, I found Bertrand Russell’s “Why I Am Not a Christian” to be a disturbing, intriguing, and moving reading experience. This book’s content does not favor my religious beliefs in the slightest and if anything, seeks to dismiss them entirely. This happens mainly within the start of the book, but Russell makes his way back to Christian related topics through a number of social issues in later essays. Russell attempts to reason as to why Christianity is useless and even damaging, while presenting some plausible arguments to support his claims. Many of these arguments are common, but his expression of detail succeeds in addressing most of his points. In some of the most important cases however, he dismisses aspects of Christianity too abruptly, leaving room for believers to reason their beliefs as possible. What I enjoy most about Russell’s

writing is his demonstration of intelligence on religious and related social subjects. Where I have heard many nonreligious people harp on Christianity in senseless ways, Russell not only uses the content of Christianity to attempt to explain its failures, but also cites the bad example that many of its followers exemplify. I even agree with a few of Russell’s points. While I found this to be a challenging and eye opening read, my second impression upon rereading many of his ideas was not as significant. Better yet, upon doing research in challenge of his views, I found more solace and confidence in my faith than before I read the book.

Bertrand Russell begins the book with a lecture that was given in the late 1920s in South London, at the Battersea Arts Centre, then known as the Battersea Town Hall. While his vocabulary and speech is

impressive, what's most intriguing is his informal tone in this portion of the book. It feels like reading a Tedx talk, where I can envision a crowd listening attentively and laughing in unison to the more light hearted parts. It's this part of the book that outlines his major points against Christianity. He begins by attempting to find reasonable modern criteria for what a true "Christian" is. He's fair, because while he isn't taking input from an audience, he is considerate of various facts and opinions regarding the matter. This part of the book was my biggest takeaway and it can be applied to the topic of Christianity in any context. His accurate criteria for a modern Christian requires one to believe in God and immortality, while also believing in Jesus Christ. He then explains why he doesn't share these beliefs, starting by questioning the existence of God. His first attempt is to refute the classic "First Cause" argument. He claims that people believed the universe had to be justified with a cause and God had to be that cause. This is a reasonable belief, until you ask the question of what the cause of God must be. Christians usually dismiss this argument by assuming God doesn't play by the same rules as us. Where we believe our reality requires creation for it to exist, God; an almighty deity, simply may not require a creation. Russell argues that if God may not have to play by those rules, then why would it be ridiculous to believe that the universe may not play by those rules? If Christians believe that God always existed, why couldn't he believe that the universe always existed? While this is all logical, neither side of this argument can disprove the other. All Russell is saying is that it may not be necessary for the universe to exist, because of a creator, but make no mistake, this is a significant point. He then attempts to dismantle the "Natural Law" argument, which also suggests God's existence. He recalls Christians many centuries ago, believing that the planets revolve in orbit because of God. He mentions how today we understand gravity according to Einstein's explanation. Another example he could have highlighted is how diseases used to be considered demons. Today, we

understand diseases to be infections or illnesses that attack the body physically. We now have a scientific understanding to explain these phenomena. These understandings will continue to change and develop over time, and Russell argues that the further understandings make less of a reason to hold God credible with any Natural Law. I agree with Russell that Christians should not take issue with any scientific discoveries currently. Christians should understand that if there is a method to how things work, God has probably conducted it in a step by step process, similar to the creation story in Genesis, but likely not literally. More recently, many Christians were disappointed by Pope Francis, claiming that God is not a magician with a magic wand, while embracing science and the big bang theory.

Russell then goes deeper and refers to how atoms at times don't seem to obey the laws of physics. While physics is out of my field of study and experience, atoms and their behavior are part of why I believe in the creation story. I'll first admit that my belief in the rhythm in the ways of the universe and life itself seem sometimes orchestrated, as if by a greater deity, may be coming from an artistic view point and not a scientific outlook. However, when it comes to atoms, even physics experts have trouble understanding their behavior and predicting what they will do. The infamous "measurement problem" in quantum physics seems to suggest that an atom behaves a certain way, according to whether you observe it or not. "What is the measurement problem in quantum mechanics? "In quantum mechanics, the measurement problem is **the problem of how, or whether, wave function collapse occurs**. The inability to observe such a collapse directly has given rise to different interpretations of quantum mechanics and poses a key set of questions that each interpretation must answer." Hsu. This segways into larger and weirder ideas, but the problem itself suggests that consciousness may have a major influence on our reality.

It's in human nature to create and make advancements in all aspects of life, no matter how unimpressive they may be to Bertrand Russell, which he does mention. "Do you think that if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and millions of years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Klu Klux Klan or the Fascists? (Russell 10). Today, humans have made scientific discoveries to better understand the concepts from centuries ago. We understand that the universe seems to have an end and limitations, while the smallest pieces of our universe are atoms. It's likely that at some point we will discover energy and fundamentals beyond the make up of atoms, or peer past the ends of the universe into a larger realm. Regardless, our scientific discoveries seem as if they could go on indefinitely. The idea of God succeeds this, but the idea of science does not. Scientific discoveries will only help us adjust our understanding to how the universe functions and exists. Some questions may never be answered by scientific discoveries, and it's likely that upcoming discoveries will force us to reset how we interpret our current knowledge, forcing us to ask more questions. Science suggests that there must be a final solution to these problems, such as where the energy required for the big bang came from, which of course is somehow the same amount of energy still in existence today. Science is unlikely to ever answer that question. The idea of a creator who exists within and outside of our universe as an orchestrator, though ridiculous to some, has always answered that question.

Russell notes a few issues with Christ's moral character. As for Christ's questionable moments, Russell is correct that they are some seemingly odd ones. "I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha or Socrates above him in those respects." (Russell 19). Even Christ's followers at times have questioned his intentions and actions. I understand these situations better by remembering first, that while

Christ had his positive and upbeat moments, he was still considered a man just as much as the son of God. While many Christians wouldn't dare entertain the notion that Christ wasn't perfect, he is documented as explaining this himself. "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." (Mark 10:18). It wouldn't shock me to think that while Christ made examples to teach certain points, he worked with what was available to him. This involves the terrain, objects, people, and even the human emotions he experienced. For certain actions of Christ, in an attempt to teach a lesson, coming across as offensive to some people shouldn't surprise anyone. If there truly was a person who knew and preached the ultimate truth, it likely would be offensive or misunderstood in many contexts and not everyone would agree with it. Despite Christ's questionable moments, there are far more amazing ones. While Russell does express agreement with some of Christ's teachings, he doesn't share his thoughts on many of Christ's greatest moments. For example, Christ asked God to forgive those executing him during his crucifixion. I would be curious to hear Russell's thoughts on that.

One point Bertrand Russell states, but doesn't really unpack is the question of Christ even existing. "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one." (Russell). Here, Russell bluntly and unimpressively dismisses the existence of Christ. To a Christian this is a scary idea, but contrary to the common acceptance of this statement among some nonchristian scholars, it is likely that Christ did in fact exist. It's troublesome to me that Russell glazes over this portion of his explanations so quickly. I understand the questioning of the accuracy of biblical texts, especially ones written long after a historical figure is deceased, but to not acknowledge the legitimate oral tradition of the ancient Jews is wrong. In the first century most people didn't have reading or writing skills, so oral history of

religious texts with a strong emphasis on accuracy was vital to their tradition and history. To make a mistake or intentionally tamper with their oral material would be an extreme heresy. The Christians, at the time recently converted Jews, would have shared this tradition and recognized its vitality. While the earliest writings on Jesus date to around a quarter century after his death, our 11 or so historical sources of Jesus within a century of his death make him one of the highest standards for ancient historians. The earliest sources to Alexander the Great date to over 3 centuries after his death and we don't question his existence. There are many other revered historical figures with far lesser credentials, so to dismiss the existence of Jesus so easily, is to doubt every event of ancient history, being that the life, death, and teachings of Jesus are some of the most well sourced histories in the ancient world. Some historians would even say these are the best sourced histories of all. As ridiculous as it may seem, this also stands for the history available to the resurrection of Jesus. Russell mistakenly disregards the legitimacy of Christ as a historical figure and would have been better off in his argument by not bringing up the issue at all. It isn't credible or fair to claim it doubtful that a story is untrue or that a person never existed, because you and your audience were not there to claim your own evidence.

Another one of Russell's weaker arguments resides in his section titled "Has Religion Made Contributions to Civilization?" He of course focuses on Christianity here and cites a few bad examples that Christianity has to show for itself. I'm sure he'd have more were he alive today, but to focus on one side of any issue without acknowledging its counter points is wrong. "'Judge not, that ye be not judged,'" and ask yourself what influence such a text has had on the Inquisition and the Ku Klux Klan." (Russell 15). These are good points and it still baffles me that a practicing group of "Christians" in functional families could attend church on Sundays, after lynching people the night before,

but ultimately, Christianity did end up on the right side of this issue. Martin Luther King himself, was a minister whose world renown contributions to the civil right's movement were heavily influenced by Christianity. While these may be different time eras, they involve the same social issues and religion. Russell's essay was written long before King's time in ministry, but the influence of Christianity eventually worked, as it was meant to in this case. As far as the Ku Klux Klan goes, Jesus disapproved of seemingly righteous and practicing Jews all the time. "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." (Matthew 23.) Not to mention, Jesus was of course crucified by people within his own religion. The K. K. K. isn't a proper example of Christian beliefs. As for Russell's issue with the conduct of Christians, he is stigmatizing them with generalizations in some cases and putting them all into one category. Claiming to practice Christianity or simply identifying as one, does not make you a good acting example of a Christian, even if you are a Christian by Russell's definition.

Russell also mentions how the church, mainly the Catholic church demonizes sexual activity. This is one point I would partially agree with him on. "Almost every adult in a Christian community is more or less diseased nervously as a result of the taboo on sex knowledge when he or she is young." (Russell 29). Christians aren't eager to acknowledge it, but we all make our own interpretations of the religious teachings. As for the many Catholic and Protestant communities I've pursued fellowship with, I can verify that they have all demonized sexual activity, and some forms of it even within wedlock, such as how the Catholic church views the use of contraception. While I think abstinence can be a righteous path for many like within certain religious orders or a unique and valiant approach to marriage, practiced in many religions outside of Christianity also, I can't be sure it's

absolutely necessary to achieve successful Christian religious practice. The book of Leviticus outlines a detailed list of sexual sins to avoid at all costs. You may be surprised to know that premarital sex is not one of them. Many biblical scholars also question the assumed sexual term “orgies” for the context it is used, as it is commonly paired with acts of idolatry, which was a serious problem in the old testament stories. The term “fornication” comes from the Latin term “foricatio”, which refers to intercourse with prostitutes. Sex itself, was likely not the sin, but could be used as a conduit for sin, easily. The way the church has interpreted this does not have to be the way all Christians interpret it, as we all have our own bibles and can all seek our own answers and translations. Russell shouldn't have blamed Christianity as a religion for this, but should hold the churches responsible for their interpretations instead.

Bertrand Russell is a supporter of science and intelligence. He encourages the pursuit of these things a few times throughout the book and argues that Christianity as a social institution seeks to discourage individuals from developing skills and experience in the field of science. He believes religion is mainly based on fear. “Science can help us get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look around for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look at our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of this sort of place that churches in all these centuries have made it.” (Russell 22). I admire Russell's emphasis on humanity facing fear and creating solutions, but I don't agree that religion is an obstacle to that, if practiced correctly. Also, if Russell puts that much confidence into science, he would today be willing to acknowledge certain studies that suggest Christianity in its entirety to be real anyway. Part of what influenced my return to the Catholic church were the miracles of the eucharist.

The Catholic church practices a sacrament in which the priest consecrates the host; bread and wine, into the body and blood of Christ. The religious belief is that there is some sort of legitimate change of the bread and wine into actual flesh and blood. This is known as the transubstantiation. This practice stems from Christ's words at the last supper where he says... The sacrament is meant to not only remind us, but also to make us part of Christ's sacrifice in some way; Christ's sacrifice being the brutal crucifixion. It surprised me to learn that there are consistent scientific studies that regard the consecrated host as legitimate flesh and blood; a piece of a human heart ventricle and human AB blood type to be precise. I understand how absurd this sounds, but these studies are noncatholic and considered reliable scientific studies, as they have been retested and repeated with the same results multiple times. “Two studies conducted by eminent forensic experts with different methodologies have shown that the substance originates from the interior, excluding the hypothesis that someone could have placed it from the exterior. The blood type is AB, similar to the one found in the Host of Lanciano and in the Holy Shroud of Turin.” Kosloski.

Russell later presents an eye opening case in favor of “nice people”, suggesting that they are a dying breed. “To be a nice person it is necessary to be protected from crude contact with reality, and those who do the protecting cannot be expected to share the niceness that they preserve.” (Russell 151). He shares some realistic incites about nice people and their roles in society; mostly feminine caregiver types. What he fails to explain is the difference between nice people and good people. It's a nice person that cares for the greater good, but will never achieve it because it may cause a disturbance. It's a good person who is willing to be persecuted or worse, in the pursuit of the greater good. One example of a good person is a German army soldier, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg who was executed after an attempt to assassinate Hitler in

WW2. Some examples of “nice” people are the many German people who fell in line with the evil ideologies of Nazi Germany, rather than question them. Nice people are quite common in all societies and they certainly don’t mean any harm, but could be capable of it with the wrong leader.. A nice person can’t be trusted, as they mask their intentions with smiles and passive behavior, but a good person cares less for your approval and to spare your feelings, in a vital situation.

While Bertrand Russell has considerable arguments for why he’s not a Christian and later cites many relevant social issues in regards to the church, he doesn’t consider the undeniable personal and cultural aspects of the influence of Christianity. It’s likely that he takes these for granted, as they are that much ingrained in our world wide culture, especially that of western culture. “Culture: the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. Oxford. Culture is a structure of categories that we all participate in and understand. Generally, we all have a similar understanding of the world, at least similar enough to converse and that is something significant. That mutual agreement stems from the bible itself. The bible, the most influential collection of books of all time, makes up a story

(comedy; as it has a happy ending despite its twists and turns) in its sequence. In verbal communication, meaning derives from the relationship between words. The more concepts depend on a specific thing, the more fundamental and vital that idea is. “So now imagine you have an aggregation of texts in a civilization. Which are the fundamental texts? The texts on which most other texts depend. And so you’d put Shakespear way in there in English...Milton and Dante’, fundamental authors, part of the western canon, not because of the arbitrary dictates of power, but because those texts influence more other texts and then you think of that as a hierarchy with the Bible at its base...it isn’t that the Bible is true, its that the bible is the precondition for the manifestation of

truth.” Peterson. This is the basis for story telling, not only in our many forms of modern media, but also in our personal lives. This is a large contribution to how we interpret feelings, thoughts, people, attempt to empathize, pursue relationships, measure value, loyalty, morality, and many other things. The irony is that the bible is fundamental to Russel’s justification against Christianity; how he rationalizes the good and bad that Christianity has to offer, through his series of essays and examples. This is a large part of where his moral lens originates and he doesn’t realize that.

Bertrand Russell attempts to dismantle Christianity in a respectable manner. Aside from challenging one’s beliefs, he doesn’t personally attack many Christians in this book who didn’t deserve it. In the context of spirituality, I would recommend that Christians avoid this book, with hopes to preserve their and grow their beliefs. However, in a logical context, avoiding Russel’s incites would be a harmful thing to do. I read this book with an open mind, but not an open heart. I did my research with the same approach, but I was still forced to reconsider many aspects within my own beliefs and practices. This sort of challenge took me through a turbulent process of highs and lows, as my spiritual life influences many, if not all aspects of my life. My original intention was to understand the concepts of this book as best I could. I didn’t want to bluntly dismiss his ideas and arguments to spare my own innocence. I’m curious to hear more religious opinions on this book, but while I chose to attempt to refute it using logical sources and thought, I know many would happily dismiss the points of the book due to their faith alone. As much as I respect that approach, I must admit that Russell’s ideas are worth listening to.

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# Global Food Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 and the Ukraine War on Foodways and Health

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*Connor Ahrendt*

**Course:** *Foundations of Health and Healing*

**Professor:** Alice Baldwin-Jones

**Student:** Connor Ahrendt

**Essay:** *Global Food Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 and the Ukraine War on Foodways and Health*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to research the global food crisis, focusing on converging disruptions such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the

Ukraine war. Research included assigned readings, educational videos and group discussion.

