

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Editor	x
Introductory Level	x
Winner: Once Upon an Egotistical Daydream Hannah Bartee	x
Rape Culture in America Amanda R. Selck	x
A Nobody in America Eliana Hudson	x
Intermediate Level	x
Winner: Get with the Program: The Importance of Gifted Education Cindy Jiang	x
The Dehumanizing Power of Gender Illiteracy Austin Allen	x
Disney's Progressive <i>Mulan</i> : Examining <i>Frozen</i> as a Feminist "Breakthrough" for Disney Clarissa Engel	x
Higher Education's Dichotomy Jonah Graves	x
Computers in Elementary Classrooms Bridget Mohn	x
Too Old for Ads? Implications of Age Discrimination in Advertising Vivek Vallurupalli	x
Women in Gaming: Blasting Away Sexism Daniel Stucky	x
Advanced Level	x
Winner: Patriarchy and One Direction Rachel Alvey	x
Contributors	x
Teachers	x

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In my time as editor of *The Sosland Journal*, I have been privileged to help in adapting the journal to the needs of our writing instructors, our students, and the UMKC community. This year's edition marks the biggest change for the *Sosland* to date. With this year's edition, *The Sosland Journal* will now be an online journal. Moving online offers many advantages. We will be able to provide the journal to our students for free, enabling our instructors to use it in their classroom without concern about the cost of materials. In addition, by publishing online, we will reach a broader audience and increase the relevance of the journal in a time when new media is a crucial medium.

While our format may change, the content remains the very best that our undergraduate writing students have to offer. This year was an especially lively, interesting group of essays. They run the gamut from rape culture, to video games, to education reform. My thanks, as always, to the students who so generously submit their work and the instructors who encourage them to do so.

Thanks go as well to my team of readers, Miun Gleeson, Craig Workman, and Jonathan Nevins. Jonathan has also served as the Assistant Editor for the *Sosland* this year and played an instrumental role in bringing the journal online. This work would not have been possible without his contributions. The judges, Ben Moats and Alison Coupland, had the unenviable task of choosing the winners. I am tremendously grateful for the time and care with which they undertook this task. As always, I would like to end by thanking our benefactors. *The Sosland Journal* could not be published without the generous support of

Rheta Sosland-Huwitt and the Sosland family. It is our hope that *The Sosland Journal* continues to reflect the Sosland family's commitment to excellence in education.

Happy Reading!

Kristin Huston, Editor, *The Sosland Journal*

Beginning Level Winner

ONCE UPON AN EGOTISTICAL DAYDREAM

Hannah Bartee

Animated Disney movies are a staple of the complete American childhood. Ask any group of children, and they will know all about Simba, Ariel, Pocahontas, and Aladdin. The fascination extends beyond youngsters to teenagers and adults. Everyone, it seems, loves Disney. The franchise began in 1937 with the release of *Snow White*, Disney's first animated full-length feature, which did wonderfully at the box office. The movie reinvented the classic tale of Snow White in a benign, kid-friendly way, setting the tone for the rest of the movies. Indeed, it is the princess movies that are the most successful and well-loved among viewers. Young girls, especially, are entranced by the portrayals of beautiful, enchanting women who win the love of a prince and live happily ever after. Disney's portrayal of women on the big screen has an undeniable influence on society, social norms, fashion, commercialism, etc. In her article, "What's Wrong with Cinderella?", Peggy Orenstein observes that "even Dora the Explorer ... has ascended to the throne" (1). In short, Orenstein is pointing out how America's princess obsession has gone beyond the bounds of Disney and influenced other children's shows. Our fascination with royalty in an anti-monarchy nation is strange, if not a trifle concerning. Americans today tend to believe that Disney films have harmless, even positive, influences on their children. However, these are films that require close analysis to determine the true

effects of the princess mentality on young consumers. In sum, beneath the top layer themes of bravery, love, and family, there is an equally present, if less visible, layer of negative messages, including superficiality, selfishness, and stereotypes.

Many Disney princess movies encourage the idea that physical appearance is the easiest way to find happiness, and more importantly, to get that prince. Every female character is strikingly, impossibly perfect. They all have tiny waists, long legs, gorgeous hair, beautiful voices, flawless skin, and intelligence. They are all traditionally feminine. Their ankles are small, and their voices are high and soft. Most of them are of medium height and have long hair. Their noses are perfectly straight, their cheeks are pink, their lips are red and full, and their eyes are unnaturally enormous. According to E. A. Lawrence, “Good characters (e.g. Simba, the Sultan, Ariel, Pocahontas) exhibit juvenile traits such as big eyes and round cheeks and are drawn in curves, smooth, round, soft, bright, and with European features” (as qtd. In Lee Artz). Lawrence goes on to point out how villains such as Scar, Jafar, the Hun, and Ratcliffe possess sharp angles, dark, oversized features, and have a general ugliness about them. Lawrence’s claim is important because it illuminates the superficial nature of Disney in regards to the viewer’s reception of specific characters. When the villains are first introduced, audiences are immediately clued in to their evil nature not because of words or actions, but because of appearances. With constant exposure to films that so strongly support the idea that physical features mimic the heart and mind, children’s perception of reality may be altered for the worse.

Furthermore, the majority of the female leads fall in “love” at first sight – literally – with an almost-as-perfect prince. The princes usually lack basic personality traits. This is

especially prevalent in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, whose princes do not even have actual names and go by the generic “Prince Charming.” They are like Jake from *Sixteen Candles*. They are there to look cute and save the day, but rarely is the viewer given any reason to believe that they will be a stable and loving romantic partner. Of course, there are always exceptions. Li Shang and Mulan did not become romantically involved until the last five minutes of the movie. *Aladdin* has a man as the lead character, so he has some depth to his personality. At the end of most of the movies, the princess is beaming, having triumphed over ugly evil, her trophy husband on her arm.

In addition, Disney princesses exhibit, at times, shocking levels of selfishness. Take Ariel, for instance. She has everything at her fingertips: power, wealth, family, friends, and her health, yet she yearns to be a human. She is unhappy with what she has. The underlying selfishness that Ariel has motives her every action, including that to abandon her father, sisters, and kingdom to chase an unfamiliar life with an unfamiliar human (let’s not forget that Prince Eric is also technically an entirely different species). Although it is true that the Little Mermaid may possess some admirable qualities such as determination and bravery, her less wholesome traits cannot be overlooked (Clausen/Kielbasa, 1-3). However, Ariel is by no means the only princess with blinders. Pocahontas spends all day gallivanting in the woods instead of helping her tribe with work. She is so wrapped up in her own love affair with the outdoors that she has put her own desires above her responsibilities. Even Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* is a workaholic who is unable to see anything but her dream of a glorious and lavish restaurant. What appears to be good, hard work is actually self-absorption. She is willing to give up all her time with family and

friends in order to save up the money. While the concept of saving for a future goal is generally positive, the extremity to which Tiana has gone is downright unhealthy.

Finally, there is the intensely stereotypical side of Disney films that is the very essence of the films themselves. The fact that the lead characters are princesses at all, in fact, is stereotypical of Disney movies, especially those aimed at female audiences. Is it not strange that the media in America, a country which began by rebelling against monarchy, is infatuated with the idea of royalty? From William and Kate's wedding to *Sleeping Beauty* to the new Disney Channel show, *Princess Sophia*, little girls sure do love their princesses. The stereotyping goes on in other ways, such as in *The Lion King*. The lions, especially Mufasa, all speak with perfect diction, while the scraggly group of hyenas speak with a ghetto accent. It was reported that in a shopping mall, a young white child was heard to shout, "Look, Mom, hyenas!" when they were nearby a group of urban, black teens conversing with one another (Whitlock, as qtd. in Lee Artz). Not surprisingly, the child was referring to the Disney hyenas and connected the voices of the youths with those of Scar's idiotic, malicious posse.

Moreover, since the dawn of Disney, young, innocent women have been tormented by wicked stepmothers and taken it with a smile. Though Cinderella is practically a slave to her evil stepmother, she does all of her work with a cheerful attitude. She behaves perfectly and does everything she is asked to do. Belle is ridiculed by the townspeople and sexually harassed by Gaston, and yet she consistently treats these people with kindness and decorum. Snow White is hunted by her stepmother and finds herself homeless in the dark, cold forest, and as soon as she finds shelter, what does she do? She cleans house (but of

course, she doesn't get all tired and sweaty-she has woodland creatures to help her out). Mulan is abandoned by her band of brothers and almost killed by Shang, yet ends up saving them all. Jasmine, only a teenage, is forced by her sultan father to find a prince to marry, but she holds no grudge against him. In fact, she has a fantastic relationship with him and understands that he has no choice because it is the "law" (one would wonder how she could forget that her father is the master of the law). Princesses never yell. Princesses never lose control. Princesses always have a level head. They are good girls who are constantly "the bigger person," and though they cry on occasion, they are never allowed to ugly sob like the rest of us.

In conclusion, while Disney princesses are not the best role models, they are perfect for commerce. Disney knows what sells, and that is why the company continues to produce princess after princess. Certainly the characters have evolved – no longer do we see princesses who are devoid of personality and passively do as they are ordered. Perhaps in the future the princess infatuation will die out, but only if our culture changes and turns away from the idolization of self-gratification and flawless, easy romance. Parents should think carefully about what they allow their children to watch and not assume that just because a film is a Disney movie, it is healthy. After all, Disney is merely answering the demands of the consumer, as all successful businesses do.

Works Cited

- Artz, Lee. "The Righteousness of Self-Centered Royals: The World According to Disney Animation." *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies* 18.1 (2004): 116-146. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.
- Bonds-Raacke, Jennifer M. "Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty: Developing A Course On Disney and Fairytale Movies." *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 35.3 (2008): 232-234. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.
- Clausen, Janet and Marilyn Kielbasa. "Of Myths and Mermaids." *America* 185.8 (2001): 20. *MasterFILE Premier*. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.
- England, Dawn, Laura Descartes, and Melissa Collier-Meek/ "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses." *Sex Roles* 64.7/8 (2011): 555-567. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.
- Orenstein, Peggy. "What's Wrong with Cinderella?" *New York Times Magazine* 156.53803 (2006): 34. *MasterFILE Premier*. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.

RAPE CULTURE IN AMERICA

Amanda R. Selck

The word 'culture' evokes many different thoughts, feelings and memories for every individual. For some, culture may be found in the delicate folds of a hijab, or in the painstaking decoration of sugar skulls for an annual Day of The Dead celebration. For some, the word 'culture' may remind them of the first time they watched a dreidel spin. A sense of culture is traditionally thought of as being achieved through the customs, beliefs and ways of life that individuals participate in and normalize. However, a sense of culture may also be achieved through the violent actions that a nation's constituents commit upon each other, especially when such actions are excused or justified by the culture as a whole. Rape Culture is best defined as a perception that assumes sexual violence is inherently associated to the culture of a society, where common beliefs and actions tolerate, justify and perpetuate rape (Rape Culture). Rape Culture poses an ever-present threat to the progression of a society, by entrenching sexism, protecting a patriarchal society and ensuring women are treated like second-class citizens. There are numerous ways to fight rape culture, but education and awareness are the easiest and most effective ways to combat it.

There are countless instances where a society may perpetuate a rape culture. Simply stated, "Rape Culture exists because we don't believe it does" (Women's). The most prominent indicators of a rape culture are language choice, the objectification of women, the glorification of violence, tolerating victim-blaming, making excuses for and sympathizing with rapists, sexual jokes and "scrutinizing a victims dress, mental state and history" (Women's). Another major example of rape culture is substantial inflation of false rape reports (Women's). These things are

not commonly thought of as a problem; however, all of these influences have substantial influence on the way a society views and responds to rape.

Rape is a crime of power, and sympathizing with rapists shows the victims that they are powerless. Sadly – albeit honestly – stated, “A man could, feasibly, sacrifice his coffee break raping a woman. That woman would then spend her entire life with it. So would her daughters. So would theirs. This distribution of power is not acceptable” (Muscio). The United States does not truly grasp the tremendous psychological effects that sexual violence has on the victims – and especially does not consider the effects on the children and grandchildren of such crimes. “Rape isn't about men raping women. It's about the powerful raping the powerless” (Muscio). “Women constantly die unnecessary deaths because they have been taught they are powerless” (Muscio). Such deaths include suicide as a result of anxiety, depression and other mental disorders and alcoholism or drug overdose – all of which resulting from the traumatic event of sexual assault. Victims are proven to be three times more likely to suffer from clinical depression, six times more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, thirteen times more likely to become alcoholics, twenty-six times more likely to become addicted to drugs and four times more likely to contemplate suicide (Who). However, the uneven distribution of power does not uniquely apply to adult women; it is also observed in instances of sexual assault against children. Society does not dare to talk about the adults that take advantage of children that trust them- such as priests and teachers (Muscio). In the United States exists a culture that disproportionately rapes children. Sexual Abuse of children is common and child pornography is ever-accessible. No other culture commits these atrocities to this degree (Muscio). By excusing these acts of violence, the United States shows rapists that their actions give them control, while simultaneously showing victims that they are defenseless against such attacks.

The data that has been factually and objectively proven to reflect rape culture in the United States ought to stand as a testament to the inadequate way in which the nation as a whole responds to rape victims and offenders. “91% of victims are assaulted by a serial offender. Serial offenders have an average of 14 victims before the age of 30” (Baker). Roughly 89,000 rapes are reported per year in the US alone- yet 60% are never reported to the authorities (Castrigno). Twenty five percent of the women in the United States will be raped within their lifetimes, and an additional nineteen percent have to fend off rapists (Muscio). These statistics are shocking, yet the United States has shown no significant strides towards combating rape culture.

Socioeconomic status plays a large role in both the lives of the offenders and victims of acts of sexual aggression. The anti-rape movement has made it easier for women to speak out about rape; however, religious beliefs and socioeconomic backgrounds still prevent many from doing so. Additionally, from the survivors point of view, victims may often be led to wonder what their own race and socioeconomic status had to do with the attack, and if it was racially motivated (Stewart). This isn't to suggest that the color of one's skin has anything to do with their likelihood of being attacked, nor being an attacker (Stewart). Assuming that only a body of color has the disposition to commit violent sexual crimes is unfair to the entirety of the race. However, the nation can no longer ignore the socioeconomic undertone that motivates crimes of power, such as rape. Yet exists another reason for policymakers to start paying attention to the voices of the socially disadvantaged – if power was more evenly distributed, there would be less of a desire for the disadvantaged to find power in other aspects of their life.

The way an individual defines his/her sexuality may also make him/her more likely to be targeted for sexual crimes. A LGBT prisoner's chance of being raped is twelve times that of a straight body, according to a study done by the Department of Justice in 2009 (Welcome). Rape

is viewed as a punishment for being different. Transgender women are disproportionately forced to engage in sexual activity with police officers (Muscio). It is necessary to avoid looking at the black and white statistics of gender violence because there are more than two genders (Ten). Biological women don't necessarily suffer more from rape, but objective statistics only exist for biological women (Muscio). Where “manhood” is assumed to be aggression and domination, “womanhood” is assumed to be synonymous with being weak and submissive and this fuels the fire that is rape culture (Women's). Society often assumes that only weak men can be raped (Women's). Every individual must define his or her own sense of manhood or womanhood, and not let society tell them how they ought to behave in their gender roles (Women's). Every individual body ought to establish his/her own sense of gender, and precisely what their gender role is. By doing so, society’s commonly held belief that a woman must be subservient and weak and a man strong and powerful is rejected, which leads to respect for all genders, and less of a desire to “punish” an individual for being different.

