

# Proceedings of GREAT Day

---

Volume 2018

Article 30

---

2019

## The Proceedings of GREAT Day 2018

Proceedings of GREAT Day  
*SUNY Geneseo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day>

---

### Recommended Citation

Proceedings of GREAT Day (2019) "The Proceedings of GREAT Day 2018," *Proceedings of GREAT Day*. Vol. 2018 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2018/iss1/30>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the GREAT Day at KnightScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of GREAT Day by an authorized editor of KnightScholar. For more information, please contact [KnightScholar@geneseo.edu](mailto:KnightScholar@geneseo.edu).

# The Proceedings of GREAT Day 2018

SUNY Geneseo  
Geneseo, NY

© 2019 The State University of New York at Geneseo



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License unless otherwise noted. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Milne Library  
1 College Circle  
Geneseo, NY 14454

GREAT Day logos have been used with the permission of their original designer,  
Dr. Stephen West.

ISBN: 978-1-942341-61-1

# About GREAT Day and *The Proceedings of GREAT Day*

Geneseo Recognizing Excellence, Achievement, & Talent is a college-wide symposium celebrating the creative and scholarly endeavors of our students. In addition to recognizing the achievements of our students, the purpose of GREAT Day is to help foster academic excellence, encourage professional development, and build connections within the community.

Established in 2009, *The Proceedings of GREAT Day* journal compiles and publishes promising student work presented at SUNY Geneseo's GREAT Day symposium. The projects, presentations, and research included here represent the academic rigor, multidisciplinary study, and creativity of the students taking part in the SUNY Geneseo GREAT Day symposium.

Editors: Nicole Callahan, Geneseo Class of 2021,  
Dimitri Wing-Paul, Geneseo Class of 2019

Publishing Supervisor: Jonathan Grunert, Scholarly Communications Librarian,  
Milne Library

Editorial Consultants: Dan Ross, Head of Access Services, Milne Library,  
Sheryl Larson-Rhodes, First-Year Experience Librarian,  
Milne Library

Production Manager: Allison Brown, Digital Publishing Services Manager, Milne  
Library

Publisher: Milne Library, SUNY Geneseo

These proceedings can be accessed online at [go.geneseo.edu/greatjournal](http://go.geneseo.edu/greatjournal)



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Patty Hamilton-Rodgers, GREAT Day Coordinator

Dr. Denise A. Battles, President

Dan Ross and Sheryl Larson-Rhodes, Milne Library

GREAT Day is funded by the Office of the Provost,  
the Student Association, Campus Auxiliary Services,  
and the Jack '76 and Carol '76 Kramer Endowed Lectureship.

The GREAT Day Website: [http://www.geneseo.edu/great\\_day](http://www.geneseo.edu/great_day)



# Table of Contents

<b>An interview with President Denise Battles</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>An interview with GREAT Day Coordinator Patty Hamilton-Rodgers</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Erik Buckingham</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>Black Women Be Knowing: Double Consciousness and the Maid's Tear in <i>Get Out</i></b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Erik Buckingham</i> <i>sponsored by Lee Pierce</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Anni-Ming Larson</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty sponsor Meredith Harrigan</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>An American Stuck in Another Body: Narratives of Adopted Emerging Adults</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Anni-Ming Larson</i> <i>sponsored by Meredith Harrigan</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty sponsor Lee Pierce</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with directors Sang Wook Nam and Luc Turnier</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Laura D'Amico</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty sponsor Jonette Lancos</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	



<b>A Study of Labanotation and its Applications from 20th Century Europe to 21st Century America</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>Laura D'Amico</i> <i>sponsored by Jonette Lancos</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Samantha Schmeer</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>Inspiration vs. Appropriation: Representation of Indigenous Cultures in Western Dance Companies</b>	<b>50</b>
<i>Samantha Schmeer</i> <i>sponsored by Jonette Lancos</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty advisor Maria Lima</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>Cooking Confrontations à la Francophonie</b>	<b>58</b>
<i>Sophie Boka</i> <i>sponsored by Maria Lima</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Kylie Mathis</b>	<b>88</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty advisor Melanie Blood</b>	<b>90</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>Sexual Violence and DC Comics</b>	<b>92</b>
<i>Kylie Mathis</i> <i>sponsored by Melanie Blood</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Simone Louie</b>	<b>101</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty advisor Michael Masci</b>	<b>103</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>Writing a Modern <i>Missa Brevis</i></b>	<b>106</b>
<i>Simone Louie</i> <i>sponsored by Michael Masci</i>	
<b><i>Missa Brevis</i></b>	<b>113</b>
<i>Simone Louie</i>	

<b>An interview with student presenter Ryan Lee</b>	<b>124</b>
<i>Dimitri Wing-Paul</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Julia Cameron</b>	<b>128</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>The Effects of Fictional Portrayals of Therapy on Attitudes about Seeking Mental Health Treatment</b>	<b>131</b>
<i>Julia Cameron</i>	
<i>sponsored by Steven Kirsh</i>	
<b>An interview with student author Claire Edgington</b>	<b>142</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>An interview with faculty advisor Jennifer Katz</b>	<b>144</b>
<i>Nicole Callahan</i>	
<b>Bystander Responses to Women's Sexual or Physical Assault: Moderating Effects of Personal Victimization History</b>	<b>146</b>
<i>Claire Edgington</i>	
<i>Jennifer Katz</i>	
<i>Tess Ramos-Dries</i>	
<i>sponsored by Jennifer Katz</i>	



# The Proceedings of GREAT Day 2018



# An interview with President Denise Battles

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **How has GREAT Day changed since your first one as president in 2015?**

I started my position in July of 2015, but by early 2015 I knew I was coming to Geneseo as I had already been named President-elect; I just hadn't started yet. So, I visited Geneseo specifically to attend GREAT Day in April 2015. I received an advance perspective because I had heard so much about the event, and I was not disappointed. I was delighted that I had that opportunity. In terms of specific changes we've certainly had an increase in the number of presenters; we've crested the 1,000 mark, which I don't believe we were at in 2015. I would say the variety of presentations has expanded as well, and that's a good thing. It shows the wide range of interests our students have. I suppose one other change is that—unlike when I came here in 2015 and my knowledge of the students was obviously very limited and likewise the faculty and staff—now when I attend GREAT Day I know the people who are mentoring and working so closely with the students, and I can see the trajectory of the scholarly and creative works as these mentors continue their efforts with a new group of student scholars. So, it's delightful to see that progress because I know the people.

## **What do you look forward to at GREAT Day?**

There are relatively few institutions that have such a priority on undergraduate research that they will carve a precious full day out of their academic term to dedicate to highlighting it. Fortunately, Geneseo is one of those institutions. I enjoy the excitement that accompanies the event; it's just a different vibe. It's toward the end of the academic year, so it's sort of a culminating scholarly piece. I really appreciate the excitement; I get to observe the passion that the student participants have in highlighting their work. So that's really what I look forward to, is to get to be a participant in all that.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo's culture and on higher education in general?**

One of Geneseo's points of pride is that our learning is not limited to the confines of a classroom. We support our students in their efforts to integrate learning across a variety of disciplines, across academic and co-curricular areas, but also to apply it. Undergraduate research is an excellent way to apply what students learn in the classroom,

and it enables students to take something that reflects a piece of scholarly interest, whether it's creative work or lab research or field research, whatever it might be, to pursue something that really fuels their creativity. At a campus like Geneseo, we are fortunate because we are primarily an undergraduate institution, our students have opportunities they might not have at schools that are larger or have a large graduate population. Our students in physics get to work on a Pelletron accelerator, it's such a rarity that students get such a quality scholarly opportunity; in a graduate or research institution, it would be the graduate students who have those opportunities. So, it really positions our students for whatever comes next, whether it's graduate school—and I think in part our level of undergraduate research is the reason why we have such a high placement rate of students who go on to graduate school—or whether they're looking to go right into employment post-Geneseo. They have wonderful applied learning experiences that enable them to really get the most out of what they're learning. The other piece I would say is that having that sort of faculty- and staff-mentored experience helps our students build really strong bonds with our personnel, and that's not just something that occurs during their undergraduate years; it is sustained. I see it every year when alumni come back for homecoming, alumni that are five years out from graduation, ten years out, twenty years out, fifty years out. I even met an alumna who was eighty years out this past year, and what I hear focuses on the strong relationship our students had with the faculty.

### **When you took the position of president, what did you guess the student body and staff would be like during GREAT Day, and were you correct in that assumption?**

I assumed that since the institution had gone to the lengths of setting aside a whole day to celebrate students' scholarly and creative activity, what I would see were very dedicated, enthusiastic, talented people exploring their passions, and I did find that, but I underestimated all of those. I underestimated the scale, the sheer numbers, the level of excitement on campus. So, when I came I was blown away by the high caliber of what I was seeing. It wasn't something that was a modest endeavor; this was truly something of a high caliber that was more reminiscent of graduate students than undergraduates.

### **What has been the most rewarding thing to experience at GREAT Day?**

I don't know that it's been just one thing, but I think it's been about being able to be a witness, and see students explore their passions, and presumably take a step forward in pursuing their passions. It's the first step in what one assumes will be a successful professional life. So being there and being able to experience students being so poised and articulate in explaining their research, or being so adept in their creative performances. It's watching a transformative moment when people are saying, "This is what I want to do, and I am giving it my all," and it's watching them launch.

# An interview with GREAT Day Coordinator Patty Hamilton- Rodgers

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What changes have you seen in the GREAT Day presentations over the past several years?**

I think our numbers have been stabilized. We get typically between 900 and 1,000 students, which is something to be very proud of because we are close to twenty percent participation. The poster numbers have gone up, as well. Two years ago, the poster numbers have gotten so much that we could not fit all the posters in the ballroom. We had to split: one set of posters during the noon time session and one set of posters during the late afternoon session. So, we have had more posters but fewer oral presentations. I have also lost a lot of the dance groups that used to perform. We have tried to work with the cultural dance teams to perform either in the late afternoon poster sessions or in the open poster sessions, whatever we can do to fit them in. However, they have kind of gone by their wayside, and I get tired of tracking them down. I think that it is sad. Geneseo recognizes excellence, achievement, and talent and we have a lot of talent here. But, those groups do not seem to rise on the occasion, so that makes me sad. But other than that, we have tried to make modifications to GREAT Day every year to be more reflective of what is going on in campus, and what people like. Several years ago, that is when we used to have three poster sessions: one in the morning, one in the noon time, and one in the end of the day. We just switched that into two sessions and modified the schedule a little bit. We are always trying to change things up for GREAT Day to be more exciting and engaging for people.

## **What do you suggest for students who want to present for GREAT Day?**

Present! [Laughs] The only qualification is that you need to have a faculty sponsor. But for GREAT Day, I try to be all encompassing. When somebody comes to me with an idea that makes me go, "Wow!" we try to make it work. I never forget when the GEO organization came in, and they wanted to do a dumpster dive. Now, I am getting a picture that they actually want to place a big dumpster in front of the College Union, but that is not what it was. It was very different so we make it work. When the Guerilla Poets wanted to do some different things, we sat down with them to make it work. For our Winter Guard, they [wanted to perform in] the lobby of the Col-



lege Union so we make it work. So, if you have an interesting idea that you wanted to present, come see me because we try to make it work. We try to be encompassing for all in GREAT Day, so the more the merrier. That is why the Geneseo Isonomia [Film] Festival screening and awards are at the end of GREAT Day, which is a perfect place for them to be. We try to include as much as we can. There was a student who got one of the ambassadorships last year, and he came to me earlier on. He wanted to build a tunnel and have it displayed. It did not come up how he wanted it to, but we sat down and worked out a location for him. Even if it is wacky or crazy, we still try to make it work.

### **What changes have you seen in the *Proceedings* since the first publication?**

The quality! The quality has exponentially improved, and it is not just the appearance. I think first it was just, “Okay whoever wants to do it,” but now, you have to have a level of quality before you go into the *Proceedings*. I just think that it adds prestige to it. So, that is far away the biggest improvement, which is the quality.

### **What does GREAT Day mean to you?**

It is my baby. I took it over after I worked with the person that I coordinated with in 2011. I made it my mission to make sure that everybody knows what GREAT Day is. I have been in Higher Education since 1985, and it is probably my favorite program that I’ve ever worked on in my entire career. People supported GREAT Day, and they come out for it. There is an energy on campus on GREAT Day that there is no other day like it. Almost every college does some sort of symposium day or scholars day, but it just does not compare to what we do. The symposium days from other colleges are not as encompassing, and our GREAT Day really speaks to the spirit of Geneseo.

# An interview with student author Erik Buckingham

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What inspired you to write this paper?**

First, I wrote it for a class as an assignment. We had to pick one theory from one of the readings that Professor Lee Pierce gave us. Professor Pierce suggested an article about tears in movies for the class Visual Criticism. We have watched a lot of movies, and we saw what different effects that [were] used and how these effects help them in the film. One of them was the use of tears. The theory was tears can mean something sad, or tears could mean a point of the story that says something about the narrative. So, I found tears interesting, and Professor Pierce suggested to me that there is a scene in *Get Out* where the maid smiles and cries, so she said, “You could do this one,” and I ended up writing about that. I’ve never thought about that scene until she mentioned it.

## **Had you watched the movie before?**

I had watched it, but it was more for entertainment. I was not analyzing the movie at all. This was a completely different way of thinking. I would have thought I would be analyzing it for the plot, but my analysis was more about the visual cues and a lot of the history about it and what the movie was saying in a larger picture than just what usually happens at a horror film.

## **How was that experience of analyzing the visual cues, specifically the tears, for you?**

I thought it was really difficult. However, Professor Pierce has a really good knowledge of rhetoric, and [she is] good at thinking that way. She really pushed me to think of tears as visual cues, in a way that says something more than just when someone is sad.

## **How did you present your work at GREAT Day and how was that experience?**

That was the first time that I really talked about my paper. GREAT Day was the point that we had not completely finished the research papers, so I was not really sure if people would understand it because I did not understand it at first. I felt that I had to make it really relatable to the audience because it was such a theoretical piece. I was more so worried that people would not understand what I was trying to say. But, I

would say that it was a good experience overall. It was also a good experience in public speaking.

**What did your involvement in GREAT Day mean to you?**

It made me feel like I was contributing to the school's academic culture.

**Are you planning to continue to present for the next GREAT Day?**

I am not presenting for the next GREAT Day because I am going to Spain next semester.

# Black Women Be Knowing: Double Consciousness and the Maid's Tear in *Get Out*

Erik Buckingham

---

---

*sponsored by Lee Pierce*

---

---

## ABSTRACT

This essay argues that the 2017 horror film, *Get Out*, portrays the chronic double consciousness of black Americans, especially women, amidst late capitalist liberalism. I focus specifically on a scene midway through the movie in which a black, hypnotized maid simultaneously laughs, smiles, and sheds a tear. This essay discusses double consciousness, body language, clothing and facial expressions in order to illustrate the ambivalent stance that *Get Out* takes toward black women as both empowered and disempowered, arguing against the laudatory critiques of mainstream film commentators who have focused on the emancipatory potential of *Get Out's* narrative.

---

---

Throughout history, black women such as Harriet Tubman have been rightfully regarded as mentally strong and knowledgeable about the human condition. An old African proverb states, “Black women be knowing” (Willis, 2017). We might consider the modern version of that statement to be today’s racially hip “Get woke,” which means to become actively aware within and about the black community’s experience with racial oppression. One particular phenomenon in popular culture where we see the manifestation of “Get woke” is in the popular criticism of Jordan Peele’s 2017 film *Get Out*, in which a white family hypnotizes African Americans and takes over their bodies and consciousnesses.

*Get Out* portrays the vulnerability that accompanies marginalization; however, it also shows the chronic double consciousness—or the mental experience of living within two cultures—of black Americans, especially woman, amidst late capitalist liberalism. I read across the film’s racially ambiguous form, focusing specifically on a scene midway through the movie in which a black, hypnotized maid simultaneously laughs, smiles, and sheds a tear as she denies her own racial oppression. I read this scene with the assistance of Eugenie Brinkema’s theory of aesthetic form in *The Forms of the Affects*, where Brinkema argues that an artifact such as a tear either expresses emotional discourse spontaneously or after a sequence of connected events that convey a mes-

sage regarding the whole (2014). Emotional discourse is addressed in critic Sharice B.'s review of *Get Out*, in which they comment on the maid's ability to overcome trauma and become powerful: "Through adversary and with the very little we are given, black women have resisted political and racist authority, [and] made something extraordinary out of nothing" (2017). In other words, the maid shows that symbols of empowerment still need support. Her mixed emotions suggest that empowerment is a double-edged sword; what empowers us also holds us to the expectation of feeling strong, even when we feel the opposite. To lay out this argument, I will first offer a brief review of double consciousness—an abstract concept of blackness in mainstream white America—and its relationship to shed tears. Following the literature review, I will analyze the role of body language, clothing, and facial expressions—all supporting artifacts in the presentation of the maid's tear in *Get Out*—in order to illustrate the ambivalent stance that *Get Out* takes toward black women as both empowered and disempowered—in contrast to critiques that have focused too long and too hard on the emancipatory potential of *Get Out*'s narrative.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Media coverage of natural disasters reveals the constricting conditions of racism and marginalization. Literary critics Best and Marcus write, "The real-time coverage of Hurricane Katrina showed in ways that required little explication the state's abandonment of its African American citizens; and many people instantly recognized as lies political statements such as 'mission accomplished' " (2009, p. 2). In their analysis, a medium shows only one perspective at first glance; however, recognizing that a text only shows one perspective allows us to envision the other perspectives that exist. As Marxist scholar Frederic Jameson argues, we cannot interpret a text unless we accept that the text "never means exactly what it says" (1981, p. 61). For example, Beyoncé Knowles was able to critique the media's lack of perspective in her music video for "Formation" (2016). "Formation" used visual elements from Hurricane Katrina, such as a sinking car and damaged homes, to comment on why the lack of media coverage of African American communities was unsurprising. These visual elements showed trauma that had begun before the hurricane hit the Black community in New Orleans, as the hurricane arrives at the end of the video. Just as curators used New Orleans' historical context to assemble Beyoncé's video into a narrative about the African American experience, critics comment on African American women's marginalization in history by assembling the visual cues found in *Get Out*.

One of the visual cues discussed among critics of *Get Out* is the "creepy" tear shed by a supporting character in the film, Georgina, the maid, played by Betty Gabriel. The maid's tear in *Get Out* has been regarded by critics overall as highly significant, as this excerpt from *Blavity* suggests:

I think we all can agree that the scene where Georgina cried then laughed then cried...then proceeded to repeat "no, no, no" is the creepiest part of the film. I can see this moment going down in history with the many clas-

sic horror-thriller scenes such as the ax through the door in *The Shining* or Anthony Hopkins' incredible monologue in *The Silence of the Lambs*. (2017)

What the critic describes as “creepy” is precisely the affective response this essay intends to examine. What makes the scene “creepy”? What is the relationship between the unsettling feeling experienced during the maid's scene and blackness in mainstream America?

Furthermore, how can rhetorical theory tie these elements together so that we have a better understanding of the relationship between media, form, and race? Critic Eugenie Brinkema states that western culture encourages tears to be read as windows to a character's interior state. Brinkema highlights this idea: “One first perceived a fact (Lion!), which then excited an emotion (Fear!), which finally led to a bodily affection (Fight!—or, perhaps, flight)” (2014, p. 4). This analysis takes the perspective that tears logically map out the course of emotional expression; tears express internal feelings. As Catherine Leglú writes, “Tears are the expression and representation of a variety of emotions in Western medieval culture” (2000, p. 495). While both Leglú and Brinkema present one perspective, the tear as an external representation of a character's internal state, Brinkema has suspicions that a tear points elsewhere:

Because of these theoretical negotiations, the trajectory of the tear in philosophical thought moves from clarity to cloud, from transparency to suspicion, from the sense that we know what a tear is to the sense that a tear is always anything but itself—even that the tear is a lie. (2014, p. 3)

Unlike the logical progression suggested before, here Brinkema argues that the tear tricks us into thinking that we are seeing a character's internal state. However, Brinkema continues, suggesting that tears sometimes point to elements separate from the character. How, then, do we read a tear that falls but is not cried? Or, put differently, when a black woman sheds a tear that is not a direct expression of her consciousness, what is that saying about the conditions of living for black women in general?

At their most rudimentary, tears invoke emotions in an audience; however, when analyzed in a larger context, tears explain a character's situation to the audience. Leglú recognizes that tears are evocative: “Grief, love and anger are simultaneously performative and introspective” (2000, p. 495-6). While both Leglú and Brinkema see tears as emotional symbols, Brinkema cites Aristotle's *Poetics* to prove that tears provide structure for the incidents in a play: “Tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle, but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play” (2014, p. 4). Brinkema recognizes that the structure of a play can be analyzed through a tear, but the context for the structure of the play lies in the external elements that work in conjunction with the tear. The tear is no longer a sign of interior emotion when analyzed in a larger, archaeological context.

The tear provides an archaeological context, but it does not advance the plot of *Get Out*. Rather, the tear reveals the symbols before itself and provides a framework for analyzing what comes after the tear. The tear itself “is not expressive of the emotions of a subject, not an external production or an internal state,” argues Brinkema, “It does not speak to either its emissive past or to its judged emotional future, and it is ripped from, and sits only ever so gently on the surface of, the body” (2014, p. 19). In other words, tears resist their own self evidence. Further, formal elements separate from the tear, such as clothing, light, curves, and body language, must be read for their own relation to affect in order to understand the tear’s meaning.

While the tear provides meaning when it is in relation to external elements, it does not provide advanced meaning about the subject in which it falls. This can be seen when “the tear no longer functions as a pointer—to the secrets of the heart, to cathartic release, to interior states—it is no longer possible to regard it as an entry into the knowledge of a subject” (Brinkema, 2014, p. 22). When voided of interiority, Brinkema believes that the tear loses its deeper meaning. It is precisely the shedding of this “deeper meaning” that is accomplished when the maid sheds her tear in *Get Out*. The tear voids the maid’s interiority and deeper meaning in order to express the larger issue of the limits of marginalization of black women during liberalism in America.

Further, Brinkema writes that a tear “does not drop, but folds” (2014, p. 22). This suggests the tear does not convey any deeper meaning about the interior state. Instead, the tear fails to avoid creating a deeper meaning because it is used in conjunction with clothing, body language, and a smile, thus signifying the conflicting external states of the maid.

## DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE TEAR THAT FOLDS

The maid’s tear points to a marginalization and a double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, sociologist and activist W. E. B. Dubois states: “The Negro is...gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (1903, p. 198). His analysis of the status of African Americans suggests that blackness can only be defined through a definition of whiteness; thus, a double consciousness emerges. Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe uses the metaphor of “the wake”—as in the wake of a ship—to name the paradox that African Americans cannot run from the marginalized space that they are put into because of the pressures that they put onto themselves: “To be in the wake is also to recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force” (1999, p. 16). In other words, the wake prohibits African Americans from overcoming racial barriers because conservative African Americans are seen as a force against African American advancement. This extends into the twenty-first century, with the idea that African

Americans only receive praise for their progress once white people overcome their own prejudices; thus, black progress is defined by white progress (Rock, 2014). Critic Cassie Da Costa uses both DuBois and Rock's arguments to say, "Good-intentioned, liberal-minded micro- and macro-aggressions are not explained away or forgiven, and kind-eyed white people, and white viewers, cannot remain hazily removed from their daily acts of ignorance and violence" (2017). She emphasizes that aggressions are not explicitly explained in *Get Out*; instead, surface elements such as the maid's tear show the difference between whiteness and blackness. I do not assume unconscious cues from the film to read the maid's double consciousness; rather, *Get Out* must be read for its differing visual cues that symbolize whiteness and blackness in different contexts.

The maid's tear creates suspicion about whether the maid believes her own thoughts. As Brinkema writes, "The trajectory of the tear in philosophical thought moves from clarity to cloud, from transparency to suspicion" (2014, p. 3). This suspicion is the result of the maid's continuous smile followed by an eventual tear and scowl. Furthermore, the maid is set in the middle of the frame. This technique is used sparingly by filmmakers in order to emphasize significance. The maid considers her identity as important yet conflicting on an individual level. Actor Betty Gabriel observed about her character, Georgina, stating that "She's a white woman in a black woman's body" (Hope, 2017). While racial confusion happens on an individual scale, it also occurs on the societal level. Culture critic Alyssa Rosenberg argues, "We see black people, who turn out to be white people who are trying, and largely failing, to act convincingly black" (2017). The maid's denial that she is being marginalized reflects the elite liberalist idea that our society is above racism and oppression; that is, it is an unconscious fantasy to deny the existence of both.

The tear is intimately related to the unconscious fantasy that haunts race. As Brinkema states, "The unconscious fantasy produces abundant tears that are sudden and seemingly without cause; thus, tears no longer require the mediation of judgement or conscious processing" (2014, p. 14). But the maid's tears are caused by her internal struggle, as seen in her opposing smile.

The maid's tears are not spontaneous; they reflect the years following slavery when liberals detached from its aftermath. Unlike those post-Civil War liberals, the maid cannot detach herself from the emotional turmoil that racism inflicted on her. Despite the actor's seeing the maid's tear as a secret, it does not necessarily reveal anything about her unconscious mind (Hope, 2017). Brinkema seeks to debunk the "mystery" that lurks around tears, writing, "The tear that does not fall but sits thickly next to the eye without revealing its source or its embodied secret: whether it was secreted at all" (2014, p. 2). The maid's tear is a paradox that has distracted critics into thinking that it cannot be read on the surface.

The tear is central to Brinkema's idea that crying is structured like a language. Brinkema argues,



Once the tear is unlinked from emotion, from expression, from interiority, from subjects—even from life and vitality—it is liberated to be read for the exterior structures it takes; the ultimate culmination of the tear placed under suspicion is the dehiscence of tear from sure recuperable substance. (2014, p. 21)

When viewing things from this framework, the analysis of the tear detaches from the assumptions the audience might make about tears' inferiority and emotional expression. The maid's double expression separates her tear from her smile. This separation reflects film critic Alissa Wilkinson's argument that *Get Out* depicts the colonization of experiences: "*Get Out* draws on the visceral experience of being objectified or colonized by another consciousness" (2017). The maid's tear and smile represent two different beings; that is, her white façade smiles while her black identity cries.

A "twoness" presents an important struggle between their privileged white façade and their silenced black identity. W.E.B. Dubois highlighted this conflicting racial identity in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1903, p. 2-3)

Just as black voices have been silenced or erased by white privilege, the maid's black identity was silenced by white colonization. The maid's black identity, specifically, cannot communicate through any method other than a tear, as suggested in Lathrop's argument that the tear is the only testimony that the maid can give (2017). The tear is the black identity sacrificing itself to the white façade, which critic Jones describes as, "What Whiteness does to the black mind and psyche, but most of all, the desire to be white and what must happen to the black parts of yourself in order to make that journey" (2017, p.17). The maid's tear symbolizes the black parts of herself that the maid must give up in order to shout, "No, no, no, no, no" when the man across from her accuses her of blindly believing everything that the white family, or elite liberalism, has convinced her and her black peers to think.

The maid's tear can be distinguished as part of her black identity because the tear does not give a character power or privilege: "The tear is no longer a privileged sign of emotionality" (Brinkema, 2014, p. 10). In Brinkema's theoretical framework, emotionality cannot be linked to symbols of privilege. The maid's black identity lacks power or privilege while she is under the hypnotism of the racist family, as seen in their inability to contemplate their hypnosis. Contrary, the maid's white façade smiles while she wears a collared white shirt under a sweater. Furthermore, she wears expensive-looking jewelry and sports a hairstyle similar to that of Jackie Kennedy. The maid's façade, according to actor Gabriel, is "the worst kind of assimilation" (Hope, 2017).

The maid's assimilation into white society masks her black identity, thus causing her double consciousness to work against itself.

While the use of a tear can be detached from power and privilege, *Get Out* depicts the tear as black denial of modern racism. This is evident when the maid sheds the tear after arguing with a black man across from her. The black man wears modern clothing and is found checking his phone. This man represents the material success of African Americans that the maid has failed to achieve in her life despite her assimilation into white society. Additionally, the man has more than she has, despite his resistance of complete assimilation into white society. This can be seen when Gabriel recognizes that the maid represents years of enslavement under white society: "There are members of our country that have assimilated so much, in a very right-wing conservative way and I go, wow, sister girl, why do you believe these things and say these things and support these politicians?" (Hope, 2017 p. 21). In other words, the maid denies modern racism even though she is marginalized. Though the tear can be read separately from the person's emotions and situation, "When interpretation finally takes place, the tear does not signal a deep longing or private expression of the heart, but an unconscious fantasy ambivalently expressed as a symptom" (Brinkema, 2014 p. 14). This tear is not an expression of emotion; rather, it shows the maid's reality. This reality contradicts the maid's unconscious fantasy that the racist family means well.

*Get Out* relates the maid's feeling of empowerment directly to her body language. Social psychologist Amy Cuddy argues that when we feel powerless, we close up and wrap up our bodies, that closed body language relates to a lack of power (2015). On the other hand, visual critic Anjelica Sanders argues that the maid is "the black woman who recognizes the powers that be, who knows what is in store for the black man in America, but who is paralyzed by her inability to save him before danger hits" (2017). While she argues that the maid represents a symbol of power, the maid's body language suggests a lack of power as she stands in the doorway with her hands folded in front.

While *Get Out* relates body language to empowerment, the maid's tear blurred critics' understanding of their power. Brittany Willis suggests that the scene where she sheds a tear shows that black women can crack under pressure and that black women become vulnerable under certain circumstances (2017). This argument reveals the maid's vulnerability, or emotional disclosure. Black studies scholar Jason Silverstein emphasizes this: "People assume that, relative to whites, blacks feel less pain because they have faced more hardship" (2013). This experience of hardship relates to Du Bois' idea of the double consciousness because critics are relating their own sensations, or affect, to the scene even though no surface elements point to that effect. Double consciousness' effect can be seen when black studies scholar Terrill states, "Double-consciousness results from a longing to join with others in a civic culture that is characterized by contempt, pity and strife, so that Du Bois recognizes citizenship as a mode of engaging with self and others that is embodied, enacted and rife with affect—it is a sensation" (2015, p. 26). Du Bois' "sensation" blinds critics into thinking that the scene is about

introspective aspects of the maid. While many critics read their own vulnerability in the maid's tear, those critics neglect how the tear works with other elements in the scene where the maid cries. The maid's tear works with body language to express historical significance, similar to Brinkema's idea that crying is like a language (2014, p. 2). Willis' argument could be true because the maid may not be able to use her words to express their vulnerability, as seen when she states, "No, no, no" (2014). The tear controls interpretation of the maid's symbolism, or, "The girl sobs not as a loud profession but in order to remain silent" (Brinkema, 2014, p. 17). The tear as a symbol of silence relates to the history of African Americans in the United States at large. This is similar to when Sharice B. argues:

For decades, black women have been dubbed as the most powerless, least protected and the most mocked/belittled group of women in America. Through adversary and with the very little we are given, black women have resisted political and racist authority, [and] made something extraordinary out of nothing. (2017)

Resistance, in the form of protests by African Americans, has been long remembered as peaceful, such as Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat and Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel during the playing of the national anthem. But that preferred memory of peace can often cover a history of violent resistance to power. Just like words relate with each other to convey meaning in a sentence, the maid's tear and body language relate to each other to convey both historical vulnerability and the power of African Americans in the United States even if their power is nothing more than a brief disruption in the grammar of white privilege.

*Get Out* does not use the frame to show the maid's body language when she cries, and this limits if we can judge the maid as vulnerable or not. Willis states that the maid is vulnerable in the scene where the maid cries (2017). Brinkema justifies Willis' statement by stating, "It seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy" (2014, p. 5). If tears created pleasure in the scene where the maid cries, then Willis' statement would be an accurate description of the scene. On the other hand, the scene fails to show the maid's full body language, which would have put the tear into context.

*Get Out* uses body language to convey when black women lack or have power, placing the tear in the later context. Body language is twofold: it works chronically and in the moment (Cuddy, 2015). This is similar to Brinkema's argument that a tear either folds chronically or drops in the moment (2014). The maid is vulnerable when the tear falls, but her body language suggests that the tear is folding into a broader context (Willis, 2017). When the maid walks into the room, she stands with her hands folded in front, suggesting a feeling of vulnerability. Further, the maid is placed in the right third of the frame. If the maid symbolized empowerment, she would be in the middle of the frame and would have her hands on her hips, a pose that suggests empower-

ment and strength (Rhimes, 2015). The maid's body language in this scene suggests a lack of power. Further, the maid is not crying and smiles. If a tear symbolizes the maid's black identity, then the happy expression in the doorway is a white façade. In *Get Out*, the maid's closed body language and lack of tears work against each other, thus signifying that black people who exemplify white liberal ideas mask their own black identities.

*Get Out* later places the maid in a power position while a tear is on her face, thus allowing body language and the tear to work chronically. The maid's head is in the center of the frame and her shoulders are back. Furthermore, a tear streams down her face. When analyzing this scene, Sanders states that the maid's position in this scene reflects the external struggles of black women in America (2017). But the maid's body language and tear reflect an internal struggle with being a black woman during white liberalism, not the maid's struggle with black men. While she states that the maid represents the worst kind of assimilation, the portraying actor also believes that the maid is a white woman inside of a black woman's body (Hope, 2017). The maid's placement in the center of the frame puts her in a position of power. If black women are expected to be seen as empowered, then this position suggests that the maid is in a black woman's body. However, the maid's placement and body contradict her clothing, which does not match the dresses found during indentured servitude or slavery.

While the tear falls, the maid also continues to smile, an expression not commonly found within black empowerment visuals. Visuals related to black women's empowerment such as Beyoncé's "Formation" video do not show women with hard smiles. Rather, these women have serious expressions and open body language. The maid's body language matches that of an empowered black woman, but the clothing and smile does not. The tear allows us to use *Get Out's* contrasting visual elements to decide that the maid is a black woman on the inside, but the maid's internal and external race is only a preoccupation. That is, Gabriel and Sanders fail to recognize the limits of empowerment within racial marginalization (Hope, 2017; Sanders, 2017). Brinkema emphasizes this when they state, "All crying, then—even the cathartic kind—is crying at a remove" (2014, p. 5). In the case of *Get Out*, the maid is removed from herself when standing in the doorway. Black women are chronically labeled as empowered, but *Get Out* portrays the momentary struggle of being empowered. *Get Out* wants viewers to decide what race the maid is internally and externally, but the maid's body language, smile, and clothing give viewers the choice to see the maid's race differently depending on the context.

If *Get Out* only used clothing, framing and body language, it would not give viewers insight into the historical struggle of being a black woman during liberalism; however, the maid's tear gives viewers several visual elements that contribute to interpretations of the maid's race. The viewers are able to put the maid's clothing, body language, and framing into different historical frameworks, depending on whether or not the tear is shown with those elements. Brinkema views the tear as an independent element, stating:

In the sense of both substance and corpus, the tear no longer has a body. In this exteriorizing of the tear, in place of the wet pointer to some other scene hidden in the soul, the tear points only ever and again to itself and to itself as an exteriority that has form. (2014, p. 22)

The tear works in conjunction with other elements—such as the maid’s outfit, position in the frame, and smile—to create an identity separate from the maid’s body. However, the scene in which these visual elements are laid is a rhetorical device that weighs all items equally (Lanham, 2003, p. 29). The audience is unable to identify which items are the most important, thus audiences such as the critics for *Get Out* choose some items as more important than others based on their own experience with a double consciousness. While the tear allows us to further separate items such as the maid’s clothing, smile, and body language, it lacks introspective information that would allow for a proper analysis of the maid as black or white in certain situations.

## CONCLUSION

While the maid’s tear in *Get Out* was read by critics as symbolic of the maid’s introspective identity crisis, closer attention to the maid’s clothing, body language, and smile complicate those critics’ analyses. The tear is, in fact, more than a tear. While many critics saw the tear in *Get Out* as a tear that had been dropped, and could therefore be read symptomatically, I have argued that the tear folds into a historical context about both personal and collective race identification in the United States. The tear, then, does not express a unilateral command for black Americans—black women especially—to “get woke” but, rather, suggests *Get Out*’s ambivalent, but by no means disinterested, positioning of black women as simultaneously empowered and disempowered. In this brief conclusion, I will consider one major implication of the preceding reading, which is that a seemingly minor misunderstanding of racial consciousness in a film becomes an alibi for a cultural narrative of violence and exclusion toward people of color at large.

Race identification remains an issue in America, as evident when Barack Obama addresses race in ways that echo W. E. B. DuBois and mainstream critiques of *Get Out*. In his memoir *Dreams from My Father*, Obama searched for some telltale sign for his “true race” but only found a troubled heart, mixed blood, and divided soul (2004, p. xv). Obama points to a deeper truth beyond racial identification: that race, at least black race, is fundamentally a double consciousness. In being black, one is always defined in and against whiteness, thereby never being entirely free of it, never truly “woke.” Blackness and whiteness are neither distinct, nor easily defined by popular emotional elements such as the tear because, rhetorically, racialized tears are always shed by both a white and a black consciousness simultaneously.