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The Covid-19 pandemic affected the entire world. According to the article by Lawrence Haddad and Saskia Osendarp, it created three different crises in the world, an economic crisis, food system crisis, and a health crisis. The article calls this a triple threat that has had a significant impact on nutrition. There has been a limited supply of food and a rise in costs for what is available. World hunger has been on the decline for the last decade. Unfortunately, the covid pandemic has caused a steady increase again. Of course, the main focus was on trying to avoid getting the virus and surviving the crisis. However, people in the United States have no idea of the actual impact the pandemic has had on World Hunger. According to David Beasley, the director of the World Food Program, hunger rose 18 percent during the pandemic. Grocery prices have risen 8.6 percent over the past year. The Forbes article discussed the food chain disruption in

great detail. It explained how limited workers and those available were at risk for covid. Food distribution was affected, and therefore food was not being processed. Meat plants closed, many animals were slaughtered due to lack of distribution, crops rotted, and packaging was hit hard. Food banks were low, and people at the poverty level were left starving. The United States was also affected. Many people lost their jobs and were faced with severe physical and mental health issues. It is true that many people did not have enough food to feed their families. The low-income levels were hit the hardest. Luckily the majority of the middle and upper class were concerned over the low supply of just certain items like toilet paper, but that pales compared to the people who were starving. Our country does waste a tremendous amount of food. It is so sad to think of how much food gets thrown away in a local restaurant on any given evening. There needs to

The economic crisis also affected many people. The lockdown forced many businesses to close their doors, losing tremendous amounts of money. Companies had to fire and lay off many employees. Other companies offered the same employment for a lesser amount of money. Companies that stayed open either ran a skeleton crew or had their employees work from home. Many individuals were afraid to leave their homes and report to work. Transportation of products slowed down and created shortages in all markets, not only the food supply. The cost went up on items ranging from lumber to food.

A shortage of health supplies created an even bigger problem. Hospitals were faced with a steady flow of patients. There was not enough PPE for the workers and not enough supplies for the sick. The health crisis affected everyone worldwide, rich or poor. There was no escaping the virus. The news kept reporting information that was changing all the time. People were unsure of what to believe. Clearly, we were not prepared for a crisis of this magnitude.

As if things weren't bad enough, now we are all dealing with the war between Ukraine and Russia. We are lucky that we are not part of the actual war, but it still affects the world as a whole. The consequences of the war are affecting everyone. The economy was just starting to settle down, and now it is out of control again! The economy is hurting for many reasons. The United States has seen a rise in the cost of gas and food prices. Products cannot be bought, sold, or transported from that area. This problem is affecting many businesses that are just starting to get back on their feet. The food system is facing an even bigger problem than it already had. The NY Times article discussed how crops of wheat, barley, and corn from Ukraine and Russia are being destroyed or wasted due to a lack of transportation. Fertilizer is also a leading product that is not able to be transported. Russia is blocking the Black Sea, and Ukraine does not have enough railcars for alternate transportation. Russia has

had many sanctions placed on them, and they are at a standstill in many ways. Russia is financially blocked, and Ukraine is physically blocked. Crops that cannot be transported due to the war are creating havoc on the food industry and World Hunger. Countries can't buy the fertilizer to grow their crops, while others can't purchase crops from countries that they rely on for their food source. Russia is financially ruined due to the sanctions that have been placed on them. The lack of proper nutrition is putting many people at risk of starving to death and contracting numerous diseases. Low-income countries are facing a greater need for healthcare assistance. Ukraine has faced an incredible loss of life and severe physical and mental damage to its civilians. The effects of this war will be felt long after the fighting stops.

The covid 19 pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine have made us all realize how one country's actions can affect the entire world. People are also becoming more aware of the issues that foreign countries face and the depth of their hardships. Maybe we can all walk away from this with respect for one another. It has indeed shown us that many of our systems need to be improved, and money needs to be directed towards what is most needed.

Russia has gone to war with Ukraine, but it is affecting all of us. Most people probably never realized the impact this war would have on the entire world. Hopefully, we will see an end to this war and the covid pandemic, and we can all try to rebuild a better future for us all.

# The Social Standing of Women of Color in the United States: Investigating the Struggles of Women of Color in Climbing the Success Ladder

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*Starmecca Grier*

**Course:** Women and Gender Studies Capstone

**Professor:** Ruth Maher

**Student:** Starmecca Grier

**Essay:** *The Social Standing of Women of Color in the United States: Investigating the Struggles of Women of Color in Climbing the Success Ladder*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to conduct formal, objective research on a subject relative to their major and within the Community & Social Justice sphere.

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## **Introduction**

Historically, women, in comparison to men, have borne the brunt of subjugation and discrimination in the United States. Most women have been compelled to deal with numerous experiences of discrimination and prejudice for ages. Even now, sufficient objective indicia demonstrate that most women still experience various forms of gender-based discrimination. Thus, women of all ethnic groups have a common denominator with women of color but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on black women. As per extant evidence, most minority communities – especially black people – have experienced different forms of racial bias. Such discrimination varies across different aspects of society.

For instance, African American people have notably dominated the headlines regarding fatal encounters with law enforcement officers. The widely covered case of George Floyd perfectly exemplifies the degree to which most black people have experienced brutality at the hands of law enforcement officers. Suppose that one is a woman of color. Sandra Bland was racially profiled during a traffic stop, sent to jail, and was later found hanged in a jail cell in Waller County, Texas with very few statements on her death. Breonna Taylor was fatally shot in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment when at least seven police officers forced entry into her home.

While most American women have been discriminated against in one way or another, black women particularly

stand out. These women experience more severe instances of discrimination due to their skin color. Of profound relevance is the fact that women of color are exposed to limited opportunities for economic growth. This primarily inhibits their potential to succeed in a chauvinistic and predominantly white country. This paper's topic arises from this fact. This paper investigates how black women of color are inhibited from seeing or experiencing economic success like their white counterparts through a systematic review of the literature.

In essence, relevant evidence concerned with this topic was gathered and synthesized. Subsequently, various findings were established. First, this paper found that generally, men get preferential treatment over women. Despite this, white women frequently get preferential treatment over black women. In addition, these women of color find it hard to access health resources such as hospital insurance and high-quality care. Lastly, women of color are also inhibited across many other areas that are frequently overlooked, such as underrepresentation in both houses of Congress, challenges in getting loans, or numerous impediments in establishing businesses.

While many studies have investigated how women, in general, are discriminated against or how black people are subjugated, limited studies were found to have explored the differences between the treatment conferred to white women and that endowed to black women. This research paper attempts to explore this difference and add to the limited existing literature. Such an addition would significantly highlight how the US systemically keeps these specific women of color from earning and/or gaining economic success.

## Background

There has been widespread recognition and acknowledgment that women have traditionally been discriminated against in recent years. Due to this, different stakeholders have taken several incremental

steps to reduce the disparities between women and men in America in various sectors, such as the labor industry (Massie, 2016). For example, political parties, have attempted to use legislation to bridge the gap between women and men through affirmative action. Irrespective of these efforts, credible findings show that not all women have benefitted equally from these efforts. According to Kohut & Keeter (2003), a significant share of people, predominantly white people, were against implementing an affirmative action initiative due to a perception that it would mainly benefit women of color to the detriment of white women. Fast forward, and the actual outcomes of affirmative action are significantly different than had been anticipated. Outcomes show that white women are the significant beneficiaries of affirmative action (Massie, 2016). These disparities range from education and wages to healthcare and equality.

Most black women still find it hard to access quality healthcare. At the same time, black women do not access equal education opportunities as white women (Massie, 2016). Of all populations, the significance of healthcare for women cannot be questioned. Women require efficient care due to a plethora of reasons. Despite this, the healthcare inequality between white and black women in the United States is still astonishing. The government has shown efforts to address this through the Affordable Care Act. The provisions of this act primarily called on American states to expand Medicaid coverage for people from low-income families. Black American women would benefit from Medicaid expansion in numerous ways. In this sense, "Under the expansion, Medicaid eligibility would be extended to adults up to age 64 with incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty level" (Health Insurance Organization, n.d.).

Now, why is this detail essential? As per extant data, it is fair to suggest that black women form a significant part of low-income families. According to 2019 census data, black people make up a tremendous 23.8% of

the poverty population, i.e., the people living below the federal poverty line (The United States Census Bureau, 2020). Of this number, a significant share is made up of women living as single mothers. The financial strain imposed on black women living as single mothers cannot be overlooked. Most black single women and their children do not access care easily due to numerous financial constraints (Health Insurance Organization, n.d.). This explains the necessity of Medicaid expansion.

Moreover, there are considerable differences in wages between white women and black women, with white women earning more than their black counterparts. All this points to issues of equality and inequality; it is the opinion of this paper that there is no equality between the treatment of white and black women. In the context of this paper, equality is defined as the state of being equal in accessing opportunities. Before getting into finer details, it is also worth mentioning that inequality is an inherent challenge plaguing American society.

Most scholarly work has focused on gender inequality and racial inequality. The latter has already been discussed extensively in this introduction. It is fair to also provide some coverage for the former. Irrespective of the progress the US has made concerning eradicating gender inequality, this still remains one of the inherent challenges facing American society. Gender inequality is still evident across many aspects of American society, including pay gaps, education, social institutions, politics, social and cultural norms, and political participation (Quffa, 2016). Women are significantly underrepresented across many areas of contemporary American society.

Nonetheless, existing data on this matter also demonstrates the progress made towards eliminating the most notable gender disparities in American society. An excellent example can be seen in the trends of minimum wage differences between men and women in America over the past four decades. Recent

data collected by the Pew Research Center implies that the wage gap between women and men has significantly reduced. For instance, during the 1980s, the wage gap between women and men aged 25 to 34 was 33 cents (Barroso & Brown, 2021). In 2020, the wage gap is seven cents (Barroso & Brown, 2021). Without question, this is an illustration of the progress made thus far. Despite these signs of progress, women of color still lag in this regard. For this reason, this paper seeks to assess this topic further.

## Methodology

As discussed earlier, this research paper utilizes a systematic review as its core methodology. For this reason, the researcher critically evaluates three crucial parameters. These include a case study, comparative statistics, and census data. These parameters are evaluated for different reasons. For instance, comparative statistics are reviewed to conclusively establish the inequality between white women and women of color through variables such as wage gaps, access to healthcare, and other factors. Similarly, census data is also reviewed to garner the comparative differences between women of color and white women. Furthermore, a case study is also examined to understand better the challenges confronted by women of color in the country. All findings from these reviews are synthesized and explored in this research paper.

## Argument

### White Women get Preferential Treatment over Black Women

Generally, inequality has been a long-standing issue in America. This also explains the significant literature on inequality in the USA. Now, as addressed in a previous section of this entry, significant progress has been made to eliminate some of the common discrepancies or elements of inequality between women and men in

America. However, black women still bear the brunt of inequality. This section acknowledges that little has been done to highlight how white women may receive preferential treatment over black women. Hence, it evaluates the possibility that white women often receive preferential treatment over black women.

While men have historically received preferential treatment over women, most findings also demonstrate that white women often get preferential treatment over women of color. It is worth noting that incremental efforts have been directed toward reducing the significant wage gaps between men and women in America over the years. Despite these efforts, there are still notable discrepancies. For example, according to Wisniewski (2022), “national median earnings for civilians who worked full-time, year-round in the past 12 months was \$53,544 for men compared to \$43,394 for women” (p.1). These wage gaps primarily illustrate the extent of the inequality problem in America.

However, Wisniewski (2022) further contends that some of these wage differences come down to the kind of employment women occupy compared to men. To this end, Wisniewski (2022) explicates those men occupy most top occupations. These occupations are – quite expectedly – the most well-paying. Even so, when comparing black and white women, there are tremendous differences. For this reason, Bleiweis et al. (2021) argue that “Women of color continue to suffer the most severe gender wage gap in the United States, a reality that reflects the effects of intersecting racial, ethnic, and gender biases that threaten the economic security of them and their families” (p.1). Even though women of color have consistently exhibited the highest levels of participation in the labor force, they only earn 63 cents for every 1 dollar earned by white women.

These disparities do not end here. However, it is essential to acknowledge that there are several contributing factors to the differences portrayed in this case. For instance, most women of color lack equal

educational opportunities as white women. At the same time, most white women hold superior positions to women of color. In a 1995 report, it was indicated that 57,250 white women occupied managerial positions (Massie, 2016). This compares to 19,000 Latinos and 10,500 African Americans (Massie, 2016). Education is a root cause for most of these

challenges. The inability to access better education means that women of color are limited in terms of the occupations they can occupy or other economic opportunities they may get.

This is further evidenced by the discrepancies between black and white women in accessing good jobs. In a recent research report by the Center for American Progress, Weller (2019) verifies that black women continue to face systemic hurdles in accessing stable and well-paying jobs. As per American economic data, black women get fewer employment opportunities, poorer benefits, lower pay, and considerable job instability as compared to their white counterparts. While more black women currently have increased opportunities for jobs, most of these jobs are unstable and not well-paying. In contrast, most white women have access to more stable opportunities. Additionally, they occupy a great share of well-paying jobs than black women (Weller, 2019).

### **Unequal Access to Health Resources**

Healthcare is one of the essential topics in contemporary American society. In recent years, this topic has attracted immense controversy. One of the most memorable controversies concerning this topic in recent years centers on President Obama’s Obamacare. While this policy was intended to make healthcare affordable to all populations, especially the poor, it received significant opposition across numerous social circles. The fact remains that black people, who make up a great share of low-income families in America, still find it difficult to access health resources. For black women, particularly single mothers, the situation is even worse.

Women of color are limited in their access to health resources; compared to white women, women of color do not access similar insurance policies, high-quality care, and other essential parameters related to female health. It is inarguable that for women, healthcare access is fundamental. This is because of the distinctive healthcare needs of female health and wellbeing, such as close care during pregnancy. While notable improvements regarding black women's access to healthcare have been made in recent years, significant gaps still exist.

According to Chinn et al. (2021), the healthcare disparities between African American and white women can be seen through parameters such as life expectancy. As per the latest data, African American women have a shorter life expectancy than their white counterparts (Chinn et al., 2021). Furthermore, maternal mortality rates are higher among women of color than white women (Chinn et al., 2021). These factors are attributed to the fact that healthcare costs in America are astronomical, and few women of color can afford expensive insurance policies to cover these lucrative healthcare costs (Chinn et al., 2021).

Numerous issues burden African American women. For example, women of color make up the most significant share of single mothers (Chinn et al., 2021). In addition to this, a good number of these women are unemployed. In cases where these women are employed, they earn lower salaries than their white counterparts. These factors contribute to the lack of access to quality healthcare among women of color. Even though these women experience all these challenges, they have minimal support from the government or non-governmental stakeholders. This is irrespective of most of the essential incentives for these disparities being well known even among governmental stakeholders. As Chin et al. (2021) reaffirm, "The health inequities experienced by Black women are not merely a cross-section of time or the result of a singular incident" (p.212).

It is impossible to wrap this section without mentioning the Affordable Care Act and its effects on black women. As noted in a previous section, black women have generationally confronted many challenges in accessing better healthcare resources. Hence, when this legislation was implemented, one of its primary objectives was to promote quality care among disadvantaged populations, including black women. Indeed, some studies have investigated the effects or outcomes of the Obamacare Act. Most of the extant findings seem to suggest that the impact of the Obamacare Act has been substantial and of significant benefit to women.

According to Chaudry et al. (2019), the rates of uninsured persons across America have substantially gone down since the implementation of Obamacare. Most of these changes have been exhibited across most black, low-income communities. As per Chaudry et al. (2019), minority groups appear to have benefitted the most from the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. For example, the coverage gap between black and white people was 11% in 2013 (Chaudry et al., 2019). However, after the implementation of this act, this gap considerably fell to 5.3% in 2017.

At the same time, the gap between black nonelderly adults lacking coverage in 2013 was 20.5% (Chaudry et al., 2019). In 2017, this gap reduced to 12.3% (Chaudry et al., 2019). While no specific data has definitively looked at how black women have benefitted from the Obamacare Act, using the findings presented above, it is easy to predict that black women have similarly benefitted from this piece of legislation. To an extent, it has reduced the gap between white and black women on the question of equal access to care.

### **Other Overlooked Opportunities for Success**

The previous sections of this paper have thus far evaluated some of the common parameters that

highlight the disparities between white and black women in America. However, there is a wide array of other factors that illustrate the disparities between white and black women in America. In this sense, black women typically confront numerous obstacles on the path to success. This section reviews other overlooked opportunities for success involving black women.

In addition to the essential factors discussed above, women of color have also been overlooked across many other opportunities for success. An excellent example is in the banking sector; concerning this, most black women do not access loan facilities like white women. Again, this outcome is incentivized by several factors. For example, as earlier stated, most African women do not occupy similar lucrative positions as white women. Due to this, their wages are much lower than most of their white counterparts. Consider this; Frye (2019) explains that the gap in pay between women of color and white men over the course of their (the women of color) careers is a significant \$946,120.

Lower income means that most women of color can only access loans at higher facilities or interest fees. It is even more daunting for single African American mothers who may be unemployed to access loans. While high-interest rates generally affect Americans of all social circles, especially lower income and poor, black women tremendously suffer from this challenge due to the many other things affecting them. For example, the previous section identified that black women do not have equal access to stable and well-paying jobs as white women. Hence, when these women are also compelled to take loans with higher facilities, this affects them substantially. The current lack of opportunities for well-paying high value jobs destabilizes the lives of most women of color. The financial instability accompanying such situations makes it hard for women of color to access vital loan facilities that can propel or expedite their road to success. Not having these privileges limits women of color in advancement in many ways.