Rape culture is sustained by the actions of State Governments. In 31 states in the United States, a rapist can sue for custody and visitation (Childree). Connecticut required a mentally disabled victim to prove that she fought back against her rapist, and when she couldn't, the rapist walked (Rosario). In Kansas, a doctor lost her medical license for giving a 10 year old incestuous rape victim an abortion (Marty). The United States is a Democracy – a government by the people. US policymakers need to be encouraged by the people to form and reform legislation that favors the victims of sexual assault, not the perpetrators.

Rape culture is most prominent on the campuses of American colleges, with 1 in 4 women being victimized sexually (Baker). However, “95% of college rapes are not reported” (Castriagno). Everyone knows the story of the guy with a ski mask and a knife – but this is rarely

the case in regards to rape, especially on college campuses (Baker). “90% of college survivors know their assaulter” (Baker). Often, rape is committed by someone the victim considers to be a friend (Castrigno). Rape is the most common crime on college campuses, and although the majority of victims are sure of the identity of their assaulter, the crimes go unreported all but 5% of the time.

Rape is viewed as a tool of war worldwide. 48 women are raped per hour while Congo is in conflict (Stop Rape). History books make no mention of the rapes that occurred in concentration camps during World War Two. The amount of rapes that actually occurred during that period of time is an untallied millions (Chemaly). Of course, the United States isn't the only nation that rapes its women; it is a common –and often ignored – tool of war worldwide.

Rape culture even exists in the military. Incidents of sexual violence in the military rose over 26,000 in 2012 alone (Johnson). 80% of those discharged due to being charged with rape are discharged with honor whereas 90% of those raped in the military are discharged involuntarily (Chemaly). These women go to fight for their country and they are disrespected and humiliated when they are shown that the men that raped them are shown to be valued at a higher level than they are.

Even United States' politicians perpetuate rape culture in the decisions they make. Why isn't rape culture a community heard of issue? These aren't brought up, because policymakers thrive on those who are struggling (Muscio). It is disturbing to hear pro-life advocates such as Todd Akin, who believes that in the case of a “legitimate rape, a woman's body can simply shut the whole thing down” (Rigby). This should go without saying, but the chance that a woman's body will shut the whole thing down is roughly zero in 3.2 billion – in fact, the chance that a raped woman conceives is two times that of a woman engaging in consensual sex (Chemaly).

The politicians that make such absurd claims are typically smirk males that know what they say is completely false, and never provide evidence to prove that it is valid (Rigby). These male politicians are not affected by their statements and policy making decisions such as, for example, abortion. The most adamant of pro-life policymakers are men, who will in no way be affected in either a world where abortion is illegal or legal; however, they realize their decisions will greatly affect many women – and may even cost some their lives (Rigby). Citizens need to rally against these politicians and raise awareness about the appalling things that they are saying, and the legislation they are passing. This absurdity thrives because constituents remain ignorant about what their candidates are saying and voting on – even ones that may drastically affect them personally.

The way the community responds to rape in the status quo is inadequate. “Cities bestow awards of valor to firefighters and good Samaritans, not women who elude, maul or successfully prosecute would-be rapists” (Muscio). The United States sees rape as a crime, but the substantial impact rape has on the society itself, and how it ensures the patriarchy is maintained, is ignored entirely (Muscio). This sex-negative culture teaches women not to feel positive about having sex which, in turn, makes it harder to talk about rape (Baker). Survivors often realize that rape carries a stigma, and then wonder if they ought to even tell anyone (Stewart). A victim even called a victim support line and asked to speak with someone, but was told no one would be available to talk with her for a month (Stewart). She also called the clinic to get tested, and was told she couldn't come for two months. Once she demanded to speak to the supervisor, however, an emergency appointment was made. On top of all of these disappointments comes the most devastating of them all, when this particular victim was told that a single African-American hair was found, and was later told that the hair belonged to her – a white, blonde woman. Once she

inquired as to how that hair could feasibly belong to her, the police admitted they messed up yet made no resolution to continue to search for the identity of the man (Stewart). If all women learn to love themselves and their sisters, there exists no individual attack. A sexual attack against one woman means an entire community will fight back. No one feels lucky it wasn't them because it's just as personal if it were someone else (Muscio). The nation does not respond to rape allegations in the way that it ought to.

There are two main ways rape culture may be combated – education and awareness. Those who aim to educate about rape believe that they are combating rape culture by teaching women how to avoid being raped – instead of teaching men not to rape (Women's). However, gradually organizations are embracing the idea of educating boys of rape culture (Baker). Once an individual realizes that rape culture exists, he/she begins analyzing the media for examples of it – and it becomes more prevalent in their world (Women's). Such as the fact that one in eight Hollywood movies contains romanticized rape scenes. These are made from the point of view of men with intention to humiliate or show power over women (Muscio). If a movie contains a rape scene, demand a refund, write to the producer, organize a protest, et cetera (Muscio). Or, if you know a movie contains a rape scene, go and loudly narrate a graphic version of what you are seeing and then continue on to make a public scene (Muscio). Excusing or justifying such idealized depictions of rape shows the community that rape is tolerable. While it is important to raise awareness of the misleading way in which the media represents rape, it is more important to raise awareness about the living and breathing rapists that live in the community. Inga Muscio offers a very aggressive way of responding to rapists, since the majority of rape victims know their attacker, and this is quite advantageous when it comes to extracting revenge and humiliating them. She suggests that a large group of women going to a known rapist workplace

would send a message. However, if they threw rotten eggs at him, the message would be very clear, and if he had to walk through a crowd of angry women, then he might possibly feel a fraction of the humiliation that his victim did (Muscio). These somewhat immature actions are justified because if the news of a rape causes a movement, at the very least, that particular woman didn't suffer in vain. This is why silence must be avoided at all costs (Muscio). Women benefit from rape survivors speaking out and teaching that rape is an ever-present threat (Muscio). Join or make a group that aims to educate, raise awareness of, and end violence against women – the possibilities are truly endless, as long as they educate and raise awareness, then something was accomplished (Women's). Once more individuals realize that sexual offenders aren't born – they're made by a society that justifies rape – more progress will be made (Baker). The United States must combat rape culture by educating both men and women equally and raising awareness about rape. Education and awareness are not the only tools that can help a society combat rape culture – truly, there are millions of possibilities – however, education and awareness are the foundation upon which other actions will be taken.

The culture of the United States is distinctive in the sense that it is truly a melting pot of all other cultures – millions of unique instances of values, beliefs and arts coexist within the borders of the nation. While the United States ought to be proud to have such cultural diversity, it ought to be equally ashamed of the negative aspects of culture that are regressive to the welfare of the society, such as rape culture, and every constituent of the nation ought to actively work to reject the notion that such aspects are inherent to the culture.

Works Cited

- Baker, Terrah. "The Date Rape Culture." *The Free Weekly*. N.p., 25 Apr. 2013. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Castriagno, Emily. "Is 'Rape Culture' the New Normal? - New America Media." *Is 'Rape Culture' the New Normal? - New America Media*. New America, 26 July 2013. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Chemaly, Soraya. "50 Actual Facts About Rape." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Childree, Tim. "The United States Congress: Strip Rapists of Parental Rights over Their Victim's Child." *Change.Org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Johnson, Luke. "Sexual Assaults In Military Rose To Over 26,000 In 2012: Pentagon Survey." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 07 May 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Marty, Robin. "Menu." *RH Reality Check*. N.p., 25 June 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Muscio, Inga. *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence*. [Seattle]: Seal, 2002. Print.
- "Rape Culture." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 17 Nov. 2013. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.
- Rigby, Jim. "Jimrigby.org." *Jmrigbyorg*. N.p., 20 Aug. 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Rosario, Justin. "Mentally Retarded Woman Can't Prove She Fought Rapist, Rapist Goes Free." *Addictinginfo.org*. N.p., 11 Oct. 2013. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- Stewart, Lucretia. "A Rape Victim Tells the Horrors of the Rape and Its Aftermath By Lucretia Stewart." *A Rape Victim Tells the Horrors of the Rape and Its Aftermath By Lucretia Stewart*. N.p., 23 July 2003. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- "Stop Rape in Democratic Republic of Congo - The International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict." *Stop Rape in Conflict*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- "Ten Things to End Rape Culture | The Nation." *Ten Things to End Rape Culture | The Nation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- "Welcome to Texas, Prison Rape Capital of the U.S." *Dallas Voice*. N.p., 22 Mar. 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.
- "Who Are the Victims? | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network." *Who Are the Victims? | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

"Women's Center." *Marshall.edu*. Marshall University, n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.

A NOBODY IN AMERICA

Eliana Hudson

The competition within America to become the greatest has varied from businesses strategically fighting for the biggest profits and best products, to schoolchildren vying for their teacher's attention so they can show off their knowledge of a subject. This has trickled down to everyone being constantly critiqued, compared, evaluated, and criticized against their school peers, friends, and work colleagues to determine who is the best and who cannot compare. These evaluations are comparable to tests given by schools. If there are too many wrong or incomplete solutions, it is a strike against you, it is a wrong answer, it is a tick mark off of perfection. The definition of the ideal "perfect person" in America varies from individual to individual, but the basics stay the same. We see the "perfect person" as an able-bodied, fit and healthy, usually white man, who is intelligent, and has the money and the connections to get the right job to support his family. Those people who stray against this checklist of perfection are looked down upon, as they do not fulfill our society's image of what a model person looks like.

Precious, the main character in Sapphire's novel *Push*, is not considered a "perfect person." She is a black girl who is overweight, uneducated, in the lower-economic status, and has AIDs; these attributes are automatic strikes against her. Precious, however, realizes her hardships and strives to make the most out of her life, as it seems she is beginning to move forward from the horrors she has endured during her short life by the end of the book. She is a loving mother who reads to her baby, Abdul, and is determined to complete her GED so she can go to college. Yet, one thing that hinders Precious from truly moving forward are the "tesses" she must take, not only in

school, but in real life. These physical and seemingly arbitrary tests shape Precious as another faceless minority in America: she is just an illiterate and poor black girl. Not only do these tests portray her as nothing, but try as she might, Precious will not be able to rid herself of that label. This label not only defines Precious, but also is a title of all other women like her in America, erasing their identities and depicting them as a failure.

Immediately upon reading the first chapter of *Push*, we learn that Precious is failing her education. She is in the “ninth grade,” when she should be in the “eleventh grade, getting ready to go into the twelfth grade” (3). She has been held back and suspended due to her pregnancies, is unable to distinguish one number from another, and cannot read. Precious says, “I really do want to learn. Everyday I tell myself something gonna happen, some shit like on TV. I’m gonna break through or somebody gonna break through to me—I’m gonna learn, catch up, be normal, change my seat to the front of the class” (5).

Yet, wanting is not enough. Yes, she went to the alternative school and was able to increase her reading literacy levels exponentially, but the fact that she is so far behind in her general education puts her in an unofficial group suggesting failure. American culture glorifies education and getting a college degree. The higher you go in education, the more highly you are regarded by your peers and colleagues. We see those who are willing to get their PhD as constantly yearning to open their minds to new and diverse perspectives. They are willing to spend thousands of extra dollars on their education to gain, not only a respected title, but also the highest title possible. We applaud the hard work and dedication needed to gain this coveted honor in education and we look upon those who are high school and college dropouts as “bums” and “losers” who do not want

to do anything productive with their lives. These under-educated individuals are given the stereotype of people who mooch off the government's aid and do nothing to further society.

Precious is neither a high school dropout nor a woman pursuing a college degree; she is pursuing her GED. Be that as it may, she will still be lumped into the “bums” and “losers” category of education due to her age and what grade she is currently in. When people run into a real life Precious figure, they will shun her and her lack of education. Never mind that Precious' mother and father have sexually, physically, and mentally abused her since she could remember and she was raped twice by her father and forced to carry both children; people will ignorantly disregard the environment that has impacted her lack of education. They will look at her failed tests—and therefore failed education—and forever condemn her as another low-income failure that will do nothing to contribute to the advancement of the American nation.

Not only is the lack of education a strike against Precious, the fact that she is poor in America makes others view her as inferior. America values materialistic items, which encompasses having copious amounts of money. This, in turn, transcribes into becoming a part of American culture, i.e., the “American Dream.” The “American Dream” is defined by Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld's well-known sociological book, *Crime and the American Dream*, as a “cultural commitment to the goal of economic success, to be pursued by everyone under conditions of open, individual competition” (x). America's obsession with superficial items, like money, create a distinct blockade between the “has” and the “has-not's.” The Gilded Age is a prime example of Americans showing off their wealth and looking down upon those who are not as well off as

themselves. The Gilded Age, as fabulous and extravagant as it sounds, helped to foster the ideology that having little or no money equates you to being a nobody. After all, if you did not have money, you would not have the connections to go to the special events with the other high-class citizens. Without money, you could not afford lavish outfits for each dance, throw grand parties, and eventually marry the wealthy, properly brought-up man who would continue to work hard for you to live in the content notion that your life revolves around your excessive resources. Without the marriage, you would not receive your family's inheritance and the connections that came with marrying into another elite socialite's kin, continuing the aristocratic ideology that money solves all problems. These socialites believed money makes you happy, and without it, you are nothing.

Precious has grown up in a poor household. We learn her family is on welfare and she is usually unable to buy breakfast on her way to the alternative school. Her family's low-income status, as unfair as it seems, is a barricade between her gaining opportunities that those with more money have. Even though America's creed is that we live in a "land of opportunity," and those who try will succeed, this is not true. Those with money have easier access to better education (which leads to pursuing a higher educational degree), connections that can help them with jobs, and are able to afford items that will enable them to live a more secure life than those who are more restricted with their funds. In the 2011 October issue of the *American Sociological Review*, sociologists Geoffrey Wodtke and David Harding from University of Michigan and sociologist Felix Elwert from University of Wisconsin-Madison say: "Compared to growing up in affluent neighborhoods, growing up in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and unemployment reduces the chances of high school graduation from 96 percent to 76

percent for black children.” Although Precious is not a high school drop-out, she is in an environment that treats her as if she will become one. This environment is filled with the belief that you will not become successful, you will not be able to get out of the poor neighborhood you reside in, and you will never become anything.

This lack of education, due to living in a low-income neighborhood, means that it will be difficult for Precious to get a high paying job that requires a college degree. She will be forced to continue to live in a poor neighborhood and raise her child in an impoverished environment. If Precious does not have a high paying job, then she will not be able to spend extra money and flaunt her wealth. She will not be fulfilling the American Dream of economic success. As America is a capitalist nation, money is everything. With her lack of money, those with money will see her as an inadequate American who failed to seize her potential and become triumphant in life. She has already received another mark against her as a poor girl thrust into the cruel walk of life.

One of the biggest, and automatic, marks against Precious is that she is a black girl living in America. Many, usually white, Americans try to claim we are living in a post-racial society. After all, we have elected and re-elected our first black president. This, of course, is quite false. The racism that African-Americans face has shifted from obvious oppression, such as segregation in schools and other areas, to institutionalized oppression, such as unemployment gaps between whites and African-Americans and the higher incarceration rate of African-American males to males of any other race. African-Americans are still treated unequally, even though we have tried to combat the racism and systematic oppression they have endured for centuries. The racism and systematic oppression has led to numerous negative stereotypes about African-Americans and they

have stuck. These stereotypes have created a world in which we fear the black man and we degrade the black woman, just because of their skin color. As a woman, Precious can walk down the street and experience street harassment and catcalls. As a black woman, Precious can walk down the street and people will view her as a ghetto menace to society. Those who perceive Precious as just a “ghetto” black girl infused with negative stereotypes, and not a black girl who is human and has feelings and a life of her own, dehumanize her and create a sticking notion that she is inferior.