## REFERENCES

- Best, S., & Marcus, S. (2009). Surface reading: An introduction. *Representations*, 108(1), 1–21.
- B. S. (2017, March). Why Georgina is an unsung hero in “Get Out.” Blavity. Retrieved from [https://blavity.com/why-georgina-is-an-unsung-hero-in-get-out?fb\\_comment\\_id=1198917210224725\\_1198981916884921](https://blavity.com/why-georgina-is-an-unsung-hero-in-get-out?fb_comment_id=1198917210224725_1198981916884921)
- Brinkema, E. (2014). *The forms of the affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Brown, K., Hogan, H., Knowles, B., & Will, M. (2016). Formation [Recorded by Beyoncé Knowles]. On *Lemonade* [MP3 file]. New York, NY: Parkwood Entertainment: Columbia.
- Cuddy, A. J. C. (2015). *Presence: Bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, Hachette Book Company.
- Da Costa, Cassie. (2017, March). Feministing films: “Get Out” captures double consciousness perfectly. Feministing. Retrieved from <http://feministing.com/2017/03/15/feministing-films-get-out/>.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk; essays and sketches*. New York, NY: Johnson Reprint Corporation.
- Hope, C. (2017, April 14). A chat with actor Betty Gabriel about Get Out, white colonization and the allure of horror films. The Muse. *Jezebel*. Retrieved from <https://themuse.jezebel.com>
- Jameson, F. (1981). *The political unconscious*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Johnson, J. M. (2016, February 10). “#Formation as curated by black women.” *Diaspora Hypertext*. Retrieved from <http://dh.jmjafix.com/2016/02/10/formation-as-curated-by-black-women/>
- Jones, R.J. (2017, February 27). Get the fuck outta here: A dialogue on Jordan Peele’s GET OUT. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@SonofBaldwin/get-the-fuck-outta-here-a-dialogue-on-jordan-peeles-get-out-831fef18b2b3>
- Lanham, R. (2003). *Analyzing prose* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury Academic Press.
- Lathrop, L. (2017, February 26). “Get out”: The call is coming from inside the house. *The tusk*. Retrieved from <http://www.tusk2.com/2017/02/17/get-call-coming-inside-house/>
- Latour, B. (2004). Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry*, 30, 225–248. Retrieved from <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/89-CRITICAL-INQUIRY-GB.pdf>
- Leglú, C. (2000). Tearful performance: When troubadours weep. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 51, 495–504.
- Lewis, S. (2016, February 10). “Formation” exploits New Orleans’ trauma. *Slate*. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/articles/double\\_x/doublex/2016/02/beyonc\\_s\\_formation\\_exploits\\_new\\_orleans\\_trauma.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2016/02/beyonc_s_formation_exploits_new_orleans_trauma.html).
- Obama, B. (2004). *Dreams from my father: A story of race and inheritance*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Peele, J., & Blum, J. (Producer), & Peele, J. (Director). (2017). *Get Out* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Rhimes, S. (2015). *Year of yes: How to dance it out, stand in the sun and be your own person*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Rich, F. (2014). “In Conversation Chris Rock: What’s killing comedy, What’s saving America.” *New York Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html>

- Rosenberg, A. (2017, March 15). "Get out" captures how white supremacy isolates black people even from each other. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- Sanders, A. (2017, March 17). Georgina and Walter: *Get Out's* complex characters that no one is talking about. *The 405*. Retrieved from <https://www.thefourohfive.com/film/article/georgina-and-walter-get-out-s-complex-characters-that-no-one-is-talking-about-148>
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On the blackness and being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Silverstein, J. (2013, June 27). I don't feel your pain. Science, *Slate*. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2013/06/racial\\_empathy\\_gap\\_people\\_don\\_t\\_perceive\\_pain\\_in\\_other\\_races.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/06/racial_empathy_gap_people_don_t_perceive_pain_in_other_races.html)
- Terrill, R. E. (2015). *Double-consciousness and the rhetoric of Barack Obama: The price and promise of citizenship*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Wilkinson, A. (2017, February 25) Get Out is a horror film about benevolent racism. It's spine-chilling. *Vox*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/2/24/14698632/get-out-review-jordan-peepe>
- Willis, B. (2017, March 10). The most overlooked and underrated characters in "Get Out" are black women. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-most-overlooked-underrated-characters-in-get\\_us\\_58c3049de4b0a797c1d39c5b](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-most-overlooked-underrated-characters-in-get_us_58c3049de4b0a797c1d39c5b)

# An interview with student author Anni-Ming Larson

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What inspired you to write this paper?**

I am adopted from Shanghai, and my mom is White. I have always been interested in why I did not really care that much about being adopted. I was having this moment—I think it was in my junior year at Geneseo—when I was like, “Woah! I still think very positively about being adopted but I realized how it has definitely shaped my identity.” I had a professor, Dr. Harrigan, who studied the narratives of adoptive parents, and Dr. Harrigan also adopted a child. I thought this was perfect because I think that there are not enough narratives from us, as adoptees, about adoption so we started to work together and brainstorm about the topic. The paper sorta came up because of the people that I know that was adopted. Also, I thought if I had an “ah ha” moment in college, I wondered how many other people would have that “ah ha” moment in college so I wanted to explore that.

## **How did you present your work at GREAT Day?**

Actually, I just did a poster which is hanging in the Communications department. I only did a poster because the paper was not ready at the time for GREAT Day. It was a directed study that I was doing. So, I just did a poster, and I did not have a formal presentation or anything. I presented in one of the poster sessions.

## **Did people just walk around and view your poster?**

Yeah! People just kinda walked around. Oh, I was also asked to present to the Presidential Board and that happened a couple days after GREAT Day. There were about twenty of us or less. Maybe about fifteen or sixteen of us that bought our posters to show people on the Board. So, I think a lot of people saw my poster that way.

## **How was your experiences in presenting during GREAT Day and on the Presidential Board?**

Those experiences were really cool. I was really proud because most or every other poster was about biology or STEM-related topics, and my poster was the only one on qualitative research. I think there might be one or two others [of qualitative research]. I had a lot of people that came up to me and asked questions about my poster. The amount of people that sort of felt connected to my work, even if they were not adopted, if they had adopted kids, or knew of an adoptee, was really awesome. I wanted



that to happen. I wanted people to say that this is a work that is grounded in as an example of visibially adopted people. I wanted to develop a vocabulary or [provide some] information to audiences of how adoptees think about and want to talk about adoption, their relationships with their parents, how they think about themselves, and how they identify themselves in those challenges. I absolutely did that. I think that there are so many other things going on in our world right now. We are trying to build vocabulary, such as LGBTQ+ terms and transgender rights. We are talking about race and socioeconomic class. Even though adoptees are quite a large community, we are not talked about as much. So, that is why I wanted my work to do, which is to be able to have my voice attached and have a casual conversation surrounding [adoption]. So, I feel like this was actually powerful for me and for many other people.

### **Do you think your GREAT Day presentation was in some way helpful in preparing you for the demands of work after graduation?**

Yeah! Right now, I am working at a domestic violence courthouse in Chicago. In the legal clinic, I am interviewing and getting people's stories, and drafting them into affidavits. The work that I did in terms of the interviewing process for GREAT Day was incredibly helpful for me and for this project. I think that this project is difficult for me to work on at times and to get on the swing of things, now that I have graduated. But, it is so important to me and I know that I will continue to do this work in my life. So, the emotional maturity that it took me to do this as well as the basic skills, such as doing structured interviews, transcribing interviews, typing, and doing certain amount of hours for research, helped me immensely in my job now. I am really thankful that Geneseo gave me the ability to be creative with something.

### **In retrospect, do you think your GREAT Day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?**

I actually think that it was! It was a long time coming and I have never been around for previous GREAT Days. I transferred to Geneseo as a sophomore. In my sophomore year, I went on a trip during GREAT Day. In my junior year, I was studying abroad. So, senior year I was not actually thinking about it. But then, my teacher [Dr. Harrigan] said "You should really submit this. Just submit it. It will be accepted and just submit it as a poster. Number one, it would force you to do a poster and that would be great. Number two, it is such an important and different work. Number three, you will get to experience GREAT Day, which is wonderful." So, on that day I did my presentation, and I also went to many other presentations and panels. I loved it. It was great and that is something that I am really proud of Geneseo for. I am really proud that they have something like that. It was really a positive memory in my mind and it was a good professional experience. You have the support of your friends, who may or may not know what you do in a different context,[and] your dorm friends, who may be like biology majors [and they] might not know what people in the Communications department are studying. I am really happy that I got to show my work.

# An interview with faculty sponsor Meredith Harrigan

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

It's a fabulous way for students to put into practice all the technical, scholarly materials they've been learning about in class, so, because of that, it's a way for people to really see what scholarship can do for us.

## **What impact do you think undergraduate research has on Geneseo culture and on higher education?**

I think it plays a key role in our culture. It is really what we want to do. We want to provide transformational experiences, transformational learning opportunities for students, and through our active research process, that we see first hand on GREAT Day, in particular, we give students those opportunities. And if I can expand that, I'll say that not only do we give students the opportunities, we give transformational teaching opportunities for faculty. For example, the projects I mentor give me the chance to learn about new projects, and think about my mentorship skill and improve that process. So, it's really, I think, a very vibrant part of our college culture and an important part—not only for students but also for faculty.

## **What characteristics of the research the research that your student nominee did made you think it would be successful and what made you recommend it to us?**

The key point was that it was connected to her experiences. Anni Ming was passionate about this topic when she came in as a new student, and she maintained that passion throughout her time here at Geneseo. So when she finally got the time to pursue the topic in her research project she was connected to it more so than we often see people be connected to their work. So right there we knew it was going to be good. It's one that we can learn so much from because it's all a topic that I would argue is underexplored in the literature on interpersonal and family communication, which is where her project centered. It was her deep connection that she had to it that really made her project stand out, her enthusiasm made it stand out, her passion made it stand out.

## **What role do you think you provided in the research process?**

I came in with the scholarly background because her topic was a topic I studied for my doctoral dissertation. So I came in having the theoretical, having the technical

background. She came in with the personal experience, and so in terms of mentorship, I could help her make sense of her personal experience and those she was studying, from the more theoretical and scholarly perspective. So that was the way that I shaped the research project.

This is a fabulous project because it was so tied to her. I think having the opportunity to present her work in such a context was special because she wasn't just talking about some research project that was disconnected from her, she had an opportunity to share a part of her life to everybody who listened. That is transformational.

# An American Stuck in Another Body: Narratives of Adopted Emerging Adults

Anni-Ming Larson

---

---

*sponsored by Meredith Harrigan*

---

---

## ABSTRACT

The present study involves a phenomenological, interpretive investigation of how visibly adopted emerging adults communicate about adoption and the possible contradictions that are present in their speech, as well as how they choose to manage those contradictions. Using Baxter's 2011 relational dialectics theory as a lens to analyze five semi-structured interviews. The findings show five contradictions.

---

---

**T**his project began out of personal curiosity. Shortly after I got to college, I realized how much I was contemplating who I was, why I was the way I was, and ultimately I concluded that my adoption was more influential to my identity than I ever thought before. I was eighteen, entering "emerging adulthood" and reflecting on my upbringing and my unique experiences. Subsequently, I began to think of this experience from an academic perspective in addition to a personal one and chose to study adoption through the eyes of a family communication scholar.

I began reading Meredith Harrigan's works on the storytelling and narrative choices of parents of visibly adopted children. The findings began to jog my memory about the communicative decisions my mother made with me. I then switched to thinking about what effect those adoption narratives have on the adoptee. Besides my wondering on this matter, I questioned my sudden interest in the subject. Was it pure luck in meeting a professor who studied a topic close to my heart, or could it be my reaction to the first time in my life where I was completely independent of my family, and thereby free to reflect on my experiences?

Jonathan Smith, a psychologist that specializes on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), states that IPA is "concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith, 2007). Additionally, the purpose of a phenomenological analysis is a dynamic research exercise designed to be active for

both the participant and the researcher, letting the researcher into the participant's personal world (Smith, 2007). Therefore, choosing an interpretive phenomenological analysis seemed appropriate for the study of adoption, a topic that I have first-hand experience with.

Family makeup in the U.S. is more diverse than ever (Turner and West, 2018). The changing legal and cultural landscape has opened up many possibilities for non-traditional families. For example, the legalization of same-sex marriage in all fifty states legitimized new family structures. However, social change does not free members of non-traditional family types from challenges. The number of international adoptions in the U.S. has increased, as has transracial, challenging the traditional idea of what a family looks like and what it even means to be a family. Eighty percent of international adoptions are considered transracial adoptions (Anderson, Reuter, and Lee, 2015). In fact, in 2013, nine out of ten internationally adoptive parents were White, and eight out of ten adopted children were from Asia, Latin America, or Africa (Anderson, Reuter, and Lee, 2015).

According to Kathleen Galvin, a family communication scholar, non-biological families are discourse dependent. A discourse dependent family is one that relies on communication and discussions to construct a positive family identity for themselves, because their family type may not be positively viewed in society (Galvin, 2006). Parents may have to talk to their children about their family identity or discuss certain assumptions that children may hear from outsiders; these communicative steps are taken to legitimize their family inside the family unit and outside of it. Although adopting a child is by no means a new or even rare way of creating a family, adopted families are still considered to be discourse dependent.

Anderson, Reuter, and Lee (2015) discussed racial and ethnic differences in internationally adopted families, and they found that parents and adolescents tend to perceive conversations about race and ethnicity differently, and adoptive parents may over-report their engagement with racial and ethnic issues (p. 291). In transracial families, the adoptive parents of ethnically or racially different children are usually Caucasian, while the adopted children are not. Compared to same-race ethnic minority families, transracial adoptive parents have limited cultural resources to teach the child about his or her heritage due to a lack of shared racial, ethnic, or national origin identity, a greater likelihood of living in a racially white community, and parents' limited experiences with discrimination (Shiao & Tuan, 2008, p. 290). This leads to an even larger need for storytelling and narratives from adoptees themselves, rather than literature focusing on the parental experience.

Emerging adulthood is a stage of relative independence in a person's life. This time period is distinguished by "relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations" (Arnett, 2000, p. 8). Arnett describes this time as the point when "the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course" (Arnett, 2000, p. 8). For transra-

cial adoptees, this is the first time where they are most likely living apart from their ethnically or racially different parents, thereby removing the visible aspect of their adoption. I hoped that doing a study on emerging adults, who have just begun to live their lives independently and start to re-examine how their experiences have shaped them, would provide rich material from adoptees at this stage in their development.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: RELATIONAL DIALECTICS PERSPECTIVE**

The present study is grounded in relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 2006). Relational dialectics theory (RDT) functions as lens to help researchers understand the way that family members negotiate and create their multifaceted experiences. Relational dialectics theory stems from the studies and research put forth by Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. His theory of dialogism explains the reason why social life should not be treated as a “monologue;” instead, he describes social life as “an open dialogue characterized by the simultaneous fusion and differentiation of voices” (1984). This approach frames researchers’ approaches; it operates based on the idea that a discourse, or system of meaning, emerges from not one voice, but many voices including from societal, cultural, familial, and personal perspectives. Bakhtin regarded social life as a product of “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” (Baxter, 2004). In RDT, Baxter argues that “meaning making is a process that emerges from the struggle of different, often opposing, discourses” (2008, p. 350). In the present study, I sought to point out some discursive struggles that are present within visibly adopted emerging adults’ communication about adoption.

Dialogue is the core concept of RDT. It argues that oneself and one’s relationships are constituted in communication (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The self is a fluid thing, dynamic, constantly changing due to the dialogues we engage in. Therefore, to study the ways in which visible adoptees see themselves and see adoption might be specific to the time in their lives. I argue that relational dialectics theory can help capture some common experiences and ground those experiences in the larger context of societal and familial discourses. The research aims to address the following questions: (1) What contradictions are present in adoptees talk about adoption? and (2) How do adopted emerging adults manage these contradictions?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Currently, these findings are based on five semi-structured in-depth interviews with visibly adopted emerging adults. In order to participate in this study, participants needed to meet three criteria: (1) they had to be at least 18 years of age, (2) they had to identify as an 18–25 year old who was adopted into a single or dual parent household in which their race or ethnicity is not the same as their adoptive parent(s), and (3) they had to be someone who identifies as a person who does not have an ongoing re-

relationship with one or more birthparents, meaning that the participants were not part of an open-adoption agreement. Five visibly adopted emerging adults volunteered for this study. All current participants identify as female. The ages of the participants vary from 19 to 23. The five women are adopted from various countries: two from China, one from India, one from South Korea, and one from Colombia. None of the participants recalled contact with their birth parents or have had an ongoing relationship with them presently.

## **Procedure**

After collecting willing participants by posting research announcements on SONA systems, as well as announcing my study in classes on my college campus, I scheduled the interviews. All participants engaged in semi-structured, open-ended interviews that lasted between twenty and sixty minutes, and they were asked to fill out a brief demographic survey before the interviews began. In addition to background information such as birthplace, age, and name, participants were asked to jot down words, phrases, bullet points, or even drawings of a few things that come to mind when they hear the word 'adoption.' Interviews took place either face-to-face or via Skype, depending on distance and availability. Questions focused on adoption and the participants' feelings toward their adoption or adopted life were asked: (1) What is your relationship with your adoptive parent(s) like? (2) How, if at all, do you think the fact that you're adopted influences your self-concept, self-esteem, or the person you present to others? (3) What, if any, thoughts/feelings, do you have toward your birth parents that you may have been reluctant to share with your adoptive parents? (4) Why do you think, if you feel reluctant, that those thoughts/feelings are difficult to share?

To ensure transcription accuracy of the participant responses, each interview was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. I then listened to the audio-recordings and transcribed the responses. Once finished with the transcriptions, all recordings were destroyed. The consent form stated that I would stop the interview at any time and turn off the audio-recorder, if participants request it. Participants could choose not to answer any question at any point during the interviewing process.

## **Data Analysis**

To analyze the participants' interviews, a qualitative thematic analysis was used. A qualitative thematic analysis is a process that researchers use to find repeated themes that emerge from the participants' responses. The analysis process began with the re-reading of the transcripts, while highlighting consistent or repeated language or themes. After reading and annotating the participants responses, I identified key words to guide my research questions on potential contradictions and the ways that the participants may communicatively manage these contradictions. However, themes that emerged from these responses were not meant to generalize or assume objective truths about how adoptees talk about adoption. Instead this interpretive study was intended to shed light on personal experiences of visible adoptees, relating their stories

for those who share similar experiences or those who desire to learn about adoption through personal narrative.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

The data shows how adoption may add layers of contradictions to an emerging adult's identity. It also reflects how the contradictions that they experience do not necessarily have easy explanations.

### **Culture as both birth culture and raised culture**

All participants expressed confusion and unknowingness about which culture they belonged to or should want to belong to. According to Horstman, Butauski, Johnsen, and Colaner (2017), many adoptees feel secure in their adoptive identity until the first time an outsider challenges their identity. This type of interaction or feeling usually occurs in the first few years of elementary school, often times by classmates. Participants often discussed when and where and whom they decided to disclose their adoptive identity to within the context of elementary school. Adoptees privacy management has been noted as complex, and the things that they choose to disclose or keep private affect their identity work and well-being at times (Horstman et al., 2017). However, when visibly adopted or have an aspect of birth culture that has been kept hidden by adoptive parents, the choice to disclose a story, assimilate into a culture, or decide which culture to momentarily belong to may not be possible. For example, Participant Three stated:

I always hated my middle name from [place of birth], because I always hated it when teachers would put your name up on the board and put your middle initial and then all the girls in my classes would go around and say, "Oh my middle name is this or that." And I just thought, "Oh gosh, now I have to explain this whole new concept, this is my middle name and here's why." I just didn't want to do it front of random classmates I didn't know, and I didn't want to be ridiculed for it either.

### **Family as a structural definition and social definition**

The definition of family, according to family communication scholars Turner and West is "a self-defined group of intimates who create and maintain themselves through their own interactions and their interactions with others; a family may include both voluntary and involuntary relationships; it creates both literal and symbolic internal and external boundaries; and it evolves through time: It has a history, a present, and a future" (2018, p. 4). Many participants describe believing in a social definition of family is one that is not created through blood ties. Instead they talk about honesty, love, and open-communication fostering their sense of family and thankfulness; however, there is also a contrasting discourse of missing a blood relative, making the structural definition important in their lives.



When asked about what their future family might look like, all of the participants who expressed wanting children disclosed that they would adopt, but they would also love to have their own child; often following that statement was a notion of confusion as to why they want biological children. It may be difficult for adoptees to accept the sadness and helplessness they feel when they voice the fact that they have never met or seen someone who they are related to and looks like they do. Participant Five stated:

My mom has given me a lot of my core values as a person that I will bring onto my family...but I really want to have my own biological children, ummm, I think it is interesting when I see kids with their parents, and I'm like, "Wow, she looks exactly like her dad," or "They're a good mix of half and half," and I don't have that reference.

## MANAGING CONTRADICTIONS

### Privacy management

Past studies have indicated that transracial adoptees want to avoid feeling different or weird, and want to blend in with their white parents in their white community (Horstman et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that disclosing information about being adopted can lead to the adoptee receiving insensitive comments, or potentially negative reactions. Visibly adopted emerging adults do engage in privacy management when meeting new people or living their daily lives. Participants in the interviews have mentioned different ways that they keep the information hidden. Participant Five expressed what happens when the topic of families and backgrounds comes up on first dates by stating, "If I don't feel a connection with the person is going any further, I won't disclose, or I'll make up a story. Actually, I kind of have a set story that I always refer to, but sometimes people guess that I am adopted because I don't seem like the stereotype."

In that case, avoidance and deception were used to cover up the fact that they were adopted. Participant Four noted disclosing their adoption in order to clarify a situation, in this example, their application to medical school. Participant Four said:

Applying to med school is far away, but demographics and things like that play huge parts in opportunities. So I think it's important for me to share that information because I just think people can make assumptions about how I grew up, not realizing that I am different.

A challenge that is constantly at play for visibly adopted emerging adults is the idea that assumptions will be made about physical appearances. Regardless of whether or not parents are around, or the name is disclosed without permission, we make judgments based on race or ethnicity, and when someone's culture or chosen culture is confusing or does not match their race or ethnicity, people become confused.

## DISCUSSION

### Limitations

The present study explores the narratives of a minimally researched group, however there were certain aspects that may have been limited. Although a semi-structured interview is a proven way to collect data and stories from participants, due to the nature and specificity of the questions, the responses from participants may not reflect the most honest or true discourses involved. In addition, although qualitative research is not meant to generalize for smaller populations or provide generic language with which to talk to the group, I am sure that the study would benefit from having a larger number of participants. Due to timing and resources, it was not possible to interview more than five people.

### Directions for Future Research

The area of communication within visibly adopted families and among visibly adopted emerging adults has a great realm of possibilities for future research. Although this research added to the minimal but existing research on how adoptees feel about their adoption and how it might have affected their identity, research on invisibly adopted emerging adults may be a good next step. Visibly adopted emerging adults are more likely to experience macroaggressions and racial assumptions, however I wonder how an invisibly adopted emerging adult may approach the topic of disclosing their adoptive status if outsiders could not see the racial or ethnic differences. In addition, it would be interesting to interview both visibly and invisibly adopted emerging adults and compare the ways in which they negotiate their familial identities.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

My hope for the future of this research is to create a book of quotations, brief passages, and images that reflect the messages that visibly adopted emerging adults have expressed. A compilation of experiences and explorations of identity from adopted children is much less common, if in existence at all, than books and materials for the audience of parents of adoptees. I believe that the reason for this stems from the fact that adoptees have a sense that they do not own their stories. The feeling adoptees have, of not owning their own narratives, is potentially very problematic. Their right to their own stories should not feel illegitimate just because their stories have different tones than those adoption narratives told by parents—these stories are powerful because they are the words and feelings of an adopted child to be read by other adopted children.

Though I am adopted, I have found that I rarely discuss my story or my feelings about adoption openly, even with friends who are also adopted. I speculate that this is due to the fact that adoptees think their feelings about their adoptive and birth families must be kept secret. Unfortunately, due to history, psychology, and media messages, adopted children are often seen as damaged or wounded. Therefore, it makes sense

that they would not want to disclose feelings of sadness, anger, hurt, frustration, happiness, or love, because that might make them seem vulnerable and weak to outsiders who already believe they are fragile. In creating a book for adoptees to share their side of the story, I hope to create thorough presentation of all of the mixed emotions that exist, to show a complete dialogue that will hopefully inform others on how certain adoptees want to be approached with questions, or even to act as a relatable book for other adoptees who feel reluctant to share or think about their adoption.

## CONCLUSION

Research shows that adoptees seek affirmation rather than apathy after personally disclosing their feelings related to adoption (Horstman et al., 2017). Therefore, in the continuation of this study, I hope to synthesize previous literature with the data collected from the participants to create a beautiful mélange of narratives. Dialogue is a way to hear the contrasting and conflicting discourses that are present in one's self, so with more semi-structured interviews and transcriptions, the sense of tension and complexity may show through—making it easier for adopted individuals to understand the normalcy of the multiple feelings they have, the conflicts and contradictions, and sense-making processes.

## REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. doi: 10.1037//0003-066X.55.5.469
- Anderson, K. N., Reuter, M. A., & Lee, R. M. (2015). Discussions about racial and ethnic differences in internationally adoptive families: Links with family engagement, warmth, & control. *Journal of Family Communication*, 15, 289-308.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Baxter, L. A. (2004). A tale of two voices: Relational dialectics theory. *Journal of Family Communication*, 4(3&4), 181-192.
- Baxter, L. A. (2004). Relationships as dialogues. *Journal of Personal Relationships*, 11, 1-22.
- Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2008). Relational dialectics theory: Crafting meaning from competing discourses. In D. O. Braithwaite & L. A. Baxter (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple perspectives*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *The Guilford communication series. Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.
- Braithwaite, D. O., Bach, B. W., Baxter, L. A., DiVerniero, R., Hammonds, J. Nunziata, A. M., Willer, E. K., & Wolf, B. M. (2010). Constructing family: A typology of voluntary kin. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 388-407.
- Bylund, C. L. (2003). Ethnic diversity and family stories. *Journal of Family Communication*, 3, 215-236

- Galvin, K. (2003). International and transracial adoption: A communication research agenda. *Journal of Family Communication*, 3(4), 237-253
- Galvin, K. (2006). Diversity's impact on defining the family: Discourse-dependence and identity. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.). *The Family Communication Sourcebook* (pp. 3-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Harrigan, M. M. (2010). Exploring the narrative process: An analysis of the adoption stories mothers tell their internationally adopted children. *Journal of Family Communication*, 10, 24-39.
- Horstman, H., Butauski, M., Johnsen L., & Colaner, C.W. (2017). The communication privacy management of adopted individuals in their social networks: Disclosure decisions in light of the discourse of biological normativity. *Communication Studies*, 68, 296–313. doi:10.1080/10510974.2017.1324890
- Horstman, H. K., Colaner, C. W., & Rittenour, C. E. (2017). Contributing factors of adult adoptees' identity work and self-esteem: family communication patterns and adoption specific communication. *Journal of Family Communication*, 16(3): 263-276 doi: 10.1080/15267431.2016.1181069.
- Krusiewicz, E. S. & Wood, J. T. (2001). 'He was our child from the moment we walked in that room': Entrance stories of adoptive parents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(6): 785-803.
- Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2007). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. in *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (J. Smith, Ed.) Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, pp. 53-78.
- Turner, L. H., & West, R. (2018). *Perspectives of Family Communication* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

# An interview with faculty sponsor Lee Pierce

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

I think about undergraduate research as putting containers around things. So, part of the reason that you go to college is to learn containers. Containers can be interpersonal communication theory or immediacy theory or a certain model of communication for us. And your job at the stage one of the research is, I think, to go find something that fits that model and putting a container around the thing. What I like to see in the second stage is the container and the thing are pushed back against each other. So, instead of just taking an idea and saying, “Oh, I found an example of that,” I would like you to say, “Well, this example would not quite fit,” and so how does that then make us have to rethink about the container or rethink about the model. And I think that is what research comes from because you just do not take research and say, “Okay, this works perfectly and I found it!” You have to also say, “Oh, there is a shortcoming to this research,” and then that’s when you actually now contribute something original to the process.

## **Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.**

I am a very deep editor. I have worked draft after draft after draft of students’ projects. There were three types of projects that I have sponsored. They were panels and there were projects that I have cherry picked from different classes that I have taught over the year, just for the students to come and bring their projects out to the world. One was a research project that we are hoping to get published in [another] journal. Another one was a film that one of my students made about microaggressions. My hand in the process was really to dig in to their work. I know a lot of people were like, “Oh, I have to stay hands off because I really like students to work independently for their projects.” But for me, I do not think that my editing, revising, and suggesting research and sending the students into different directions and wanting them to do different things are taking the project away from them. I just think that the students are new to the process. Since students are in undergraduate level, they are being asked to work at a level that is so far above where they may naturally be. Without me as a silent co-author on the work, I do not see how they are supposed to get it to the next level.

## **What characteristics about the project do you believe made it successful?**

I think taking something from research that everyone knows about and putting a twist on it, so that you go, “Oh, I have never thought about it that way.” Erik Buckingham’s project was on the horror film *Get Out*. Erik read everything that anyone had written about the film. There are tons of stuff! I sat down with him and said, “Show me something about this film that would not occur to me just by watching it.” I call that kindergarten: any six-year-old could watch the film and be like, “Oh, this paper is really good at critiquing white, liberal racism. I do not need to be a scholar to get that.” It is about finding something in there that would not be immediately visible to someone who did not have the training. The same thing is true in SK’s work on microaggressions [*Mosquito Bites*]. If he not done in-depth interviewing, I am not sure if he would have been able to find something different about understanding microaggressions.

# An interview with directors Sang Wook Nam and Luc Turnier

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## ABSTRACT

*Mosquito Bites* is a short documentary of students from SUNY Geneseo. Students discussed the meanings of microaggressions, examples of microaggressions and implications of those who are targeted, specifically towards marginalized groups. They also shared their experiences of microaggressions on campus. The documentary aims to spread more awareness about microaggressions and the effect. To access the video, please visit the online publication of *The Proceedings of GREAT Day*.

---

---

## What inspired both of you to do this video?

Sang Wook Nam: At first, I started because I had to film something for my class project. [To Luc] Have you taken a class with Lee Pierce?

Luc Turnier: I have not taken it, but I am going to take it next semester.

SWN: Professor Pierce said that I should submit something, and I was thinking, “Can I submit... can I make some kind of documentary film?” and then she was like, “There has not been any documentary film, so it will be really interesting to have one.” That is how I decided to make a documentary film, but I needed at least one more person to help me out because I could not do everything by myself. So, I knew [Luc] was interested in filming, editing, and film making, basically. So, I asked him and he said, “Yeah let’s do it,” and then we started meeting up together for once a week at the beginning of the semester, and we talked about what we can do. We came up with different topics, but we ended up on this one.

## PGD: What made you pick microaggressions?

LT: We had a lot different iterations at first. At first, we were gonna do a short film. We were even gonna send it to a film festival before we really narrowed down to talk about microaggressions. Microaggressions are a thing on this campus that is seldom talked about. We have talked about microaggressions, and certain clubs address stuff like that. But when it comes to say the Asian community here at Geneseo, it is not really talked about a lot. So, we wanted to get a perspective that no one has actually even thought to look for. And S.K. being Korean, you know, was a perfect fit and I was actually really honored when he asked me if I wanted to help because he is like a film-making genius.

SWN: Nah! I am okay. I am okay.

LT: He is really good!

SWN: Because I know many international students on this campus. I go to Chinese culture club, and I met many international students like Chinese American students or Japanese American students. One time, the Chinese culture club had a presentation about microaggressions, and some of the members of the Chinese culture club shared their story about what kind of microaggression they experienced and how they felt. Before I met them, I never thought that microaggressions were real. I honestly thought it was not a big deal, but that people get hurt easily. But then after hearing their stories, I realized how important and how serious this could become. So, that is why I wanted to start with microaggressions.

LT: Microaggressions are things that can be easily overlooked. I mean, microaggressions could be really passive aggressive and could be a small minute thing that any other person would be like, “Oh, that is just nothing and maybe they are just having a bad day or something.” But it can be targeted, and it can be really hurtful if it is done in a really bad way.

**I actually watched the video and very much enjoyed it. I think that highlighting microaggressions is super important, especially going to a PWI [primarily white institution]. Some people may not be aware about microaggressions while some people are. Were the interviews planned, unplanned, or both?**

SWN: Some of them were planned. But in the beginning of the film, the people that we interviewed together were not planned. It was more like we went to the library and we went to different places to...

LT: Yeah, we went to Starbucks, we went to the library, and we just asked people, “Hey, is it okay to interview you?” and they were like, “Yes.” Some people said, “No,” but for the most part, people said, “Yes,” and we were able to get some good answers out of them. Yeah, but in the other hand, he was able to find some personal friends to talk to them and about their experiences.

SWN: Yes. Yes. So, those three people in the middle of the video—I was already planning to interview them because I wanted to hear different perspectives from international students, from Chinese American students, and from immigrants. So, I wanted to compare different types of people and how microaggressions differently, or something like that. So, about half of them were planned.



## **PGD: What were your reactions when interviewing some of the people?**

LT: I was doing most of the interviews, especially for the random ones, and some of them I was actually kind of shocked. Some of them were like, “Oh, I don’t really care. It is not that big of a deal.” Some people were just kind of like whining or complaining. Some people really gave super in-depth answers about how they feel about microaggressions and how they affect people as a whole. So, I was genuinely surprised, especially from who they came from. It was actually a really nice surprise.

## **PGD: So, microaggressions are really prevalent in Geneseo. At the end of the video, one of the questions appeared, “How can microaggressions be stopped?” and there was a common theme such that majority of the interviewees said, “Education.” Do you think that there are other ways to stop microaggressions? How can we educate people?**

SWN: I think, I think it just really a hard question to answer because it really depends on education but I do not think we can really... people cannot really control their environment and how other people were born in different areas, you know what I mean? It is really hard.

LT: Yeah.

SWN: Education is the key, but it is almost impossible to change in short periods of time. It is going to take a long time to spread this message: microaggressions exist. You know, people should care about their people’s background or just be careful when they are talking.

LT: Some people really do not want to learn.

SWN: Yeah, we cannot control it.

LT: Education has a lot of different formulas and there are different ways to educate people. I feel like one of the best ways to educate people is just to have conversations, talk to people and have them ask you questions and answer them. But, people are not willing to have conversations, and people are not willing to talk about it. But if people are willing to have an open mind, because sometimes microaggressions can be unintentional but they happen still. Those people who may have just made a mistake and they just actually wanted to learn, we can definitely talk to them. The more people we talk to, the more we could spread the message.

## **PGD: How was the video presented at GREAT Day?**

SWN: So, we were assigned in one of the classrooms in Welles.

LT: Yeah.

SWN: And many people were there. We basically showed [it] to people through a projector, and I just told them what is the video going to be about. I just answered their questions after the video. Yeah, that is just about it, I think.

LT: There were a lot of people, too.

SWN: Yeah, there were a lot of people.

LT: Yeah, a lot of people were sharing too.

### **PGD: What type of people were asking questions and making comments?**

LT: I think professors did.

SWN: Yeah professors did.

LT: I think professors were asking a lot of the questions.

SWN: They asked a lot of questions like, “How did they make this?” I think they basically asked many things about “How did we come up with this idea?” and “How did you film this?”

LT: It was kind of hard to remember what they asked at the top of our heads. But, I felt that a lot of the students who were there... I mean we go to like a liberal arts college and everyone was like, “Oh, yeah yeah, I already knew about this,” or something like that. So, I feel like that is what contributed to students not asking a lot. I feel like professors really took the forefront. I feel like professors asked the most because they have a lot of power that students do not have. I could brush a student off, but I have to see a professor at least once or twice a week. So, that is why I feel that they really were engaged with it.

SWN: I think students were just watching the documentary film and they were like “Ooooh,” and then after the film, they were like “Oooh!” [Laughs] Yeah, they were like that.

LT: You killed it with the graphics too!

SWN: Nah.

LT: I saw those graphics come out the screen, and I was like, “Ohhh, my, son.” You had some after effects in there and I was like “Okay!”

SWN: Nah it’s okay.

### **PGD: Do you both remember any comments that stood out?**

LT: The people that we interviewed?

PGD: Yeah, or the day of the presentation as well.

LT: I think I was surprised the amount of people who did not know what microaggressions were and [people who] kinda downplayed them. There were people who were kind of like, “Toughen up!” you know what I mean? Also, because we did interviews with a variety of people from different backgrounds and seeing and hearing their different explanations. We interviewed two different African-American girls, and they were like, “Yeah, I know what microaggressions are and this is what this is.” We, I think we interviewed one or two Asians, and they were kind of just like in the middle about it. And one Latino, I think?

SWN: Yeah.

LT: And he was also a little down about it. He was like aware of it, but he just also I just feel like, from what I can recall, he was a little like, “It is what it is,” and just kind of like, “We are gonna get through it.” But that one white lady in the interview, she went hard.

SWN: She was serious about it. She was with it.

**PGD: Are you both planning to do something like this for the next GREAT Day?**

SWN: I am actually graduating this semester [Fall 2018]. If I was staying here, then I would have work with it again. But, I am leaving.