For instance, most women of color cannot get loan facilities to boost their businesses or purchase their homes due to these limitations. These factors create a space for setbacks and forces African American women to either heavily delay their ventures by funding themselves or . It is also worth touching on the underrepresentation of women of color in leadership positions. Under corporate leadership, only one woman of color heads a Fortune 500 company (Carter & Peters, 2016). Most studies contend that social, economic, and interpersonal barriers unify to prevent women from reaching or occupying these leadership positions (Carter & Peters, 2016). For example, the underrepresentation of women in politics is centered on an interpersonal belief among women that politics is meant for men (Showunmi, 2021). These perceptions greatly hold women back.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is well evident that American society is systemically designed in a way that explicably and adversely hinders women of color from progressing or climbing the success ladder. As this paper suggests, there are many credible justifications for this view. These factors are reviewed using a multidimensional approach. First, the research findings indicate that historically, men have received preferential treatment over women in America. However, when women of color are compared with white women, it is unquestionable that the latter receives preferential access and treatment over the former.

As the researcher highlights, most white women have higher wages than women of color. Additionally, most white women occupy more managerial positions than women of color. These discrepancies are similarly replicated in many other areas. In healthcare, white women have access to quality healthcare due to their ability to afford more expensive healthcare covers. Women of color are limited in this respect. Most of the challenges facing women of color culminate from their

lower social stance, meaning that they confront challenges in accessing loans, quality healthcare, or better education for their children.

This research paper makes many urgent revelations. Hence, this paper hopes that crafting this research paper will evoke expert attention and action on the topic and add to the existing literature. In addition, the researcher recommends increased expert attention to this topic. It is presumed that current events such as

the process of the confirmation of Honorable Jackson to the Supreme Court will help people shift their focus to the plight of the urgent need to understand the prevailing motives behind the preferential treatment of white women over black women as well as raise the potential of triggering a response from legislators that will change systemic America. A change in systemic America must include a focus on the needs and state of Black women, particularly African American women.

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# Confidence and Aspirations

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*Lucas Solej*

**Course:** 19th Century Women's Voices

**Professor:** Barbara Suess

**Student:** Lucas Solej

**Essay:** *Confidence and Aspirations*

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## **Assignment:**

The goal for this assignment was for students to provide a literary or cultural analysis related to one or more of the texts read in class this semester. Students

were expected to write a proposal, a reflection, and documentation of the research that informed their project.

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It had been a few months since my departure from the Bloomfield household. I searched every newspaper, every inch and every corner, looking for someone in desperate need of a governess. Each attempt to reach out to potential clients resulted in disappointment. This was until one gloomy morning when my mother handed me a paper she was rather excited about.

"Agnes, come see." She beckoned me over, very eagerly.

"Yes, mother?"

"Come see," she repeated as she forced the paper in front of me.

"Hold it still so I can read it!" I teased. When I finally grasped the paper away, I was rather shocked at to what she was referring. Right there, in the center of the page, was an advertisement. A wealthy family from the countryside was seeking for a governess. Their pay was high, likely as high as their expectations.

"But, mother," I replied. "Surely they are looking for someone with more experience. I have only been a

governess for a few weeks! A household of this stature is likely searching for decades of governing."

"Have you seen the pay?" she asked. I was well aware of how much they were offering, more money than any other governess advertisement I have seen in my entire life. "It is still worth a try," she calmly reminded me, and I agreed. One thing happened after another, and I forgot about the proposal for a while, understandably. I did not lend it my entire confidence. That was, until, a response fatefully showed up in our mailbox one morning! The Lady of the House, Mrs. Darcy, wanted to meet with me! Soon enough, I found myself saying goodbye to my family and being sent out into the world once more. It all happened so fast! Before I knew it, I was already on my way to the Darcy household.

As the carriage traveled along the path, the storm around us began to grow stronger. Snow piled up all around us so quickly that it was a challenge to see even ten feet in front of the horse. This did not stop

the Darcy mansion from making its presence known, however. I was not even sure it was a house at first. As its shadow loomed in the distance, I was certain it was too enormous to be anyone's house. But, sure enough, I was eventually dropped off on its doorstep. I knocked on the door as the icy winds howled around us. There was no response, at first, and I refused to come off as rude for knocking once more.

Some time passed, and sure enough, there was still no response. I was moments away from knocking on the door a second time when it finally opened. My hand was already halfway committed to the knock, so when Mrs. Darcy herself opened the door, I was ashamed to admit I was somewhat fumbling over myself.

"Goodness!" She winced as the cold wind greeted her before I could. "Come in at once," she ordered.

"Thank you, thank you," I responded, more than urgently trying to escape the horrible weather. Looking back, I am sure I looked rather helpless, which was not an ideal first impression. I was caught off guard by the interior of the lobby. The walls and ceilings were adorned with the most lavish paintings I had ever seen! I was certain museums existed with less artwork seen in just this one room.

"Come," Mrs. Darcy beckoned me. "We shall discuss in another room. Would you like anything?"

"Hot tea, if you may." Although I was trying my best to make my best impressions, warming myself up was my second most urgent priority. As Mrs. Darcy led me through what felt like a labyrinth of hallways, I was certain I would be lost for all of eternity without her guidance. By now the sun had set, so she guided me with a candlestick. For a mansion this large, I was certain a servant of some sort would have been the one to greet me. Mrs. Darcy being here herself warranted great respect, something I was more than willing to offer her. It was then that I realized we had not said a single word to each other since meeting at the front door!

"Thank you for letting me in," I reassured her.

"Of course," she responded. We were now walking side by side as we talked. "I prefer to do as much as I can myself."

"I see. I appreciate the effort."

"Enough of that." Mrs. Darcy nearly rolled her eyes at me. "It was no trouble." Although her words were reassuring, I quickly took the hint. Her appearance was quite admirable. She was dressed regally and much younger than I had expected for a mother of three. Although she looked young, her youth was weighed down by, well, something. I could not tell what, but something felt off about her, as if something was wrong and I had no idea what. I hoped that I did nothing to offend her. It was not before long that I found myself seated in what was likely one of the mansion's many dining rooms. Mrs. Darcy placed her candlestick at the center of the dining table, which was long enough to seat tens if not dozens of people. "Have a seat," she ordered.

"Thank y-" nearly slipped through my lips before I chose to silently seat myself. I was at one end of the table and Mrs. Darcy at the other. The only sources of light were the candlestick and a fireplace in the corner. The candlestick barely illuminated the artwork that covered every last centimeter of the room, causing an effect where the figures depicted looked upon us with rather sinister expressions. The warm glow of the fireplace made it easier to see the falling snow through the frosted windows.

"So, Ms. Grey," Mrs. Darcy began to speak. Being so far away, I could barely hear her. "Yes?" I offered a response. It was then that Mrs. Darcy began to smile.

"How foolish of me," she laughed to herself. "Please, move closer so we may discuss the position." I did as she asked, now sitting to her immediate left. "Thank you for coming in this horrible weather."

"Such a thing is not a problem," I smiled. I wanted to

display how diligent I could be even in the worst conditions. Now that I am pondering for a moment, I realize I do have my limits. The Bloomfield family proved too much to handle. If I even manage to secure the job at all, how disappointed I would be to fail once more! How embarrassed would my own family be?

“You know, when I was your age, my family could not afford a governess. I was one of five sisters,” she spoke with a hint of nostalgia in her voice. Oh no, she had been talking while I was lost in my own thoughts!

“Oh, really?” I politely responded, trying my best to catch up to the conversation. “Could you tell me more about that, Mrs. Darcy?”

“Hm? Oh, of course! I would be delighted. And please, call me Elizabeth.” She began to recount the events of her life that led up to this point. I was only asking out of politeness for the sake of conversation, but soon enough I found myself lost in the tale! Sure, it tended to drone on and on, but I found the recount incredibly fascinating. In turn, she was inquisitive of my own life. I did not share everything, but I answered each question to the best of my ability. We talked and talked for hours, not even realizing that time was passing at all. By the end, the fireplace had been reduced to smoldering embers. We had only noticed because the candles nearby were almost completely melted themselves.

“What time is it?” I asked as politely as I could. Weariness was building up under my eyelids. I looked to the clock mounted over the fireplace only to realize that midnight had come and gone hours ago. I had not even realized that the tea I was offered never arrived, but I thought nothing of it at the time.

“My goodness! We must continue this conversation tomorrow, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind at all, Mrs. D- er- I mean, Elizabeth.”

“Wonderful!” Soon enough, we were retired for the night. I found myself sleeping in a bed more luxurious

than I had ever seen in my life! I’m sure the queen’s own bed was not this comfortable.

The following morning flew by in such a rush, that before I even knew it I was back in the dining room with Elizabeth. She insisted that we continued our meeting straight away in private. Servants were bringing in an assortment of trays that carried a banquet fit for royalty. Elizabeth herself looked different somehow. Last night she looked rather pale and weary, but now she looked a bit healthier and brighter.

“Good morning, Ms. Grey,” she greeted me as I walked into the room.

“You may call me Agnes,” I insisted.

“Of course. Please have a seat, Agnes.” I sat in the same seat as I had before, as did she.

“I would like to continue where we left off.” I folded my fingers, eagerly awaiting whatever questions she had prepared. This was my opportunity to make an impression if I were to stand out from every other possible governess with professional training. I, myself, was not a professional, but I still have many skills and fluencies with which to impress Elizabeth. What would she ask about first, I wondered. How many languages can I speak? My fluency in music? Whatever she asked first, I was ready to answer. The entire night was spent preparing each possible response over and over so I could answer as fluently and professionally as possible.

“What does your independence mean to you?” she asked.

“Oh?”

“Yes, your independence.”

“I- uh...is this related to the position?”

“Yes and no,” Elizabeth affirmed. I was so caught off guard that I struggled for nearly up to two minutes to piece myself back together. “You want to be a governess, yes?”

“More than anything in the world,” I replied. Last night, I had caught her up with most of my history that made me look favorable. I never mentioned the Bloomfields because of how humiliated I still felt about the whole situation, even after months.

“You traveled all of this way, even uncertain you were going to get the position,”

Elizabeth reminded me. “When I was your age, I could not have dreamed of traveling so far for any reason. I once walked for miles on foot, but you traveled ten times that much in the snow.”

“I am aware,” I responded. I had no idea at the time where this was going. I was just trying my best to play along.

“You told me you had some experience, but you did not go into much detail,” said Elizabeth. There was certainly no advantage to bringing up the Bloomfields now. “You are aware that there are dozens of other governesses with more experience?”

“Yes...” I bit my lip. Did she bring me here to humiliate me?

“Yet, here you are,”

“Yes, I am here,” I swallowed my nerves. I took a deep breath and somehow managed to regain my footing in the conversation. “I am more than equipped for the job. I have experience in-”

“No, no, no. You don’t understand,” Elizabeth interrupted. “You told me your father was very ill, yes?”

“That is true,” I insisted.

“If money is your goal, then there are easier ways to obtain it. So many girls your age run off and marry wealthy. Why on Earth would you want to travel halfway across the country to slave away for someone else’s children?”

“Where is the principle in such a thing?” I responded.

“Oh?”

“In my perspective, if one were to want something so bad, by all of the work and failures it takes to achieve it are worth it in the end.”

“Then tell me,” Elizabeth commanded. “Tell me of your failures.” It was this moment I realized that I was left with no other choice. She knew I was briefly governess for the Bloomfields, but I had to tell the truth about my failure there, even if it made me look like a poor candidate.

“I had no choice but to leave,” I started. “I was unable to keep up with their unruly demands. I was so certain that I was able to handle the tasks, and yet, I still failed. But, I know not all people are like them. It was a learning experience that made me a better person. You were generous enough to share your life story, Elizabeth, and it was inspiring. I know that no family is perfect, but there are genuinely good people out there. You are one of them.”

“I see,” Elizabeth nodded. “You are confident.”

“Thank you,” I replied, unsure what to make of her response.

“But, and more importantly, you are not prideful.”

“That is correct.”

“So, to ask my question a second time, what does your independence mean to you?” I was ready to answer now. My fears and anxieties were no longer in the room with us.

“Being able to do what I love is worth any price. It does not matter the distance or time it takes to achieve it.”

“That is wonderful to hear.” Elizabeth smiled warmly at me. The morning light made the snow on the ground outside glisten and beam through the open windows, which was nearly blinding. “When you are done with your breakfast, meet me in the lobby.” I did as I was told and soon met up with her where she requested. The lobby looked less threatening in the daytime.

“Walk with me,” Elizabeth commanded.

“Is everything alright?” I inquired.

“More than alright,” she reassured me. “When I was your age, I struggled so hard to fight for what I believed in. Even adults struggle with letting go of their pride. This is not something you struggle with as much as I. You are the kind of person to learn from your mistakes, and as you grow older, you will continue to grow and change.”

“If I may,” I interrupted. “But I am still not sure what any of this has to do with the role of a governess.”

“You are right,” Elizabeth. “You are aware now of my scheme. Yes, the role of a governess for my children still needs to be filled, but recently I had slipped into a terrible melancholy. I have my own regrets, Agnes. There was more I wish I could have done throughout my life, both related and unrelated to my story with Mr. Darcy. When I read your letter, inquiring for the job, I must say I saw a bit of myself in you.”

“Truly?” I asked.

“Yes. I have to say, I think both of us needed this meeting. I feel a great satisfaction out of knowing people like us are out there in the world. It was almost as if fate had brought us into each other’s lives.”

“Most certainly,” I agreed. I truly did agree, reader. Speaking to the older and now wiser Elizabeth had really helped me put things into perspective. The worries of the Bloomfield incident repeating again no longer bothered me. I was more than shocked to hear that Elizabeth gained so much from our discussion.

“Please pardon my unprofessionalism,” Elizabeth said. “I made so much of my inner turmoil a burden on you.”

“It is more than alright,” I reminded her.

“As I grow older, I realize that I have inherited some of my lunacy from my mother,” she laughed. “I owe you a proper rundown of the job. Are you still interested?”

“Of course!” I said with confidence. Elizabeth then told me we were on our way to meet her children and Mr.

Darcy himself. Although I was nervous, I had no true fear. This was just another step in my journey. I was certain that no matter what happened, I would be alright. I knew that if they were to hire me, it would be quite exciting news. If they were to turn me away, or if I needed to leave prematurely, it would be equally as fine. No matter where I would go from there, I was still me and that was all I needed.

Dear reader, I do have some unfortunate news. As much as Elizabeth liked me, the Darcy family did not hire me after all. After meeting with Mr. Darcy, he insisted that they were looking for someone with more experience, as I had suspected. After breaking the unfortunate news, Elizabeth pulled me aside.

“Pay no mind to his rudeness,” she insisted. “It truly is nothing personal, Agnes. I truly am sorry.” I reassured her that everything was okay. Even after all this time, I knew deep down that the odds were not in my favor. “I feel like you could have been a sister,” she said, and I felt the same. We hugged before my departure, and soon enough I was on my way. As the Darcy manor vanished in the distance, I knew that she was still with me in spirit.

I finally arrived home a few days later, exhausted and weary, and reunited with my family. My mother was waiting at the door with more job opportunities waiting in the flyers in hand. I did not feel discouraged at all. Soon enough, the Murray family eventually responded to my letter and was more than eager to have me be their governess.

All the while, the rejection from the Darcy family did little to deter my spirits and I am certain Elizabeth knew that to some degree. We still write to each other from time to time. I kept her up to date with my time with the Murrays as she did with her own family. She and Mr. Darcy eventually agreed on a governess, but she still insisted I was irreplaceable. I wish I could have been the governess for the Darcys. I am sure God wills things to happen for a reason, and I am certain our

meeting was no accident. It was truly an experience  
the both of us would remember for the rest of our lives.

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# The Influence of Social Support Systems on Mental Health Quality

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*Jordyn M. Rush*

**Course:** Research Methods, Psychology

**Professor:** Natalie A. Obrecht

**Student:** Jordyn M. Rush

**Essay:** *The Influence of Social Support Systems on Mental Health Quality*

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## **Assignment:**

Students were asked to read at least four professional peer-reviewed journal articles, design a study,

and collect/analyze data in order to examine a psychological question.

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Isolation and lack of support can be detrimental for one's mental health, especially if those individuals are more susceptible to those factors. According to a study on social support systems and mental health in college students, Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) found that students that identify as a minority were more likely to be isolated, and therefore were at a higher risk of developing a mental disorder. The study measured how both the quantity and quality of social support independently affect mental health, with both parts of the study being conducted through the participants responding to surveys. Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) hypothesized that more isolated populations are more likely to develop mental health-related disorders, with these populations including minority groups and those of a lower socioeconomic class; factors such as race, gender, financial stability, and living situation (who lives with them) were all considered. To make

associations between social support and mental health, students were assessed for different types of mental health-related disorders and symptoms, in which higher scores indicated a higher likelihood of having that certain disorder (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

Additionally, studies conducted by Mereish and Poteat (2015) and Eres, Postolovski, Thiekling, and Lim (2021) found similar results regarding individuals who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community. Mereish and Poteat (2015) hypothesized that associations between distal and proximal minority stress and physical and psychological distress were brought about by shame, poor relationships, and isolation. To test this hypothesis on minority stress, a LGBTQIA+ sample of participants were looked at regarding variables such as distal stressors (discrimination and rejection), proximal stressors (internalized homophobia and concealment

motivation), mediating factors (shame, poorer quality relationships, and loneliness) and health factors (psychological distress and physical distress). Results showed that minority stressors, via indirect paths such as shame and loneliness (high levels of loneliness, caused by shame and or poor relationships, are significantly associated with distress, for example), were significantly associated and in turn, could possibly result in psychological and physical distress (Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Eres, Postoloviski, Thielking and Lim's (2021) study hypothesized that LGBTQIA+ individuals would report higher levels of loneliness, depression, and social anxiety, as well as higher risks of poor social support and social isolation, compared to a group that does not identify with the community. All participants were given an online survey via Qualtrics and were assessed on the following measurements: loneliness, depression, social anxiety, risk of social isolation, social support, sense of belonging, and quality of life. As expected from the study, the results showed that the LGBTQIA+ group had higher levels of loneliness, had poorer mental health regarding depression and social anxiety, and reported disrupted social support in comparison to the non-LGBTQIA+ group (Eres, 2021).