Not only is it a problem that there are negative stereotypes about black women, but it is an even greater issue that the media continues to depict black women as nothing but clichés. It is hard pressed to find television shows that have successful black women in the workforce and not as poor criminals. The media and ads are continuously shoved down our throats and Americans consume what they tell us. It has repeatedly told us how to think and we do not question it. Many problems stem from our unquestioning adherence to the ideas that are forced down our throats. We begin to see, and believe, that certain types of people behave a specific way since we see it so often in movies, in books, and on television. We learn that black women are welfare queens, have multiple children from different fathers, are uneducated, are loud and use profanity, and are criminals. These depictions render black women as second-rate citizens who can be forgotten about. Obviously, Precious cannot change her skin color. She will forever be labeled as another irate, boisterous black girl who takes advantage of the welfare system. Try as she might, she will not be able to rid herself of this label, as the media continuously feeds us these lies about black women.

Precious has a rough life, there is no doubt about it. She has been sexually, mentally, and physically abused by her parents ever since she was a toddler. Her father has raped her and has gotten her pregnant twice. Precious is striving to make a better life for herself and her two children. Try as she might, society will always look down upon her: her lack of education, strapped income, and being a black woman are three strikes against her. These combined attributes paint her as another anonymous minority in America; she is just another wave in the sea of people. She is, as deemed by American society and culture, a nobody. She will not be able to distance herself from this label. She has failed the test of American culture by not being the perfect person. No matter how much Precious yearns to create something of herself, outsiders will see her and her deemed failures as insignificant. She is, after all, just a poor, uneducated black girl-- one of millions in America. These labels will stick with her for the rest of her life, no matter how hard she tries to combat through gaining an education and loving her children. Even though she is a fictional character, this critical evaluation of Precious and her failure of passing these tests encompass the cynical reality we live in today. She is a template of what American citizens yearn to distance themselves from: an uneducated minority who is impoverished and cannot detach themselves from the system that continues to strike down their attempts to rise above their struggles.

Works Cited

- Berman, Jillian. "Children Living In Low-Income Neighborhoods Less Likely To Graduate High School: Study." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 04 Oct. 2011. Web. 05 Nov. 2013.
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/04/children-low-income-neighborhoods-high-school_n_994580.html>.
- Messner, Steven F., and Richard Rosenfeld. *Crime and the American Dream*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 1997. X. Print.
- Sapphire. *Push: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 1996. 3-5. Print.

Intermediate Level Winner

GET WITH THE PROGRAM: THE IMPORTANCE OF GIFTED EDUCATION

Cindy Jiang

Hidden in the shadows of education reform in America lies a population of students completely overlooked and disregarded by society. These students are the ones who begin reading Shakespeare's works at the early age of six or creating works of art that rival Monet by the age of eight. They are the ones classified as "gifted." This label has often been associated with elitism and negative connotations, causing inherent bias in what is done educationally for gifted children. Education and knowledge provide advancements in society and the chance to make a difference in the world. The importance of gifted education arises from the fact that every child deserves to learn and feel challenged in the school setting. It is time for students to be encouraged to pursue excellence rather than putting so much focus on adequacy. However, this is not an easy task to accomplish due to the hindrance of gifted education, which can be attributed to many factors such as: lack of funding, political and societal views, inadequate curriculum in current programs, and failure to implement any solutions.

Whether it is due to nature or nurture, it is an inevitable fact of life that all human beings on this planet are different. Each person possess unique talents and abilities. Rather than dismissing this fact and treating everyone as a monochrome unit, society should strive towards enhancing the gifts and potential of all individuals. This idealistic view has been difficult to implement in terms of education. Students deemed as gifted are at a disadvantage and far from

encouraged to pursue accelerated higher learning. There is no universal definition of gifted, which makes determining what exactly qualifies as gifted extremely difficult. The federal definition, as seen in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, states that “the term 'gifted and talented', when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (National Association for Gifted Children). Being gifted in no way means that one student is better than another. It simply means that they learn and garner knowledge differently from one another. We should not separate kids into two different categories, gifted or non-gifted. Instead, we should label the services necessary to develop high potentials and when we identify traits or aptitudes in students, we should focus on specific behavior manifestations (Renzulli 151). However, our society has an affinity for giving everything a name or classification. In order to remove stigma and negative associations connected with gifted education, the label gifted could essentially be replaced with any other less controversial word. This allows the needs of gifted children to be carefully examined without a heavy label causing a deviation from the real issues.

These gifted students are generally identified through various forms of testing initiated by either the school or parents of the child. The amount of gifted students may be outnumbered by the general population, but they too deserve to receive an education that allows them to reach their fullest potential. “5% of the 3,520 gifted students [followed by researchers] dropped out of school after eighth grade. Astonishingly, that’s almost as high as the 5.2% of non-gifted kids who dropped out” (Cloud 2). If the education gifted students are receiving is not challenging enough it often leads to a disinterest in education and ultimately a decrease in motivation and/or

hard work. Some other issues that occur include: extreme boredom in the classroom, difficulty paying attention, and becoming troublesome and acting out. This demonstrates the importance and desperate need for gifted friendly programs and environments that will give these students the opportunity to excel and succeed. It's alarming that we live in a country that is so desperately trying to compete with the rest of the developed world in education—and yet we fail to keep hold of the children that give us the best shot at competing. We're losing an average of 5% of our future CEO's, innovators, inventors, physicists, chemists—we're losing 5% of our Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, because after all, at least they finished high school.

Unfortunately, the lack of funding available for gifted students is dismal or even nonexistent in some areas, which makes the development of quality gifted programs difficult to accomplish. "Gifted students may just be among the most underserved students in the nation. They are one of the few special populations with no funding mandates and no legal requirements to serve their special needs" (Jerome 1). Currently, there is no federal mandate implemented that demands every school to offer identification or services for children that are gifted. Thus, a school is not required by federal education law to aid these children. In many states across the nation, limited amount of funding for gifted programs often means that they are the first ones cut when school districts must tighten their budget. This leaves gifted students with little to no options in terms of receiving a suitable education. Only those who are wealthy enough can afford to attend private schools to further their education, while minority students are left behind in the public education system where no attention is given to their special needs as gifted students. This disparity in opportunity for education can be solved by providing students with gifted programs. Federally mandated funding is ultimately needed to improve these conditions.

No federal mandate for gifted education also means that policies for gifted education differ from state to state. For example, Missouri does not require gifted services to be available and spends a total of zero dollars on funding for gifted and talented education. However, Kansas, a state that shares a border with Missouri, spent 11 million dollars on funding for gifted and talented education in 2010-2011 and also requires gifted students to be provided with services (National Association for Gifted Children). This staggering difference for what is available to gifted students is both astounding and eye opening. This can be attributed to the fact that Kansas has a higher median income. However, when comparing the spending per student, Kansas spends only \$80 more. The real answer comes when you examine the percent of persons over the age of 25 who hold a bachelor's degree; Kansas has almost 5% more college graduates than Missouri (US Census Bureau).

Why is this a big deal? In states with higher college graduates rates, there's a direct correlation with higher rankings in terms of education. It's because those states tend to put an emphasis on their children; parents will do whatever it takes to see their child succeed. The status quo shows that gifted education programs are hit and miss. The states that find money in their budget to offer quality gifted education are the same states that appear at the top of national rankings year after year. And it's an endless cycle; the better a state does in its federal testing, the more money the state receives from the federal government. States that struggle to meet standards year after year are forced to spend their money to ensure that they can give the same basic education to all students so that they can reach the standards as well.

The recurring problem is that there is no allocation of funds. Federal funds are earmarked for education and "gifted education" is not a category that the government recognizes when dispersing funds. The biggest thing that needs to happen is that when funds are appropriated,

they should also, similar to federal mandates, ensure that a certain amount of money is spent on gifted education. There is no more effective investment than in the youth that will become the leaders of tomorrow.

The only federal legislation passed to aid gifted students was the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in 1988. It provided funds and/or grants to research effective methods of testing, identification and programming for gifted students (National Association for Gifted Children). It comes as no surprise that this minuscule amount of recognition for gifted students was taken away and defunded by Congress in 2011. This is a trend that occurs every year at the level of each school district, county, city and state. When budgets must be cut, the go-to item is gifted education, and that way of thinking needs to change.

In an era when policy makers have expressed concern for the future needs of our society and stressed the importance of education that could help the United States keep our economic advantages, it is curious that the federal government has done little to ensure that the educational needs of these children are addressed (Levy & Palley 8). This is when political and societal views come into play. The argument most often brought up is elitism versus egalitarianism. Elitism is the belief that certain individuals possess qualities or distinct attributes that set them apart from others, thus giving them more power and authority over others. On the other hand, Egalitarianism is the idea of “equality in terms of distribution of benefits and burdens of social cooperation” (Levy & Palley 3). Essentially egalitarians believe in the equal moral worth of individuals, which overall appeals to a wider population. Tension arises when egalitarians accuse gifted programs of being elitist and exclusive. This has strongly affected the view society has on gifted education. The egalitarian view believes that it is unfair to reward or offer extra services to those children who are lucky enough to be born with high academic potential (Levy & Palley 3).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) perfectly demonstrates the egalitarian view society has on education. The purpose of this act was to ensure that all students, including ones deemed disadvantaged, are capable of achieving academic proficiency. Although this was a well-intended act, it has negatively impacted gifted students. The federal government's attempt at leveling the playing field and making education equal ended up causing one group of students to be hindered and restricted from raising the standards of education and reaching their fullest potential. "In other words, NCLB's expectation for many high-ability and gifted children was underachievement. When examining recent NAEP score trends, students who scored in the "advanced" level in 4th grade but did not receive adequate academic support saw their scores steadily decline from scoring "in the top quarter or top half of advanced nations over time. By [age] 15 these rankings drop to the bottom half" (Jolly & Makel 36). If the standards of education are not raised then the United States is faced with a serious problem – a loss of talented children who possess traits that will provide innovation and creativity.

The egalitarian view is completely contradicted by NCLB. An equal education is not being received by every student. Gifted students are not given the same opportunity to succeed in school. Instead of leaving no child behind, the focus of education policy should be on improving every student. Each student should be guaranteed a year of learning, regardless of what point they began at. The goal of education should be striving towards excellence, not just mediocre proficiency. Another view point should be brought in to compete with the ideas of elitism and egalitarianism, a view that believes in equal opportunity, but not necessarily outcome. Such a view should be used to create all education policies.

The United States as a whole has been struggling with the idea of academic excellence. Students are no longer encouraged to expand their minds and work to their fullest capabilities.

Instead, they are asked to pass one standardized test after another, which affects what they are learning in the classroom. This problem has been affecting the curriculum for all classes, especially gifted programs. Currently, the teachers who are in charge of gifted classes are not specially trained or have the qualifications to teach. If teachers for those with disabilities are required to meet certain criteria and receive specific training then the teachers for the gifted should also be held to the same standards. Gifted students, like the students with disabilities, are a special group who need the right guidance and different ways of teaching. Thus, an instructor's skill and ability must be optimally matched with students.

Research by Vantassel-Baska in 2009 on effective curriculum interventions in language arts, science, and social studies suggests that higher level thinking results can be obtained if a structured curriculum is used and implemented faithfully over at least 24 hours of instruction (71). Unfortunately, the coursework used by gifted students is not differentiated enough from regular work, which inhibits increased levels of higher level thinking. There is no explicit focus on creative, problem-based or application forms of thinking. Gifted students spend most of their time in the regular classroom where teachers are unable to modify curriculum to fit their needs. According to Jolly and Mackel, there is research that shows gifted students learn differently than their classroom peers (36). These differences include being able to process more information over a shorter period of time, thinking in an abstract and complex manner, learning information in the first time (making re-teaching and repetition unnecessary), and liking and seeking intellectual challenge (36). Not only do these students require differentiated curriculum, but they should also be provided with the opportunity to seek advanced opportunities outside of school. Academic excellence can only be achieved if students are motivated to gain new knowledge.

This motivation stems from being challenged academically and positive attitudes towards advanced learning.

An easy and cost effective solution for ensuring that gifted students are appropriately challenged is allowing them to participate in acceleration. According to a report called *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* by Assouline, Colangelo, and Gross, there are 18 types of acceleration such as: grade-skipping, early graduation, self-paced instruction, advanced placement, and extracurricular programs (11). The idea of allowing kids to skip grade levels is often viewed negatively due to the perception that it inhibits social skills and psychological development. Most educators, like Debbie Peña, a supervisor of gifted education for the Garden Grove Unified School District, discourage grade skipping because it doesn't make sense at a social or emotional level (Cloud 3). This is a completely false allegation, but such fears are difficult to control. Although, there is evidence and research that indicate students who participate in acceleration do not face any long term psychological or social problems. In fact, none of the acceleration options have been shown to do psychosocial damage to gifted students as a group; when effects are noted, they are usually in a positive direction (Assouline, Colangelo & Gross 64). This demonstrates that acceleration is a viable option for the future of gifted education. It should be carefully looked into and assessed.

Another effective solution would be to teach teachers a short course on assessing and meeting the individual needs of their students. The most effective way to assess students would be to measure in a way that allows us to see their actual growth throughout a school year. This requires a pre-assessment and then a post assessment. Some tools that allow for this type of measurement include using performance-based or curriculum assessments that target the use of higher level skills in content areas and portfolio approaches that document product growth over

time (Vantassel-Baska 79). Current assessments that can be used as a model include the Advanced Placement programs and International Baccalaureate programs. Teachers must also undergo training in teaching creative and innovation thinking. The best strategy to accomplish this is to encourage creative problem solving, which focuses on using brainstorming as a way to improve ideational fluency. Students should also be taught how to view issues from different vantage points. This will allow them to formulate their own unique ideas and opinions, which fosters creative thinking skill development.

Yet another effective solution, though more comprehensive, is to force federal funds. Legislation is urgently required to address the lack of available opportunities for gifted students. Federal law would ensure that all states are receiving equal amounts of funding for gifted education, as well as a more uniform and efficient curriculum. Most importantly, the rights of gifted students must be protected by the law. Gifted students have the right to education, just like everyone else. To achieve this, laws that require a certain amount of money and attention appropriated to gifted education must be implemented. The importance of gifted education must be brought up at a national level. This will allow it to receive more supporters and advocates.

In conclusion, the importance of gifted education lies in the fact that these students are quite possibly the future of the nation, as well as the idea that every student deserves a decent education. The roadblocks – limited funding, political and societal views, inadequate curriculum, and failure to implement solutions – must be removed, so that the issue of gifted education can emerge from the shadows and enter the limelight. Otherwise, the future of education is in danger of not only plummeting down the global rankings, but also the deteriorating intelligence of children – the future of the United States. It is time for this nation to get with the program and understand the importance of gifted education.