LT: Since I am taking the class that he took, I might be able to continue that line. I might try to add a little more focus to it. Maybe instead of microaggressions, just do general campus culture and stuff like that. Just interview a few people and see how that goes. I would be definitely willing to kind of continue it on and see where it goes. It kinda has to be a one man solo show, you know? But we will see what I can do.

# An interview with student author Laura D'Amico

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What inspired you to write this paper?**

Oh, good question! So, I decided to take a directed study with Professor Lancos, who is head of the Dance Studies department. Labanotation has always interested me. I have taken courses where the professors teach about it and they teach about [Rudolf Laban's] movement analysis and his pattern recognition and theories. Labanotation [provides] a historical perspective of the new artistic revolution of the early twentieth century, especially in Europe, and how that impacted the fine arts world, specifically dance and science for that matter throughout the rest of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yeah, I have taken many classes, and I wanted to amalgamate all of them together, so that is why I wrote about it. I love spreading my enthusiasm because I am a dance nerd.

## **What type of dancing you do?**

I do mostly ballet, but I have been delving into modern recently too. Part of the reason I also wrote the paper because we, as a school, resurrected the first-ever Labanotation piece in America last spring semester. We had an alumna come out, who is doing her master's on Labanotation, and she set the piece on us. We have the original scores and the copies of the original scores to look at while we were recreating the piece.

## **What were the goals in creating this paper?**

Well honestly, I wrote my paper because it was a final paper for my directed study. My goals were to provide a basic rundown of what Labanotation is, such as how to read a simple score, what each column means, and what the measures are. I wanted to explain that stuff so that someone can look at a score and not see it as hieroglyphics. Also, I did it because the course was kind of an informal history course, so I wanted to delve into what we learned just from the experiences of our [course] too. I briefly talked about some of the other notators like Ann Hutchinson Guest, Ray Cook, Irmgard Bartenieff, and other people who were notable in the dance notation world. I just wanted to create something that encompassed a broad generalization and how it personally relates to the work that I was doing at Geneseo.

### **How was your experience at presenting for GREAT Day?**

I loved the experience. Even though I knew everything that I was going to speak about, I felt that I was still learning and relearning what I was putting into the slide show. I did a fifteen minute presentation at GREAT Day. Yeah, it was a great experience. It was also Tech Week for the show, and I was also really sick. So, putting it all together was a little rough, but I did it.

### **What did your involvement with GREAT Day mean to you?**

I was just happy to leave a mark at Geneseo, since I participated in something that recognizes my interests and intellect. I am not just another student who goes in and out of the SUNY system just for a degree. When I initially entered Geneseo, I wanted to get in and out as fast as I could just to get my diploma. I already had an associate degree, and I thought that I already had my life plans set out. So, when I started I said, "I am not going to waste my time studying more dance at Geneseo and taking Labonation directed study." But, I am just happy to be part of Geneseo and say that I did take away something that I am enthusiastic about that was outside of my major. It just means a lot to me to participate in GREAT Day, especially in the Dance department, because dance is not always taken seriously, especially when it comes to the academia. But, dance is so academic. So, that is also why I care so much about what my work and where I stood at GREAT Day in Geneseo, particularly because dance does belong to academia. Dance is a fine art just like music and studio art.

### **In retrospect, do you think your GREAT Day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?**

One hundred percent! I think back to times that I missed about Geneseo such as sitting down at lunch time and just chatting with my professors informally, and learning by word of mouth from an expert. Because of those experiences, those experiences made me participate in GREAT Day. So, when I think about GREAT Day, I get to think about all the times that I sat down with [Professor Lancos] whom I love so much. GREAT Day gives me a really personal experience.

# An interview with faculty sponsor Jonette Lancos

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

I started mentoring students on paper presentations, when GREAT Day wasn't GREAT Day, it was part of the Humanities Undergraduate Symposium. It was at night and the philosophy department put it on. Paper writers from the dance history class learn how to do scholarly writing and research, and we would put those forth to a panel and a moderator. Some of the ideas from that continued, so when GREAT Day started I was like, "Oh, well we've been doing that for a long time." I actually have some of those papers still. It was very interesting. I had a student, Shara Willson, who was an English major, and she participated in the Humanities Undergraduate Symposium, and she's gone on to do her doctorate, and she now teaches in a college and is a dean. So, I've been doing undergraduate research for quite a while. For me, it's a way that students become inspired by the content of a course, and then they learn to write and present about it.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?**

The research is significant, because it helps to prepare the many that are going on to a graduate program. So it prepares them to write or to do a presentation. To prepare for the next step in their life. At Geneseo there are so many students that take ideas and they bring one idea, like dance scholarship, into their major. I think that's what's so good as a liberal arts college, that students are able to pull from all of the liberal arts and the arts, to understand the importance of scholarship. Students at GREAT Day have their colleagues come and witness their work, and being able to witness the extraordinary achievements of other students is key as to why Geneseo is such a prominent college. The faculty also really collaborate with students, in labs, in art, and so on, and involve them in collaborative projects. That's why I think GREAT Day is wonderful. We've also had students go on to participate in the American College Dance Conference, where dancers will present their creative work based on scholarly work.

## **What characteristics about the poster/presentation you believe would make the poster/presentation successful? OR What made you recommend the presentation you did?**

Samantha Schmeer presented her paper at the oral report, and I said, “you have to present this at GREAT Day; it’s wonderful.” It talked about being careful not to appropriate indigenous cultures, and I thought it was such a valid paper in relation to how we live our life and how we think about people other than ourselves. I enjoy seeing how they take that small idea and develop it. When she presented it at GREAT Day she had developed it, and it was just an amazing presentation. She used some of the articles I talked about in ,ssalcit made such an impact on her that she wrote this amazing and passionate essay about being very careful not to appropriate Native people’s works for your own. I think that was inspiring to hear people in at GREAT Day to hear her speak. Then she made a dance called *Harbingers* about the breakdown of the earth, and that was inspired by the Native American phrase, “When one tree is gone, it’s not ever going to be again.” So she feels very strongly about those important social ideas, so that was part of that paper, which then continued into a creative project. I see her carrying this idea forward, I think it’s an important part of her philosophy.

## **Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.**

What I do is to suggest that they apply to present at GREAT Day. Then, they present the paper outside class and I give them suggestions on how to present the paper, what kind of visual ideas they’re going to have. It’s not always good to have a PowerPoint with all the text, because then it’s like, “Well why am I listening to the presentation?” I made suggestions to her about speaking, diction, dynamics of vocal capacity. It’s a frightening thing, to a certain extent, because your friends show up and so on, so I try to give them the confidence they need for presenting. I acknowledge that they’re on the right track and assure them their paper will be well received. My role as a mentor is to make them feel confident, and when it comes time to do the presentation they blossom.

# A Study of Labanotation and its Applications from 20th Century Europe to 21st Century America

Laura D'Amico

---

---

*sponsored by Jonette Lancos*

---

---

## ABSTRACT

Labanotation is a system of dance notation with a history of use stretching from the late 19th century to today. This paper examines that history, the technical elements of Labanotation, and different applications of Labanotation. This paper examines the use of Labanotation in many different contexts, including in the SUNY Geneseo piece *Hebrides Suite*. I also examine how Labanotation succeeds at representing the three-dimensional act of dance on paper.

---

---

## AN HISTORICAL ACHIEVEMENT OF LABAN

Humans have recorded their stories through various media for thousands of years. Literature and music have had their own widely accepted, ever evolving symbols, able to withstand the test of time. Dance, on the other hand, has only been passed down through human interaction, making it a fragile language. It is not documented on paper as easily as words and music, and is thus easily lost and forgotten. Until the twentieth century, recording and reading a three-dimensional story on a one-dimensional surface has been intimidatingly tedious to a movement artist without a universal standard script.

Many attempts at dance notation have been made, but the form developed by Rudolf von Laban in the twentieth century is the most widely used language of dance. By the late nineteenth century—the second Renaissance for Western Europe—Germany had politically united, and it was becoming an industrial superpower. Cities like Berlin expanded rapidly, increasing transportation, igniting communication, and, of course, encouraging artistic literacy to flourish. American dancers like Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan attracted eager audiences and left North America to grace stages, parlors, and garden parties all across Europe with their new take on interpreting the body's natural way of movement in time when technology and automation were first peeking their heads through the future trenches.



As Fuller and Duncan left their homes, Laban, born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1879, left his family of military nobility and moved to Paris to study design, anatomy, and architecture, quickly finding himself caught up in the hustle and bustle of the Parisian pedestrians around him during its 1900 World's Fair (Karina, Lillian & Kant, Marion, 2003). Under the instruction of Heidi Dzinzkowska, he moved to Munich to focus on new studies in Ausdruckstanz, an expressionistic dance (UK Digital Dance Archives-Rudolf Laban). While teaching in Berlin, Laban published the first version of Labanotation, titled *Kinetographie Laban*.

## LANGUAGE

In Labanotation, nouns refer to specific parts of the body and their involvement in dance; my study focused on arms, legs, feet, and palm-facing. Verbs relate action, absence of action, stillness, flexion, rotation, and extension, and time functions as an adverb. Place denotes absence of action, which can sometimes be considered stillness. If the dancer is not moving, nothing is noted in the specified column. Rotation is noted in palm-facing and feet. For our purposes, flexion and extension were only used in the legs, noting plie, straight legs, and releve. Time was represented in measures, much like in music, with large, drawn-out shapes noting legato movement, and spaces representing staccato movement.

### Center Line and Measure Lines

The center line is the basis of notation, representing the spine cutting down half of the body. This makes a clear visual for the reader, embodying the movement in a right or left fashion in space and time. In order to tell the reader when to start, the notator begins the phrase with a double starting line, just like in music. Along the centerline, the notator records the movement in measures, but in a vertical fashion, not a horizontal one. A new measure is notated by a horizontal slash perpendicular to the center line. If the movement or timing is difficult to glance at quickly, smaller horizontal slashes for every quarter note are also useful.

### Columns and the Staff

Universally, the columns adjacent to the center line indicate the parts of the body being used. From the center outward, the order of parts notation is this: supports (where the weight is held in the legs), leg gestures, body, and arms. Additional body parts, such as hands, feet, and head, are added accordingly.

### Symbols: Direction, Levels, and Time

In place, limb directions include forward, right, left, and behind, determined by the levels in which they are used: low, middle, high, and place-high. The length of the symbol drawn on the staff represents the specific place in time intended for the movement. A symbol stretching for a whole measure is a long, sustained legato movement, while a

short symbol of the same shape with a space in between each symbol represent short, crisp movements, such as jumps.

## APPLICATIONS OF LABANOTATION

Some professional dance instruction emphasizes Bartenieff Fundamentals, a system that incorporates LMA (Laban Movement Analysis) into dance. Irmgard Bartenieff (1900-1981) was Laban's student in Hamburg, and she extended his theories as she developed her own fundamental movement theories in order to rehabilitate patients during the polio epidemic of the mid-twentieth century (Pasquarello-Beauchamp, 2012). With the use of LMA, Bartenieff Fundamentals can re-pattern the neurological connections that govern movement. It is based on four principles: breath, core support, dynamic alignment, and spatial intent. Neurological connectivity can be explained through Bartenieff's work: head-tail, upper-lower body half, homolateral body-half, core-distal, and contralateral, or diagonal, movement are all movement patterns seen in the stages of motor development (Pasquarello-Beauchamp, 2012). Bartenieff's addition to Laban's work has improved the spheres of physical therapy, mental counseling, and actor training.

On stage, professional dance companies around the globe regularly use Labanotation. In order to maintain the legal rights to a piece, the dance must be written down. For example, any ballet staged from the Balanchine Trust Foundation is Labanotated and checked by a professional notator or a dancer who knows the piece in detail (Lancos, 2017). In 2015, former New York City Ballet dancer Lesli Peck staged Balanchine's historic *Serenade* on the company. Labanotation bridged the original choreographer to the dancers of today.

## EXAMPLES OF OUR STUDY

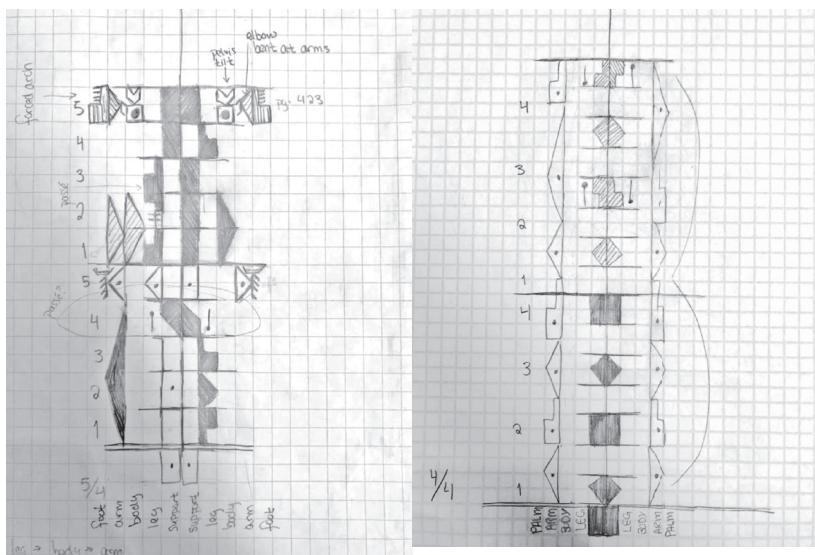


Figure 1: Example of Labanotation

## RELATIONSHIP TO *HEBRIDES SUITE*

Ambre Emory-Maier, director of education for BalletMet in Columbus, Ohio, staged the *Hebrides Suite*, originally created by SUNY Geneseo professor Nona Schurman in New York City in 1951. Emory-Maier regularly re-stages ballets using notated scores, emphasizing the standard goal in a professional company is to stage one minute of choreography per hour of rehearsal time. Of course, this depends on the number of dancers, their familiarity with the piece, and the complexity of the choreography. For *Hebrides*, she simply stated she has never taken on such an intellectually challenging piece: there are six simultaneous solos; the music is in 6/8; the style of dance is unfamiliar to her; and the score contains ambiguity and mistakes. Even with her extensive background and certification in Labanotation, she realizes the challenges notation puts on choreographers and dancers alike. Due to its challenging complexity, this project was meant to be taken on by a group of instructors, including Jonette Lancos, Jacque McCausland, and Angela Caplan.

The key takeaways from working with Ambre were how *simplicity* is the key to Labanotation. Notators understand that the style of dance removes any extraneous symbols. For example, it would be redundant for a ballet dance to have small pins indicating rotation for every single step, since rotation is an integral component in the style of dance.

Labanotation also relies on pattern recognition. Much like reading music, it eventually becomes second nature to sight-read. For example, an experienced Labanotator can easily recognize a grapevine-type step with a rocking motion. The secret to being able to read quickly, much like in a verbal language, is to glance at the script and translate it to a motor function.

Translating a score from the paper to the body requires not only motor functioning skills, but also exemplary short-term memory. Just like how an actor tries to be off-book as soon as possible so they can embody their movement intentions, so does a dancer. Even more than an actor, a dancer simply cannot do their job with a printed book in hand telling them every sequential step. It is essential to be able to memorize movement patterns as quickly as possible so the artistic process can take over once the learning process is finished. This is the only way an artist can make the material their own.

Nona Schurman was famous for saying “get literate.” Being able to be the first person to step into the past and fill a real dancer’s original role gives an authentic persona to the work. The process is an emotionally invigorating experience, channeling a departed dancer’s vision and emotions back to life through one’s own body.

## CONCLUSION

Labanotation gives new insight about how bodies interact with time and space; it provides a three-dimensional representation of a story on one-dimensional paper. Danc-

ing can lead to improvement in problem-solving skills and being able to work through counting and spacing issues more efficiently, regardless of time signature or number of dancers.

Similar to a published article in a journal, art also must be written down for the sake of ownership, reproducibility, and communication. This way, credit is given where it is due, so dancers both in the present and in the future can perform and pay homage to a different place and time, evoking unfamiliar perspectives in dancers and audiences alike. Today, dance companies all over the world are performing Labanotated scores from artists from other continents and cultures. These works must be communicated across all boundaries for the sake of furthering the ideas presented in the script.

Ultimately, dance notation has the uniquely exclusive ability to transcend evening-length concert pieces through space and time in a three-dimensional fashion.

## REFERENCES

- Abel, A. (2017) "Der Boom Hält an: Berlin Zählt Mehr Einwohner." *Zur Startseite*, 23 Aug. 2017, [www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article211682483/Boom-haelt-an-Berlin-zaehlt-mehr-Einwohner.html](http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article211682483/Boom-haelt-an-Berlin-zaehlt-mehr-Einwohner.html).
- "Department of Dance." (2018) *Department of Dance*, 1 Feb. 2018, [dance.osu.edu/](http://dance.osu.edu/).
- Emory-Maier, A. (2017) Lecture, *Hebrides* rehearsal. Fall 2017.
- Hutchinson-Guest, A. (2005) *Labanotation. The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*. Fourth Edition.
- Karina, L. & Kant, M. (2003) (translator: Steinberg, J.). *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich*, New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Lancos, J. (2017) Lectures from Labanotation Directed Study, Fall 2017 *Hebrides* Rehearsal
- Pasquarello-Beauchamp, R. (2012-13) Modern Dance I and II Class. Fall 2012. Spring 2013.

# An interview with student author Samantha Schmeer

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What did your involvement with GREAT Day mean to you?**

Personally, I have just always liked doing research-oriented work, especially because my paper concerns the arts, and I think we forget about that a lot when we're talking about academia and research. We tend to think about the STEM fields when it comes to research, and the arts are kind of ignored, but I think they are super important. So I think that was something important to me about GREAT Day. I also think giving students the opportunity to create research oriented work and have it published is super important, just to give them that experience and credibility that I think they don't get in a lot of college atmospheres. It's an important opportunity for students to have their research put out there and valued in a meaningful way.

## **What do you think GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community?**

Along the same lines as what I was saying before, I think there are so many students here who have such a wide range of specialities, so I think giving those students a voice and letting them get out their unique perspectives is an important factor in any liberal arts college. I think that's the main thing that GREAT Day does really well, you're able to get this really diverse picture of all the viewpoints at Geneseo.

## **What inspired you to write this paper?**

It actually came out of my dance history class. We watched a video of the dance I wrote about, and at the time I was also taking a class in Native American literature, so I put the two together and started thinking critically about how indigenous groups are represented in the arts. It's very common for dances to be inspired by tribal or indigenous groups, because a lot of dance itself came out of those groups. But now that so much time has passed and they've been so marginalized by society, it kind of creates this problem where they really need to be represented in the arts, but how do you do that without taking advantage of your status as a non-minority, because most of dance is white? All of my different fields of study kind of came together and sparked that interest in me.

## **What were the goals in creating this?**

I wanted to spark a meaningful conversation about diversity and representation in dance studies. It's already something that's talked about a lot, but I don't know if anyone has enough in depth conversations about representing minorities groups within dance. On one hand, dance is a very diverse field because there is a higher LGBTQ+ population, and there are fields of dance, like African dance, that are very popular and have huge African American representation. But at the same time most of the administrative and choreographic positions in dance are white men, most dance companies are run by white women, so I think a what sparked my interest in that paper was just trying to start a conversation about how we can diversify the arts.

## **Are you currently writing/researching topics related to your piece?**

I am doing more work with dance studies, talking about diversity and funding in dance for GREAT Day this year, but nothing about indigenous communities.

## **Are you planning to continue to present for the next GREAT day?**

Yes, I am writing a paper on funding for the arts and dance, specifically, focusing on the New Deal.

## **How did you feel when you presented your work?**

Nervous, just because I think my topic is something that can spark push back. Any conversation about cultural appropriation is a bit controversial sometimes. I don't think people like to be told they're doing something wrong or a field is doing something wrong, or not even that they're doing something wrong but that things can be improved. So I guess I was pretty nervous about that, just because I was presenting in front of dance faculty who have their doctorates, so that was a bit scary. Once I got into it, though, I was pretty proud that I was able to say something meaningful, and I think I got my point across.

# Inspiration vs. Appropriation: Representation of Indigenous Cultures in Western Dance Companies

Samantha Schmeer

---

---

*sponsored by* Jonette Lancos

---

---

## ABSTRACT

In modern, Westernized society, we are often fascinated by cultures that differ from our own. The well-meaning interest in other cultures, especially the cultures of indigenous tribes, can become problematic when people unknowingly treat these very real cultures and people as fictional entities. Our words and actions can perpetuate stereotypes harmful to these minority groups, contributing to an idea of “otherness,” the idea that these people are separate from us. Artists have a high degree of responsibility when using other cultures as inspiration for their work. A long, brutal history of genocide, racism, and theft of land and identity makes dealing with indigenous tribes a sensitive and complex matter. Concurrently, it is important their cultures be shared and appreciated. This paper will explore how dance choreographers have successfully navigated the terrain between inspiration and appropriation, focusing specifically on Jiří Kylián, director of the Nederlands Dans Theater, use of the Aboriginal cultures for his ballet *Stamping Ground*, as well as the Limón Dance Company’s piece based on Native American tribes. Their works will be compared to pieces performed by the American Indian Dance Theatre. This paper will also discuss cultural equity, an ideal championed by Alan Lomax, an American ethnomusicologist.

---

---

In modern Westernized society, it is easy to understand why people are often so fascinated by different cultures. This fascination is not inherently of concern; however, well-meaning interest in other cultures, especially those of indigenous tribes, can become problematic when people unknowingly treat others from different cultures as fictional entities. Cultural appropriation is the term used to describe the “adoption of elements of a minority culture by members of the dominant culture” (Cambridge English Dictionary). Cultural appropriation often refers to an unequal cultural exchange, reflecting the power imbalances caused by oppression of the mi-

nority culture by the dominant culture. Inspiration, on the other hand, describes the feeling one gets when a creative idea is sparked by someone or something. Using Native cultures as inspiration as a jumping-off point does not reflect the unequal power balance or appropriation. However, once artists directly replicate aspects of an indigenous culture, then concerns arise. Walking the line between appropriation and inspiration can be complicated, but artists must be careful not to cross it. Unlike a dance company composed entirely of those with Native ancestry, Western dance companies cannot simply copy every aspect of tribal dances without crossing the line into cultural appropriation. Prominent choreographers, such as Jiří Kylián and José Limón, have done a good job at creating this balance.

For many years, the artwork and dance of indigenous cultures were dismissed and ignored by Western societies. As Western scholars and artists began to move past the prejudices, their interest in these cultures intensified, especially in the realm of dance. The movement of depicting indigenous dances eventually, whether directly or indirectly, led to the more structured and codified forms of dance present in Western dance companies today, such as contemporary dance, modern dance, and ballet. For example, Isadora Duncan, the “Mother of Modern Dance,” developed her technique in part by incorporating the less rigid movements of tribal dances (Kraus et al, 1997).

Ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, well-known for preserving and publishing recordings of folk music, opened up the field of study of tribal dances and music with the intent of showing the world that there is something valuable to be learned from these groups. He also worked on The Choreometrics Project, a term he coined for the worldwide study of movements as they relate to and measure a culture. Through this field of study, which Lomax explained in his book *Folk Song, Style, and Culture* and his film *Dance and Human History*, he finds distinction in the dance sphere. The ideas from his study acted as guiding principles by which Western choreographers could bring Native cultural influences to their pieces. Lomax’s idea of “cultural equity” puts forth the notion that ethnic minority cultures should not be overlooked merely because Western society deemed them undeveloped or unsophisticated. Indeed, Lomax thought these cultures “should be equally valued as representative of multiple forms of human adaptation on Earth.” He founded the Association for Cultural Equity which, according to its website, “was founded to explore and preserve the world’s expressive traditions with humanistic commitment and scientific engagement” (Association for Cultural Equity). Lomax’s observations of the basic underlying principles of a group’s dancing are principles that a choreographer may utilize when forming a new piece. Rather than producing an exact copy of a dance, a choreographer can instead use the abstraction of “low to the ground” or “into the air” movements instead. Lomax saw that art, and therefore dance, often acts as an important preserver of culture (Lancos, 2017). The respect Lomax had for these cultures, partnered with his fascination, is what allowed Lomax’s work to be so groundbreaking and to influence the work of noted choreographers such as Jiří Kylián.



Artists must ask themselves questions like, “Who has the authority/ability to tell this story?” and “How can I prevent this story from becoming convoluted or misinterpreted?” when dealing with minority groups or sensitive topics. The type of questions that a choreographer in a Western dance company must ask are not altogether different. A long, brutal history of genocide, racism, and land theft made Western dealings with indigenous tribes a sensitive and complex matter. At the same time, it is important that these cultures be shared and appreciated. Performances by dance companies such as the American Indian Dance Theatre, which presents dances from the Native Americans in the United States and the First Nations in Canada, are one way of sharing and appreciating these cultures. In this company, dancers from a variety of tribal backgrounds recreate dances to traditional music while wearing traditional clothing. They perform the exact choreography that has been passed down through their ancestors. The Fancy Shawl Dance, for example, is performed by women in colorful shawls who twirl and hop athletically and gracefully around each other. Another example is the Hoop Dance, typically a solo performance in which a male dancer uses several hoops as props while he weaves the hoops around his body in order to create dynamic shapes (Los Angeles Arts Education, 2014). Does this mean that only members of this group can take inspiration from these dances? If a choreographer or director from an American ballet company is inspired by the Hoop Dance, are they forbidden from ever using it? How much can diverse cultures truly be shared and admired if only those small minorities who are members of the culture can take part? Answering these questions can be difficult, but it involves understanding the difference between inspiration and imitation.

Separating inspiration from imitation can be especially challenging for choreographers because creating a dance unique from its inspiration can be extremely difficult. Jiří Kylián’s work, *Stamping Ground*, was inspired by his trip to Australia, where he observed and filmed verbal and nonverbal communications of Aboriginal tribal dances. *Road to Stamping Ground*, a film by the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation, details the story behind his inspiration, and it illustrates the internal struggles he faced to maintain a respectful and responsible dance reflection of what he saw in Australia. The film encourages the viewer to ponder complex questions about art and humanity, while suggesting a guideline for creating cross-cultural dances. The movement in *Stamping Ground* reflects movement that Kylián observed during a tribal dance gathering on Groote Island in Australia. The unique movements of these tribes present a stark contrast to movements seen in many Western professional dance companies, as well as the dancing that typifies pop culture. Surely, this contributed to their inspiring Kylián. However, he was extremely cautious not to overstep his boundaries. He specifically drew a distinction between imitation and inspiration, and through this, he implied that to imitate would be to appropriate. He even stated that imitation would be somewhat of a robbery because it is one of the few things the Aboriginal people wholly possess, and each dance is “owned” by those who execute it (Kylián, 1980). He echoes the sentiments of Alan Lomax, that ancestral land was stolen from them, and they rely on their traditions, specifically their dancing, to keep their culture alive. He

did not want to become yet another example of an outsider entering the sacred space of an Aboriginal tribe and stealing something that did not belong to him. Achieving this understanding was a crucial first step toward respectful inspiration.

Kylián's extensive research prior to attempting to create and stage *Stamping Ground* was another important and necessary step in his choreographic journey. By acting as a respectful observer and learning about the beliefs of the indigenous peoples of Australia, Kylián ensured that he would not take inspiration from a culture he did not understand at all. He remained humble and aware of the fact that no amount of research would make him part of a culture he was observing. He stated that he may never completely and truly understand what he saw and experienced there. Other artists might learn from Kylián's research, that they might do the same.

Another crucial realization Kylián came to during his observations was that, although they do belong to a larger group, the Australian Aborigines, the tribes he observed were all distinct from one another. He noted differences in the ways each tribe moved and stamped, and in the body paint each group wore. It would be simple for Kylián and other choreographers to simply copy their stamping patterns, or to recreate their garments and body paint when costuming the dancers in his company. However, this might cross the line from inspiration to appropriation, as it would be a direct imitation of Native art. Because Kylián's dancers are not Australian aboriginals, to have them produce and perform an exact copy of the tribes' dancing would be taking advantage and feeding into the power imbalances that exist between oppressed minority cultures and the dominant culture. To avoid this cultural appropriation, he pulled abstractions from the movements he witnessed to maintain a sense of uniqueness without overstepping. He utilized the groundedness, breath, and basic motor rhythms of the different styles of dancing from different tribes in his own choreography. The Netherlands Dans Company dancers wore simplistic costumes, tan or black leotards, or dance short and tops. Kylián relied on movement, breath, and structural components such as spacing, levels, and pathways to illustrate his themes (Kylián, 1980). To distinguish between tribes, he incorporated solos into his piece in which dancers varied movement from each other. One dancer performed quick motor rhythms in deep plié, while another moved more slowly and incorporated jumps. This allowed the audience to perceive the individuality of different tribes. To some, these differences may seem unimportant, but they are necessary to put an end to a cycle that contributes to the systemic robbery of indigenous cultures.

The method of taking abstractions from solid movements can also be seen in the José Limón Dance Company's interpretation of Native American dancing. In spring of 2018, the company performed their piece *The Unsung* in SUNY Geneseo's Wadsworth Auditorium. The piece, originally choreographed in 1971, is a depiction of Native American chiefs; Limón faced the same difficulty as Kylián in that he had to distinguish between different tribes without producing exact replicas of their dances. The influence of tribal dance became apparent in the use of breath, stamping, and groundedness juxtaposed with jumps and leaps. Like *Stamping Ground*, *The Unsung*

dancers were not dressed in traditional clothing, but in simplistic dance pants. Further, Limón did not use tribal music, but instead the dancers performed in complete silence, which added emphasis to their breath and motor rhythms. His company also utilized lighting and solo sections to reinforce the idea of individuality between tribes. Limón struck a sound balance in emphasizing the different groups without pretending to represent all of them.

It is a sort of paradox to say that indigenous cultures should be shared, valued, and more widely accepted, but also that the non-Native majority has no right to take part in said cultures or to depict these cultures in art. How can a minority culture be shared when the majority culture is not allowed access to it? Companies like the American Indian Dance Company, comprised of dancers from various tribal backgrounds, are amazing to watch because they so greatly differ from what most dancers and the public are typically exposed to. They represent a history that is still relatively foreign to most Americans, but integral to our understanding of the country. A choreographer may see these dancers perform and feel a desire to recreate the dance for their own dance company. While it is great to be so inspired, one must be careful not to be offensive or to pretend to fully understand a culture other than their own. Respect for these cultures is not only important, but an absolute necessity when taking inspiration from them, especially knowing that these groups have such tragic histories. Artists must learn to take inspiration responsibly. There are many Western dance companies and choreographers that have navigated this road well, including the Nederlands Dans Theatre and the José Limón Dance Company. The vast majority of dancers and choreographers within Western dance companies do not have Native ancestors, so it is a responsibility to ensure respectful treatment of those minority cultures. Students, scholars, and artists can learn from these prominent examples within the dance sphere.

## REFERENCES

- Association for Cultural Equity. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.culturalequity.org/alan-lomax/about-alan>
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cultural-appropriation>
- Dixon, B., Kraus, R., & Hilsendager, S.C. (1997) *History of dance in art and education*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lancos, J. (2017) "Alan Lomax Choreometrics". Dance History 221. SUNY Geneseo, Geneseo. 13 Sept 2017. Lecture.
- Lancos, J. (2017) "Ancient and Lineage-Based Dancing." Dance History 221. SUNY Geneseo, Geneseo. 18 Sept 2017. Lecture.
- Lomax-Wood, A. (2014). "Thinking about my father." *Cultural Equity*.
- Los Angeles Arts Education at the Music Center. *American Indian Dance Theatre - Eagle Dance and Hoop Dance*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP4GBiE4xlc>
- Matthews, N. (1997). "Taking Back the Outback." *Travel Holiday*. 180.5.
- Riding, A. (1999). "With a Celebration of Dutch Freedom, He Frees Himself." *New York Times*.
- Road to Stamping Ground*. (1980). Jiří Kylián. Aboriginal Cultural Foundation.

# An interview with faculty advisor Maria Lima

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

Ah; it's interesting that you wanted to start with...of course, since this is mostly an undergraduate school. Maybe we could start with what research means to the students, right? Because I do not know what undergraduate research means to me because unfortunately, when I went to college a hundred years ago, there was no such thing. When I went to school, the system was the banking system: The teacher knows; they lecture, you take notes, and then you vomit the notes back in the exam. Paulo Freire, a brilliant Brazilian educator, writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that everything is wrong with the banking system because number one, students are passively consuming someone else's knowledge and that is not real knowledge. He wants knowledge to be consciousness raising. So for me, undergraduate research I cannot speak from that angle because I learned then what education should *not* be like. I tell my students here that I was very bored between 1970 and 1974.

What I consider crucial for my students is their ability to identify areas of real interest, things that they really want to know and pursue on their own. You know, find their questions and find their own answers, which is what education should be all about. Even my regular classes, I do not give prompts for papers because I tell them the paper has to find you. So, each student writes a different paper; they write three papers and all the papers are different from each other because they choose the text, they choose the argument. We meet if they are insecure to try out an idea or a focus for the paper. So, research should be at the core of true and real learning. So, for me, it's good to do it every time I teach. But what GREAT [Day] does and how students benefit from learning to present at a conference and eventually publish their work takes their knowledge a step further. I am already contacting students who wrote the best research papers for my Black Atlantic Novels course last semester to get a panel together for GREAT Day. "Research" is the term that kind of disguises what is really true ownership of knowledge. When I say let the paper find you, we always get interested in different things. So yeah, that's what research means to me. It's kind of my way of looking at it; it's called true learning.

## **Describe your mentorship role as a faculty sponsor.**

I have been mentoring many students—both English and Comparative Literature majors—for their honors theses or capstone projects. It is a year-long process, and most of the time, the capstone becomes a GREAT Day presentation. I make the GREAT Day presentation a requirement for both the Women and Gender Studies and the Black Studies capstone projects. Presenting in GREAT Day is part of the picture, it's part of the grade, it's part of the requirement because I tell my students you can be a great writer, but unless you are able to present your ideas, to make people understand the argument and where you are coming from, entertain questions at the end, you did not get it yet. Because in the real world, you have to be able to successfully argue, make a presentation even if you work for the World Bank, you have to be able to make your ideas understood. And most of the time, the best writer would persuade other people to see with them. So, the mentorship is a year-long process. Once they identify a text that they are interested, you know, in the first semester they are doing research. They are looking at the existing conversations on the author, right? And then they will go into the research, they only have to do an annotated bibliography at that point because you need to see what the existing conversation on the author [is] to actually decide what is you want to argue that is different from the existing conversation. I mean if it has been published before, what is the value of doing it? They research in the first semester [with] an annotated bibliography at the end and then they'll write the paper the second semester. The second semester is usually in the Spring with the GREAT Day presentation as part of the requirement. And then if they are lucky, they will get to publish it.

Some students are scared to be published because they are going to apply for graduate school, and want to save the publication for later. And some students they are English majors and they are brilliant but they do not want to get into grad school; they want to go Peace Corps or something, you know what I mean. So, I guess some of them choose not to get published.

## **What characteristics about the presentations do you believe makes it successful?**

I see the value in a panel, when there is a formal, either a PowerPoint presentation with the full argument [and] with research backup, at least [there is] a twenty-five minute interaction between the presentation and a question and an answer period. You know, a student reads a paper or presents a PowerPoint or whatever it is, and then there is some kind of conversation at the end.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?**

It is true that Geneseo students are driven. They really work very hard, and we do have the reputation of “The Ivy” of the SUNY system. I've been the University Faculty Senator for Geneseo for many years. So I know we do have a reputation that is really

important for the college, now getting grants, getting recognition, and even SUNY really listens when Geneseo speaks. That is part of the picture, but most benefit comes to the individual students to be empowered early on to be a knowledge producer. Rather than the banking system that I told you about; rather than banking on someone else's knowledge, the students see themselves as knowledge producers.

# Cooking Confrontations *à la* *Francophonie*

Sophie Boka

---

---

*sponsored by* Maria Lima

---

---

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I compare two francophone novels, Calixthe Beyala's *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* and Maryse Condé's *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots: récit*, to explore how, in engaging one another, they offer a cookbook for self-empowerment to francophone societies still struggling with the internalized cultural norms of their former colonizer. Such lingering norms are impossible to satisfy, especially for the novels' black female protagonists who, inherently, can never become the colonizer's ideal of beauty (white, thin, attractive by western convention). Thus, these characters are cast away into a cultural in-between: although literally visible within their countries, they are denied full visibility and, by extension, full subjectivity. Yet, I argue that by channeling additional senses, such as taste and smell, the characters manage to push back against oppressive colonial ideals. By placing these texts into conversation, it becomes clear how, varying in form and generation, each character utilizes their relationships with food and body as a means to assert an otherwise unseen presence in their countries. With the help of these tools, the women begin to challenge the dominant zeitgeist, nourishing the bellies of history, and, in doing so, too, realize into society the power of their own stories.