In a study assessing social support and mental health in transgender communities, Pflum, Testa, Balsam, and Goldblum (2015) hypothesized that connectedness in the community would be negatively associated with depression and anxiety, in addition to Caucasian transgender and queer individuals having higher measures in connectedness in comparison to ethnic minority individuals identifying the same way. The study measured general social support, trans community connectedness, depressive symptoms, and generalized anxiety symptoms, with all measurements involving Likert-type scale items. The study showed that for both transgender male and transgender female participants, social support was negatively associated with depression and generalized anxiety symptoms (Pflum, 2015). However, there was a lack of

ethnic minorities that participated so the results could only suggest that Caucasian trans individuals were more likely to feel connected in their community than ethnic minority trans individuals.

All these studies suggest the hardships that these minority groups face, whether it be isolation from non-minority groups, lack of support from friends and family, or connectedness within their own communities, are associated with lower quality mental health. They also suggest that, in general, low quality support systems will negatively affect mental health. According to the results of these studies, I conducted my own non-experimental study that looked at the relationship between social support quality and mental health quality. I expected that having a greater social support system will be associated with a positive mental health rating. In addition to this prediction, I expect that participants identifying as both a racial minority and sexual minority will have the poorest quality social support and mental health, while white and heterosexual individuals will have the best quality.

## Method

The sample consisted of 157 adult participants that were recruited via a convenience sample; the students who participated in making the research questions were asked to collect as many participants as they could in order to collect their data. As many of the researchers go to school at William Paterson University, it is likely that most participants selected are also college students. Out of the participants, 33.12% identified as White, 40.76% identified as Black or African American, 2.55% identified as Asian, 20.38% identified as Hispanic or Latin American, and 3.18% identified as "Other". Additionally, the majority of the sample (81.53%) identified as heterosexual, while 2.55% identified as gay, 2.55% as lesbian, 11.46% as bisexual, and 1.91% as "Other". Participants were asked to answer questions developed by multiple students for a research project via an online Qualtrics survey. Partici-

participants were sent the online survey and were given ample time to complete it. Informed consent was given as a result of completing the survey. The questions, “Overall, how would you describe your mental health?” and “How would you rate the quality of your social support systems (people in your life that can help you)?” were used for a non-experimental study; all participants were given the same questions to respond to and were asked to self-report their ratings for each. These questions, both scaled from 1 to 5 (See Appendix 1), were used to assess the quality of their support systems and the quality of their mental health, where higher scores indicated greater quality support systems and better-quality mental health. To avoid any order effects, the questions given to each participant were randomized. Participants were also asked to answer demographic questions so any associations with their responses could be looked at; the demographic questions about race and sexuality were used in the dataset for this study (See Appendix 1).

## Results

Although the survey sample ( $N=157$ ) was enough to find significant data, I feel as if the results were not very representative of the general population, as I was genuinely surprised by the results. As my main hypothesis was looking at the quality of people's support systems, I found that the respondents rated their support systems on average of 3.75 ( $M=3.75$ ,  $SD=.97$ ) on the 1 to 5 scale, meaning that most believed their support systems were either okay or good. My main hypothesis also looked at people's mental health ratings, in which the respondents rated their mental health at an average of 3.17 ( $M=3.17$ ,  $SD=.96$ ) on the 1 to 5 scale, meaning most rated their mental health to be okay.

For my main hypothesis, I predicted that there would be a positive relationship between the quality of support systems and mental health rating. I found that my results supported my hypothesis; the results of a

correlation showed that the relationship between the two was positive, significant and had a medium effect size ( $r(155)=.33$ ,  $p<.001$ , see Figure 1). This indicated that as people have a greater support system, their mental health is likely to be better.

My additional hypotheses looked at any possible interactions between demographics and their ratings. My prediction for these hypotheses was that individuals that identify as white and heterosexual would have both better support systems and better mental health. Because the sample size for certain demographics were too small, arrangements were made to help identify significant results; those who answered “Asian” and “Other” were taken out of the sample due to low response rate, making the sample smaller than before ( $N=148$ ), and all sexualities other than heterosexual were combined into one group, “Non-Heterosexual”. These hypotheses were not supported by my results, which were conducted via two 3x2 factorial ANOVAs. When the 3x2 factorial ANOVA was conducted to look at the independent variables, race and sexuality, influencing the dependent variable, quality of support systems, sexuality did not have a main effect on support systems ( $F(2,142)=.54$ ,  $p=.46$ ), but there was a significant main effect of race influencing support systems ( $F(2,142)=4.19$ ,  $p=.017$ ,  $\eta^2=.056$ ). White individuals reported a higher average quality of support systems ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=.89$ ), meaning that most white individuals reported that they had a good quality support system. However, there was no significant interaction found ( $F(2,142)=.17$ ,  $p=.84$ , see Figure 2). Another 3x2 factorial ANOVA was conducted to look at the independent variables, race and sexuality, influencing the dependent variable, mental health ratings. Sexuality did not have a main effect on mental health ratings ( $F(2,142)=1.31$ ,  $p=.26$ ), but race did have a significant main effect on the ratings ( $F(2,142)=3.42$ ,  $p=.035$ ,  $\eta^2=.046$ ). The results showed that black individuals had the highest rating for mental health ( $M=3.30$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) compared to white ( $M=3.10$ ).

$SD=.89$ ) or Hispanic individuals ( $M=3.13, SD=.91$ ). There was a significant interaction with a medium effect size between race and sexuality on their influence on mental health rating ( $F(2,142)=4.08, p=.019, \eta^2=.054$ ). According to the means, mental health steadily decreased if the individual identified as white and non-heterosexual ( $M=2.3, SD=.94$ , see Figure 3).

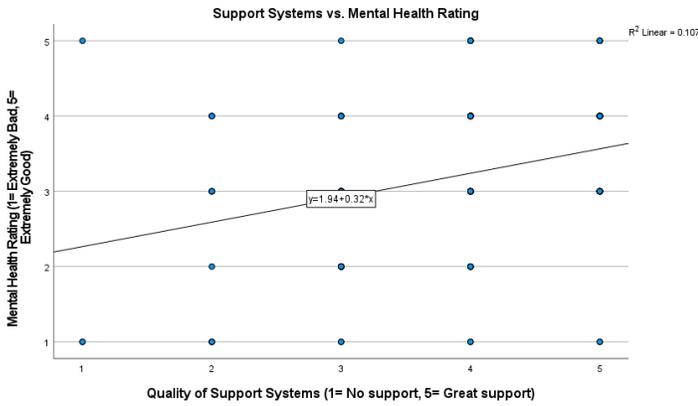


Figure 1. Mean support system ratings on a 1 to 5 scale being compared with mean mental health ratings, also on a 1 to 5 scale. Higher numbers indicate greater support and greater mental health

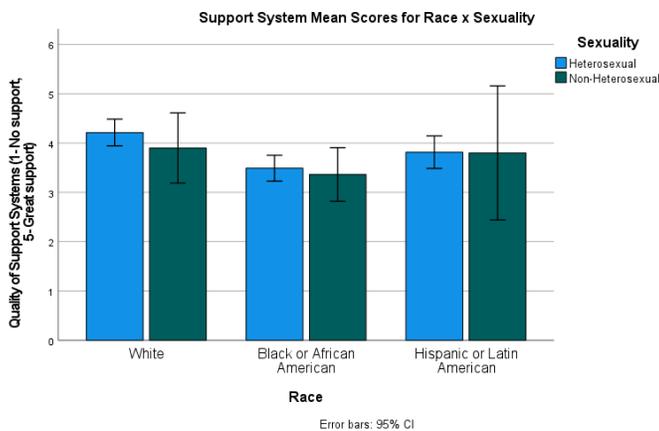


Figure 2. Mean support system ratings showing interactions between race and sexuality. Standard error bars are shown.

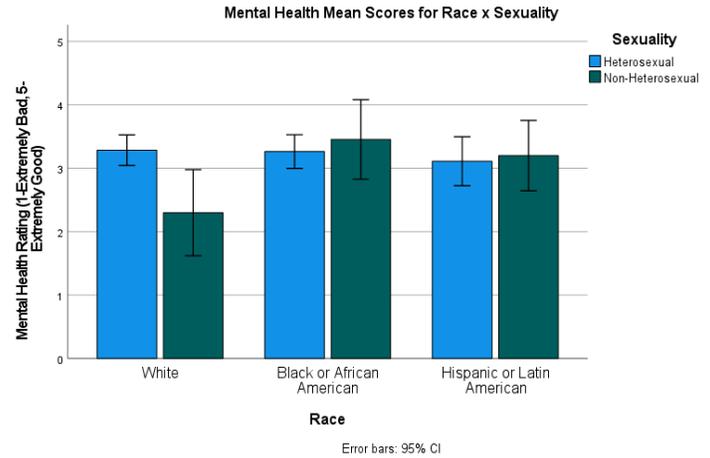


Figure 3. Mean mental health ratings showing interactions between race and sexuality. Standard error bars are shown.

## Discussion

My main research question looks at the quality of social support systems and its influence on mental health. My hypothesis, stating that quality of support systems has a positive relationship with mental health, was supported in both my results and studies mentioned previously. Results showed in both cases that as the quality of support systems increase, so does mental health ratings. However, my secondary hypothesis, stating that race and sexuality interact to influence both quality of support systems and mental health, was not supported by the results of this study. The interaction only influenced mental health ratings, where white individuals had worse mental health ratings than other races if they also identified as non-heterosexual. There are many factors that may play into these results, including possible internalized homophobia, lack of support in regard to sexuality alone, or simply due to low response rates regarding non-heterosexual individuals. As studies have proven minority status and sexuality do, in fact, influence both support and mental health, there are limitations that may be preventing significant and supportive results from arising.

## Limitations

Due to the small sample size, many responses needed to be either removed entirely or edited to yield significant results. If the sample was larger and more varied, in which more participants identified as non-heterosexual and more equal distributions among types of races, then it would be likely that the results regarding interactions between race and sexuality on quality of support systems would be more representative the general population. Extraneous variables may have also impacted the results, as with the school in which the study was created at; William Paterson University has a very diverse population, so participants who go there may feel more supported by their peers.

## Future Directions

To find more conclusive results in this study, the sample size should be increased as well as having a more equal distribution of participants in all groups. It is important that the sample be as representative of the population as possible, and the limitations of the study has prevented to show what struggles both racial and sexual minorities face that would lead to lack of support and poor mental health. Clubs, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance at William Paterson University, could have been contacted to yield more participants with demographics that the study was looking. Studies like these are important to take note of, as spreading awareness through research can result in change, no matter how small that change might be.

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# Denial of Saint Peter by Caravaggio

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*Tekoa Criddell*

**Course:** Baroque & Rococo Art

**Professor:** Claudia Goldstein

**Student:** Tekoa Criddell

**Essay:** *Denial of Saint Peter by Caravaggio*

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## Assignment:

For their semester project, students were asked to choose a specific work of art and use it as the basis for

an oral presentation and an eight-page research paper examining the work's particular historical context.

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Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, usually known simply as Caravaggio, is a revolutionary artist from the Baroque period, and his tumultuous life is almost as enrapturing as his paintings. In his painting *Denial of Saint Peter*, he not only displays mastery over the materials but displays a tone apparent in many of his later works. In this essay, I will explore Caravaggio's life and the controversy therein, along with the story of Saint Peter, relating his struggles with Caravaggio's. Furthermore, I will discuss how the composition and techniques used in the painting help illuminate these themes.

Caravaggio was born in Milan, Italy to his father Fermo Merisi and Lucia Aratori. His father was both from and worked for a man in the town of Caravaggio, which became his artistic namesake. He became an apprentice to Mannerist painter and student of Titian Simone Peterzano in 1584. Although Caravaggio spent most of his life and career in Rome, this time and early experience with the art style of Northern Italy

most definitely affected his work. Certain elements of his work, such as emphasis on light and color, precise handling of paint, and a more naturalistic style all come from the influence of his first master and the artists he emulated: great painters such as Titian, Tintoretto, Lotto, and Savoldo<sup>1</sup>. His penchant for chiaroscuro and tenebrism may have come from the influence of art he saw in Milan, such as Leonardo daVinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*. Also, the religious climate of his environment, at the height of Counter-Reformation Italy, may explain the pared-down and solemn elements to his rendition of the apostle Peter's greatest mistake.

Caravaggio, for all his talent, is well-known for his personal failings as much as his triumphs. He has a reputation of being quick to violence, a sort of 16th century renegade. You can see this documented early

<sup>1</sup> Gash, John M. "Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da." *Grove Art Online*. 2003

on in his life: there is evidence that he left his childhood home and never returned because of his imprisonment due to the wounding of a constable.<sup>2</sup> He also did not always have the best relationships with his benefactors; a priest that he was living with in Rome in his early years had him do chores and fed him mostly salad; this led Caravaggio to give him the nickname 'Monsignor Insalata' (*Monsignor Salad*), and he left after only a few months.<sup>3</sup> His personality did not improve with his advancement in the art world and amazing success: "The pressures of success (and criticism) may have played their part in further destabilizing Caravaggio's volatile character, and in the period from 1600 to 1606 he was frequently arraigned before the courts for a variety of offenses."<sup>4</sup> All of this culminated in his most well-known offense: the fateful murder of Ranuccio Tommasoni in Rome in 1606. The reasons for this death, whether it was a fight or duel, about a tennis match or a woman, are obscured, but either way the outcome of this event forced Caravaggio have to flee the city to escape punishment. It is against the backdrop of Caravaggio having to flee the city of Rome and the turbulent feelings he must have had towards the end of his life that the painting *Denial of Saint Peter* was made. This dark, morose image depicts Peter as he is accused of being a follower of Christ. Both the woman who spotted him and the Roman guard are pointing at him accusingly, and Peter reflects his own hands toward himself, looking nothing like the brash and confident apostle he is often described as in the Bible. The overall somber tone of the painting as well as the acknowledgement of fault and remorse no doubt reflected the feelings Caravaggio had at this time.

The apostle Peter is one of the first disciples of Jesus and had the privilege of being a Bible writer as well. He is a significant Biblical figure to anyone who is a Christian, but for Catholics, he plays a particularly important role. In the book of Matthew, Jesus says to Peter: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the

gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."<sup>5</sup> Catholics interpret this to mean that Peter was to be the "rock" that the church will be built upon, and that he was to be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, like the keys of the papacy. Saint Peter is also written about in the gospels as a man who had considerable authority in the early Christian congregation, often taking part in discussions about doctrine and how people were to act as Christians in this fledgling religion after the death of Jesus Christ. Peter's importance in the Catholic tradition was emphasized even very early in the Church's history. Pope Clement I, or Saint Clement of Rome, began his papacy in 88AD, and in his writings, "Peter is identified not only as the "first of the apostles", "the first one to whom the father revealed the son", and "the one who blessed the Christ", but also as the one "who on the basis of true faith and trustworthy content of his teaching, was designated to be the foundation stone of the church"<sup>6</sup>.

Despite this impressive resume, Peter was not perfect, and it is perhaps his flaws as much as his stalwart faith and accomplishments that make him so appealing to Christians struggling to do the right thing down to this day. The Counter-Reformation was a movement by the Catholic church after the Protestant Reformation to convince people to be Catholic again. Part of this movement's goal through art and other means is to communicate to people that they can sin and make mistakes, and still be forgiven by God and the Church. Perhaps the reason why Peter was so prevalent as a subject, especially for Caravaggio who was in a heavily Catholic area in Rome, was to communicate that you

<sup>2</sup> Gash, page 2

<sup>3</sup> Gash, page 3

<sup>4</sup> Gash, page 19

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:18,19 King James Version

<sup>6</sup> Hengel, Martin. Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle.

can fail greatly as Peter did, and still be forgiven by Christ and even possibly ascend to the papacy and sainthood.