Works Cited

- Cloud, John. "Saving the Smart Kids." *Time* 27 Sept. 2007: n. pag. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.
- Colangelo, Nicholas, Susan G. Assouline, and Miraca U.M. Gross. *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*. Rep. Vol. 2. Iowa City: U of Iowa, 2004. *Acceleration Institute*. Web. 22 Apr. 2014.
- Jerome, Sarah. "The Rise of the Rest." *District Administration*. N.p., Nov. 2010. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.
- Jolly, Jennifer L., and Matthew C. Makel. "No Child Left Behind:." *Childhood Education* 87.1 (2010): 35-40. Print.
- Levy, Traci, and Elizabeth Palley. *U.S. Education Policy: Liberal Inadequacies and the Care Alternative*. N.p., Mar. 2007. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.
- "QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." *US Census Bureau*. US Department of Commerce, 27 Mar. 2014. Web. 13 May 2014.
- Renzulli, J. S. "Reexamining the Role of Gifted Education and Talent Development for the 21st Century: A Four-Part Theoretical Approach." *Gifted Child Quarterly* 56.3 (2012): 150-59. Print.
- Vantassel-Baska, J. "Curriculum Issues: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Gifted: A Problem-Based Learning Scenario." *Gifted Child Today* 36.1 (2012): 71-75. Print.
- "What Is Giftedness?" *NAGC*. National Association for Gifted Children, n.d. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.

THE DEHUMANIZING POWER OF GENDER ILLITERACY

Austin Allen

Most people take for granted that they're capable of behaving in a socially acceptable way amongst their peers of the same sex. Few people are ever forced to adopt a perspective from which they can see just how restrictive and intricate are the rules of the language of gender. Some of those who do see from such a perspective are the gender illiterate. Those whose mastery of this language is poor are not unlike those who we conventionally call illiterate (that is, those whose mastery of some particular language such as English or Spanish is poor) in the sense that ours are stories of repeatedly falling through the cracks, missing the marks, and sinking into a state of deep frustration. The key difference, however, is that gender is not an essential aspect of living a full and happy life, whereas spoken and written language certainly are.

Not everyone will agree with this thesis. Some see gender expression as an essential part of communication amongst people, as much as are writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Many among both gender conformists and gender variants believe this. Whether one chooses to express the gender which is ascribed to him or her based on his or her sex or to express the opposite gender, or some combination of the two, the choice to overtly express gender and to in so doing send a message to others about yourself is to accept the premise that gender is *important*, even necessary. Still others are completely oblivious of any possible difference or conflict between sex and gender and find any

discussion of these matters utterly inane. Then there are the gender illiterate, who have never unlocked the secret to using gender expression as a means of understanding others and of empowering themselves.

Gender literacy generally consists of learning one or the other of the two gender dialects, but, as Barbara Mellix says in her essay *From Outside, In*, "...I grew up speaking what I considered two distinctly different languages....and in the process of acquiring these languages, I developed an understanding of when, where, and how to use them." In her essay, Mellix is referring to switching back and forth between "black English and standard English," having grown up in the country and moved to the big city. As a child, I felt torn between my female peers, with whom I associated willingly, and my male peers with whom I was expected to be comfortable and at ease. Switching back and forth was stressful for me. Even at a very young age, most of my peers were learning how to read in this language of gender, just as most of us were learning to read books. I tried to be a part of both groups, but found myself consistently saying the wrong things and being left out of the male group, which had different values, expectations, and unspoken norms than those that I was used to. I managed to stay literate among my female peers until around the time that everyone started going through puberty.

At that point, a whole new dimension was added to the language of gender, and I fell even further behind. Acting in a way that strictly fit either of the gender archetypes became extremely important as my peers were beginning to integrate this new concept of sexuality into their social interactions and evaluations, and these were the years when I really gave up on fitting in. Fortunately, I managed to find others like me, who didn't fit

the proper definition of any ideal. They were few and far between, but they didn't expect me to be anything other than me. Meanwhile, those fluent in the language of gender thrived, forming relationships promoted by the heteronormative establishment, excelling in gender-appropriate activities, making their parents proud. With any form of illiteracy, there are mountainous feelings of shame, inadequacy, and self-loathing. It tends to become a festering, fiercely guarded secret. My self-esteem suffered perpetually. Later on, when I discovered that gay and lesbian people have their own set of values, expectations, and norms where traditional gender roles are far less important, I still found myself incapable of speaking correctly these languages. Always there are grammatical faux pas, mispronunciations, misuse of vocabulary, and just a general reception of "we don't like your accent." Although the expectations placed upon me by this peer group were far more reasonable and acceptable to me than those of the majority, it still seemed that I had merely traded the pursuit of one gender- and sexuality-based ideal for the pursuit of another.

How is it a person who society reads (identifies) as male supposed to dress? My answer is simple: however he wants. And, as an adult, this is to some extent true to my life and experiences, but as a child it most certainly was not. There were always different dress codes for boys and girls at my schools, and dressing in a way even slightly askew of the arbitrary standard was the best way to get ostracized. My clothes were always too big or too small, hand-me-down, out of fashion, frumpy, and embarrassing. But I wasn't embarrassed because I was dressing poorly; I was dressing poorly because I was embarrassed. I walked through the halls of my junior high school with my eyes glued to the floor, counting the alternating brown and white tiles, my clothes layered to hide my

body regardless of the season, clutching my books to my chest defensively as if I expected to be assaulted at any moment. All this because I was being assaulted at every moment, but almost never physically. I was being assaulted by the general and evident recognition of my own deficiency that was plastered all over every face that I passed.

There was never anything seriously, irreparably wrong with me. The problem was that, at that age, one was either a beautiful, budding young lady, a strapping, spunky young gentleman, or a monstrosity. Successful upload onto the social network was absolutely contingent upon faithful adherence to the gender code. To the girls my age, I was disgusting; to the boys my age, I was pathetic, too low to even both bullying. Yes, I was socially stunted, but I firmly believe that at the heart of my segregation was always the question of gender, always without an answer. Meanwhile, I was and always have been unusually thoughtful, intelligent, open-minded, generous, hard-working, and kind. None of that ever worked to my advantage; quite the opposite.

How is a person who society reads as male supposed to walk? How is he supposed to talk? How is he supposed to smile, or laugh, or write, or sit, or eat, or run, or love? I know the answers to these questions, but the most important one of all is this: how is a person supposed to live his life and be true to himself with all of these rigid prescriptions of behavior weighing down on his soul? Every day, I am judged for being myself. In response, I have dug a well of internal strength, resilience, and belief so deep that it can never run dry. I have adapted. That's what's happened on the inside, but unfortunately I've changed on that outside as well. As a defense against the years of ridicule, I've built a cocoon of coldness, insensitivity, and disinterest that drives others away and hides my true

feelings. And, perhaps most injuriously, my relationship with my principal male role model, my father, has been left in shambles along the way.

But, as I previously said, life beyond gender is not only possible, it's beautiful. As an adult, I've finally learned to love me for the things that I thought were unlovable, and have in so doing opened the door for others to do the same. I see gender as a barrier that keeps others away and unable to see us for whom we really are. Once you really get to know someone, all considerations of it fade away. Because so many of our rules for social interaction are rooted in gender, approaching someone who is neither/nor is very unnerving for most people. But tearing down the façade of she or he can allow the judgment of others on more important grounds, such as kindness, generosity, intelligence, and an elusive and shy thing called inner beauty.

Works Cited

Mellix, Barbara. (1983). "From Outside, In." In D. Cavitch, *Life Studies: A Thematic Reader*. New York City: St. Martin's Press, 75-84.

DISNEY'S PROGRESSIVE *MULAN*: EXAMINING *FROZEN* AS A FEMINIST "BREAKTHROUGH" FOR DISNEY

Clarissa Engel

Frozen has been lauded as a feminist breakthrough for the Disney movies. However, there are movies that came before it that were much more progressive. *Mulan*, for example, defies many of the stereotypes that the old movies perpetuate, specifically gender stereotypes. In the discussion of *Frozen* as a breakthrough film, many generalizations about the old films have been presented. In this way, the films that preceded it are lumped together. Discussions of *Frozen* as feminist have included the assertion that *Frozen* is progressive because gender is not portrayed in a stereotypical manner. However, *Mulan*'s portrayal of gender also breaks from tradition. Additionally, many argue that *Frozen* is progressive because it pokes fun at the idea of marrying someone you just met and there is no wedding in the film. Although this holds true, *Mulan* does not marry someone she just met (or anyone at all, in fact). In these discussions of *Frozen* by popular reviewers and of the previous Disney movies by scholars, *Mulan* is overlooked as the progressive film that it is. Although *Frozen* is very progressive in some ways, it is not actually a feminist breakthrough for Disney since *Mulan*, which came many years before it, was actually more progressive in many ways.

Many scholars believe that Disney movies perpetuate gender stereotypes (Ayob, Ayres, England, Held, Liebermann). In Ayres' book, *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, Ayres explores the Disney franchise, attempting to uncover stereotypes and patterns in the movies. Ayres asserts that "disney perpetuates a nineteenth century notion of

domestic ideology: Women are to be submissive, self-denying, modest, childlike, innocent, industrious, maternal, and angelic” (39). In contrast, she argues that the men are aggressive and decisive, frequently taking the lead. Ayres is not the only scholar to hold this belief. Ayob delves into the positive and negative aspects of Disney films in her article “The Mixed Blessings of Disney’s Classic Fairy Tales.” She also believes that a reinforcement of stereotypical views of women remains one of the negative effects of the films: “Ever since Mickey mouse came onto the scene in the 1930s... Disney films continue to reinforce hegemony of gender ideology in America” (48). In other words, Ayob argues that Disney has always presented gender in a stereotypical way and continues to today. In the article “Gender role portrayal and the Disney Princess”, the authors explored the gender differences between female and male characters in the Disney films, and found that there are “strongly gendered messages present in the resolutions of the movies [that] help to reinforce the desirability of traditional gender conformity” (England et al. 565). These writers all argue that these anti-progressive messages serve to reinforce the patriarchal system wherein men have power and women are submissive, obedient, and exist to be looked at.

Another common generalization about the Disney movies before *Frozen* is that the female characters always look a certain way. Specifically, they are all preposterously slim and attractive: “Princesses are always slim and curvy, with soft, beautiful features” (Ayob 56). This sexualized portrayal of women provides an unattainable model for young girls to emulate. In *Dismantling a Myth: A Critical Analysis of Disney’s Mulan in Relationship to Structures Common to Animated Films*, the author explains the problem with films having this type of role model for girls: “Images seem to be polar opposites where the female is either the beautiful,

popular and mentally impaired cheerleader, or she is the brainy, not-so-cute editor of the school paper. Neither of these images is particularly empowering for young women because they place extreme limitations on what role women can embody” (Held 19). Held is referring to film in general, but the limitations found in Disney movies are even more stifling because the princesses are only the former (Ayres, Ayob). The unrealistic depiction of female characters in the Disney movies stems from the sexist conception that women’s worth derives from their physical appearance. With these princesses as a model for young girls, the implication is that “they must grow up to be like Snow White, who uses her beauty to attract a man so that she can serve him and serve her children” (Ayres 43).

These generalizations do have some merit. Recognizing that a lot of the older Disney movies are littered with stereotypes representative of old, antifeminist ideals allows critical reflection and understanding of existing power dynamics. In many cases, the heroine embodies the submissive, obedient, physically attractive cast. She is also helpless and in need of saving by a man, as Liebermann explains in “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale,” in which she examines fairy tales in general, as well as Disney in particular. When examining Disney, she explains that the princesses always wait for princes to save them and are incapable of saving themselves (Liebermann 129). These assertions are indisputably true for some of the Disney films such as *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. However, by grouping *Mulan* with films like these, they have been condemned as antifeminist and backward, when in reality, that could not be farther than the truth. Although some films fit the mold, over-generalizations have lead progressive films like *Mulan* to be (denounced as stereotypical and overlooked as feminist as a result).

Mulan is perhaps the most progressive movie in the Disney series. Although the main character, Mulan, is not technically a princess, Disney adopted her into the franchise. The movie, created in 1998, focuses on the story of Fa Mulan, a brave young woman who saves China from the Hun army. The movie opens with the Hun's invasion, and the emperor drafts one man from every family to protect China. Defying the patriarchal system, Mulan speaks out when her crippled father is summoned to join the fight because she worries for his safety. In order to protect him, she assumes the appearance of a man and joins the army, where she must prove herself as a soldier. Mulan states early on what she hopes to accomplish she wants to bring her family honor, find her place, and prove herself. She ends up doing so by saving the entirety of China by impersonating a soldier, defeating the Hun army, and saving the emperor himself.

Mulan's portrayal of gender is anything but stereotypical, as many scholars have argued (Ayob, Ayres, Held, Liebermann). In fact, there are many instances where *Mulan* blurs gender lines and the fundamental differences between the genders is obscured and questioned. For example, often when discussions of men or manliness occur in the movie, the film juxtaposes ideals of traditional masculinity with the female protagonist Mulan. For example, during the scene where the emperor instructs his subordinates to draft and train more men, he explains that "a single grain of rice can tip the scale. One man can be the difference between victory and defeat." Immediately afterwards, the film cuts to Mulan, who is holding a single grain of rice, suggesting that she embodies that one "man," which equates "man" to woman. The same type of unification of the two traditionally distinct genders appears again during the training sequence for the soldiers. As Mulan and the others train, the song "I'll Make A Man Out of You" plays, touting traditional ideals of masculinity. The song's chorus:

Be a Man

We must be swift as a coursing river

Be a man

With all the force of a great tycoon

Be a man

With all of the strength of a raging fire” (20-25)

clearly associates masculinity with strength and physical prowess. However, Mulan is the first one to “be a man”. The troops are performing poorly and she herself is sent home, but refuses to heed the orders. Instead, she proves that she is a man by demonstrating physical capability and retrieving an arrow that none of the men had been able to reach. Following, all of the troops are shown improving and becoming good soldiers, with Mulan as their leader. Again, the difference between man and woman is obscured as Mulan, the woman, becomes the example of the ideal man.

Additionally, at both the beginning and the end of the movie, the metaphor of a late blooming flower, an object traditionally used to symbolize femininity, is applied to Mulan. First, Mulan’s father tries to comfort her as they sit under a flowering tree: “My, what beautiful blossoms we have this year. But look, this one's late,” he says, indicating the only closed blossom on the tree. “But I'll bet that when it blooms, it will be the most beautiful of all,” he finishes, tucking the flower behind Mulan’s ear. Later, after Mulan has saved the emperor, he tells Shang that “the flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all,” referring to Mulan. Finally, as Mulan’s father awaits her return while sitting under the tree from earlier, the last flower falls onto his lap (now in bloom). Immediately after it falls, Mulan enters. Comparing Mulan to a flower while also celebrating her as the ideal man further blurs the line between femininity and masculinity.

Mulan also does not fit the stereotypical cast of the Disney princess as submissive, obedient, and unintelligent, as many scholars have argued all Disney princesses do (Ayres, Liebermann, Held,). Mulan speaks out multiple times in the movie. For example, when her family's name is called and her father walks forward to accept his call to war, Mulan steps in-between him and the royal official, saying that her father cannot go and has already fought for China. Then later, at the dinner table, the family eats in silence, no one acknowledging that her father will soon go to war until Mulan slams down her cup of tea, exclaiming "you shouldn't have to go! There are plenty of young men to fight for China!" Even as her father interjects, trying to subdue her, Mulan persists. Also, in the battle against the Hun army, Mulan disobeys direct orders from her general, Captain Shang. Mulan knows that she must shoot the last cannon at the mountain rather than the Hun's leader, Shan Yu, and she takes it and runs even as Shang yells in the background for her to come back. The film clearly shows Mulan in the forefront of the scene, running away from Shang's authority as a blurry figure in the background.