---

---

"If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."—Audre Lorde<sup>1</sup>

When placed in conversation, Calixthe Beyala's *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine* (2000) and Maryse Condé's *Victoire: les saveurs et les mots* (2006) offer recipes for self-empowered identity formation to francophone women of color grappling with the oppressive, internalized cultural norms of France, their former colonizer. The protagonists' internalization of these norms manifests through illustration of their power struggles with food and their bodies. My curiosity in these particular power struggles came about through my own rather vexed experiences with them, being quite sensitive to body narratives, forever struggling with my own. Influenced by dominant norms' subjugation of bodies, I became curious as to how these norms change depending on cultural context. I grew up immersed in the French culture of my

---

1 Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007).

father, hyper-conscious of the exclusive nature of the historically cemented ideals that influenced my development. Thus, I first approached my readings through the lens of the colonizer, interested in understanding how, by way of colonization, French culture has impacted the food and body image of women of *Francophonie*—the greater francophone world—specifically those whose roots trace back to the former colonies.<sup>2</sup> Yet, upon engaging with Beyala’s and Condé’s texts, immersing myself within the narratives of their female protagonists, I shifted my study to a protagonist-centered pursuit: how these women use food and their bodies to combat the exclusivity of colonizing French norms and, in so doing, reclaim subjectivity within colonized spaces. Now, I must note, I believe these cultural norms are impossible for anyone to satisfy, especially the Black women protagonists of the texts’ colonized spaces, who, due to the color of their skin, can never totally satisfy the colonizer’s ideal of beauty. (White and thin are considered attractive by Western convention.) Consequently, the protagonists are captive in a sort of cultural in-betweenness due to lingering French ideals: although literally visible within their countries, they are denied full visibility and, therefore, full subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> However, varying in form and generation, the radical protagonists of both texts utilize their relationships with food and body as a means to assert an otherwise unseen presence in their countries. With the help of their own bodies, these women begin to challenge the dominant zeitgeist, nourish the bellies of history, and, in doing so, reclaim power to create their own narratives and constitute their own unique identities.

Though general Western cultural ideals enforced upon the female body are widely understood, regional nuance of French Western norms can be illustrated with a few symbolic examples. In 2010, UNESCO added the gastronomic meal of the French to their list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (“Gastronomic meal of the French,” 2010). This valorization demonstrates the preservationist pride that France takes in the tradition of their cuisine, a pride that can be traced back to the 19th-century text *La physiologie du goût*, effective scripture for French food culture (Brillat-Savarin, 1825). Although centuries have passed since the penning of this foundational book, and despite the undeniable event of globalization, these national preservationist tendencies persist. As noted by Alexander Stille, reporting on racism in contemporary France, “During the 2012 [presidential] elections, after Marine Le Pen [a far right candidate,] began asserting that it would be soon impossible to buy anything other than halal meat in France, Nicolas Sarkozy, [the president at the time], down in the polls, announced that ‘the subject of halal meat was the most important in the minds of French voters’ ” (Stille, 2012). The underlying issue here is France’s xenophobic stance on immigration, specifically North African immigration and immigration from their former colonies. This demonstrates the utter metonymic power of food in France, such that a confrontation with non-traditional cui-

2 See “The Justice Minister and the Banana: How Racist Is France?” for reflection on Christiane Taubira, deputy from French Guinea, first black candidate to a French presidential election in 2002, and, from 2012-2016, the Minister of Justice of France, against her perpetual confrontation with racial discrimination in France (Stille, 2013).

3 See *Un-ruly*’s 2014 article “what the baoulé taught me about beauty” in which the publication’s founder, Antonia Opiah retraces history to illustrate an example of non-Eurocentric ideals of beauty: Black beauty.



sine has the ability to signify the entirety of their struggle with xenophobia, allowing food to stand as synecdoche for the nation.

Xenophobic impulses, manifest through food culture, emerge quite abhorrently in France's narrow cultural ideals, specifically ideals of the female body. In order to outline this claim, I will note that France has made it illegal to collect data on the breakdown of ethnicity and race within the Republic, a ruling, according to Law professor David Oppenheimer, with "roots in the revolution of 1789" and "the most recent French Constitution, adopted in 1958[ , which] carries forward this principle, banning all distinctions based on racial identity" (2008). Yet estimates show there are 3 to 5 million Black people living in France, making up about 5 percent of France's population (Kimmelman, 2008). France's republican value of *égalité*, or 'equality,' which is the stated defense for not collecting such data, thus makes France officially color-blind;<sup>4</sup> for, by extension and by law, France totally invalidates difference and 'other-than-White' subjectivity. This notion of a supposed equality (or, an absence of difference), however, only masks the veritable exclusive nature of French societal ideals and their omnipresent supremacy. Within this context, the question of French ideals for the female body is a manifest demonstration of the relationship between France's notion of equality and its xenophobic impulses, epitomized in the figure of Marianne, national symbol of the French Republic. Marianne, the goddess of liberty, became France's national symbol shortly after the 1789 revolution. From then on, Marianne's image as a young White woman has represented the ideals of the nation, harbinger of the country's principal values. The portrayal of this woman has therefore carried much cultural significance, representing France in female form. Always young and always White, the symbol's correlation and influence on beauty norms in the country became obvious when, in the 1960s, the nation selected living French women to represent the country's national symbol: Brigitte Bardot, Mireille Mathieu, Catherine Deneuve, Laetitia Costa.<sup>5</sup> Each of these women held a celebrity status as a sex symbol of her time.<sup>6</sup> With the bestowed title of Marianne, these women came to symbolize both ideal woman and ideal country, unifying the two ideals and embodying the ideal French woman. And it is true that these Mariannes are demonstrative of French beauty: each is White, feminine, unfeasibly frail yet buxom—in other words, attractive by Western convention and, moreover, anatomically unachievable and/or unnatural. Yet these ideals are nonetheless elevated, despite the minority of French women who can embody them. In turn, through France's cultural and political reins,

4 See Lemn Sissay's 1999 poem "Colour Blind" for poetic depiction of this phenomenon.

5 Conversing with Julie Burchill's *Girls on Film*, bell hooks highlights Burchill's comment on race and gender construction of "woman" in media images: "What does it say about racial purity that the best blondes have all been brunettes (Harlow, Monroe, Bardot)? I think it says that we are not as white as we think." bell hooks responds to Burchill's comment: "Burchill easily could have said, 'we are not as white as we want to be,' for clearly the obsession to have white women film stars be ultra-white was a cinematic practice that sought to maintain a distance, a separation between that image and the black female Other; it was a way to perpetuate white supremacy" (hooks, 1996).

6 See Vanessa Willoughby's article "When French Beauty Means White Beauty" from *Media Diversified* for further discussion of French beauty ideals (Willoughby, 2015).

such female ideals were also firmly transplanted within their colonies and amongst the wave of immigrants that followed. This interaction clearly depicted in Beyala's *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*, through its protagonist Aissatou, a young franco-phone immigrant from Cameroon living in Paris. Aissatou describes the hegemonic body narrative she has submitted to in the French city:

I'm not sure when I became white. I now smear my skin with...cosmetics made for whites. That isn't the end of it, though. Because to be white you've got to be thin. I've tortured my body to make it as small as possible. So now, I don't have any breasts and my thighs are flat geometries—all because the mirror of the world requires that I make my body pleasing to white men. A beautiful woman is flat as a pancake, thin as a rake or a slice of Melba toast. (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2016, p. 7)

For her, to be White means to be socially acceptable. Here, Aissatou describes torturing her body to fit into Parisian standards, specifically to be attractive to White men, symbols of the patriarchy that created these exclusive, oppressive ideals. These ideals are then recreated by society, the mirror of the world. Aissatou negotiates within society that she, in order to best fit in, must go through a process of erasure, making herself small and fragile, consumable, bland as toast.

Such erasure—or rather, what the French call *égalité*, according to the aforementioned outlawing of demographic statistics—illustrates how questions of diasporic identity formation exist in suspension within the cultural language of French systemic power, a system which renders certain groups undefinable in themselves (for they are only culturally definable as what is *not* French), and therefore marked as “other.” Although discussing France's particular breed, the tension of diasporic identity formation is not uncommon, specifically within the cultural hold of previously colonizing powers. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall grapples with similar questions of diasporic identity articulating a framework with which to ground suspended notions of self (1995). Hall debunks the Western definition of identity as a fixed entity, instead suggesting identity as fluid, dependent upon context, a shift in understanding which confronts the colonizer's “self vs. other” or “us vs. them” binaries enabled by fixed definitions of identity. Hall also rejects the West's dichotomizing of myth and reality, which enables the creativity essential to the production of the stories we tell about ourselves (1995). This creativity is key for it is what ultimately guides reclamation of authorial control over one's own narrative. When identity is no longer determined by those in power (a reality that has historically been scaffolded by binaries), it can then begin to define itself creatively for and by itself rather than in opposition to an “other.” Identity can no longer be relegated to a simple “us vs. them,” thereby defying subjugation by those in power. Moreover, it is, in fact, this fluid, creative quality of identity formation that ultimately provides the fodder for self-liberation. In his essay, Hall also abandons the concept of cultural essence, the claim that people of a place can be reduced to a specific set of characteristics, a mode often used to discuss identity in Western discourse. Focusing on the people of the Caribbean, a group dislocated by colonization both

literally and figuratively, Hall demonstrates that diasporic peoples cannot be reduced to a single essence.<sup>7</sup> For Caribbean people, there is no return to origins, to roots. The Africa of their ancestors has not been stagnant in time, waiting for their return. It moved on. For people of the greater African diaspora, including the protagonists, this is the case. Hall's processes demonstrate how these texts' protagonists use their relationships with food and their bodies as tangible catalysts for the reclamation of their subjectivity, to "renegotiate" their identities and to reallocate the position of definer to the defined.<sup>8</sup> The first process of Hall's guide to identity formation is retention, which can be enacted through the reproduction of ancestral traditions. These re-enactments, he argues, are what enable one to cope through the trauma of dislocation, a trauma which, as we have noted, has been inflicted upon diasporas from the former colonies (Hall, 1995). The second process is assimilation, the mirror-like relationship to another, a move arguably asymptotic in function (Hall, 1995). I want to highlight how Hall's third process, renegotiating identification, offers one's past not as a keeper of one's 'true' identity but rather as a means, as resource for its creation, thereby temporally placing identity within the present moment. bell hooks, too, views this act of "looking and looking back" as a means, as "a process whereby we see our history as counter-memory, using it to know the present and invent the future" (hooks, 1996, p. 104). By placing identity in the present, Hall thus renders it fluid, contextual, not something to be found or told. Identity, as defined according to Hall's renegotiation process, is visible in the journeys of our three protagonists', and is thus alive, a constantly updated narrative in conversation with the world around it.

## INTERROGATION OF THE HEART

Stuart Hall's earlier work "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" asserts that cultural identities "undergo constant transformation" throughout history as they are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power" (Hall, 1989, p. 70). Feminist author Calixthe Beyala plunges her readers into such contemporary "play" of diasporic identity formation in her novel *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*, tracing protagonist Aissatou's journey to reclaim authorial control of her identity through her relationship with food and body. Having migrated from Cameroon, a country riddled with various colonial influences—Portuguese, German, British, and, of course, French—to Paris, the heart of the Republic, Aissatou epitomizes a subjectivity in tense suspension between the plethora of neocolonial influences that both form and, on account of her body's otherness, reject her selfhood. Cameroon gained its "independence" from France in 1960 and, about a decade later, France released its final colonial territories. However, each severance occurred only in a single kind of way. For, as mentioned earlier, this release of power did not correlate with a

<sup>7</sup> I will continue to use the term "diasporic peoples" throughout for such reasons as laid out by Maria Helena Lima: "The concept of an African diaspora is powerful in that it allows us to speak of continuities and connections within the African world experience, without compromising the uniqueness and historical specificity of each cultures under its rubric" (2018).

<sup>8</sup> See Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*: "Definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (1987).

shift in cultural attitude—the cultural norms of the former colonizer lingering. With xenophobia still deeply woven within the fabric of France’s culture, Aissatou, if not only on account of her Blackness, an unshedable marker of her relative otherness, is cast into an in-between space, her self fractured by the societal rejection of her body. This fracturing materializes early on in the novel, when, hurrying onto an underground metro, Aissatou’s inner world escapes her bustling environment, transporting her from her body’s surroundings to a more open space: “*Je suis quelque part dans la cambrousse africaine... Je ne m’engouffre pas dans le métro où des gens se bousculent, mais dans une jungle noire*” yet when “*J’émerge rue des Couronnes et je suis bien obligée de revenir à la réalité*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 49).<sup>10</sup> To the beginning of this passage, translator David Cohen has added a sentence: “This girl, me, is in Paris and not in Paris. I bilocate down Equator way” (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2016, p. 33).<sup>11</sup> Aissatou’s fracturing of self from body is apparent here in her initial identification of herself as “this girl,” grammatically indicating an exogenous relation to self through her use of the pronoun “this” suggesting something observably close yet outside. The use of the subject “girl” reads as if by observation made by another outside of herself, as if the identity does not belong to her. The immediate parenthetical “me” bolsters this claim, as if suddenly remembering to acknowledge that this observable girl is Aissatou herself, an identity over which she has ownership. Despite Aissatou’s literal presence in France, her demarcation and subsequent fracture render her figuratively absent, unembodied, and her existence, on account of her physical deviation from norm, relegated into a transient in-between.

Being Black, female, and an immigrant, Aissatou embodies multiple identities that exist beyond the bounds of French cultural norms. Her multiplicity renders the conditions necessary for Aissatou to find place—to root herself within the French society that seeks to erase her difference—nearly impossible. Early on in the novel, introducing the readers to her story through confessional pondering on her place in France, she declares: “*La lumière du jour comme celle du soir créent des ombres sur le bon sens que mes parents ont eu tant de peine à m’inculquer*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 19).<sup>12</sup> I argue that the light of which she speaks here metaphorically stands in for France’s patriarchal culture, echoing the mantra of lead colonial power England’s infamous phrase: ‘the sun never sets on the British empire.’ Be it that light is what enables visual form, the more time spent under this patriarchal light, the more time spent immersed in this worldview, the greater are the shadows cast over her memory and, by extension, the greater the

9 If not otherwise noted, English translations will be my own. Here, read: “I am somewhere in the African countryside [...] I am not swallowed by the metro amongst the tumbling passengers, but within an ebony jungle.”

10 “My body gets out at the Rue de Coronnes where my soul has to adjust to reality” (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2014, p. 33)

11 Though I do not hold Cohen’s translation in high esteem, several of his lines communicate the social and cultural dynamics I wish to explore. Furthermore, his interpretations of Beyala’s work advance an argument similar to my own. Thus, I will make reference of them when relevant.

12 “The light of day, like evenings, casts shadows on the knowledge my parents worked hard to pass down to me.”

erasure of herself. Aissatou comments further on her erasure under this light: “*Je ne sais plus comment aider une chèvre à mettre bas ou dans quelle direction enterrer les morts afin qu’ils ressuscitent des ténèbres*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 49).<sup>13</sup> Immersed within this worldview, no longer can Aissatou recall the rituals of life passed down to her by her family. This loss is echoed by her forgetting of how and in which way to bury the deceased, both figuratively and literally signifying a loss in relation to grounded connection with roots. With this dynamic in mind, I argue that, in the space of France, Aissatou cannot engage in Hall’s first process of identity formation, retention, by which he suggests one survives by engaging with tradition, for, under the light of the patriarchal culture, she lacks the space to engage in such practices. Rather, I claim that her first mode of self-survival is actually in conversation with Hall’s second process of identity formation, assimilation. Aissatou does not assimilate unknowingly. Rather, she is “*si perturbée dans [s]es repères que [s]es yeux se méprennent sur la vision du monde*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 49).<sup>14</sup> Aissatou understands that her existence is not in a state of calm, that her worldview is “*perturbée.*” Beyala’s choice of the word *repères*, translating to *landmarks*, is suggestive of how Aissatou is aware that her navigation of the world is awry, for landmarks denote physical and familiar, protected, grounded structures, which, in France, Aissatou is both unfamiliar with and denied access to. An initial claim of Aissatou’s emphasizes this dynamic, asserting, “*J’ignore quand je suis devenue blanche : ce que je sais, c’est que mes connaissances d’antan m’ont désertée*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 19).<sup>15</sup> Here, Aissatou acknowledges the desertion of her “*connaissances*”—understanding, appreciation, knowledge, and awareness of “*antan*” (former times/ancestry/roots)—noting how, in their desertion, comes the taking on of a new qualifier, “*blanche,*” a symbol of hegemonic cultural norms.

Assimilation, the secondary process of Stuart Hall’s concept of identity formation, becomes apparent as Aissatou struggles to survive within the French city. Her state of “*devenue blanche*” only perpetuates the instability of her identity: “*Même mes pensées sont devenues imprévisibles*” (Beyala 2014, p. 19).<sup>16</sup> Her thinking is not grounded, determined by cultural ideals, as Cohen’s translation unveils that Aissatou’s thoughts “*bend or balloon to fit the latest clichés which decree what’s beautiful even though [she doesn’t] really agree with them*” (Beyala, trans. Cohen 2016, 12). Unable to retain tradition, Hall’s primary process of identification, Aissatou’s identity is left to the whims of decreed clichés. Since “*decree*” is defined as command by legal authority, the usage suggests French culture’s responsibility in creating these clichés. Aissatou’s disagreement with yet adherence to these clichés demonstrates her state of desperation in France; under the light of its xenophobic norms, she clings to whatever she can in an attempt to fit in, to make place, despite her liking. As referenced, the first sections of Beyala’s novel welcome readers with a placeless narration, perhaps a choice made

13 “I no longer know how to assist a goat giving birth, nor in which direction to bury the dead so that they can be resurrected from the darkness.”

14 “So disturbed in her landmarks that her eyes misunderstand their vision of the world.”

15 “I’ve ignored when I became white: what I know is that my familiarity with my past had deserted me.”

16 “Even my thoughts have become unpredictable.”

to echo the theme of dislocation between Aissatou's world of mind and body. When readers first encounter Aissatou in Paris, they observe her amidst preparation of her body for its presentation in public: "*Je ficelle mes jambes dans un pantalon noir. Ma poitrine étouffe dans un corsage rouge: je vais affronter les autres*" (Beyala 2014, p. 27).<sup>17</sup> Here, Aissatou has selected for herself an essentially Parisian outfit, simply styled in basic colors (Berest, 2014). The aggressive language with which the act of putting on her clothing is described suggests the nature of her actions: rather than serve as form of expression, Aissatou's dress serves as a coat of armor. The word '*ficeler*' translates to tie-up, or to bind, suggesting the way she must contort her body in order to make such a presentation. Her breasts are stuffed into her top, too, suggesting a sort of binding, a hiding of her body, her flesh, the source of her othering in the outside world. Cohen adds to his translation, when describing the placement of her red top: "I just manage to fit" (Beyala, trans. Cohen 2016, p. 17). The literal stuffing of herself into these articles of clothing figuratively indicates how she forces herself to fit into a French image, how she both literally and figuratively suppresses herself in order to do so. The power of these garments is echoed when Aissatou, having hit rock bottom, exits her apartment and enters into the public realm:

*J'enfile un jeans et quitte l'appartement. Je marche comme une survivante, les yeux éteints, les mains serrées au fond de mon blouson noir. Mes cheveux défrisés, que je n'ai pas eu le temps de plaquer, se dressent sur mon crâne en épis. Les stigmates de mon passé sont à mes pieds.* (Beyala, 2014, p. 48)<sup>18</sup>

Once again, she chooses an essentially Parisian outfit as armor, a black jacket and a pair of jeans. The verb '*enfiler*,' translating in English to "to slip," suggests the mechanical action she takes to cover her body in this garb. In the outfit, she marches as a *survivante* through the heart of the Republic. Aissatou is a survivor of the environment that perpetually seeks to jettison her. At this point in the novel, the "stigmas of [Aissatou's] past are at [her] feet," signifying what is unchangeable for Aissatou: the stigma associated with her Blackness, her otherness. In this line, the stigmas she struggles with are associated with her feet, the part of her body that is physically closest to French ground. They are thereby associated with her roots and with the French terrain on which she traverses. Although demonstrating rejection, the stigmas' location also signifies something without constraint: her forward motion. What French culture has used as resource to create these stigmas are inherent parts of her narrative—things she cannot shake. They are what connect her to her mother, her story, her effaced past. This idea of unbridled movement is buttressed by the freedom of her literal roots, her hair, which is notably "*défrisés*," unharnessed by Western convention. Thus, this line, exhibiting the movement of her body forward, suggests a shift in her thinking to fu-

17 "I bind my legs within a pair of black jeans. My breasts are stuffed in a red top: I will confront the others."

18 "I slip on some jeans and leave the apartment. I march like a survivor, eyes blinded, hands in front of my black jacket. My hair relaxed, that I haven't had the time to flatten, falls on my head in pieces. Stigmas of my past are at my feet."

ture movement: no longer will she let the stigmas at her feet shackle her motion; she will move onward.

Yet before Aissatou claims this shift in narrative, before she engages with Hall's third process of renegotiation, Aissatou must refine her choices of cultural consumption through the act of refusal as a means of authorial control. For, not only does Aissatou attempt to assimilate through what she puts on her body but also what she chooses to put into it. Early in the novel, alone in her room, "*C'est l'heure du souper. J'ouvre un sachet de véritable soupe chinoise aux nouilles et aux légumes*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 38).<sup>19</sup> Aissatou's meal is something small, prepackaged, and instant, suggesting that it lacks nutritional value, feeding Aissatou's body very little. Furthermore, this soup is "*véritable soupe chinoise*," but can the true cuisine of a nation be so artificially packaged by another culture? Instead, this meal is a comment again on the metonymic interplay between power and cuisine in France: the supposedly authentic version of this other-than-French food is artificial, lacking substance. And this is how Aissatou chooses to nourish herself. To contain her soup, she "*choisis un bol bleu, serti de fleurs de lotus, parce qu'il fait << femme d'intérieur >>. Je mélange... mon repas est prêt*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 38).<sup>20</sup> Often, "*femme d'intérieur*" translates to "housewife," though it might be better interpreted literally: "inner woman." Read this way, Aissatou's choice of this bowl suggests the superficiality of her consumption. The external carrier of her bowl reads "inner woman," yet the inside is artificial and lacks substance. The lack of intention she places in her nourishment, taking only some hot water, a few stirs, indicates the true disconnect and superficiality that Aissatou actually nourishes her "inner woman." To consume her meal, "*Je suis assise, apathique, devant le film du soir. Mais yeux sont posés sur l'écran, sans envie. Je n'arrive pas, malgré la beauté du film à inventer de nouvelles terres où m'évader : la solitude ôte l'appétit*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 38-9).<sup>21</sup> Not only does Aissatou consume nutritionless food, but this mealtime also features her consumption of French culture through the screen. As she sips her soup, her eyes consume the images on the screen, which, although beautiful, will not allow her to escape herself, her body. Though assimilation is asymptotic, Aissatou's desire to escape, to hide herself in a space does show is her underlying desire for place of belonging, one she has yet to find in the city. This desire is hinted at through the final line, "*la solitude ôte l'appétit*," indicating that if no longer in this state of solitude, if accompanied by some relationship, her hunger will grow.

Aissatou's patterns of consumption begin to shift after a provocative experience at a restaurant where White French male customers harass her. They verbally affront Aissatou, denigrating her, invading her space despite her expressed disinterest in them. Tired of their antics, she leaves the restaurant:

19 "It's dinner time. I open a bag of authentic Chinese soup with noodles and vegetables."

20 "Choose a blue bowl, decorated with lotus flowers, because it says, '*femme d'intérieur*.' I mix [...] my meal is ready."

21 "I sit, apathetic, in front of my evening movie. But my eyes are on the screen, without envy. I cannot, despite the beauty of the film to invent new lands, escape myself: solitude strips the appetite."

I pay the bill in the midst of all this couldn't care less. I don't exist any more [sic] not even for the man with crummy teeth. I might as well have melted into the wall. I go outside and muddle into the street. It's bright, noisy, all consuming and it consumes me. (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2014, p. 13)

Here, the protagonist confronts the effacing behavior that French society acts upon her, acknowledging that, within the power system of this space, she does not exist, not even for the man with the crummy teeth. His crummy teeth betray his weak roots, as he is not of the upper echelon of this power system whose teeth would be cared for or fixed, thereby suggesting that Aissatou is nonexistent not only to the powerful, but to all who subscribe to this system of power. Although some may argue that this scene can be read in the particular, that it signifies nothing more than one encounter with one group of deprecating men, Aissatou's next action appears to say otherwise; for even when she exits the interaction at the restaurant—the place of consumption where, instead of food, the men attempt to verbally consume her—and enters into the outside space of the public, she remains under the “bright” light of the “all consuming” French patriarchy, which, as she claims, too, “consumes [her].” However frightening, this stark realization is met with yet another when she ultimately concludes: “*Il ne m'appartient pas de décomplexer l'homme blanc*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 21).<sup>22</sup> To this line, Cohen's English translation adds the nonrestrictive clause, “his phallic insecurity” (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2016, p. 13). Where the text reads “*décomplexer l'homme blanc*” (“to fix the white man's complexes”), I extend the subject of “*l'homme blanc*” to Parisian and Western society at large, for the present societal structure of France, Europe, and the Western world has been historically patriarchal in form. When Aissatou claims that her destiny is other than White man's, she includes all of White society. By extension, it is through understanding her destiny as something “other than” that Aissatou begins to dismantle the prescriptive power of the oppressive White culture that both limits and invalidates the multiplicity of her selfhood: she is both Parisian and Black. It is, too, important to note the language with which the translator has chosen to make this claim: the language of “complexes” and “phallic insecurity” (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2014, p. 13). Rendering White power as mere complexes and insecurities is Aissatou's acknowledgment to expose the supposedly superior power of White society as nothing other than humanly fallible. I especially find this reading apparent in the translator's phrasing “phallic insecurity” here, in discussion of the relationship between the self and body in society. By associating White societal power with body insecurity, particularly that of a sensitive area, the text indicates how the Parisian power structure, too, has feelings of insecurity toward their own body (both political and corporal), revealing the societal superiority of France's cultural ideals as but a controlling front, a mask used to hide their own fallibility, insecurity—their humanity.

Offering an alternative to such posturing, Beyala sprinkles *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine* with Aissatou's recollections of her mother's cooking, how her mother

22 “It is not my responsibility to tease out the White man's complexes.”



would cultivate dishes to find resolve for quotidian trials. When burdened by romantic feelings, Aissatou recalls her mother's instruction: "*Mange du veau, ma fille, aurait dit maman. Sa chair tendre permet de retourner à l'enfance insouciance*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 46).<sup>23</sup> Aissatou's awareness of her mother's instruction haunts her at the beginning of the novel, though its message falls upon deaf ears, as Aissatou, self-fractured by society, cannot yet seem to access the resources of "expressive culture" needed to pursue her mother's culinary guidance (Hall, 1995, p. 7). As Aissatou finishes her "authentic" Chinese soup, she claims, "*Finalemment, j'aurais dû faire comme maman : cuisiner un attieké aux crevettes*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 39).<sup>24</sup> Her concession demonstrates both the rift and connection between herself and her mother, "the subterranean link" to her roots (Hall, 1995, p. 7). Beyala bookends each chapter in the novel with Aissatou's mother's recipe for a dish she has recalled, offering a roadmap that Aissatou can and does eventually follow to navigate the trials she faces. Through reproducing her mother's recipes, she utilizes the resources of her past to, in Hall's formulation, both retain and renegotiate her life à l'Africaine.<sup>25</sup> These recipes offer memories from which Aissatou can draw resource and nourishment, physical and otherwise. Feminist writer and thinker Virginia Woolf writes in her foundational essay *A Room of One's Own*, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1929/2005, p. 4). Here, Woolf's use of "money" is a stand-in for social currency, and "room" is a space where one can "write fiction" or develop one's own narrative. Now, in a literal reading of this line as applied to Aissatou's situation, one could argue that Aissatou in fact has a room of her own, for she lives in her own small apartment in Paris. However, Woolf's "room" does not need necessarily refer to a physical space as much as a psychic one. Furthermore, even if possessing a literal room, Aissatou lacks the "money" or social currency that Woolf deems a necessity. Cultural norms still deny her subjectivity, finding ways to leech into her literal space; their power "all consuming [,] and [they] consum[e] [her]" (Beyala, trans. Cohen 2016, p. ). Poet Fred D'Aguiar writes of a similar phenomenon in his poem "Home," describing his Black British speaker's observations: "At my front door, why doesn't the lock/ recognize me and budge, As I fight it" (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 103). As with D'Aguiar's speaker, it is not until Aissatou finds a space wherein she can recreate her mother's recipes and, in Hall's words, engage with "an umbilical connection with the African homeland and culture," that she begins to substantially reconnect with herself (1995, p. 7).

23 "Eat some veal, my girl, mother would have said. Its tender flesh will transport you to your childhood, carefree."

24 "In the end, I should have done as my mother would have done: cooked an attieké with shrimp."

25 See *Ms. Afropolitan's* article "Tradition matters for female farmers, and female farmers matter for everything" for discussion on the foundational role of women not only working with the production of meals but, too, in agriculture (Salami, 2016). In the article, she also critiques the roles of foreign influences on Nigeria's agricultural system. I also suggest referencing *Ms. Afropolitan's* article "When Africans connect food, nature and our deepest selves" for reflection on the symbolic nourishment of food preserved within various African culture (Salami, 2017).

Under the oppressive light of French culture, Aissatou's "room" takes the form of a romantic relationship with her neighbor, Mr. Bolobolo. Like Aissatou, Mr. Bolobolo is Black in Paris, the son of Malian immigrants. The shared elements of their identities offer multitudes to Aissatou, for in him she can finally see reflected societally rejected parts of herself. Encountering Mr. Bolobolo for the first time in the stairwell of her apartment, "*Je m'immobilise soudain dans des gestes désordonnés parce que vient, en sens contraire, un Nègre. Je prends le temps de l'examiner. Il a la taille d'un homme dont aucun soleil ne peut mesurer l'ombre*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 27).<sup>26</sup> The immobilization Aissatou experiences upon this encounter coupled with the stand-alone nature of the noun "*un Nègre*" indicates how his presence disrupts Aissatou's routine. His non-Whiteness enables her to "*prends le temps de l'examiner*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 27). bell hooks contextualizes the significance of this comment in her essay "The Oppositional Gaze," stating simply, "there is power in looking" (hooks, 1996, p. 95). She goes on to assert that "spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see" (hooks, 1996, p. 95). For Aissatou, Bolobolo offers this space wherein she can claim the agency to look: both to look in a state of togetherness and to look to interrogate the Other (that is, French culture). Aissatou's gaze allows her to look mutually, breaking her out of the in-between state that she has for so long occupied in the French city and into the present moment, into connection with another. This presence enabled by her connection with Bolobolo opens up a space within which she can interrogate the French culture that has heretofore fractured her identity, as depicted in Aissatou's claim that "*Il a la taille d'un homme dont aucun soleil ne peut mesurer l'ombre.*" Reading the sun as a symbol of French patriarchal power, the space shared by these two is impenetrable by such oppressive light. Aissatou looks further, admiring "*des touffes de cheveux crépus s'amoncellent sur son crâne comme un paysage aimé, mais depuis longtemps disparu*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 27).<sup>27</sup> Aissatou's visual consumption of Bolobolo's hair prompts her to use the analogy of a faraway land, long disappeared. Arguably, the observation of his natural hair demonstrates a sudden connection with her own roots, as she is the one who creates this analogy, therefore implying a remembrance of her own faraway land, thus providing Aissatou access to her disengaged memory. Her interrogation of the Other through this act of looking is crafted through the connective pool of resources that their interaction provides, similar to Hall's retention and renegotiation. This engagement with their past and within their present context allows Aissatou to do the work of reclaiming her subjectivity in France. Not only does Bolobolo allow her access to her memory, but he also allows her connection to her body. Rather than see something divergent from norm, her desire for him enables her to see beauty in his Blackness. She comments on his skin: "*Minuit doit pâlir de jalousie à la vue de sa peau noire et douce. Je vois qu'elle est douce rien qu'à la regarder*" (Beyala, 2014, p. 27).<sup>28</sup>

26 "I suddenly stop, awkwardly, for in the opposite direction, comes a Negro. I take the time to examine him. He is the size of a man whose shadow cannot be measured by the sun."

27 "Tufts of frizzy hair piled on his skull like a beloved landscape, long gone."

28 "Midnight must turn pale with envy at the sight of his soft black skin. I can see that he is sweet just by watching him."

Connecting with her desire for him, too, allows Aissatou to connect with her own body. As they look together,

*lorsque nos yeux se croisent, cela me prend d'abord par les membres. Mon corps est saisi d'une liesse indicible tandis que mon cerveau se dilue en torpeur. Tout devient vert, bleu, jaune, et j'ai l'impression que toutes les voies sont désormais libres... Nous deux, toi et moi, et le temps devant nous.* (Beyala, 2014, p. 27-8)<sup>29</sup>

The desire, the physical feeling that she has for him rushes through her veins, seizing her. Unlike the “*immeuble gris*” of the city that she sees through the window on her return to her room, with Bolobolo, everything becomes colorful, and “*toutes les voies sont désormais libres*”—she is offered a space, a freedom, a path. “*Nous deux*,” she finds a space to exist within, a space to see color, to connect—a feeling not yet expressed within the Parisian heartland. After leaving Mr. Bolobolo and returning to her room, she is reminded of her mother: “*Elle aurait poussé des trémolos et des couinements: ‘Un homme qui vous faire ressentir de telles émotions, avait-elle coutume de dire, mérite le paradis!’ . . . ‘Y a-t-il assez de sel et de poivre?’*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 30-1).<sup>30</sup> The presence of Bolobolo, this looking relationship, thus enables the space within which Aissatou can begin to retreat from the solitude of her plighted in-between and into togetherness through connection with another, with her body, and, too, with the memory of her roots and of her mother, which the latter is significant for it provides her with a creative outlet that she can use to both maintain and create herself within the room of this newfound relationship: cooking.

What, exactly, is the nature of this space, this ‘room’? Some may argue that Aissatou’s reconnection with self, since discovered in relationship with a man, demonstrates an anti-feminist submission. Others might argue that her creation of a self-narrative through this relationship is not actually for her, but for a man, and thereby another manifestation of her submission to French patriarchal norms. Yet I refute these arguments for Bolobolo is neither White, nor does he identify as a Frenchman. Although born and raised in France, he does not occupy the same position in society as those with social currency, for he is not White. Additionally, description of the pair’s interactions largely pertains to Aissatou’s experience of the relationship, her feelings, her body, and her desires—not Bolobolo’s. Finally, it is worth noting that the memory of Aissatou’s mother, which Aissatou holds in an advisory regard, and Beyala’s conclusion to the chapter, does not encourage Aissatou to submit herself to Bolobolo. Rather, her mother’s memory encourages Aissatou to celebrate her emotions, to be with him in paradise, a heavenly place that *she* helps to create with him rather than one found in him. The initial shift in her relationship to French cultural power is catalyzed through

29 “When our eyes meet, it first hits me in my limbs. My body is seized by an indescribable attraction while my brain dilutes into torpor. Everything becomes green, blue, yellow, and I feel that all paths are now free [...] Us two, you and me, and the time before us.”

30 “She would have uttered tremors and squeaks: ‘A man who makes you feel that way, she used to say, deserves paradise!’ [...] ‘Is there enough salt and pepper?’

her relationship with a man, a relationship initially motivated by her drive to win him over. However, this impetus does not invalidate her agency. Aissatou even claims toward the end of the novel, after their marriage and his repeated infidelities, that “*on ne demande pas à un mari d’être un héros*” (Beyala, 2016, p. 135).<sup>31</sup> To pursue Bolobolo is, after all, her own choice, an act divergent from past modes. For so long, Aissatou sacrificed herself for assimilation, stuck in an oppressive cycle. Aissatou’s choice to be in relationship with Bolobolo is an act of self-ownership and a move toward the decolonization of her mind and body.

After encountering Bolobolo for the first time, the memory of her mother prompted by this interaction encourages Aissatou to recreate her mother’s remedying recipes, an action through which she can begin to recreate her past in her present. As their relationship unfolds, she attempts to woo him through cooking traditional meals, which the two devour together, consuming their roots and reworking them into their lives in Paris. Although the intention of these meals is initially flirtatious, Aissatou soon creates these meals to satisfy herself.<sup>32</sup> The creation of these meals offers Aissatou a means to expression, a voice that she has been otherwise unable to communicate. Later in the novel, as Bolobolo and Aissatou share an intimate moment where he rehashes heavy memories of his upbringing, becoming weighted down by his emotions, Aissatou observes, “*Monsieur Bolobolo se tait maintenant,*” silenced by the memory of his past (Beyala, 2014, p. 146).<sup>33</sup> Detecting the silence of her partner, hoping to relieve him from this weighted state, she asserts her voice, for “*qu’il faut qu[’elle] lui raconte une histoire stupéfiante et exquise pour l’extraire de sa douleur,*” so she asks him: “*As-tu déjà mangé du ngombo au four nappé de coulis de tomates?*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 146).<sup>34</sup> Aissatou suggests that the creation of narrative through food is what can ameliorate the present from the weight of the past, a learned behavior that she builds in the space of their relationship. Food is her choice of expression and communication. But Bolobolo initially snubs her in response: “*T’arrive-t-il de penser à autre chose qu’à la bouffe?*”<sup>35</sup> to which Aissatou “*fixe le mur,*”<sup>36</sup> then asserting, “*La nourriture est synonyme de la vie Aujourd’hui, elle constitue une unité plus homogène que la justice. Elle est peut-être l’unique source de paix et de réconciliation entre les hommes*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 146).<sup>37</sup> Here, Aissatou acknowledges the metonymic value of food, its ability to express more than itself, as explored above. Through its creation and consumption, we create and

31 “One can’t ask a husband to be a hero.”