What then are some of these notable flaws? One standout example is in the book of John: “Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.”<sup>7</sup> When envisioning Jesus and his apostles preaching to people while he was on earth, you may not imagine one of them carrying a sword and actually using it violently. Granted, this event was right before Jesus was to be killed, and they were coming to seize him so some may say Peter was justified in his anger. However, talking about the same event in the parallel account, Matthew shows Jesus’ response to Peter’s actions: “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”<sup>8</sup> Here Peter shows a rashness and penchant for violence that may have been understood by Caravaggio, given his tumultuous past with others. This is not the only time in the scriptures that Jesus rebuked Peter, either for arrogance or hastily acting without thinking. Despite all of this, and his major sin of denying Jesus three times, Jesus saw something in him and knew that he truly loved God and his word. This is why he allowed him to be a key part of the Christian congregation after his resurrection, and perhaps this redemption after so many mistakes appealed to Caravaggio and the populace as a whole at that time. Of all his mistakes, none were as grave as the one committed in Matthew chapter 26:

“Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they

that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”<sup>9</sup>

Saint Peter, after arguing arrogantly to Jesus in front of everyone that even if all his other disciples had abandoned him, he never would, did exactly as Jesus said he would. Not only did he deny that he knew someone he followed through thick and thin, someone who he believed to be the son of God, he did so three times. This was no doubt the lowest point of his life. When Caravaggio painted *Denial of Saint Peter*, he was also at one of the lowest points in his life. Not only had he been banished from Rome, his home for most of his life and the center of the art world at the time, he had also been badly wounded in an altercation in Naples as well.<sup>10</sup> Toward the end of his life, Caravaggio was constantly on the run, hiding from those he had offended. Perhaps reflecting on this Biblical story helped him to see the similarities in his own life. Peter is portrayed as somber and ashamed, maybe Caravaggio felt the same emotions, especially because the predicaments they were in were both partly of their own making.

Caravaggio’s work in his later years were in some ways a more heightened version of his already established style. According to art historian John Gash, “These paintings are also distinguished by a new, unblinking sobriety of mood. In them Caravaggio’s insights into human nature come closer than ever to the ardent ideals of the Counter-Reformation.”<sup>11</sup> In *Denial of Saint Peter*, Caravaggio uses many techniques that should be

<sup>7</sup> John 18:10 King James Version

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 26:52 King James Version

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 26:69-75 King James Version

<sup>10</sup> Gash, page 22

<sup>11</sup> Gash, page 20

familiar to those who know his work: a starkly dark background, a few figures that take up the whole of the composition, and those figures being very close to the picture plane, allowing the viewer to feel like a part of the scene. The rougher, cut-off brushstrokes and dark restricted color palette add to the tragedy of the scene. Using a common technique for the Baroque period, you are walking into the part of the story where Peter is currently being accused of being a disciple of Christ. Although there is not a lot of motion, as all the figures are from the torso up, it is a starkly dramatic scene due to the lighting and the fingers all pointing at St. Peter. Three fingers pointing at Peter symbolize the three times he denied Jesus in the Biblical story. “The fully illuminated face of Peter is an especially haunting depiction of guilt and remorse.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps it is this guilt and remorse that appealed to Caravaggio at this time. Saint Peter in particular seems to be an interesting parallel to the artist himself. He was chosen to be a follower of Jesus, so he must have had faith and good qualities, but he is just as well known in the Bible as being outspoken, occasionally arrogant, and violent. Even after the famous denial of Christ, he is reprimanded in the scriptures by other disciples. In some ways he is one of the most relatable apostles. Caravaggio too had many weaknesses, made many mistakes, and had a legendary temper. Perhaps in the twilight of his life, as he was painting this two years before his death, he was reflecting on some of these bad decisions that led him to this moment: exiled from Rome and running from the Knights of Malta. Baron Niccolo di Giacomo described Caravaggio during this time as having *cervello stravolto*, which likely means that he was distressed and agitated.<sup>13</sup>

Caravaggio’s influence on the art world cannot be understated, and his techniques have gone on to be studied and copied by countless artists over the hundreds of years since he’s been dead. And yet, along with such talent we see a deeply imperfect man. Similarly, Saint Peter was a stalwart defender of the

faith who followed Jesus through persecution and played a key role in the spread of Christianity after Jesus’ death. He is also according to Catholic doctrine the first pope, and yet he is also the one apostle to outright deny knowing Jesus because of fear. His temper and rashness sometimes got the better of him, and he had to face the consequences for these bad character traits. In some ways, these two men, separated by centuries, culture, and distance, are very similar, and I think it is this commonality that adds to the dark tragedy of one of Caravaggio’s last paintings: *Denial of Saint Peter*.



By Caravaggio - Self-scanned, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15216569>

<sup>12</sup> Bambach, Carmen C., Nadine M. Orenstein, James David Draper, Carolyn Logan, Keith Christiansen, Walter Liedtke, Stuart W. Phyr, and Perrin Stein. “Renaissance and Baroque Europe.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 56, no. 2 (1998): 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3269043>.

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# Gender, Stereotypes, and Language

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*Mackenzie Malkinski*

**Course:** Language Matters

**Professor:** Ellen C. Frye

**Student:** Mackenzie Malkinski

**Essay:** *Gender, Stereotypes, and Language*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to write a research paper about any aspect of Linguistics (morphology, semantics, etc.), particularly

Anthropological Linguistics, connected to the course's central concept, "Language Matters."

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Have you ever wondered what effects language? First what is language. Language is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as "a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings". Language is not only an oral act but could be hand gestures, facial expressions, pictures, etc. Language is a key component in a society. Some societies have their own languages, use their own pictures, own gestures, etc. These differences in language use create unique aspects of a societies shared structure of language. There is another factor that can create differences in language, that being gender or societies stereotypes of gender. This area of study is called sociolinguistics. This is the study of social factors that affect language. The idea of gender differences in language has caused some discussion between researchers because of biological sex and gender. This paper is referring to

gender based on societies bias and stereotypes of gender.

Society places certain traits or stereotypes on women and men. Some being that women need to be more feminine and sensitive than men. Men are aggressive and dominate. Women who are assertive and speak their opinion are bossy while when men speak their opinion it is expected. These stereotypes play a huge part in the ways someone presents themselves, whether they are trying to fit into it or go against it. Some of these stereotypes also relates to language use between men and women. Is this a stereotype or is there a true difference between how these genders use language?

In certain cultures, native languages can be gendered or genderless. A gendered language being Spanish. In Spanish speaking countries they have nouns and pronouns that are based off the gender it is referring to. An example being "o" is put at the end of words for

males like “amigo” while “a” is put on words referring to females like “amiga”. A genderless language is Mandarin where no nouns or pronouns are used for specific genders. While English is a neutral gender, where there is a mix of these gendered and genderless words. In gendered language cultures there are patterns used that favor one gender, that most times being male. Using the masculine tense is more common and the default compared to the feminine form of the word. In cases like this it could affect how society views gender on a social scale. These gendered and genderless languages already create a difference in language between genders.

Furthermore, looking at the English language more closely we can see how the genders use language differently. One area being vocabulary used in daily speech in women and men.

Following society’s beliefs that men are more aggressive we can see that in the vocabulary they use which consist of more profanity and sarcasm. The article *On Gender Difference in English Language and Its Causes* it states, “tabooed words and slang can be found more frequently in men’s language than in women’s, though they are of the same educational level” (Ning and Dai, 127). Could the reason men use this kind of vocabulary be because of the idea that men in society are supposed to be masculine and strong and that do not show weakness or sensitivity. Does this vocab show dominance? If a female were to use taboo words or slang, would they be less feminine than what society believes women should be. Vice versa if men were to use ‘dainty’ vocabulary would they be seen differently in societies eyes. Women also use more adjectives in their daily vocabulary.

When describing something they use words like ‘adorable’, ‘lovely’, etc. While men do not use adjectives like women do in their speech. In the journal article *Men and Women Differences in Using Language* “it was found that women used 11 words of adjective, while men just used one adjective” (Wahyuningsih, 84).

Cultural expectations are a major reason there are gender differences in language. On *Gender Difference in English Language and Its Causes* states “linguists in related areas have pointed out that much of gendered behavior is a kind of learned behavior as a result of the expectation from culture and society” (Ning and Dai, 129). Society expects certain things for each gender. For women language should reflect the idea of being ‘ladylike’ and the traits of politeness. For men language can be used to fit and be ‘one of the guys’ so their language may be more aggressive. Men also do not want to be perceived as ‘talking girly’ so they are conscious of what words they are using to stay masculine.

Another area that language use differs between genders is seen in females that are in a superior position. Men when giving orders use direct words and get straight to the point of what they want done. On the other hand, females use indirect words that allow them to be seen as approachable. They use statements like “should we” which even though they are the one giving orders they still lessen themselves. They use polite words that will not offend anyone that they are leading over. Men use facts and data to get their point across while women share personal information and participation to build a relationship. This can be seen as men giving ‘report’ and women giving ‘rapport’. This ‘report’ way of communicating is very factual and does not contain any personal stories that give examples and there are no real emotions driving their language. On the flip side ‘rapport’ is the way of incorporating personal experiences/ emotions into their communication to build a personal relationship that can be benefited.

Women also ask for more questions or speak cooperatively than men. Men use language to showcase their dominance and attract an audience. They use a commanding voice that keeps the audience’s attention. If looking at presenters we can see that male presenters use a loud, deep, command-

ing voice that showcases superiority and the idea that you must pay attention to them. While female presenters usually use a softer tone that may not catch the audience's attention right away, they must work to be heard by an audience. Women have a wider range of pitch and have more of a tone range than men and this can be a reason why women are presented as emotional speakers.

Even though there is clear evidence on language differences between genders, there is another aspect to look into, which is that of culture. Depending how a person's culture views gender it will play a part into how they use language. The way someone grows and the environment that they have around them is going to affect how they communicate. What they believe is appropriate behavior for their gender based on how their culture is going to dictate how they communicate.

Another thing that will affect how genders communicate will be the context of who they are communicating with. Men more commonly with speak very "manly" with other men and that's why there is that common phrase "bro talk". They do not want other men to see them communicating in a way that could be seen as girly. Females typically when talking to men may downplay and simplify their language so they are not seen in the negative light that society places on women who speak out. One more context that affect the use of language between genders is the relationship that they hold with the person they are talking to. If a man is talking to their significant other than he may not use an aggressive or dominant tone like men usually do. They may instead be more sensitive and in touch with their emotions and that reflects in their language use with that person. Motherese is a form of communication that is used when speaking to infants. This can also be referred to baby talk, but most people relate this back to a mother speaking to their child, hence the name 'motherese'. They change their voice in terms of tone and make

words more exaggerated. Another area that changes when mothers speak to their children is their timbre. It was found that mothers do not even know of this shift in their voice, and it was also found that this happens across many languages. There is common bias that 'moms always know what their kid is saying even more than their dads' could this be because of how language differs between the genders.

Language is not only verbal communication but also nonverbal cues. These cues can also vary between the genders. Women when talking nod their heads to show the speaker they are listening or create almost a hum to indicate a point made. Men may do this but most often do not because they do not want to be seen as agreeing to something. The genders take this cue differently, women are just acknowledging that they are paying attention and are letting the speaker know to continue, they do not take them nodding as a point of agreeing. Another nonverbal cue that differs is facial expressions. Women use their body to communicate what they are trying to say without words. They use more facial expressions and eye contact while talking or listening than men tend to use. And use more gentle touching cues like a light hand on the shoulder to show support while men may pat someone on the back. Nonverbal ways of communication are just as important as verbal communication when using language.

We use language everyday whether we know it or not. We could be speaking verbally or giving a shy smile which is communicating something to someone. There are so many factors that go into language use. These contextual things are studied by sociolinguists. They look at how things in society affect the use of language. Factors such as class, race, age, even occupations can sway language, one more area could be gender. Men and women use language differently in both verbal and nonverbal areas. Differences are seen in vocabulary use, leadership, facial expressions/ touch, etc. Stereotypes of the genders creates these

silent rules that factor into language when women and men speak. How much gender factors into language is something that sociolinguists are still trying to figure out.

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# Expressing Conflict Through Hip-Hop: How Acknowledging the Conflict of Mental Health Can Save Lives

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*Arianna Vega*

**Course:** Experiences in Literature

**Professor:** Jason Myers

**Student:** Arianna Vega

**Essay:** Expressing Conflict Through Hip-Hop: How Acknowledging the Conflict of Mental Health Can Save Lives

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## **Assignment:**

For this section of ENG 1500, students were able to choose their own topics. They could either expand an earlier discussion board post into a longer paper or develop their own focus and direction, as long as the

paper performed an analysis of at least one primary source hip-hop and/or literary text as well as integrated at least two outside sources.

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One major issue that is typically stigmatized and ignored in America is mental health; and more specifically that suicide is the tenth most leading cause of death in the United States (americashealthrankings.org). Still, even being within the top ten leading causes of death, suicide is something that goes unspoken of in public discourse. In more recent years, some popular hip-hop artists are beginning to take up this charge in rapping about mental health. Some examples of hip-hop artists that have done this are Mac Miller, Kid Cudi, and Logic. One particular song that highlights the struggle of finding oneself and making it out of a suicidal and depressive state is “1-800-273-8255” by Logic featuring Alessia Cara and Khalid. In this song,

Logic shows the struggles of a person that feels out of place and uncomfortable expressing who they really are.

One of the most important messages of the song “1-800-273-8255” lies in the title itself. The title is the number of the suicide hotline and made more of an impact than one would think. According to Insider, “On the day that it was dropped, the hotline received the second-highest daily call volume ever with over 4753 calls” and on the day after the release, “the hotline received more than 5,000 calls.” With this, one can see that the song was more than just a song. It was able to make a life-saving impact and reach so many people. Furthermore, it goes to show that if mental health was

further addressed by prominent members of society, people would feel understood and see that there are resources that can help. Having this significant influx of calls, shows the impacts that a song can have on people. When touching on prevalent topics, like suicide songs will often go unnoticed or will not chart, but when they do, it shows how society needs to focus on artists that release music like this.

Not only did the title of the song have an impactful meaning, but also the lyrics are relatable to those who are struggling. For example, towards the beginning of the song, Logic sings, "I feel like my life ain't mine. Who can relate?" This is significant because it shows how Logic is trying to reach out to his listeners. By asking, "who can relate?" he is letting listeners know that they are not alone in feeling as if they are not in control of themselves, or anything that is occurring around them. Similarly, later on in the song Logic sings, "I know I'm hurting deep down, but can't show it." This exemplifies a feeling of emptiness and misery that many people feel cannot be shared to those around them. Oftentimes, a person does not have supportive or understanding people around them who will listen to what they are going through. Also, in the music video, the main character is a gay highschooler. He feels as if he can't express his true self, nor get help from the people around him because no one is supportive. In the beginning of the song, Logic exemplifies what it is like to feel this lack of belonging and sympathy.

Towards the middle of the song there is a significant shift. At this point in the music video, the main character has made the call to suicide hotline. The lyrics change from being very gloomy and dark to hopeful. More specifically, Alessia Cara's feature in the song starts this shift. In the song, her voice is very soothing and has very delicate sonic qualities, which promotes a sign of hope and relaxation for listeners. One very important line in her part is, "It's holding on though the road's long, seeing light in the darkest things." This line uses metaphor to show that while it may feel like you can never be happy,

you have to hold on and wait for things to get better. Also, Alessia Cara is showing how even when things seem bad, a person should always try to find the good in everything. The shift in the song goes from hopeless to hopeful, signifying that at times you may feel hopeless, but hope will eventually show up again.

At the end of the song, Khalid comes in. A particular line that is very important is when he sings, "I wanna feel alive, I don't even wanna die anymore." The way in which Khalid delivers these lyrics is in a cry and heartbroken voice. This shows the emotional impact of going through a time with such severe mental health and with suicidal thoughts. It is at Khalid's part where the main character calls the suicide hotline and gets help. The music video then pans to him in the future being happy and getting married to another man. This shows how there is hope for the future. While in the beginning of the music video, the main character's dad basically disowned him for being gay, he is now able to freely embrace his sexuality and is finally accepted by his family. The lyrics bring a sense of hope and show the healing process of a person recovering from mental health issues.

In 2017, Logic, Alessia Cara, and Khalid performed "1-800-273-8255" at the MTV video music awards. This performance was incredibly empowering, being that it was being performed at such a well known and watched award ceremony. Furthermore, Logic wears a hooded sweatshirt that says "everybody." With Logic doing this, it really shows the message he is trying to spread. Typically, when rappers perform they wear flashy costumes and jewelry that either makes them look rich or mainstream; however, Logic is trying to bring change and awareness. He brings is trying to show how although everyone is born equal, they are not treated equally and can experience things like sexism, racism, and discrimination. All of these issues significantly impact mental health and suicide. Another important aspect of the performance is when the camera pans to all of the suicide survivors that Logic intentionally has

scattered along the stage. They are all wearing shirts that have the suicide hotline number on them and state “you are not alone.” With bringing all of the survivors on the stage and having them wear these shirts, it is really promoting the message of how so many other people have experienced attempting suicide and being in debilitating mental states. By doing this, viewers are able to see that there is hope to get better and that they are not alone in their fight. Logic also speaks on his performance at the end. He states, “I just want to take a moment right now and thank you all so much for giving me a platform to talk about something that mainstream media doesn’t wanna talk about. Mental health, anxiety, suicide, depression, and so much more that I talk about on this album.” With this, one can see the impact that Logic is trying to make through hip-hop. Rather than rapping about the typical topics like sex, drugs, or money, Logic touches on topics that are so detrimental, yet go unspoken of. He is using his platform to spread a positive and uplifting message, rather than rapping about topics that are so prevalent, but should be more irrelevant in mainstream media. Additionally, according to CNN, “The lifeline reported a 50% increase in call volume after the show.” This shows how much of an impact empowering hip-hop can have on people; it saves lives.