This scene also shows Mulan's intelligence. When the rest of the soldiers see how greatly outnumbered they are against the Hun army, they resign themselves to dying in combat. Shang dictates that the last cannon should be aimed at Shan Yu. Mulan however looks at the reflection of the mountain in her sword and is struck with an idea. She brilliantly realizes that by shooting the cannon at the mountain, she can create an avalanche that will wipe out the entire army instead of just Shan Yu. This intelligence is shown early on in the movie as well. While Mulan prepares to meet with the Matchmaker, she walks by two old men playing checkers. After looking at the board for only a second or two, she makes a move for one of the men that wins the game. Additionally, at the end of the movie when Shan Yu has invaded the palace, Mulan is the one who comes up with the idea to dress as women in order to enter the palace. In her final battle

against Shan Yu, she is weaponless, but smart and resourceful as she utilizes her fan to twist Shan Yu's sword out of his hand and bind him to the roof, which she has already rigged to explode.

The over generalizations about past Disney movies, which have been perpetuated by many scholars, have led to the false belief that *Mulan* is not progressive. Consequently, *Frozen* created a huge buzz as the first feminist Disney movie. *Frozen* (2013) is the story of Anna and Elsa, two sister princesses. Elsa has the seemingly unlimited power to freeze things, and is forced to conceal herself and her power by her parents after she harms Anna as a child. They become estranged and distant, despite Anna's efforts. After their parents pass away, Elsa is crowned queen and at her coronation her powers are revealed to everyone. She flees to the mountains and accidentally freezes the entirety of her kingdom. Anna sets out in hopes of reconciling with her sister as well as reversing the magic.

Many reviews and blogs praise *Frozen* for being the first to defy traditional gender stereotypes (Halbur, Fairchild, Rosten). For example, Petra Halbur, a frequent reviewer of film and other media for the last two years, explains that "after years of princess movies wallowing in mediocrity... it was such a glorious relief to watch a movie that's progressive" (1). Halbur efficiently casts every movie before *Frozen* as anti-progressive just as she heaps praise upon *Frozen* for being the first of its kind. She exhibits the same tendency to overgeneralize the old films as the scholars Ayres, Ayob, Libermann, England, and Held. However, one key issue that all of these reviewers miss is the way the female characters look in the movies. The character of Mulan is a cut above both the characters of Elsa and Anna because they are both ridiculously thin and attractive, just as scholars argue that anti-progressive princesses are (Ayob, Ayres, Held). Mulan, on the other hand, has a much more realistic shape:



Figure 1 - Elsa (left) and Anna (right)



Figure 2 - Mulan

Whereas Anna and Elsa are both skinny and traditionally attractive (see Figure 1), Mulan defies this trope. Mulan has thick, muscular legs and arms as the result of rigorous training (see Figure 2). Her waist is a reasonable size and she is not traditionally beautiful. When *Mulan* came out in 1998, it gave young girls an aesthetically new model to aspire to. *Frozen* just exhibits more of the old, as the female characters are stick thin and exceedingly attractive.

Halbur also argues that the complexity of Anna and Elsa's character is what makes the film more progressive than the past films: "Elsa and Anna have distinctive personalities that take more than a single adjective to summarize" (1). Although true, this assertion dismisses all of the past princesses as one dimensional, which intelligent, brave, cunning, strong Mulan is not. Similarly, Writer Megan Fairchild, who reviews for *The Speaking Eagle*, argues that "Anna and Elsa are both a new brand of princess" due to their complex character roles (1). Although *Frozen* has extremely progressive elements, these reviewers assertion that it as the first of its kind falls short in the face of *Mulan*. Anna and Elsa are undoubtedly complex characters. Anna is brave and confident, but somewhat helpless and naive. When she rushes out to save her sister she shows great bravery and confidence in her ability, but she does not consider the practicality of entering a

blizzard without a coat or the fact that she has no idea how to survive or find her way. As a result, she needs the help of Kristoff to find Elsa. She is definitely flawed and not one-dimensional. Elsa's complexity stems from her struggle to accept herself and her fear of her powers. The movie displays Elsa's eventual acceptance and understanding of her powers, which shows character growth. Neither of these characters are one dimensional, but argued that they are the first to have multiple dimensions is false. Mulan has many different characteristics and flaws as well, including a lack of self confidence she must overcome in order to become a good soldier.

Reviewers also argue that *Frozen* is progressive because there is no wedding at the end of the movie or, similarly, that it is the first Disney tale to not revolve around romantic love (Fairchild, Hensatri, Rosten, Verzuh). Fairchild, claims that since "neither girls' main goal in the film is to marry into safety," it is progressive. Here, Fairchild assumes that all of the past films do end in marriage, consequently making *Frozen* a breakthrough for Disney. Similarly, Hensatri, a blog writer who frequently reviews movies, argues that the films mock the trope of "marrying someone you just met," which supposedly takes place in all of the past films. Shelby Rosten, a writer for *Feminspire*, a website that prides itself in feminist reviews and articles, argues that *Frozen* is "the first Princess movie to not revolve entirely around a love interest or romantic love" (1). Jennifer Verzuh, writer for the "Empire State Tribune," argues that *Frozen* is progressive simply because it does not feature a wedding. Although all of this is true of *Frozen*, it is also true of *Mulan*, which came out 15 years prior to *Frozen*. In *Frozen*, the central focus is on Anna and Elsa's relationship as sisters and it does not end in a wedding. However, in *Mulan*, the central focus is on Mulan bringing honor to her family and finding her place in the world. Shang becomes a love interest at the conclusion of the film, but he is asked to stay for dinner, and was

not “resolved in Mulan’s inevitable marriage to the general,” (Fairchild 1). These writers aim to praise *Frozen* as a breakthrough, but they use arguments that hold true for *Mulan* as well.

In light of *Mulan*’s extremely progressive portrayals of gender, it is surprising that *Frozen* has been praised as a feminist breakthrough. Although “feminism” is hard to define, the scholar Bell Hooks attempts to in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. She concludes that there exists no one definition of feminism, but a commonality exists between them all. At its roots, feminism stems from “the struggles to end oppression- to change existing power relations between men and women” (Hooks 29). *Mulan* strives to do just that as the main character rebels against the patriarchal system and proves that preassigned gender roles are false. Although *Frozen* does exhibit women in power and defies some gender norms, it does not challenge traditional power dynamics in the way that *Mulan* does. *Mulan* obscures the differences between male and female and presents a female main character who is not ridiculously skinny, attractive, and helpless. It features a female lead who oozes strength, intelligence, and determination. *Frozen* has progressive elements as well. Anna and Elsa defy gender stereotypes found in some of the previous movies, such as women as submissive and searching solely for love. However, *Mulan* does not exhibit these traits, either. Therefore, *Frozen* cannot be praised as the first of its kind since *Mulan* came out 15 years before it. *Frozen* ultimately fails as a feminist breakthrough film in the face of *Mulan*.

Works Cited

- Anna and Elsa. Digital Image. Google Images. November 26 2013. Web. 21 April 2014.
- Ayob, Asma. "The Mixed Blessings of Disney's Classic Fairy Tales." *Mousaion* 28 (2010): n. pag. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.
- Ayres, Brenda. *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*. New York: P. Lang, 2003. Print.
- England, Dawn Elizabeth, Lara Descartes, and Melissa A. Collier-Meek. "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses." *Sex Roles* 64.7-8 (2011): 555-67. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.
- Fairchild, Megan. "The Speaking Eagle." : "*Frozen*" *Redefines Princess Stereotype*. N.p., 28 Feb. 2014. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.
- Frozen*. Dir. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee. Perf. Kristen Bell and Idina Menzel. Disney, 2013.
- Held, Rebecca. "Dismantling a Myth: A Critical Analysis of Disney's Mulan in a Relationship to Structures Common to Animated Disney Films." *Masters Abstracts International* 40 (2001): *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.
- Hensatri. "Frozen: A Feminist Tilt in the Disney Tale." *A Point of Contention*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2014. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.
- Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End, 1984. Print.
- Liebermann, Marcia K. "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale." *Don't Bet on the Princes: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. Ed. Zipes, Jack. New York: Methuen Inc, 1986.
- Mulan*. Dir. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. Perf. Ming-Na Wen and Eddie Murphy. Disney, 1998.
- Mulan. Digital Image. Google Images. June 30 2012. Web. 21 April 2014.
- Osmond, Donny. "'I'll Make A Man Out Of You' Lyrics." *AZ Lyrics*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.
- Rosten, Shelby. "Disney's 'Frozen': The Feminist Fairy Tale We've Been Waiting For (With No Prince Charming)." *Feminspire*. N.p., 2 Dec. 2013. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.
- Verzuh, Jennifer. "8 Reasons Why Frozen's Anna and Elsa Are the Most Feminist Princesses from a Disney Movie Yet." *8 Reasons Why Frozen's Anna and Elsa Are the Most Feminist Princesses from a Disney Movie Yet*. N.p., 28 Feb. 2014. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

HIGHER EDUCATION'S DICHOTOMY

Jonah Graves

The United States is currently stricken with inequity with regard to different socioeconomic groups' educational opportunities. This is the unfortunate residue of harsh racism and discrimination existing since before the foundation of the country. From the time of the civil rights movement, there have been drives to bring minorities into academia and to allow for equal access to opportunity with regard to education. Some of these attempts include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Affirmative Action, and increased federal aid such as student loans and grants. While these may have positively affected the public's stance on educational equality, these efforts have not gone far enough. This is due to the lack of integration and inappropriate attempts of integration of different cultures and groups into academia, which have resulted in an implicit definition of what is ideal and improper in its students. The problem is that the ideal student, as determined by academia, closely models and is influenced by the white, privileged population. This has developed a dichotomy within academia of white, privileged students and everyone else, thereby instilling a sense of otherness within minority students and giving advantage to white, privileged students. Because of this phenomenon, opportunities in higher education will not be equal until all lifestyles and cultures are recognized, respected, and represented. Before discussing discrepancies within higher education, disparities outside of academia need to be considered in order for a more holistic view of the society that perpetuates these inequalities. It is important to note that in this paper, black and latino populations will be compared with white populations; however, similar trends exist for most minorities in comparison with the white, privileged majority as well as injustice with regard to male privilege in education.

Academia is not the only societal flaw with regard to racial and social inequity. In fact, it can be argued that these issues existing within academia are the result of injustice toward minorities leading up to the time of entering higher education. Evidence for this exists in children's situations within minority populations. According to the *Washington Post*, forty-five percent of black children live in concentrated poverty, and thirty-five percent of hispanic children live in concentrated poverty (Plumer). This shows a clear disparity in comparison with the twelve percent of white children living in concentrated poverty (Plumer). In parallel, the average black family's annual income is \$32,068; the average hispanic family's annual income is \$37,759; and the average white family's annual income is \$54,620 (Plumer). To make things worse, the black unemployment rate is twice as high as the white unemployment rate (Plumer). Despite the historical circumstances that have led to these statistics, these numbers clearly show significant financial inequity within the United States. This economic injustice correlates with education beginning in primary and secondary school with underfunded schools, working parents, and limited extracurricular activities. In the context of economic disparity in higher education, one major alienating factor of the underprivileged is its cost.

The escalating cost of tuition is a major factor influencing the dichotomy of students in higher education. In 2012, the average tuition cost of a four year institution was \$23,066 per year. This is an increase of more than \$14,000 since 1980 ("Tuition Costs of Colleges and Universities"). In 2012, student loan debt accumulated to be over \$1 trillion (Sobel 85). The escalating price of tuition is above the rate of inflation which would lead one to believe that either the value of education has increased or schools have lost funding. In the United States, however, public institutions are devoted \$76 billion in direct state support, and other costs, such as full-time faculty, have been decreased over time (Sobel 86). It is also unlikely that the value of

having or receiving an education has increased in line with its cost, which is more than 150%. When considering all of this information, it is clear that higher education is not lending itself to benefit the marginalized and underprivileged people in society. Simply put, the average year of tuition costs well more than half of the average black and latino family's entire income. This is only tuition and does not include other expenses such as fees, books, room and board, and other living expenses adding well into the thousands of dollars per year. For a person born into the average black or latino family, the ability to go to college may very well depend on taking out student loans. With a poor job market in post great recession economy, taking on crippling debt is not always an appealing option. It is true that there are programs which provide financial assistance to people in need including scholarships, work-study programs, and government grants. There are even programs which selectively serve minorities in need. However, the extreme cost of higher education sends a charged message that it is not attainable for everyone. It is almost as if academia is saying that you need to be financially well-off in order to be included, thus adding to the exclusivity of higher education and the support of white, privileged students. For those students who are able to circumvent the financial blockade, non-white presence is not always the most embracing.

Universities across the United States have implemented diversity offices with the goal to diversify the campus population. Their initial goal, however, is to serve under-represented students. These offices are staffed with faculty that share similar backgrounds with the idea that under-privileged students will relate better to them (Tharp 14). The problem with this scenario is just that; diversity offices are staffed almost exclusively by underprivileged faculty and specifically serve under privileged groups (Tharp 14). While it is good that resources and offices are available for these students, this furthers the dichotomy of academia's white, privileged

students and the so-called diverse students. The label of diverse, however, is a glamorous tag for the *others*, or ones who do not fit. The label carries the stigma of not being normal. Scott Tharp addresses this issue directly in his article in support of hiring privileged, or white, faculty in diversity offices when he claims that “whiteness does not translate into a cultural void. Having a professional who shares the cultural background of privileged students challenges traditional concepts of culture” (14). Diversity offices being staffed by underprivileged faculty alone supports the idea that non-white or underprivileged students are diverse or different and white students are not. This idea then adds to the otherness stigma that non-white students receive upon entering academia because they are associated with culture and diversity while white students are not. If a campus, or office, were truly diverse then they would be staffed by all races, privileges, and cultures. Outside of administration offices, public education curriculum can often push the same idea.

An old saying in history classes claims that history is written by the winners. The same thing can be said for curriculum being depicted by the oppressors. In the case of higher education, as well as primary and secondary education, curriculum is often produced from the white or privileged perspective. This can seriously have an effect in history education and textbook selection. In the first chapter of his book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, James Loewen discusses how the white perspective on history has tainted education. One specific example he gives is of the heroizing of Woodrow Wilson based on his development of the League of Nations and his efforts in the First World War. This, however, negates Wilson being a rancorous white-supremacist and his attempts to segregate the federal government. In his response to many textbooks avoiding this topic, Loewen states, “Omitting or absolving Wilson’s racism goes beyond concealing a character blemish. It is overtly racist. No black person could ever consider

Woodrow Wilson a hero. Textbooks that present him as a hero are written from a white perspective” (20). Black, latino, or other underrepresented students could have issues with this and other aspects of their education. With textbooks and curriculums not recognizing different backgrounds and struggles, and possibly denying them in the case of Woodrow Wilson, there is a clear bias in material and information about many topics. This overt bias toward historic heroes may be extreme and some educators may have an open perspective; however, situations like these show that academia still has room to improve. By negating aspects of history and other areas of academia that are not pretty, a further dichotomy is created by teaching the standardized, accepted curriculum without always incorporating the other point of view. Along with choice of material, pedagogical styles can cause the same effect.

