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## PURE Insights Volume 8 Full Issue

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# puzzle

## insights

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## ***PURE Insights* Volume 8 Editor's Note**

**Dr. Paula Baldwin, Western Oregon University**

With each new volume comes change and challenges. Volume 8 is no exception. However, perhaps the trick is to view each of those changes and challenges as mere happenings, neither good nor bad. We do not always feel it in the moment, but oftentimes, those very circumstances can be the impetus for some pretty impressive change. As a publication based in a higher education institution, we remain sensitive to the changes occurring, not just within our campus, but without, across our state, and our nation as we strive to maintain our "great experiment," as George Washington named it in 1790.

One thing is certain, you, our WOUvians, remain the brightest hope for our future and this volume confirms that for me, and hopefully, for you. We continue to grow the diversity and inclusion scope of *PURE Insights* by including the outstanding undergraduate graduation speeches by Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas, and BilleAnn Stempel. Mr. Casas' speech transcript is published within this volume in both English and Spanish as delivered at graduation 2019. We continue to embrace our digital medium by having embedded links in each speech transcript so that you might listen to their inspiring words at any time. Once again, we have the privilege of publishing the top three poets from the Peter Sears Poetry competition, and Volume 8 has two outstanding Spanish articles for your reading pleasure.

These authors are your contemporaries and for many of you, they carry your voice. Everyone is not a great writer; some people have the gift for turning what we often feel, but cannot articulate, into the written word. I am grateful for those people because in my lifetime, they have many times given me the voice I did not know I needed. Read their work, their research, and their stories, and rest well knowing that you are heard. And if for some reason, you do not hear your voice, or your story, then take up the challenge and *write your story*; I look forward to seeing it in Volume 9. But for now, to the authors of Volume 8, I salute you. Well done, WOUvians. Well done.

Sadly, it is not possible to be Chair of Humanities and sustain the needed workload of Managing Editor, so it is necessary that I step down from my role with *PURE Insights*. I will treasure every moment of my time that I have spent with your voices and your stories, and I look forward to seeing what else you bring to the next volume. With that, I hand the reins of *PURE Insights* over to the very capable and expert direction of Maren Anderson.

Dr. Paula K. Baldwin, Managing Editor, *PURE Insights*

## ***PURE Insights* Volume 8 Cover Image**

**Cory Timmons**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Jennifer Bracy**

*Keywords:* photography



The photo is a representation of the connection between minds. Taken with a single exposure lit by several colored lights, the translucent images show the mystery and energy of the workings of the brain. The work shows the way in which knowledge is social, and how sharing wisdom leads to new opportunities undiscovered. Analogous to research, the overlapping of minds creates interplays of warm colors, new shapes, and new faces. Yet, knowledge is also internal, bound by the shell which keeps the consciousness intact. Our thoughts and insights are our own until we choose to share them with the world. At first, knowledge is hazy, but with the help of others, it can be resolved into something sharp.

# Am I a Feminist? Narrative Fidelity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "We Should All be Feminists"

Nora K Angus, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Emily Plec

In this paper I analyze Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and her TED Talk based off her book, "We Should All be Feminists." Adichie is a Nigerian woman who has firsthand experience with feminist issues of inequality and she serves as a speaker and activist for issues of feminism and beyond. She is a renowned author, activist, academic, and a feminist. In hearing of her personal experiences regarding inequality, I realized I am able to identify parallels between her experiences and the inequalities which I have faced despite our vastly different origin stories. The importance of her work as a feminist is emphasized in her rhetorical techniques, such as using personal narratives and public vocabulary to bring connection and a sense of equality to her audience. Adichie urges society to modify their actions in order to promote and normalize feminism in a positive light.

**Keywords:** feminist, rhetoric, narrative, narrative fidelity, feminism

How we represent ourselves in society is a question that involves structure and hegemonic norms. Social reality calls for labels that categorize us even if we don't necessarily wish to be categorized. The labels which are stuck to us with pins, super glue and perhaps even cemented to our foreheads, take a pivotal role in the directions that society guides its members towards, or even places us. Feminism has a variety of tones and descriptions and can commonly be defined as "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes" (Webster Dictionary, 2019). My role as a white, middle class citizen placed me among a group of culturally accepted citizens who live in something I call a 'safety-net' in society's acceptance of us. I have the ability, based on the color of my skin, to not be discriminated against, to afford my college education, or to simply buy food without worrying if I'll be judged for what I buy. I, as a woman, however, commonly caution myself for defense, in all aspects of life. I, as a woman, prepared myself for sexism. I, as a woman, cautioned my outfit choices. I, as a woman, purposely took up as little space in public as possible, never wished to be a professional athlete, wore a bra, spent half my paycheck on make-up; only to realize it condemned the socially accepted version of being female, not the version I wanted to be.

Feminism is considered by some to be a bad word, because everyone can design their personal definition of the word and enact their definition into society. If I were to ask someone to describe the sun, the definition they

give will most likely be similar or identical to mine: a bright circle in the sky. Yet if I were to ask someone to describe a feminist, their definition most likely will encounter a multitude of different words or phrases which can strongly impact how they think or make judgement of what a feminist is. Equality is not just feminism; equality is acts of justice in all aspects of life and the acts of feminism can strengthen the acts of justice. One individual who has guided my passion for pursuing feminism is renowned author and speaker, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the TED Talk based off her literature, "We should all be feminists." In this paper I analyze the speaker and activist of more than just feminist topics. Adichie is a Nigerian woman who has experience with feminist issues of inequality, has written renowned and nationally celebrated books, all of which have won a plethora of awards and is active in the issue of feminism in not only the United States, but the world. The importance of her work will be emphasized through the deconstruction of her background prior to becoming an author, her experiences throughout her life which promoted her response to studying communication regarding equality and the connections of which I have learned through my courses in connection to Adichie's success as a rhetor. We will begin with her biography and a look into her childhood, her experiences in America, her educational background, and continue into her success as an author and speaker. To follow, an assessment of the rhetorical situation which Adichie identifies as challenges will be clarified thorough understanding her main arguments and a debrief of her

call to action for a feminist society. To conclude this essay, I will discuss the importance of her claims as well as what Adichie has meant to me as a rhetor and role model of feminism.

Born in Nigeria, September 15th, 1977, Adichie entered life as one of six children in an upper-middle class family with educators and scholars for parents. Living on a University campus, her mother, one of the university's first female administrators and her father, a professor, helped inspire her activities in academia as a young child (Eastern Connecticut University Alumni Profiles, 2019). Chimamanda lived in a household with educated guidance from her parents and humor and mischief from her five older siblings. Also, in the household were the in-home help who provided daily support and were primarily local community members employed by her parents to tend to the needs of the children and the homes. At the age of four, she spoke two languages and was proficient in her ability to write by the age of seven. In another TED Talk given by Adichie in 2016 called "The Danger of a Single Story," she describes her connection to literature through the absence of seeing her identity in the books she read as a child. As English is classified as one of the official languages of Nigeria, Adichie was given English American story tale books consisting of blonde haired, blue-eyed princes and princesses who "played in the snow and ate apples." Through the TED Talk, she speaks of her unawareness of exclusivity of the stories she read as they were all she had ever been exposed to. Later in life, she questioned the authority of these books as she and everyone around her had never seen snow, did not have blue eyes or blonde hair, and ate mangos. She says, "I did not know people like me could be real in literature." Through the examination of her unrealistic childhood story books, Adichie began to write her own books which began with short stories with matching crayon pictures, and they later in her life developed into several nationally renowned, bestselling short literatures.

Several experiences throughout her young adulthood caused Adichie to dig deep into her thoughts on inequality. After graduating from secondary school, Adichie enrolled in medical school at the University of Nigeria to study medicine and pharmacy. With a love for writing, she volunteered as the editor for the university's magazine called 'Compass' and dropped out after less than a year to pursue her enthusiasm for writing. At the age of 19, Adichie came to America to attend Eastern Connecticut State University to study communication

and political science. While growing up in Nigeria, she was not aware nor used to being identified by the color of her skin, yet when she came to America that changed as she was suddenly confronted with what it meant to be a person of color. She speaks of one example in her TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," about her college roommate being shocked of her ability to speak English so well. When the roommate asked to listen to Adichie's "tribal music," Chimamanda played Mariah Carey. Her college roommate assumed Adichie did not know how to use a stove or turn on the shower and automatically assumed pity and felt sorry for her because since Adichie looked African, then he must fall under the stereotypes which many Americans have of Africans.

The inequality Adichie faced did not stop at the preconceived ideas her roommate insisted upon, but instead sparked her platform for several of her best-selling books. After graduating from Eastern Connecticut University, Adichie moved on to earn her master's degree in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University in 2003. Later, she completed her second master's degree in African Studies from Yale in 2008 and was awarded the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" grant which functioned as the financial foundation for her future publications. Her knowledge did not stop there; in 2011, she continued with a yearlong fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University to dig deeper and further her thesis regarding African Studies and communication in society. Throughout her years of educational success, she produced several short collections of literature. In 2003, her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published by Algonquin Books in association with Workman Press, a highly qualified publication company; the book also won The Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award. The London Times deemed her first novel "a monumental literary achievement and a prayer for Nigeria" (Eastern Connecticut University Student Alumni Profiles, 2019). Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published in 2006, became popular by several publications with internationally acclaimed companies along with being awarded the Orange Prize, one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious literary prizes awarded to female authors. This was the year her literature began an international movement, as her stories were translated into 32 different languages. Her literature and other pieces of work have been published in *Zoetrope All-Story*, *Prism International*, *Wasafiri*, *Calyx Journal*, the *Iowa Review*, *Other Voices*, as well as the

Anthology Proverbs for the People and of course, New York Times Top 10 Best Books.

Adichie's life-long academic success is partial to her emphasis on the issue. In August of 2016, Adichie became the co-founder of a Nigerian nonprofit, the Farafina Trust, established to promote reading, writing, and a culture of social introspection and engagement with society through literary arts (Farafina Trust, 2019). Their promotion of literary arts and social engagement was driven by the work of Adichie's literature. In several of her TED Talks, and at the foundation of all her books, is a story of an experience in which she connects to current problems of injustice; injustice of race, sex, gender, and class, among others. Adichie splits her time evenly between Nigeria, America and her travels for publications of her work or lectures such as TED Talks or commencement speeches. Her most current publication, "Dear Ljeawe, A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Parts" arrived in the spring of 2017.

The power that Adichie has as a woman, an author, a rhetor and activist makes her very compelling. Through a lifetime of inequality and passed judgment, she continues to pursue grace and composure through her work, her communication style and her ability to persuade. One of the many reasons I admire Adichie is her story-telling technique and personal narratives. In the books she has written and the talks she has given, she is admirable in her ability to tell a story and allow the reader to feel as though they were there living it with her. As I listen to her speak in the TED Talk, "We should all be Feminists" which I deconstruct next, I cannot help but appreciate her ability to connect with the audience as the rhetor; an ability I believe is the highest quality a rhetor can achieve.

Adichie's literary success is a large part of her rhetorical power. Her ability to advise her audience using narrative is one of her strongest moves in order to persuade the audience to agree or think deeper on what she is communicating. One of Adichie's literary move is guiding the audience through captivating personal or general stories which have taken place in her life. Several of her novels are altered life-experiences connected to some of society's greatest problems as a way to explain the need for change from the author's perspective. A generalized conception about this speech is to promote the idea and acceptance of feminism and how it should take place in society regularly. She emphasizes the importance of feminism and how the audience can utilize techniques of feminism to combat society's hegemonic norms.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave the TED Talk, "We should all be Feminists" on April 12, 2012 in a series of presentations regarding diversity. The speech issues a call for equality and an approach to the topic of feminism through real life examples, clear-cut facts and lastly, a call to action for society to reconfigure the idea of feminism. Feminism provokes just one of the many strengths in which Adichie has. Most of her essays and short literatures are presented via TED Talks or presentation as a verbal expression for the reasoning of her books. Several of her literary pieces condemn topics of social inequality and injustice, particularly on the basis of race and gender. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, regards matters of family discord and verbal mistreatment. Another novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, discusses the topic of moral responsibility under colonialism, war torn countries and ethnic allegiances about class and race. Other novels of hers include *Americanah*, a rich spin-off of her own experience coming to America when, despite her academic success, she is deemed incapable due to America's societal views of Blacks and other minorities. Lastly, her book, *We Should all be Feminists*, offers readers a definition of feminism in 21st century lingo in order to root awareness and inclusion in the word. Drawing from her own experiences, she gives deep understanding of the commonly misunderstood realities of sexual politics, discrimination, and inequality.

Adichie's TED talk offers remarkable exploration of what it means to be a woman in the twenty-first century through a clear, deep connection with her audience and ends in a call for why we should all be feminists. Her academic credentials contribute to her ethos as a speaker. Here, she shows the audience she is clearly a renowned author and highly qualified academic, but also a person, just like them. Not once in her speech does Adichie reference her credentials, but instead uses a plethora of personal narratives to lay a commonality with the audience as a means of trust as an equal rather than a superior. Her personal narratives and examples provide evidence of the inequality that occurs to women all over the world, but most importantly, ones that happened to her. Though from Nigeria, she expresses through her books and speeches, how inequality is spread throughout the world, not just Africa and the United States. Through the language and examples, she uses her ability to relate the matters of foreign countries and America and brings attention to the call for everyone to take part in being a feminist.



Palczewski, Ice and Fritch, define the term *Persona* as the “ethos, roles, identity, authority and image a rhetor constructs and performs during a rhetorical act” (p. 165). The persona of Adichie is what establishes who she is and how the audience can connect to her. It helps in reference to what she talks about, who she is speaking to and how she performs as a rhetor. Ethos is defined as “the character of a rhetor performed in the rhetorical act and known by the audience because of prior interactions” (p. 167). Adichie’s ethos is important as a rhetor because it is what helps establish a commonality with the audience. She purposefully emphasizes elements about her to which the audience can relate. She emphasizes being a woman, someone of color, someone who has experienced inequality both as a woman and as a person of color the inequality and discrimination she has faced from a stranger or by a friend.

Palczewski, Ice and Fritch, quote “the exigence calls for or demands a rhetorical response. If rhetoric cannot create a change in the exigence, then it is not a rhetorical situation” (p. 227). In the United States, issues of feminism have lasted beyond their prime years. In Adichie’s speech, “We should all be feminists,” the exigence, the imperfection marked by urgency, is the unjust and unfair treatment of women around the world. She defines feminism and continues to state personal narratives which provide examples of what feminism does not look like and what it should be. Adichie uses the power of herself as rhetor by using the technique of enactment which is when the “person engaging in symbolic action functions as proof of the argument s/he advances” (pg. 77).

Feminism has come in several waves throughout history, all of which have taken different societal challenges and acceptance along the way. An online source, Feminist.com states in their article, “Is there a fourth wave of feminism? Does it Matter?,” the first wave of feminism, approximately 1840-1920, grew into a movement from abolishing slavery to ensuring dedicated women’s rights with the main goal for rights of citizenship such as voting and ownership. The second wave of Feminism, approximately 1960-1988 grew in the subject similar to the first wave as a social-justice movement. Like the first wave, the second wave was a work of ensuring rights for black Americans as well as females, though most association and protection was geared toward white women’s liberation. Topics of women in the workplace, peace, free speech and gay rights took place in the movements well. The third wave of feminism,

approximately 1988-2010, was an enormous cultural shift for the acceptance of feminism and if it was an overall accepted idea or not. Marked by a critique of the classes of race and politics of the first and second wave of feminism, the third wave emphasized the need for learning to accept all races in feminism. As a sexist dominant culture, feminist-influenced celebrities and women of power began to speak out and embrace a feminist-influences civilization. The current wave of feminism which approximately began in 2008, but peaked in 2012, the time of Adichie’s speech, “We Should all be Feminist,” was categorized as a media-influenced wave. Social media and technology were pivotal in the lives of citizens which perhaps became the most significant experience of the movement of women. Feminists created blogs, twitter campaigns, #Hashtags, Instagram accounts and other social media outlets which helped influence the #MeToo movement, and the ability for feminists to comment on media outlets to continue their empowerment and rebuttal. The online source, Feminist.com, promotes the fourth wave of Feminism as “the communication wave”- due to the uptick in open communication on the matters of feminism such as: sexual harassment, rape culture, transgenderism, male feminists, unequal pay and discrimination. The fourth wave of feminism is associated with the belief that all humans are equal, alongside a heavy focus on intersectionality, greater empowerment of marginalized groups in society and advocating for the greater representations of such groups through politics and business. Adichie’s TED Talk occurred in the middle of this 2012 movement as a call for action for civilization to change the means of how they perceive equality. The term *Kairos* is defined as “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment” Palczewski, Ice and Fritch (p 223). Adichie’s speech occurred at an opportune time during this decade’s feminist movement which helped express the call for civic engagement of individuals to take control of making equality the new social norm. She uses a range of empowering rhetorical techniques to captivate her audience into being a part of the change for equality.

She begins her speech with a short story of her close friend passing in a famous plane crash in Nigeria in 2005. She expresses how her friend, Okoloma, was the first person to call her a feminist and did so in a way that was clearly not a compliment. Even though Adichie at the time did not know what a feminist was, she clarifies this experience as the turning point for what sparked her

interest in the subject. Throughout her speech, the personal narratives Adichie uses are the data to help support her claim of why we should all pursue feminism. Narratives are “the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the others” Palczewski, Ice and Fritch (pg. 131). Throughout the speech, several examples of personal narratives are used as data to support her claim. Adichie’s claim is that current cultures have inequality between men and woman and we as a society have a duty to change that. She states “Gender matters. Men and women experience the world differently. Gender colors the way we experience the world. But we can change that” TED Talk 2019 (min 25:27). Adichie’s personal narratives and her ability to share personal memory are claims of fact as they happened to her, her claim of value can be seen in the quote “I am angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. We should be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change; but, in addition to being angry, I’m also hopeful. Because I believe deeply in the ability of human beings to make and remake themselves for the better” (min 9:36). Her claim of policy can be seen in her quote “so if it is in fact true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we must make it our culture” (TED Talk, 2019, min 27:18). A second claim of policy is her call for society to raise their boys and girls better as they are the ones to impact differences on future generations and empower great change. She quotes “And I would like today to ask that we begin to dream about and plan for a different world, a fairer world, a world of hipper men and happier women who are truer to themselves. And this is how to start: we must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently” (TED Talk, 2019, min 9:56).

The courage it takes to connect with a wide range of audience members is a skill many strive to perfect. The common phrase most of us heard as a child “words are stronger than actions” is exemplified in Adichie’s phrasing. Her choice to use structured vocabulary to adapt her audience to her subject is one of many features I admire about her. Adichie uses a public vocabulary which is defined by Palczewski, Ice and Fritch (2015) as “the culturally established and sanctioned terms that compose people’s taken-for-granted understanding of the world” (p. 49). One example is the story she tells regarding her friend, Louie, and his realization of inequality. When in Lagos, Louie and Adichie experienced extravagant gestures by members of the community whom rushed to help them joyfully

pack their car in hopes for earning money. Adichie decided to use some of her own money to pay the group of men for their kind gestures. The citizen took Adichie’s money, leaned past her and thanked her male friend Louie for the money because the citizen ultimately assumed that whatever money she had, came from a male. Before this situation, Louie did not know what it meant for women and men to be different in terms of equality, until this realization in differences men and women face, his perception of feminism was incomplete. A 2016 survey from the Washington Post took a poll of men and woman and asked what they thought of feminism. 50% of men declared themselves as not a feminist nor did they know what it was (Washington Post, 2016). Adichie describes feminism as “the theory of political, economic and social equality of the sexes,” yet it is clear through the poll by the Washington Post that feminism is defined and understood differently by individuals in society.

As a female, Adichie experienced inequality firsthand on a daily basis. She explains her experiences and constraints through personal narratives and shared experiences with her audience to prove the constraints she faces as a woman are current in the accepted social norms. Constraints are described by Palczewski, Ice and Fritch as “persons, events, objects and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decisions and actions needed to modify the exigence” (p.231). The biggest constraint at the time of her speech in 2012, was the government. Unfair treatment in political, economic and sexual forms take place towards women across the country and certain circumstances such as rape-culture, unfair pay or social discrimination between genders are among the many. These culturally accepted social norms have the ability to be made illegal, yet the U.S government has created constraints from providing easy access to feminism across the nation. Another constraint Adichie and women across the world face is the constraint of societal sexism which is forced upon us based on societal norms and gender configuration. Though she speaks and writes for audiences globally, US citizens may view her as an outsider trying to change a system that she is not even a part of. She references culture in her speech through the quote “so if it is in fact true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we must make it our culture” (TED Talk, 2019). Referencing through personal narratives, she discusses her difficulty with feminism in the US, Nigeria and around the world, indicating that different cultures view women differently and have

different ideas of what is appropriately “equal” thus, another constraint. Through her literary success, her identity as a female, her experiences in in the inequalities which society has placed upon her, Adichie exemplifies her desire to be a feminist and to call others to follow as well.

Today, the label of a feminist can have positive and negative connotations. Washington Post’s 2016 article states 43% of respondents believe the word “angry” and 30% of respondents believe the word “outdated” describe the word feminism in the United States (Washington Post, 2016). Common misconceptions for the word ‘feminist’ make it difficult for it to be widely accepted by society. Adichie uses resignification of the word to turn it’s meaning into positive altercations. If society connects additional words such as “angry” or as the article also states the words “outraged,” “useless,” or “outdated,” then the proper meaning is lost. In 2012, the fourth wave of feminism began, and only two years later, did nearly half of the individuals express alternative descriptions of the word. An example from her speech, “I was once talking to a black man about gender and he said to me, ‘Why do you have to say, ‘my experience as a woman’? Why can’t it be ‘your experience as a human being’?” Adichie’s goal is to translate the words and perceptions of feminism into a culturally accepted topic of equality for society to understand. Audience members have a linear segment of the timeline of feminism which she challenges by coordinating and addressing all waves of feminism. The connections of elements of the four waves of feminism are expressed by Adichie through who she is, where she was born, and the accomplishments she has made which help alter the odds against her. As an educated, woman of color, she mixed the challenges of women in color throughout history as they were commonly excluded in the waves. Even in 2019, the limitations of each of the waves of feminism continue.