32 *Edible Manhattan’s* featured article “The Woman Behind Belmere Catering’s Haitian Cuisine Cooks to Heal” paints a beautiful picture of chef Rose Michel and how she tends to past wounds through the creation of food à *la Haïtienne* (Pattillo, 2018).

33 “Mr. Bolobolo is silent now.”

34 “She knows that she has to tell him an amazing and exquisite story to extract from his pain” [...] “Have you ever eaten baked ngombo topped with tomato coulis?”

35 “Do you think of anything other than food?”

36 “Fixes her eyes on the wall.”

37 “Today, food is synonymous with life. It contains more unity than justice. It is perhaps the only source of peace and reconciliation between men.”

consume messages, which is finally validated by Bolobolo: “*T’as sans doute raison*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 146).<sup>38</sup>

Aissatou’s relationship with Bolobolo has, from their first encounter, served as catalyst for reconnection with her own body. Through her desire for him, she begins to feel. By cooking the recipes of her mother, consuming them with him, allowing her body to love and be loved, she slowly rejects the fear of her body imposed upon her by French patriarchal culture. This rejection is best seen when Aissatou visits a sauna that she had frequented. There, she is confronted with bodies of women hoping to shed into a more ‘ideal’ form. Aissatou is, too, looking to shed something by returning to the sauna, though she no longer is looking to shed herself, but rather the same ‘ideals’ that first led her to the sauna, to shed these “extrinsic force[s]...like the serpent sheds its skin” (Hall, 1989, p. 78). The description of the sauna’s treatment of their bodies demonstrates the literal and figurative erasure that women enact in order to attempt an ideal: “*Des main épaisses ou délicates frottent avec vigueur chaque parcelle du corps...on rabote les tailles si bien qu’à la fin on ressemble à un morceau de rôti saignant*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>39</sup> When the other women see Aissatou in this space, they question: “*Qu’est-ce qui t’arrive, Aissatou? Voilà des semaines qu’on ne t’a pas vue!*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>40</sup> Her absence indicates that, during her time spent from the sauna cooking and eating and loving with Bolobolo, she no longer needed this space of female erasure. Aissatou comments further that “*Elles m’entourent et accrochent les excroissances sur mon corps. Elles pensent: << Elle doit se laisser aller parce qu’elle a des problèmes.>>*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>41</sup> Here, she encounters the gaze of the women, seeking to other her with their own gaze, to make her less than, in correspondence with the French ideals that they hold. When the women see that Aissatou has gained weight, “*Il y a une jouissance sur leurs visages que dément la tendresse de leurs voix*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>42</sup> These women’s attitudes reflect the oppression their bodies experience. When the definition of beauty is so slim, only few can fit into it, creating competitive impulses among women. Aissatou shirks this slim definition when, out of a newly-developed body confidence she boldly acknowledges, “*C’est vrai que mon corps a perdu de sa maigreur comme certains arbres leurs feuilles. Il a verdi avec la puissance d’un baobab à la saison des pluies : mes joues se sont arrondies et mes seins, tels de bougainvilliers, ont fleuri plus qu’un printemps*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>43</sup> Rather than fear her departure from conventional beauty, Aissatou takes solace in her connection with nature, suggesting a more grounded relationship to her body in its natural

38 “You’re definitely right.”

39 “Thick or delicate hands rub vigorously every part of the body [...] we map our sizes so that at the end we look like a piece of rare roast.”

40 “What happened to you, Aissatou? We haven’t seen you for weeks!”

41 “They surround me, judging my body. They think, ‘She’s let herself go—she must be having problems.’”

42 “They look contented, unveiling the kindness in their voice.”

43 “It’s true that my body has lost its old figure, as some trees lose their leaves. Yet it has become green with the power of a baobab in the rainy season: my cheeks are rounded and my breasts, like bougainvillea, have bloomed for more than one spring.”

form, and to its roots, as denoted by the imagery of the baobab, an African Tree. The baobab is unique in its ability to provide abundance despite environmental scarcity—offering various parts of itself as remedy to illness, its fruits as a source of dense nourishment, its body as a shelter, water, and more. Its ability to provide, nourish, and heal lends the baobab one of its many names: “the tree of life.”<sup>44</sup> Aissatou mirrors this tree’s life-giving modalities through her ability to reclaim authorial control of her life’s narrative, fixing herself at the center of her own story. She mirrors the tree through her ability to provide for herself, to be her own remedy, within the culturally arid terrain of France.<sup>45</sup> Embodying the power of the baobab, unlike the clichés that she has once subscribed to, her beauty no longer fades in one season. Confident, no longer desiring to blend in, she prepares to leave the sauna: “*J’enfile mon caleçon rose, mon tee-shirt vert pomme et je me chapeaute avec un magnifique plumeau noir. Je suis différente des branchées parisiennes qui cachent leur manque de goût dans d’éternels vêtements noirs... l’homme déteste la différence, c’est connu*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87).<sup>46</sup> Through her colorful outfit, Aissatou pushes back against the erasure of assimilation, claiming her subjectivity through attractive colors, inviting eyes to see her difference. She is who controls her public persona, not the ‘tasteless’ Parisians. With this new approach, authorial pen in hand, she re-contextualizes her relationship with her difference on her own terms. bell hooks expands on this notion of self-invention, writing that in creating self, “[Black women] do more than resist. We create alternative texts that are

44 To get a brief overview of the ecological information surrounding the baobab can be found in the “*Adansonia Digitata*” entry on *PlantzAfrica* (Hankey 2004). Information on the baobab’s cultural importance is explored in Hillary Cox’s “The Tree of Life” in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (2008). Kat Smith takes a good look at the nutritional value of the baobab in her piece “Ingredient Spotlight: Baobab, the African Superfood That Has Twice as Much Calcium as Dairy” from *One Green Planet* (2017).

45 Furthermore, this tree predates humanity and the rupture of Pangaea. Its temporal and physical origins are significant, for they suggest that the tree’s figurative roots date back to a time before the artificial divisions and power that humans in power affix to origins (i.e. being African is somehow less than being European). Another relevant point is that the tree provides resources specific to women’s health and fertility, suggesting the particular breed of empowerment that Aissatou, as a woman, taps in her connection with this tree. Her connection with the baobab is more intricate when discussing its many names. The baobab is sometimes called “the upside down tree” due to the root-like appearance of its branches. This root-like expression of its branches can be found metaphorically in Aissatou’s new found comfort in the expression of her natural self, as demonstrated at the sauna. Finally, another name of note is the tree’s Latin name, *Adanson digitata*, with *digitata* meaning “fingers,” an expression of its finger-like, branches. This word emphasizes the power that Aissatou has reclaimed to manipulate, to control her life. The legacy of the first word, *Adanson*, evokes the history of colonial, and more generally Western, power riddled in the field of science, as it is the name of a French surgeon. This history is echoed in the names and graffiti engraved in many baobab trees in Africa by European settlers, literally colonizing through the mechanical act of naming the trees and scientifically defining the trees. Aissatou’s powerful embodiment and identification with this tree refutes European attempts to own it, seeing how she utilizes the symbol of the tree for means of self-empowerment in the face of Colonial subjugation (Wickens, 2008).

46 “I put on my pink underpants, my green apple T-shirt and I’m wearing a beautiful black feather duster, I’m different from the chic Parisians who hide their lack of taste in eternal black clothes [...] men hate difference, that’s a fact.”

not solely reactions” (hooks, 1996, p. 103). Furthermore, this looking, this crafting of self truly exists for themselves. It is not for men, not for the patriarchy, whom she believes would “*déteste la différence*,” a belief evidenced throughout the novel. Upon leaving the sauna, “*Je prends le chemin du retour, sous le bleu sombre du ciel [...] Place de la Bastille, j’allume des désirs carnavalesques*” (Beyala, 2014, p. 87-8).<sup>47</sup> Traversing the French terrain, boldly embodied in her healthy frame and bright colors, her presence alone proving bold enough to challenge the cultural norms that have once held her. The gray of the Parisian sky, too, appears to have changed form, donning instead a bright blue. The passage ends with Aissatou occupying the *Place de La Bastille*, a memorial located in the heart of the city. It is of note that the *Place* is the former site of the *Bastille* prison, helm of pre-revolutionary power for the *Ancien Régime*. During the French Revolution, amidst confrontation, the prison was physically obliterated by protestors. Since the revolution, the *Place de La Bastille* has represented a symbol of liberty and justice, of reformation and voice, often serving as a site of protests and political organization. Given the symbolic power of this space, it seems that the presence of Aissatou’s body here indicates the revolutionary destruction of her own prison: her emergence from the physical jail of bodily expectations, the prison of being othered by cultural norms in France.

## INWARD EMBODIMENT

Victoire, the namesake of Maryse Condé’s *récit*,<sup>48</sup> *Victoire: les saveurs et les mots* and the author’s maternal grandmother, too, subverts the denial of self by colonizing norms through pursuing her own means of embodiment within her temporal and physical context. Writing in the 21st century, Condé pushes against the systemic denial of her grandmother’s subjectivity by weaving an intergenerational narrative of the lives of her mother and grandmother, a craft unavailable to her grandmother, who never learned to read or write, and therefore could not preserve her story. Without access to the French language, since Guadeloupe remains under the hand of the French Republic, Victoire lacks a tool essential to gaining access within the island’s French systems of power. Yet, Condé engages in the creative reimagining detailed by Hall’s third process of identity formation: renegotiation of one’s past within the contextual framework of one’s present (1995). Condé notes of her writing process: “It was a way of coming to terms, through my mother and grandmother, with Maryse Condé” (Doll, 2010). Hall’s debunking of the Western myth/reality dichotomy, too, flushes salient in Condé’s work, for Condé reimagines the narrative of her grandmother into words, creating space for Victoire’s memory within the Francophonie. That said, Condé emends the notion that, without access to the French language, Victoire lacked subjectivity. In fact, Victoire had concocted a rich world of her own, not through written words, but through the creative act of cooking and the intimacy of sex.

47 “I make my way back, under the dark blue sky [...] Place de la Bastille, I illuminate carnivalesque desires.”

48 Due to its grounding in nonfictional events, Condé notes in an interview, “I wanted to call it a tale, a *récit*. The publishers are the ones who changed it. Most of the story is based on actual fact, it is not solely the work of imagination. It is not a novel” (Doll, 2010).

Throughout her life, Victoire is widely rejected on account of her pale Black body's confrontation with various cultural ideals, being too White for her family, too Black for the colonizers, and too socially subordinate for her daughter. Victoire experiences such social spurning from birth. Born with "skin tinted pink," and with her birth precipitating her mother's death, it seems that within her family unit and local community, Victoire's life-taking, pale body reified colonization of Black spaces (Condé, 2010, p. 6).<sup>49</sup> The only White men in the colony at that time were those with power—priests, plantation owners, or soldiers. Even within her family's community, she was an outcast, relegated to a similar in-between space as Beyala's Aissatou, and for similar reasons: her body confronted dominant cultural norms. Within her community, "Victoire was scary, with her skin too white and her eyes too light...Others were convinced she was no less than Ti-Sapoti: that so-called orphan who haunts the roadside at night" (Condé, 2010, p. 11). Despite being a child, narratives projected onto Victoire efface her on account of her difference; no one wants to identify with her, choosing to only acknowledge her presence through the lens of a curse, separating themselves from her. When a young girl, she was sent to work for her godparents, filling a role as assistant to their servant, a position usually held by a *restavek*.<sup>50</sup> Victoire received no welcome: "In fact, Victoire was treated like a pariah, like a slave at the Jovials. Never like a relative, not even a poor or disreputable one" (Condé, 2010, p. 19). Later on, as a mother within the community of White Creole parents and children, "she would stick out like a sore thumb from the other parents, educated and well-dressed white Creoles and mulattoes. How they would all look her up and down!" (Condé, 2010, p. 101). This White looking can be analyzed through the lens of bell hooks' claim that, "in resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating 'awareness' politicizes 'looking' relations" (hooks, 1996, p. 95). The White Creoles here assert dominance over Victoire through their looking, effectively putting her in her place. Subsequently, Victoire "knew only too well that Jeanne [raised in the White Creole community] was ashamed of her" for "she reminded [her] of an embarrassing past" (Condé, 2010, p. 182). Only with her grandmother Caldonia did she find some space of acceptance, for Caldonia had been the only figure who had attended to her. After Caldonia's death, Victoire "hardened her heart. She had loved her grandmother so much that, deprived of her warmth, she drew into herself" (Condé, 2010). She had nowhere else to go, no one else to turn to with her grandmother gone.

Although Victoire learned to turn inward for sense of self at an early age, away from the others who denied her presence, in rare moments she does find connection to her cultural sense of self through food. Food becomes a means of recollecting her relationship with her grandmother, Caldonia. Until her death, Caldonia offered Victoire a space of connection and belonging, substantiating her physicality through "long cuddling session that would have surprised a good many people...Then she [would

49 Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* are from Richard Philcox's English translation of the text.

50 In Haiti, a child from an under-resourced family who is sent to work as a servant.



do] her hair” (Condé, 2010). Similar to Aissatou’s relationship to hair, Victoire’s action here symbolizes a sort of literal and figurative connection with her roots. Despite these loving gestures, “Victoire only found consolation once she had been given her cereal flavored with cinnamon and sweetened with wild honey” (Condé, 2010, p. 10-11). This superior form of sweet, nutritious consolation lays the groundwork for Victoire’s use of food to form connections within a society that seeks to disconnect from her. Victoire’s relationship with food crafts much of the fodder with which she engages Hall’s first process of identity formation: retention. Throughout the *récit*, as Victoire fashions dishes, she accesses intimate memories and traditions. Unable to take on dominant norms due to her social positioning, Victoire skips over Hall’s second process of assimilation, instead moving onto his third process, a renegotiation of her past. She brings her sharing food with Caldonia into the present through the act of cooking, reimagining traditional meals to share. After Caldonia, the Victoire connects in this way with her first lover, Dernier Argilus. Their relationship begins after she delivers food to his apartment, resulting in a short-lived affair that leaves her pregnant with her daughter, Jeanne. While mothering Jeanne, Victoire “remained silent as if shackled from inside. There were moments of gentleness even so. She would make Jeanne delicious little dishes and was overjoyed at her appetite” (Condé, 2010, p. 48). Victoire expresses her love for Jeanne in the only way she knows how: nourishment. Later, this expression is demonstrated with Valérie-Anne, the daughter of Victoire’s friend and employer. Like Victoire, Valérie-Anne was neglected by her family, othered due to her lack of conventional beauty: she “grow[s] up skinny and red-haired, her brother’s punching bag, ignored by mother and father alike” (Condé, 2010, p. 102). Taking on the role of Caldonia, Victoire takes Valérie-Anne under her wing, rehashing her history through this present relationship: “Victoire transferred her little treats onto Valérie-Anne. She was in dire need of them” (Condé, 2010, p. 102). A life-long relationship developed between the two, Valérie-Anne affectionately viewing Victoire as her other mother. Although Valérie-Anne’s adoration of Victoire sustains itself, Jeanne’s fades over time. Yet, when Jeanne becomes pregnant with her first child, their connection is once again fostered through the sharing of food as Victoire nourishes her daughter throughout her pregnancy:

The most extraordinary thing was that Jeanne got her appetite back, possessed once again of those cravings she hadn’t had since the age of reason. Victoire responded with devotion, feeling at last avenged for so many years of indifference...She especially strived hard to make desserts, puddings, creams, and flans, since pregnant women need excess sugar to nourish the brain. (Condé, 2010, p. 151-2)

As seen through Aissatou’s reproduction of her mother’s recipes, Victoire’s recipes, too, offer more than just nourishment: they provide remedy. Furthermore, quite literally, here, Victoire connects intergenerationally, for as she feeds her pregnant daughter sweets, she connects with the past, present, and future, through Caldonia’s recipes, her own daughter, and Jeanne’s child: “This belly that was miraculously swelling was a bond of sweetness that tied her to her daughter” (Condé, 2010, p. 151). Victoire takes

delight in recognizing that through pregnancy, her daughter practices her very own form of communication through the sharing of food with her child in utero: “The woman I carried inside of me is now carrying her own child. A little stranger has taken refuge inside of her. It’s breathing and feeding thanks to her” (Condé, 2010, p. 151).

Victoire uses food to connect with others, allowing her to engage her roots and ancestry, the narrative combining both her past and her present. The creation of food allows her to communicate, to express what she cannot through the French language. Despite her inability to employ the colonizer’s system of communication, Victoire communicates through food, claiming her own space through alternative senses. Her mastery of cooking sets Victoire apart, bringing her into visibility. In her first job as a cook, “from the very first day her destiny took shape. She proved to have an incomparable gift. She won over the Dulieu-Beaufort family with a cream of pumpkin and black crab soup” (Condé, 2010, p. 44). Victoire makes herself heard through her culinary talents. This talent, however, is not executed for the purpose of being seen by others. Victoire cooks, primarily, as self-expression. When coping with difficult emotions, she turns to cooking. For example, “she had trouble getting over her daughter’s bitterness and had difficulty understanding it. She plunged herself in her cooking while her talent reached a perfection of fantasy and inventiveness” (Condé, 2010, p. 101). Through cooking, she shapes her “destiny.” Her manipulation of her own destiny indicates the personal agency she takes when creating her meals, demonstrating the development of her voice through her dishes (Condé, 2010, p. 44). Furthermore, “far from merely cooking Creole dishes with panache, [Victoire] used her imagination to invent them” (Condé, 2010, p. 59). Her re-imaginings of traditional Creole recipes again demonstrate Victoire’s engagement with Hall’s third process of identity formation, renegotiation. Through cooking she pens, or mixes together, her own narrative, reclaiming her subjectivity from oppressive societal structures.

Despite her desire to cook as a means of self-fulfilment, Victoire’s mastery of her culinary voice reverberates through the public realm. While living with her adult daughter, Jeanne, Victoire volunteers her time cooking meals at Open Door, a local soup kitchen run by the church in Le Moule. There, Victoire makes her mark through her mastery: “Victoire metamorphosed everything. It was something like the Transfiguration... The *maléré* in their amazement, unused to such good fortune, surged and the numbers swelled more than fifty percent” (Condé, 2010, p. 154). The priest overseeing Open Door, “Fully aware of the malicious gossip rumored about her [...]...made it known that it is possible to massacre the French language and have one’s heart in the right place” (Condé, 2010, p. 124). The priest’s defense of Victoire validates and valorizes her mode of communication, destabilizing the exclusive power of French cultural norms by arguing the claim that it is possible to not be French and to still be good. For Victoire, food occupies the function of language; her recipes, as Condé discovers “among the papers my mother kept,” were “lyrically composed like a poem” (Condé, 2010, p. 70). Victoire employs food to communicate her last words. Toward the end of the novel, thwarted by the compounding combination of heartbreak and illness, Victoire’s cooking abilities immobilize. That is, until approaching the thresh-

old of death's door, when, with her little remaining energy, she organizes "The Last Supper...[,] her way of writing her last will and testament [for she] wanted this meal to remain a lasting memory on the palate and in the heart" (Condé, 2010, p. 189). Through that last meal, Victoire aims to express how "one day, she hoped, color would no longer be an evil spell [and that] Guadeloupe would no longer be tortured by questions of class" (Condé, 2010, p. 189). Victoire seeks to leave her loved ones with her legacy, to ingrain within their memory, the destabilization of the powers which have subjugated her throughout her life, which have sought to keep her invisible and demarcated into a liminal silence. Through her *récit*, Condé now affirms the voice of her grandmother: "What I am claiming is the legacy of this woman, who apparently did not leave any. I want to establish the link between her creativity and mine, to switch from the savors...to those of words" (Condé, 2010, p. 59).<sup>51</sup>

As demonstrated, the *récit* connotes Victoire's use of cooking with the function of verbal expression in order to unite *les saveurs* ("the flavors") with *les mots* ("the words"), Condé's act of weaving her grandmother's story into the French language such that she can memorialize her narrative and empower her legacy. Yet Victoire's expression through her body also sources a significant mode of communication and identity formation. Victoire's body, rejected on all counts, is generally unwanted by the breadth of social strata in Guadeloupe and as such becomes autonomous, freed from the demands of cultural expectations. Without these cultural expectations, her body becomes a space of her own. Victoire's engagement with this bodily space as source and expression of personal pleasure pushes against a culture that denies women such enjoyment and agency in a culture where women are often rendered sex objects under the gaze of male desire. More specifically, Victoire's engagement pushes against the cultural norms that seek to other Victoire's body. Victoire's ability to take pleasure in her body demonstrates that, unlike society, she is not afraid of her body. Her comfort with her physicality expresses itself intimately, for, "Victoire had always loved water," perhaps because showering beneath it was what gave her a space where, "naked, she would crouch against the rough wall of the stone basin above which dripped a tap. She would wash her long, straight hair that during the day she rolled into buns bristling with pins under her headtie. She would rub her body with a bunch of leaves, lingering over her private parts, surprised at the pleasure she felt" (Condé, 2010, p. 68). Here, Victoire's ability to touch her body and find joy in its softness and roots recalls Aissatou's trip to the sauna. In these spaces of cleansing, these women stand embodied and in so doing, wash away the oppressive cultural forces which seek to diminish them,

51 Also, through writing the untold narratives of the people who reproduce a culture through food, Riaz Phillips uses his project Tezeta Press to collect and put forward into society the heretofore absent stories of the individuals who have made and continue to make up different food communities in the UK, beginning with those from West Africa. As he told Henna Zamurd-Butt, Phillips took on this initiative after going to the library and trying, without success, "to find stories of people who came over and how they started, and who the first wave of people were, the originators, but there was very little" (2016). Thus, like Condé, Phillips took it upon himself to, as Zamurd-Butt notes, "chronicle the missing histories of Caribbean eateries" (2016). See Henna Zamurd-Butt, "A Belly Full of Stories: exploring the history of Caribbean food in the UK" for *Media Diversified*.

those that encourage “bend[ing] or balloon[ing] to fit the latest clichés which decree what’s beautiful” (Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2016, p. 12).

Victoire’s comfort with her body demonstrates why she finds such solace in her inner world: her relationship to her body is one that colonizing norms do not touch. Jettisoned from the game-like power dynamic of the French female ideal, Victoire’s sexual relationships with men are sought not to impress a man, to impress power, but rather to engage her own pleasure. As is the case with the relationship between Aisatou and Mr. Bolobolo, Victoire’s sexual relationships allow her a space, similar to the space of the shower, wherein she can touch and be touched, wherein her physicality can not only be validated—a state of being with which her neglected body is oft unfamiliar—but also cherished. It is of note that after her first sexual encounter with Dernier, Victoire lost her appetite. Instead, “what nurtured her were the kisses, the caresses, and the sweet words breathed into her” (Condé, 2010, p. 38). This connective bodily relationship feeds Victoire with life. With her lover, Victoire’s body finds place. Reflecting on Victoire’s relationship with her later long-term lover, Boniface Walberg, Condé asks, “Was Victoire sensual? Was she fond of lovemaking? Everything points to the affirmative” (Condé, 2010, p. 67). The validating nature of Victoire’s relationship with Boniface is epitomized when, after sex, “they [would sleep] in each other’s arms, united by a fear of the dark, a survival of their childhood” (Condé, 2010, p. 67). Here, this shared space of vulnerability and togetherness suggests a mutual engagement. Sex, for Victoire, was not about pleasing a man, but rather about expressing and engaging with herself in the world through this space. This intention is made clear when, despite her responsibility to the Walbergs and to her daughter, and amidst a well-developed relationship with Boniface, Victoire disappears from this world to pursue pleasure with a newfound lover, Alexandre, in Martinique. Her relationship with Alexandre allows her to explore and express herself in newfound ways, as Condé writes, “I imagine it was something like the beginning of the world” (Condé, 2010, p. 90). The notion of the beginning of the world calls attention to the creative force behind Victoire’s engagement sex and her body, the self-narrative that she expresses, defines, and explores through her relationship with her body.

## COLONIZATION IN REVERSE<sup>52</sup>

Victoire’s daughter, Jeanne, feels entitled to a world more sophisticated than her mothers, as she has been raised alongside the White Creole children of her mother’s employer, the Walbergs. Navigating a more privileged role in a Whiter space, Jeanne simultaneously experiences both re-enforcement and resistance to French cultural norms. Additionally, unlike Victoire, who, at birth, was deemed monstrous, “As soon as [Jeanne] emerged from her mother’s womb,” she was “beautiful [...] a mass of hair more curly than frizzy or downright kinky” (Condé, 2010, p. 46). While Victoire’s

52 Lifted from Jamaican poet Louise Bennett’s poem, “Colonization in Reverse,” on the relationship between colonized, colonizer, place, and power, re: Jamaica and England. Reference the final stanza for titular line: “Wat a devilment a Englan! Dem face war an brave de worse,/ But me wonderin how dem gwine stan/ Colonizin in reverse” (Bennett, 1982, lines 41-44).

White father had socially cursed her with the lightness of her skin, Jeanne's father was a prominent Black activist in 19th-century Guadeloupe. Unlike her pale mother, Jeanne's skin was darker, her familial roots reflected in her curls, which symbolize her otherness in the eyes of colonial hegemony, as it does for Beyala's Aissatou in the heart of Paris. Jeanne's physical presence is a marker of her otherness in White spaces and she ascends into Hall's second process of identity formation: assimilation. Jeanne takes on French cultural norms she learned in her formal French education. Upon discovering her mother's affair with Boniface by a surprise encounter with their naked bodies, Jeanne seeks to separate herself from her mother's narrative: "Jeanne discovered what was going to matter in her life: her studies" (Condé, 2010, p. 75). And it is through such studies that she is taught that "Africa doesn't count. Over there is a bunch of savages and cannibals who eat one another in a cooking pot" (Condé, 2010, p. 76). Jeanne's tutor was highly regarded for his ability to apply French standards, functioning as an agent of indoctrination to French systems of power and meaning.<sup>53</sup> His imagined narrative about Africa is likely a calculated one. The tutor's ludicrous articulation of Africa's place in history is a means to other those with similar ancestry. He claims that without Africa, "All that is left is Europe. Situated at the center of the world...it has constantly generated a torrent of fertilizing ideas" (Condé, 2010, p. 76). Here, the tutor clearly articulates to a young Jeanne the power system in play, of European values as central to all that is of worth. A fastidious student, "Jeanne swallowed all that hook, line, and sinker," to which "M. Roumegoux marveled at her intelligence," telling her "You could go far. Pity you're so black!" (Condé, 2010, p. 75-76). Roumegoux's praise of Jeanne's innate intelligence, though quickly flattened by his subjugation of her body, communicates that her only impediment to success is her physicality, her Blackness creating a barrier to certain spaces. Unlike her mother, Jeanne is able to harness the tool of her learning the French language, the oppressor's system of communication and power. Modulating from within this system, Jeanne's relationship with her body becomes one of subversion as she assimilates to French cultural norms, claiming the ideals of the colonizer as her own, as point of access into spaces of power, a way of advancing her own agenda and, by extension, claiming her own narrative, one that differs from the position in society occupied by her mother.

Equipped with the French language and a thirst to take in its knowledge, Jeanne rejects connection with her mother's narrative. In rejecting the traditions of her past, Jeanne skips over Hall's first process of identity formation, retention. First developed during adolescence, a time hallmarked by a coming into her own, Jeanne's sudden distaste and outright refusal for her mother's food—Victoire's only method of connecting and expressing love toward her daughter—symbolizes her forsaking her mother's narrative: "From one day to the next all ceased, replaced by a muted hostility, at least in Jeanne. It was expressed by mere nothings. Jeanne no longer allowed her mother to dress her and do her hair," no longer allowing her literal access to the space of her body and metaphoric access to her roots (Condé, 2010, p. 96). Instead, "she combed

53 See Grenadian poet Merle Collins' poem "The Lesson" for poetic depiction of such educational power dynamics (Collins, 1989).

her hair as best she could...[and] picked out and slipped on her panties all by herself” (Condé, 2010, p. 96). Jeanne’s refusal of her mother’s hands to do her hair illustrates the agency Jeanne claims at a young age to separate her body from her mother’s in order to arrange her roots herself and craft her narrative to her own liking. However, “she who previously had a healthy appetite began to eat like a sparrow. In a single month she consequently lost twenty pounds, signifying therefore that she wanted nothing to do with earthly nourishment, as a way of punishing her mother, who placed so much importance on it. In a manner of speaking she refused any type of dialogue with her” (Condé, 2010, p. 96). Jeanne’s appetite stands in for a hunger to connect with her mother, an ability to trust her growth in the hands of her mother’s nourishment. The absence of her appetite illustrates the evaporation of their relationship and Jeanne’s connection to her past. Her sparrow-like pecking illustrates Jeanne’s claimed authorial hand, selecting what she will and will not consume into her narrative. This authoritative approach to identity formation can also be read into Jeanne’s rapid weight loss; once usurping directive power from her mother, she quickly sheds what she no longer desires: the weight that had been nourished by her mother’s dishes. The narrator verbalizes how the end of Jeanne consuming her mother’s dishes signifies an end to their communication, for this claim serves both to validate Victoire’s form of culinary expression and to illustrate how Jeanne wants nothing to do with her mother’s way of being in the world. No longer consuming her mother’s messages, Jeanne “always had her nose stuck in a book with an expression what seemed to say: ‘I’m the only one in this house who has other things on her mind that stuffing her face with food,’” positioning herself, again, against her mother, as we have shown and, too, against Beyala’s protagonist who, like Victoire, valorizes “food [as] the stuff of life” (Condé, 2010, p. 96; Beyala, trans. Cohen, 2016, p. 98). This difference suggests Jeanne’s reliance on other resources to form her identity. Perhaps these resources can be found earlier on in Jeanne’s narrative. Although Jeanne’s adolescent refusal signifies her choice of independence, her nourishment as a child, too, illustrates Jeanne’s independence from her mother’s narrative from an early age: “Unlike most children, Jeanne was weaned very early on and placed in a box room that had been converted into an English nursery for the Walberg children” (Condé, 2010, p. 48). Jeanne did not consume her mother’s maternal care, her time, her milk, her biological nourishment; instead, she was left alone in a box. This image shows how Jeanne develops without nourishment from the past, relying instead on the rigid European structures, as denoted by the box her body is contained within, that corralled her youth.

Rigid reliance on the controlled structures that corralled Victoire’s first moments set the tone for the rigid control continued as Jeanne crafted her narrative and fashioned her body. Condé does name Jeanne’s controlling relationship with her body, commenting how during a dinner scene Jeanne’s “mood translated into her refusal to feed herself, which perhaps today we would call anorexia or something similar” (Condé, 2010, p. 108). This rejection shows that Jeanne does, in fact, utilize food to communicate her emotional mood. For Jeanne, what underlies this behavior is a desire to control herself. For Jeanne, and for each of the female protagonists discussed so far,

French cultural norms are legitimate and fully-identified external forces. Jeanne's acceptance of her body in its natural form recalled her mother, who, in Jeanne's view, embodied a compliance with patriarchal control: "Jeanne could not bear seeing Victoire and Boniface go into the same bedroom holding a candle. The four-poster bed of locust wood where they slept seen through the half-open door made her vomit... She was no different from a courtesan, a woman who sold her body, except that those Italian women were usually excellent poets, whereas Victoire couldn't even read" (Condé, 2010, p. 107). Her mother's relationship with Boniface arrested her societal status as servant, comparing her to Italian prostitutes. But, rendering Victoire even worse off, she did not have access to the language of the state in power. As with the shedding of her pounds, Jeanne's vomiting illustrates the urgency with which Jeanne must push away her mother's narrative in order to set herself apart from it. Commenting on the sexual relations between races, Jeanne writes of Boniface Jr., who persistently seeks out Jeanne:

In his eyes...she was nothing but black meat he could take for pleasure as he wished. Not an ounce of feeling in his propositions. Moreover, she was convinced a white man could never love a black woman. Only lust and concupiscence could exist between them. (Condé, 2010, p. 108)

Jeanne refuses objectification. Condé writes of Victoire's relationship with sex: "I don't know what my mother thought of her wedding night or any of the following nights. What I do know is that I never heard her broach the subject of sex—which is unusual, even exceptional in our islands—without some measure of disgust" (Condé, 2010, p. 138). For Jeanne, there is no place or use for desire or such connection with the body in her narrative. She lives a life of the mind. She will not allow herself to be equated with "earthly nourishment," as Victoire does (Condé, 2010, p. 96). The only use for her body is to manipulate it in such a way that allows her mind access to spaces she would not otherwise be allowed into on account of her skin color. Unable to change her color, Jeanne controls her frame. In conversation with Zora Neal Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression," journalist Jaylin Paschal comments on how clothes "operat[e] beyond the functional use of covering one's body appropriately for the occasion, to serving as a declaration of self" (2017). We see Jeanne engage with this behavior when, as a young adult, she leaves home for boarding school:

Jeanne is walking in front, dressed in the elegant Scotch plaid uniform that the nuns demanded—pleated skirt flapping around her ankles, blouse buttoned up to the neck, patent leather pumps with a low heel, and smart white Panama hat. She is tall, slender, aloof. Something in her expression puts a stop to the racy jokes by the ragamuffins who are already idling in the streets. Hard on her heels, the mother with her headtie, heavily loaded, dressed in her shapeless dress with a leafy pattern, looking like a servant. (Condé, 2010, p. 99)

Here, the placement of her body walking in front of her mother demonstrates the power Jeanne feels in relation to her—she independently leads the way forward in her narrative. Her fashion is well-constructed; she wears classic European pieces, arming her with a uniform, a tool, with which she can more swiftly navigate Versailles, her rather appropriately named boarding school, the school's name recalling the heart of Louis IX's power.<sup>54</sup> Through Jeanne's fashioning of her body, she "puts a stop to the racy jokes," demonstrating the efficacy of her choices. The contrast between Jeanne's sophisticated self-fashioning and her mother's unshapely presentation also reflects Jeanne's successful separation from her mother, allowing her access to spaces her mother is not welcome, and making this departure from her "without a farewell gesture" (Condé, 2010, p. 99). In these spaces, Jeanne would come to win many accolades, making history as the 'first' black woman to succeed in various domains. Although her Blackness presented obstacles to such achievements, it remained integral to her identity; Condé reflects on her mother as "a black militant before her time," arguably demonstrating that Jeanne's use of assimilation was in fact used as a tool, as a means to her ends (Condé, 2010, p. 2). bell hooks writes of this use of assimilation when commenting on the character of Mignon in Julie Dash's *Illusions*: "though she is passing to gain access to the machinery of cultural production represented by film, Mignon continually asserts her ties to the black community" (hooks, 1996, p. 103). Jeanne, too, asserts her ties to the Black community by advancing herself through these traditionally White norms, through these traditionally White spaces. Moreover, by achieving objective success and accolades within them, her presence in these spaces subverts the power in play. These moves ultimately gain Jeanne access to the Black intelligentsia of Guadeloupe, an intellectual space where her mind is most welcome and lauded, where she can pursue her agenda: "For her this was Desirada, the promised island for the sailors of Christopher Columbus, reached after days of misadventures. For better or for worse she had to carve out a place for herself" (Condé, 2010, p. 123). The imagery used to describe Jeanne's achieved access to her desired intellectual space is of note for it recalls Columbus' colonization of the Americas. Given that Jeanne exists herself within a colony, to some this metaphor may not seem aptly chosen. Yet I read its power precisely through its comparison to colonization. As Aissatou redefined the Place de La Bastille through the mere presence of her confident Black body, here, Jeanne, too, engages in a breed of this embodiment, of this, to recall one of poet Louise Bennett's memorable lines, "colonization in reverse." By reclaiming the norms that were enforced to suppress her mobility, Jeanne subverts systems of cultural oppression, allowing her subjectivity to take shape in a way she controls.

---

54 I do not make the claim about Jeanne donning a more 'Western' fashion in order to say that this sort of fashion belongs to any one group of people. Fashion is, like identity, subject to a various amalgam of personal elements: ancestry, geography, culture, preference. Rather, I make this claim to show the power of choice clothing and how it can be a tool to communicate and navigate oneself and one's role in society.