Many educational traditions and systems are based out of historical practices that are now considered normal. Some examples include large lecture halls with hundreds of students and one professor, slide shows, and a few tests that determine one’s grade. Not long in the past, however, was a time when students were predominantly white and male. This may make these pedagogical styles biased and in coherence with the white, privileged population. This is important to consider because what we view as the proper, standard pedagogy may be further marginalizing non-white students.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire talks about this style of education and labels it as a banking concept where students are the bankers who receive the education deposit, and the teachers are the customers who deposit the education within the students (72). In this scenario, Freire claims that this negatively affects their education because “the contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified” (71). This then forces the teacher to talk “about reality as if it were

motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable” (Freire 71). Freire makes the argument that this method of education can be used by oppressors because they aim to alter the thought process of the oppressed (74). This can be seen in higher education with all students, privileged and under-privileged, being expected to meet one standard prescribed by the curriculum. In this setting, students are unable to decide for themselves how the topic affects them and are not always presented with different view points. This furthers what academia deems as being proper and improper being biased towards the white and privileged students, with the subject material being decided by white, privileged administrators. When stepping outside of the classroom toward other learning opportunities, underrepresented students are at a disadvantage as well.

Educational experiences outside of the classroom can involve experiential education, foreign exchange programs, as well as other hands on, in-the-field experiences. With regard to experiential education programs, designed to teach team building, leadership, and tactical skills through in-the-field experiences, the dichotomy is evident and advantage is given toward white, privileged students. One of the causes for this is the cost of experiential education. In his personal reflection on his experience as an experiential educator, Jeff Rose writes that on one trip “eight of the ten participants on [the] course were funded by scholarship from a variety of non-White racial backgrounds. That is, the generosity of donors and various nonprofits paid for them to participate” (137). Rose goes onto explain that the white students on the trip, and on other trips, were not in need of scholarships in order to attend the program. The sheer cost of these opportunities proves to be a barrier to non-white students, with the evidence being that they were only on the trip by a scholarship. Another aspect of these experiences is that the educational styles do not necessarily relate to non-white students. Rose writes that experiential education’s curriculum includes aspects like discussion circles, challenge by choice, and environmental

behavior guidelines that come from white, privileged instructors (144). If experiential educational programs do not relate with under-privileged students, possibly along with other programs, it shows that non-white students are prevented from seeking out extra education at the fault of the curriculum and cost. This is further evidence of higher education lending itself toward white, privileged students and excluding the others.

Organizations within higher education can be associated with the existence of the dichotomy of white, privileged students and the others. Fraternities and sororities have traditionally received a bad reputation for selective discrimination. In 2001, the president of the University of Alabama confronted Greek organizations over their racial segregation. At that time, thirty seven fraternities and sororities were exclusively white along with eight organizations being exclusively black (Reeves). At the time, there was no official rule preventing black people from being accepted into white fraternities and sororities; however, it had yet to be done showing a clear, implicit racism that existed at the University of Alabama (Reeves).

In his book *Privilege*, Ross Douthat describes a similar experience at Harvard with elite clubs and their careful selectivity. While his experience was not with racism, it was with the elite status of the members of Harvard's social clubs, that were male-only in replacement of fraternities that had been banned (Douthat 54). Douthat describes these clubs as being hierarchal and traditional with members mainly from multi-generational Harvard families. He describes these clubs as accepting only specific people that fit within standards of these traditions and statuses. Along with that Douthat claims that they "adapted to the needs and realities of the twenty-first century, which embraces entitlement but not noblesse oblige, and champions class over, well, *class*. The clubs are Harvard in miniature, homes to the privileged among the privileged, the rulers of the ruling class" (63). With these kinds of social patterns, people who do

not fit into these stereotypes, like those from underprivileged populations, clearly do not fit in with these clubs. These examples of segregated fraternities, sororities, and bourgeois student organizations show that the college experience outside of the classroom is just as much of a segregating dichotomy as it is inside the classroom, making higher education all the more less appealing toward underprivileged people. This disadvantage and polarization of education does not begin with higher education but much earlier.

Beginning in primary and secondary education, black and latino students, along with other minority groups, are put at a disadvantage in several fashions. The first disadvantage comes from underfunded, urban schools. Typical black and latino neighborhoods are commonly paired with low-budget and low-achieving schools. This then provides low level faculty and resources (Dodson 21). Furthermore, these students are often associated with being at a disadvantage and with being low-achieving; therefore, there is no crisis or disappointment within our society if black and latino students, in large numbers, do not perform well (Dodson 21). The issue here is that there is a connection with poor school performance and their students' race when there should not be. Constant association with poorly performing public schools associates black and latino students with poor performance rather than poor, urban schools. This becomes further societal oppression against underprivileged students, by giving them the expectation of failure. Being expected by society to fail, having poor early education, and being financially poor all work against underprivileged students upon pursuing higher education and further makes them the *others* upon entering it.

How to alleviate the plethora of inequities that underprivileged groups face within higher education is a daunting task and can be approached from several angles. The first and foremost change that needs to occur is reform within primary and secondary education in areas of

concentrated poverty. Because high percentages of black and latino children live in concentrated poverty, this would be a direct action in their favor. A second change that needs to be made is with regard to access to higher education. As previously discussed, one of the major blockades to higher education is the mere cost of tuition. To work with this, inexpensive or free community college education could be offered along with reduced cost in public education. A gradation in cost depending on the family's financial status, like when qualifying for student loans, could also be beneficial. When considering curriculum and diversity within universities, we have to accept that culture and diversity comes from all races and ethnicities, not just minorities. Such a push would nullify the notion that there are the white, privileged students and the other, underprivileged students. A celebration and education of all cultures along with social education needs to be pushed in order to increase awareness of these issues within our society.

A manifest dichotomy exists within higher education, consisting of the white, privileged class and the other, under-privileged students. This distinction comes from access to education, societal injustices within education, and a dichotomized academic approach. This sense of otherness descended upon non-white students prolongs racism and discrimination within our society and is a major factor in socio-economic discrepancies among different populations. A shift in academia's attitude toward itself and its recognition and acceptance toward its students will have a positive impact on both academia and society as a whole.

Works Cited

- Dodson, Angela P. "Coming to the Defense of Black Students." *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* 29.6 (2012): 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Apr. 2014 .
- Douthat, Ross Gregory. *Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class*. New York: Hyperion, 2005. Print.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000. Print.
- Loewen, James W. *Lies my teacher told me: everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York: New Press, 1995. Print.
- Plumer, Brad. "These ten charts show the black-white economic gap hasn't budged in 50 years." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 28 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Apr. 2013.
- Reeves, Jay. "University of Alabama seeks to end segregation in fraternities, sororities." *Associated Press*. The Associated Press, 31 Aug. 2001. Web. 19 Apr. 2013
- Rose, Jeff, and Karen Paisley. "White Privilege In Experiential Education: A Critical Reflection." *Leisure Sciences* 34.2 (2012): 136-154. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 3 Apr. 2014.
- Sobel, A.E.K. "The Escalating Cost of College." *Computer* 46.12 (2013): 85-87. *IEEE*. 13 Apr. 2013.
- Tharp, D. S. "The Role of Privilege in Diversity Education." *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* 26.21 (2009): 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 5 Apr. 2014.
- "Tuition Costs of Colleges and Universities." *National Center for Education Statistics*. Institute for Education Sciences. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

COMPUTERS IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

Bridget Mohn

Think back to your elementary school days, the days when learning still excited you and recess was every day. For those of you who had computer labs in school, do you remember how you felt when you found out that today your class was going to the computer lab? There was probably a rush of excitement, for most of us, because at that age we rarely got to work with computers and we happen to think they were the coolest things ever. Back in those days computers were just starting to become a big deal but today they play a huge role in our lives. They are used in almost every aspect of life and are increasingly used in educational settings. Most schools have at least one computer lab available for use by the entire school, but very few have computers within the classroom themselves. According to many articles and studies on the matter, while the number of computers in classrooms is still relatively low, those figures are in fact growing...as is the controversy that surrounds the topic of computers within elementary classrooms. Some believe that elementary school students are too young to be interacting with computers and would not benefit from having access to them. However, others believe that the computers would have a positive impact on not only the children but the teachers as well. They think that the computers would benefit the students educationally, emotionally, and socially and it would help the teachers to become better acquainted with the technology, collaborate more with other teachers, and have better daily agendas. The many studies that have been conducted on this topic have shown that allowing elementary classrooms access to computers for educational reasons is beneficial to the entire classroom, both the students and the teacher.

Students have better peer relationships, motivation, attitudes, various skills and education while the teachers gain better peer relationships, attitude and are able to create more effective agendas for each class.

The placement of computers in classrooms is not entirely new. According to Yvonne Belanger, in her article “Laptop Computers in the K-12 Classroom” which discusses the emergence of laptops in high school, middle school, and elementary school, computers have been in classrooms since as far back as 1988 (Belanger 31). However, those computers that have been in classrooms since 1988 have been in higher education classrooms such as colleges and other postsecondary institutions. She does go on to say that in the 1990’s there were a number of private schools that started implementing laptops within the classroom (Belanger 31). Although many higher education and private schools have already experienced computers in the classroom, the situation is not the same for elementary classrooms. Though most elementary schools do not have classroom computers, most do have “shared computer laboratories”, according to Henry J. Becker in his article “Access to Classroom Computers” (Becker 25). However, a shared school computer lab does not offer the same opportunities that individual classroom computers do (Becker 25). Belanger mentions a program that was created by the Microsoft Corporation and Toshiba with the objective of encouraging the use of laptops in K-12 education (Belanger 31). Microsoft and Toshiba began promoting the program in 1996 and it has been successful in increasing the presence of computers in classroom of these grades since its inception (Belanger 31). However, the number of PC’s in elementary classrooms is still relatively low today. This could be because some people do not believe that having computers in elementary classrooms would truly be beneficial for the students.

Opponents of computers in the classroom say computers deployed have impacted the elementary students using them and that the benefits are not great enough to justify putting computers in classrooms at that young age. Constance Holden, the author of the article “Dubious Benefits for Early Computer Use”, claims that when it comes to math, computers in elementary classrooms are a waste of money and ultimately counterproductive (407). Holden says that a survey done by the Educational Testing Service found fourth graders who had access to computers in their classroom had no change to their grades in sharp contrast to eighth graders whose grades were positively affected by interaction with computers in the classroom. The survey showed that the eighth graders were using the computers in a more sophisticated way than elementary school students, one that related the math to real life situations (Holden 407). It is not difficult to imagine districts failing to use computers in real life scenarios would suffer similar trouble, through no fault of technology. In the article “Elementary In-Service Teacher’s Use of Computers in the Elementary Classroom” the authors, Janell D. Wilson, Charles C. Notar and Barbara Yunker explain the results of a study done to see how teachers themselves are using computers and how they are implementing them in the classroom. They found that out of 1.5 hours a week that students were using computers the “teachers reported that students used the computer only after other assignments and work had been completed and usually as a reward for their classroom behavior” (Wilson, Notar, and Yunker 261). This shows that some teachers barely allow their students to use the computers and when they do it is mainly for reward, which indicates they are likely playing games (Wilson, Notar, and Yunker mention this possibility in the study). This would be a perfect example to show that sometimes computers are not being implemented in a way that most benefits the students. The way computers are used makes all the difference, which is demonstrated in a number of these studies. Studies also report numerous

benefits to computers in elementary classrooms when those computers are used properly. The benefits ranged from better peer relationships to better day to day teaching agendas.

Many studies and articles agree that computers in the classroom have bettered the students' ability to work with each other effectively. In many computer classrooms there are only enough for about half of the students to use them at one time which means that they have to share the computers. The article "Effects of Technology on Classrooms and Students" discusses the various benefits seen from putting computers in elementary classrooms, and they find that there was "an increased inclination on the part of students to work cooperatively and to provide peer tutoring" when students shared computers (Technology and Education Reform). The website draws its conclusions from information obtained directly from teachers. This behavior occurs in both shared and individual computer scenarios. It is mentioned later on the website that "even when each student has a computer, teachers note an increased frequency of students helping each other" (Technology and Education Reform). Computers appear to have a relationship with peer cooperation amongst students in most scenarios. They combine knowledge to accomplish the assignment or more proficient students "tutor" the students who are having trouble.

There are other articles and studies that echo the information on the Technology and Education Reform website, supporting the theory that when elementary students have access to computers in their classroom they are more inclined to work with the fellow students. Carolyn Keeler, in her article "Networked Instructional Computers in the Elementary Classroom and their Effect on the Learning Environment: a Qualitative Evaluation", talks about the beliefs of many supporters of this point of view and explains a study she conducted "of a school-wide computer implementation project" (Keeler 329). She explicitly mentions her finding that computers have

encouraged students in those environments to work with each other. In her conclusion she says that “computers changed student and teacher attitudes about learning and working together” (Keeler 329). Although this statement does not specifically say that computers changed students’ attitudes towards working together for the better she mentions after that “students chose to use their lunch and recess time for additional computer time” which would imply that the students had a positive attitude change about working with each other since they gave up recess and lunch time, which are really the only times that they have during the day for leisure activities, to continue working with one another (Keeler 329). Both Keeler and the website Technology and Education Reform emphasize that the increase in student willingness to collaborate with others, and help them on their work if needed, was one of the many, if not most obvious, benefits of putting computers in elementary classrooms.

Another benefit of having computers in elementary classrooms would be the increased motivation in the student population. Many of the articles and studies say that computers in the classroom have not only made students want to be a part of learning but also made them more adventurous pursuing information on their own time. The students want to learn more, they actually want to do the work that is assigned to them and even extra work on their own time. The website Technology and Education Reform states in regard to the effect that computers have had on students motivation, that “the most common—and in fact, nearly universal—teacher-reported effect on students was an increase in motivation” (Technology and Education Reform). They are saying that a majority of teacher responses to how computers affected their students were related to an increase in their motivation to do the work. Keeler also reports that teachers involved in her study said that students became more involved with learning, which backs up the previous observation pulled from the earlier paragraph saying that they skip recess time to continue

working (Keeler 329). It is clearly obvious that the students are truly invested in learning at least in part because of the computers they use on a daily basis, especially if they are willing to skip recess to work on them.

Many other articles cite increased motivation as a benefit of having computers in elementary classrooms. The article “Technology as a Tool in the Primary Classroom” by Suzanne Alejandre and Varnelle Moore focuses on the benefit that computers in the classroom have on students’ geometry skills. Even though the article is specifically looking at one subject it talks about increased motivation when it states that “[t]he students took charge of their learning...” (Alejandre and Varnelle 16). The computers in this particular classroom helped the students to get an idea of what the shapes should look like so when they were asked to identify or build the same shapes without the computer they were able to use what they had learned from the computer and apply it to the challenge in front of them (Alejandre and Varnelle 16). The article “Laptop Learning: A Comparison of Teaching and Learning in Upper Elementary Classrooms Equipped with Shared Carts of Laptops and Permanent 1:1 Laptops” by Michael Russell, Damian Bebell, and Jennifer Higgins also names increased motivation as a benefit of having computers in the classroom. Their article is a study of teaching and learning activities between upper elementary classrooms that have permanent laptops available in their classroom and those that use a cart of laptops. One of their findings is that motivation and engagement was higher in the 1:1 classrooms (Russell, Bebell, and Higgins 321). They say that when one of the teachers was asked about increased effects on her students the teacher said “students appear more motivated and interested in assignments on the computer” (Russell, Bebell, and Higgins 322). Therefore, according to this study the students with permanent computers in the classroom showed to have higher increased motivation. All of these articles and studies undoubtedly agree

that computers have increased students interest and engagement in the learning process. The elementary school students want to spend their free time doing activities on the computer even though the purpose behind those activities are the help them learn.