Near the end of her speech, she expresses a call for civic engagement with the audience she faces. Adichie is speaking at a TED Talk convention to an audience who willingly signed up to listen to speakers talk about diversity. Adichie uses several concepts as a rhetor to help engage her audience into better understanding her call for feminist action in the world of feminism. The rhetorical audience in Adichie’s speech is certainly the feminist who listen to her speech at any point. Bitzer defines rhetorical audience as “any audience that consists only of those persons who are capable of being

influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” Palczewski, Ice and Fritch (p.229). Arguably, the rhetorical audience can be anyone who might hear the speech, but Adichie is specifically speaking to those who will continue to be active in the change needed for feminism to be accepted. I believe she is also trying to persuade audience members who are ‘on the fence’ about participating in feminism. Several quotes from her speech represent who she is talking to such as “Gender matters. Men and women experience the world differently. Gender colors the way we experience the world. But we can change that” (TED Talk, 2019). She is speaking to anyone of a gender who is willing to partake in the actions to change the world’s view of feminism and encourage them to continue changing the social norms and minds of others. A great quote from her speech is “A feminist is a man or a woman who says, “Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it. We must do better” (TED Talk, 2019). In the beginning of the TED Talk, the visual element of her speech pans to the audience where you can see men and women of all races and presumably social classes. I saw one male audience member had his arms crossed during her speech, while his female companion was laughing at what Adichie said, he remained still and emotionless, indicating he was unamused and did not relate to what Adichie said. I believe the audience was one she knew she could persuade to understand the meaning of feminism and spark engagement to begin action. Adichie used excellent skills of knowing and catering to her audience to establish her goal of inviting others to partake in feminism. She had to break barriers as not only a woman herself, but an African woman. At the end of her speech, the camera panned to the same couple from before; now the male audience member was laughing and communicating in an enjoyable manner, the same as his female companion. Over the course of her speech, Adichie was able to reach different audience members and connect with them, reaching a sense of unity. A concern may be the irrelevance of her understanding of American inequality due to her majority experiences occurring in Nigeria. Several times throughout her speech she explains occurrences of inequality that have happened to her as a young child in Nigeria, to a student at the American University, to her travels around the world. By utilizing her extensive list of personal narratives, she allows the audience to connect with her through similar life experiences in order to better understand why she is asking them to partake in feminist activism. She helps paint a lifespan of inequality to the audience by stating her experiences of inequality in a

chronological order. Beginning with personal narratives of inequality in her youth, to college years, to years of adulthood during her travels and to end, a narrative of her feminist grandmother. She exemplifies the idea of the length of time inequality has lasted by creating the redirecting the element of time. The order in which her narratives are told provide an illusion of a lifetime of inequality; beginning with youth not knowing what a feminist is, to ending with an elderly woman being a feminist and not even knowing it but being proud to be one.

The social truth of inequality in the world, but particularly America, deals largely between genders. The difference between what is socially accepted for a woman versus a man is apparent in every culture. Adichie uses a prime example of not being allowed to be the class monitor in grade school due to being female, even though the requirements of having the highest test score belonged to her. She quotes "I very much wanted to be the class monitor. And I got the highest score on the test. Then, to my surprise, my teacher said the monitor had to be a boy. She had forgotten to make that clear earlier because she assumed it was... obvious" (min 3:31) What is culturally and socially accepted as "obvious" in terms of what boys/girls, men/women are allowed or not allowed to do, confines our us greatly. Adichie quotes "The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing who we are" (min 18:20).

There are a number of reasons why Adichie is an idol to me. I admire her ability and passion to strive for being better. I admire her ability to include the audience through personal stories and letting them in on her life. She becomes vulnerable and tells her audience the truth of inequality rather than pretending she is perfect but claiming it is there. She speaks in a powerful yet whimsical manner that hypnotizes you to relax and release your heart-felt emotions. She incorporates the deepest corners of everyone's heart not by artificial persuasion, but through the pain of truth and victory of overcoming it. As a fan of several of her books, I enjoyed digging deeper into her life in order to have a better understanding of the reasons for why she does what she does. The day I knew I was a feminist, came when an unfair action hindered my ability to pursue my passion to its full potential. I was applying to receive my certification to become a specialty coffee roaster, and unlike my male coworker who walked through the process with me, my application was \$50 more than his even though our work and requirements were identical. To this day, my ability

to roast coffee has been restricted by the number of days I can roast compared to my male coworker due to unfair insurance rates. My biological gender and chosen identity of female has created an appalling roadblock in my access to pursue my career. Due to the acts of inequality from this day, my passion and choice to live a feminist life is one I strongly believe in. Adichie's speech, "We should all be Feminists" was already a beautiful speech to me before I learned to deconstruct its rhetorical value. Now, with the knowledge I have gained, I have a deeper understanding of her as an author, rhetor, woman and most importantly, a feminist. We should all be feminists.

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## Coming Home

**Nicole Caldwell**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Henry Hughes**

First Prize, Peter Sears Prize in Poetry

*Keywords:* Peter Sears Poetry Prize, poetry

They shipped us home,  
never telling us enemies would follow,  
crouching in fever dream jungles, watching  
our gun boat slide by,

or that there's no waking from scanned riverbanks,  
shifting eyes and hidden barrels, that in all the waters  
of the world, we'll see heads of unlucky brothers,  
bobbing obscenely

in the ripples we cast, graying skin stretched tight  
across skulls like membranes across the rice drums  
we sometimes heard through rattling palms,  
that even eyes clenched shut,

won't convince us they're only rocks.

## 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

**Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Molly Mayhead**

Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas, recipient of WOU's 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech, English Version

I am honored to be a WOU commencement speaker for the graduating Class of 2019. I hope to find a message that resonates with everyone. Phrases like: “crap, that’s due tomorrow”– to when we used to say “YOLO” in 2015 to other current themes & phrases like “climate change is real,” “Trans Rights and Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” “the Pay Gap exists,” “less discrimination, more acceptance,” and, of course, (by my girl, Ariana Grande) “Thank U, Next,” were all candidates. Ultimately, I realized that there is no way I can think of a theme that can resonate with all of you; which is what makes it so beautiful. We are so diverse with our own experiences and backgrounds that one size does not fit all. Finally, I realized that the theme was right in front of me: Authenticity. Diversity. Journey for Self-Identity. Once you know yourself and establish a personal code, nobody can take that away – just like our degrees that we are receiving today. Not only did WOU give me the opportunity to challenge myself academically, but it allowed me to question my beliefs, values, the status-quo, social constructs, and anything or anyone.

As a first gen cis male from a low-income Mexican family, whose parents migrated to Hood River, OR from Colotlan, Jalisco, Mexico for a better life, I was instilled with rich ethnic culture that my parents shared with me, with traditional Latino values & norms of service, tradition, familia, machismo, and quality work ethic – and in the same time – shared insight on sociocultural and economical gaps and deficiencies that I slowly understood. As my two worlds collided between Mexican and American life – I realized that my self-identity was preordained. But, this allowed me to embrace my hardships and transform them into drive, motivation, embrace diversity even more and ask myself “why not me?” when it came to the question of attending a 4-year university. Eventually, WOU welcomed me with the Diversity Commitment Scholarship. I was momentarily derailed by an obstacle that challenged my inherited beliefs and values and emerged a third world that

ultimately tumbled me into self-alienation, depression, and suicidal tendencies. I had to hide my sexual orientation due to not wanting to feel outcasted, judged and rejected, as I grasped to the terms. This was the most brutal self-to-self battle that I ever endured. I don’t say this for empathy, but to create awareness about these hardships and help eradicate prejudice about the LGBTQ+ community that exists in all cultures. And I am mad at myself for letting a bigoted, small mindset potentially derail my path, and stand here with PRIDE representing the LGBTQ+ community.

Which leads me back to the elements that helped me get to this spot: Authenticity. Diversity. Journey for Self-Identity. Many of us are still like “I do not know who the heck I am or what I wanna do after graduation.” I challenge you to be comfortable with who you are, be open minded and pursue your authentic passions. Ask questions and do things that you have always wanted to try. Find what makes you intrinsically motivated, celebrate it and use it as a personal code.

We have all made an impact on Western Oregon University and we will do the same on whatever endeavor we embark on. Failures are unavoidable in life, but how we bounce back is what determines our path with resilience. We’ve all had our fair share of obstacles and mistakes along the way throughout these 4 years, yet we learned from them, and now graduating with a degree. Remember, we have the power to create change and shape a life and democracy that we’re proud of.

Get ready class, we have work to do out there.

Congratulations to the graduating Class of 2019, we made it!

## 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

**Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas**, Western Oregon University

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Molly Mayhead**

Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas, recipient of WOU's 2019 Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech, Spanish Version

Es un honor estar aquí presentando este discurso formal. Como un hombre de primera generación de una familia mexicana de bajos ingresos, mis padres emigraron a Hood River, Oregon desde Colotlán, Jalisco, Méjico para una vida mejor, y me inculcaron una rica cultura étnica, con valores latinos tradicionales como servicio, familia, machismo y ética de trabajo de calidad - y al mismo tiempo - compartieron la perspectiva de las deficiencias socioculturales y económicas que poco a poco comprendí. Esto me permitió transformar mis dificultades en motivación y a celebrar a la diversidad aún más y hacerme la pregunta "¿por qué no yo?" cuando se trataba de entrar a una universidad. Finalmente, Western Oregon University me dio la bienvenida con una beca que me ayudó a pagar mis estudios y hacer mis sueños realidad.

Durante mis estudios, me tropecé con un obstáculo que desafió mis creencias y valores y finalmente me llevó a caer en un profundo capítulo de depresión y de tendencias suicidas. Tuve que esconder mi orientación sexual como parte de la comunidad homosexual - porque no quería sentirme marginado, juzgado y rechazado. Esta fue la batalla más brutal y dolorosa que tuve que soportar y perseverar. No digo esto para recibir empatía, lo digo para crear conciencia sobre estas dificultades y ayudar a erradicar prejuicios con la comunidad homosexual (Gay), y ayudar a comprender que esta comunidad existe en todas las culturas, y es normal. Y es nuestra responsabilidad y deber de educarnos de esta comunidad y aceptar y celebrar aquellos que se identifican como parte de la comunidad homosexual. Y finalmente, me arrepiento que deje esta batalla consumirme y casi terminé mi vida, en vez de celebrar y aceptar quien soy para seguir adelante para alcanzar mis sueños.

Sé que muchos de nosotros, graduándose hoy, seguimos preguntando "No sé quién diablos soy o qué

quiero hacer después de graduar". Te desafío a que te sientas cómodo con quién eres, ten una mente abierta y encuentra tus pasiones auténticas. Y si no estás seguro, haz preguntas y haz cosas que siempre has querido intentar. Encuentra lo que te motiva y celebra y utilízalo como un código personal y una política de guía.

Todos hemos hecho un impacto en Western Oregon University y haremos lo mismo a donde vayamos con nuestro esfuerzo. Los fracasos son inevitables en la vida, pero la manera en como nos recuperamos es lo que cuenta y determina nuestro camino. Y sé que todos hemos tenido una buena cantidad de obstáculos y errores en el camino, pero aprendimos de ellos y ahora nos graduamos con un título.

Graduados, cuando celebras hoy, recuerda siempre a apoyar y agradecer a aquellos que los ayudaron a llegar a esta etapa, y recuerde que tenemos el poder de crear un cambio en el mundo y en nuestras vidas.

Prepáranse clase, tenemos trabajo que hacer.

Felicidades a la clase de 2019, lo logramos!



# When the Truth Isn't Enough: Anti-Racist-White Hero Framework, Tokenism, and Postracism

**Sarah Daves**, Western Oregon University

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Emily Plec**

By applying Madison's "anti-racist-white-hero" (ARWH) framework developed in 1999, I seek to discuss how ambiguous, and yet, obvious views of race, racism, and success are threaded throughout the 2000 film *Men of Honor*, and so, create a false sense of post-racism, which includes a rhetoric of tokenism. Through the application of this framework, I am then able to conclude that the film does, in fact, "sustain systemic racism even though it appears to expose and condemn it" (McFarlane p. 82). By taking an in-depth look at the film, I am able to expose the *myth of white superiority* and assert that post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media as it applies to the film industry. I analyze the film against the backdrop of Tokenism according to Cloud, as explained by Bineham in his article, *How the Blind Side Blinds Us*, and find that the responsibility of failure is removed from the systems of power and privilege that are largely creating the obstacles in Navy Diver Carl Brashear's life in the first place, and positions that responsibility solely on Brashear himself. Through examining the facts of Carl Brashear's real-life events and comparing them to the larger than life events that Hollywood created, I reframe the narrative of the film to find the ugly truth...*racism sells*.

**Keywords:** *Men of Honor*, Carl Brashear, feminism, anti-racist-white hero framework, tokenism, postracism, race(ism), race, media

The Film, *Men of Honor*, released in 2000, is based on the life and career of Navy diver, Carl Brashear. Brashear became the Navy's first black Master Diver, the Navy's highest-ranking diver status. Brashear catches the negative attention of Master Chief Billy Sunday, a white racist who eventually acknowledges Brashear's fierce determination and dedication to his goal and becomes Brashear's biggest advocate.

Based on true events, the protagonist of this film, Carl Brashear, resonates strongly with me, from the first time I watched the trailer to the film's stunning conclusion. From the early scenes of the movie to the very end, Brashear's grit, perseverance, and self-determination are constantly displayed as he is challenged with one obstacle after another while desperately trying to reach his ultimate goal of becoming a Navy Master Diver. By the end of the film, I was in awe of both Brashear and Sunday, and happily went on with my day, never once pausing to reflect on my emotions or question which events in the movie were actually "true" and what was artistic license used by Hollywood. I, like many other moviegoers, took the movie at face value.

That is, until I took a Criticism of Public Discourse class. For my final paper I chose to do a rhetorical criticism of the trailer of *Men of Honor*, with the film as a reference.

Expecting the outcome of my analysis to be centered on the racism that Brashear experienced during his time in the military and viewing racism as a thing of the past, I could have never prepared myself for the journey that I was about to embark on and the eye-opening revelations that I was about to encounter. The common tactics used to frame things to look as though they are something that they are not became clear the more I researched the film, compared the actual events of Brashear's life to Hollywood's larger-than-life version, and analyzed the film with Madison's anti-racist-white-hero (ARWH) framework. The analysis of this trailer, supported by the film, will demonstrate how Hollywood's framing of racism serves to perpetuate the ideologies of white heroism, tokenism, and post-racism.

Through decolonization, defined as "breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality, of our own experiences" (Foss, p. 144), we can go beyond the surface meanings portrayed in this film and look to the root of the messages in order to decode the ambiguity that lies within. These tools will be examined in conjunction with Madison's ARWH framework, the impact of these findings on the viewers of the film, and the implications as they pertain to our culture as a whole. The research will discuss how the film fits within the

ARWH genre that features a rhetoric of Tokenism, the larger-than-life aspect of the film, and why this is necessary to the marketing of the film, which will lead to discussing race(ism) in the media. Finally, the conclusion will briefly summarize why this research is important to our culture, and future implications of a continued denial of post-racism and white heroism.

## BRASHEAR'S LIFE ACCORDING TO HOLLYWOOD

Carl Brashear is first introduced to the audience as a young boy, approximately 12 years old, who is a talented swimmer. Born to sharecroppers, he was raised on a farm in Kentucky in the 1930s. Unlike most children who grow up in sharecropping families, Brashear was sent to school every day rather than being kept at home to work on the farm. However, Brashear's family receives word that the farm owner is replacing them and bringing in another family where the kids work too. In an effort to stop this from happening and keep their farm, Brashear's first act of heroism comes when he stands firm with his father and tells him that he is not going to school and stays home to help plow the field. As the years pass, Brashear becomes a young man and decides to enlist in the Navy. While waiting to get on the bus that would take him away from his family and to the naval base, Brashear's father says to him "You get in there and fight, Carl...Don't quit on me...ever." Just as Brashear is boarding the bus, his father hands him a hand-made radio to take with him that has the letters A.S.N.F. (A Son Never Forgets) inscribed on the side of it.

While in the Navy, Brashear serves as a cook on the ship, U.S.S. Hoist, with Master Chief Billy Sunday who becomes Brashear's inspiration for becoming a diver when he observes Sunday do a "bounce dive" to save an officer who is drowning despite orders from the ranking officer, Lieutenant Hanks, for Sunday to stand down. Hanks warns Sunday that if he "even touches the water" he will take his "Captain's mask" and have him demoted. Ever the rebel, Sunday salutes Hanks and jumps into the water anyways. While on this bounce dive, Sunday suffers an inoperable embolism on both lobes of his lungs and is told that he can never dive again. Upon hearing this news and having a minor breakdown, Sunday is taken off the ship and reassigned to a training position at a diving school in Bayonne, New Jersey.

During his time on the U.S.S. Hoist, Brashear challenges the rules and decides to take a swim on Friday, the day reserved for the white people to swim, instead of on

Tuesday when the "colored people" can swim. Once he makes his point and has a swimming race with one of his white fellow officers whom he beats, he is sent to the brig. Captain Pullman, the ship's white commanding officer, confronts Brashear in the brig and tells him that he is one of the fastest swimmers on the ship, and so Pullman is transferring him to the search and rescue unit. Eager to jump into his new position, Brashear states that he will gather his belongings and report to the unit's living quarters immediately, but he is stopped by Pullman and told to stay with the cooks, he is only there to swim, nothing else. Meanwhile, Carl begins writing letters to get into dive school. After multiple letters and a personal recommendation from Captain Pullman, Brashear is finally accepted to dive school where he will be the school's first black diver trainee.

As soon as Brashear arrives at diving school in Bayonne, New Jersey, he is immediately met with hostility and racism, beginning with the school's director, Mr. Pappy, an older white racist traditionalist, who tells the guard not to let Brashear enter the base. Shortly thereafter, Brashear has his first of many encounters with Master Chief Billy Sunday, whom he had previously served with on the U.S.S. Hoist. Sunday recalls Brashear as a cook on the ship and calls him "Cookie" from that point on. Sunday drives off and comes back hours later only to find an overheated and dehydrated Brashear still standing outside the base gates. Sunday offers to buy him a beer and a bus ticket so he can "go back to whatever burrow he sprang from," but Brashear refuses. Upon noticing scars on Sunday's hands from the reigns of driving mules, Brashear makes a comment that infers he and Sunday have something in common when he says, "And no self-respecting navy man makes a living driving mules, Sir." As a foreshadowing of the racist mistreatment Brashear will soon face, Sunday responds, "You know what the Chinese say, Cookie? Be careful what you wish for." Then, Sunday tells the guard to let Brashear in. Outraged by Brashear's reference to them having anything in common, Sunday immediately begins wielding his authority over Brashear and creating obstacles to hold Brashear back from advancing in the program.

As his training continues, Brashear finds himself faced with the possibility of flunking out of the program due to low test scores. He is encouraged by his instructor to seek help "outside the controls of the camp." Upon turning to the local library for tutoring, he meets Jo, the library aide, who is working toward her nursing degree.

After a relentless, yet flattering, pursuit and proving to her that he is willing to put in the effort, Jo agrees to tutor him, but warns that if he wastes her time, she will quit. Their relationship soon grows beyond tutoring as they begin dating, and eventually marry.

One day during a training exercise, trainee Petty Officer Isert's air hose becomes "fouled" and has to be changed out while he is under water in a sunken ship that has rolled over. His training partner, Machinist Mate Rourke gets scared and abandons ship. Sunday begins to prepare to dive in himself to help Isert, but Brashear, aware of Sunday's lung condition, challenges Sunday's spontaneous decision and convinces Sunday to let him go instead. Sunday reluctantly consents, and Brashear successfully changes out the air hose, saving Isert's life. However, under the watchful eye of Mr. Pappy, Rourke is later credited with saving Isert's life and awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal of Honor in front of his entire platoon.

Other challenges that Brashear faces while he is in training include, but are not limited to, death threats via notes left on his bunk, and being challenged by Sunday in front of many of his fellow trainees at a bar to engage in a competition with Sunday to hold his breath for five minutes while wearing a divers hat filled with water. The conditions were that if Sunday won, Brashear would quit and leave the base that night. This challenge came on the eve of the same day that Brashear found out, in a telephone conversation with his mother, that his father had fallen ill and passed away. Both Brashear and Sunday suited up and trainee Rourke timed them. However, around the four-minute mark, Sunday begins to waver and almost passes out as blood starts to appear from his nose due to the pressure building up from him holding his breath. The onlooking sailors stop the challenge and remove the helmet from Sunday so he can breathe. Thus, forcing Sunday to forfeit, and lose the challenge.

The final test of Brashear's grit in dive school came on his last day of training when he had to complete assembly of a flange under water in order to qualify as a diver. There was no time limit, just the requirement that he completed the assembly accurately and fully. Upon reaching the bottom of the river, Brashear calls up to have his tool bag sent down to him, but when Sunday instructs his assistant to send down the tool bag, he cuts a long slit in the tool bag and throws it into the water causing Brashear's tools to scatter on the riverbed. This

is the turning point where Sunday finally acknowledges Brashear's fierce determination and strong work ethic. Concerned that Brashear could go into hypothermia if he stays in the water any longer, Sunday decides to make Brashear stop his project, but Mr. Pappy orders Sunday not to bring Brashear up until he stops moving. Realizing that Brashear's life is in danger, rebellious Sunday radios Brashear telling him that "this isn't worth dying for," but Brashear refuses to surface. Just as Sunday gives the command for Brashear to be brought out of the water, Brashear signals that he is ready to surface. After nine hours and thirty-one minutes, a shivering and semi-hypothermic Brashear ascends from the riverbed having successfully completed the flange assembly and achieving the right to graduate with his class.