Despite his speech at the end of his VMA performance, Logic has done many interviews where he touches on his song. In one specific interview, he speaks about how he makes music to touch on prevalent topics, rather than rap about topics that are so mainstream and will not make a change within society. In an article by GQ they include that interview: “ If you listen to that album, it doesn’t have any hits on it. Because I didn’t make the album to have a hit. I made the album to say something. I wasn’t in a place where I wanted to quit entirely, but I was done with the rat race of trying to score a hit single.” In this, one can see how Logic was ready to give up because he felt as if his

albums weren’t having the impact that they should be. It is so hard to have an album or a single become a hit, when it’s not what sells in the hip-hop industry. Furthermore, in the same interview, he speaks about the inspiration behind his song “1-800-273-8255.” He states, “So I was always helping people indirectly by helping myself, and the deepest it ever got was when people would say to me that they were thinking of killing themselves but my music had helped them hold on and stay alive.” This is significant in showing how much of an impact Logic’s music made, even when he was writing songs to help himself get out of dark places. This concept goes hand in hand with the “you are not alone” slogan that he used in performances for “1-800-273-8255” because people don’t realize that others are going through the same thing, when it is not addressed. Additionally, Logic speaks on the impact the song made when he says, “I wanted to bring these issues of mental health and suicide to the forefront of people’s minds and make them stop and look and pay attention, and I did. Which is almost impossible to do nowadays, but I did it, and if it sounds like I’m bragging a bit and patting myself on the back when I say it, I am, because in that moment I needed to pat myself on the back.” In, this one can see how proud Logic is to have a song that touches on suicide make such an impact on others. With how hard it is to do this, Logic feels accomplished not only because he did this, but because he brought light to an overlooked topic and situation.

Logic uses “1-800-273-8255” as more than just a song, but a message. He not only uses the important resource of the suicide hotline number in his title, but also shows people that they are not alone. He incorporates Alessia Cara and Khalid in portions of the song, to show the shift from being suicidal and depressed, to feeling hopeful and content. The shift in the song allows listeners to see that they have to hold on even when things seem terrible because eventually, they will get better and there are resources that can

help. This song is a pure example of how even just acknowledging a major problem, can make a huge change. Logic's performances and the release of the song led to a significant increase in calls to the suicide hotline number and that's not including the amount of people that were moved by this song. With Logic's performances and the incorporations from Khalid and Alessia Cara, people feel as if they are not alone.

In a society that only focuses on irrelevant topics in mainstream media, artists like Logic are so important. These artists bring light to situations that are so debilitating and can make a person feel so alone. If more hip-hop artists that addressed the conflict of mental health gained more popularity, there could be much more change seen within society.

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# Lil Pump Dumps on Langston Hughes: A Comparison Between Hip-Hop and Poetry

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*Jeremyah Flowers*

**Course:** Experiences in Literature

**Professor:** Jason Myers

**Student:** Jeremyah Flowers

**Essay:** *Lil Pump Dumps on Langston Hughes: A Comparison Between Hip-Hop and Poetry*

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## **Assignment:**

For this section of ENG 1500, students were able to choose their own topics. They could either expand an earlier discussion board post into a longer paper or develop their own focus and direction, as long as the

paper performed an analysis of at least one primary source hip-hop and/or literary text as well as integrated at least two outside sources.

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In his 2011 interview with rocawear, Jay-Z made the controversial statement that “Rap is Poetry.” “Hip-hop lyrics,” he explains “not just my lyrics, but those of any great MC, are poetry” (rocawear, 2011). Jay-Z deliberately merged the qualities of great rap with that of poetry sparking a heated debate over whether Hip-Hop could, and should, be considered poetry. The internet went into a frenzy because, while many people either love or hate rap, one thing is for certain: rap does not get nearly as much love as poetry in the world of art and academics. For example, one Quora user asked, “Why is rap so bad?” Eric Oehr (2022), studio nerd and minor dance music star, responded, “Short answer: because you’re listening to the wrong rap.” Matthew James (2021) claims, “Rap is so bad because it does not fit within your music taste. For those of us who like it, it is not bad.” Others like John Webster (2021) remarked, “I used to love rap now

99.99% of it sucks”; and Philip Harris (2021) wrote a detailed list of his reasons on why he hates rap:

Repetitive, BORING droning chanting over a booming beat THAT NEVER CEASES or changes in tempo or volume, vile lyrics - BEAT POETRY, NO NEED to have true MUSICAL abilities such as singing and or playing a musical instrument! You name it, RAP BLOWS... Think about it and discuss amongst yourselves, BUT I HATE RAP. IT SUCKS BIG TIME!!! I cannot tell you to stop listening to RAP CRAP, so go on getting down to those Rap grooves and enjoy the SAME ATONAL CHANT OVER AND OVER AGAIN. It’s your choice just as it is my choice to state that I hate Rap.

These individuals show two distinct opinions between rap’s listeners: demonstrating that not everyone thinks rap is as closely related to poetry as Jay-Z. As Harris (2021) illustrates, those who hate rap often believe that it lacks musical integrity. This group fins rap mind-

less, annoying, and less intellectually appealing than poetry. Oftentimes, these haters create a negative connotation for rap, which is also often transferred over to the rappers themselves. Instantly, a rapper's influence, intellect, and skill can be discredited because almost nobody cares to address these harmful ideas. In fact, negative publicity and controversy are often used to fuel rap's sales. As a result, the rapper is condemned to embrace their stereotype rather than to dismantle it. They are obligated to be social and political pariah - 'uneducated', 'raw', 'unsophisticated', and 'vulgar' – because they are assumed to be anything but geniuses.

For example, Shawn Corey Carter arose from poverty to amass his fame and wealth. Through his rap genius and cunning entrepreneurship, he established the name “Jay-Z” for himself, which today is known around the world. Throughout his career, Jay-Z has collaborated with many rap legends, including the Notorious B.I.G, Timbaland, and Eminem. He has also signed and tutored many of the best rap artists currently out, namely Kanye West and J. Cole. Furthermore, Jay-Z has displayed a huge amount of knowledge, versatility, and prowess in his own life; with a net worth of more than a billion, he currently ranks among the highest selling artists to date. Genius, a popular website dedicated to song lyrics, wrote this as Jay-Z's bio: “having sold over 100 million records worldwide, and holding the solo artist record of 14 billboard #1 albums, Shawn “JAY-Z” Carter is possibly the most talented, accomplished and respected rappers of all-time.” (Genius Contributors, 2022) Being at the billboard #1 album is no easy feat – but 14 times AND selling over 100 million records worldwide? Not only has Jay-Z perfected his craft, but he has also become a role model to millions – and heck, he even married Beyonce.

However, despite these accomplishments, many critics and academics both view Jay-Z as a lucky businessman rather than a genius. “Is Jay-Z really a genius like some

people say?” asks a Quora user (n.d.). “Above average intelligence... Definitely. “Genius” .... Probably not,” Todd Anderson (2020), former Head of Chemistry teaching at MIT remarks. “Not even close”, says Scotty Boom (2020) from Washington State University. Boom and Anderson both illustrate the scholarly perspective that a rapper's accomplishments do not equate to any genius or innate ability. This perspective is detrimental because of the negative connotation that rappers are irrelevant entities without rap, relegating them to the sole status of “rapper” and, therefore, undermining their ability to be seen as intelligent and thoughtful; ultimately, rap and rap artists are seen as one in the same – both devoid of merit, ideas, and meaning. However, by developing a fair comparison between hip-hop and poetry, rap and poetry might work together to reveal a beauty and intelligence previously unknown to many listeners. But first, to determine whether rap can, or should, be considered poetry, we must first define what we mean by “poetry.”

The conceptual basis for this analysis will be based on Oxford Language (2022). Oxford language defines poetry as follows: “Literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; poems collectively or as a genre of literature; a quality of beauty and intensity of emotion regarded as characteristic of poems; something regarded as comparable to poetry in its beauty.” (2022) Another definition, presented by acclaimed poet William Wordsworth (2010), states, “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” In essence, a poem is a type of literature, which affords a special intensity to feelings and ideas, using various styles and rhythms. It through a working toward a definition of poetry that two main questions arise, which this paper attempts to help answer: If rap can express intense feeling and emotion, then why can it not be poetic? Likewise, if poetry can contain beauty, style, and rhythm, then is it so different from rap?

Jay Electronica, a rapper from Pittsburg, is heavily endorsed by Jay-Z as 'the future of Hip-hop.' Since the analysis is based on Jay-Z's definition of a great MC, Electronica will work to show what Jay-Z meant by breaking down Electronica lyrics from his song A.P.I.D.T.A (2020)::

Eyes fiery, cry tears to my diary  
Sometimes a Xanny bar can't help you fight back the  
anxiety  
I go to my love quietly, teardrops on our faces  
Teardrops on my faces, like teardrops become  
waterfalls  
By the time they reach my laces  
My eyelids is like levees but my tear ducts is like glaciers  
'Cause I contemplate creation, the salt that heals my  
wounds  
Pour out my eyes, it's like libations  
I can't stop my mind from racing, I got numbers on my  
phone  
Pictures on my phone  
The day my momma died, I scrolled her texts all day  
long  
The physical returns but the connection still stay strong  
Now I understand why you used to cry sometimes we  
ride down Claybourne  
You just missed your, you just missed your mama  
Now I just miss my mommas  
The clothes we wear to bed at night to sleep is just  
pajamas  
The flesh we roam this earth in is a blessing, not a  
promise  
I bow with those who bow to the creator and pay  
homage  
Sleep well.

"Eyes fiery, cry tears to my diary" - Jay is expressing that he is both angry and sad. A metaphor for fiery eyes is to foreshadow a deep brewing passion within, contrasting the tears that pour out, symbolizing purification or cleansing. Notice, he is crying his tears to his diary, symbolizing a need for safety, and a lack

thereof – he's looking for a safe place where he can vent his emotions. From this line, Jay Electronica shows he has an intense passion for something that has caused him to cleanse, losing his feeling of security and searching for safety in his diary.

Continuing, he states, "Sometimes a Xanny bar can't help you fight back the anxiety". Xanax is a medically prescribed sedative commonly used in the treatment of anxiety and panic disorders to produce a calming effect that lasts anywhere from 31 to 134.5 hours. Electronica is showing that his anxiety is so overwhelming that taking a Xanax no longer calms him. Furthermore, notice he says, "fight back", not overcome. Electronica is suggesting that no matter how hard he fights, he will never overcome the anxiety that comes from this traumatic event - further foreshadowing.

Next, Electronica states, "I go to my love quietly, teardrops on our faces". Jay is not alone, there are multiple people who have tear drops on their faces as well. By stating "our", Electronica is showing that these people are going through a similar struggle. Quietly means with little to no noise, meaning he wants to express his love in a way that does not disturb those around him. Essentially, he did not express himself in that moment because everyone around him was struggling with the same event. "Teardrops on my faces, like teardrops become waterfalls by the time they reach my laces". Laces are the strings which hold shoes together. Like laces, Jay becomes completely unraveled by this event.

He begins crying uncontrollably, signaling a shift that he can no longer compose himself. Jay elaborates, stating, "My eyelids is like levees but my tear ducts is like glaciers". These similes show that Electronica wants to stop his tears from overflowing but cannot because his tears have accumulated to a breaking point: Jay gives his first reason for his inner turmoil, "'Cause I contemplate creation, the salt that heals my wounds pour out my eyes, it's like libations". Creation and

libations are both allusions to religion, which provides meaning to life. Jay questions life's meaning, and in doing so, cries in an anger which heals him. Thus, Jay sees his tears as offerings to a higher power which returns him with healing. He proceeds by stating, "I can't stop my mind from racing, I got numbers on my phone, pictures on my phone." Again foreshadowing, Jay gets lost in a sea of his thoughts, phone numbers, and pictures, which demonstrates a loss of clarity. In the previous line, he appeared to sober up, but in this he emphasizes his loneliness and the need to recollect. Jay is reminiscing on people he can no longer reach, and these losses create incoherent thoughts which perpetuate his struggle.

In the next verse, Electronica starts by stating, "The day my mamma died, I scrolled her texts all day long. The physical returns but the connection still stays strong." This is the first time Electronica attempts to make sense of his situation by reflecting on an experience that was equally painful – his mother's death. Although he remembers losing her physical body, suggesting it "returns" either to heaven or the Earth, he still feels strongly connected with her. He then reflects by stating, "Now I understand why you used to cry sometimes we ride down Claybourne. You just miss your, you just missed your mama." In this line, Electronica reveals that he is writing to someone unbeknownst to the listener – presumably someone who has recently passed. He gives a personal anecdote, highlighting and reinforcing their connection. Crying, especially in front of someone else, represents an extreme state of sensitivity and vulnerability. For Electronica and this other person to cry with one another demonstrates a strong love and bond within the relationship. This person meant so much to Electronica that he stutters after reflecting on their experiences, "you just miss your, you just missed your mama." Electronica realizes in the middle of his verse that he connects with this person's story.

He further demonstrates this idea by revealing, "Now

I just miss my mommas." Jay does this purposefully; he momentarily breaks his rapper persona to interrupt his flow and create a powerful notion: he misses this other person because they were exactly like him. Both him and this other person not only shared their lives but were close enough to confide in one another, explaining Electronica's inability to express himself openly. This person was a monumental part in Electronica's life. After they passed, Electronica started buckling under the pressure of loss – causing him to recoil and start cleansing his emotions. With this idea, he shares a final insight, "The clothes we wear to bed at night to sleep is just pajamas. the flesh we roam this earth in is a blessing, not a promise." Here, pajamas are used as a metaphor for temporary – you put pajamas on to go to sleep and take them off when you awake. Eventually, all humans must die just as the clothes they wear to sleep must come off. Furthermore, no human has control over when it turns day or night, just as, when you live or die. Electronica calls life a "blessing" because the memories and feelings you shared with the deceased will not fade if you are living. Finally understanding, Electronica states, "I bow with those who bow to the Creator and pay homage". He recognizes this is a universal truth, hence "I bow with those who bow". He respects the things he cannot understand, accepts his loss, and closes saying, "Sleep well". Electronica puts his loved ones to rest, however, he does not end there: he continues through the song's chorus to symbolize him living and carrying on his loved ones - to the very end.

The meaning of life and death is something that many poets express in unusual ways; Electronica expresses his grief through a profound use of lyrics and metaphors that convey every message with such raw emotion - even the most complex ideas become apparent. He observes not only his own afflictions but the natural plight to the human condition: the rise of one's deepest passions pitted against the downfall of their greatest regrets. Electronica is stepping outside

of the confines of a “rapper” to illustrate his ability to make us feel human. A.P.T.I.D.A is a love song as much as it is a song of loss; it is a cry for help as much as a call to action. Jay is not creating rap or poetry: he is combining the power of storytelling to convey thought-provoking ideas to everyday problems to create unique art.

In essence, Electronica is showing how rap is not just a boring chant: it is a collective voice struggling to situate itself in a sea of critics who overshadow it. Once we situate this idea, the problem becomes not the rapper’s message but the chatter which denies them their agency. Rappers are people, just like Phillip Harris, who have opinions and an ability to express themselves through words. Rappers can be geniuses, scholars, innovators, creators, activists, businesspeople, and role models, merited for the great works they create instead of the controversy they generate. Likewise, rap can be used as a vehicle to uplift and edify, in addition to, tearing down blockades and

barriers. For example, think how far Jay-Z has risen: from the once destitute Marcy Projects to being a leader and role model for young Black entrepreneurs. He has used rap to reinvent himself, building up communities and multi-million-dollar businesses from scratch. Despite this, many scholars would still refuse to consider him a genius, but what merits a genius from anyone else?

Is it ludicrous to think that Jay Electronica’s song “A.P.T.I.D.A.” does not merit some credibility to the idea that “Rap is Poetry.” Equally troubling is the reality that Jay-Z is not normally afforded enough credit for his numerous feats of intellect and ability to overcome obstacles and presented as a genius and potential role model for students in classrooms across the nation. Rap is a genre with merit – and the individual who “pimps it to his advantage” (Kendrick, 2015) should not be stigmatized within academic contexts and considerations of high art; because, in the end, “Rap is Poetry.”

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# Literary Heroes

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## *Taylor Crowley*

**Course:** Humanities Honors Seminar II

**Professor:** John Peterman

**Student:** Taylor Crowley

**Essay:** *Literary Heroes*

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### **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to discuss books they have read in the second half of this course (*Portrait of the Artist*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Trial*,

*Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*) by selecting a topic of interest that includes all of these works.

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Literary characters from past cultures that were once considered heroes tend to be viewed differently in accordance with contemporary values. The concept of a hero has changed over time and has since evolved to reflect changing societal views. The Ancient Greeks characterized their heroes such as Odysseus with extraordinary physical strength and combat abilities. Tackling a grand quest and overcoming dangerous obstacles were also considered heroic as demonstrated by Dante from Dante's *Inferno*. As time passed, heroes such as Socrates began to embody superior intellectual abilities as well. Through the progression of literature, it appears that society's view of heroes seems to have shifted to highlight the power of the ordinary individual. Through Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, it is clear that the definition of a hero has evolved to reflect concepts of self-heroism in ordinary people. Additionally, through Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Kafka's

*The Trial*, the idea of a hero has developed to reflect individuals who battle everyday struggles and society-based conflicts. Through these five books, heroes stray from their conventional forms, and worlds without traditional heroes are created. A careful analysis of the characters Stephen, James, Joseph K., John, and the Reader will demonstrate this shift and highlight how modern heroes are geared toward the ordinary person.