A better overall emotional state is yet another benefit of placing computers in elementary classrooms. Some of the articles and studies discuss how the computers affecting the children personally, not only their education but also their feelings and attitude. According to Keeler, when talking about the impacts that computers have had on students, she claims that after a certain period of time of working with the computers “the climate [was] more positive” (Keeler 329). She is saying that the student’s attitude toward educational pursuits had become more positive, they actually wanted to learn, and therefore the atmosphere of the entire classroom had become more positive. Technology and Education Reform goes on to claim that the students even had increased faith in themselves when it states that there “was enhancement of student self-esteem”, claiming that being able to master the technological assignments and knowing how to work with the technology boosted the student’s self-confidence across the board (Technology and Education Reform). One of the teachers that the Technology and Education Reform uses as a source also says, with regard to the increased self-confidence, that “[s]tudents gain a sense of empowerment from learning to control the computer and to use it in ways they associate with the real world” (Technology and Education Reform). Again, this shows that allowing those elementary students to interact with computers on a daily basis increased their faith in themselves. The fact that computers have been actively placed in classrooms at such an early age has helped the students to become more confident and have a positive outlook on learning will ultimately have a positive effect on their future as well both in terms of education and in general. The world today is growing more reliant on computers, so being able to work with them will be a

valuable asset. Also, having a positive outlook on learning and being more confident could push those students to strive for even greater achievements in terms of jobs or higher education. The positive effects of computers may be evident in the present but could very well have positive effects in the future as well.

Yet another benefit of having computers in classrooms is that they allow students to improve a wide variety of skills. According to Technology and Education Reform they can better their technical skills, design skills, the effective use of outside resources, and the skill of being able to recognize and adjust to their audience. The website points out that “students, even at the elementary school level, are able to acquire an impressive level of skill with a broad range of computer software” (Technology and Education Reform). Allowing elementary students to interact with computers has given them a great amount of knowledge about technology which will give them a leg up in an increasingly complex and networked work force and world. The students also greatly improved their design skill by working with PowerPoint and their language skills through writing papers. By working on computers constantly the students have become aware of what is presentable and have become very good at making their work appropriate for public presentation and consumption (Technology and Education Reform). These are only a few of the students’ skills that see improvement when working with computers.

Along with the few skills above teachers also noticed an increase in the citation of outside sources within their students’ work. Technology and Education Reform claims that “this effect was most obvious in classrooms that had incorporated telecommunications activities.” The website makes the claim that out of all of the effects seen from placing computers in elementary classrooms this particular effect was the most obvious. The last skill that is bettered by interacting with computer daily is the ability to recognize the audience they are catering to and

adjust accordingly. The teachers used as sources by the website say that the students “appear to support a greater awareness of audience needs and perspectives” (Technology and Education Reform). The teachers noticed that students are becoming better at recognizing who their audience is and what that audience expects. All of the skills that have been improved because of the students interacting with computers are skills that will be useful in future classes and future life situations.

Computers in elementary classrooms have also been shown to have positive effects on the student’s education. To no surprise, this is the effect that most people expect to see when the topic of computers in the classroom is raised. Various studies have shown that test scores for students with access to computers within the classroom are higher than those who do not have access to computers in their classrooms. Alejandre and Moore talk about the integration of computers in a math class’s agenda. They allude to the fact that the geometric shape activity on the computer, which is used by that math class, helped the students to remember the shape of certain shapes which in turn helped them when they were not using a computer to do their work (Alejandra and Moore 16). James Kulik, Chen-Lin Kulik, and Robert Bangert-Drowns discuss in their article “Effectiveness of Computer-Based Education in Elementary Schools”, the difference between computer-managed instruction (CMI) and computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in classrooms (59). They claim that “the average effect in 28 studies of CAI programs was an increase in pupil achievement scores of 0.47 standard deviations, or from the 50th to the 68th percentile” (Kulik, Kulik, and Bangert-Drowns 59). They are saying that the students who used the computer-assisted instruction were shown to increase their grades on tests by quite a bit as compared to students who used the computer-managed instruction. Edward J. Lazaros in his article “Promoting Language Arts through Vocabulary Development with Internet Resources in

the Elementary Classroom” also claims that computers in the classroom increases students’ pace of education. His article focuses on using certain internet websites to increase the language knowledge that students have. He believes that by using certain internet resources like the website “Find the Technology” would ultimately help increase student vocabulary and memory of that vocabulary (Lazaros 11-12). These articles prove that using computers in elementary classrooms do better educate students and will continue doing so, ultimately resulting in the learning and remembering of more material.

The ability to work more effectively together and have better peer relationships is also a benefit that elementary teachers see from having computers placed in the classroom. Keeler, in her findings, notes that once computers were placed in the classroom the teachers began to work more closely together (Keeler 329). They began working together, according to Keeler, in order to “compare and share computer program uses” (Keeler 329). These particular teachers were just as new to the learning programs that would be used on the computer in class as the students were. Therefore those teachers who had computers in their classrooms began socializing more in order to understand the programs and decide on the best way to use them within the classroom setting. As a result of having to get together so often to understand it, the teachers involved in learning the particular programs and similar situations gained better relationships with peer educators. This study proves that students are not the only ones that would benefit from having computers in the classrooms of elementary schools.

Just like the students, teachers are also shown to have improved attitudes when computers became a part of everyday learning. According to Keeler, “they began to feel renewed and they expressed that there was a new excitement and energy in the classroom” (Keeler 329). These teachers are saying that after implementing something new into their agenda they felt as if it was

their first day of teaching again. This was a whole new experience for the teachers as well which made them feel “enthusiastic about their teaching” (Keeler 329). The teachers were basically at the same level as the students were in terms of familiarity with the technology so being able to work something new into the curriculum, something that they used outside of school, helped the teachers to find “a new freedom to learn along with their students”, as Keeler says (329). The new found excitement might also be due to the change in the teacher’s role, as Technology and Education Reform puts it. They claim that because of the computers the teachers were “no longer the center of attention” (Technology and Education Reform). The teachers were now able to help every individual student if necessary. Since in many of the classrooms where these studies were conducted the computers were used as the main educator, the teachers were able to float around the room asking questions and providing suggestions and support where it was needed more in a mentor role than a disciplinary position (Technology and Education Reform). Keeler agrees that roles of teachers changed from “teacher-centered to student-centered instruction” (Keeler 329). She also mentions “that their role had become more supportive” (Keeler 329). The change from a teacher-center instruction to a student-centered one and the excitement of learning something new helped the teachers to once again become excited about teaching and coming to class, which in turn put them in a much better mood. It is not hard to believe that the students picked up on this.

Another benefit that the teachers see from having computers in the classroom is the ability to create more effective learning and teaching plans and being more available to those students who need them. With computers in the classroom the teachers have access to many programs that can be used to teach certain individual subjects to the students. As Keeler says, in regards to the change seen in teaching strategy, “teaching strategies made as a result of the

computer include the use of centers for learning, which allowed the students to discover knowledge for themselves” (Keeler 329). Therefore, Keeler study shows that the implementation of computers allows the teachers to plan for daily learning in such a way that the students are the ones teaching themselves instead of the teachers lecturing for the entire class period and then hoping that the students understand the substance of the lecture. Using this new teaching plan also allows the teachers to become more involved in the learning process; they are able to clearly see who needs help and where exactly they are struggling before testing. The statistics that Keeler uses to support her findings show that the teachers involved in her study found their teaching methods changed for the better as they implemented learning technologies. One teacher said, “I just think it has been a great experience for me, I think it has really enhanced my teaching” (Keeler 329). Another teacher says, “I’m free to help individual kids more, I do very little whole-group instruction” (Keeler 329). These two teacher statements show that teachers are in fact learning to create better teaching plans and provide individual education, and are indeed able to help more students than they were before. Putting computers in elementary classrooms have helped the teachers in those classrooms become better teachers.

Placing computers in classrooms is not a new movement. However, the push to put computers in elementary classrooms is both a growing interest and one that is surrounded by controversy. There are professionals and critics that say that this movement is a bad one, that it could in fact be counterproductive to better education. They claim that computers do not actually have an effect on elementary student’s grades. On the other hand, there are many people out there who believe they have had the desired effect of increasing the student’s grades and more and even improving certain aspects of the teacher as well. The various studies and articles that have been discussed throughout this paper show that computers have measurable and positively

impacted elementary students and the teachers that work with them. The computers have not only improved educational aspects, such as test scores of the student's school life but also their attitude, their confidence, various skills they possessed and their ability to work well with their peers, even when such a task is not required of them. Computers in the classroom have also helped the teachers to have better attitudes, daily agendas, and relationships with both other teachers who are in the same situation and their students. It is hard to tell this early whether computers would have the same effect everywhere and if they should even be implemented in every elementary classroom across the United States; every environment is different and the results may not be globally applicable. Nonetheless, if the movement to put the computers in elementary classrooms progresses deliberately, more positive impacts could emerge and those who opposed the movement might be more inclined to see the good that the computers could eventually do within the classrooms and for future education. Much of the world already uses computers for almost everything else in daily life and the usage of them will only grow with time. Ultimately it would be better to integrate them into our elementary school classrooms now so that future generations can become familiar with and even master the technology that will play a huge role in their life and education.

Works Cited

- Alejandre, Suzanne, and Varnelle Moore. "Technology as a Tool in the Primary Classroom." *Teaching Children Mathematics* 10.1 (2003): 16. *ProQuest Technology Collection*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Becker, Henry J. "Access to Classroom Computers." *Communications of the ACM* 43.6 (2000): 24-25. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Belanger, Yvonne. "Laptop Computers in the K-12 Classroom." *Teacher Librarian* 29.4 (2002): 31-33. *ProQuest Technology Collection*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Holden, Constance. "Dubious Benefits for Early Computer Use." *Science* 282.5388 (1998): 407. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Keeler, Carolyn M. "Networked Instructional Computers in the Elementary Classroom and their effect on the Learning Environment: A Qualitative Evaluation." *Journal of Research on Computing in Education* 28.3 (1996): 329. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Kulik, James A, Chen-Lin C. Kulik, and Robert L. Bangert- Drowns. "Effectiveness of Computer-Based Education in Elementary Schools." *Computers of Human Behavior* 1 (1985): 59-74. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Lazaros, Edward J. "Promoting Language Arts through Vocabulary Development with Internet Resources in the Elementary Classroom." *Children's Technology & Engineering* 17.1 (2012): 10-13. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 March 2014.
- Russell Michael, Damian Bebell, and Jennifer Higgins. "Laptop Learning: A Comparison of Teaching and Learning in Upper Elementary Classrooms Equipped With Shared Carts of Laptops and Permanent 1:1 Laptops." *Journal of Educational Computing Research* 30.4 (2004): 313-330. *Google Scholar*. Web. 19 April 2014.
- Technology and Education Reform. Archived Information, n.d. Web. 28 March 2014.
- Wilson, Janell D, Charles C. Notar, and Barbara Yunker. "Elementary In-Service Teacher's Use of Computers in the Elementary Classroom." *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 30.4 (2003): 256-64. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 March 2014.

TOO OLD FOR ADS? IMPLICATIONS OF AGE DISCRIMINATION IN ADVERTISING

Vivek Vallurupalli

Perhaps the most admirable aspect of American society is the transition from a country filled with explicit discrimination towards people of certain races, religions, and genders to a country that has successfully eliminated, or at least minimized, such prejudice. Yet, there still exists one form of discrimination that remains deeply entrenched within the social fabric of our society. This discrimination is one that can inevitably affect each and every person in America. It is known as ageism, or discrimination against a certain age group, especially the elderly. One of the biggest offenders of ageism is the advertising industry, which either ignores the elderly population altogether or presents them in a caricatured, negative light (Carrigan and Szmigin, 46). Not only is such ageism within the advertising industry economically unwise, but it also perpetuates damaging cultural attitudes towards elderly people, which can ultimately be detrimental to their health and can affect the outlooks of younger people as well.

From an economic standpoint, the trends in population growth have been changing rapidly for the elderly. Older people have been absolutely surging recently in terms of their presence in society. It is estimated that by 2030, there will be about 72.1 million older persons in the US, more than double their number in 2000 (“Characteristics of an Aging Population”, 57). The percentage of people 65 and older is also predicted to surge to 19% of the general population compared to 12.4% in 2000 (“Characteristics of an Aging Population”, 58). As one would expect, companies should consider these demographical realities and adapt their strategies in order to stay on top of the economic game. Yet, unlike other industries such as travel and

insurance, the advertising industry has been slow to respond to these changes. Statistics reveal that over-45s have almost 80% of all financial wealth in the US, as older adults are swiftly becoming the largest market sector in society, and are projected to have the most purchasing power of any demographic in human history (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 58). However, studies show that younger models dominate in advertisements, including those for products meant for older people (Carrigan and Szmigin, 43). This strategy is obviously not a very economically judicious one in a society where older people are growing in numbers and in their buying power. So by maintaining a stalwart focus on younger people, and nearly ignoring the much wealthier older people, the advertisement industry is hurting itself economically.

Likewise, even the demographics of the marketing agency employees are not on par with the changing demographics of the general populace. A 1995 study by *Aging Demographics* showed that the average corporate ad representative was 31, and the average ad agency account executive was 28 (Surowiecki, 2). This trend of young writers and directors in the marketing industry has been shown to true even 10 years later, in another 2005 study (Bogart, 121). First and foremost, when there lies a discrepancy between the demographics of advertisers and their audience, a certain disconnect is inevitable—that is, a disconnect between what advertisers’ believe older people want and what older people actually desire. Moreover, as David Wolfe argues in *Ageless Marketing*, since this discrepancy between product message creators and their consumers has worsened, “marketing productivity has fallen” (22). Regardless of other factors, such as the surge of the Internet, Wolfe argues that much of the economic problem with advertising “arises from generational perception gaps” (23). Wolfe’s claim is a judicious one. Yes, there are several factors which have to be looked at assess the changes in marketing productivity. Yet, when a marketer is not able to connect with the perceptions of his consumers

(who compose of the big-spending elderly people as shown earlier), the consumers will have an invariable unwillingness to spend money on a marketed product. In turn, this causes a decline in marketing productivity, which counteracts the very economical intention of any marketing agency. If a marketing agency seeks to be economically sound, then perhaps it should ditch their detrimental and ageist practice of hiring younger and younger employees.

One of the resolute beliefs that the advertising industry maintains in order to explain and possibly justify this focus on the youth and exclusion of the elderly regards 'brand loyalty'. Advertisers have a long-held belief that "brand loyalty must begin at an early age, because consumers over 30 are too set in their ways to switch brands and preferences and therefore are less susceptible to advertisements" (Davis, 78). In other words, the marketing agency seems to believe that a consumer's loyalty to a brand is a quality that once established at a young age, will remain permanently affixed as the consumer ages. In reality, this notion has been proven to be false. Two studies, from 1996 and 1997 respectively, have demonstrated that "adults aged 35 to 53 were more likely than younger adults to abandon a favorite brand", and that "people over 65 were found to be less tied to specific products than those ages 19 to 44" (Surowiecki, 2). Trying to cultivate a brand loyalty that may not persist or one that may even dissipate with age, is not a useful strategy. Especially because the elderly of today are more sophisticated and have more exposure to a plethora of media sources and advertisements, the average older consumer is not as brand loyal as they used to be in the past (Chura, 3). The advertising industry attempts to justify its ageist exclusion of older people through the concept of nurturing brand loyalty from a young age. Yet, as the evidence suggested, brand choice is dictated more by an individual consumer's experience rather than his or her age. By adhering to the philosophy of focusing on the younger

consumer base with less money to spend rather than their older, richer counterparts, the advertising industry is again being economically inefficient.