Brashear receives his first diving assignment at the Brooklyn Naval Yard as a standby diver but turns it down because he can't make Master Diver as a standby diver. Upon hearing this of Brashear's decision, Jo informs him that she is pregnant with their first child. Eventually, Brashear ends up back on the U.S.S. Hoist where he has been tasked with diving to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea to search for a missing hydrogen bomb that was dropped by a bomber plane. While looking for the bomb Brashear's air hose gets caught on the flap of a Russian submarine that is directly in his path, which causes him to be carried through the ocean on his back for some distance. Barely missing the propeller of the submarine, his air hose finally slides off the flap. Once the sand settles, and Brashear regains his wits, he spots the bomb on the ocean floor and alerts the ship's captain. The ship's crew quickly get him back on deck, and after he has had the chance to recover from his run-in with the submarine, Brashear returns to the ship's deck to watch the seamen raise the bomb from the bottom of the ocean. During the recovery, the bomb becomes unbalanced and one of the cables breaks, causing a piece of pipe to break off, ripping through Brashear's lower left leg, which he would eventually decide to have amputated. Even with half of his leg gone, Brashear refused to accept the diagnosis that he would never dive again.

After hearing about the accident, Sunday decides to pay Brashear a visit while he is in physical therapy. Sunday informs Brashear that Lieutenant Hanks, who is also a white man and Sunday's nemesis, intends to form a medical review board to have a hearing and retire Brashear due to his injuries by claiming that he is unfit to dive. Sunday convinces Brashear that he can help him

train, beat Hanks, and return to full active diving duty. Sunday meets with Hanks who agrees to give Sunday four weeks to train Brashear before holding the medical review hearing, and that if Brashear fails, Sunday will retire. Sunday puts Brashear through a series of exercises and pushes him to go beyond his limits over the next four weeks.

Finally, the time comes for Brashear to appear in front of the medical review board. Chief Sunday is not allowed in the courtroom during Brashear's hearing, but when Hanks orders a full diving suit to be brought into the courtroom, and Brashear insists upon walking twelve steps right then and there to prove that he is fit for duty, Sunday forces his way into the courtroom and tries to stop Brashear from walking the twelve steps. However, Brashear will not relent in his demands to walk the twelve steps, so with the consent of the Board, Sunday counts out twelve steps from Brashear and commands Brashear to begin walking towards him. With each step that Brashear takes Sunday counts it out loud, but suddenly at step eight, Brashear's prosthesis begins to buckle under the weight of the diving suit, and Hanks orders him to end his attempt, but a heroic Sunday tells Brashear to disregard Hanks' order and complete his steps. With each step, Sunday recites a cadence, encouraging and pushing Brashear to complete all twelve steps. Upon completion of the twelfth step, Brashear is seated, and Hanks is forced to reinstate him to full active duty. As Sunday begins to leave the courtroom, he turns and salutes Brashear, who is seated in a chair in the middle of the courtroom. As Sunday leaves the courtroom a hero, he is surrounded by many people. However, Brashear, the true hero, is surrounded only by his wife and son.

## ARWH GENRE & TOKENISM

Madison's framework argues that "an ARWH film genre exists, which simultaneously sustains systemic racism while it appears to expose and condemn it" (McFarlane, p. 82). Thus, fitting perfectly with the story told by *Men of Honor*, and supporting "Madison's main arguments about the ARWH framework that white supremacist ideologies are advanced by 'defining white supremacy in a particularly distant, extreme, blatant, and therefore, superficial way'" (McFarlane, p.85). In this context, "the audience is able to cognitively separate the situation in the film from that of the present, allowing themselves to get lost in what often ends as a 'feel-good' film about problems that seemingly no longer exist" (McFarlane, p.85). Madison also notes that "ARWH films are told

through the eyes of a white protagonist" (McFarlane, p.85).

We can see these observations play out in the film *Men of Honor*. For example, the story is based on the life and career of Carl Brashear, the U.S. Navy's first black diver to attain the rank of Master Diver, who is also an amputee. However, the story is primarily told from the perspective of Master Chief Billy Sunday, who from the moment he is introduced is immediately characterized as a "God-like" figure, representing authority and superiority over everyone, but even more so, over Brashear. The film is set primarily in the 1960s and 70s as Brashear overcomes increasingly insurmountable odds to reach his goal of becoming the first black Master Chief Navy Diver, which supports the ideology of post-racism and creates a safe cognitive distance between the events and the audience, ultimately leading to the "feel-good" experience in the end, which "works to relieve a primarily white audience of any legitimization crises they may experience while watching a film about white racism" (McFarlane, p. 85).

Due to the emotional connection that takes place between the audience and the characters as camaraderie develops out of the tumultuous relationship between Sunday and Brashear, a primarily white audience is able to dismiss the extremely racist comments and actions of Sunday and other white characters throughout the film as occurring only in the past, which serves to relieve them of any shame or guilt they may experience. For example, at the end of the film in the courtroom scene, as Brashear and Sunday are walking down the hallway towards the courtroom, they are walking shoulder to shoulder, their steps are in line with each other, and the father-son relationship that has developed between the two men is obvious. In this moment, all the racist actions and remarks of Sunday towards Brashear can be conveniently overlooked, as the audience becomes enamored by how much Sunday has assisted Brashear and the sacrifices he has made to ensure Brashear's success. Given the final unity of Brashear and Sunday across racial lines, there is an opportunity to presume that all the racism that Brashear faced is in the past, and that he never faced any other acts of racism thereafter, or that similar acts of racism do not exist today. Due to this post-racism ideology, the audience is relieved of any responsibility or call to action once the movie has ended and is why one can walk away from the film feeling that the kind of racism they just witnessed no longer exists.



In his article, “How The Blind Side Blinds Us,” Bineham explains tokenism as defined by Cloud, “tokenist narratives feature a central character whose situation in the beginning is characterized by dramatic hardship and depression.” Brashear’s story begins on a field in Kentucky, where he and his family are faced with the hardships that come with being a sharecropping family. Hardships accompany Brashear throughout his life as he enlists in the Navy and experiences a plethora of racial discrimination and barriers which are constructed to ensure his failure. While it is not blatantly stated, one can deduct that Brashear would face bouts of depression during such dramatic events such as the loss of his father, the daily insults hurled his way with constant pressure from white officers to quit and give up, and the loss of his leg.

Cloud goes on to say, “The character overcomes that hardship and depression primarily through his or her own ‘faith, work, and determination. Tokenist narratives thus, interpret success and failure as a matter of individual responsibility regardless of one’s structural location in systems of power and privilege.” Brashear overcomes all these hardships through his hard work, dedication, and determination. He never gives up or quits. He allows the barriers and ridicule to fuel his passion, and push him forward, regardless of his structural location in the systems of power and privilege which stand between him and his goal of becoming a Navy diver.

“Tokenist narratives are thus post-racial: While they admit the existence of racism, they deny its power to determine the success or failure of its victims. Tokenism ‘glorifies the exception in order to obscure the rules of the game of success in a capitalistic society. Racism, in this view, erects not barriers that prohibit success but obstacles that one must overcome to achieve success” (Bineham, p. 233). This tokenist film admits through characters like Chief Sunday, Mr. Pappy, and Lt. Hanks, that racism exists, but denies that Brashear, if not for his determination, his drive, and his persistence, would have failed due to the barriers that were constructed for the sole purpose of prohibiting him from becoming a Master Diver, or even completing dive school. Thus, shifting responsibility for Brashear’s success, and/or failure, squarely onto his shoulders and completely removing it from the white tokens who are primarily responsible for the barriers in the first place.

For example, the tokenist narrative presents the scene where Brashear’s tool bag is sliced open and his tools

scattered on the river bottom as an obstacle that he must overcome in order to graduate rather than a barrier to his success. Therefore, if he had failed at assembling it, the responsibility for the failure would fall completely on his shoulders, rather than being seen as a direct result of the men who sabotaged him in the first place. Another example lies in Brashear’s courageous fight to return to full active duty against Lieutenant Hanks and the powers that existed after the loss of his leg. The tokenist narrative in this situation would mandate that Hanks and the system that existed were mere obstacles for Brashear to overcome and were completely independent from his success or failure. Thus, any failure on Brashear’s part to return to full active duty would have strictly been a result of his inability to recover from the injury, regardless of the human and systemic barriers that existed and were formed specifically to keep him from succeeding.

## **LARGER THAN LIFE – WHY THE TRUTH IS NOT ENOUGH**

As I conducted my analysis and research on *Men of Honor*, I was amazed to find out just how loosely (emphasis mine) this film depicts actual events. According to Stillwell, in his article *Looking Back*, he recalls how he was “struck by the fact that the version on the big screen is larger than life. It is intriguing to compare his [Brashear’s] actual life with the exaggerated version that Hollywood and actor Cuba Gooding, Jr. created. In the hands of the screenwriter, Brashear became a mythic character.” Examples of these ‘larger than life’ perceptions from Stillwell’s article include the fact that Master Chief Billy Sunday’s character is entirely fabricated and is a “composite of a number of men that Brashear encountered throughout his career.” Although Brashear did receive death threats via notes tucked in his bunk, “he was not subjected to the kind of well-beyond-reason test the film shows him performing to qualify as a diver. When Brashear was so discouraged that he wanted to drop out, a boatswain’s mate named Rutherford said to him, ‘I can’t whip you, but I’ll fight you every day if you quit. Those notes are not hurting you. Show them you’re a better man than they are.’” Another example from Stillwell is that no one coached Brashear and helped him recover after the loss of his leg. “As soon as he could, he got an artificial leg and put himself through a punishing regimen of calisthenics and running to get back into shape. And he sneaked away from hospitals to prove that he could still dive effectively” (Stillwell). Lastly, the scene where Brashear is attempting

to out-run a submarine and gets caught by his diving hoses and drug through the water never happened.

Why all this dramatic effect? Were the actual events of Brashear's career and life not dramatic enough for the big screen? Brashear recounts the accident that nearly ended his career,

"So there I was on the ship with my leg torn up – no doctor, no morphine, six and a half miles from the cruiser Albany (CG-10). While we steamed toward the Albany, I was telling the guys about what I had rigged on the ship, and how to rig it. I thought I was going to the sick bay on the Albany, but they put me in a helicopter toward Torrejon Air Force Base in Spain. They didn't fuel the helicopter and couldn't make it, so they set me down a dilapidated runway, wanting for a two-engine small plane to come and get me. I lost so much blood that I went into shock and passed out. When I was rolled into the emergency room, I didn't have a pulse. The doctor decided to feel on me one more time. He found a faint heartbeat. Right away, he started making arrangements to get some blood. They pumped 18 pints into me, and I came to." (Brashear)

When we take away the Hollywood dramatics and are left with the unadulterated facts of Brashear's story, our view is reframed, and we are able to see the ugly truth... racism sells. By inventing events that are primarily focused on the white token doing everything they can to save or help the black token, the white hero narrative is reiterated, and viewers are reminded that "black people cannot succeed absent the charitable acts of benevolent white people" (Bineham, p. 233).

From Hollywood's perspective, Brashear would have never become a search and rescue diver if Captain Pullman had not promoted him. Brashear would not have gotten into dive school without Captain Pullman's personal recommendation. Brashear would not have graduated from dive school if Sunday had not directly disobeyed Mr. Pappy's orders to leave him in the water until he stopped moving. Finally, Brashear would have never recovered from his leg injury and returned to full active duty if Sunday had not stepped in to train him, and ultimately, save him. This false white hero ideology is what an audience is subjected to, and unquestionably, buys into every time one of these ARWH genre films is created and released.

By humanizing a false white hero (Sunday) and mythicizing the true hero (Brashear), media is able to simultaneously promote and criticize racism through the guise of heroism. As human beings, we see Sunday go through a life changing event and an emotional breakdown after being told that he will never dive again due to sustaining an inoperable embolism on both his lungs. Most of us can relate to having something that we are passionate about stripped away, maybe not to that extent, but to a certain degree, nonetheless. Many of us can relate to personal struggles like alcoholism or addiction of some kind, anger issues, or marital problems. There is a human connection that exists between the audience and Sunday, because, in some way, we can all relate to his struggles on a personal level. We can also relate to his plight of wanting to help Brashear, and his willingness to go against the authorities that be and fight for what he believes in. We become captivated by Sunday's efforts and personal sacrifice to help Brashear succeed. Thus, accrediting this false white hero with the heroism that truly belongs to Brashear. We forget that if the white hero is Hollywood's artistic license and a composite character, then so is his (or her) heroism.

Brashear is mythicized to the point of being supernatural or superhuman, thus, creating a disconnect between he and the audience. How many of us can say that we have survived being drug through the water by a submarine, spent nine and a half hours under water to complete a flange assembly, or had enough grit and emotional stamina to withstand the amount of racism and barriers to our success that Brashear faces in the film without ever faltering or having any kind of depression or mental breakdown?

With the exception of Brashear crying over the loss of his father, and a slight emotional breakdown during his physical therapy, where, none other than, Sunday just happens to walk in and heroically offer his help and support, the film never shows Brashear getting depressed, angry, outraged, wanting to quit, or any other kind of emotional unsettledness. He is always strong, brave, tough, pushing through, overcoming, facing his challenges head on. He never gives up or becomes defeated, which, in part, makes him mythical. Brashear is emotionally segregated from everyone else, and thus, distance is created between the audience and the mythical man.

One aspect of Sunday's fabricated heroism is his impeccable timing to always being there to save Brashear just at the right time. Sunday is there to take the fall when Brashear graduates from dive school and Mr. Pappy would rather see him die of hypothermia. Sunday is there to offer his assistance and support just when Brashear seems to begin to give up while in physical therapy and falls to the floor in pain and frustration. Sunday is front and center of the courtroom when the 290lb dive suit becomes too heavy and Brashear's wooden leg begins to give way underneath him. It is Sunday who walks out of the courtroom a hero followed by many people, including his wife and other military personnel, while Brashear is seated in the middle of the courtroom surrounded by only his wife and son.

Brashear, on the other hand, is never portrayed as the lone hero. His heroism is always assisted by or dependent on that of Chief Sunday or Captain Pullman. Even when he is the hero, his heroism is taken away, both blatantly and subtly. For example, when Brashear saves Petty Officer Isert, whose air hose has become tangled during an underwater training exercise, he is not awarded the medal of honor for his act of heroism. Machinist Mate Rourke is given the award instead, and all Brashear gets is a distant "thank you" from Isert as he exits the barracks and manages to catch Brashear's eye while this event is unfolding.

The more subtle observation to be made here, is how the film portrays Sunday during the unfolding of these events, which requires us to go back to the beginning of the scene where Isert initially gets into this precarious situation. When it becomes obvious that someone is going to have to dive in and save Isert, Sunday is the first to begin unbuttoning his shirt and preparing to dive. However, Brashear, who is already fully suited up in his dive gear with the exception of his helmet, reminds Sunday that he can't dive due to the embolism on his lungs. Sunday responds, "You better not be talking to me like that, I won't have your familiar tone!" Brashear responds, "I'm ready. Let me go." After a brief pause, Sunday finally concedes, and Brashear is allowed [emphasis mine] to make the dive.

When reframed, the scene begs the question, "Why was there a need for Sunday to attempt to be the hero before allowing Brashear to make the dive?" The answer is simple, the white audience needed to see Sunday at least attempt to be the hero, so that Brashear's heroism could be viewed as dependent upon Sunday's physical

limitations that exclude him from being the hero. Meaning, the white audience would not be comfortable with Brashear being the hero unless Sunday, through his own innocence, could not be the hero.

"To avoid this potential discomfort among 'white' America and ensure box office sales, 'anti-racist-white-hero' narratives are performances of white innocence, of a 'diversely human' whiteness that diffuses guilt, and, in benevolently superior relation to blackness, reaffirms the legitimacy of white domination and identity" (Madison as quoted in McFarlane p. 84).

Therefore, although the film outwardly criticizes racism, it can be clearly seen that inwardly, the film condones racism through the act of mythicizing Brashear, the black token, and humanizing Sunday, the fabricated white token. By removing the heroism of the black token who portrays a real person, and giving that heroism to a white token who portrays the fabricated persona of a white superior who dominates the underprivileged black token, it is evident that racism is not only condoned, but is also active within the making of the film as well.

## RACISM IN THE MEDIA

"Racial representations in the media have been recognized as problematic for quite some time. From television programs and advertisements, film, and video games, there is widespread acknowledgement among scholars that media representations are biased" (McFarlane, p. 82). McFarlane outlines Madison's elements for "most films that depict black struggles for equality in the U.S. and in South Africa. "Each movie either principally follows or contains the same general narrative structure: 1) White hero experiences some extreme form of racism vicariously through some black contact." Mr. Pappy, the dive school's Commanding Officer, and an arrogant Lt. Hanks, both directly and passively, threaten Sunday's career on several occasions for his role in assisting and defending Brashear. Some of the sailors even heckle Chief Sunday and call him names when they notice his reaction to seeing Brashear on T.V. while he is on a dive mission to recover a hydrogen bomb that has been lost at sea.

2) "White hero develops a relatively racial anti-racist consciousness." As time passes, Brashear and Sunday develop a very "father-son" relationship. Sunday goes from being Brashear's biggest nemesis and racial enemy, to be his biggest advocate and ally. Sunday's anti-racial

change of heart truly begins when Brashear stays in the water for nine hours and thirty-one minutes to complete his flange assembly for graduation. The change continues and comes full circle in the final courthouse scene when Sunday helps Brashear to complete his twelve steps in a 290 lb dive suit, and both Sunday and Brashear salute each other as Sunday leaves the courtroom a hero.

3) "White hero sacrifices a great deal at the hands of white racists to further the cause of the black people's struggle (usually in some type of leadership capacity)." Sunday puts his career and reputation on the line multiple times in order to assist and protect Brashear. For example, Sunday is demoted and shipped out of the dive school for his direct disobedience of Mr. Pappy's order to leave Brashear in the water until he stops moving. Sunday also risks his career when he takes a stance against Lt. Hanks by refusing to reveal Brashear's whereabouts after he has gone into hiding in order to prepare for his appearance in front of the medical review board.

4) "White hero suffers terribly for his or her efforts but manages to somehow prevail in the end" (McFarlane p. 83). Sunday suffers ridicule from white peers, superiors, and other seamen for his actions in helping Brashear to the point of demotion and multiple threats and attempts of others to force him into an early retirement and out of the Navy. These events, coupled with alcoholism and a bad temper conspired to highly disrupt, and nearly ended his marriage. After undergoing intense withdrawal symptoms and a stay in a rehabilitation facility, Sunday sobers up and manages to salvage his marriage and his career.

"These ideologies, although quite subtle to most audiences because of the degree to which they have become naturalized, play an important role in perpetuating inferential racism (and sexism) in popular media." (McFarlane, p. 83) Through this revelation, one can obtain decolonization and break free from the hegemonic views of our culture to come to terms with the reality that race(ism) is still as rampant today as it was in the 1960s and 70s. The falsities of post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of not only the media, but American culture as well. White Americans can no longer hide behind ignorance and white innocence simply because they are not comfortable with the acts of racism and white supremacy that discount and distort the truth of the black man or black woman's story.

Writers and publishers can no longer be allowed to hide behind the mask of, "I follow Carl's life and career, but my goal was to be true to his spirit, not his shirt size" (Cinema.com), while simultaneously fabricating events that center around the career and goals of a white protagonist. Similar acts of racism and white supremacy are also seen in more recent films such as: 1) *Green Book* (2018) where Dr. Shirley, a black pianist and musician, and Vallelonga, Shirley's white bodyguard, become close friends as they embark on a tour across the South in the 1960s. Based on a true story, but called "a symphony of lies" by Dr. Maurice Shirley, who is Dr. Shirley's last living brother (Darrisaw), 2) *Hidden Figures* (2016) which is the story of three black women who work as human computers at NASA's Langley Research Center and need the protection and help of white fictional tokens to succeed in their careers. While based on a true story, most of the white tokens are composite characters (History vs Hollywood.com), and 3) *The Blind Side* (2009) in which a black homeless teenager, Mike Oher, also known as Big Mike, is saved by the white Tuohy family when they take him in, get him into a private school where he joins the football team, and help him get into college on a full-ride scholarship. Also based on a true story, the film is fairly accurate, but there are a couple of big discrepancies that are worth analyzing. "Some things in [the movie] are the truth, some things are not. People have got to do things to sell it. But everything is good, though." - Michael Oher (History vs Hollywood.com).

By illuminating these injustices and calling attention to systems of oppression and superiority that are prolific throughout media, it is my goal that white Americans would reject the ideologies of post-racism and acknowledge the truth...black people (and other people of color) have not achieved equality. Racism is not a thing of the past. As educated adults, we need to recognize and understand that the falsity of post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media, American culture, and white supremacy. Therefore, we have a responsibility to research facts and ensure that we are not taking information that is fed to us through multiple means at face value. Moviegoers should not attend and support these films when it is evident that tools of manipulation and false ideologies are in use by the media. Lastly, researchers and scholars need to continue to go beyond the surface of ARWH films to expose the hidden agendas and messages contained within for the purpose of combating and revealing the ideologies of white heroism, tokenism, and post-racism.



## CONCLUSION

Through the use of Kelly Madison's "anti-racist-white-hero" (ARWH) framework developed in 1999, I have discussed how ambiguous, and yet, obvious views of race, racism, and success are threaded throughout my artifact, *Men of Honor*, and so, create a false sense of post-racism, which includes a rhetoric of tokenism. I have exposed the "myth of white superiority" (Bineham), and have asserted that post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media as it applies to the film industry. By using strategies of disruption, I was able to decolonize the ways that American culture is defined and shaped, in this case, by the media, and assert my own understanding of that reality, through Carl Brashear's real-life experiences and true story. The implications that this criticism has on rhetorical criticism are that it helps to broaden the scope of understanding of how media conceals, and yet bombards its audiences with false ideologies that both affirm and deny the existence of racism in American culture today. It is my sincere hope that more scholars will begin to go beyond the surface of the ARWH films and expose the hidden agendas and messages to those who are still blinded by the ambiguous nature of racism.

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## La nación chicana imaginada

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*Keywords:* nación, chicana, chicano, Ernest Renan, Benedict Anderson

En marzo 1969 la primera Conferencia Nacional de la Liberación de Jóvenes Chicanos declaró “en frente del mundo, en frente de todo norteamérica, en frente de nuestros hermanos en el continente bronze, somos una nación, somos una unión de pueblos libres, somos Aztlán” (National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference). Más allá de la fuerza política de esta declaración, el lenguaje plantea una cuestión importante sobre la noción de lo que constituye una nación: ¿Es posible tener una nación que existe dentro de otra? Hay varios lugares en el mundo donde la tensión entre la gente de diferentes comunidades está inherentemente conectada a esa pregunta. Las regiones autónomas en España y el conflicto entre Israel y su población palestina son claros ejemplos de esa confusión de identidad y política. La cuestión chicana es especialmente interesante porque su existencia como “nación” es más reciente y menos establecida. Esta investigación busca averiguar si las naciones pueden existir dentro de otras naciones a través de un análisis de la nación chicana.