## TEXTUALIZATING BODY POLITICS

Despite spanning temporal and spatial worlds, the power wielded by each protagonist's recipe for narrative production is formed within the tangible body of the text. Through fixing the stories of these Black francophone women within French language (and, too, in translation) that the texts insert such body narratives into dominant culture. These narratives, in their strength and multiplicity, diverge from ideals endorsed by those in power, paving way for their rightful space beneath the umbrella of French identity. Beyala and Condé's texts boldly assert the voices of their protagonists within cultural zeitgeist by taking up space within it via the texts' materiality, in like fashion of the bodies of their own protagonists. Nigerian author and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie critiques Western hegemonic production of a "single story," saying that "it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" (2009).<sup>55</sup> It is this single story of otherness that relegates other-than-white-and-thin subjectivity as both other and less-than, for, as Adichie goes on to say, "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person," one which renders anything that does not satisfy it as abject (2009). This dynamic suggests why, for Adichie, it was "because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye," writers in whom she could finally see a reflection of unrepresented parts of herself, that she "went through a mental shift in [her] perception of literature. [She] realized that people like [her], girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature," exist within a cultural narrative (2009).<sup>56</sup> With Beyala and Condé's texts into Western society, a physical reclamation of space for our protagonist's narratives, thus functionally destabilizes the power of France's sterile and exclusive notion of *égalité*: the absence of difference.<sup>57</sup> These divergent narratives demonstrate how, despite the upholding of the stale cultural ideals which seek to efface their presence, that these women still, in fact, exist, and exist boldly. Condé's act of publishing *Victoire les saveurs et les mots*, the act of recreating her grandmother's story and preserving its space in the world, for example, is literal

55 Read Dorothy Lennon and Antonia Opiah's article for *Un-ruly* "the ideal beauty from hollywood to nollywood" to begin answering the questions: "What is the Nigerian standard of beauty and, in a country where most people are black, how is it different and similar to the American standard of beauty, where "white traits" dominate?" (2014).

56 I have found that such desire to see physical reminder of self in text, read by extension in cultural domain, and, too, from within the text, such reclamation of space in cultural domain through food and body, is, too, found in writing outside of the francophonie. A few noteworthy examples: In Kadija Sesay's short story "Love Long Distance" (2008), Sesay details her British-Ghanaian protagonist's straddled relationship to her body/food/power/identity. Through her closeted protagonist, Barry, and his fashionista daughter, Maxine, Bernardine Evaristo discusses the relationship between body presentation and projected identity utilized in order to navigate both British and Antiguan cultural norms. Also, Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1997) looks at food culture and its power to influence identity within a British-Indian community.

57 See Jonathan Romney's article "The stars of Girlhood: 'Our poster is all over Paris, with four black faces on it...'" in *The Guardian* for discussion of the French film *Girlhood*, its representation of Black women in French media, and the films influence on French society and culture (2015).

demonstration of how such creation can both serve to archive an otherwise lost history and, through such archiving—as seen through both Condé’s recreation and our interpretation of it—catalyze new and newly nuanced intertextual conversations on being francophone into present dialogue on being. For, as Condé is first to assert, such engagement with her grandmother’s narrative was not just reclamation for her grandmother, but “it was a way of coming to terms, through [her] mother and grandmother, with Maryse Condé. How [she] became a writer, why, what are the causes that [she] do[esn’t] even know [her]self” (Doll, 2010). Bodies are powerful, acting as vessel for the stories uniquely held by ourselves yet shared by those in solidarity with us, and in so doing forging communities that validate their power.<sup>58</sup> Like a recipe, the stories of these women offer an archived process, in language, to the re-creation of self. As one may reference a recipe in order to recreate a dish, in turn, readers can reference the recipes for self-offered by the protagonists’ relationships with their bodies in colonized spaces in order to engage in the formation of their own identity under present forms of discrimination, taking from these narratives what they uniquely need to exist and subversively, to tangibly reclaim the narrative arch of their bodies, of their uniquely and rightfully confectioned selves.<sup>59</sup>

---

58 Today, this community can be found online through social media accounts designated for discussion on black bodies and beauty, aimed at sparking visibility and solidarity. Too, online journals and topic specific websites have been created to write and share and make space for the narratives of Black women as written by Black women such as Antonia Opiah’s *Un-ruly*, which, through its online platforms, “take[s] an in-and-out approach to beauty, looking at it on both a surface and profound level. [The site] know[s] that hair and beauty create experiences shared by women all over the globe, and so [it] ultimately aim[s] to be a supportive community, stirring productive dialogue within the female and Black communities at large” (n.d.). Mina Salami’s *Ms. Afropolitan* “connects feminism with critical reflections on contemporary culture from an Africa-centred perspective” (n.d.), while *Black Girl in Om* “creates space for Women Of Color to breathe easy,” through fostering a community around holistic self-care” (Carpenter, 2018) Sites like these are important because they foster a space to be heard, to be seen, to collect, to validate in spite of outside forces that do the opposite. Now, this is not to say that these forces do not exist online. They most certainly do, and often in unharnessed, extremist ways, though, too, of course, through micro-aggressions, as is demonstrated in physical reality. Yet, I argue that the space of the Internet can allow for more accessible community to be formed around shared narrative despite immediate external circumstances, equipping more tools for self-narrative formation.

59 “*Il devient indifférent que je me souviens ou que j’invente, que j’emprunte ou que j’imagine*” – Bernard Pignaud. Therein lies the beauty of fiction. (Condé, 2010).

## REFERENCES

- Adichie, C.N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video file]. [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/)
- Bennett, L. (1982). Colonization in Reverse. In J.J. Figueroa (Ed.), *An Anthology of African and Caribbean Literature in English*. (pp. 254). London: Heinemann Educational.
- Berest, A., Diwan, A., de Maigret, C., & Mas, S. (2014). *How to Be Parisian Wherever You Are: Love, Style, and Bad Habits*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Beyala, C. (2014). *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*. Paris: J'ai Lu. (Original work published 2000).
- Beyala, C. (2016). *How to Cook Your Husband the African Way*. (D. Cohen, Trans.). London: Psychology News Press Ltd.
- Brillat-Savarin, J. A. (1825). *Physiologie du goût, ou méditations de gastronomie transcendante*. Paris: Philibert-Auguste Sautelet.
- Carpenter, S. (2018). Black Girl In Om prioritizes wellness for women of color. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/redeye/culture/ct-redeye-black-girl-in-om-chicago-20180104-story.html>
- Collins, M. (1989). The Lesson. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 35(1/2), 50-53. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40653727>
- Condé, Maryse. (2006). *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. Paris: Mercure De France.
- Condé, Maryse. (2010). *Victoire: My Mother's Mother*. (R. Philcox, Trans.). New York, NY: Atria Books. (Original work published 2006).
- Cox, H. (2008). The Tree of Life. *Cultural Survival*. (32-4). Retrieved from <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/tree-life>
- D'Aguiar, F. (1995). Home. In V.J Ramrai (Ed.), *Concert of Voices: An Anthology of World Writing in English*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 102-103.
- Doll, M. (2010). An Interview with Maryse Condé. Retrieved from [www.booksclut.com/features/2010\\_02\\_015665.php](http://www.booksclut.com/features/2010_02_015665.php). Accessed 25 October. 2018.
- Gastronomic meal of the French. (2010). Retrieved from <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>.
- Habila, H., & Sesay, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Dreams, Miracles and Jazz: New Adventures in African Fiction*. New York, NY: Picador Africa.
- Hall, S. (1989). Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 36, 68–81.
- Hall, S. (1995). Negotiating Caribbean Identities. *New Left Review*, 209, 2–14.
- Hankey, A. (2004). Adansonia Digitata. Retrieved from [pza.sanbi.org/adansonia-digitata](http://pza.sanbi.org/adansonia-digitata).
- hooks, b., Belton, J. (1996). *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators. Movies and Mass Culture*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 247–265.
- Kimmelman, M. (2008, June 17). For Blacks in France, Obama's Rise Is Reason to Rejoice, and to Hope. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Lennon, D. & Opiah, A. (2014). The ideal beauty from Hollywood to nollywood. Retrieved from <https://un-ruly.com/the-ideal-beauty-from-hollywood-to-nollywood/>
- Lima, M. H. (2018). Literatures of the African Diaspora: Course Description. *SUNY Geneseo, ENGL 342-01*.
- Lorde, A. (2007). *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.

- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Opiah, A. (2014). what the baoulé taught me about beauty. *Un-ruly*. Retrieved from <https://un-ruly.com/what-the-baoule-taught-me-about-beauty/>
- Oppenheimer, D. B. (2008). Why France Needs to Collect Data on Racial Identity—In a French Way. *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, 31(2) pp. 735–752.
- Paschal, J. (2017). “And Black People Created Style”: Adornment as Self-Expression and Rebellion. Retrieved from <https://afropunk.com/2017/02/and-black-people-created-style-adornment-as-self-expression-and-rebellion/>
- Pattillo, N. (2018). The Woman Behind Belmere Catering’s Haitian Cuisine Cooks to Heal. Retrieved from <https://www.ediblemanhattan.com/foodshed-2/how-the-woman-behind-belmere-catering-cooks-to-heal/>
- Romney, J. (2015). The stars of Girlhood: ‘Our poster is all over Paris, with four black faces on it...’. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/apr/26/girlhood-film-karidja-toure-assa-sylla-celine-sciamma>
- Salami, M. (October 2016). Tradition matters for female farmers, and female farmers matter for everything. Retrieved from <https://www.msafropolitan.com/2016/10/farming-and-tradition.html>
- Salami, M. (June 2017). When Africans connect food, nature and our deepest selves. Retrieved from <https://www.msafropolitan.com/2017/06/when-africans-remember-the-connection-between-food-nature-and-our-deepest-selves.html>
- Salami, M. (n.d.). Bio. Retrieved from <https://www.msafropolitan.com/bio>
- Sissay, L. (1999). *Morning Breaks in the Elevator*. Edinburgh: Payback Press.
- Smith, K. (2017). Ingredient Spotlight: Baobab, the African Superfood That Has Twice as Much Calcium as Dairy. Retrieved from [www.onegreenplanet.org/vegan-food/ingredient-spotlight-baobab/](http://www.onegreenplanet.org/vegan-food/ingredient-spotlight-baobab/).
- Stille, A. (2013, November 14). The Justice Minister and the Banana: How Racist Is France? *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/>
- Syal, M. (1997). *Anita and Me*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Un-ruly. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved from <https://un-ruly.com/about-us/>
- Wickens, G. E. *The Baobabs: Pachycauls of Africa, Madagascar and Australia*. Springer Netherland, 2008.
- Willoughby, V. (July 2015). When French Beauty Means White Beauty. Retrieved from <https://mediadiversified.org/2015/07/16/when-french-beauty-means-white-beauty/>
- Woolf, V. (2005). *A Room of One’s Own*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt. (Original work published 1929).
- Zamurd-Butt, H. (October 2016). A Belly Full of Stories: exploring the history of Caribbean food in the UK. Retrieved from <https://mediadiversified.org/2016/10/16/a-belly-full-of-stories-exploring-the-history-of-caribbean-food-in-the-uk/>

# An interview with student author Kylie Mathis

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What did your involvement with GREAT Day mean to you?**

I would say GREAT Day is a huge part of the culture at Geneseo, so it was really cool to be asked for my work, especially my Senior Capstone Project, to be included in that.

## **What do you think GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community?**

I think it just shows the amount of collaboration that goes on on campus and the variety of work that students are engaging in.

## **What inspired you to write this paper?**

So, my Senior Capstone was actually on feminism in film. It was based on a wonderful class taught by Dr. Melanie Blood. A lot of our work went into the idea that film typically only shows one perspective, and a lot of voices go unheard. Comic books are a form of media I regularly engage in, and I wanted to apply that same idea to a different form of media.

## **What were the goals in creating this?**

My goals were first, to get people interested in comics, because they may not have considered that media form as something they wanted to engage in. And second, to comment on a trend that I think is troubling and problematic. Comic books are great, they're an important part of our culture. We see superheros reflected in advertisements, and commercials and everything, and I really think the sexual violence we see still today in comic books is troubling.

## **What did conducting your research teach you about your discipline?**

I think when conducting my research what I really found was there's not a lot of information out there on sexual violence in comic books, despite the research we have on how violent media really affects public opinion on things like rape and sexual assault.

**Are you currently writing about topics related to your piece?**

No, I am not. I was actually an education major, but my concentration was women and gender studies.

**Do you think your GREAT Day presentation was in some way helpful in preparing you for the demands of work after graduation or in graduate school?**

I learned how to condense a lot of information into something that readers who may not know much about the subject can understand.

**In retrospect, do you think your GREAT day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?**

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's something I'll look back on and really be proud that I worked on.

**How did you feel when you presented your work?**

That's a tough one! I would say I was pretty proud. I put in a lot of work to the essay all semester, and I was pretty proud to pull everything together. Especially at the end of my senior year.

# An interview with faculty advisor Melanie Blood

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

That's pretty broad. It can mean a great number of things. So, within the fields that I worked most often, which are English, Women's and Gender Studies, and Music and Musical Theatre, it has distinct meanings. One would be training in presenting academic work in a way that is accessible to whatever audience that you would be speaking to. In GREAT Day, it's generally your peers, students, and faculty. And then in the other area, it means performances, presentations in different performance forms. And I think that having opportunities like GREAT Day, like the COPLAC conference, like the SUNY undergrad research conference are things that Geneseo has a very high level of participation in; it's one of the things that really makes Geneseo unique that there are so many opportunities for students.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?**

I think research, taken broadly, is one of the things that makes students more competitive as they leave the school, whether it's going into graduate programs, whether it's the job market. And I would hope that the culture of expectation to present in this kind of higher form, more competitive form, more professional form would inform the culture simply by making students more serious and aware of their goals after Geneseo, so that college really feels more... gives it more depth, makes it a bit more goal oriented at least a couple times a year.

## **What characteristics of Kylie Mathis' presentation made you nominate her research?**

She did a Women's and Gender Studies capstone presentation. She's an Education major and Women's and Gender Studies concentrator. And last year out of her class of ten students in the senior capstone seminar plus the people who did independent work mostly off campus in internship formats, her work really stood out to me as having an excellent analytical approach so that the material that she found to speak about really showed a depth of research. And then, her own analysis applied to it was outstanding. She was talking about visual culture, and she also was able to support it extraordinary well with visual examples. Her presentation style was really fluid; she

was able to understand her audience and make her work really accessible and interesting to her audience. So, I'm very pleased that her work made it in!

### **Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.**

As the coordinator of Women's and Gender Studies, I run a senior seminar every spring and I mentor the students who are doing an off-campus internship. [Mathis] was a part of the course that did both work in visual culture generally, work on film and feminism theory applied to film for about half of the semester, and then students developed their own project as well. They went through various steps: proposing their project, presenting a first round of research findings as they started to hone in on their thesis, then presenting a completed opening paragraph with a full thesis and an outline, and then preparing both a GREAT Day presentation and a written format, and presenting those for the class and then in their final form as well. So, it's pretty rigorous across the whole semester.

### **What is your management style as a faculty sponsor?**

I do think those smaller steps that I was describing that I set up for the whole class are really important. That way no one step feels overwhelming. I remember when I was an undergraduate writing my thesis, I was actually doing philosophy, which was one of my majors in undergrad, and just facing the blank page and the thought of, "Oh my God! I have to finish this seventy-five to one-hundred-page document, and I'm staring at a blank page!" was kind of overwhelming. And my mentor at the time didn't set up this kind of concrete steps that I do but he did give me really good advice, which was just to get anything down in the page. Acing that blank page is the hardest thing. If you have anything down there, the process of revising is far easier than staring at a blank page. So, I just have, over course of my career, developed a series of smaller steps to help students.



# Sexual Violence and DC Comics

Kylie Mathis

---

---

*sponsored by* Melanie Blood

---

---

## ABSTRACT

In this essay, I analyze the history of the disturbing, often dismissive treatment of sexual violence in comic books through social conflict theory. Social conflict theory is a Marxist argument that society is a series of violent interactions wherein privileged groups exploit those with less power. I explore the way the prevalent mistreatment of sexual violence in DC Comics is a part of gendered conflict, and how this depiction of sexualized violence affects our understanding of sexual violence in the real world. Rather than suggest that all depictions of sexual violence and abuse are harmful, I examine more constructive, narratively driven examples of characters experiences with sexual violence and how these depictions are a step forward for the comic industry.

---

---

Despite the recent renewal of empowering, female-driven storylines, DC Comics has a long and troubled past due to the depiction of the mistreatment of female characters. In fact, the trope “Women in Refrigerators”—used to describe how female characters are often killed, maimed, or disempowered in order to advance the plot of a male character—originated as a reference to *Green Lantern #54*, published in 1994 (Marz). The hero returns home to find his girlfriend, Alexandra DeWitt, murdered and stuffed into his refrigerator. While violence will always have an integral role in comic books, DC Comics’ history and continuation of gendered violence remains troubling. The purpose of this paper is to analyze some of DC Comics’ violent issues through a social conflict approach, primarily examining how gender relations contribute to violence, especially rape or sexual assault, even within a fictitious story. The four main characters depicted in these issues—Barbara Gordon, James Gordon, Dick Grayson, and Harley Quinn—demonstrate the ways depictions of sexual violence rip agency away from otherwise empowering characters. This paper also examines the necessity of including sexual violence in stories and offer up ways in which it can be included in plotlines in a manner that empowers survivors, rather than revictimizes them. Comic book artists do not need to depict the act of rape in order to create compelling and convincing stories. The decision to include these acts only reinforces a culture that accepts sexual violence as part of its citizens’ lives. Instead, comic book artists should work to develop narratives that challenge this complacency.

Social conflict theory takes roots in Marxism, arguing that individuals and groups interact within society on the basis of conflict rather than consensus. Groups fight over vari-

ous amounts of resources, and those with more resources use this power to exploit those with less power. These resources can be material (e.g., water, food, capital) or non-material (e.g., status). While social conflict theory is often applied to social classes, in this work I examine gender conflict, and specifically how fictitious depictions of sexual violence strip power from women, placing them in unequal status with their male counterparts.

The character of Barbara Gordon exists to be a female counterpart to iconic superhero Batman. She made her debut appearance in January of 1967 in *Detective Comics #359* and the live action show *Batman* later that same year (McAvennie & Dolan). Barbara, the daughter of Gotham City police commissioner James Gordon, spends her free time secretly patrolling the streets as Batgirl. After the events of *The Killing Joke*, she is left paralyzed from the waist down. She is later re-established as the computer expert and information broker known as Oracle and often provides intelligence and computer hacking services to assist other superheroes, including Batman.

The issue that reshaped the character of Barbara Gordon, *The Killing Joke*, focuses on the backstory of Batman's perhaps most famous adversary, the Joker. This helps readers understand the tragedy behind his downfall and demonstrates how closely Joker's story mirrors that of Bruce Wayne. A large portion of the story revolves around the Joker torturing the Gordon family. *The Killing Joke* displays Barbara's torture in an almost sexual manner, writhing in agonizing pain after having been brutally shot (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: The shooting of Barbara Gordon

Barbara's father does not fare much better, as later he is paraded through a carnival naked and chained. In Figure 2, Commissioner Gordon mirrors the panel of the Joker unbuttoning Barbara's shirt—demonstrating the emasculation of sexual assault. This is unsettling because men are placed in the vulnerable positions as victims of sexual assault—depictions usually reserved for women.

Not only is Commissioner Gordon symbolically castrated by his own nakedness and vulnerability, readers are to understand that his inability to protect his daughter Barbara further undermines his masculinity. The illustrations of Barbara in these panels are presumably meant to represent the pictures taken by the Joker as he strips her down to perform the single most disempowering act: rape.



Figure 2: *The victimization of Commissioner Gordon*

Despite the controversy it caused, *The Killing Joke* remains one of DC's most popular comics to this day, managing to top *The New York Times* bestseller list 28 years after release (2016). The comic has been adapted into a cartoon that grossed over \$4 million worldwide (Nash Information Services).

Steven Kirsch and Paul Olczak (2002) argue why such graphic depictions of violence, on display in *The Killing Joke* and in other in comics, are troubling:

Although the impact of media violence has been underreported by news services, research has consistently found that exposure to violent media appears to increase aggressive behavior, thoughts, and feelings in children, adolescents, and young adults. The vast majority of this research has focused on portrayals of violence in television, movies, and, more recently, video games. However, an understudied source of violent content to which children and adolescents are exposed comes from comic books. (p. 1160)

This study recorded the effects of violent comic books on social information processing. Participants in the study were given either nonviolent comics, such as *Archie*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, and *The Rugrats*, or extremely violent comics including *Homicide*, *Curse of the Spawn*, and *Dark Realm*. After reading their assigned comics, participants read a series of ambiguous provocation situations and asked to respond as though they were ten years old. Some stories contained overt aggression, such as standing on the playground when another child hit them in the back with a ball. Others contained relational aggression, such as a childhood friend playing with another child that they did you do not like very much; physical harm was not involved. Participants were to evaluate their reactions to these scenarios. After all the responses were made, they were sorted into three categories: Highly aggressive responses (such as, "I'd hit them or make them suffer."), moderately aggressive responses (such as, "I'd spread a rumor about them."), and neutral or positive responses (such as, "They didn't know I sat down."). Higher scores reflected on more aggressive responses and behaviors. The study demonstrated that participants who read extremely violent comic books responded with more hostility to both overt and relational aggressions. Researchers also found significant gender differences as well. Men were more likely to respond with a high amount of aggression when overt aggression was used, while women were more likely to respond with a high amount of aggression when relational aggression used. Men also responded more favorably to extremely violent comic books, while women were more likely to prefer nonviolent comic books.

Why do these findings matter? Women are significantly more likely to experience sexual violence in their lifetime. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network found that in 2013, nine out of every ten rape victims in the United States were women (RAINN). Depictions of sexual assault in *The Killing Joke* not only reinforce the idea that women's bodies are meant to be violated, but the vast number of cosplays and fanart inspired by this version of the Joker would suggest that its readers view these behaviors as something to emulate. However, despite how valuable the research presented here is, it also has gaps. Most data on sexual assault does not consider the vast amount of sexual violence committed against trans and nonbinary persons, nor the fact that men are less likely to come forward if they are sexually assaulted. While RAINN also finds that only 1 in 33 American men will experience an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime, there is likely a significant amount of the population that simply has not reported their assault (RAINN). It is troubling not only that the true statistics behind sexual assault may remain forever hidden, but that men are depicted as free from its impact.

Male characters are also victims of sexual violence in DC Comics. Introduced in the April 1940 issue *Detective Comics #38* as a young acrobat, Dick Grayson becomes an orphan when Gotham's mafia murders his parents (Finger). Millionaire Bruce Wayne takes him in as a legal ward and trains him as the original Robin. In addition to helping Batman fight crime, Dick establishes himself as the leader of the Teen Titans. He soon tires of working under Bruce and takes on his own identity as Nightwing. He

spends a significant amount of time protecting the neighboring city of Bludhaven, both as Nightwing and as a rookie police officer.

*Nightwing Vol. 2 #93* takes place in the turbulent city of Bludhaven, where the villain Blockbuster is wreaking havoc. Right away the comic fridges a female character. Nightwing's girlfriend Maxine Michaels is gunned down to further his angst. Afterwards, Blockbuster tells Nightwing that he will kill not just Maxine, but everyone Nightwing has ever loved. While this in itself is traumatic, Nightwing also feels pressure to follow the one rule Batman continuously instilled in him: "Don't kill. Ever." (Grayson, 2004).

The final scenes of *Nightwing Vol. 2 #93* remain some of DC Comics' more controversial panels. Tarantula, a vigilante named Catalina Flores who kills without remorse, shoots and kills Blockbuster. Nightwing, as he made no attempt to stop Tarantula, is represented with Blockbuster's blood literally on his hands, causing him to break down. Fuzzy speech bubbles and a dizzying shot of the stairs represent the extent of his emotional distress. He makes it to the roof where he collapses, and in a very difficult scene to read, Tarantula take advantage of Nightwing's extremely vulnerable state. Despite his inability to consent, and the fact that he manages to say, "Don't touch me," she engages in sex with him anyway (Grayson, 2004). Readers then see a framing of Tarantula on top of Nightwing, with her back arched, facing upward, and hair cascading down her body in a classic "sexy" pose. All this time, Nightwing repeats, "Never gonna stop." Everything about the way the comic is set up suggests he was in no state to consent.

When asked in a 2004 interview shortly after the comic's release why she chose to introduce rape into a story about a male character, the comic's author, Devin Grayson, coyly answered, "For the record, I've never used the word 'rape,' I just said it was nonconsensual." She further explained how "rewarding" it is to place heroes in these types of situations, as it can "challenge them as people as well as superheroes" (Burtis, 2004). Grayson's relaxed attitude about rape depicted in the comic is disturbing, especially considering that following this issue, Nightwing goes on to date Tarantula and the rooftop assault is never mentioned again.

Another area of controversy, introduced by long-time fans of the boy wonder, is Dick Grayson's coding as bisexual. As readers see in an earlier issue, Dick encounters a fellow cop being harassed for his sexual orientation. Dick steps in to stop the violence, and when asked, "What *are* you Grayson, his boyfriend?" the vigilante answers, "So what if I am?" While Dick is not intimately involved with this man, many readers believe his willingness to be perceived as gay suggests some fluidity in his orientation.

This potential element of Dick's character introduces another group that are victims of gender conflict. I would like to expand and include members of the LGBTQ community, particularly men, as likely victims. This issue of *Nightwing* is not the first time Dick was sexually assaulted. Though less graphic than Tarantula's assault, Nightwing's ally Mirage poses as his girlfriend, Starfire, and has sex with him in an issue of *Teen*

Titans. Like in *The Killing Joke*, these plotlines emphasize the idea that rape and sexual assault are intended as an emasculating experience. It breaks down otherwise untouchable characters and is seen as exceptionally “rewarding” when it occurs unexpectedly.

When used freely as a plot device, sexual assault becomes expected, especially when performed on more vulnerable groups. This is problematic when readers consider how it exploits an experience many women will go through in their lifetime, but also how it belittles male victims of rape or sexual assault, who are already unlikely to come forward for fear of judgement and not taken seriously when they do (RAINN). Plotlines like that of *Nightwing #93* only reinforce ideas that prevent victims of sexual abuse from receiving help.

Devin Grayson was later interviewed in 2015 for a collection of essays celebrating the original Robin. In this interview, she offered an apology for her glib remarks on depicting rape in her comic: “Rape is used so casually in comics as a gesture of ‘something really bad happened to someone,’ and I am deeply sorry to have contributed to that trope” (Geaman, 2015). Grayson’s apology shows the potential for growth in the comic industry.

The growth of understanding in the comic industry is demonstrated best by the character development of Harley Quinn. Harley was first introduced in *Batman: The Animated Series*. Originally the Joker’s psychiatrist, she falls in love with him and helps him escape Arkham Asylum. She spends a significant amount of time as his sidekick, where she is repeatedly abused as a form of comic relief. Harley is thrown out of windows, slapped across the face, sexually and emotionally abused by the Joker. Writers went as far as to write a plotline in which the Joker plans to kill her. Rather than using Harley’s treatment to empower victims of abuse and give a voice to their experiences, she spent over two decades as a punch line. However, when she learns the Joker has plans to kill her, she joins up with Poison Ivy and Catwoman and begins having adventures independently from her abuser.

In *Harley Quinn #25*, Harley and the Joker reunite. Harley visits him in Arkham Asylum to get answers about an unrelated case. At Arkham, Harley, a well-educated and capable psychiatrist, was manipulated into a life of crime and abuse. Rape victims are often forced to relive the pain of their abuse, especially if they choose to press charges against their rapists. For many victims, the assault can even take place in their own bed. Figure 3 depicts the intense discomfort Harley feels throughout their reunion.

Even in discomfort, there is strength and self-empowerment. Harley Quinn says, “It’s amazing what a few years an’ a lotta miles away from you and yer garbage can do fer a girl’s self-respect.” As most abusers do, the Joker immediately tries re-establishing his power, but Harley refuses. When the Joker forces a kiss, she responds by ripping off a piece of his lower lip. The character has come a long way from her first appearance in 1992; rather than reliving her trauma, she is empowered—not re-victimized.



tough question. Are you getting off on it? Are you including this rape scene for titillation, to be sensational, to set tongues a wagging [sic]? Are you using rape as a tool, a signal, a way to tell the reader that you mean business? (2015).

Not all comics showcase rape scenes to demonstrate the complex sufferings of victims of sexual violence. The *Jessica Jones* Netflix series follows private investigator Jessica Jones as she struggles to keep her superhero abilities hidden while simultaneously suffering from PTSD. Her trauma, viewers learn quickly, is the result of being repeatedly raped and used by Killgrave, a man who can control minds. But the sexual violence she experienced is never shown on screen. Viewers see the aftermath—her panic attacks, her alcoholism, her tendency to isolate herself from others, but there is no scene filled with shots of her exposed body as her abuser grunts on top of her. That is not necessary to understand the profound effect this experience has left on her life. In this way Jessica Jones is empowered, not revictimized—her panic attacks are halted by exercises taught to her by a therapist. She opens herself up to other people and reconnects with her childhood best friend while forming new and healthy relationships. She may fling bad guys three times her size across the room, but she is also emotionally resilient and refuses to be remade into a victim—survivors of sexual violence are not here to make plots more tantalizing or interesting. In this show, Marvel has created a narrative that is so painfully raw, while still ensuring the survivor has the final say, an example for DC Comics to follow in giving survivors the respect they rightfully deserve.

## REFERENCES

- Bennett, R. J. (2015, March 19). Why Are You Writing a Rape Scene?. Retrieved from <http://www.robertjacksonbennett.com/blog/why-are-you-writing-a-rape-scene>
- Conner, A., Palmiotti, J., Hardin, C. & Sinclair, A. (2017). *Harley Quinn* No. 25. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Finger, B. (1940). *Detective Comics* Vol. 1 #38. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Grayson, D. (2004). *Nightwing*. Vol. 2, No. 93. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Kirsh, S. J., & Olczak, P. V. (2002). The Effects of Extremely Violent Comic Books on Social Information Processing. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17(11), 1160–1178. doi:10.1177/088626002237400.
- McAvennie, M. & Dolan, H. (2010). 1960s. In *DC Comics Year by Year A Visual Chronicle* (pp. 122). London: Dorling Kindersley.
- Marz, R. (1994). *Green Lantern* #54. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Moore, A. (1988). *Batman: The Killing Joke*. No. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Nash Information Services, LLC. (n.d.). [Chart of gross domestic income of a film]. *Batman: The Killing Joke* (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Batman-The-Killing-Joke#tab=summary>
- The New York Times*. (2016). Hardcover graphic novels. Retrieved from <https://nyti.ms/2Hi6nfg>
- Palmiotti, J. & Conner, A. (2017). *Harley Quinn*. Vol. 1, No. 25. New York, NY: DC Comics.



- Planty, M. G., Langton, L., Krebs, C., Berzofsky, M., Smiley-McDonald, H. (2013). *Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010*. Washington DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- RAINN. (n.d.). *Scope of the Problem: Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem>
- RAINN. (n.d.). *Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>

# An interview with student author Simone Louie

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What did your involvement with GREAT day mean to you?**

I think GREAT Day is, well, great because it's a chance for the people of Geneseo to know what other students are passionate about. It's a way for students to know the passions of other students and to be more aware of what other students are researching on or other important things that may be going on in other fields that we may not otherwise know about at all. It's a great way to learn more about the fields of knowledge and education that we normally would never learn about. It's also a great way for us to verbalize the things that we're passionate about and really care about, and I think in that process it's a reminder to ourselves as to why we are studying what we're studying or researching what we're researching.

## **What do you think GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community as a whole?**

I think some GREAT Day projects give opportunities to students to collaborate with one another. For my project, I had fifteen singers and a conductor. The fact that you either have to or you can collaborate with other students. You have a common goal and you work together towards achieving it.

## **What inspired you to write your piece?**

The *Missa Brevis* started out as an assignment for class. We were listening to different masses written by well-known composers, like Mozart or Haydn. It gave me the idea of the conventions of the mass—what composers traditionally do in their masses—and it was interesting because in the techniques or patterns that they would use it has to do with the textual meaning of the mass. So by learning that and also with my prior knowledge of the biblical text, and merging them together, writing the mass was really enjoyable because it was mixing of this old, traditional, historical music of mass with my own personal experience and knowledge of the biblical text. I think with being someone who has gone to church since I was born and having thought about spiritual things pretty much my whole life it was very interesting to see it from an educational perspective and present it in a scholarly context and with historical context.

## **What were your goals in creating the *Missa Brevis*?**

I think the goal, other than to just make something that sounded good, was also to

present the text in a way musically where I could feel like the music was truly and accurately conveying the meaning of the text in the original context, which was the Bible. So kind of bringing out the true meaning of the text and not dismissing that as just lyrics to the song, but following the historical context behind it. Also to compare and contrast the more joyful side of the text and the more somber and serious sides of the text.

### **Are you currently conducting anything similar to your piece for GREAT Day?**

No, I actually... it's funny, in my free time I don't actually write a lot of gospel music. At Geneseo, it was my first time writing classical music. Right now, I'm just writing songs.

### **Do you think that your GREAT Day presentation was in some way helpful in preparing you for the demands of life after graduation or in graduate school? What do you think conducting this research taught you about your discipline?**

I think the biggest help it gave was in making me realize what I could do, what my potential is and how much I enjoy doing that. So even though I really enjoyed writing the *Missa Brevis* and it was really great to know I could write something like that, but I think that after graduation taking everything into consideration I realized there are other things that I enjoy more too. So, I got to try it out enough to know how much I like it and know what costs I would be willing to make in order to pursue certain things.

### **In retrospect, do you think your GREAT Day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?**

I think that besides the composing process, getting people together to make this performance happen was very important in my senior year, and I think I was very humbled to have so many people be so willing to help me. Whether it was giving me a place to rehearse or just helping me sing or conduct or even just coming to my performance. The relationships that I had or formed really encouraged me, and we were able to have a collective experience where we felt like we achieved something together and people in the audience could enjoy it. It really encouraged me.

### **How did you feel when you presented your work at GREAT Day?**

I felt excited. I normally hate public speaking, but I felt excited because I knew it was work that I was proud of, and the meaning of the text and the context of everything was something that I related to very deeply personal, so I was very eager to talk about it in a scholarly setting too.

# An interview with faculty advisor Michael Masci

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

Undergraduate research gives students an opportunity to sort of pull together a lot of what they know or what they've learned in different classes. It gives them the opportunity to work sort of between disciplines, and outside of classes. It also gives them, at least in my discipline, the opportunity to go through a process of writing, drafting, revising, and things of that nature. You know, for me it's a little different. I have them do two things in music here: On the one hand, writing music, which isn't really research it's sort of a creative activity, and in the other side of things, we have musicology where you write research papers. But I think the most important thing is that, it gives students the opportunity to synthesize things and draw things together. I think that is what the most important thing for me anyway.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?**

At Geneseo, a lot of students are conducting research either independently or with a faculty member and I think that [it is the] norm that you are doing research, especially for the upperclassman. I think, in terms of the higher education, there's been the move to incorporate more ways in getting students to do things other than attending lectures. So, the move toward incorporating undergraduate research is sort of broad efforts nationwide to get students to actually take what they've learned and sort of apply it in some way or recontextualize it or bring it into synthesis or dialogue of something else. So, I think it's an effort to make students on one hand more active, on the one hand integrating and drawing together pieces of what they've learned which you don't necessarily always do if you're in a lecture setting. So, I think there's that effort to get students to realize what they're learning in their readings and in their lectures could actually be brought and applied more broadly. I think that's what the idea behind the move toward undergraduate research is.

## **What characteristics of the students' presentation [Simone Louie] you submitted made you recommend their research?**

What she had originally proposed as a senior capstone project was not actually what she ended up doing. What she ended up doing for GREAT Day was a piece of music, she had started working on for a class. It was sort of a final project. We haven't had it

performed. It was basically just notated in software on her laptop shared it with me and it was actually really good. And we had gone through the proposal process. She was an Edgar Fellow so she had to propose an Edgar Fellows senior capstone project. She had proposed something, and then as we started trying to work on it, she said, "You know, I think maybe the previous piece, the previous composition that I have been working on for another class, actually I want to continue working on that." And then I said, "I think that's a good idea." So, we started. She already sort of had a head start and the product what she came up with, the composition, was I have to say it was probably the best piece I've ever had a student compose here. I've been here for seven years, which isn't terribly long but we don't have many music composition majors. But, it was a really (I would say for the lack of better words) mature piece for somebody who was just twenty-two. And the other thing that made it great for GREAT Day was that it was choral piece so we had a number of our music students perform it as well. So, it was a real collaboration between her, and then we have another senior who was a conducting major so he pulled together a choir, he rehearsed the choir, he conducted the choir. So, it was really nice. We had a composer and a conductor sort of collaborating on those projects. And the students who were involved in the performance really gave it their all and they were practicing, you know, twice a week for six weeks. I think there were even more, I don't know what it was. But so, I think on the one hand the quality of the work, then it just turned into this larger collaboration which is what GREAT Day is all about. And so yeah, I mean she was always a strong writer, she was a creative writing double major as well. So, she's a very creative person. So yeah, she is this person who you could trust to do a good job on an independent project like this, who will be motivated, who will stick it through the end. And it went off really well, the performance was well received. She's gotten it performed elsewhere off-campus. She lives in New York City now so she has it performed down in the city. So, the piece has taken a life of its own. One of the choirs here performed last semester as well. So, it's been really nice actually to see it.

### **Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.**

Oooh! I mean there's the sort of day to day, week to week thing you know that you're making sure that. In this case Simone was on top of meeting deadlines and stuff. We knew we needed so many weeks to practice it and rehearse it. So, we've worked back from there and said, "Okay what if you know GREAT Day was this date. We're gonna have a dress rehearsal the week before and we need at least six weeks before that for the rehearsals." But, then you gotta get the parts to people before rehearsal starts so you need to get people at least two or three weeks before that. So, after we've done all that, we then sort of mapped out, "Okay we need this section done and this section done." So, there was that. More sort of the creative side of things, Simone has a lot of ideas, (well maybe she has too many ideas) and it's always a task of giving some of the advice as to which ideas to work with. It's just like when you write an article or paper, I mean you've read it and you've written it, you've rewritten it, read it, and re-read it so many times that you can't make heads or tails of it anymore. So, you have to give it to appear to look at with fresh eyes, right. So, it's the same thing with this.