To begin, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* circulates around the main character of the story, Stephen Dedalus. Unlike traditional heroes such as Odysseus or Dante, Stephen's journey throughout the novel reflects his burning desire to become an artist without being bound by restrictions imposed by the Catholic church or Irish society. His struggle to please his family and remain a devoted Christian harshly contrasts with his desire to live freely as an artist. His first name is derived from the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen, and reflects his internal struggle to remain

loyal to the Christian ideals highly valued by his family. His last name is used in reference to the Greek mythological character who was able to construct a pair of wings to save himself and his son from imprisonment on the island of Crete. Dedalus in particular is a character that haunts Stephen's entire existence as he attempts to live up to the creativity embedded in his name. After viewing himself in the light of Daedalus, Stephen begins to lose touch with his religious beliefs. The novel reflects a coming-of-age story, and we witness Stephen's character progression as he goes through different stages of his life. Early on in the book when Stephen is a young boy attending boarding school, readers experience Stephen's first epiphany as he begins to develop an understanding of social interactions and his ability to challenge them. After Stephen is hit by Father Dolan for not doing his work in class despite his glasses being broken, he takes this matter directly to the rector to inform him about the unfair treatment.

Prior to this instance, Stephen was treated poorly by his classmates and alienated from the rest of the school children. After reporting Father Dolan, Stephen's classmates view him as a hero for addressing Father Dolan's cruel actions, and they hoist him up on their shoulders in celebration. Stephen feels happy and free, and this small action brands him as courageous in the eyes of his fellow students. Contrary to previous literary works we've read, it is the ordinary actions of people that make them heroic in the eyes of those around them. This is an extraordinary moment in Stephen's life as he is very smart but doesn't relate easily to other people. It's important to note, however, that the celebration did not last long, and before Stephen knew it, "The cheers died away in the soft grey air. He was alone" (Joyce & Deane, 2003). Despite Stephen's intense feelings of happiness and belonging during this particular section, Joyce suggests through this line that Stephen's new role as a hero may not end his isolation or outsider status. This remains true

throughout the rest of the novel as he struggles to both uphold Christian ideals and explore his creativity and passion for art. By the end of the novel, Stephen has abandoned his religious journey and decides to leave Ireland for France to fulfill the artistic promise embedded in his name. He embarks on a journey in which he sets out to be his own priest of the eternal imagination. Stephen believes that the artist doesn't live life for him or herself; the artist lives for art which in some sense is a sacrifice of oneself to live for art. Joyce indicates that the artist in his connections with other people is giving himself over to his artistic expression. Art becomes the new religion in Stephen's life as the artist is a person who does not live their life the way ordinary people do. In this regard, Joyce suggests that heroes are individuals who remain true to themselves. Heroes must decide whether to remain loyal to their own beliefs or succumb to the pressures of society. Stephen is a hero in his own life, and Joyce's novel describes his journey toward self-heroism.

In addition, James from *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf can also be regarded as a hero for the self-journey that he embarks on between the ages of six and sixteen. When the reader first meets James, he is six years old and begging his father, Mr. Ramsay, to take him to the lighthouse. After being told he cannot go, we learn that James has a very deep resentment toward his father. In fact, this hatred goes so far as for James to wish that his father was dead on multiple occasions. Through utilizing the stream of consciousness writing technique, Woolf is able to highlight the importance of her characters' thoughts and feelings over external actions and dialogue. This technique enables readers to understand James' personal feelings toward his father and others around him. Upon learning that they will not be traveling to the lighthouse, James' unsettling thoughts emerge, and readers discover, "Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then,

James would have seized it” (Woolf, 1967). James struggles internally to love and accept his father in sharp contrast to the unwavering love and affection he receives from his mother.

It’s important to mention that the Ramsay family embodies the traditional family structure from an outward perspective, but Mrs. Ramsay actually holds great power within the house. She serves to protect James, her youngest son, from the harshness imposed by Mr. Ramsay while also working to maintain the peace in the household. She fears the inevitable of James growing up and wishes he could stay young forever. She also recognizes that the young James desperately wants to gain independence from his father’s control through his desire to go to the lighthouse. In his professional life, Mr. Ramsay comes across as very confident and takes control of situations. When he produces an honest assessment of himself, it’s clear that he needs constant support and reassurance from Mrs. Ramsay who works to keep him grounded.

After Mrs. Ramsay dies and the family returns to the Isle of Skye for the first time in ten years, James is finally able to go to the lighthouse with his father and sister. He still bears great resentment toward his father at this point and begins their voyage by comparing his father to a tyrant that must be resisted and fought against. However, it seems that Mr. Ramsay’s intention in taking his children to the lighthouse is to pass his authority over the family to James. When James finally reaches the lighthouse, he thinks, “...the Lighthouse one had seen across the bay all these years; it was a stark tower on a bare rock. It satisfied him. It confirmed some obscure feeling of his about his own character” (Woolf, 1967). Through this line, Woolf demonstrates the character shift in James after all these years as he finally begins to feel secure in his character and is awarded the patriarchal power he’s desperately been seeking his entire life. Despite James’ resistance toward his father, it becomes clear that the two are

more similar than previously believed. Through the progression of James’ character, Woolf highlights that heroism can be embodied through self-journeys in which individuals finally come to terms with their true selves and find closure regarding long-lasting conflicts.

As we transitioned to Kafka’s *The Trial*, readers witnessed a hero presented in the form of an ordinary individual who had his life turned upside down by a corrupt court system. One important aspect of a hero is to be tested, and the title of *The Trial* could also be written as *The Testing*. The main character in the novel is a man named Joseph K., and he experiences the biggest test of his life beginning on his 30th birthday. Once he reaches this day, K. begins to realize that life is much more complicated than he previously believed. K.’s daily routine is interrupted in the beginning of the novel by two warders entering his residence and informing him that he has been arrested for a crime that they cannot share. K. is instantly filled with feelings of rage and confusion, and these feelings remain persistent throughout the course of the novel. K. is the Chief Clerk of a large bank where he holds a significant amount of responsibility and respectability. In a sense, the Bank can be viewed as a representation of some kind of Holy Trinity power with K. being the third highest in command. Within the Bank, things are always stable, and K. retains control over what takes place. If K. would have been arrested in the Bank, he would have maintained control over the situation and asserted his authority. However, the warders caught him in a vulnerable position within his bedroom where K. lacked complete control. Through the powerless position of K. in regard to the Court, Kafka paints his hero in a different light than previous heroes we’ve encountered thus far this semester. K. is illustrated as a defenseless man in the face of the Law, and nothing he does is sufficient enough to bring about justice. However, it is his unwavering efforts against the untouchable Law that mark him as heroic

As the novel progresses, K. seeks out various sources

hoping that others can divulge more information than he has received, but his efforts prove to be pointless. Within Chapter 5, K. discovers that the two warders he reported for inappropriate behavior are being whipped as punishment for their actions. K. feels extremely guilty as he did not intend for the men to be physically harmed. He attempts to bribe the Whipper to make him stop, but he is unsuccessful in his attempt. One of the warders, Willem, states to K., “We are only being punished because you accused us; if you hadn’t, nothing would have happened, not even if they had discovered what we did. Do you call that justice?” (Kafka & Muir, 2001). Through this line, Kafka indicates the brutally corrupt nature of the Court that K. will soon have to face. All that K. can do is resist against the Law as much as possible and hope for his freedom. Through K.’s self-journey, readers witness his struggle between the Court and the invisible Law. The Law is only powerful by means of its own legitimacy, and the Law and Court combined are untouchable figures. K. is considered heroic for his attempt to battle through an impenetrable system. K. never discovers which crime he has been accused of by the time of his death at the end of the novel, and readers are forced to feel the same frustration as K. through Kafka’s writing style in K.’s limited perspective.

In Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John can be viewed as a hero for his self-journey toward spiritual rebirth and awakening. Baldwin’s novel takes place in Harlem, New York during the early 20th century. During this time, racist ideals plagued the South, and the North was considered a safer haven for African Americans to live. The book highlights what it means to be black in America and demonstrates the struggles of characters such as Gabriel, Elizabeth, and Florence when growing up in a racist society. Baldwin begins his novel on John’s fourteenth birthday similar to Kafka’s beginning with K.’s 30th birthday. The reader learns early on that John feels resentment toward his abusive father, Gabriel, and he struggles to win his affection.

John faces an internal battle as he blames his father for neglecting and beating him but also feels there must be something wrong with him to deserve this type of treatment. In addition to Gabriel’s clear verbal abuse toward John, he also expresses physical abuse as he frequently beats his children. In fact, Gabriel says to John on numerous occasions, “I’m going to beat the sin out of you” (Baldwin, 2016). John is terrified of committing sins, and his strong sense of moral integrity can be deemed as an admirable heroic trait. Through John’s perspective alone, readers are uncertain as to why Gabriel treats John differently than his other children.

As the novel later shifts from Florence’s perspective to Gabriel’s perspective, the reader discovers that Gabriel is not the biological father of John, and he resents him for his illegitimacy. John is referred to as “Elizabeth’s presumptuous bastard boy” from Gabriel’s perspective, and we learn that Gabriel offered to take John in as his own in order to gain forgiveness for having his own illegitimate son, Royal. Gabriel proves to be quite hypocritical as he harshly blames Elizabeth for having an illegitimate son and wants her to express regret for having John. We learn that Gabriel’s first wife, Deborah, was brutally raped by a group of white men, and we later discover that John’s biological father committed suicide after being falsely accused and incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. All of this information has been discreetly kept from John who continues to have a rather naive and innocent outlook regarding the racist society he lives in. In this world, the church is viewed as a place of refuge for John’s family similar to the way the Bank is a place of refuge for K. By the end of the novel, John is saved as he becomes one with the church in order to gain respectability in the eyes of Gabriel who is a minister. He joins the rest of the saints, and to be a saint is to accept Jesus as your savior and allow the Holy Spirit to come inside you. Since John is now saved, it is assumed that Gabriel can no longer beat him in the same way he used to, and a sense of

equalization is brought about. Through the progression of John's character, Baldwin illustrates the concept of a hero as one who embarks on a self-journey toward religious salvation. It is heroic for John to sacrifice himself to Christ and equalize the playing field between himself and Gabriel. Self-sacrifice, intelligence, moral integrity, and unyielding dedication are all heroic traits embodied by John and reflected at a young age.

Finally, as for Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the hero of the story is presented in a unique way in which the Reader is the hero. Similar to Dante from Dante's *Inferno*, the Reader is revealed as more of a reluctant hero. In contrast, the Other Reader is presented as a woman named Ludmilla who acts very much in the moment and changes her reading preferences quite often. Calvino indicates that the position of the Reader is to be interpreted from a male perspective as referenced through the Reader's relationship with Ludmilla. Ludmilla is described as the ideal reader, and Calvino idolizes her for the way she approaches books with an open mind free of expectations and a sense of innocence. The Reader learns from Ludmilla's reading style, and this internal growth is a heroic feature associated with self-journeys. Ludmilla's relationship with the Reader early in the novel seems to be that he wants something more meaningful, while her intentions remain a bit unclear.

Through Mr. Cavedagna, the Reader learns what has happened to the missing endings of all the books he's been reading. A deceitful man named Ermes Marana claimed to be a translator, but he has purposefully used translations of other works to pass them off as the correct translations of the novels he's been tasked with. The publishing house is in a state of disaster, and the Reader embarks on a mission to find the endings of these books with Ludmilla's help. At one point, the Reader travels to Ataguitania with the intention of searching all over for Marana. The Reader does so

out of love for Ludmilla, and it is both admirable and heroic for an individual to be so highly driven by love. Although the Reader is ultimately unsuccessful in identifying and reading each of the missing books he desperately desires, his journey through the process of reading marks him as a hero. He stands up for both his rights as a reader and his hopes as a lover. His self-journey proves to be for the greater good as it not only benefits Ludmilla but also all of us who are reading this book. The Reader struggles for us so that we may also discover the endings to these stories. As the novel reaches its end, a happy conclusion is brought about in which the Reader marries Ludmilla, and he is finally able to read Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. The process of learning more about oneself through reading marks a heroic journey through self-identification and growth. The Reader also exhibits control over the novel in a similar sense that the author exhibits control. Although this sense of authority is different in nature when compared to the role of an author, the Reader maintains control over when to put the book down, skip ahead, or disagree with what the author writes.

In conclusion, there are stark differences present between the heroes we've examined during the second half of the semester and the heroes studied during the first half. Odysseus, Dante, and Socrates each seem to embody characteristics associated with traditional heroes such as bravery, courage, superior intellectual abilities, and god-like features. In contrast, heroes such as Stephen, James, Joseph K., John, and the Reader are heroes of themselves. They embark on self-journeys and reflect realistic conflicts based on societal flaws. The last five books analyzed in this course focus on a world without traditional heroes. Throughout everyday society, many of us encounter individuals similar to Stephen, James, or John, and modern heroes do not need to accomplish anything extraordinary in order to earn their title. In today's world, there has been a significant emphasis placed on self-growth and

understanding, and these novels reflect this shift in changing societal ideals. Heroes have become merely a social construct to give us hope for the future. We are not beyond heroes in the modern world, but we have altered heroic traits to reflect the capabilities of

the ordinary individual. After a careful analysis, these books put into perspective that we should each strive to be our own hero.

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# The Role of K-12 Sex Education and Institutions in Supporting LGBTQ+ Students

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*Toni Anne Mac Lean*

**Course:** Capstone Thesis

**Professor:** Ruth Maher

**Student:** Toni Anne Mac Lean

**Essay:** *The Role of K-12 Sex Education and Institutions in Supporting LGBTQ+ Students*

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## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to conduct formal, objective, research on a subject, relative to

their major and within the Community & Social Justice sphere.

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## **Introduction**

LGBTQ+ identities have historically been marginalized throughout Western culture. Here within the United States, while attitudes are changing, queer individuals are still targeted and stigmatized, aiding the the erasure of their identities and perpetuating harm. As social justice tensions have become greatly contested since the start of the pandemic, public education has come to the hot seat of political debate. The discussion of systemic racial inequalities have lead to a push for Critical Race Theory to be added to curriculums. Similarly, with the increased visibility of gender non-conforming individuals within our society and the increased acceptance of the wide spectrum of sexual orientations, there is a call for greater quality sex education in public institutions. However, despite attitudes shifting towards inclusivity, the social backlash from political conservatives have contested

these topics, preventing them from being regulated in the American educational system.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are either routinely left out of sex education, causing erasure, or discussed through misinformation, causing stigmatization and shame. Though it is argued that education is the first step in altering attitudes towards inclusivity, historical stereotypes of LGBTQ+ individuals as sexual deviants are at the forefront of this debate. Many children grow up in families that do not follow the nuclear model made popular through the Standard North American Family ideology. Families may consist of two fathers, two mothers, or two parents following the legalization of gay marriage in America. Regardless of the various manifestations of the American family, queer individuals are not deemed appropriate for children. Accusations of “grooming” non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity children and

issue relating to low self-esteem (Fischer, 2021, pg 9. Mercier, 2021, pg 17. Orr et al. Pg 1). The goal of this research is to illustrate the ways in which educational institutions can do just that through inclusive sex education curriculums and reducing shame and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ students. Firstly, I will discuss the current regulations surrounding requirements for sex education in K-12 public schools as well as current legislation proposed. Secondly, I will analyze instances where representation of LGBTQ+ teachers, counselors and support staff have improved quality of life for the youth they serve. Lastly, I will discuss the ways in which K-12 educational institutions can better resource their LGBTQ+ students for a safer environment.

## Background

Through out this paper, I will use the term “queer” as a blanket term referring to the inclusion of all identities, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, within the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

I will also reference “heteronormativity”, coined by Micheal Warner in 1991. This ideology assumes every person is straight and cis-gendered, providing privilege to those that identify within the standard and stigmatize those that do not. Most data has been collected thorough news articles and scholarly journals.

Current legislation has increased the threat already prevalent in the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals. Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bills was passed in March of this year, and continued anti-trans legislation in multiple states bars access to facility bathrooms and gender affirming healthcare. Information around protests and backlash were gathered through social media posts from advocates and activists within the queer community following the passing of these policies.

The history of treatment for LGBTQ+ individuals impacts every part of the educational system in America, including the hiring of queer educators. LGBTQ+ educators within public institutions face

difficult decisions to either be openly “out” or hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Major fears revolve around accusations from both homophobic students and parents of pedophilia. Additionally, employees may distrust policies within their work environment, which may not provide de facto protection or safe spaces in practice. The decision to confront these situations are taken case-by-case. I will discuss some of these confrontations later in this paper.

It is worthy to note that anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments within culture, as reported both by the students themselves and their educators, begin circulating as early as elementary school (Fischer, 202, pg 11. Mercier, 2021. pg 16 ). The normalization of homophobic language has desensitized dominant cultures in society to the harm enacted against LGBTQ+ individuals. The usage of such language in schools primes individuals from a young age to feel shame or guilt around budding identities. Because of this, it is not enough to teach accurate queer-related topics in K-12 curriculums. Effective policies must be implemented within these institutions to ensure harm is reduced.