Antes de empezar el análisis, es importante notar la extrema ambigüedad que existe en el concepto de la nación. Aunque es una palabra común, ha resultado ser muy difícil de definir. Sin embargo, hay intelectuales que se han atrevido definir lo que califica una nación, como Ernest Renan en “What is a Nation?” y Benedict Anderson en “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism”. Sus definiciones serán usados para investigar la legitimidad de la nación chicana y si realmente es posible tener una nación dentro de otra.

Uno de los aspectos más importantes de una nación, según Renan es la memoria compartida y, además, que se han “olvidado muchas cosas” (Renan [la traducción es mía]). La nación chicana tiene una memoria compartida basada en la historia de los Aztecas, la conquista y la Guerra de Estados Unidos - México. La literatura chicana explora mucho esa historia, como en el libro “Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera” de Gloria Anzaldúa (1999). En su desarrollo de la identidad chicana cuenta la historia desde los indígenas más antiguos en Texas hasta la migración moderna. Esa memoria es compartida porque los mismos temas son tocados en el Plan de Aztlán y el Plan de Santa Bárbara.

Además de compartir una memoria, una nación tiene que compartir su sufrimiento. Según Renan y Anderson, una nación debe tener una solidaridad y amistad entre los miembros. El sufrimiento de la población chicana aparece muchísimo en sus productos culturales. El poder de las dificultades para unir a la gente es evidente en el Plan de Aztlán cuando dice “la fraternidad nos une, y el amor por nuestros hermanos nos convierte en gente cuyo tiempo ha llegado y que lucha contra el “gabacho” extranjero quien explota nuestras riquezas y destruye nuestra cultura” (National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference [la traducción es mía]). El Plan de Santa Bárbara identifica “la lucha justa de nuestra gente” como una de las fuentes donde la nación chicana saca su fe y su fuerza (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education 9 [la traducción es mía]). Ambas citas prueban que hay un sentido de sufrimiento compartido en la nación chicana.

Los Estados Unidos los oprime con actitudes que los discriminan basado en el color de su piel y su lengua. Esta opresión compartida, combinada con las características que configuran una nación ya descritas, hace de esta comunidad una nación “legítima” o realizada.

Hasta aquí, parece que la nación chicana realmente es una nación, aunque existe dentro y bajo de los EEUU. Sin embargo, hay aspectos de la nación delineados por Renan y Anderson que son más difíciles de analizar y, quizás, revelan algo que previene a la comunidad chicana ser una nación completamente realizada. Estos son el sacrificio, la soberanía y el consentimiento presente.

La voluntad de sacrificar es difícil de analizar. La nación chicana no tiene un ejército para demostrar su capacidad de sacrificarse por la nación. Sin embargo, el espíritu de sacrificio aparece en la escritura chicana. Una de las metas del Plan de Aztlán es la defensa propia. Bajo ese plan, la nación chicana se encargaría de varios aspectos gubernamentales, incluyendo “la utilización de nuestros cuerpos para la guerra” (National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference). Además de mostrar una voluntad de morir para la nación, insinúa que la misma voluntad no existe para los EEUU. No quieren que el gobierno estadounidense los use para luchar en el campo de batalla.

El problema más grande con la existencia de la nación chicana como una nación completamente realizada es la falta de soberanía. La nación chicana no es independiente; no tiene su propio gobierno; no tiene sus propias leyes. Sin embargo, existe un anhelo dentro de la comunidad para esa soberanía. El Plan de Aztlán habla mucho sobre el futuro de la nación y su soberanía diciendo que es “una nación autónoma y libre”, “somos libres y soberanos” y aún declarando “la independencia de nuestra nación mestiza” (National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference). No obstante, ese tipo de poder dentro de la comunidad chicana todavía no existe.

Los chicanos son gente de herencia mexicana viviendo en los EEUU, pero no todas las personas que caben dentro de esa definición se identifican con la nación

chicana. Para ser una nación legítima, hay que existir un consentimiento entre los miembros de la comunidad de participar e identificarse con esa nación. Es difícil averiguar si existe este consentimiento entre los chicanos. La identidad chicana viene de la experiencia de ser rechazado por la cultura estadounidense y la cultura mexicana. Por eso es “el alma de dos mundos que se unen para formar un tercer país - una cultura de la frontera” (Anzaldúa 3 [la traducción es mía]). Bajo esa idea y el concepto del consentimiento presente, un chicano no puede identificarse como mexicano ni estadounidense exclusivamente. El problema es que a veces eso pasa. Hay inmigrantes que no se asimilan con la cultura estadounidense; permanecen monolingües en español. Por otro lado, hay gente de herencia mexicana que ha construido su identidad basada en una asimilación completa de la cultura estadounidense. Hay gente chicana que no habla español. Es complicado decir que existe consentimiento entre los miembros de la comunidad chicana sobre su participación en la nación cuando hay dos otras opciones de naciones posibles para esta identificación.

En conclusión, hay muchos aspectos de la comunidad chicana que le hace parecer como una nación. Sin embargo, la falta de soberanía y consentimiento presente la previenen ser una nación de verdad. El reconocimiento de esas necesidades en el Plan de Aztlán demuestra que quizás algún día sería posible tener una nación chicana completa dentro de los EEUU, aunque todavía parece ser muy optimista. Esa es una conclusión que se puede extraer de este análisis. La otra es que, como ya se usa la frase “la nación chicana” y se ha usado por décadas, no es la comunidad chicana que tiene que redefinirse, sino el concepto de la nación moderna.

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## A Changing Understanding of Writing

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**Keywords:** writing, developmental scale, student writers, writing pedagogy, composition, writing process, writing instruction

Near the end of my time as an undergraduate student, I was stunned to find out that although I had always loved to write and excelled in my English classes, I knew no strategies for addressing writing. I was taking a class on style and genre at the time, and I realized that even the most basic, common-sense understanding of the writing process had so far eluded me. How could this be? It seemed impossible that I had made it so far without acquiring any practical strategies for generating ideas, any appreciation for the importance of format and genre, any understanding of how writing can be taught. And yet, there I was, about to graduate college without being able to articulate how or why I wrote the way I did.

It became clear that I was not the only one who had been left in the dark. Everyone in my class, it seemed, was having the same revelations. Outside of class, the situation was much the same. Friends I talked to, including English writing majors and future teachers, confessed feeling similarly confused and unprepared for the demands of the writing tasks before them. Basic strategies for drafting and revising were world-shaking epiphanies to them. The more people I talked to, the more I realized I was not alone.

As a future educator, I was naturally drawn to the pedagogical implications of all this. It became apparent that many of my own teachers had unknowingly failed me because they themselves had never been given access to the knowledge and strategies I was learning. After all, you can't teach what you don't know. I was thrilled to be learning ways to improve my own writing habits, but I was even more interested in finding out how writing can and should be taught. As I contemplated my own development, I considered how I would go about leading others through the same steps of growth.

My hope is that by exploring my own journey as an emerging writer, I can offer some insight for student writers into their own developmental process. Further, I hope that teachers of writing can use my experience to better understand the experiences of their students. Ideally, teachers and students alike will come away from this paper with a better understanding of the writing process, as well as practical applications that they can use to engage in, and instruct, writing.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT WRITING?

The idea of a process is well established in the field of composition. As far back as the early seventies, Murray (1972) argued that writing should be taught as a process rather than a product. Murray described three general stages of the writing process: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Flower and Hayes (1981) expanded on this idea, stating that the process of writing itself contains a hierarchy of embedded cognitive processes and asserting that writers generate goals for themselves to guide these processes.

Many researchers have emphasized that the writing process is recursive, meaning that a writer will likely revisit previous stages as they progress through the process (Elbow, 1981; Flower and Hayes, 1981; Murray, 1972, Bishop, 2004). According to Elbow (1992) and Gallagher (2011), it is also generative; rather than writing to show what they know, a writer can use writing to discover and create meaning. Elbow (1981) also asserts that writing is a collaborative effort, and that writers should seek feedback from others rather than relying solely on themselves.

Halliday (1985) described a functional approach to language which places an emphasis on construction of meaning rather than a set of prescriptive rules (as cited in Bloor & Bloor, 2013). This is echoed by Derewianka (1999), who stated that a functional language model can



be used alongside instruction in the writing process. Rather than thinking in terms of grammatical correctness, writers should consider the rhetorical situation their writing addresses, focusing on the appropriateness of their piece in terms of audience, genre, and purpose (Elbow, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1980). According to Hoey (2010), writers can arrange their texts with consideration to the needs of their readers; skilled writers omit irrelevant information and answer their audience's questions without compromising their own message. Myhill (2009) found that mature writers make careful grammatical and syntactical choices to influence the style and effect of their work. Despite this evidence, Connors (1985) found that teachers of writing disproportionately focus on mechanical correctness, and students rarely receive feedback on more substantial stylistic and process-related concerns.

Writing theorists have problematized the notion that the act of writing can be generalized to a single process, and some have critiqued the over-prevalence of process theory in composition studies (Kent, 1999). On the surface, post-process theory seems to suggest that writing cannot be taught, and theorists like Kent have been criticized for their vague or nonexistent considerations of pedagogy (Breuch, 2002). However, Breuch suggests that post-process theory invites teachers to think critically and reflectively on their practice. Rather than a rejection of foundationalist practices, post-process theory is a rejection of oversimplifications; it suggests that the act of writing is a set of individualized and recursive processes instead of one rigid, universal process.

## A WRITERLY DEVELOPMENT SCALE

As teachers understand more about writing, they themselves are transformed. Shaughnessy (1976) describes a developmental scale for writing teachers similar to the scales on which students are often measured. According to Shaughnessy, educators must go through stages of unlearning biases and opening themselves up to new ideas. Similarly, my understanding of writing and the way I approach it has changed drastically over time. Based on my own experiences, as well as what research says about student writers, I created a developmental scale that can be generally applied to most writers' change over time. Although this scale is largely illustrated with examples from my own life, my experiences are not

unique. The majority of student writers go through something similar over the course of their schooling.

Instead of dictating what students should be doing, this scale describes observable patterns that typically emerge among student writers. It does not always have to occur in the order below, and some stages may be skipped, condensed, or combined. The scale, like the writing process itself, is recursive; ideally the writer would get into a cycle of repeating the final two stages, building on former knowledge and always seeking out new understandings that can be applied to both learning and teaching writing.

## MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The first stage in the writer's developmental scale is called Myths and Misconceptions, so named because writers in this phase have little evidence-based understanding of the writing process, and instead rely on unfounded—and often untrue—assumptions about composition. Due to patchy, erroneous prescriptivist instruction, they believe that grammar is a set of rules and that there is a “right way” and a “wrong way” to write (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). Their “revision process,” if they have one at all, consists of catching formal errors (Murray, 1972). They have no knowledge of the way in which people learn to write, and most likely think that the world is divided up between those who can write and those who cannot. They may believe that they fall into the latter category because they are unable to spit out a spotless first draft on command, or they may believe they are in the former category purely because they've had the advantage of growing up in a culture that understands Standard Academic English and are able to get good grades on writing assignments without really trying (Schleppegrell, 2004). Students in the Myths and Misconceptions phase think of writing as a solitary activity, likely imagining writers as tortured geniuses spitting out classic novels in fits of inspiration (Flower & Hayes, 1980). They probably do not enjoy writing or even think of themselves as writers, because their perception of what writing is and what the writing process looks like has been so skewed.

My Myths and Misconceptions period lasted a long time. Though I had plenty of writing assignments in elementary and middle school, I had very little instruction in writing.

My seventh-grade teacher introduced the concept of a “rough draft” to me for the first time, but even then I did not have a real writing process. I had to turn in my draft and wait for her to put cryptic symbols and phrases like “¶” and “comma splice” all over it in red pen. Then, confused though I was by her commentary, I dutifully fixed every typo and tried to follow her directions. After I made these superficial changes, I was ready to turn in my “final draft,” which was almost a carbon copy of the “rough draft.” Nowhere in this process did I receive feedback from my peers, or indeed even consider the prospect of readership beyond my teacher. Writing was a solo activity, and I liked it that way. I would hardly have wanted anyone to read my finished piece, much less a work in progress.

The five-paragraph essay was the only way I knew to structure my writing, but I never encountered an assignment I could not apply it to. I grew up in an English-speaking home with parents who spent time teaching me, had an above-average understanding of the demands of academia, and was naturally predisposed to enjoy reading and writing. I was not, in the eyes of my teachers, “remedial,” and so I received no extra guidance or feedback, sailing through my English classes with decent enough grades that I raised no complaints and asked no questions.

I was taught grammar— and therefore writing, because at that time I was told that writing and grammar were inseparable— in a way that overemphasized and overassessed mechanical correctness, as described by Connors (1985). Though the instruction was vague and (as I now know) outright incorrect at times, it was very clear about the fact that there was only one “right” way to do things, and deviating from standard, prescriptivist expectations was a huge mistake. My teachers focused on the visible and easily-targeted grammar errors rather than delve into more complex writing instruction (Connors, 1985). And so, even though no one offered any real criticism of my writing, I lived in eternal fear that I was always moments away from messing up, or that I already had. It seemed to me that I had fooled everyone into thinking I could write well through the sheer dumb luck of not accidentally doing something wrong. I did not feel that I knew how to write at all, because I had no grasp of the rules I was told not to break. Since I had absolute faith in my teacher’s knowledge and authority, however, I failed to see that perhaps the problem was not with my inability to understand rules, but with the rules themselves.

## COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

That came later, when I began to move into the next stage of the writer’s development scale: Cognitive Dissonance. In this phase, the writer begins to suspect that something is wrong with the way they have been taught writing, but has no knowledge about language to back up their hunch. They can sense that there is a problem, but cannot articulate what the problem is. They are frustrated because they lack the resources to find a better way, and so continue on as they always have, only now with a creeping dissatisfaction at the back of their mind.

In high school, some of my English teachers had good ideas about writing instruction. They introduced me to the idea of a writing process— the importance of planning and gathering information and the need for more substantial revision (Murray, 1972). For the first time, I was given the opportunity to see writing as collaborative, as suggested by Elbow (1981). One of my teachers had the class break into peer feedback groups for every major assignment, sometimes multiple rounds of review for multiple drafts. We were encouraged to move beyond catching typos and give meaningful feedback on more global issues. Additionally, some of my teachers criticized the preoccupation with standardized testing that led to an obsession with the dreaded five-paragraph essay, which is often restrictive when taught without an understanding of its purpose (Nunnally, 1991). At the same time, though, my classmates and I were gearing up to take state tests, AP exams, and IB tests. It was necessary to learn an efficient format for exams, so we had some variation of the five-paragraph essay drilled into us day in and day out, from all sides.

This kind of contradiction was everywhere. I was told I needed a revision process, but not given any revision strategies. I was told that peer feedback was necessary, but not given enough instruction to be able to craft helpful comments. I felt that I had cobbled together a very bad writing process, but had no idea how to improve upon it. It was upsetting, because I felt that I disagreed with how I had been taught and how states and schools teach writing, but I had no idea why I felt that way. I could not provide any evidence; it was just a feeling, but an irksome one that would not leave me alone.

## BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

That feeling propelled me into the next stage, Building Understanding, in which the writer's perspective on writing shifts as they find alternatives to the way they have been taught. They begin to unlearn the harmful and incorrect things they have been told about language and writing. They start to view the "rules" they grew up with as a set of tools, and see how they can be applied in different situations to improve the complexity and appropriateness of their writing (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Myhill, 2009). They understand that grammar and editing are not writing, and that different texts use different formats and language (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). They gain knowledge of the writing process and the way people learn to write.

In this third stage, I re-evaluated my beliefs about what writing is and how it should be approached. No longer do I buy into the myth of the "Eureka moment," which holds that a writer's ideas come from bursts of inspiration with no discernable source (Flower & Hayes, 1980). I have come to see writing as a way of discovering and creating meaning— rather than knowing what I plan to say before I start, I can use writing to help me find my point along the way (Elbow, 1981; Gallagher, 2011). Writing is not a linear process, but rather, recursive, able to be revised (Murray, 1972). It is collaborative, not solitary (Elbow, 1981). It can be messy. In short, writing is not sitting alone for a few hours, plunking out some words, proofreading, and calling it good. It is a vibrant, many-tiered process that involves much more than just one person trying to transcribe their thoughts on paper.

## APPLYING NEW IDEAS

Armed with a new way of thinking about writing, I moved into the final stage: Applying New Ideas. Here, the writer starts to put the things they have learned to use in their own writing, and they develop their own writing process. They know techniques for prewriting and revision that they draw from for each writing project, rather than trying to write everything in one draft (Murray, 1972; Bishop, 2004). They also view other people's writing through a new lens; rather than criticizing non-standard usage, they look at the reasons the author may have deliberately or unknowingly written that way (Gallagher, 2014; Myhill, 2009). They analyze the craftsmanship of experienced writers, always looking for new tools to add to their writer's toolbox.

In this stage, I was finally able to create my own writing process. I explored strategies for getting started that are much healthier than trying to write a final draft in one go. I experimented with sets of prompts meant to help me explore a topic from various perspectives, such as Elbow's (1981) Loop Writing and Perl's Guidelines for Composing (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005). My favorite strategy by far is plain and simple freewriting, wherein the writer writes without stopping, even if all they say is "I don't know" over and over (Elbow, 1992). The first time I tried writing without stopping or worrying about conventions for a set amount of time, I only planned to write for five or ten minutes, but I liked it so much that I just kept going. Since then, I have done at least one freewrite for every writing assignment I have had to do for school, as well as several for projects outside of class. The benefits of freewriting were made especially clear when I tried "unfreewriting," in which the writer must adhere to arbitrary rules as they write, such as "put an asterisk by every preposition" and "capitalize every R, S, V, and B wherever they appear" (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005, p.107). I only got five lines of unfreewriting compared to a page and a half of freewriting in the same amount of time. That activity made me realize how much I have been restricting myself by trying to get everything right in my first draft. Once I was able to let go of the need to always write "perfectly," I was able to be much more productive and create a more useful first draft with lots of content I can pull from and rearrange.

Rearranging, in fact, is the major component in my other favorite activity for drafting: making a collage (Bishop, 2004). In this activity, I literally cut up my draft into chunks and physically rearranged them. Just like with freewriting, I had to get over my conception that a draft should be untouchable— I had to force myself to put scissors to paper the first time, but once I did I found it incredibly satisfying. Making a physical collage was even better than doing the same thing on a computer, because I was able to make piles and shift things around, see how my paper fit together in a real space. I was most surprised by how much ended up in my discard pile (half of my total material, or nearly so). I had been so focused on figuring out how to generate content in the first place that I failed to consider what to do with all the excess and how to whittle down what to say to focus only on what is most relevant and effective in the particular assignment.

Previously, removing words or chunks only came at the very end of my writing process, as part of my “revision,” though that term is used loosely here. I never had a good understanding of the division between revision and editing until I was well into college, and the few strategies for revision I had somehow picked up along the way were what inexperienced writers do, according to Sommers (1980). I was overly concerned with lexical repetition, and my idea was to tweak my sentences until they “sounded right.” Now when I revise, I am able to focus on finding the form of my argument (Sommers, 1980). It is significant for me to be able to revise well now, since for so long revision was one of my main problem areas in writing— I knew I had no good strategies, but I could not figure out how to acquire them.

The realization that audience, purpose, and genre should always be at the center of any writing project was completely revolutionary for me (Elbow, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1980). Those three things should inform every single step of the writing process and every aspect of the design, but for some reason I never gave them much thought. I suppose in the past I felt that they were always the same for school projects. My audience was my teacher, my purpose was to meet the demands of the prompt, and the genre was “academic essay.” In addition, unless the assignment was particularly creative and zany, I never assumed any role besides myself. I had some idea of the variations that could crop up— I could tell that a scientific research paper was different from a literary criticism essay, for example. I just never realized how integral these elements are when creating a piece of writing. My entire perspective has shifted, and I pay much more attention to the audience, purpose, genre, and even my own role now.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

The final stage, with its emphasis on application, is also where a writer starts to think about how writing is learned and how it should be taught. Once they have learned to use strategies in their own writing, they can pass them on to others.

I firmly believe that writing is learned by writing. There is no way to improve if you do not practice often. Therefore, it is important for students to write a lot, but it is also important for teachers to do so (Gallagher, 2011; Gallagher, 2014). It is simply impossible to teach

writing if you are not a writer yourself. Teachers should know what they are talking about when they assign tasks, and they should know what strategies and tools exist and how they can be employed. That way, they can give their students actual guidance. Writing teachers should write, and they should do it alongside their students and share their drafts so that students can see what a writing process looks like— namely, messy (Gallagher, 2014). I cannot think of a single time in my academic career that a teacher shared drafts of their own writing with the class until I was nearly finished with college. The difference that would have made, the effect that would have had on my early perceptions of writing, would have been incredible. As I go forward, I plan to write in my free time to hone my skills, but also write in front of my students to give them a guide.

I was stunned to realize how crucial that kind of guidance is. Though I have always preferred having examples to look at, I assumed it was just that— a personal preference. The concept of providing authentic mentor texts (Gallagher, 2014) has completely changed the way I think about writing assignments. I now realize that there should always be a range of examples of successful real-world texts provided for students to analyze and emulate, so that they understand the features that are expected in a piece from their assigned genre. Students can also look at successful pieces of writing to find strategies for increasing the complexity and effectiveness of their own work (Myhill, 2009). They can look at the language choices and structures used in particularly interesting pieces, so that they can incorporate elements into their own writing. Whatever the writing assignment, mentor texts are always immensely helpful.