She was sitting with this piece for so long, working on it, reworking on it so much. As a composition teacher, I provide fresh ears to hear this [piece] because she has heard it so many times, she played it so many times. But then, she will come and play it for me and I'm like, "Oohh." I'll hear things that she never heard in it or ideas that I'll say, "Oh, you might wanna explore that idea more," because she's just gotten so much used to it. So, having that pair of extra ears and that feedback [are] really important I think for any writing. So, there's that aspect of it. And you know, I had worked with her before. She's a composition major, so I was familiar of what she was capable of and everything. I think there are two things; making sure things stay on target and being that extra pair of ears. I mean as for the rest, they really took charge, her and the conductor, really took charge in sort of [running] these rehearsals, [wrangling] these singers. I was really impressed. As far as my role of mentoring or advising a GREAT Day project, that's the thing that I really wanted to twist arms to get students to perform and everything. But I just attended just a few rehearsals and then the dress rehearsals and when I went to the dress rehearsals, I felt completely comfortable putting that piece on stage, you know. And that's where you want to be. You don't want to be like, "Ooooo gosh! We cannot perform this. This isn't gonna be ready." I mean, I have had situations where you know with student work it wasn't ready. So, we had to cut that piece and performed something else. This is what GREAT Day ideally is: students taking charge and being creative.

# Writing a Modern *Missa Brevis*

Simone Louie

---

---

*sponsored by* Michael Masci

---

---

## ABSTRACT

Composing a *Missa Brevis*, or short Mass, is a long, collaborative effort. My *Missa Brevis* attempts to convey narrative through music. I use the traditional Greek and Latin text from the Mass Ordinary of the Roman Catholic Church combined with modern harmonies to bring light to the themes of supplication, intercession, glory, holiness, joy, and peace. This piece, which was originally composed on piano, through my own efforts and collaboration with my conductor and advisor, became a four-part choral piece for an a capella choir. The four movements of this particular *Missa Brevis* are the Kyrie, the Sanctus, the Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei. This process is by no means a perfect one, and despite the many successes of the piece there are still elements that can be improved, but overall the music works well to convey the message of the text.

---

---

## A REFLECTION ON METHOD

To prepare for the composition process, our class compared different missae breves by Mozart, Handel, Haydn, Poulenc, and Fauré, and identified some mass conventions from observing the similarities across the missae breves. One convention is the connection of lyrical themes to musical themes. For example, in one of Mozart's masses, for lyrics that had to do with Jesus Christ's supplication, such as "Kyrie eleison" ("Lord, have mercy") and "Agnus dei" (Lamb of God), he uses minor, augmented, and diminished harmonies—harmonies that carry tension—alluding to the tension in Jesus' supplication as he pleaded for the sins of the world. Another mass convention is the acceleration and dynamic build-up of the Hosanna, which contrasts with the pastoral, peaceful Sanctus and Benedictus sections. Mozart does this in his *Mass in B $\flat$  major* and Haydn in his *Mass No. 7 in B $\flat$  major*. My *Missa brevis* uses some of these mass conventions to be in conversation with these classical mass settings.

Different parts of the *Missa Brevis* echo and contrast with one another not only musically, but also textually, evident in the way lyrical themes use similar musical language. In the Kyrie and the Agnus Dei, themes of supplication are both expressed in the slow, reflective vocal melodies. However, despite these similarities they still contrast with one another, as the Kyrie and the Agnus Dei both speak of supplication with slightly different emphases: one is an explicit plea for mercy; the other identifies Jesus as the lamb of God,

the atonement for sin. Since the latter presents a resolution to sin, this theme is depicted more hopefully within the music through major harmonies and open intervals.

A good portion of the *Missa Brevis* draws from biblical text. The slow, solemn, heavy opening reflects the moments when Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane and when he cried out on the cross, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” These moments speak strongly to the theme of supplication and Kyrie Eleison. The heaviness of the opening chordal texture, along with the darker, melancholy harmonies, portray this aspect of supplication. Although the Agnus Dei also speaks of the suffering and supplication of Christ, it moves into “Dona nobis pacem” (“God grant us peace”), which places a heavier emphasis on themes of hope and peace, contrasting with Christ’s supplication and suffering that brought about peace and the hope of salvation. The Kyrie begins the piece with second species counterpoint, chordal progressions played in monophony, and it moves into a more intricate, polyphonic texture, while the Agnus Dei begins with polyphony and moves into chordal second species counterpoint to end the piece.

The Sanctus speaks of glory, and of God being the Lord of hosts. The melodic theme shares similar melodic contours and modal harmonies with the Kyrie in Poulenc’s *Mass in G major*. The need for contrast against the slow and solemn Kyrie and the depiction of God’s glory in Isaiah 6:3<sup>1</sup> produced bright harmonies, angular melodies, fast tempo, and heterophony present in the Sanctus.

The Benedictus is about blessing, and it contrasts with the Kyrie and the Sanctus with its pastoral sound, simple harmonies, and waltz-like meter. The key, A $\flat$  major, is the relative major of F minor, the key used for the Kyrie. The blessings in the Benedictus are a result of Christ’s supplication and sacrifice; the cry for mercy (F minor) turns into a blessing (A $\flat$  major). The simple harmonies of the Benedictus portray the harmonious relationship, a reconciliation between a holy God and a sinful person. Christ’s supplication shows a separation between humans and God, but the Benedictus speaks of their reconciliation, made possible by Christ’s intercession. This reconciliation reflects the unity of God and Christ, and the unity of the trinity is depicted in the threes present in the Benedictus: the triple meter, and the use of A $\flat$  major which is a minor third above F minor, the key of the Kyrie.

The Agnus Dei begins with the rising four-note motif, one note for each syllable of “Agnus dei,” with harmonies stacking beneath the melody as each note is sung. Instead of fitting all the text into the same line with a three-note motif, I had the lower voices sing the longer part of the text in response to the short motives in the upper voices. The modulation from the D $\flat$ /A $\flat$  harmonies back to the home key of F goes like this: The enharmonic notes between a D $\flat$  scale and an E major ninth chord (D $\sharp$ /E $\flat$ , F $\sharp$ /G $\flat$ , G $\sharp$ /A $\flat$ ) make this transition smooth. The composition process of the Dona Nobis Pacem mainly consisted of improvisation at the piano using hand positions with minimal hand movement.

---

1 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (New International Version)



Rehearsals for performing the *Missa Brevis* revealed some necessary modifications that improved the piece. The conductor, who understood the effect of the piece and the sentiments behind it, and who had experience serving in mass, relayed the complexity of suffering and hope to the singers and worked diligently to bring out the contrast between the musical themes. His work during rehearsals helped to convey the deeper meaning of the text.

Because I had written my *Missa Brevis* on the piano, I was not aware of some of the difficult leaps in the vocal lines and strange interchanging of melodies between certain vocal lines. Lines that felt natural to play on the piano were sometimes unnatural for the voice to sing. There have been slight alterations to the score because of these difficulties. In composing future choral pieces, I would play each vocal line separately before giving it to singers, to ensure feasibility of singing the vocal lines while preserving the same harmonies and general texture of the music.

Another thing I learned was to be more aware of the phonetic conventions of the language I am writing in. Out of all the sections of the mass, the *Agnus Dei* had the most revisions. As I was not familiar with Latin when I first composed the piece, the *Agnus Dei* sounded unnatural before my conductor made his suggestions for changing the syllable placement. His edits can be seen in this excerpt of the score (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conductor's notes on *Agnus Dei*

Some other changes to the piece include changing the solo parts to group parts and adding notes that act as leading tones to dissonances. The change from solo parts to group parts were applied to the last part of the *Kyrie*, and a similar edit was made to the call-and-response answer parts of the *Sanctus*. This change was made because the music would have been too soft with solo singers. Adding leading tones to parts with dissonances made them easier to sing.

All in all, the methods used were to ultimately bring out the true, deeper meaning of the text in the *Missa Brevis*, whether it was through listening to other missae breves, reading the Bible passages that the text alluded to, being intentional in choosing the tonality, texture, and key of the music, or giving rehearsal directions.

## AN ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITION

My *Missa Brevis* uses the traditional Greek and Latin text from the Mass Ordinary of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a four-part choral piece with four movements, composed for an a capella choir. The four movements of this particular *Missa Brevis* are the Kyrie, the Sanctus, the Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei. My composition combines traditional text with modern harmonies, and the relationships between the various movements portray the traditional text in a way that brings to life deeper meaning of the text—how the themes of supplication, intercession (Kyrie, Agnus Dei), glory, holiness (Sanctus), blessing, joy (Benedictus), and peace (Agnus Dei) fit into the message of the Christian faith.

The Kyrie speaks of supplication and intercession. The slow tempo, simple rhythm and homophonic texture allow the listener to focus on the harmonies and the meaning of the text, with moments of polyphony pushing the piece forward. The *Christe Eleison* (“Christ, Have Mercy”) section is in a major key as a contrast to the solemn beginning of the Kyrie, and depicts the hopefulness that comes with begging Christ for mercy—there is hope when we say, “Christe eleison,” because he first said, “Kyrie eleison.” The Kyrie ends on a hopeful, resolved note, in the knowledge that the Lord has had and will have mercy on us because of Jesus’ supplication and intercession. This theme returns in the Agnus Dei, which will be further analyzed.

The Sanctus is the brightest section of my *Missa Brevis*. The Sanctus speaks of glory, of God being the Lord of hosts. The upbeat tempo, the bright harmonies with diatonic dissonances, the angular melodic lines, and the call and answer between voices are to express this gloriously chaotic scene from Isaiah 6:1-4:

I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.” (New International Version)

The cries of “Holy, holy, holy!” in the Sanctus sharply contrast against the solemn supplication in the Kyrie, through bright harmonies, angular melodies, and fast tempo. Calls and responses between the upper and lower voices in the beginning of my Sanctus convey the imagery of praises high and low, in heaven and on Earth, from kings and rulers to the lowliest. The musical theme echos with variations between the voices, layers added as the section nears the climax. The climax is a slow, diatonically

dissonant repetition of the theme that contrasts with the upbeat single melodic lines in the previous call and answer section. All the dynamic and textural build-ups, back-and-forth between voices, and the final homophony of voices place emphasis on God as Lord of hosts (“dominus Deus sabaoth”), praised by individuals and by multitudes.

In a traditional mass setting, the Hosanna first appears after the Sanctus and is repeated after the Benedictus. I follow this tradition in my own *Missa Brevis*. In the Hosanna, the upper voices sing a repetitive accompaniment that sustains the harmony while the lower voices move up and down a scale that is mixture of an F mixolydian and Phrygian scale. The tempo quickens, just as in the Hosannas of Mozart’s and Haydn’s masses. The change of emotions from fear and awe to the joy of praise and welcoming the Messiah is depicted in the harmonies that are less dissonant than that of the Sanctus. The text for the “Hosanna” comes from Jesus’ triumphant entrance on a donkey into Jerusalem, where he is met with people waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>2</sup> This is the text that continues from the Hosanna into the Benedictus, the next section of the mass.

The Benedictus has a waltz-like meter, straightforward harmonies, and a mainly homophonic texture to contrast with the more harmonically and rhythmically complex Sanctus. The Benedictus is peaceful because it speaks of blessing, contrasting with the awe and excitement in the Sanctus and Hosanna. The text of the Sanctus calls God “the Lord of hosts,” placing emphasis on a group celebration. The Benedictus is private in contrast, personal. It portrays the harmonious relationship, the reconciliation, between a holy God and a sinful person; a reconciliation made necessary by the holiness in the Sanctus and made possible by the supplication and intercession in the Kyrie and the Agnus Dei: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,[...] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> The blessing of Christ’s plea and intercession is only made possible by the agony in the Kyrie that came before it, but it is made sweeter because of the reconciliation it mentions.

The Agnus Dei starts with short ascending melodic phrases echoed by longer lines in the lower voices, that reach an imperfect cadence before arriving at the *Dona Nobis Pacem* (“God, grant us peace”) section. In the last few measures of the mass, the Kyrie theme is echoed in the melody, affirming that God has and will grant peace in answer to pleas for mercy because Jesus, the Lamb of God, pleaded first.

The Agnus Dei hearkens back to the Kyrie, as the text returns to the theme of Christ’s supplication and intercession. While the Kyrie speaks of Christ’s intercession, the Agnus Dei speaks of the sacrificial intercession carried out through his death on the cross. The stillness of the Agnus Dei reflects the imagery in Isaiah 53: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the

2 John 12:12-19, New International Version

3 Galatians 3:13-14, New International Version

slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”<sup>4</sup> The stillness, although associated with Jesus’ undeserved suffering, also foreshadows the peace in the *Dona Nobis*.

The *Dona Nobis* mirrors the *Kyrie* in a number of ways, serving as a resolution for the pain that is expressed in the *Kyrie*, and answering the hope that is portrayed in the *Christe Eleison*. The harmonies of the *Dona Nobis* echo that of the *Kyrie*, particularly with “*Christe eleison*.” The triple meter of the *Dona Nobis* changes into cut time, the time signature of the *Kyrie*, and the melodic theme of the *Kyrie* creeps in while maintaining the harmonic language of the *Dona Nobis*. Supplication and pain are answered with peace.

The *Missa Brevis* is an appropriate piece for revision, because of the vocal difficulties that arose due to the piece being composed at the piano. The main issues are the vocal range of the second soprano and alto voices, measure 13 (in the *Kyrie*), and interval jumps in the lower voices in the *Agnus Dei*.

At several points, the melody written for the alto voice is out of range. Some examples are at measures 22 (D5), 25 (E♭5), 82-83, and 160-162. One possible solution was to give those alto parts to the second soprano. The hard part for the *Missa Brevis* performance was that there were only fifteen singers, including four altos and four sopranos. Giving the alto line to the second sopranos would significantly decrease the volume of the soprano line. Ideally, the piece would be sung by a large choir, and the altos could sing a lower part while the second sopranos take the high, out-of-range alto parts. However, because of the small choir, we had to strike a balance between giving certain alto lines to the second sopranos and letting the altos sing the out-of-range parts in a soft voice. Another possible solution would be to write new notes for the altos completely. This was done in the *Agnus Dei*, where instead of singing the high note at the end of each measure, in 160-162, the altos repeated the second note of each measure, which was always a fifth lower than the high note. There are also parts of the alto voice that could be taken a whole octave down; for example, measures 82-83 in the *Sanctus*.

Measure 13 is messy because the voices split and come back together quickly. In the upper staff, the music goes from having two vocal lines to four and then to three within the span of three measures; in the lower staff, it goes from two vocal lines to three, back to two, then back to three. Because the piece was written on the piano, the splits felt natural for the hand to play, but the voice splitting was too complicated for a vocally performed piece. In revision, I would make both the upper and lower staff in measure 13 have three lines each.

There are a couple sixth- and seventh-interval jumps in the lower voices of the *Agnus Dei*, as seen in measures 161, 162, and 166. Since the voices are singing sixteenth notes, the large intervals are sung quickly and the lower notes do not resonate as they would on a piano. The legato effect is different when played on the piano than when sung. On the piano, the large intervals can be played in legato even when the notes

4 Isaiah 53:7, New International Version

are sixteenth notes, whereas for a voice, it is difficult to sing large intervals in legato quickly. Hence, in revision, I may change the lower note to a higher note or have the bass singers sing a lower sustained note on the third beat of those measure.

Another part of the mass that could be revised would be the *Dona Nobis*. At times, the “ch” sound in “pacem” appear in the different voices one after the other (especially in measures 184-187, where “-cem” is sung by a different voice at every half note). The repetition of the strong consonant sound disturbs the peace of the music, so the piece may benefit from rearranging some of the syllables.

Other revisions that have been made to the score include transcribing the score for an SATB choir, rather than for the piano (having four staves instead of two). Because a piano accompaniment was needed for this semester’s performance, it may be good to write an official piano accompaniment score for the piece. Changes would have to be made to the current piano score because some parts, particularly the Hosanna section, have too many notes for two hands to play effectively.

Hearing a performance of my *Missa Brevis* was deeply meaningful. Just as the composition itself contrasts corporate worship with personal worship, the execution of this piece brought together the traditions of many previous generations with personal faith. The composition and rehearsal processes, as well as analyzing the composition, revealed to me the grace Christ offered in answer to the world’s brokenness, pain, and suffering.

# Missa Brevis

Simone Louie

Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son, ky - ri - e e - le - i - son Ky - ri - e

*♩ = 56*

Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e e -  
*p* Ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son Ky - ri - e  
*pp*

Ky - ri - e ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e

10

Ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e e - lei - son Ky - ri - e e - le - i -

le - i - son Ooh e - le - i - son Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son Ky - ri - e e - le - i -  
*p* Ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e e - lei - son ky - ri - e e - le - i -  
*f*

Ooh Ky - ri - e e - lei - son. Ky - ri - e e - le - i -

18

son, ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e Ky - ri - e

son ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son, Ooh e -  
*mp*

son ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e ky - ri - e e -  
*mp*

son ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son Ky - ri - e

26

e - le - i                      Chris - te e - le - i - - - Chris - te e - le - i - son,

le - i - son                      e - le - i - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son                      Chris - te e - le - i - son,

lei - son,                      e - lei - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son,                      Chris - te e - lei - son,

e - lei - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son, Chris - te e - le - i - son,

*p*

34

e - le - i - son.

e - lei - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son.

e - lei - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son,                      Chris - te e - le - i - son.

e - lei - son.                      Chris - te e - le - i - son                      Chris - te e - le - i - son.

*p*                      *pp*

42

e - le - i - son,                      e - le - i son.

Chris - - - te                      e - - - le - i - son.                      Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son,                      e -

Chris - - - te e - le - i - son.                      Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son

*mp dolce*

49

le-i-son, e-le-i-son Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son, e-le-i-son

Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son - Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son, ky-ri-e e-le-i-

55

lei-son, e-le-i-son.

Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son, e-le-i-son, e-le-i-son.

Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son.

son. e-le-i-son, Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son e-le-i-son.



62  $\text{♩} = 116$

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc - - - - - tus

*mf*

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc -

68

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc - - - - - tus

*mf*

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc - - - - - tus

- - - - - tus

74

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc - - - - - tus

*mf*

Do - mi - nus De-us Sa-ba-oth, sa - ba -

Sanc - tus, sanc - tus

80

oth Do - mi - nus De-us sa-ba-oth, sa - ba - oth Sanc - tus

*mf*

Do - mi - nus De-us sa-ba-oth, sa - ba - - - - oth. Do - mi - nus De-us sa-ba-oth, sa-ba-oth

86

Sanc-tus, sanc - - tus, sanc - - - - - tus

*f*

fle - ni sunt cae - li et ter-ra



110

Ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis, ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis.

Ho Ho Ho Ho

112

Ho-san-na ho-san-na

Ho-san-na ho-san-na

115

Ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis, ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis.

ff

119 *pp dolce* Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit, qui ve - nit Be - ne - dic - tus qui

*mp* Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus

Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus, Be - ne - dic - tus qui

125 ve - nit, in no-mi-ne do - mi - ni. be - ne - dic - tus ve - nit

be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus Be - ne - dic - tus no-mi-ne do-mi - ni do - mi - ni

be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus do - mi - ni

ve - nit, ve - nit. Be - ne - dic - tus, be - ne - dic - tus.

131 *mf* Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit, qui ve - nit Be - ne - dic - tus qui

Sop. split

*mf* Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus

Be - ne - dic - tus, be - ne - dic - tus Be - ne - dic - tus qui

137 *poco rit.*

ve - nit, in no-mi-ne do - mi - ni. no - mi - ne do - mi - ni

be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus

*mp* Be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus be - ne - dic - tus

ve - nit, ve - nit. Be - ne - dic - tus, be - ne - dic - tus

143  $\text{♩} = 108$

*p* Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na Ho - san - na

*mf* In ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na

In ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis

147

*p* Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na Ho - san - na

*mf* In ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis in ex - cel - sis Ho - san - na

in ex - cel - sis

151

*f* Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na

*Subito p* Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na Ho - san - na

*p* Ho - san - na ho - san - na

Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho

Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho - san - na ho - san - na

154

Musical score for measures 154-155. The score is in 5/4 time and B-flat major. It features a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. A 'rit.' (ritardando) marking is present above the right hand in measure 155.

156

Musical score for measures 156-159. The score is in 5/4 time and B-flat major. It features a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. A 'ff' (fortissimo) marking is present below the right hand in measure 156. The lyrics are: Ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis, ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis.

160  $\text{♩} = 60$

*p* Ag-nus de - - - i ag-nus de - - - i ag-nus de - - - i ag - nus de - i.

qui tol - lis pec-ca - ta mun - di, qui tol - lis pec-ca - ta mun - di, qui tol - lis pec-ca - ta mun - di

164 Ag-nus dei ag-nus dei ag-nus dei

Ag - nus, ag - nus, ag - nus

qui tol-lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, qui tol-lis pe - ca - ta mun - di, qui tol-lis pec - ca - ta mun - di

167 Ag-nus dei ag-nus dei ag-nus dei no - bis.  $\text{♩} = 90$  Do - na no - bis

*mp* Ag-nus dei mi-se-re-re no-bis mi-se-re-re no-bis mi-se-re-re no-bis no-bis. Do - na no - bis Do - na no - bis Do - na no - bis

*poco rit.* Ag - - - - nus Ag - - - - nus de - i. Do - na no - bis

172 pa - cem, do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem, no - bis pa - cem

pa - cem, do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem, do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem, no - bis pa - cem

*p* pa - cem, do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem, no - bis pa - cem





# An interview with student presenter Ryan Lee

Dimitri Wing-Paul

---

---

## How did you present at GREAT Day?

I presented on what makes an eighteenth-century violin special. There are so many violins out there—millions of violins ranging from a couple of hundred dollars to fifteen million dollars and everything in between. So, what makes eighteenth-century violins more special than the violin that was made yesterday? My presentation was basically distinguishing those two things. I got a violin generously loaned to me through Tarisio, which is an auction house based in New York City, and it is one of the most famous in the world. They loaned me a Nicolò Gagliano made in the late eighteenth-century. I used that violin to convey a message and the message was just because an eighteenth-century violin is old does not mean that it is the best. There are contemporary makers that make the violins that are excellent, if not even better than these eighteenth-century violins. So, the whole idea was to tell people why they were special, but at the same time that they are not the only ones that are treasured.

How did you feel when presenting the violin and what were the reactions from the people?

Well, the thing with that is I had more time with certain people. If a certain group of people were clearly more interested, I would spend more time delving into details. The problem with my presentation was that I couldn't give it in five minutes. I spent fifteen minutes talking about one thing, which would lead to another if I received questions. So, I had to go in depth in order to really say something that was worth saying. I could not even briefly discuss each point, otherwise the point that precedes [would] not make sense.

I love presenting when it comes to violins because I find it so fascinating. There are so many facets to fine hand-crafted violins [violas and cellos]! What got me going was an internship that I got at Tarisio for two summers, learning from luthiers that are instrument caretakers for Sally Thomas, Ann Setzer, Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, Giora Schmidt, Frank Hwang, and countless other world class musicians gave me an opportunity to learn from the best.

Why has the physical form of the violin remain the same over 400 years? Of course there are people out there that are trying to make the violin better by changing certain aspects such as the shape of the f-holes (sound holes). But for the most part, if you go to the RPO [Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra], you'll see that everybody has

something that looks similar. All of them have four strings that are strung up in the four pegs in the peg box. The reason why is because it worked. The shape of the F-holes worked. It provided the most power in terms of projection of sound. One part of the presentation had to do with comparing the F-holes of the violin and the sound hole of the guitar. So, why can't the guitar project more than an acoustic violin, and an acoustic violin versus a higher name? If I stood in this corner and started to play the guitar without amplification, people in Starbucks would not be able to hear me. If I did play the violin, they would be able to hear me simply because of the velocity—that is, the amount of air volume that is pushing out of the F-holes. If you take a look at the F-holes, they are used in corners, top and bottom, and it's like a white end and this is instrumentally projection because it acts like a wind tuck. For example, let us say it is a windy day in January in New York City, and there is a wind of fifty miles an hour. You do not feel the wind as much until you reach a corner and you feel you would be lifted away by the wind. That is the same concept in terms of projection. It won't project as much if it's at hold, you know because there is no velocity. Velocity that is not the right term. It is the ability to displace air. It is very complex.

[Violin-making] encompasses a lot of fields. It encompasses chemistry, mathematics, and even how trees grow. The determining factor is if you cut down a tree, it determines the wood and where the trees grow. Now, a lot of these violins, the wood that is chosen is primarily [more] evolved than in Balsam. It's just different for some reason. American maple and American spruce just are not superior to the spruce of maple that you would find in Europe. It is the process of making them is also very interesting to me. What does one person do when another person does not? Because everybody does things differently, every violin looks different. From afar, it might look the same except for the varnish, which gives the wood its vibrant color. If you look at two violins that were made by two different people without coating or varnish, it would look the same. It is really the varnish that deals with how it looks.

### **What do you think that the GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community?**

I think that GREAT Day is very important because it acknowledges what students have to offer. I think it is essential that students are able to learn more about what they love. I felt that GREAT Day was the perfect opportunity to organize my thoughts. I already did the research with many specialists in the field over the summer and they helped me. I did not do much in the fall. But in the spring, GREAT Day sort of crept on me and a professor actually told me that it was a great idea to organize everything that I know and present it. Because not a lot of people are interested, not a lot of people know the violin is such a complicated machine. People would just think that it just two pieces of wood with a neck and a head.

I think it is very interesting because physics, mathematics, chemistry, and history are involved in the making of the violin. It is fascinating because there is not one thing that makes a violin great. It is really multiple factors rather than just the quality of

the work, where is it from, what damage, and whatnot. Then, you go about color. How do you get to color slabs? There are two slabs; one you can make one piece and another two pieces back. The two pieces back... the back is made out of two smaller pieces of maple. It is hard to find good quality maple and it is from larger trees. So, in order to get good quality and to get a few small trees, you have to put these two pieces of maple together. You [have to clean the pieces] down to a walkable surface and you use smaller planes. After you trim out the excess, you cut the shape or form of the violin and do the top of whatever you have and finish that. I am giving you a very brief synopsis. Then you do the arching of the top and bottom. It is not just one flat piece of wood. It is carefully arched and you use mathematics and physics because it takes more than one spot and things like that. So, therefore it is more flexible. But then you run into the problem, "What do I thin out a lot and what do I not thin out too much?" Because, anything in one area that is too much then becomes too flexible. But then, a lot of makers do it on the top because it projects, and you get a louder violin. If you have a thicker plate, thicker back, and a thicker top, it is harder to activate those plates. You would just apply more weight, rather than speed in order to activate the strings. But, the strings' vibrations are just more difficult for its vibrations to enter the bridge, which then enters the top. Then, after you do the arching, finish [flattening down the woods], make the scroll, make the neck and clean the neck, you take a template and trace it out and pin holes so you know where to cut your angles. It is just such a complicated machine.

Over the summer I tried making a scroll. I went back to Tarisio, and they were planning to make violins but I just did not have the time. It was just so much work I had to do at the time. But, then after you finish the scroll you do the purfling, which is the decorative edge of the violin. Yes, it is decorative and more so serves the purpose so if you crack at the edge of the instrument, the crack would not go right through the instrument. The [purfling] of the violin, let's say that it cracks, is there to suck the pieces of wood. So, if there is a crack, [the purfling] stops [the crack] right there. That piece of wood protects the rest of the top. Then, you have the violin. Well, you do the pegs to cut the holes and push them and then you set up the varnish and the varnish is cooked resin. If we want a certain color and a certain hue, we want the resin [to be cooked] for a longer period of time. Cooking resin is usually, for months sometimes, very difficult and it's not easy. Let's see, you have the oil and resin to make the varnish. Some people use UV light in order to darken the wood over a short period of time because back then, they just laid it on the sun to just dry them out [and] to get it to a certain color. You have to make the ribs by making the top and back pieces together.

So, I do not want to go too far away from the subject. What makes old violins special? It is hard to say. It could be the age, it could be the varnish. Some people say these violins have time to be passed down through generations because it was played a long time. Yes, the more you play the violin the more valuable it is, but then you reach that plateau where it would sound its best and when you do not play it, it would not sound as good. Some violins just sound terrible. A lot of people play a lot of instruments simply because it is not as temperamental. There are so many problems

due to humidity, it is too cold, if the air is dry—that affects the sound. But, I have a twenty-first century violin that was made this year [2018], and it was made by one of the world's leading violin makers. Their violins are played by renowned artists. Why do people choose these violins? Simply because they are better. They do not react so much and all these other factors. I personally think that the violin is beautiful. I am temperamental when it comes to sounds. It has been much better. The violin is just fascinating because they are so many facets. There are a whole set of problems if you go to expertise because you have really to know who make it [and] you have to know how violins are because every maker makes a slightly different [version]. Not every violin is the same. People would say, “Oh, there is a label!” Yes, there is a label in the violin, but five percent of the time, maybe eight or nine percent of the time, is fake. A lot of people take authentic labels and they are serving them as fake commodities. So, if you know if the violin is authentic, you have to look at the scrolls and the age of the wood.

# An interview with student author Julia Cameron

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What did your involvement with GREAT Day mean to you?**

I think it is good practice to be able to talk about your research both with people in your field and people outside your field; with people outside of your field especially because it's really easy to get caught up in this belief that everyone is using the same language for methodology and everything that you are. So, it's helpful to be able to share your results with everyone instead of just kind of staying in your little corner. But then, it is really helpful to practice presenting to other colleagues and professionals in your field because I was able to go to a conference right after GREAT Day, so it was really nice to have that practice before going to a more professional psychology conference.

## **What do you think GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community as a whole?**

I think it adds so much. It is such a wonderful day. I really just love looking at the schedule, and seeing what everyone is doing, and wanting to go to every single event. Because everyone's doing something really awesome and it's really easy to not be aware of those things. So, I like that this day kind of puts that more out in the open, and is like, "Go to this cool music performance," or, "Go learn about the political sciences." There's a lot out there that we don't always get to see because we're so focused on our specific major, so it's really nice to be able to see what other people are working on and to support each other.

## **Your piece was about how fictional portrayals of therapy affect the way people see therapy. What inspired you to write that paper and conduct that research?**

I had been working in a media psychology lab with Dr. Kirsch on campus, so I had come from a background of wanting to do research that involved some sort of media variable. I was also generally interested in help-seeking behavior, which is essentially what encourages someone or discourages someone from seeking out mental health treatment and trying to figure out how to merge those, the media interest with the interest of what encourages someone or stops someone from going to therapy.

### **What were your goals in creating this work? Would you say it was looking at help-seeking behavior?**

Yes. Because, I don't remember the exact statistic off hand, but a lot of people that could benefit from mental health treatment don't get it. There are many numbers of different reasons, but really one of the main reasons is this cultural stigma, and media can perpetuate that stigma. So really just trying to better understand that relationship between potential media stigma and help-seeking behavior.

### **What do you think conducting this research taught you about your discipline?**

It definitely taught me that there aren't easy answers, because a lot of my data wasn't as conclusive as I was hoping, which was a little frustrating, but I think it is good to see that there's always more work to be done. One study with a hundred undergrads isn't going to solve the field or anything. So, it's helpful to continue research with that mindset, that this isn't the puzzle, but it's a very tiny piece of this much larger puzzle, and it's helpful to get any knowledge that you can.

### **Do you think that your GREAT Day presentation was in some way helpful in preparing you for the demands of life after graduation or in graduate school?**

Yeah, 100%. I'm in a Ph.D. program for clinical psychology right now, and I'm doing a lot of the same work. I am continuing research in help-seeking behavior and barriers to treatment seeking. So doing the project in undergrad and being able to talk about it at GREAT Day, and with my mentor, Dr. Kirsch, as I was doing the project, really helped me formulate my research ideas and begin thinking in a research scope. I think GREAT Day helped me to be able to talk about my research interests with potential grad schools at interviews. Being able to frame my interests in a way that wasn't so confined to one specific class in undergrad, but was broader.

### **In retrospect, do you think your GREAT Day project was an essential part of your experience at Geneseo?**

Definitely. Yeah. I did it as a capstone for the Edgar Fellows program, so it was something I had been thinking about through a lot of my undergrad career, and it did feel like a capstone. It was cool to take all my psychology knowledge, and the knowledge I had in the research lab, and just tie different Geneseo experiences together. It was a really helpful stepping stone to grad school.

### **How did you feel when you presented your work at GREAT Day?**

Horrified, but it was fun. I was a little nervous because I hadn't really done a presentation in front of multiple different professors before. At most, it was a presentation

to a professor and a lot of students. So, when I got up there and saw a bunch of different professors that I have had, I was like, “Oh, there’s a little bit of pressure here.” But then I was also really happy that they came out and were interested in the work I did, so it was also really validating. Despite some stage fright, I think it was a really cool experience. I felt good when it was done, and people were asking questions that showed they were really interested in what I had just talked about, it was cool to see that I was a part of that community.

# The Effects of Fictional Portrayals of Therapy on Attitudes about Seeking Mental Health Treatment

Julia Cameron

---

---

*sponsored by* Steven Kirsh

---

---

## ABSTRACT

Understanding barriers to adequate mental health treatment, such as stigma and negative attitudes about therapy, can allow professionals to work towards alleviating these factors. This study hypothesized that individuals with higher stigma would have more negative attitudes about mental health treatment, and that individuals exposed to positive fictional portrayals of therapy would have more positive attitudes than individuals exposed to negative portrayals. Correlations and regression analyses were used to analyze survey data from 96 young adults in western New York ( $M_{age} = 18.8, SD = 0.902$ ). This study found that stigma was negatively correlated with attitudes about mental health treatment. Additionally, individuals who watched positive portrayals of therapy reported being more interested in therapy than individuals who watched negative portrayals. These findings are consistent with previous research and may have important implications for promoting help-seeking behavior and decreasing the treatment gap in North America.

---

---

Understanding barriers that prevent individuals from receiving necessary mental health treatment can allow professionals to work on alleviating situational and personal factors that stand in the way of adequate care (VanDorn et al., 2006). A commonly reported barrier is stigma, or fear that seeking treatment will lead to being negatively evaluated by others (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007). Additionally, negative attitudes about the therapy process can deter an individual from seeking out mental health treatment (Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008). Recent research has found that television portrayals of therapy impact attitudes and stigma about mental health treatment, which then impacts intentions someone may have to seek therapy (Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008; Maier, Gentile, Vogel, & Kaplan, 2014). These previous studies have focused on collecting information on general past exposure to television that often portrays psychologists or psychotherapy, without examining the immediate impact of fictional portrayals of therapy on attitudes about seeking mental health treatment. This present study examines how exposure to fictional television portrayals of therapy impacts immediate attitudes and intentions about seeking mental health treatment.



There is a well-known, large gap between those who require treatment and those who actually receive it. There are approximately 44.7 million adults in the United States living with mental illness, and an estimated 45% of those Americans who might benefit from mental health care do not receive it (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014; NIH 2017). Additionally, when individuals do seek treatment, there is often a significant delay between the onset of symptoms and receiving professional care (Fikretoglu & Liu, 2015). Timely treatment can significantly minimize symptoms and associated impairment, so it is important to understand the barriers that prevent someone from seeking professional help (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007; Fikretoglu & Liu, 2015). While some barriers are more explicit and structural in nature, there are also perceived barriers that cause individuals to feel as though receiving treatment would not be the best option for them (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014). In fact, the perception that there are barriers to treatment increases for individuals who have clinically significant symptoms; Mohr and colleagues (2006) found that while half of non-depressed patients reported at least one barrier, almost 75% of depressed patients reported at least one barrier. This further legitimizes the need to examine perceived barriers, as well as factors that may influence them.

Various studies have documented stigma as a highly reported perceived barrier to seeking out mental health treatment (Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013; Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007). Stigma can be an umbrella term, encompassing concepts such as social and public stigma, which are defined as fear of judgement from others in a social network or from others in society as a whole, respectively (Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013). Vogel and colleagues explain that individuals who are in treatment are more likely to be labeled as awkward, dependent, and less in control of their emotions, among other negative descriptions (2007). Self-stigma occurs when individuals internalize these negative cultural messages (Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013). These concepts can become into beliefs that seeking treatment will cause an individual to be thought of negatively; concern about what others would think is then considered a treatment barrier (Lucksted & Drapalski, 2015; Mohr et al., 2006). Despite high levels of distress, individuals who could benefit from mental health treatment may choose to try and handle their problems on their own, in order to avoid negative cultural perceptions. Motivations for seeking out or avoiding treatment inform attitudes about mental health treatment, which in turn influence treatment seeking behaviors (Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013; Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008). Researchers have also found that higher levels of perceived social and self-stigma are associated with more negative attitudes towards seeking help (Jennings, et al., 2015; Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013). Higher self-stigma and more negative attitudes toward treatment-seeking predict a preference for self-reliance in times of need, thereby discouraging treatment-seeking behavior (Jennings et al., 2015). The association between stigma, attitudes, and likelihood of seeking help allow researchers to assess attitudes as a predictor of future behavior (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007).