## Current K-12 Sex Education Regulation

There is much debate over the perimeters of sex education at each level: elementary, junior high and high school. Legislators often debate what is appropriate to be taught at which levels in grades K-12. With stigmatization of the marginalized LGBTQ+ community, many students developing their identities during public education may feel isolated depending on their experiences. There is much uncertainty over what topics of sex education, including gender identity and sexual orientation, should be taught at which grade. Furthermore, within the United States, the efficacy of current sex education proves to be insufficient in all areas. The purpose of this section of research is to analyze current sex education curriculums

and propose a uniform, comprehensive education that supports LGBTQ+ students.

There are no federal requirements for sex education, which leaves requisites to be established at a state level. While there are no regulations on what should be taught, there are often state regulations on what cannot be taught. More conservative states even leave sex education up to the districts to decide on, often allowing the school board to compile their own curriculum and causing great inconsistency and harm with misinformation campaigns. Forty states require parental consent or notification when sex education is being taught with 36 of those states allowing for the parent to withdraw the student from this course. Most states require this information to be abstinence only and very little states educating on the importance of consent (Guttmacher Institutue. 2022.). Only the state of Vermont and the District of Columbia consider abortion a necessary topic to cover.

There is significant controversy regarding LGBTQ+ topics in sex education. The Pew Research Center reports that on average, gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals become aware of their sexual orientation between the ages of ten and thirteen years old. By the age of 17, these individuals, as well as those who identify as transgender, were 92% certain of their LGBTQ+ identity (Pew Research Center. 2013.). Additionally, children begin expressing gender between the ages of two and four (Orr et. Al, pg 8). However, twenty-six states within the U.S. require that education programs and instructions be deemed “appropriate” for the students age (GuttMacher Institute. 2022.). And a majority of Americans do not view LGBTQ+ identities are not important enough to be taught in school at all (Cox, 2021).

In March of 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida signed HB 1557. Lines 97-101 of the bill, earning it the title of “Don’t Say Gay”, states:

“Classroom instruction by school personnel or third

parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards”.

Aside from the consistent general vagueness of the bill, we see the reference of “appropriate” subject matter for students used. With no definition or clarification of topics deemed age appropriate, the complete erasure of LGBTQ+ identities continue.

Sex education is typically first presented in schools to students at age eight with the introduction of bodily changes during puberty, including menstruation. Children’s books at the elementary level that are inclusive of gay and lesbian characters are only supported by fifty-four percent of Americans (Cox, 2021). Topics of sexual orientation are not introduced until high school despite recognizing sexual orientations around elementary levels and into junior levels. A majority of Americans agree that LGBTQ+ history, such as the gay rights movement, should be included in high school social studies textbooks (Cox, 2021).

In the American Northeast, junior high sex education is brief. Usually a part of marking period’s Health class, one week may be dedicated to sex-related topics from a scientific stand-point. Sexual anatomy is typically covered, though detached from the organ’s sexual functions. Other topics, such as hormonal increases and functions may be discussed. At the high school level, the length of time reserved for sex education is increased. Topics discussed at the junior level will be expanded upon, sexual intercourse is biologically discussed and contraception and abstinence is emphasized.

Not much is noted of LGBTQ+ experiences in sex education. A 2015 Human Right’s Campaign survey reports that only 12% of millennials stated that their sex education classes covered queer relationships

(HRC Foundation. 2015.). Furthermore, five percent of those individuals said that LGBTQ+ topics were positively presented. State regulations around the education of queer identities vary widely. Only 10 states require these kind of inclusivity to be taught, nine states require this information be unbiased and five states require this information to be negative (Guttmacher Institute. 2022). The focus on heteronormative standards centers cisgender individuals, specifically male, in sex education. While never explicitly stating, this androcentric culture implies that men are the only gender expected to have sex for pleasure (Stenton, 2020).

Although the current state of sex education does not seem to be adequate, Planned Parenthood provides free resources both for educators and for students. Easily accessed online, Planned Parenthood breaks down sex education subjects into the grades at which they should be addressed, starting with the topic of puberty at grade four. At the junior high level, it is suggested that sexual anatomy and physiology be taught, including an understanding of the menstruation cycle, as well as how to access sexual health services both inside and outside of school. By grade eight, the more controversial topics of reproduction, STIs, pregnancy, consent and abortion should be presented (Planned Parenthood, 2022).

With legislators deeming LGBTQ+ identities inappropriate for children, the erasure and displacement of queer people maintain their status at the margins. Frequently, queer parents and their allies will simplify this seeming complex debate by explaining that some children may have variations of moms and dads; one or two moms, one of two or dads, or maybe just two parents, keeping in line with the nuclear family model legislators tend enforce. This is further compounded with harmful instructions from lack of medical accuracy and centering of cisgender men and heterosexuality. Additionally, the quality of sex education at higher public school levels has left

many American students with inadequate knowledge about their own anatomy, bodily autonomy and preventative or protective measures for STIs and pregnancy. While legislators quibble over what is deemed “appropriate”, the inconsistency in quality education has led to erasure and displacement of the LGBTQ+ identity. This comes together to support my thesis by highlighting the discrepancies in public school sex education. Despite sexual orientations beginning to develop in elementary and middle-school aged students, toxic ideologies and stereotypes perpetuated in sex education leads to misinformation and further stigmatization, causing an environment ripe for bullying.

### **Inclusivity of LGBTQ+ Educators**

Our heteronormative culture is reproduced within our institutions, creating atmospheres that marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals. The perpetuation of these norms has created a “hidden curriculum” within educational institutions (Mercier, 2021, pg 18). Under the guise of “grooming” students to be queer, harmful stereotypes have been used to keep LGBTQ+ educators out of schools, ultimately leaving LGBTQ+ students feeling unsafe and unprotected. Instances of breaking through these stereotypes to alter people’s perceptions of queerness have been shown to improve quality of life for both students and adults within institutions. However, if left unchanged, queer-identifying students are left at higher-risks of negative life consequences, and educational staff are less likely to intervene or identify as LGBTQ+ themselves. This section will identify how exposure to positive LGBTQ+ representation for both young students and adults within in public institutions, like schools, reduces the negative impacts of marginalization for queer folks.

The stereotype of queer educators being pedophiles still plagues many public educational institutions, creating discriminatory practices in hiring and allowing false accusations from older students lead to firings.

However, the landscape for LGBTQ+ educators seems to be changing favorably with each generation with 57% of K-12 students wanting to be taught LGBTQ+ topics (Cox, D. 2021). American's are also trending to increase support of LGBTQ+ individuals as teachers at every education level. Sixty percent of Americans are comfortable with transgender folks and 81% for gay and lesbian folks teaching in elementary schools (Cox, 2021).

While this trend towards inclusivity seems promising, there is still little support seen institutionally to cease the fear of harassment and bullying evident for many LGBTQ+ students. Current legislation surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity in schools are being proposed to further limit identity expression and representation within schools. In solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, Florida teachers have drafted a teacher's memo as response to the "Don't Say Gay" policies, informing parents of students that:

"To be in accordance with this policy, [they] will no longer be referring to your students with gendered pronouns..., will no longer used gendered titles such as 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.'... [and] will be removing all books or instruction which refer to a person[s]... gender identity that also may allude to sexual orientation" (Papenfuss, 2022).

While this seemingly lighthearted retaliation is meant to be satirical, LGBTQ+ individuals are still at risk for stigmatization. Safety concerns stemming from such environments that do not accept sexual orientation or gender identity leave students at higher rates of drop outs or experiences of mental health issues (Zingg, 2020. Fischer, 2021, pg 3). In instances of bullying due to gender identity, students are two times less likely to pursue secondary education opportunities (HRC Foundation, 2015).

There is currently no direct evidence that there is a correlation between LGBTQ+ educator representation and improved student achievement, but there is quite

a bit of empirical evidence from past students whose queer teachers made an impression of them (Mercier, 2021, pg 22). The relationship between improved self-esteem and representation has so far paralleled the findings of race and gender representation in youth. Diversity in representation of LGBTQ+ teachers and staff is still necessary, despite the lack of research about the specific impact of queer representation. An example of the positive impact experienced by students of LGBTQ+ teachers can be seen courtesy of Teach for America.

Teach for America interviewed LGBTQ+ students about the increased visibility for their own identities through the authenticity of their teachers. For some like Gargi Sundaram, it was the first time they could see the other side of an seemingly condemning aspect of their identity

"I feel like I could have had a lot of questions answered, especially about what my life could look like. I'm a very future-oriented person. But it was always kind of hazy. I'd sometimes try to fit it into this heteronormative box of what it would look like, but it felt wrong." (Zingg, 2022).

Sundaram eventually went on to become a high school level biology teacher, highlighting the impact left on them. For many others, a sense of safety and belonging was established where a lasting appreciation had inspired many to pursue careers within educational institutions to becomes role-models for the younger generation. Others interviewed report seeing, some for the first time, that there are alternative ways to be a "boy" or a "girl".

Inclusive teachers and staff have proven to reduce negative educational environments for LGBTQ+ students. A decrease in homophobic language has also been reported at educational institutions that employ openly "out" faculty and staff (Mercier, 2021, pg 21). What's more is that teacher's who feel supported by their school's leadership are more likely to aid in anti-

bullying efforts (Fischer, 2011, pg 36). With school leadership's support, implementing and enforcing anti-bullying efforts are more effective and promote a safer environment for students.

Queer educators both allow for visibility of a stigmatized community and assist in combating anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments at every education level. Representation for children and youth is an important factor developmentally and, despite lack of conclusive evidence to support this for queer students, echos the findings of positive representations for other identities pertaining to race and ethnicity. This supports my thesis in highlighting the potential impact exposure to LGBTQ+ role models, such as "out" teachers have on their students. They aid in empowering their students, leaving lasting impressions that alter their trajectories and allow them to feel seen and validated, ultimately improving students' self-esteem.

### **Creating a Safer Environment for LGBTQ+ Youth**

Ideologies of a dominant culture, in this instance heteronormativity, are reproduced within our institutions. If policies outside of the institutions are unfavorable to the queer community, then to affirming care and support is made difficult to access. The goal of this section is to assess access to resources for LGBTQ+ students to create a safer educational environment. Much of the work for educational institutions centers around anti-bullying efforts and gender-affirmation. The onset of legislation such as the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida have sustained a culture of silence for queer-identifying students. In barring discussions around sexual orientation and gender identity, zero-tolerance efforts against homophobia are thwarted. Similar legislation has been presented in at least 5 other states such as Georgia and Louisiana, both of which have been killed in committee.

Retaliations to this piece of legislation include a teacher's memo agreeing to the discontinuation of gender pronouns and language in class as well

as national critics. Disney, a major financial donor of every sponsor and co-sponsor of HB 1557, was accused of rainbow-washing and maintaining compulsive heterosexuality by remaining silent on the matter (Bernstein, 2022). Employees of Disney theme parks staged walk-outs from March 15- 22 until CEO Bob Chapek issued a statement condemning the legislation, vowing to help repeal the policy (Shanfeld, 2022).

While Disney's production staff may be helping overturn hostile environments for LGBTQ+ students, it is school staff and faculty that are on the front lines of anti-bullying efforts (Orr, et al. Pg 11 & 30. Mercier, 2021, pg 47). All over the country, non-LGBTQ+ educators serve as allies within school buildings by implementing anti-bullying practices forty-nine percent of the time, whereas LGBTQ+ educators are likely to use these efforts at seventy-four percent (Mercier, 2021, pg 43). These efforts may include advocating for training and educating staff on queer issues and policies, serving as an advisor to a student club like the Gay-straight Alliance, adding queer studies in their curriculum or talking informally about queer identities, providing one-on-one support and guidance or displaying signs of LGBTQ+ support within the classroom. (Mercier, 2021, pg 133). These signs of support are not without their backlashes, as less than half of Americas think it is appropriate to display items like the pride flag within classrooms (Cox, 2021).

Other forms of support have been made available within educational institutions for students. Student run clubs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, have become increasingly popular among high schools. The primary role is to provide support for sexual minority youth and improve students' sense of belonging. Research shows that in sharing their stigma with others that have been stigmatized too, LGBTQ+ individuals can reduce negative mental health problems (Fischer, 2011, pg 9). Some GSA programs acquire community involvement, allowing for non-students to participate. Additionally,

since schools have moved to be remote since the start of the pandemic, support groups like Gay-Straight Alliances have become virtual, allowing for easier support access at any time. This is especially poignant for students whose identities are not accepted within their own households.

As previously stated use of anti- LGBTQ+ language begins early in elementary public education and increases in usage at every grade level thereafter (Fischer, 2021, pg 2). With high levels of victimization of LGBTQ+ youth leading to significant negative risks, accountability for upholding these practices have helped validate queer student experiences and even instilled a sense of pride for students who have “come out” (Fischer, 2021 ,pg 10. Mercier, 2021, pg 123. Orr et. al, Pg 17). Restorative justice models have been suggested in preventing further victimization. Zero-tolerance policies that have been implemented in schools for gender non-conforming students have even reported no incidences of harassment or bullying upon allowing students to access facilities comfortable to them (Orr, et. al, Pg 30).

The issue of facility use within institutions continues to make headlines as accommodations for transgender and gender non-conforming students develop. North Carolina’s 2016 HB2 passing eliminated gender-neutral bathrooms and facilities, forcing individuals to use gendered bathrooms in accordance with their sex assigned at birth. While this law has since been repealed, the controversy still remains, playing on the stereotype of transgender individuals as sex offenders. The Human Rights Campaign has suggested a framework for educational employees that may have concerns regarding such possibilities. Most matters of dishonesty should be discernible, but documentation of the student asserting their gender identity outside of an educational setting may be requested. Again, it is suggested that teachers do not shy away from these topics in the classroom, tying politics to the rights issues that may be effecting LGBTQ+ youth (Journell,

2017. Mercier, 202, pg 133).

Students of a non-normative gender identity, if disclosed to educational staff, are at risk of being shamed and stigmatized through legislation like HB 1557. This bill requires teachers, counselors or other educational support staff to inform the parent’s of students who have identified as queer, effectively “outing” a student before they may be ready. This becomes dangerous for LGBTQ+ students whose families may not be supportive of such identities, heightening the harm already prevalent for LGBTQ+ youth. While it is suggested that instances of gender-expansive behavior be addressed to the parent’s of children to ensure they are being acknowledged at home, the Human Right’s Campaign emphasizes the role of consent from the student. If met with resistance from the family, the school staff should be ready with resources to mitigated any harm and help parents understand the child’s experience (Orr et. al, pg 30).

Creating a safe environment in public schools for LGBTQ+ students requires support from staff in upholding policies implemented and centering the needs of queer students. Stigmatization and negative experiences have lasting mental and health effects for students. Through using educational tools, the political climate can be presented in class rooms as rights issues for individuals. This can aid in feedback to develop a safer environment for queer students and help understand how to implement safe spaces such as GSAs or gender neutral bathrooms. There are multiple ways in which educational institutions can improve the quality of life for their LGBTQ+ youth and the access to free resources can help institutions implement anti-harassment policies.

## Conclusion

The greatest way to destigmatize marginalized communities is through education and wareness. With targeted legislation aiming to prevent the discussion of LGBTQ+ individuals in public schools, the erasure of

sexual orientation and gender identities that do not fall within the heteronormative model continue to occur. Arguments in favor of these policies, like HB 1557, cite queer people as “grooming” children and youth while failing to recognize that heteronormative “grooming” has already been in effect. Interestingly, the acceptance of Disney movies where princes and princesses kiss and books of fairytales where the girls fall in love with their male rescuers seemingly does not classify as such. The conclusion derived from this argument then is that in claiming to protect children from sexually explicit content, legislators are sexualizing LGBTQ+ individuals and thus maintaining the negative stereotype of sexual deviants. Conflating non-normative sexual orientation and gender identities as sexually explicit reproduce the stereotypes of queer people as sexual deviants, aiding in the misinformation commonly presented within education. If education is indeed the best way to address and alter these stereotypes with accurate information and representation, we must continue to push for inclusive sex education in K-12 schools.

Based off of the information presented, a multi-angled approach is needed for educational institutions to support their LGBTQ+ student bodies and reduce this social harm. This can be effectively done if the quality of sex education is improved and built upon to include identities outside of the gender binary as well as through support groups where stigmatized individuals can be with others that share their stigma. Accurate information regarding queer individuals will assist in combating unsafe environments. Additionally, representation of such individuals within the school system as teachers, counselors and support staff seemingly reduce the effects of internalized stigmatization of LGBTQ+ students. Not only does inclusive staff help enforce anti-bullying efforts, but it is imperative that school leaders, such as the board of education and principals, be on board in supporting their queers staff and enforcing implemented policies

for safe, inclusive spaces. The institutions themselves should have the proper bathroom facilities and provide access to other means of support outside of the school. Mediation is also recommended for students who identity expressions may lead to hostile environments at home. Student clubs, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance have proven to be effective in engaging community support and ensuring acceptance in students’ family.

Qualitative evidence is leaning towards an improved quality of life for LGBTQ+ students if they see similar identity representations at school. More conclusive research still must be done on the effects of queer representation specifically. Because negative health effects disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ youth, destigmatization must be key. The acceptance of queer identities are becoming more common. Along with this, the fight for inclusive education, including more positive representations, can reduce the internalization of shame for LGBTQ+ children and youth.

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