In addition to mentor texts, teachers should give explicit instruction. While this seems like common sense, I was amazed by how many teachers do not give good instruction, and how much of a social justice issue it is. Many students do not have the opportunity to learn the language of schooling and the demands of academia, and they are barred and challenged at every turn by gatekeepers (Schleppegrell, 2004). It is the teacher’s job to give them skills and help them navigate, so that they can acquire the power that has been denied them because of the culture they were born into (Delpit, 1988). Teachers should be very clear about their expectations for each writing assignment. Relatedly,



they should be incredibly explicit with their grading criteria, so students know what they need to do to be successful. Explicit instruction is the cure for many of the problems that left me in the Myths and Misconceptions and Cognitive Dissonance stages for so long— if students are taught what they are supposed to be doing, they will be able to do it, instead of constantly worrying that they are messing something up.

The emphasis in writing classrooms should always be on the process. Teachers need to give students plenty of strategies that they can use along the way, and then provide adequate time for them to employ the

strategies. Because writing is collaborative, there should be frequent opportunities for students to give and receive thoughtful peer feedback (Elbow, 1981). When teachers themselves give feedback, they should focus more on rhetorical issues than formal errors, especially if the feedback is given during the process (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). The idea is not to penalize students for violating prescriptivist rules, but to give them a full toolbox that can be used to create interesting, complex writing that addresses the audience, purpose, and genre of each individual writing project in appropriate and effective ways.

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# Opportunities for a Senior Center and University to Serve as Third Places and Advance Age-Friendliness in Their Community

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The purpose of the current study is to understand the potential use of a community senior center and university campus as third places, where people can gather informally for psychological support through a shared sense of grounding, ease, comfort, friendliness, and mutual concern (Oldenburg, 1999). Third places can help individuals age in place by contributing to the age-friendliness of communities (Banning, Clemons, McKelfresh, & Gibbs, 2010). Through a case study design, researchers used mixed methods to collect data from senior center members, senior center directors, and university administrators. Data were analyzed utilizing focused coding of open-ended responses and descriptive statistics from the quantitative data. Findings revealed implications related to lack of awareness, communication, and perceived barriers, contributing to the overall goals of supporting older adults aging in place through creating opportunities for them to feel engaged and empowered in their communities.

*Keywords:* third places, age-friendly, senior center, university, community

Third places have been explored as places outside home and work environments where individuals gather informally with ease, comfort, friendliness, and mutual concern. In a small college town in Oregon, both the local senior center and the public university could serve as third places for community members. The senior center has a thriving community of over 300 members who participate in a broad range of activities including games, trips, potlucks, films, and crafts. Located just next to the senior center, the university provides free tuition for adults 65 years of age or older auditing courses (per ORS 351.658; OregonLaws.org, 2014), as well as inviting spaces open to the community such as the library, gift shop, coffee shops, and food court. The researchers in this study investigated how both the senior center and university might be serving local older adults as third places and how they could help to advance age-friendliness of their community.

## THIRD PLACES AND AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

A third place is defined as a setting outside of the home (first place) and work (second place) that serves as an informal place for comfort, to find retreat, and community (Banning, Clemons, McKelfresh, & Gibbs, 2010). These

places have “homey” characteristics and provide psychological support through senses of rootedness, ease, comfort, friendliness, and mutual concern. Typical examples of third places include coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and barbershops (Oldenburg, 1999). A third place allows older adults to age in place, but it also provides sociability, belonging, and an escape from daily stressors (Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016).

As older individuals become a larger share of the overall population, community systems that support their health and independence will be increasingly important to meet their preferences to age in place. Around the world, many cities and communities are focused on becoming more “livable” or “age-friendly,” qualities that enable people of all ages to engage in community activities and afford them opportunities to be healthy, active, and respected. An age-friendly community strengthens feelings of belonging and commonality among all age groups (Tuan, 2002). Livable communities comprise an ample number of public spaces that enhance sociability – the types of places often identified as third places. A third place can ultimately contribute to the creation of an age-friendly community by encouraging communication, engagement, and belonging (Banning et al., 2010).

## THE ROLES OF SENIOR CENTERS IN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Senior centers serve as places within the community dedicated to providing positive social settings to older adults. For many, this is the location where social stimulation and affection is given outside of the home, contributing to the overall well-being and promotion of social ties amongst older adults (Pardasani & Thompson, 2010). Senior centers can therefore be instrumental to creating age-friendly communities as they support both physical and social well-being (Nieboer & Cramm, 2017). Physical well-being is ensured when stimulation and comfort are supported within the environment, whereas social well-being is guaranteed with appropriate levels of affection, status and self-perception.

Older adults 75 to 84 years of age primarily represent the senior center population, and many senior centers are actively seeking ways to attract the growing number of older adults in younger cohorts (Eaton & Salari, 2005). In order to maintain active membership, senior centers across the United States are evaluating the interests of the older adults they serve and many are promoting lifelong learning in order to maintain attendance and continue to serve their communities (Eaton & Salari, 2005; Pardasani & Thompson, 2012).

## THE ROLES OF UNIVERSITIES IN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Higher education plays an important role in contributing to overall quality of life within communities. College towns have historically been considered high-quality places to live, even for those with no direct connections to the institution of higher education; for the community, campus serves as an environment for learning and as a public space (Gumprecht, 2003). As pointed out by Narushima, Liu, and Diestelkamp (2018), participation in lifelong learning is associated with many positive outcomes related to health, relationships, behaviors, and civic participation. Older adults, in particular, have been found to experience increased psychological, social, cognitive, and physical well-being when participating in lifelong learning.

Institutions of higher education are increasingly examining ways to become age-friendly, with over 51 colleges and universities around the world becoming part of what's known as the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network. They are doing this because they are

considering their nontraditional students, older faculty and staff, alumni, donors and community residents (Eisenberg, 2019). As with age-friendly communities, the goals of the partners in this network are aspirational; they are aligned with AFU principles, which include: encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs (Principle 1); and promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers (Principle 2; AGHE, 2019). As the university included in this study recently endorsed the AFU principles, researchers wanted to explore ways to advance the work associated with these principles. This study intended to examine the barriers and facilitators to using the university and senior center as community resources and potential opportunities that exist to increase their use and help to make the larger community more age-friendly.

## METHODS

This case study was conducted by an undergraduate research team led by a faculty member with expertise in gerontology, community development, and case study research. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the study occurred in two phases, using a mixed methods approach. In the first phase, researchers conducted survey research to help understand how senior center members used their senior center and, in comparison, how they used the nearby university campus. Items in the survey were designed to assess the frequency, purpose, barriers, and facilitators to use of both places, as well as basic demographic information of participants. The survey was reviewed by two faculty members with expertise in survey design to establish face validity. Researchers distributed surveys over a 3-month period at the senior center, at well-attended events and during regular drop-in visits. Surveys included a pre-stamped envelope and contact information for the participants to follow up for in-depth follow-up interviews.

In the second phase of the study, researchers conducted interviews to gain a deeper understanding of some of the facilitators and opportunities for the senior center and university to serve as third places to older adults in the community. Researchers contacted all survey respondents who indicated interest in participating in interviews and scheduled interviews. All interviews included semi-structured protocols that were reviewed by two faculty members with qualitative methods

expertise. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed professionally.

Sample characteristics shown in Table 1 include study participants who were members of the local senior center.

|                  | Interview<br>(N=9)          | Survey<br>(N=46)            |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Age              | M = 73.4                    | M = 75.2                    |
| Race/Ethnicity   | 100% Caucasian              | 97.8% Caucasian             |
| Household Size   | M = 2                       | M = 1.6                     |
| Education        | 88.8% at least some college | 89.1% at least some college |
| Mobility Devices | 0 % usage                   | 21.7% usage                 |

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

## DATA ANALYSIS

For survey data, SPSS and Excel were used to generate descriptive statistics and MAXQDA was used to analyze open-ended responses. Interview data were analyzed both by hand and with MAXQDA. Researchers engaged in collaborative coding, which allowed the research team to build codes together and then create a shared interpretation and understanding of what was happening in the data (Saldana, 2016; Weston et al., 2001). One member of the research team served as the codebook editor, creating, updating, revising, and maintaining the master list for the group. Each team member coded on their own, then members came together as a group to discuss findings and interpretive convivence. Intensive group discussion and group consensus were used to reach agreements, with rare and easily resolved disagreements. As the team coded, patterns/categories emerged; the team met weekly to discuss the meaning of these categories and the relationships among them. They created a preliminary coding scheme based on these categories, which was revised and expanded by the codebook editor as codes were applied to further

interviews. Major categories were compared with each other and consolidated into themes.

## RESULTS

From the first phase of data analysis, which included the survey data, researchers gained a sense of how senior center members used their senior center and, in comparison, how they used the nearby university campus. For example, in terms of frequency of attendance: 59% (n = 27) of participants reported attending the senior center more than once a week; 30% (n = 14) reported attending the senior center a few times a month; and 9% (n = 4) reported attending it only a few times a year. In comparison, 9% (n = 4) of participants reported attending the university more than once a week; 17% (n = 8) reported attending the senior center a few times a month; and 26% (n = 4) reported attending it only a few times a year. When asked to rate their experiences at both the university and senior center, 98% (n = 45) of participants rated their experience at the senior center excellent or good whereas 80% (n = 37) of participants rated their experience at the university excellent or good.

After completing the second phase of data analysis, which included the data from the interviews (N = 9), researchers found that four major categorical themes emerged. These themes included: benefits of attending the senior center, which primarily included opportunities for socialization and friendship, exercise, and education/learning; barriers to attending the senior center, which primarily included lack of awareness/promotional activity, lack of diversity, and desire for more activities/offerings; benefits of the university in the community, which included the aesthetics of the university campus, events, and opportunities for intergenerational interaction; and barriers to accessing the university in the community, which included lack of parking, unawareness of activities/offerings, and feeling unwelcome.

## BENEFITS TO ATTENDING THE SENIOR CENTER

A recurring theme in the data related to socialization and friendship as a primary benefit of attending the senior center. To illustrate, 96% (n = 44) of survey respondents and 100% (n = 9) of interviewees discussed the use of the senior center as a way to remain socially connected, make new friends, and/or feel welcomed or supported. One survey respondent commented: "It is a friendly and welcoming place to come; I feel respected," while another said "Activities with other seniors providing

contact to form new acquaintances with interesting backgrounds.” From the interviews, one participant stated: “...some people are coming here and getting active trying to stave off or get through depression; you know, get back out in the world so they don’t isolate; they’re doing that on purpose (Interviewee #2).” This was reinforced by a comment by Interviewee #3: “...when I stopped working it was pretty depressing...I decided to start coming to the senior center and doing some volunteer work.” Exercise was also considered a primary benefit for 28% (n = 13) of survey respondents and 56% (n = 5) of interviewees. For example, a survey respondent commented, “The stretch exercise helps my body so I can move without as much pain; it gives me a sense of worth.” Education/learning was considered another primary benefit by 24% (n = 11) of survey respondents and 67% (n = 6) of interviewees, with one survey respondent commenting, “Because we are a university town, many of us are retired teachers.” From the interviews, one participant said, “I know I’m not the only one that is intellectually hungry (Interviewee #1)”; another said she likes that “the kinds of things I do to keep my brain active [laughs] ... and I usually go with friends to these things, so it’s a socialization thing as well (Interviewee #7).”

### **BARRIERS TO ATTENDING THE SENIOR CENTER**

Among survey respondents, only 24% (n = 11) reported any barriers to, or limitations of, the senior center. Over 63% of these reflected a desire for more activities/offerings. Suggestions included computer training courses, lectures from university professors, a lending library, and activities targeted for more diverse older adults. Among interviewees, 89% (n = 8) identified barriers to attending the senior center, largely the lack of diversity among participants (n = 7) and issues around marketing and misunderstanding/unawareness of what is going on at the senior center. As one interviewee stated, “I think it’s really important to be able to... show an active group of people...doing active things, activities, that are not just playing cards (Interviewee #3).”

### **BENEFITS OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE COMMUNITY**

Primary benefits expressed by survey respondents with regard to the benefits of the university as part of their community included social connections with students (n = 8, 17%), campus beauty (n = 5, 11%), and events on campus, such as sports games (n = 5, 11%). Among interviewees, all respondents (n = 9) identified some

benefits of co-location of the university and the senior center, primarily because this provides intergenerational interaction, as illustrated by the following quote: “There’s a lot of grandmas and grandpas that want to nurture these kids (Interviewees #8-9).” The university also provides access to more activities and events, a vibrant/active feel in the community. As one interviewee stated, “...without the university we’d really be out of balance as a community.” Other interviewees commented on the benefits of living in a college town: “I love living in a small town that has a college” (Interviewee #7); “We like college towns ... I had always taught part-time and wanted to continue to teach part-time... so yeah ... we often will walk down to the campus (Interviewee #4).”

### **BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE UNIVERSITY IN THE COMMUNITY**

Among survey respondents, 39% (n = 18) said there are barriers to accessing the university in the community. The most frequently-mentioned barriers included parking issues (15%, n = 7), being unaware of activities/offerings (11%, n = 5), and feeling unwelcome or that campus is not accessible (11%, n = 5). Among the interviewees, 22% (n = 2) also explicitly mentioned parking as a barrier whereas eight interviewees (89%) discussed challenges associated with being unaware of activities/offerings or lack of advertising of events to the community, as demonstrated by Interviewee #4: “If there is anything that’s being offered...it’s not getting here.” Another stated: “I understand that we’re not allowed to be inside of [the recreation center] ... it’s reserved for students... but I’d like to go in (Interviewee #6).” This person also alluded to the fact that faculty don’t seem involved with the senior center: “We have a rich resource in faculty on this campus and I’m not sure they ever participate in the senior center (Interviewee #6).” All of these interviewees (n = 9) mentioned roadblocks to the tuition-free auditing option at the university for older adults, as illustrated by the following quote: “Someone said to me recently – and I did not know this – that seniors can take classes there for free (Interviewee #5).” An item was included in the survey instrument specifically about auditing and if respondents were aware that they could audit classes for free as older adults; the results were that 85% (n = 39) did not know they could audit classes, 15% (n = 7) were aware that they could audit classes, and only 5% (n = 2) had actually audited classes at the university.



## DISCUSSION

This study has notable implications for the field as well as potential limitations. Limitations related to the sample include the fact that the sample was fairly small and not a truly random sample due to the methods used to select participants. Additionally, researchers may have had biases toward the data and results that may have affected the study's legitimacy. Also, due to the lack of prior research studies on the topic, there was limited foundation for investigating this particular topic.

This study demonstrated that facilitators and barriers exist for using both the senior center and the university. Notably, there seem to be greater barriers for the research participants to accessing the university, even though the two community resources are co-located. Senior center members seem to use the senior center as a third place, as it allows for informal gathering and seems to be a place for comfort, to find retreat, and community (Banning et al., 2010). Once a stronger relationship is built with the older adult community, the university would potentially be used as a third place as well. Sense of belonging, however, needs to be cultivated further; interestingly, as pointed out by some interviewees, the university does contribute to the identity of the town itself and the participants seem to value its presence overall.

Overcoming barriers will be key to moving forward from this research. Some ideas included simplifying the auditing process and raising awareness of the opportunity to audit; scheduling faculty lectures and workshops at senior center; encouraging students to volunteer at the senior center; and inviting seniors to participate in physical activity (e.g., swimming, walking) on campus. Increased education and leisure activities, for example, could help foster the desire of the senior center members to get more involved in such activities at the university (Chesser & Porter, 2019).

Another concern identified by older adults regarding visiting the university is the perceived sentiment of not being welcome on campus. This concern might prompt older adults to avoid intergenerational interactions with university students for fear of rejection (Stanley, Morrison, Webster, Turner, & Richards, 2019). This could be remediated by conducting training on how to make contact and communicate with older adults prior to any planned interaction between the two cohorts (Vrkljan et

al., 2019). Perhaps by overcoming some of these barriers, older adults in the community can view this location as a place to foster intergenerational relationships and, for retired faculty or alumni, a place to relive the meaning they made years ago on the campus.

The data from this study indicated that there is intentionality and desire for a stronger partnership between the university and the senior center. As a participating member of the AFU global network initiative, the university is working towards improving this partnership through research and identification of areas to improve, expand and implement features of the AFU principles. This research, which entailed involving students in projects to be conducted as part of undergraduate classroom activities – similar to what has been done by other AFU partners like the University of Manitoba (Chesser & Porter, 2019) – is helping to lay the groundwork. This could provide both stakeholders in this study the chance to experience personal growth, add to the age-friendliness of the town overall, and facilitate aging in place.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has potential limitations. Limitations related to the sample include the fact that the sample was fairly small and not a truly random sample due to the methods used to select participants. Additionally, researchers may have had biases toward the data and results that may have affected the study's legitimacy. Also, due to the lack of prior research studies on the topic, there was limited foundation for investigating this particular topic.

## CONCLUSION

The feedback and insights gathered from participants in this case study indicated that there is room to improve for the university and senior center to serve as third places, and opportunities exist for them to collaborate and contribute to making their community friendly for aging residents. The barriers established all can be overcome; with the university's senior center partnership and AFU endorsement, the campus can work to be more inclusive to all community members, not just the students who pay to attend classes. By partnering, the senior center and university can both enhance the lives of older and younger adults in the community.

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## "It's Just What You Do:" Exploring Relationships Between Young-Adult Grandchildren and their Grandfathers

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The grandparent role is a dynamic and often ambivalent relationship requiring simultaneous navigation of “being there” and “not interfering” in the lives of grandchildren (Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007). These relationships change as grandchildren mature and can result in new grandparent-grandchild connections based on communication, intimacy, and mutual respect (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Utilizing a sample of grandfathers and young-adult grandchildren (N = 32), this study investigated the impact that grandfathers have on their young-adult grandchildren. Utilizing a life course perspective, we asked: a) How do grandfathers invest in the futures of their young-adult grandchildren? b) How do young-adult grandchildren recognize and receive their grandfather’s investments in their futures? Results suggest that grandfathers emphasized their grandparenting role but undervalued their contributions to their grandchildren. Grandfathers and grandchildren also did not always agree on the transmissions intended and received. When asked to recall meaningful memories of grandfathers, young-adult grandchildren were more likely to remember instances of shared hobbies, interests, and personal connection. Findings have implications for understanding and strengthening the ties between grandfathers and their grandchildren.

*Keywords:* grandfathers, families, communication, young adults

As the older adult population continues to expand in the United States, women and men are finding that they have more time to experience grandparenthood. On average, today’s older adults can expect to spend over a third of their lifetime as a grandparent (Hayslip & Page, 2012). Additionally, grandparents are more likely to live long enough to become great grandparents and have the ability to build relationships with their grandchildren and great grandchildren over time (Connidis, 2009; Hayslip & Page, 2012). These grandparents can also look forward to healthier lives, better financial security, and more time to engage in the grandparent role (Uhlenberg, 2009). Many researchers have examined the roles and impacts of grandmothers in intergenerational relationships, yet grandfathers are under-examined and under-represented in gerontological literature (Bates, 2009; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013). Regardless of this discrepancy, grandfathers have demonstrated no difference of interest towards their grandchildren, nor do they express any difference in a sense of responsibility associated with their roles as grandparents (Bates, 2009; Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Thiele & Whelan, 2008).

Generativity has been established as a cornerstone of the grandparent experience (Bates, 2009; Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Erikson, 1982; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Villar & Serrat, 2014). This concept is drawn from Erikson’s (1982) stage of generativity versus stagnation, which refers to the need or desire to invest in future generations through guidance and support, lest productivity in life be perceived as stagnant. It has been shown that the grandparent-grandchild relationship serves to fulfill and resolve this life course task (Erikson, 1950, 1982; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Thiele & Whelan, 2008; Villar & Serrat, 2014). The concept of generativity is multidimensional and has been examined under various scopes and circumstances. Grandfathers provide a variety of supports to their grandchildren including: financial assistance; social and emotional supports, such as shared activities, childcare, mentoring, and advice-giving; and instrumental supports, such as transportation and maintenance (Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Bates, Taylor, & Stanfield, 2018; Bol & Kalmijn, 2016; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Landry-Meyer, Gerard, & Guzell, 2005; Mann & Leeson, 2010; Thiele & Whelan, 2008). Many grandfathers place significant value on their roles of providing these supports to future generations

(Lesperance, 2010; Mann & Leeson, 2010), and consider responsibilities such as the transference of perspective, values, and behaviors to their grandchildren as tasks tied to the grandfather role (Bates & Goodsell, 2013). Emotionally significant relationships between grandfathers and their grandchildren may also be products of choice rather than the result of social pressures (Mann & Leeson, 2010).

Research on how grandchildren acknowledge and respond to generativity provided by their grandfathers is limited. Similar to their grandfathers, what is known is that grandchildren tend to consider the grandchild role as central to their identities (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Moreover, grandchildren typically report that their grandparents are major influences in their lives, and those who have had their character and values significantly shaped by their grandfathers experience more positive grandchild-grandfather relationships (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). Adult grandchildren typically describe their relationships with their grandparents as close (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). As grandchildren age, it is not uncommon for the amount of contact and the types of support they receive from their grandfathers to change. In general, frequency of contact between grandparents and their grandchildren is variable throughout the life course but tends to decline as grandchildren enter young-adulthood (Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monserud, 2011; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Typically, parental involvement is a primary determinant for grandparent-grandchild contact in early development, with parents either hindering or facilitating contact with grandparents, though the latter is more common (Barnett et al., 2010; Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monserud, 2011; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019). This type of gatekeeping decreases as grandchildren mature, move out of their parental homes, and assume new roles (Geurts, Poortman, Tilburg & Dykstra, 2009; Monserud, 2011). These new roles such as that of college student, husband/wife, and full-time worker have been negatively correlated with contact frequency and perceptions of intergenerational closeness between grandparents and grandchildren (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008).

Proximity influences intergenerational relationship quality (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 2001) and has been positively correlated with both grandparent-grandchild support exchanges and frequency of contact (Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Hayslip & Page, 2012). In general, however, contact frequency has been

found to be a better indicator of relationship quality than proximity (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) and is related to relationship closeness and role satisfaction (Bates & Taylor, 2013). Support exchanges and interactions between grandparents and their grandchildren also evolve through the life course, with relationships moving from nurturing in childhood towards more respectful and emotional relations in adulthood (Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019).