Due to the importance of stigma and attitudes in affecting behavior, researchers have an interest in understanding how these beliefs and thought processes are formed.

Researchers have found that media portrayals of therapy have a significant influence on the public perceptions of mental health professionals (Stinger, 2016). Specifically, after being exposed to a movie portraying a psychologist, individuals who had a negative perception of the characters with mental illness reported higher stigma about seeking help for mental health issues, while those with favorable impressions of the movie character had decreased stigma (Stinger, 2016).

Previous research has also found a relationship between media history and stigma. Maier and colleagues (2014) gave participants a list of TV shows and movies including portrayals of therapists, and they asked individuals how often they had seen each show or movie. Individuals who viewed psychologists or a person with mental illness negatively reportedly held more self-stigma when they thought about seeking help themselves (Maier, Gentile, Vogel, & Kaplan, 2014). When considering television on its own, individuals exposed to a positive portrayal of therapy in the television show *In Treatment* reported more positive beliefs about seeking therapy—and a greater interest in doing so—than individuals exposed to negative portrayals of therapy in *In Treatment* (Robison, 2013). Individuals who viewed therapy as more positive also reported greater interest in recommending mental health treatment to others (Robison, 2013). This is important because social support and help-seeking behavior have been found to be positively related (VanDorn et al., 2006). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning immediate effects of various television portrayals of therapy on attitudes about seeking help.

Overall, previous research has found that stigma and attitudes about seeking help for mental illnesses influence help-seeking behavior. Additionally, media portrayals of psychologists and individuals with mental illness can have an impact on stigma, beliefs about therapy, and intentions to seek help. With this foundation, there is still room for further research examining the immediate effects of television that portray therapy in a positive, realistic light contrasted with negative portrayals. This present study examines how pre-existing stigma and the viewing of television portrayals of therapy impact attitudes about seeking mental health treatment. I hypothesize that individuals who report higher stigma will have more negative attitudes about help-seeking behavior. Additionally, I believe that individuals viewing negative portrayals of therapy will have more negative attitudes about seeking treatment than individuals viewing positive portrayals of therapy.

## METHOD

### Procedure and Participants

Participants for this study included 96 young adults from a mid-sized college in western New York. The average age of the participants was 18.8 (SD = 0.902), and there were 74 women (77%) and 22 men (23%); their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. Respondents selectively signed up for a study through SONA systems, where they were

granted extra credit as compensation for participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: viewing either positive or negative portrayals of therapy.

Participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form, filled out basic demographic information, treatment and media history, and the first four questionnaires.<sup>1</sup> Then, they were exposed to thirteen minutes of either positive or negative portrayals of fictional television therapy. Video clips from eight different fictional television shows were used for this study. Each clip portrays a therapist and a patient speaking together. We used past research, news articles discussing psychologists' views of each television show, and psychological ethical guidelines to help determine which clips were considered positive portrayals of therapy, and which were considered negative (Maier, Gentile, Vogel & Kaplan, 2014; Robison, 2013; Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008).

After watching the clips, participants answered some questions about the portrayals of therapy and filled out four more questionnaires. Participants then returned their questionnaire packets to the experimenter, where they were offered a resource sheet listing mental health resources available through their college. Participants were then given extra credit for their time.

## MEASURES

### Treatment history

Participants were asked to indicate if they had ever seen a mental health provider for any reason. If they had, they indicated when they saw the professional (*lifetime, past two years, last year, currently*), how helpful they found the experience (*very unhelpful, somewhat unhelpful, somewhat helpful, very helpful*), and how likely they would be to recommend psychological services to someone else (*very unlikely, somewhat unlikely, somewhat likely, very likely*). Additionally, participants indicated if they had friends or family members who had seen a mental health provider (Robison, 2013).

### Media history

For each of the eight television clips included in the study, participants indicated how much of the show they had watched (*never seen it, one episode, multiple episodes, one season, more than one season*) and estimated how many episodes they had seen. Participants were also given space to list any other shows involving a mental health specialist that they have watched.

### Self-stigma of seeking help

Stigma from an internal perspective regarding seeking psychological help from a therapist was assessed using a scale created by Vogel and colleagues (2006). They used ten statements to examine the feelings of comfort or concern individuals may have with

<sup>1</sup> These questionnaires are available in the online publication of *Proceedings of GREAT Day*.

regards to seeking mental health treatment. An example statement is, “I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist for psychological help,” with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Statements that expressed positive attributes of therapy, such as, “My self-esteem would increase if I talked to a therapist,” were reverse scored, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Responses were averaged together, with higher scores indicated higher levels of stigma. The results demonstrated relatively high internal consistency.

### **Stigma scale for receiving psychological help (SSRPH)**

The SSRPH was used to measure perceived societal stigma about receiving psychological help (Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000). Five statements were used to examine how participants thought someone seeing a psychologist would be evaluated by others. An example statement is, “People will see a person in a less favorable way if they come to know that he/she has seen a psychologist,” with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating a greater perception of stigma associated with receiving treatment ( $\alpha = 0.705$ ).

### **Perceptions of stigmatization by others for seeking help (PoS)**

This scale asked participants to consider how people they interact with would treat them if they sought mental health services (Vogel, Wade, & Aschman, 2009). Participants read twenty-one statements and decided to what degree they believed the statement would be accurate. An example statement is, “To what degree do you believe that the people you interact with would think of you in a less favorable way?” Choices ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stigma from those the person interacts with ( $\alpha = 0.951$ ).

### **Perceived stigma and barriers to care for psychological problems**

In order to understand concerns that may impact an individual’s decision to seek treatment, participants responded to eleven items either agreeing or disagreeing that it would affect their decision (Hoge et al., 2004). An example item is, “It would be too embarrassing,” as a barrier for treatment, and participants chose a number from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating more perceived barriers to seeking treatment for a psychological problem ( $\alpha = 0.818$ ).

### **Media reactions**

After watching the video clips, participants were asked to consider the clips as a whole. They were given seven statements to respond to, questioning how accurate and posi-

tive they would rate both the overall portrayal of therapy, and the overall portrayal of therapists. The three remaining statements questioned the likelihood that the participant would recommend therapy to a family or friend, the likelihood that they believed a viewer would seek out therapy, and the degree to which they were interested in therapy themselves, if they were going through a rough time. Questions were adapted from Robison's 2013 study, and each question was considered separately.

### **General help seeking questionnaire (GHSQ)**

Participants were given two questionnaires to assess the likelihood that they would seek help from various sources (Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi, & Rickwood, 2005). The first General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) asked participants to consider who they would seek help from if they were experiencing a personal or emotional problem. Example sources of help include an intimate partner and a mental health professional. Each source was rated on a scale from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 7 (*extremely likely*). Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating a higher likelihood of seeking help for an emotional or personal problem ( $\alpha = 0.591$ ).

A second GHSQ was used to assess the likelihood that a participant would seek help from various sources if they were experiencing suicidal thoughts (Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi, & Rickwood, 2005). The sources of help and rating scale were the same as the options for the first GHSQ. Scores from the second GHSQ were considered separately from the first GHSQ. Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating a higher likelihood of seeking help for suicidal thoughts ( $\alpha = 0.707$ ).

### **Attitudes toward seeking professional help**

Participants were assessed on their attitudes about seeking professional mental health help. They were asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with ten statements (as explained by Pheko, Chilisia, Balogun, & Kgathi, 2013). An example statement is, "If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first inclination would be to get professional attention," rated on a scale of 1 (*disagree*) to 4 (*agree*). Statements that expressed negative attitudes about professional help, such as, "The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts," were reverse scored, with lower scores expressing agreement. The ten responses were summed, with higher scores overall indicating more positive attitudes toward seeking professional help ( $\alpha = 0.771$ ).

### **Intentions to seek counseling inventory**

Participants responded to seventeen statements expressing the likelihood that they would seek counseling for each of the given concerns, on a scale of 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*) (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998). Example concerns include "depression" and "inferiority feelings." Scores were summed, with higher scores indicated greater willingness to seek out counseling services ( $\alpha = 0.863$ ).

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlational data for variables pertaining to stigma, attitudes, and intentions are presented in Table 1. Self-stigma and public stigma were significantly correlated with attitudes for help, regardless of condition. Additionally, the correlation between perceived societal stigma and attitudes for help trended towards significance. Gender and condition were not found to be significantly correlated with stigma, attitudes, or intentions variables.

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Self Stigma	-									
2. SSRPH	0.426**	-								
3. PoS	0.523**	0.592**	-							
4. Stigma Barriers	0.455**	0.451**	0.568**	-						
5. GHSQ 1	-0.038	0.103	-0.037	-0.019	-					
6. GHSQ 2	-0.105	0.064	-0.091	-0.128	0.526**	-				
7. Attitudes	-0.387**	-0.186	-0.270**	-0.309**	0.244*	0.117	-			
8. Intentions	0.018	0.038	0.065	0.027	0.177	-0.013	0.389**	-		
9. Sex	-2.346	-1.422	-2.010	-0.676	0.081	-1.012	2.236	0.463	-	
10. Condition	0.549	1.378	0.527	0.786	-2.283	-1.805	0.678	-0.450	-1.7	-
Mean	6.29	23.80	46.40	26.59	37.44	38.51	19.06	40.11	1.22	1.53
SD	23.8	6.29	15.96	8.18	7.48	9.38	4.78	9.16	0.42	0.50
Range	11, 30	0, 11	21, 82	11, 48	16, 57	17, 70	7, 30	17, 65	1, 2	1, 2

Note: \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001

### Inferential Statistics

A series of regression analyses were performed to analyze the relationship between condition and media reactions. Consistent with the hypothesis, there were significant differences in media reactions between the positive and negative conditions. The regression analysis indicated that positive portrayals of therapy were rated significantly higher and more realistic than negative portrayals of therapy ( $B = -0.807$ ,  $t = 0.162$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ;  $B = -1.105$ ,  $t = 0.202$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Additionally, analysis found that therapists in the positive condition were rated as significantly higher and realistic than therapists in the negative condition ( $B = -0.728$ ,  $t = 0.172$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ;  $B = -1.081$ ,  $t = 0.196$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

The regression analyses also found that individuals who viewed positive portrayals of therapy had significantly more positive feelings towards therapy after watching the clips. Compared to the negative condition, individuals in the positive condition reported that a general viewer would be significantly more likely to seek therapy after watching the clips ( $B = -0.720$ ,  $t = 0.186$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Individuals also had more positive feelings towards therapy themselves after watching the positive clips, indicating significantly more interest in therapy for themselves, should the need arise, than those who watched the negative condition ( $B = -0.952$ ,  $t = 0.212$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Lastly, individuals in the positive condition reported being significantly more likely to recommend therapy to a friend or family member in need ( $B = -1.163$ ,  $t = 0.212$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However, there were no significant differences between the conditions in regards to help-seeking behavior, attitudes, and intentions.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examines how pre-existing stigma and exposure to portrayals of fictional therapy impact the views that individuals have about therapy and help-seeking behavior. I hypothesized that individuals with higher stigma would have more negative attitudes about therapy, and that individuals who viewed positive portrayals of therapy would have more positive attitudes than individuals viewing negative portrayals of therapy. These hypotheses were partially supported by the data.

I found that both self-stigma and the perceived stigma from individuals someone interacts with were negatively correlated with attitudes about treatment, which is consistent with previous research (Owen, LeKeldric & Rodolfa, 2013). Interestingly, condition had no impact on this relationship, as stigma was not related to interest in therapy or likelihood of recommending it. It is possible that the media portrayals used in this study were not strong enough to overcome pre-existing stigma, considering that media portrayals have been found to impact stigma in previous research (Maier, Gentile, Vogel, & Kaplan, 2014; Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008).

Existing research has demonstrated that individuals exposed to positive portrayals of therapy in a single television show had more positive beliefs about therapy and more interest in seeking it (Robison, 2013). The present study extends those findings to apply to a range of television portrayals of therapy, showing that individuals exposed to positive portrayals of therapy were more likely to rate both the therapist and the therapy as a whole as more realistic and more positive than those viewing negative portrayals. Additionally, we found that condition significantly impacted an individual's interest in therapy where individuals viewing more positive portrayals were more interested in therapy for themselves and more likely to recommend it to someone else. However, contrary to previous research examining past exposure to television shows, condition did not significantly impact attitudes about treatment or intentions to seek help (Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008). So, while the positive portrayals piqued an individual's interest in therapy, the clips did not influence the likelihood someone would seek out treatment themselves. This could potentially be due to the fact that

participants were only exposed to about thirteen minutes of video. This short amount of time was enough to immediately influence feelings about therapy without impacting measures of future behavior. It is interesting to consider how impactful even a short amount of exposure to media portrayals can be, and future research should examine how longer exposure to similar portrayals of therapy impact attitudes.

While this study assisted in gaining knowledge about the impact of exposure to media portrayals of therapy, the findings must be considered in light of some limitations. There was a small, mostly homogeneous sample size that made it difficult to assess if there were any effects due to sex or race, and also provided limited power for statistical analyses. Additionally, the limited exposure participants had to media portrayals made it difficult to determine how ongoing effects of media exposure influence an individual's attitudes and behaviors. Future research could focus on finding media that affects stigma, interest, and intentions to better understand how these different factors are related and influenced. It could also be beneficial for future research to implement a follow-up study to examine future participant help-seeking behavior, rather than determining this through hypothetical survey questions.

Overall, the present study works to expand the literature on immediate exposure to portrayals of therapy in the media, giving strength to the findings that media can impact how an individual feels about real life situations (Robison, 2013; Stinger, 2016). Positive portrayals of fictional therapists and therapy can lead to more interest in therapy and greater likelihood of recommending therapy, which may help to reduce the overwhelming treatment gap noted in the United States (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014). Understanding how even a brief exposure to ethical portrayals of therapy can positively impact an individual has great implications for encouraging help-seeking behavior and more positive conversations about mental health treatment amongst family and friends.

## REFERENCES

- Cepeda-Benito, A., & Short, P. (1998). Self-concealment, avoidance of psychological services, and perceived likelihood of seeking professional help. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 45*(1), 58-64. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.45.1.58
- Corrigan, P. W., Druss, B. G., & Perlick, D. A. (2014). The impact of mental illness stigma on seeking and participating in mental health care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 15*(2), 37-70. doi: 10.1177/1529100614531398
- Fikretoglu, D. & Liu, A. (2015). Perceived barriers to mental health treatment among individuals with a past-year disorder onset: Findings from a Canadian Population Health Survey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 50*(5), 739-746. doi: 10.1007/s00127-014-0975-0
- Hoge, C. W., Castro, C. A., Messer, S. C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I. & Koffman, R. L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *New England Journal of Medicine, 35*(1), 13-22. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa040603



- Jennings, K., Cheung, J., Britt, T. W., Goguen, K. N., Jeffers, S. M., Peasley, A. L. & Lee, A. C. (2015). How are perceived stigma, self-stigma, and self-reliance related to treatment seeking? A three-path model. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 38(2), 109-116. doi: 10.1037/prj0000138
- Komiya, N., Good, G. E. & Sherrod, N. B. (2000). Emotional openness as a predictor of college students' attitudes toward seeking psychological help. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), 138-143. doi: 10.1037/AJ022-0167,47.1.138
- Luckstead, A. & Drapalski, A. L. (2015). Self-stigma regarding mental illness: Definition, impact, and relationship to societal stigma. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 38(2), 99-102. doi: 10.1037/prj0000152
- Maier, J. A., Gentile, D. A., Vogel, D. L., & Kaplan, S. A. (2014). Media influences on self-stigma of seeking psychological services: The importance of media portrayals and person perception. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 239-256. doi: 10.1037/a0034504
- Mohr, D. C., Hart, S. L., Howard, I., Julian, L., Vella, L., Catledge, C. & Feldman, M. D. (2006). Barriers to psychotherapy among depressed and nondepressed primary care patients. *The Society of Behavioral Medicine* 32(3), 254-258. doi: 10.1207/s15324796abm3203\_12
- National Institute of Mental Health. (2017, November). Mental Illness. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>
- Owen, J., LeKeldric, T. & Rodolfa, E. (2013). Stigma for seeking therapy: Self-stigma, social stigma, and therapeutic process. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 41(6), 857-880. doi: 10.1177/0011000012459365
- Pheko, M. M., Chilisa, R., Balogun, S. K. & Kgathi, C. (2013). Predicting intentions to seek psychological help among Botswana university students: The role of stigma and help-seeking attitudes. *Sage Open*, 1-11. doi: 10.1177/2158244013494655
- Robison, T. (2013). The impact of fictional television portrayals of psychotherapy on viewer's expectations of therapy, attitudes towards seeking treatment, and induction of dramatic narrative. *Dissertation*, 1-97. Retrieved from [https://etd.ohiolink.edu!etd.send\\_file?accession=ohiou1375780084&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu!etd.send_file?accession=ohiou1375780084&disposition=inline)
- Stringer, H. (2016). Therapy on camera: Portrayals of mental health professionals in movies and television are improving—but some still fall short. *American Psychological Association*, 47(11), 44. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/12/therapy-camera.aspx>
- VanDorn, R. A., Elbogen, E. B., Redlich, A. D., Swanson, J. W., Swartz, M. S., & Mustillo, S. (2006). The relationship between mandated community treatment and perceived barriers to care in persons with severe mental illness. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 29, 495-506. doi: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2006.08.002
- Vogel, D. L., Gentile, D. A. & Kaplan, S. A. (2008). The influence of television on willingness to seek therapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 64(3), 276-295. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20446
- Vogel, D. L., Wade, N. G. & Ascheman, P. (2009). Measuring perceptions of stigmatization by others for seeking psychological help: Reliability and validity of a new stigma scale with college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(2), 301-308. doi: 10.1037/a0014903
- Vogel, D. L., Wade, N. G., & Haake, S. (2006). Measuring the self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53, 325-337. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.53.3.325

- Vogel, D., Wester, S., & Larson, L. (2007). Avoidance of counseling: psychological factors that inhibit seeking help. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 85*(4), 410-422. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00609.x
- Wilson, C. J., Deane, F. P. & Ciarrochi, J. (2005). Measuring help-seeking intentions: Properties of the general help-seeking questionnaire. *Canadian Journal of Counseling, 39*(1), 15-28. Retrieved from <http://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/cjc/index.php/rcc/article/view/265>

# An interview with student author Claire Edgington

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What did your involvement with GREAT Day mean to you?**

To me it was a way of representing my research lab and just showing the work that we do that no one sees and the research that's pretty much in the background. To be able to show that off is cool, and it feels grown up, it's like, "Oh this is a real thing."

## **What do you think GREAT Day adds to the Geneseo community?**

I think it's a way to show off your work, and it's our way of getting together and being able to explore the other departments that I wouldn't normally even think about.

## **What inspired you to conduct the research you did?**

We collaborated as a group on the research project. We focused on bystander response which is kind of cool because when you think about it all of us our bystanders, and to really analyze that data is important. While conducting the research you think, "Well, what would I do?" I didn't come up with the idea for it, but it was really cool to be involved.

## **What were your goals when you set out in doing this research?**

This specific project was to bring to light that there is not a lot of research about bystander response, actually a lot of it is done by Dr. Katz, and so it was interesting for us to see the difference between sexual assault and physical assault because they're so different. One is recognized a lot more and the other is more ambiguous, but it's still important to address it.

## **What did conducting your research teach you about your discipline?**

Being part of research is cool because psychology is so broad. Research is one path that you can do. I won't be going into research, but it shows all the parts from beginning to end, from coming up with the paper and editing and editing and editing, taking the surveys, putting in the data, coding the data. To see each part of it is important in understanding it because it's a big part of psychology.

### **Are you currently writing or researching topics relating to what you wrote about in that paper?**

I am on a project right now where we're looking at female bystander response to women of different race with the implication of sexual assault.

### **Are you planning to continue to present for the next GREAT Day?**

Yeah, I will be. I was going to step down because I've been doing it since my sophomore year, but I have to do it for my Women and Gender Studies minor. It's not a bad thing. GREAT Day is fun, and it's interesting to do, so it'll be cool to kind of show off one of our projects.

### **How did you feel when you presented your work at GREAT Day?**

My sophomore year when I presented, I had just joined the lab and it wasn't my project, so this past year when I presented and I had been a part of every aspect of it, it was a better experience because you know exactly what you're talking about. It's really cool when you have people who want to come up who are just genuinely interested. You get a lot of people looking for the extra credit, but when people actually ask questions and are interested it is validating to the work you've done.

# An interview with faculty advisor Jennifer Katz

Nicole Callahan

---

---

## **What does undergraduate research mean to you?**

Well it means a lot. When I was an undergraduate, I got involved in research and it changed my life. So, to me, it feels like an opportunity to change somebody's life in that same way. I thought it was amazing to move from a consumer of information to a producer of information. I was enthralled, and it made me decide to go into an academic career. I don't feel like everybody who works with me has to go into an academic career, but I want them to know about the magic of research and have the option and the skills to do it. Also, in terms of what it means to me now, it means a chance to work closely with really wonderful students, to learn from them and teach them all at the same time. So, it's one of the very best parts of my job.

## **What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?**

I do see it impact Geneseo culture, the fact that undergraduate research is a priority for the whole campus is amazing. The way I got involved in undergraduate research was that it was a specific course offering, of a specific type, that I was required to have. So, I did choose it but I didn't really know what I was choosing. I just knew it fit with my schedule. Students at Geneseo, even from the beginning hear about research, know about research, and it's just a part of the academic experience not just to be a consumer but a producer. I'm envious of students at this wonderful school that get to be a part of that culture. I got to be a part of undergraduate research but it was lucky, here it's not a question of luck.

## **What characteristics of the students' presentation made you recommend their research?**

I think it was really exciting, because we did the whole thing. We came up with an idea, a way to test the idea, we collected the data, we analyzed the data, and then we could answer our question. We did the whole thing and it took a long time, it took several semesters, and we were excited to share our findings, and I was like "This is another chance to share it again!" Let's do that.

## **Describe your mentorship role in the project**

I think that I can be a little controlling, and I can lack creativity. I think that makes me a good faculty mentor because I need student input for creativity and then I provide the structure, possibly too much structure, but they're good at telling me how things are. So, my basic tendencies are to be controlling and structured, but that varies based on need. In this instance we're talking about fully capable, autonomous students who were highly ethical. If they said they were going to do something, it got done. So, all the way through we shared the work, the grunt work and the high-level work, and I am very grateful to have wonderful students like Claire and Tess. There are so many students like that at Geneseo. Every semester I wish I had Hermione's time turner, I wish I had more time. There's not enough time and space for how many wonderful students there are, and Claire and Tess are some of the best.

# Bystander Responses to Women's Sexual or Physical Assault: Moderating Effects of Personal Victimization History

Claire Edgington

Jennifer Katz

Tess Ramos-Dries

---

---

*sponsored by* Jennifer Katz

---

---

## ABSTRACT

Bystanders are more likely to respond to clearly dangerous situations. Based on the concept of altruism born of suffering, those who have experienced victimization also respond and view situations differently. The first hypothesis was that bystanders would have an increased intent to intervene in a physical assault over a sexual assault. The second hypothesis was that bystanders with past victimization would report higher intent to intervene regardless the type of assault. Undergraduate women of a northeastern U.S. college (N=240) were assigned to read either a sexual assault or physical assault hypothetical situation and then self-reported their responses to the situation and past experiences of victimization. Results showed support for both hypotheses about intent to intervene. Overall, women were more likely to intervene in response to physical assault over a sexual assault. However, for women of past victimization, intent to intervene was higher in the sexual assault condition. Findings also supported the concept that bystanders view physical violence as more dangerous than sexual assault, and they provided evidence for altruism born of suffering.

---

---

Violence against women encompasses a range of intrusive and harmful behaviors including catcalling, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and physical assault (Vera-Gray, 2017). In general, the effects of sexual assault victimization tend to be seen as less severe than the effects of physical assault. Compared to physical assault,

sexual assault may seem less dangerous or harmful, and more ambiguous because observers often focus on whether the target “invited” or “wanted” it. Because bystanders are less likely to respond to situations that do not clearly involve physical danger, they may be less likely to intervene to help a target of sexual rather than physical assault (Chabot, Tracy, Manning, & Poisson, 2009; Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek, & Frey, 2006).

Despite this general trend, there may be individual differences in responses to assault based on one’s own personal history of victimization. Some research done on college students suggests that bystanders with a personal history of intimate physical or sexual victimization may be more likely to intervene as bystanders (Woods, Shorey, Strauss, Cornelius, & Rowland, 2016). In studies of altruism born of suffering (ABS), people who have faced personal hardships showed greater compassion and willingness to help others who also experience hardship (Vollhardt, 2009). Lim and DeSteno (2016) found that level of past suffering from a variety of adverse events led to empathic concern, compassion, and prosocial behavior in the form of charitable donations (Study 1) as well as time spent helping another (Study 2). In addition to promoting concern for others, hardship may increase danger perceived by bystanders. Blum, Silver, and Poulin (2014) found that past experiences of violence based on human intent were associated with elevated perceived risk for a variety of hazards. Overall, personal experiences of interpersonal violence may affect beliefs about the world that foster prosocial bystander intervention.

## HYPOTHESES

We hypothesize that bystanders will report greater intent to intervene to help a victim of apparent physical assault than sexual assault (Hypothesis 1a). We also believe that respondents will perceive physical assault as more severe than sexual assault (Hypothesis 1b).

Bystanders with personal histories of either physical or sexual assault victimization will report greater intent to intervene (Hypothesis 2a), and they will perceive the assault as more severe (Hypothesis 2b), regardless of the type of victimization observed.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate women ( $N = 240$ , mean age 18.7, 87% white) were randomly assigned to read a hypothetical incident involving either physical or sexual assault. Afterward, they completed self-report measures of their responses to the incident and about their own past experiences of victimization.

### Manipulation

*Sexual Assault Situation.* “It is a Saturday afternoon. You’re at the mall waiting for a friend. You sit at a table in the nearly empty food court when you notice a young couple about your age (Steve and Sarah) arguing nearby. You can’t see or hear everything, but



you see the guy (Steve) try to grab his girlfriend's (Sarah) butt and call her 'a whore.' You see Sarah brush his hand away and turn around, as if to leave. In response, Steve continues to grab at Sarah's butt and then starts to kiss Sarah's neck. Sarah winces, notices you, and the two of you make eye contact."

*Physical Assault Situation:* "It is a Saturday afternoon. You're at the mall waiting for a friend. You sit at a table in the nearly empty food court when you notice a young couple about your age (Steve and Sarah) arguing nearby. You can't see or hear everything, but you hear the guy (Steve) yell and call the girl (Sarah) 'a whore.' You see Sarah pick up her tray and turn around, as if about to leave. In response, Steve grabs her arm to pull her back and then raises his hand as if he's about to slap Sarah. Sarah winces, notices you, and the two of you make eye contact."

## Measures

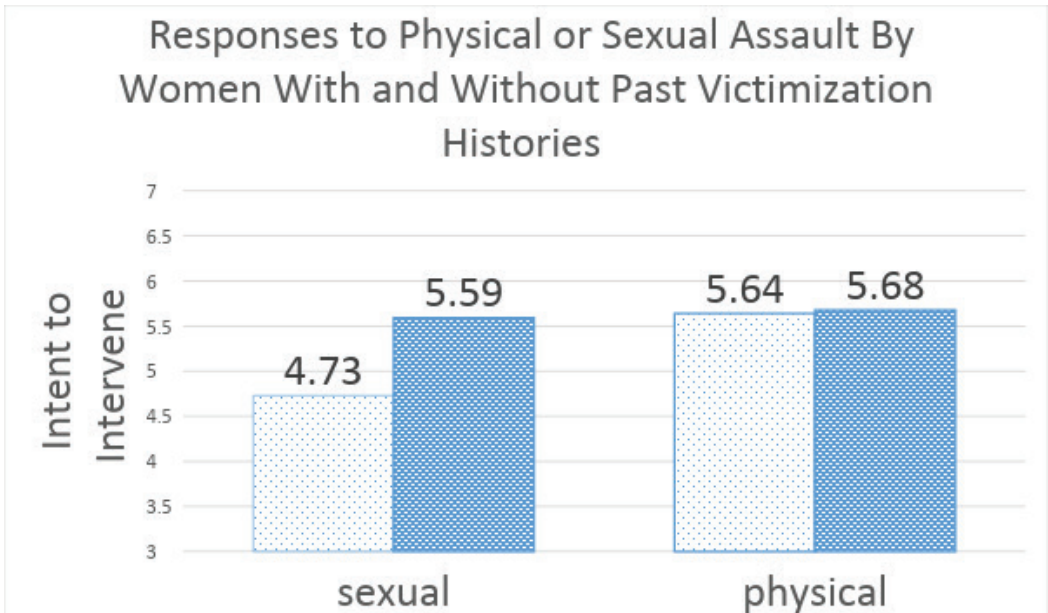
Intent to intervene was assessed with three items from Katz and Nguyen (2016): *Try to talk to the girl*, *Ask the girl if she is okay*, and *Offer to walk the girl away from the situation*. Responses range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and were averaged so higher scores reflect greater direct intervention ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

Perceived severity was assessed with three items from Levine, Cassidy, Brazier, and Reicher regarding how *serious*, *violent*, and *dangerous* the situation was for the target of the assault (2002). Responses range from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) and were averaged; higher scores reflect greater perceived severity ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

Personal victimization by an intimate partner was assessed with the twelve-item physical assault subscale from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) and the seven-item Sexual Experiences Scale (Koss et al. 2007). Any endorsement of either type of assault during one's lifetime was coded as reflecting past personal victimization.

## RESULTS

The study hypotheses were tested with 2 (type of assault; sexual or physical) x 2 (personal victimization; present or absent) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with intent to intervene and perceived severity as the DVs. This research partially supported Hypothesis 1a. There was a significant main effect of type of assault on intent to intervene,  $F(1, 235) = 5.42, p < 0.05$ . Intent to intervene was greater for those assigned to the physical assault situation ( $M = 5.67, SD = 1.51$ ) than those assigned to the sexual assault situation ( $M = 5.31, SD = 1.67$ ). There was also a trend for an interaction effect,  $F(1, 235) = 3.70, p = 0.05$ . As shown in Figure 1, and consistent with Hypothesis 1b, post hoc comparisons with a Bonferroni correction showed that women in the sexual assault situation with no personal history of victimization reported significantly less intent to intervene than those with a history of victimization.

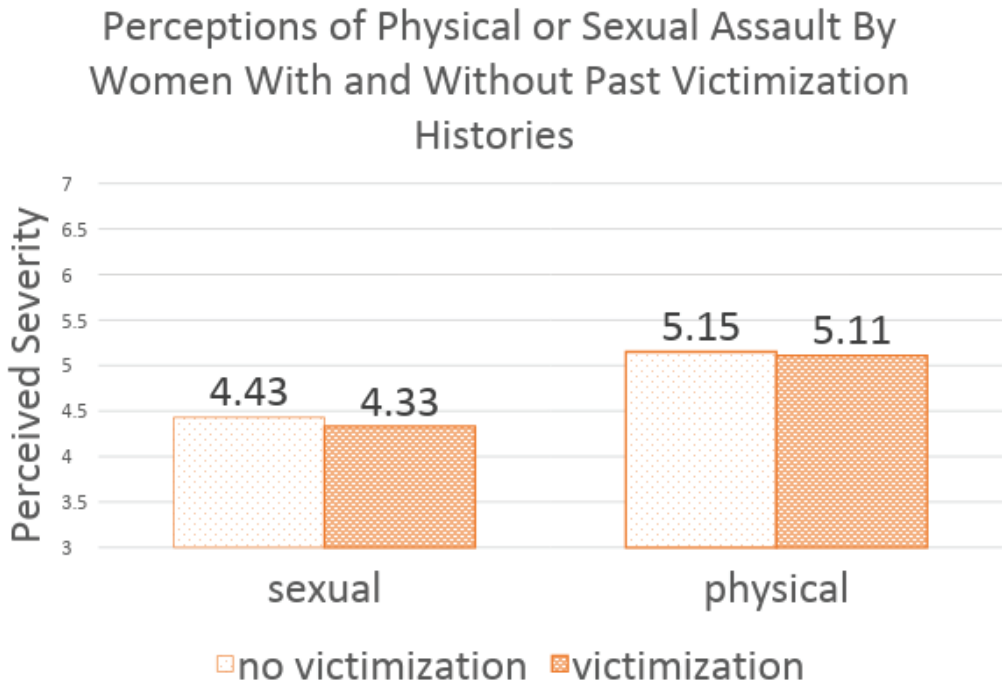


*Figure 1 shows the mean intent to intervene of participants in the physical condition alongside with the mean of participants who had previously experienced victimization. The figures for the sexual condition also display the mean of participants who had and had not experienced victimization.*

Hypothesis 2a was also supported. There was a significant main effect of type of assault on perceived severity,  $F(1, 235) = 24.78, p < 0.001$ . The physical assault condition was perceived as more severe ( $M = 5.11, SD = 1.12$ ) than the sexual assault situation ( $M = 4.36, SD = 1.02$ ). Unexpectedly, there was no type of assault by personal victimization interaction,  $F < 1, ns$ . Because perceived severity of sexual assault did not differ as a function of women's own victimization (see Figure 2), this study did not support Hypothesis 2b.

## Discussion

Overall, women bystanders were more likely to intervene in a physical assault than sexual assault situations. In addition, bystanders perceived physical assault situations as more dangerous and severe than sexual assault situations. These findings add to the existing literature suggesting that intervention is more likely to occur in less ambiguous or more dangerous situations (Fischer et al., 2011). Similarly, in vignettes depicting the conflict between a woman and man who are presumably dating, bystanders were more likely to respond to physical aggression than they were to verbal aggression (Chabot et al., 2009). The current findings extend this pattern of response to a different type of partner conflict, showing that bystanders are more likely to respond to physical assault than sexual assault.



*Figure 2 displays the mean of perceived severity of the scenario in which participants were asked to respond to in either the sexual or physical condition. Shaded regions distinguish levels of perceived severity amongst participants who had previously experienced victimization.*

Mixed support was found for hypotheses based on the ABS literature. Among women assigned to the sexual assault condition, women with a personal victimization history were more likely to intervene than those without a victimization history. This result matches with past studies showing that people who have faced hardship show a greater willingness to help others who also experience hardship (Vollhardt, 2009). It also extends past studies showing that women with past histories of victimization more frequently engage in bystander behavior (Woods et al., 2016). However, in the sexual assault condition, personal victimization history was not related to perceiving the situation as more severe. This was contrary to expectations based on past research showing that a personal history of violence increases perceptions of risk (Blum et al., 2014). It is possible that views about risk for oneself are different from views of risk for others. Based on Lim and DeSteno (2016), women with personal victimization histories may feel more empathy towards targets of any type of partner assault, and this may explain the greater willingness to intervene in the sexual assault condition. Future research should examine other bystander attributes that predict intent to intervene and help victims of different types of assault.

## REFERENCES

- Blum, S. C., Silver, R. C., & Poulin, M. J. (2014). Perceiving risk in a dangerous world: Associations between life experiences and risk perceptions. *Social Cognition, 32*, 297-314. doi: 10.1521/soco.2014.32.2.297
- Chabot, H. F., Tracy, T., Manning, C., & Poisson, C. (2009). Sex, attribution and severity influence intervention decisions of informal helpers in domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*, 1696-1713. doi: 10.1177/0886260509331514
- Fischer, P., Greitemeyer, T., Pollozek, F., & Frey, D. (2006). The unresponsive bystander: Are bystanders more responsive in dangerous emergencies? *European Journal of Social Psychology, 36*, 267-278. doi:10.1002/ejsp.297
- Katz, J., & Nguyen, L. J. (2016). Bystander responses to risk for rape perpetrated by a friend, acquaintance, or stranger. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma, 25*, 652-667. doi: 10.1080/10926771.2016.1185755
- Koss, M. P., Abbey, A., Campbell, R., Cook, S., et al. (2007). Revising the SES: A collaborative process to improve assessment of sexual aggression and victimization. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 31*(4), 357-370. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00385.x
- Levine, M., Cassidy, C., Brazier, G., & Reicher, S. (2002). Self-categorization and bystander non-intervention: Two experimental studies. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 32*(7), 1452-1463. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb01446.x
- Lim, D., & DeSteno, D. (2016). Suffering and compassion: The links among adverse life experiences, empathy, compassion, and prosocial behavior. *Emotion, 16*(2), 175-182. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/emo0000144
- Straus, M.A., Hamby, S.L., Boney-McCoy, S., & Sugarman, D.B. (1996). The revised conflict tactics scales (CTS2): Development and preliminary psychometric data. *Journal of Family Issues, 17*, 283-316.
- Vera-Gray, F. (2016). Men's stranger intrusions: Rethinking street harassment. *Women's Studies International Forum, 58*, 9-17. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.04.001
- Vollhardt, J. R. (2009). Altruism born of suffering and prosocial behavior following adverse life events: A review and conceptualization. *Social Justice Research, 22*, 53-97. doi: 10.1007/s11211-009-0088-1
- Woods, W. C., Shorey, R. C., Strauss, C. B., Corenlius, T. L., & Rowland, T. (2016). The relationship between dating violence and bystander behavior: An initial investigation. *Partner Abuse, 7*, 55- 69 doi: 10.1891/1946-6560.7.1.55