Grandfathers, in comparison to grandmothers, are less likely to discuss personal problems and family-oriented topics (Barker, 2007; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) but are more likely to engage in discussions about experiences in youth- and health-related matters (Barker, 2007). Grandfathers are comparatively less involved with grandchildren than grandmothers (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) with grandmothers also more likely to attend family gatherings, often acting as familial matriarchs (Mann, Khan, & Leeson, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001). Grandmothers feel a greater sense of entitlement towards kinkeeping roles in families (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008) and have historically been considered the primary facilitators for the nurturing and childcare of their grandchildren (Horsfall & Dempsey, 2015). Kinkeeping behaviors are those that keep family members in touch with the individual as well as with each other (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Grandfathers typically find value in their roles through the affirmation of masculine norms established through experiences, such as child-rearing and occupational involvement earlier in life (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers feel that they are masculine role models through regular and reliable contact with their grandchildren (Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers also tend to avoid parental roles with their grandchildren, especially disciplinary roles (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Lesperance, 2010; Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007).

Differences in demographics play a major role in influencing approaches to grandparenting. Specifically, socioeconomic factors (Bol & Kalmijn, 2016; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001; Swartz, 2009) and cultural norms (Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) hold the most sway. African American grandparents are more likely to provide financial support, engage in spiritual events, and assist in raising grandchildren than their White counterparts (Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001). Factors such as



obligation, tradition, religious beliefs, and an absence of alternative caregivers make rural African American grandfathers more likely to engage in kinkeeping behaviors, despite a lack of resources and the presence of distress (Bullock, 2007). Financially secure grandparents are not only more capable of providing and facilitating financial assistance to their grandchildren (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001; Bol & Kalmijn, 2016), but are also more likely to be involved in their grandchildren's lives (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) and are better able to provide instrumental support (Swartz, 2009). Grandparent education may also affect the grandchild-grandfather relationship. When proximity to grandchildren is close, college-educated grandparents are more likely to engage in shared activities with and provide childcare for their grandchildren. However, in contrast with less educated grandparents, grandparents with higher education find more personal definition and validation through their careers rather than through familial roles (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001).

As previously stated, grandfathers have been historically less researched than grandmothers (Bates, 2009; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013). Also, the research on young-adult grandchildren, their receptiveness to supports, and their perceptions of the grandfather role is limited. Furthermore, the grandfather-grandchild relationship can be wholly unique and dynamic, which makes dyadic research the essential approach for observing common themes and important variations. In order to confront these gaps in the empirical literature, this study adopted two theoretical frameworks through which the grandfather-grandchild relationship may be observed. First, this study utilized Erikson's (1950, 1982) theory of generativity in order to navigate the multi-faceted forms of support inherent in the grandfather-grandchild relationship. Second, this study used a life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Connidis, 2009) in order to identify shifts in supports, relationship closeness, and perceptions of the grandfather role across the life course. The research questions for this study included: a) How do grandfathers invest in the futures of their young-adult grandchildren?; and b) How do young-adult grandchildren recognize and receive their grandfathers' investments in their futures?

## METHOD

This qualitative study emerged from a research project established in a university course and focused on the relationships between grandfathers and their young adult

grandchildren. Under the guidance of the professor, undergraduate students were methodologically trained and conducted individual interviews with grandfathers and their young adult grandchildren focusing on relationship quality, support, and shared activities.

## PROCEDURE

After Institutional Review Board approval was received, student researchers completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training, were trained in qualitative research methods, and began data collection. Dyads were recruited, via convenience sampling, primarily by students and the professor. Once each member of the dyad agreed to interview, they received a copy of their respective protocol and signed informed consent forms. Participants were interviewed individually in a setting of their choice. The semi-structured protocols included 33 questions for grandfathers and 23 questions for grandchildren. Core interview questions were focused on grandchild-grandfather relationship quality and included questions such as "How often do you have contact with your grandchild/grandfather?," "Do you feel you spend enough time with your grandchild/grandfather?," and "How would you describe your relationship with your grandchild/grandfather?" Additional questions focused on the meaning of roles, the exchange of support, and intergenerational transmissions.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 3 hours, were recorded on audio recorders or mobile phones, and were transcribed verbatim. Data were later uploaded into MAXqda qualitative analysis software. Participant pseudonyms were used in the presentation of the data in order to maintain confidentiality.

## SAMPLE

To participate in the study, study criteria included that participants were grandfathers aged 60 years or older and their young adult grandchildren were between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Both had to indicate their willingness to interview in person. In the sample, the average age of grandfathers was 71.3 years. Grandfathers' median income was between \$50k and \$75k. Grandfathers were likely to be married (87.5%) and White (94%). The grandchildren sample included 9 women and 7 men and their average age was 21.6 years.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Once data were collected and transcribed, an initial research team including two undergraduate students and the professor engaged in qualitative data analysis as outlined by Berg (2007). At that time, sixty-two codes were established across grandfather and grandchild interviews. For this study, a new undergraduate researcher was trained to engage with the data. For the manuscript, the first phase of analysis involved frequent and intensive reading of all data. All grandfather and grandchild transcripts were thoroughly reviewed for common themes within the grandfather group, within the grandchild group, and between both groups. In the second phase, the researchers reviewed insights, discussed potential themes, and areas for further analysis. The third phase of data analysis involved utilization of prior coding by the original research team. All codes were integrated in the analysis and two new codes were created: 1) grandfather memory of own grandfather, and 2) grandchild memory of grandfather. The final phase required a review of all data utilizing the codes specific to the study's research questions.

## RESULTS

In general, young-adult grandchildren and their grandfathers expressed cohesion in their statements of contact frequency, types of support exchanged, and overall relationship satisfaction. Grandchildren also perceived that their influence on grandfathers was positive, with their grandfathers confirming these perceptions. Regardless of past or present intergenerational conflict, young-adult grandchildren were encouraged by their parents to form meaningful relationships with their grandfathers, with parents often facilitating contact. Moreover, both grandfathers and their young-adult grandchildren confirmed that the grandfather-grandchild relationship evolved as the grandchild aged, moving from primarily nurturing in childhood towards more mutualistic and friendship-oriented interactions in young-adulthood. Grandfathers supported reports by their grandchildren that grandfather-grandchild contact had become less frequent as their grandchild aged. Both grandfathers and grandchildren were also likely to cite young-adult grandchild duties and responsibilities as primary barriers to contact frequency. Emerging themes across all interviews focused on support exchanges between grandfathers and their grandchildren, perceptions of the grandfather role and outcomes, and the cocreation of memories and relationship ties.

### **"HE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME:" ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SUPPORT**

Nearly all grandfathers reported contributing either their time, some form of financial support, or both to their grandchildren. It was typical for grandfathers to joke that financial assistance was of greater value to their grandchildren, but they also stressed that being available for their grandchild was more significant to the grandfather role. A common sentiment was the desire to be a positive role model, a representation of what a "good man" should be. When Joe was asked what he thought he contributed to his grandchild's life, he replied "A positive example, and security.... I will always be there for them regardless of whatever circumstances. A positive example in their lives."

Roughly half of sampled grandfathers also offered some type of instrumental support, such as home maintenance and car repairs. Most grandfathers also reported that much of their grandfather role, and therein the types of generativity they provided, was influenced by and adapted from their experiences as fathers to their own children. Grandfathers stated that they appraised their performance as fathers as reflective of what they did or did not provide to their children, then applied what they perceived to have been effective to the grandfather-grandchild relationship while eliminating or omitting what was perceived as not effective. For grandfathers, this often meant the elimination or mitigation of disciplinary practices. As Michael shares his views on the grandfather role, "Well, I think it's a supportive role... but everybody needs to learn for themselves. It can't be like we're lecturing them. Oh, we don't do that." Michael also goes on to state "Because what we're doing is we're making up time that we could have been spending with our own kids."

All grandfathers reported that time spent with their grandchildren was the most meaningful contribution their grandchildren had provided. Grandfathers explained that these interactions provided opportunities to develop relational closeness, maintain solidarity, and, in general, keep abreast of events in one another's lives. Jack shared how his grandchild helps him "Yeah, they provide a lot of humor, and, uh, a lot of entertainment actually... the kids never had a TV when they grew up, so we read a lot and we talk, we play together, we talk together." A small number of grandfathers stated that their

grandchildren had assisted them with technology or home upkeep, but the majority of grandfathers were identified as being (by both themselves and their grandchildren) almost entirely independent.

Despite acknowledging the social and emotional dimensions of the support they provided, grandfathers were apt to devalue or diminish the impacts of these supports on their grandchildren. As Al, a grandfather, stated: "What [do] I contribute? Nagging. You know I mean. That was a big job, alright you know, and time." This is juxtaposed to the insights provided by young-adult grandchildren. Grandchildren, while acknowledging the various dimensions of support provided by their grandfathers, placed increased value on emotional and social exchanges. As Kelly stated, "He's always been there for me. Not always physically, but if I ever needed to talk to someone. I could go to him... I could tell him anything... he's always been the one I could turn to for anything."

Grandfathers also expressed an obligation to provide support, but downplayed the personal impact providing these supports had on their grandchildren. Intergenerational exchanges, including emotional and social exchanges, were seen as a byproduct of the familial and/or grandfather role. As such, the desire to provide assistance and guidance to grandchildren was framed as a means of fulfilling those expectations. Greg, a grandfather, explained: "It's just part of being family and raising children, you know? You got to nurture them along the way and help them out." Grandfathers were also likely to broach the topic of barriers (health, proximity, personality traits) to their grandchildren as a means of mitigating their potential for interactions. When asked if he thought the grandfather role was an important one, Carl stated, "Not significantly important I think because of my emotional and relational dysfunction. But I enjoy being with them and they enjoy being with me."

Grandchildren, however, acknowledged their grandfathers' barriers and expressed an appreciation for the efforts their grandfathers made despite these obstacles. Grandchildren were understanding of individual differences and expressed their own attempts at bridging social gaps. In reference to her grandfather meeting role expectations, April responded, "Totally! Yeah he meets expectations [of a grandfather]... he doesn't catch on to hints. So, we have to work on communication skills a little bit because he's not the most talented at communication."

When asked what contributions they felt their grandfathers had made in their lives, grandchildren were just as likely to refer to forms of financial support as they were to social and emotional exchanges. However, the vast majority of grandchildren would ultimately determine emotional and social support as having greater significance in their lives. All grandchildren expressed some form of appreciation towards their grandfathers, even those whose grandfather-grandchild relationship could be considered passive or disengaged. Any effort grandfathers made to be active in their grandchild's life seemed to be viewed as positive and was met with gratitude, no matter how small the gesture. Grandfathers placed the most value on social exchanges both to and from their grandchildren, and all dyads expressed at least some cohesion in reporting the types of social and emotional interactions.

### **"IT DEPENDS MORE ON WHAT MY WIFE IS DOING:" PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCES ON GRANDCHILDREN**

Regarding the grandfather role, grandfathers tended to undersell the influence their role had on their young-adult grandchildren. When asked how providing support to his grandchild made him feel, Al replied:

*Well, [it] probably doesn't make me feel either way, or one way or the other. It's just what you do. You're grandpa. It's just what you do, you know- so it's not a big deal one way or the other.*

Diminishment of the grandfather role was especially prominent when grandfathers compared themselves to grandmothers. Bill explained, "Eh, I'm not as good at it as she [grandmother] is." Grandfathers tended to view grandmothers as the more influential or important grandparent. Even grandfathers who placed increased value on the grandfather role and the support they provided undervalued the importance of the grandfather role in comparison to that of the grandmother. Regardless of how positive grandfathers perceived themselves, the respective grandmother was often credited as more influential. As Mark shared, "I feel that it's a great role, an important one, but again I depend more on what my wife is doing."

Despite undervaluing or comparative analysis, grandfathers expressed and embraced a sense of responsibility attached to the grandfather role. In fact,

the majority of responsibilities grandfathers felt regarding their grandchildren stemmed not from age-related influences (such as experience), but rather from the act of being a grandfather itself. As Jack explained: "Special responsibilities...? No, not really. I feel responsible to be the grandparent." John supports his peer, somewhat jokingly, in this regard by stating, "Here's the reality. Here's the old man with the money. We have to tolerate him." Grandchildren tended to hold an alternative view of their grandfathers, placing a high social status and value upon their roles in the family dynamic. Grandfathers were often viewed as influencers and as examples of moral and spiritual mentors. Ben provided an example of such an instance:

*He's a great man... if I didn't have my father, I would probably turn to my grandfather as my first point of reference, moral compass, I guess. Any decisions, big decisions I had in my life I would probably turn to him first.*

Finally, while grandfathers usually viewed relationships quality with their grandchildren as being relatively static over the life course, grandchildren often reported that their relationships with their grandfathers had become stronger as they approached and entered adulthood. Jessica explained, "I'd say that we've gotten closer as I've gotten older... I got much closer to him and kind of really got to take in like all of the knowledge he actually has."

### **"WE JUST TALKED THE WHOLE TIME:" CREATING MEMORIES TOGETHER**

In interviews, grandchildren were asked to provide a "special memory" of their grandfather. Of the 16 young-adult grandchildren interviewed, 13 responded to this question by either directly referring to or mentioning some form of shared activity with their grandfather. Shared activities mentioned could be categorized into two different groups: educational shared activities ( $n = 4$ ) and recreational shared activities ( $n = 9$ ). Educational shared activities centered on generativity, the transmission of knowledge from grandfather to grandchild, and were found in two areas: skills-focused transmissions and story-focused transmissions. Skills-focused activities involved passing on abilities or talents, such as when Marissa's grandfather taught her how to ride a bike: "Yeah, when he taught me how to ride a bike. It was really fun, and he, he was the one who taught me how to ride without training wheels."

Story-focused activities revolved around the sharing of important stories, moral guidelines, and faith-based teachings, typically passing from grandfather to grandchild. For his special memory, Tanner recalled, "Yeah Bible study, you know, and all the little things that happen while we're in Bible study... we've had tons of fun, awesome experiences."

As opposed to educational shared activities, recreational shared activities did not involve expressed transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Recreational shared activities were more commonly referenced and took two forms: outings and stay-ins. Shared outing activities involved those that required a departure from the home, often a vacation or trip. Outings could range from short term day trips to whole week-long excursions. One key feature of shared outing activities was that the grandparents, usually the grandfather, typically organized and oversaw outing related activities. Grant recalled, "When I was 14 or 15, we went on a hunting trip to Central Oregon... We drove around aimlessly for like three or four days, and we just talked the whole time." Shared stay-in activities were those that occurred within the home, whether in the grandfather's home, the young-adult grandchild's home, or the grandchild's parental home. These activities were typically brief or short-term in length, spanning less than a day. Shared interests were typically the focal point for shared stay-in activities, as demonstrated by Jennifer when she explained, "I use to stay the night at his house a lot and my grandma would would go to bed and he would stay up late with me and watch movies and pop popcorn... it was the best night ever."

Questions designed to ask grandfather participants about their own experience as grandchildren yielded inconclusive results. Most grandfathers reported either extremely limited or no contact with their own grandfathers. The majority of these grandfathers died at early ages, thus limiting their experience and historical frameworks for the grandfather role. When asked about his relationship with his grandparents, Nate said, "Well, I didn't have much of a relationship with my grandparents. That is unfortunate, my grandfather on my dad's side died before I was born." Due to their lack of role models, grandfathers appeared to develop their own frameworks to enact roles, including the types of generative activities they performed. These roles may have emerged as a product of what grandfathers wished to see in the grandfather role and may have also been shaped by

social expectations of what and how a grandfather is and should act.

## DISCUSSION

Grandfather-grandchild cohesion was commonly observed across interviews. As demonstrated by Sheehan & Petrovic (2008), both grandfathers and grandchildren in this study acknowledged the personal importance of their roles in their intergenerational relationships, indicating these roles as central to their identities. Parents of grandchildren also were found to be key players in fostering relational closeness and frequency of contact between grandchildren and their grandfathers (Barnett et al., 2010; Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monesrud, 2011). Shifts in supports and interactions across the life course also were reported by both grandfathers and grandchildren. Grandfathers assessed grandchild needs based on grandchild age, interests, and experience, then adjusted the types of generative acts they participated in to better fit those needs. Sciplino & Kinshott (2019) identified these transitions as typical processes of the grandfather-grandchild relationship, wherein both parties recognize maturation of the grandchild and engage in gradual adjustment of behaviors and supports more appropriate for adult relationships. Both grandfathers and their grandchildren reported that contact between them had steadily diminished as grandchildren aged. Sheehan & Petrovic (2008) found that grandchild age is typically negatively correlated with frequency of contact, and that grandchildren experience the most regular contact with their grandparents at younger ages. The same research also found that grandparent health is linked to contact frequency (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). While grandfathers referred to their health as a barrier to contact, their grandchildren often disregarded these as a hindrance and, in some cases, used them to justify the need for increased contact. Research into in-person contact frequency between grandfathers and grandchildren has demonstrated that grandfathers will refer to their grandchild's adult responsibilities and duties as reasons for diminished visitation (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 2001). Both grandchildren and grandfathers in this study were asked if they felt that they spent enough time with one another, with both parties often referencing new grandchild roles or responsibilities as primary barriers to more frequent contact.

Grandfathers reported being most generative when providing either socioemotional or financial support to their grandchildren. Traditional masculine roles place

significant value on occupation as a core aspect of identity for many men (Lesperance, 2010); therefore, it would be common to witness their role as financial providers maintained through the life course and into older adulthood. Providing financial support to grandchildren may then fulfill these grandfathers' desires to impart and maintain masculine roles through the family system (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers also reported that much of their grandfather role was adapted from their earlier roles as fathers. Many masculine norms may be fulfilled during this period in a grandfather's life and can become essential components to a grandfather's identity as they age and engage in acts of generativity with their grandchildren (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). However, many aspects of the father role may create some ambivalence once the grandfather role is adopted. Grandfathers often reported weighing the benefits of various components they experienced and acted upon as fathers and found that disciplinary actions were detrimental to their relationships with their children. Research confirms this type of appraisal and has demonstrated that grandfathers typically avoid engaging in disciplinary interactions with their grandchildren (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016).

Grandfathers in this study placed less value on the emotional and social support that they provided to their grandchildren and perceived the impact of these supports on their grandchildren as being of little consequence. This is juxtaposed with reports from the grandchildren. Studies have shown that grandfathers typically find value in the grandfather role through masculine norms developed over the life course (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016) and value their positions as masculine role models in their family systems (Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Social and emotional exchanges with grandchildren may not meet this image of masculinity that many grandfathers might seek to fulfill, and thus may cause a perceptual reassessment of the value of those exchanges for both themselves and their grandchildren.

In evaluating responsibilities attached to the grandfather role, grandfathers also were apt to shoulder mentoring and other supportive duties as extensions of their role as grandfathers and expressed an obligation to provide such. Bates & Goodsell (2013) observed that grandfathers view the transfer of behaviors, values, and experiential perspectives to their grandchildren as inherent to the grandfather role. Mann and Leeson (2010)



showed that grandfathers typically place much higher value on the grandparent role, but grandfathers in this sample were hesitant to credit their roles as important in their grandchildren's lives. This may be in part due to a lack of personal experience with the grandfather role in their own lives, wherein behaviors and "norms" for grandfathers were likely individually developed based on social expectations of masculine norms. These, in turn, may have influenced grandfathers' perceptions of their own value and influence.

Perhaps a byproduct of traditional gendered norms that consider grandmothers as more critical to family systems (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016), grandfathers in this study were quicker to diminish the value of the grandfather role in comparison to the grandmother role. Grandmothers have been historically considered to be the kinkeepers, childcare providers, and overall more nurturing grandparent by both society and family gerontological literature (Horsfall & Dempsey, 2015; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Furthermore, grandmothers often report feeling closer to their grandchildren than grandfathers (Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Geurts, Poortman, Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2009; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008), which may have affected grandfather perceptions. Grandfathers also adhered to expectations of role integration. Grandfathers, similar to grandmothers, place significant value on the grandparent role (Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) and often adopt it as a central component to their identities. Despite this pattern being present in our grandfather sample, several grandfathers nonetheless still downplayed its importance.

Grandchildren were more likely to report that grandfather-grandchild relationship quality had improved as they aged, and that they felt closer to their grandfathers now that they were adults. It has been shown that grandfathers who are more involved in the development of their grandchildren's character and values experience more positive relationships with their grandchildren (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). By the time a grandchild reaches adulthood, it stands to reason that a significant amount of these influential interactions may have occurred, especially for more involved grandfathers, and that stronger ties between grandfather and grandchild have developed as a result. Erikson (1950, 1982) also stated that each stage of the life course comes with its own tasks to negotiate in order to developmentally progress to the next stage. Generative grandfathers, in providing assistance and support to their

grandchildren, have the opportunity to assist their grandchildren with navigating each of these tasks. This, in turn, may build upon the strength of the grandfather-grandchild role as grandfathers play an important part in their grandchildren's development. Simultaneously, older adult grandfathers fulfill their own life stage task in providing generativity to the next generation (Erikson, 1950, 1982).

One role that is reportedly emphasized among grandfathers by researchers is the act of creating pleasant and fond memories for their grandchildren through quality time spent with them (Lesperance, 2010). Family leisure also has been shown to be important in developing family bonds across multiple generations (Hebblethwaite, 2015). The results from this study demonstrate just how important these shared activities may truly be to grandchildren. Shared activities and family leisure involve the navigation of intergenerational ambivalence caused by non-interference norms (Mason, May, & Clark, 2007) clashing with aspirations towards generativity (Hebblethwaite, 2015). More importantly, these shared activities provide cascading opportunities for acts of generativity between grandfathers and their grandchildren (Hebblethwaite, 2015). Due to this, shared activities fulfill high value goals for the grandfather role by providing mentorship, transference of cultural traditions and rituals, and engagement in forms of instrumental support with their grandchildren (Mann & Leeson, 2010). Activities that may be viewed as masculine may satisfy some grandfathers' desires to impart masculine norms, practices, or demonstrations, therein reaffirming gendered identity (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Shared activities can also facilitate extended and more frequent contact between grandfathers and their grandchildren, which research shows to be correlated with relationship closeness and role satisfaction (Bates & Taylor, 2013). Grandchildren report that they experience stronger, more positive relationships with their grandparents if their personalities are similar to or resembling that of their own (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). Shared activities provide common ground for grandfathers and grandchildren by which mutuality, resemblance, and cohesion may occur or be discovered.

Implications of this study are directly tied to the dynamic grandchild-grandfather relationship. Primarily, these results underscore the importance of the grandfather role in the lives of their young-adult grandchildren. Regardless of underrepresentation in empirical research

(Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelly, Whitley, & Campos, 2013) or role devaluation by grandfathers themselves, grandchildren confirmed that their grandfathers were significant influences in their lives and major players in their developmental trajectories throughout the lifecourse. These results also suggest that grandfathers mitigating perceptions of positive influence is a trait tied to the grandfather role itself, wherein providing support to grandchildren is viewed as a responsibility rather than an opportunity. Lastly, these results indicate that shared activities between grandfathers and their grandchildren are vital in establishing perceptions of grandfathers and play a key part in developing contextual frameworks for the grandfather role. By providing opportunities for generativity, shared activities may be pivotal in establishing mutuality and nurturing common interests between grandfathers and their grandchildren.

One limitation of this study was the high SES sampling of grandfathers. Research has shown that grandparents with higher income are more likely to provide financial support and are typically better able to engage in in-person contact with their grandchildren (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Also, most of the grandfathers were married in this sample, which studies have shown can greatly increase grandfathers' involvement with their grandchildren (Hayslip & Page, 2012; Sheenan & Petrovic, 2008). A more diverse sample may shed more light on the variability and similarities across the relationships that occur among grandfathers and their young adult grandchildren. In addition, the potential for social pressure towards providing strictly positive relational information to interviewers may have influenced participant responses. Finally, dependence upon student researchers, particularly in large groups, may have implications for interview consistency and depth.

Future research should focus on highlighting men and their roles as grandfathers. More diverse populations may give more insight into the common themes across grandfather-grandchild relationships. As well, increased diversity may help establish any key differences in these relationships brought on by demographic variation. Continued study in this field could also dive deeper into the biopsychosocial influences that govern grandfather perceptions of the grandfather role, specifically those that result in devaluation or mitigation of one's perceived influence. Future studies should also examine how grandchildren acknowledge the individual contributions of each grandparent, including how role expectations and relationship quality are directly affected. Finally,

future research should examine the role of shared activities in curating memories and establishing grandparent legacy for grandchildren. The results presented here suggest that grandchild interpretations of their grandfathers are strongly influenced by activities and events that they have shared. Continued investigation into the dynamic nature of the grandfather-grandchild relationship may shed light on the various cornerstones and intricacies that serve to define both of these roles.

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## ¿Cumple mi color de piel con los requisitos laborales?

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Este trabajo estudia de forma breve, la relación del racismo y discriminación laboral hacia la comunidad afrodescendiente en Ecuador por medio de un análisis de los siguientes ámbitos de la discriminación laboral: Diferencia de empleos, salarios y beneficios laborales por etnia en ocupaciones del sector urbano. Esto con la finalidad de mostrar que dicho concepto aún existe hoy día en el país. La investigación se basa en fuentes que proveen datos sobre la composición étnica de Ecuador, porcentajes de empleo en el sector moderno, nivel de escolaridad, salario, pobreza y beneficios laborales por etnia. El ensayo, también incluye información de una encuesta, una entrevista y casos de discriminación en el trabajo como ejemplos de la existencia de este concepto. En conclusión, la investigación muestra que en efecto, el racismo laboral hacia las personas afrodescendientes en Ecuador está presente y sugiere que para terminar o al menos minimizar este conflicto, la sociedad debe dejar de categorizar a individuos en razas y promover la aceptación e inclusión de diferentes culturas

*Palabras clave:* racismo, discriminación laboral, etnia, afrodescendiente, afroecuatoriano, sector moderno

A pesar del progreso de la lucha contra el racismo, aún vivimos en un mundo donde este conflicto parece nunca acabar. Esto se debe a que varias sociedades aún tienen una mentalidad medieval, llena de prejuicios hacia las minorías étnicas, quienes sufren con mayor potencia esta discriminación. Dicho concepto surge desde la época colonial y se extiende de Europa hasta América Latina. Aunque Latinoamérica no se considera racista, la discriminación étnica existe, en especial contra los grupos indígenas y descendientes africanos. En Ecuador, por ejemplo, el racismo hacia la comunidad afroecuatoriana persiste en diferentes áreas de la sociedad (la educación, política, etc). El propósito de este trabajo es exponer la presencia del racismo hacia la comunidad afrodescendiente en este país en el sector laboral, analizando la discriminación en el tipo de empleos, salario y beneficios.

Para empezar, Ecuador es un país diverso. Su composición étnica se clasifica de la siguiente manera: El 7.4% son montubios, el 7.2% son afroecuatorianos, el 7% son indígenas, el 6.1% son blancos, el 71.9% son mestizos y el 0.4% corresponde a otra etnia (Villacís y Carrillo, 2012). Pese a la diversidad de este país, la discriminación racial se hace presente en la diferencia de trabajos que desempeñan los afroecuatorianos en comparación con otras personas en el ámbito laboral moderno, por ejemplo en trabajos de empresas, política o medios de comunicación. Este contraste se puede percibir en la baja participación de afroecuatorianos (35%) en empleos del sector moderno a diferencia del

49% de los blancos (SISPAE, 2004). Este contraste se debe a varios factores. Uno de ellos es la ausencia de oportunidades de los afroecuatorianos (en comparación con otros) de recibir una educación superior, la cual los calificaría para “mejores” opciones de empleo. Esta realidad se muestra en la tasa de asistencia universitaria del país en donde los afroecuatorianos tienen la cifra más baja (11.9%), mientras que los blancos tienen un porcentaje mayor (31.7%) (SISPAE, 2004).

Otro factor es que algunos empleadores son discriminatoriamente selectivos cuando contratan al personal. Puede que al momento de percatarse que el candidato es afrodescendiente, duden de la capacidad de este para ejercer el trabajo, a pesar de que su experiencia laboral o educación respalden lo contrario. Prueba de esta discriminación es el caso de una chica afrodescendiente que solicitó un puesto en una secretaría gubernamental. Su solicitud fue rechazada porque según su empleadora, su perfil no “cumplía” con ese cargo cuando ella estaba más que calificada, ya que la descripción del empleo sólo requería que la candidata tuviese un cuarto nivel de estudio universitario y en ese momento ella estaba estudiando un octavo ciclo de Derecho (Velasco, 2015). Es evidente, pues, la discriminación racial que sufrió esta mujer porque sin considerar su preparación universitaria, se le fue negado el empleo solo por ser afrodescendiente.

Un tercer testimonio de esta discriminación se vive en trabajos televisivos, en donde las personas



afroecuatorianas muy rara vez son contratadas como reporteras o presentadoras de noticias. Según los datos de una encuesta realizada por Gustavo Darío Torres Delgado y Xavier Enrique Quijije Picón, en la ciudad de Guayaquil, solo el 2% de empleados en el área televisiva son afroecuatorianos, el 3% indígena y el 4% montubio, mientras que los blancos conforman un 6% y los mestizos un 84% (2016). Esta diferencia se debe a la descripción de “presencia física” solicitada como requisito por una gran mayoría de empleos televisivos, el cual por ser “negro” muchos afrodescendientes no cumplen. Causa de esto es que los medios de comunicación han plasmado en la sociedad una imagen que idealiza a una persona con tez blanca y ojos claros con una capacidad superior a otras de merecer ese tipo de oficios. En muchos casos, la audiencia también contribuye a este sesgo porque al no verse reflejados en un “negro” dando el noticiero, concluyen que las personas “negras” son ignorantes y por eso no tienen nada importante que informar. Lo anterior lo confirma Jenifer Vicuña Pita, empleada de la Federación Ecuatoriana de Fútbol, quien en una entrevista, comenta lo siguiente acerca de la imposibilidad de que las personas de otro color, comúnmente no puedan llegar a presentar las noticias: “...he podido notar que vivimos en un medio muy calificador y discriminador, si eres negro....indio o montubio, va a existir un poco de resistencia, es lamentable, pero real.” (Torres Delgado y Quijije Picón, 91). Esto significa que el hecho de pertenecer a uno de esos grupos y no tener los rasgos físicos ideales (ojos azules, piel clara) que exigen algunos empleadores, reduce las probabilidades de trabajar en los medios.

Por consiguiente, el racismo también se puede percibir en la inequidad de salarios. De acuerdo a la investigación de Lydia Andrés: “El salario más cercano a la de los hombres “blancos” es el de las mujeres “blancas”, seguidas de los hombres afrodescendientes y finalmente las mujeres afrodescendientes” (2017: 60). Esto se debe a que las personas afroecuatorianas en su mayoría obtienen trabajos temporales ya que, como hemos visto, la mayoría no tiene acceso a una educación superior, requisito esencial para trabajar en el sector moderno. A esta situación se le suma el estigma discriminatorio, el tono de piel, que sin mucha dificultad los asocia a un cierto estereotipo (flojo, ladrón, ignorante, etc.) que tampoco contribuye positivamente a cambiar su situación. Por este motivo, gran parte de esta comunidad, se dedica a trabajos que ofrecen un salario mínimo o debajo de este (trabajadoras domésticas,

cocineros, etc.), los cuales en general, no tienen un contrato fijo ni beneficios médicos o buenas condiciones laborales.

En los pocos casos cuando las personas afroecuatorianas sí desempeñan empleos en el sector moderno, se han observado algunas situaciones de abuso de poder. Tal fue el caso de una mujer afroecuatoriana que trabajaba en una exportadora de rosas en Quito. Ella poseía un título de abogada, pero fue contratada como secretaria, sin embargo, su supervisor le daba a realizar tareas de abogada porque sabía que la mujer tenía el conocimiento. Encima de eso, un día fue despedida cuando al visitar su empresa, el dueño (una persona blanca) se percató que la mujer era “negra” y ordenó al gerente que la despidiera de inmediato (Andrés, 2017: 58). Como podemos observar, en esta situación, el salario que la afroecuatoriana tenía era injusto porque recibía un sueldo de secretaria, menor de lo que le correspondía por tener un título universitario y realizar trabajos no relacionados con su puesto en la empresa. Respecto al despido, el dueño fue racista porque sin importar la educación de la joven, la echó por su color de piel. Adicionalmente, los datos de población pobre según ingresos, que fue registrada por el Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos en el 2001, son otra prueba de la diferencia salarial entre grupos. Los números revelan que el nivel de pobreza de los afroecuatorianos es de un 70.6%, superior al 40.5% de los blancos (SISPAE, 2004).

Por último, la discriminación racial también se hace presente en cuanto a los beneficios laborales que reciben o no las personas afrodescendientes. A juzgar por los estudios del Sistema de Indicadores Sociales del Pueblo Afroecuatoriano, en el área en donde se otorgan algunos beneficios para esta comunidad es en trabajos del sector urbano como por ejemplo maestros, oficinistas o contadores (2004). Aunque existan esos beneficios, la diferencia y el privilegio de tenerlos, como por ejemplo el seguro médico, todavía evidencia contrastes entre las personas afroecuatorianas y las personas “blancas”. Esto es así porque según las investigaciones de la SISPAE: “El grupo socio racial blanco es el que mayor cobertura posee (37,4%), seguido por el mestizo (33.3%). En cambio la población afroecuatoriana registra el promedio más bajo con apenas el 21,1%, incluso un poco por debajo de la tasa de la población indígena (21,8%)” (64). Esto significa que en caso de una emergencia médica, la mayoría de esta población está desprotegida, en especial en el sector rural, el cual no

goza de cobertura debido a la escasez de recursos. Como consecuencia de lo anterior "...los afroecuatorianos poseen la segunda tasa de mortalidad entre los niños...de 0 a 5 años, con 48.3 fallecidos por cada 1000 nacidos vivos...superior...a las tasas de los mestizos y...blancos, 37.7 y 30.8..." (SISPAE, 11).

En conclusión, el racismo laboral hacia la comunidad afrodescendiente en Ecuador, existe (como este trabajo ha demostrado) y afecta el éxito profesional y las posibilidades de ascenso social de estas personas. Este tipo de discriminación se presenta en la clase de oficios que esta población tiene a diferencia de otras. En los trabajos televisivos por ejemplo, la participación de esta comunidad es muy baja en comparación con los mestizos o blancos. Dicha distinción, también es expuesta respecto a los salarios debido a las escasas oportunidades que la comunidad afrodescendiente tiene de acceder a una educación superior y conseguir un empleo de mayor ingreso o pago. Además, los afroecuatorianos son los que tienen menos beneficios laborales. Prueba de esto son los pocos afrodescendientes que reciben cobertura médica en su empleo. Todo este conflicto tanto en el sector laboral como en otros ámbitos de la sociedad se debe a los estereotipos, prejuicios e inferioridad con los que este grupo es visto en la comunidad. La sociedad los etiqueta como ladrones, ignorantes y flojos, incapaces de realizar y merecer un mejor empleo para superarse. Mientras la sociedad promueva el racismo, los perjudicados no denuncien este tipo de comportamientos y el gobierno no haga nada al respecto, este problema continuará existiendo. Por ese motivo, hay que educar a futuras generaciones sobre la importancia de aceptación e inclusión de culturas diferentes a la nuestra, al igual que dejar de categorizar a individuos en "razas", puesto que de existir alguna, es la humana.

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## This Too Will Take Some Time

**Tricia Manzano**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Henry Hughes**

Second Prize, Peter Sears Poetry Prize

*Keywords:* Peter Sears Poetry Prize, poetry

I don't know  
what I'm supposed to do  
when you tell me lately  
I remind you of the moon  
A gravitational pull  
and push  
You say you miss  
the comforting sound of waves  
lulling you to sleep  
and the moonlit rays  
that softly blanket over you  
You say  
now, I'm ever shifting  
weightless in the sky  
You're unable to reach me  
yet I'm glowing among stars  
You always take notice  
the darkest of my nights  
I know you  
you won't take it personal  
since you know me  
I won't apologize  
for all my phases  
You're unable to see me  
as of this moment  
because I'm working  
on changing

## Paint it Red

**Jade Mong**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Katherine Schmidt**

Family is complicated. It's even more complicated if you're Oliver--a teenage boy fresh out of high school--and you add restrictive gender norms and a search for self into the mix. In the simplest terms, all Oliver wanted was to paint his nails. Sure, there were other things in life he wanted, like the latest video game, cool shoes, a new camera, a college degree, a sense of purpose. But the one thing that he'd wanted, in the back of his mind since he was eight years old, was to paint his nails bright red and walk out into the sunshine for everyone to see. But that's not what boys do.

The scarlet scarf flew up into the air, the thin, gauzy material suspended gently in the air for just a moment before floating back down into Wei's arms. She whipped the scarf upwards once more, holding onto one end, and it streamed upwards and struck the eye like lightning, a bolt of red against the pale blue sky. The camera shutter clicked. Perfect.

It was exactly the picture he'd wanted, Oliver thought to himself as he lowered the camera from his face and examined the shot. His model and best friend, Wei, looked absolutely striking. Her long black hair and bright red scarf were a sharp contrast to the seemingly endless field of tall brown grass she stood in. This was why this park was such a great place to take portraits. People were a special kind of beautiful when you set them against the backdrop of the heatstruck brown life of the park and let the early summer sun peeking through the clouds illuminate their features gently.

Though he was only eighteen himself, he'd taken countless senior photos here of his fellow students. He'd made decent money from it too. He remembered showing his mom the check from his first photography job and smiling and smiling until his cheeks hurt. His mom had hugged him so tightly that she lifted him and spun him around, even though he was way too big for her to be doing that still.

"You're really gonna make it, little face," she'd said affectionately after she put him down, using that old nickname he kind of hated. "When you were little you always hated having your picture taken. I should have known it was because you were meant to be behind the camera instead."

He had grinned at her smugly. "And you thought it was a waste of money when Auntie bought me that camera five years ago!" he said sassily. His mom's concern had been understandable, since he was a reckless and energetic kid with little patience for sitting still. But when he first got that camera he had spent hours and hours just wandering around the neighborhood finding things to take pictures of. He hadn't stopped taking pictures since then.

"And I've never been happier to be proved wrong," his mom said.

He smiled at the memory, then looked up at Wei. She wrapped the scarf around her shoulders and looked over at him, eyebrows raised in a silent question. Did you get it? He smiled and raised the camera once more and she waved her long rose colored fake nails at him and winked. He snapped a picture at the perfect time, mid-wink.

"You got it, right?" Wei asked, aloud this time, walking over to him. She reached up and took the camera strap off his neck, taking the camera right out of his hands and peering at the small screen. He nodded happily and handed over the camera readily.

"Dude," she said. "The scarf picture looks so good. Any fancy photography person who sees these pics would be like 'wow, hired. I'll pay you 80,000 dollars to put your photos in my gallery,'" she says, putting on airs of snobbiness for her imitation.

Oliver laughed and shook his head. "Thanks, I mean that's basically the goal. But somehow I don't think it works like that."

"That's exactly the goal. That's like, the dream," she said matter of factly. Then she clicked over to the next picture and was distracted. "Oh my god, I look amazing in that one," she said with a laugh, pointing to the winking picture he'd just taken.

He looked over her shoulder easily, being almost a full head taller than her. "Eh, I've seen better," he said with a false air of dismissal.

She looked up at him skeptically, half smiling. "As if." She lifted the camera to her face and pointing it right at his.

He wrinkled his nose, the camera lens little more than six inches away from his face. "Wei, you do not know how to take pictures," he said, stepping away from the camera.

"How hard can it be? You just press the button." With that, she began struggling to press the button, but her fake nails--which she just got yesterday--seriously limited her dexterity. "Shit, I can't press the button," she complained, furrowing her brows in concentration as she lowered the camera from her face and held it awkwardly in order to press the button with the pad of her finger and avoid her rather dangerous nails. He heard a click, and she grinned triumphantly. "Got it!"

"Yeah, I'm sure that was a beautiful picture of the ground," he said sarcastically.

"Hey, at least I got the button."

"Your parents will be so proud," he deadpanned.

She glared at him, handing him back the camera. "Fine, you can have this back. I need really good pictures of me with these nails for Instagram in case I never get them again because they're impossible to do anything with," she said grumpily.

"Why did you get them in the first place?" Oliver asked.

"Because they're pretty," she said like it was obvious. He rolled his eyes. "It's part of being a girl. We do ridiculous things to ourselves so that we can feel like the works of art that we are," she said, serious but also posing dramatically, as though she were a goddess in an old painting.

"But why the nails?" he asked persistently, wanting an answer to the question he'd had since she first showed up at his house waving those nails in his face.

"I can't explain it, Ollie. It's like, you have to be a girl to get it. There's just something about having long painted nails that makes everything you do a little more magical. Like, I may not be able to press the button on your camera or text very functionally, but everything I hold looks so gorgeous in my hands because of these things," she said, wiggling her fingers. "They're just so pretty and extra."

He looked down at his own short bare nails and remembered, just for a second, the look of bright purple polish adorning his nails and gleaming in the light. He remembered his shaky eight year old hands painting his aunt's nails vibrant red, and he remembered feeling just the way Wei had described: magical. He'd had to focus so hard, trying to paint her nails just right, and when he finished they were terribly messy. But he didn't know that then. He thought they looked wonderful, shining red--his favorite color--and glinting in the summer sunlight. Then she painted his nails, in easy, precise brushstrokes. She adorned his thumb nails with tiny white flowers, and though he was terrible at staying still, filled with the endless energy of a little boy, he felt that these flowers were so important that he must stay perfectly still until their completion. He had never felt anything like beautiful in his entire short life up until that day.

He had told his aunt that he wanted to have painted nails every day of his life. She told him that he could. Then he went home, and his dad told him that he could not. Normally, when Oliver did something wrong, his dad would scold him, take away a toy or make him sit in the corner. That night though, he did none of those things. He just looked at his son's hands with a look Oliver had never seen from him before but recognized immediately: disgust.

After all, boys don't have painted nails. Sure, some men like drag queens or gay men did, and that was fine for them, but it wasn't for Oliver. He knew that now. He'd never brought up this kind of thing with anyone before, and he never planned to. Some things just weren't worth sharing. He felt a pinprick of pain in his finger and winced, suddenly realizing that he'd been absently picking at his nails while he thought and his nails had slipped and dug into his cuticles. Wei looked up from the



camera and at him curiously, wondering at his sudden lengthy silence.

“Sorry,” he said, bringing himself to the present. “C’mon, we need some new scenery, let’s get you by some trees or something.” The pair walked out of the grassy field they were standing in and down the dirt path a ways, quiet for a rare moment.

“So, listen,” Wei began after a minute or two, eyes sparkling familiarly. He paused, already guessing what she was going to say.

“Oh no,” Oliver responded immediately. “Whatever favor you want from me, ask someone else.”

“Why?” she whined. “It’s not like you have anything better to do.” Oliver wrinkled his nose at that comment. She was right, he didn’t have anything better to do, but she didn’t have to call him out like that. “Please, my mom is making me help with her friends’ kids’ birthday party and I don’t want to be the only teenager in a sea of judgy Chinese moms and little girls on sugar high. Come with me.”

“As enticing as you make it sound, I’d rather not,” he said, turning and walking down the dirt path they were standing on. He pointed to a nearby tree and she obligingly walked over and leaned on it.

“You have to though,” she said, posing absently.

“Why?” The camera shutter clicked.

“Um ...” Wei floundered for a second, searching for a reason. “Because I’m your friend and you love me and I let you use me to practice taking portraits all the time? Oh! And last week I let you use me to practice taking action shots even though you know I hate moving,” she said triumphantly. Oliver sighed. He always gave in to Wei, ever since they met in first grade and she for some strange reason decided that they were going to be best friends. He didn’t want a friend that was a girl, because girls were boring and didn’t like playing soccer. But Wei had been persistent in her offers of friendship, and Oliver gave in quickly. Within two weeks of knowing her, Oliver couldn’t imagine life without her.

“Fine. When is it?” Oliver asked, tone full of resignation. Wei’s pouting face immediately turned into a sunny smile. He took another picture.

“This Saturday, starts at 1pm, and we’re in charge of a painting activity. Also I already told my mom you’re coming so you can’t say no or else you’ll disappoint her and nobody can survive the Disappointed Face of Mama Xiu,” Wei spit out her sentences quickly, as if skimming through them would make Oliver less likely to take issue with them.

“Wei!” Oliver protested. She just continued smiling at him.

“C’mon, Ollie, it will be fun, I promise. Let’s finish up this photoshoot and then I’ll buy you lunch—as long as it’s under \$12 because I’m a broke ho.”

He smiled reluctantly at that. “Fine, but when you’re a rich doctor in ten years I’ll be expecting you to take me out to fancier places than the local McDonald’s.”

“Ooh, you mean like IHOP?” she joked excitedly. “You got it!”

Oliver shook his head and raised the camera once more, trying to hide his amused smile.

Two days later, he found himself sitting next to Wei at a small table in a stranger’s backyard. The yard was quite large, with a literal white picket fence surrounding it and flowers in planters spanning the entire circumference of the yard. Mama Xiu stood with a cluster of parents gathered in the shade of the awning covering the patio, looking on benevolently as their children ran around the yard kicking no less than four soccer balls at once. Oliver and Wei sat under a tree a little off to the side, surrounded by little girls and a large box of nail polish.

“I did not think this was what you meant by ‘painting activity,’” Oliver complained.

“Don’t worry, Ollie, it’s not hard. We’re just gonna paint their nails. You don’t have to do anything fancy, they’ll just ruin it within five minutes anyways. If they want fancy stuff, refer them to me.” She pulled a handful of bottles out of the box. “We got sparkly, glow in the dark, and standard. Just ask them what they want and do it. Easy-peasy,” she said brusquely.

He nodded, picking up a bottle of red nail polish absently. His dad was supposed to call him today, he remembered. He hoped his dad would call a little early so

he could get out of this party as soon as possible. Then again, his dad was never early.

Oliver set down the nail polish as a little girl walked over to them, smiling shyly.

"Hi," Wei said sweetly, her entire manner changing immediately. "You're the birthday girl, right?" The little girl nodded. "Great! Do you want me to do your nails?"

"Yes, please," the girl said happily. Wei continued talking to her cheerily, helping her pick out a bottle of hot pink nail polish. When the girl sat in the chair across from Wei, Oliver noticed the little boy who had been standing behind her. He looked about six, with big brown eyes and an oversized red T-shirt. His small chubby hands were clasped in front of his chest, and upon closer inspection Oliver realized he was holding a small dinosaur toy and fidgeting restlessly with it, his little index finger running over the dinosaur's spine over and over again.

"Hi," Oliver said as gently as he could. He was not good with kids. He glanced over at Wei, slightly panicked. The little girl looked over at them and saw the two boys awkwardly facing off.

"Xi, why don't you get your nails painted?" the girl suggested. Both boys looked at her oddly, as if they'd never heard such a thing before.

"Good idea," Wei said. "Ollie, will you paint his nails? We don't want him to feel left out."

"Uh, yeah, sure," Oliver said. This seemed like a bad idea. Boys aren't supposed to get their nails painted, and certainly not by other guys who were probably terrible at it. The boy, Xi, sat down across from him. They were quiet for a moment, then Oliver realized he was supposed to talk. "Uh, what color do you want?" The little boy looked at the colors for only a moment.

"Red," he said decisively. Oliver picked up the red nail polish he'd been holding earlier and opened it. He had no idea what he was doing. Why on Earth had Wei enlisted his help in nail painting? What kind of guy knew how to paint nails? No normal dude had probably ever painted nails in his life, and Oliver hadn't tried since he was eight. Xi put his toy dinosaur in his pocket and held out his hands, and Oliver automatically took one to hold steady while he painted. Like muscle memory, he knew exactly what to do. He painted Xi's nails carefully, hands

unsteady but absolutely certain. He tried to focus on his work and not think about what might happen after he finished. He knew Xi's parents were here, and he still vividly remembered his own father's reaction when he came home with painted nails all those years ago.

"What's on your hands?" His dad had asked, as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Nail polish," Oliver answered cautiously, immediately put on edge by his dad's expression.

"Nuh uh. No way. I can't believe that aunt of yours put this shit on you. Is she trying to make my son a fucking fairy?"

Oliver actually thought fairies were pretty cool at the time, but the way his dad said the word made it sound entirely different. Like it was something to be ashamed of. Like Oliver was something to be ashamed of. His dad's discomfort bubbled under his skin, veiled by the thinnest layer of composure. He was not an angry man, but he was not a calm one either. At eight years old, Oliver knew this already. Now was the time to tread lightly. "You will go take that shit off right now, you hear me? You're a man, Oliver, not a little girl, and you are sure as hell going to act like it."

"Okay," Oliver said quietly. His dad looked at him for a long moment, then softened.

"You don't like that stuff anyways, your aunt is just putting ideas in your head." He squatted down to Oliver's level and grinned slightly. "I mean, you're my little man, right? You're so much like me already, so active and strong, and you've got your soccer and your karate—and you've got that little girlfriend of yours. I know you're gonna be a real man someday, Oliver. But you need to understand that real men don't wear nail polish, or makeup, or dresses, or any of that shit." Oliver nodded. He didn't understand why he couldn't be both a real man and a polish wearing fairy at the same time, but what he did understand was that his dad wouldn't be mad at him if he didn't have painted nails. So it was as simple as that. He never painted his own nails or anyone else's again. Until today.

It was the work of a few minutes, but when he let go of Xi's hand and capped the bottle, it felt like he had been absorbed in his work for far longer.

"All done," Oliver said. Then he noticed a slender older man who Oliver assumed to be Xi's father looking at them. The man began to walk over. Oliver's heart stopped in his chest, unspeakably nervous. He should have known better than to paint this boy's nails. Why had he done that? No father could possibly be okay with seeing his son getting his nails painted like a girl or something. Oliver resolved to speak up, tell the dad it was his idea and not Xi's fault. He'd rather the blame fall on him than on this innocent little boy who didn't know any better.

"Xi, what are you doing?" the dad asked when he reached them, brow furrowed. Oliver opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. The words stuck in his throat, as he looked up from his seat at this man towering over him with a question demanding to be answered. He felt like a little kid again. Xi looked down at his nails, then up at his dad, his face breaking into a giant smile, holding up his hands for his dad to see.

"Look!" he said cheerfully. Oliver reached for the nail polish remover automatically, knowing what's coming. Only, maybe he didn't. The dad's face broke into a matching smile to his son's, and Oliver's hand froze in mid-air.

"Wow, that looks amazing! And it's in my favorite color!" the dad exclaimed enthusiastically, bending down to Xi's level and taking his hands to admire them. Oliver was unspeakably relieved and surprised. The dad scooped up his little boy by the waist, gently indicating to his son hold to his hands above his head so as not to mess up his nails. "Let's go show your mama, okay? She'll think it's beautiful," he said to Xi. "Thank you," he added to Oliver kindly before turning and walking away with Xi.

Oliver watched them go, father and son chatting happily, red nails glinting in the sun. It would've been a beautiful picture, he thought absently, father and son smiling in the sunlight, heads leaning into each other as they walked away. It was the kind of love Oliver always wanted to capture in his photos. Unconditional. He knew he should be relieved that the father was so accepting, but the relief sat uneasily in his chest. He closed his eyes, unable to explain why relief felt more like jealousy. Unable to explain why he suddenly felt so hollow.

Then the next little girl in line came and sat in the chair across from him, distracting him with her animated chatter and demands of a different color of nail polish on

each nail. For the rest of the afternoon he painted nails and did crafts with Wei and a herd of little girls, and had no time to think about the encounter with Xi and his father.

When the party was over, Mama Xiu gathered them into her little Honda to drive them back to her house, where Oliver was going to stay the night. Wei sat shotgun, chatting enthusiastically with her mom, while Oliver sat in the backseat, looking out the window and not really listening. Then he heard Xi's name and tuned in.

"Don't you think it was odd, that Xi got his nails painted?" Mama Xiu asked Wei.

"I mean, not really?" Wei said. "Just because most boys don't get their nails painted doesn't mean he can't if he wants to."

"I suppose. So odd, boys these days," she responded, shaking her head in confusion. "Now some like boys, some like boys and girls, some wear makeup but still like girls, and there are all these names I can't remember for all the things," she continued. Wei laughed.

"You're so old, Mama. It's not that weird."

"It is pretty weird. But that's okay," Mama Xiu decided. "Too much same is boring." Oliver smiled a little bit. He absently reached into his pocket to check his phone for messages. It was 4:12. No notifications.

His dad was supposed to call at 4:00 so that they could talk right after the party and before his dad had to go get dinner with his new girlfriend. Every time Oliver was late for a phone call, he never heard the end of it. There was nothing his dad hated more than being ignored, especially by Oliver, who had always been his most faithful fan. But it was 4:12 and his dad hadn't even texted and the worst part was Oliver wasn't surprised at all. He hated how he'd gotten so used to being let down.

Under normal circumstances, Oliver wouldn't be too bothered by his dad's lack of a call. Sure, he'd be upset because he missed a chance to talk to his dad, but he was never angry with him. He was a little angry now. He thought that the least his dad could do was pick up the phone and call him on time. Kids like Xi got dads that lived with them, dads that supported their choices no matter what, dads that called when they said they would and never missed soccer games because they were

“busy” playing the latest videogame, dads that asked about their photography every once in a while. Why didn’t Oliver get a dad like that?

“We’re here, Ollie,” Wei said, hopping out of the car. It was then that Oliver realized that the car had come to a stop in Wei’s driveway, and he’d spent the entire ride to her house working himself up over nothing. It was just one missed phone call.

He grabbed his backpack and got out of the car and followed Wei and Mama Xiu into the house, still trying to mentally talk himself out of being upset. It wasn’t working. He knew if he told his dad he was upset his dad would say that he was sorry. He also knew that his dad would call him a pussy for getting all upset about a phone call in the first place. Somehow that thought didn’t help.

The three of them took off their shoes in the entryway and Mama Xiu headed into the kitchen without another word, already busy with her next task of the day. Wei turned to Oliver.

“C’mon. Let’s go upstairs and we can work on editing your pictures from the shoot on Thursday.” Wei was already walking up the stairs as she spoke, knowing he would follow.

He nodded and followed her up the stairs and into her cramped bedroom. Her family home was large, drafty, and sparsely but eccentrically decorated. Wei’s room was the exact opposite of the rest of the house. It was fairly large, but it was also positively stuffed with stuff. Her walls were a collage of posters, pictures (mostly taken by Oliver), drawings from friends, and pencil sketches of a variety of anatomically accurate skeletons, specific joints and muscles, and cell structures that Wei did herself throughout the years. Her bed was a huge fixture in the middle of the room, with clothes and a mound of blankets atop it. Surrounding it were no fewer than two space heaters, three rugs of conflicting patterns, and Christmas lights strung on every possible surface. Wei danced through the clutter of her room, dodging different piles of clothes, art supplies, and books in her mission to get to the desk tucked in the corner of her room by a large window. She sat at her desk, and Oliver pulled over the cushy chair next to it so he could sit as well.

She opened up her laptop and began looking over the pictures he had shared with her from the shoot with the scarf. She and Oliver looked through them, slowly picking out the best ones.

It was when Oliver checked his phone for the fifth time in the hour that Wei finally closed her laptop and turned to look at him. He could tell by the look on her face that she knew. He’d warned her earlier that he’d probably have to step out to talk to his dad at 4pm, and four had come and gone with no call.

“He didn’t call, did he?” Wei asked. She phrased it like a question, but she already knew the answer.

“No, it’s no big deal,” he started to say.

“Bullshit,” she interrupted. “I know when something’s going on in that funny head of yours.”

“I’ve just been thinking,” he said slowly.

“Ah, a dangerous game.”

He smiled a little at that. “Do you ever feel like—I dunno. Like no matter what you do, you’re disappointing people. Like you can’t do what you want to do because there are so many people who are expecting you to do all this other stuff. Only you can’t do it all. Because you’re just one person and sometimes you don’t want to do any of it. I don’t know. That doesn’t even make sense.”

“Yes it does. What do you want to do, Ollie?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yes, you do.”

Oliver sighed, deep in thought. He was quiet for a long moment, random thoughts and memories flicking through his head. “Did you know that my dad used to smoke?”

“No,” Wei said hesitantly, clearly wondering where he was going with this.

“Yeah,” Oliver said thoughtfully. “The day I was born, he quit. Because of me.” He remembered his mom telling him the story, how his dad had come into the hospital room and held Oliver in his arms. How that very day he vowed to never smoke again, abandoning his favorite

vice in a single instant, all for the love of a little boy with chubby hands and bright green eyes. “I was the first grandchild in my family, the one they put all their hopes and dreams on. I made everyone so happy just by being alive. I don’t do that so much anymore. Dad thinks photography is a waste of time. He doesn’t think I should be going to school for it.”

“Well, your dad is wrong,” Wei said firmly. “Just because you love him doesn’t mean he’s right about everything. And it doesn’t mean that he gets to control what you do with your life either. Besides, your mom and your aunt support your photography enough to make up for anyone else,” she added.

Oliver smiled a little bit.

“What got you thinking about all this?” Wei asked.

“Uh, nothing. It’s dumb,” he said quickly.

Wei narrowed her eyes at him. “Tell me.” It wasn’t a request.

“Just—you know how I painted Xi’s nails today?”

Wei nodded patiently.

“My aunt painted my nails too, when I was eight. My dad, uh, didn’t react well.”

Wei tensed, clearly thinking the worst.

“No, nothing extreme,” Oliver said quickly. “He just said a bunch of stuff about what ‘real men’ should do and how I shouldn’t be painting my nails and acting like a girl. And I believed him. I still do, I guess. But—seeing Xi and his dad today—it made me wonder if maybe my dad was wrong. And why does he get to decide what I do and don’t do anyways? He’s not even here. He couldn’t even be bothered to call me today. And if he’s wrong about this, what else is he wrong about?”

“You’re right, he shouldn’t get to decide,” Wei said, impassioned. “I can’t believe you never told me about all that.”

“I thought it was just a stupid childish thing at the time. But I dunno, it’s stuck with me this long. So maybe it’s not so stupid.”

“I know what we need to do,” Wei said, that familiar glimmer in her eye. “C’m on,” she said, standing and grabbing his hand to pull him up with her. She pulled him out of her room and down the hall to the bathroom. “Mama!” she called loudly as she marched herself and Oliver into the bathroom. Mama Xiu came up the stairs and peeked her head into the bathroom.

“What you want?”

Wei rifled through the top drawer of the bathroom counter and pulled out a plastic bag full of nail polish. “I need you to paint Ollie’s nails,” she said with a smile. Both Oliver and Mama Xiu looked at her in surprise. “I can’t do it because of my fake nails. I did an absolute shit job on those kids today and I think Ollie deserves better.”

“We really don’t need to do this—” Oliver started to say.

“I think we do,” Wei said, gently cutting him off. “It’s time for some teenage rebellion. Just because your dad doesn’t like it doesn’t mean you can’t do it anyways. If it makes you happy, it’s okay. Besides, Mama says it’s okay, so that’s a different kind of parental permission. Right, Mama?” Wei said, directing her attention at her mom. Mama Xiu didn’t look back at her daughter. Her eyes were focused on Oliver.

“You want your nails painted?” Mama Xiu asked, looking intently at him. “Not what Wei wants. Do you want?”

Oliver looked at her for a long moment, at this stern, loving woman who was like another parent to him. Did he want? He thought about his aunt holding his hand as she painted his short nails purple, about sitting painfully still just so he could feel beautiful for the few hours he wore the polish. He thought about red nail polish glinting in the sunlight, and what a beautiful picture it would make. He wondered if the version of Oliver who wore red nail polish was the one he would finally like a picture of. He nodded. Slowly.

“Yes,” he said.

Wei and Mama Xiu smiled matching smiles, cheeks and eyes crinkling with the force of their joy.

“Okay then,” Mama Xiu said, all business. “To the kitchen.”



The three of them walked down the hallway and down the stairs to the kitchen. Oliver loved this kitchen. It was by no means fancy, with outdated brown cabinetry, an oven more often used as storage than for its intended purpose, a fridge cluttered with family pictures either taken by Oliver or featuring him, and countertops that somehow never looked quite clean in spite of Mama Xiu's constant scrubbing. Nevertheless, it was the centerpiece of the house, where he and Wei spent most of their time gathered around the kitchen peninsula eating and conversing.

Mama Xiu sat across from him at the peninsula, while Wei sat next to him, one arm thrown across his shoulders.

"What color?" Mama Xiu asked.

"Red," Oliver said immediately.

"Ah," she replied with a smile. "Red is good color. Means good fortune and happiness."

Oliver grinned. "I know."

Mama Xiu dug through the bag until she found the red nail polish. She uncapped the bottle and took one of Oliver's hands. "Ready?" she asked.

"Definitely."

And with that, she began painting.

Oliver had forgotten what it felt like, the sensation of getting your nails painted. He could barely feel the gentle brushstrokes except for a slight chill at the points at which the paint edged past his cuticles and onto his fingers. It smelled absolutely terrible, but wonderful at the same time, like the way the summer sun simultaneously warmed his bones and burned his skin—an inexplicable opposition.

He looked down at his hands, watching as one by one, his short, plain fingernails were transformed. They shone in the bright light of the kitchen, beautiful and bold. He couldn't believe he was doing this. He was eighteen years old and so afraid of standing out, of being rejected, of being judged. And yet here he was with his nails painted red, unapologetically beautiful, just like he always wanted to be.

He thought of how his dad would react and winced. He didn't need to worry about that, he reminded himself. He was his own person. Then he thought of how his aunt would react and smiled. He remembered how she always had her nails painted scarlet, with red lipstick on to match. She'd had people tell her that such a bright red was bold for lips so small, and she'd promptly flipped those people off and put on an even brighter red lipstick.

"I think I look great in red, so that's what I'm gonna wear," she had told a nine year old Oliver who witnessed this exchange. "If it was up to me, I'd paint everything I possibly could red. Including you," she said, poking his nose playfully. "You'd look good in red lipstick too, little face." He giggled and shook his head.

"Boys don't wear lipstick, silly," he'd said happily.

She gave him this look he didn't understand at the time, almost a little sad. "They can though. They can wear anything they want."

He looked at her, big green eyes wide with wonder. It was a revelation, of sorts, for him to hear. He didn't believe her—having learned a different view of the world from his father—but just the wonder of hearing someone say such a thing with such conviction was wild enough.

He was starting to believe her now. Maybe boys really could wear anything they wanted.

Mama Xiu drew him back into the present with a gentle pat to his hands. She had finished. She capped the bottle and sat back in her seat with a satisfied smile.

"Beautiful," she said kindly.

"We gotta document this," Wei said. She jumped out of her seat, pulling her phone from her pocket. She stopped a couple feet away and raised her phone. "Smile," she said, preparing to take a picture.

Oliver and Mama Xiu leaned in and smiled, and Mama Xiu took his hands and lifted them towards the camera, showing off the nail polish, which was a shock of red against his pale skin.

"Got it," Wei said. She came and sat back down next to Oliver, showing him the picture with a grin. Oliver stared at it for a long moment. His blazing smile was a shock of

happiness against the backdrop of the dull brown cabinetry.

“It’s amazing,” he said quietly.

He couldn’t believe how much love there was in one picture, in the lean of their heads together and the way Mama Xiu held his hands up with so much pride. It was the perfect picture, containing all the love and happiness he saw when he wanted to take a picture of Xi and his father earlier. He looked at his own face in the picture, and for once he didn’t dislike what he saw. His entire being seemed illuminated, gleaming in the golden summer sunlight pouring through the kitchen window. His eyes shone almost as brightly as his nails, ordinarily pale green but almost golden hued in the sun and crinkled in the corners from his wide smile. He had forgotten how big and bright his own smile could be. He had forgotten what it felt like to be truly beautiful. Now he remembered, and he knew he wouldn’t forget again.

## 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

**BillyAnn Stempel**, Western Oregon University

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Molly Mayhead**

BillyAnn Stempel, recipient of WOU's 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

It is no secret that in order to get to this point in our educational careers, we have made mistakes. It is also clear that following today, we are all destined to make many more mistakes in our lives. It is inevitable. I would like to share a brief story with you today. In 1928, Alexander Fleming made a mistake that would change the outcomes of millions of lives. A researcher at St. Mary's Medical School in London, Fleming was preparing to leave his laboratory for a two week vacation. In haste, he left a petri dish with a type of staph bacteria out in the open rather than placing it in the incubator. To his surprise, this oversight led to a monumental discovery. A type of mold in the *Penicillium* genus had made its way into the petri dish where its secretions inhibited the growth of the bacteria. Fleming had discovered the antibiotic, penicillin. This antibiotic has saved millions of lives from previously untreatable infections and diseases. And, it was discovered because of a mistake. All humans, regardless of background are susceptible to mistakes. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, each of us is connected to all other humans through our flaws, our missteps, our oversights. It is in these very moments, when we open our eyes and realize that something is not right, that we must capitalize on the opportunity at hand. That opportunity, is growth. We are so lucky to know, right now, that our learning does not end when we walk across this stage. We get to leave here today and continue our journey through life trying, failing, learning, and growing into whomever we want to be. Some say our failures do not define who we are. I have to disagree. How we react to our failures, learn from them, grow because of them, and keep trying despite knowing that we might fail again, shows who we are. After we leave here today, we will all have two things in common that we cannot deny. We are all graduates of Western Oregon University. And we will all make mistakes. My hope for us is that we are each brave enough and courageous enough to try. Mary Tyler Moore once said, "Take chances, make mistakes. That's how you grow. You have to fail in order to practice being brave." So, my challenge for us is this: be brave, fail epically, and never stop learning.

## Flyfishing Romance

**Laura Wildfang**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Henry Hughes**

Third Prize, Peter Sears Prize in Poetry

*Keywords:* Peter Sears Poetry Prize, poetry

They shipped us home,  
Waders make him look even bigger,  
water swirls around his knees.  
His large arm casts between 10 and 2.  
His favorite place, the river.

A fish strikes and tries to run,  
he is patient.  
If only he was that patient with me.  
Aggressively the fish fights  
now around his knees.  
I know what the fish sees,  
looking up at the towering body from below.

He scoops the fish out of the water.  
Gently holding it,  
I wish he held me that way.  
He marvels at the colors and size;  
releasing it unharmed back to the river.

The small bruises scattered on my arms  
have begun to turn purple.

They match the ones that freckle his back  
that his drunk father left last night.

Sitting on the bank  
carefully tying a woolly bugger to my tippet.  
Fly fishing is done with love.  
We go fly fishing all the time.