Besides being economically unwise, ageism in advertising also perpetuates certain negative social sentiments regarding the elderly. To understand such an effect of advertising, it is first essential to observe the ways in which older men and women are presented. More so than in television and films, advertisements have been shown to be more ageist in their portrayals of the elderly (Berret and Butler, 36). In his extensive study *Aging with Television: Images on Television and Conceptions of Social Reality*, George Gerbner argues that advertisements in particular, “portray older women and men as one-dimensional” and represent “older persons as feeble, absent-minded, stubborn, or helpless” (8). Of course, there are countless individuals who do not display these characteristics, making these representations themselves products of stereotypes. For the most part, the majority of the ads the marketing industry employs to lure consumers consist of such prejudiced, essentialist depictions of older people which, though may not mean much to the young viewer, are downright degrading to the older viewers.

If advertisements in general had little social impact on society, then these ageist attitudes towards older people would carry little meaning in society. However, this isn't the case. Especially in today's society, advertising is more than just a source of purchase-related information. Rather, studies have shown the power of advertising to serve as a “means of social communication” that can “play significant roles in the socialization process by providing visual symbolic models for learning how to behave” (Langmeyer, 7; Leiss et al, 12). Even though most people may not concern themselves with the social roles conveyed through advertisements, they nevertheless exist on an implicit level. In fact, ads can direct the social outlooks of consumers to quite an extent. As one 1994 study shows, advertising can even exert a significant impact on

consumers' lives, whether by discouraging harmful behavior, encouraging socially beneficial behavior, or by deceiving consumers (Davis, 6). The fact that advertising has such a significant role in the social fabric on society invariably dictates the perceptions of viewers towards older people.

Indeed, advertising has been shown to be very influential in altering public's opinions of older people in certain ways. In the study *Aging with Television: Images on Television Drama and Conceptions of Social Reality*, George Gerbner states, "heavy viewers believe that the elderly are unhealthy, in worse shape financially, not active sexually, closed-minded, not good at getting things done, and so on" (11). Some may argue that in biological terms, the older a person gets, there is a definitive inclination for health to decline. Regardless, the propensity to associate all members of a population group, such as the elderly, as having worse health than younger groups, and as possessing associated behaviors such as close-mindedness, is pure speculation (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 2010). Unfavorable depictions of older people by the media implant and reinforce such impressions into the plethora of viewers. Since advertisements in particular are one of the most ageist media sources (Gerbner et al, 13), they only intensify such negative impressions in the viewers.

Additionally, this ability of advertising to perpetuate ageist impressions of older people has a vastly detrimental effect on older people themselves. Research from the Yale School of Public Health showed that repeated exposure to negative subtext by the elderly leads to an "overall devaluation of themselves" (Levy et al, 4). Furthermore, this devaluation by elder Americans can lead to direct detrimental changes to the physical health of the older individual. These changes include a "decline in memory performance, self-efficacy, will to live, and a heightened cardiovascular response to stress" (Levy et al, 5). At first glance, it may not seem like

two minutes worth of advertisements placed intermittently into American television programming makes such a tremendous effect on the health of an elder individual. Yet, considering the wide variety of media sources that advertising is available in, as well as the repeated exposure to advertising messages that the typical American experiences in a lifetime, the link becomes more evident. As the Yale study shows, consistently representing older persons in an ageist light, as advertisements continue to do so, causes the elderly to adopt a negative outlook on their own life (6). In turn, this leads to such tangible physical changes on the older person's health. Adopting more positive stereotypes of aging by older individuals has been proven to be beneficial on the other hand. Older persons that had positive perceptions of aging lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those with negative perceptions of aging (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 53). In essence, advertising has the potency to enforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes associated with aging. The elderly can definitely gain a negative outlook on their age through exposure to such depictions, leading to negative health consequences.

Ageism in advertising is not something that just affects the elderly. A younger person that embraces negative impressions about the elderly as a result of advertisements will most likely adhere to these principles for the rest of his or her life. When such a person begins to grow older himself, his negative perceptions about the elderly will increasingly become relevant to his own nature. Especially in the youth-obsessed culture of America, the ageist principles present in advertising are especially detrimental, causing younger persons to look forward to aging with an increasingly unfavorable outlook (Chura, 1; Gerbner et al, 7). The power of ageism lies in its inevitability. As the marketing agency continues to depict ageist portrayals of older people across America's billboards and televisions, it is serving to emphasize negative attitudes in a group of people that include not only the elderly, but younger people who will obviously become old

themselves. By saturating ageist attitudes in advertising, the marketing industry is implicitly causing the younger generations to view their own upcoming aging process in a negative light too. As a result, when the young carry these perceptions into old age, the internalization of aging which leads to the many aforementioned health implications only gets reinforced (Levy et al, 264). Ageism in advertising essentially leaves no one, young or old, free of consequences.

All in all, our American society has made monumental changes to combat many different forms of discrimination. Despite these achievements, ageism remains elusively fastened to the social fabric of our predominantly youth-obsessed culture, with potent forces such as the advertising industry increasingly fortifying those attitudes. The advertisement industry attempts to justify their chief focus on the youth through their own economic intentions and ‘brand loyalty’. From almost every aspect, social exclusion of older people in advertisements is economically unwise; the same older people that are excluded are both increasing in their numbers and have more money to spend. Moreover, the negative attitudes of the older generations prevalent in such a socially formidable force as advertising is leading to direct, tangible consequences in the health of the elderly. Even younger people feel the impact of ageism as they are beginning to view aging with more hesitance. Thanks to its far-reaching implications on both young and older people alike, ageism in advertising is becoming an increasingly relevant issue—one that can affect each and every single person alike. Perhaps advertising agencies should mainly focus on promoting products, rather than ageist principles, in order to be more economically sound and less somatically harmful.

Works Cited

- Anti-Ageism Taskforce. 2006. *Ageism in America*. The International Longevity Center. Web. 14 May 2014.
- Berret, Beth and Butler, Thomas. "A Generation Lost: The Reality of Age Discrimination in Today's Hiring Practices." *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*. Academic and Business Research Institute. Alvernia University. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.
- Bogart, Leo. *Over the Edge: How the Pursuit of Youth by Marketers and the Media Has Changed American Culture*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005. Print.
- Carrigan, M. and Szmigin, I. (2000), Advertising and older consumers: image and ageism. *Aging and Society*, 9: 42–50.
- "Characteristics of an Aging Population" *Demographics of Aging*. Transgenerational Design Matters, 2010. Web. 14 May 2014.
- Chura, Hillary. "Ripe old." *Advertising Age*. 5 May 2002. Web. 14 May 2014
- Davis, J. J. 1994. Ethics in advertising decision making: implications for reducing the incidence of deceptive advertising. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 28, 2.
- Gerbner, L., Gross, N., Signorelli, M. and Morgan, M. "Aging with television: images on television drama and conceptions of social reality." *Journal of Communication*. 30 (1990), 3-19. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.
- Langmeyer, L. 1993 Age role portrayals in magazine advertisements: a content analysis. *Theories and Concepts in Era of Change*, Carbondale, IL. Southern Marketing Association Proceedings. 1993.
- Leiss, W., Kline, S. and Jhally, S. 2000. *Social Communication in Advertising*. 2nd Edition. Nelson, Scarborough, Ontario. Web. 14 May 2014.
- Levy, B, Slade, M, Kunkel, S and Kasl, S. "Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, 261–70. Web. 9 May 2014.
- Surowiecki, James. "Ageism in Advertising." *The New Yorker*. Conde Nast, 1 Apr. 2012. Web. 14 May 2014.
- Wolfe, David. "Ageless Marketing: Strategies of Reaching the Hearts and Minds of the New Customer Majority." Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2003. Web.

WOMEN IN GAMING: BLASTING AWAY SEXISM

Daniel Stucky

As I scroll through the character selection of the newest arcade fighter game to hit the shelves, a common theme emerges in the female characters: scant clothing, enormous breasts, and promiscuous poses. I decide to continue with a random selection and engage in my first battle. It quickly becomes obvious, however, that the developers spent more time perfecting the physics for jiggling breasts than the mechanics for my character's jump or kick ability, both of which should take large priority in a fighting game. Unfortunately, this depiction has become far too common place in video games to even merit a second thought on how my character's breasts can move that way or why she is sporting a bikini for battle armor. Every genre of gaming portrays a similar theme and exploits the vast majority of their female characters as sexual, submissive, or weak. The video game market has seen massive growth over the past decades and has become an integral part of American culture in a short window of time. Industry sales have increased from \$12 billion in 2006 to nearly \$21 billion in 2012 with a particularly large increase in the purchase of digital content including mobile games (ESA). According to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), a majority of Americans play video games and “fifty-one percent of U.S. households own a dedicated game console, and those that do own an average of two.” What may come as a surprise is that 45% of all game players are women and nearly 76% of those women are over 18 years old, representing a larger population than male gamers under 17 (ESA). Video games have long been a male dominated industry and gaming content still exemplifies this misrepresentation today despite nearly equal gender participation.

Female gamers are often viewed as inferior players and are even sexually harassed during online play. In addition, female video game characters suffer from extreme sexualization and damsel in distress roles in order to better appeal towards a male fan-base. A sample of 669 action, shooter, and role-playing games in 2012 revealed that only 4% portrayed exclusive female protagonists compared to 51% with exclusive male protagonists (the remaining allowed for gender selection) (Herring). The rampant sexism prevalent in video games can lead to damaging stereotypes against females, creating a need for updated marketing schemes, game design, and consumer habits in the industry.

One does not have to look hard for an example of female sexualization in video game culture. A 2007 survey of teenagers confirmed that stereotypes of “female characters as sexually objectified physical specimens are held even by nongamers” (Dill and Thill 851). It has been found that over 80% of female video game characters are depicted as sexualized, scantily dressed, or the image of beauty (Dill and Thill 2007 851). In many situations, the sexualization is even completely out of context. This is often seen in the fantasy game genre where male characters will wear heavy, intimidating armor compared to their female counterparts who are dressed in iron bikinis, which offer little to no protection. In addition, a few games seem to exist with the sole intent of male eye candy. For example, *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* focuses more on the revealing female character models than the actual sport and gameplay of volleyball. Females characters are less prevalent than males in video games, and it is even less common for the female to play the role of the hero. More often, the female plays the damsel in distress such as Princess Peach and Zelda from the hugely successful Mario and Legend of Zelda franchises created by Nintendo. Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider series emerges as one of the few dominant female characters in the industry; however, her powerful character model has been

increasingly marred over the years with graphical changes for larger breasts and buttocks as well as a thinner waist (Jansz and Martis 143).

Male characters do not exhibit immunity from stereotypes either. Some argue that males are frequently portrayed as muscular and violent so who cares if female stereotypes are common as well? However, a much greater degree of negative sexism against females exists compared to males and much of this is due to casting them as sexual entities and inferior individuals. Clearly, the stereotypes against women in video games are more offensive and harmful than those relating to men.

Research supports the notion that people's perception of gender roles and social norms are influenced by mass media sources such as television, internet, and advertising (Morrison et al. 571). Self esteem in women can be negatively affected by the glamorized model images all over the media. Unsurprisingly, the promiscuous and supportive roles of female characters majorly seen in video games was found to have a similar effect on women's self-efficacy and can impact gender beliefs in real life (Morawitz and Mastro 808; Martins 825). In support of this, Morawitz and Mastro conducted a study looking at male and female undergraduate students in a U.S. southwestern university who were randomly assigned to play as a sexualized heroine, non-sexualized heroine, or play no video game at all:

First, playing the "sexualized" character resulted in less favorable attitudes toward women's cognitive capabilities. This was the case for both male and female participants. Second, playing the "sexualized" character for female participants resulted in less favorable judgments about female physical capabilities. (Morawitz and Mastro 820)

Clearly, the stereotypical portrayal of women in video games has damaging consequences for the gender as a whole. Gamers' respect for women may be diminished after frequent exposure to sexualized female characters. Furthermore, men who play games containing sexualized female characters are more likely to think of women as sex objects and engage in sexual harassment (Yao et al. 86).

Online gameplay presents a commonplace for sexual harassment against female gamers, likely in part due to the anonymity. During an interview, Heather Talpers exclaimed she is often treated with disrespect during online play of male oriented games such as Call of Duty or World of Warcraft. "I stopped using my microphone on Xbox live because then they would realize I'm a girl, and there would usually be at least one guy who would start harassing me", Heather reports. "It wasn't all bad though, I did get to laugh at some of the worst pickup lines I've ever heard too!" Heather has been playing video games for 13 years and represents just one of many women experiencing the same problem. Of course, many people are able to play a game without any consequence towards their perception of females, but harmful stereotypes do exist, creating a need for large scale amends in the video game community.

One culprit with the power to help rid sexism from video games and its players lies in the media. An estimated 60% of female character images shown in the biggest U.S. gaming magazines are depicted as sexualized compared to only 0.8% of men characters (Dill and Thill 862). A similar disproportion is seen in online reviews of games. Internet video game reviewers have gained a substantial following in the past decade as a means for consumers to gauge whether they should buy a game or not. A 2006 survey found that 41% of the females featured in online gaming articles are sexually suggestive whereas only 4% of male images are (Ivory). The box art of video games also serves as a form of advertising. Women are also not featured on

game covers as often as men, 15% compared to 85%, and when they are they usually appear “unrealistically thin, and half of them are wearing partially revealing attire such as bathing suits” (Mou and Peng 923). The media has a great deal of influence over consumers. Internet and magazine articles pertaining to video games receive a large following, but often contribute to the problem by displaying sexualized women as the poster image in an attempt to gain more viewers. Many of these articles are written by professional game reviewers who discuss their opinions on a video game and make suggestions to consumers on which games to purchase. Game reviewers should make an effort to address these problems. It is unrealistic to stop reviewing games containing sexual women, but simply putting in more consideration to the featured images would help reduce the blatant sexism usually presented. For example, instead of choosing the picture of a woman with oversized breasts or lying in a submissive pose, a reviewer could easily search for a more modest picture of the same character that is also doing something other than a strip tease. The media also needs to stop marketing all girl games as cutesy, pink social events and start trying to appeal to them in a much broader sense. With women representing nearly half of all gamers, simply showing a group of girls playing a shooter or zombie game in the next commercial instead of the usual boys, could send a positive message to the public that it is OK for girls to play these types of games.

One of the big reasons female characters may be drastically underrepresented as playable main characters and instead as sexualized damsels in distress, is that women play little part in actually developing the games. Only 12% of game designers are women and even fewer hold executive positions (Fullerton 140). It is no wonder that the majority of video games are marketed towards a male audience. As it stands, women have very little to no say about the content present in a game. Interestingly, female workers also make about \$9000 less than their

male counterparts in the video game industry (Haines). Disparity between women and men in the job market is prevalent in many fields on a national scale, however, the gaming industry's numbers are particularly poor. Equal employment, promotion, and salary opportunities must be awarded to women immediately to create a larger incentive for them to join the industry and reach executive positions where many of the decisions are made regarding a game's content. Additional consideration should also be taken to engage more young women in programming, graphic design, and the gaming industry as a whole.

The last change that must occur to initiate a reduction in video game sexism must come from us, the consumers. Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (EEDAR) reported that one of the reasons exclusive female protagonists are rare in games is because "there's a sense in the industry that games with female heroes won't sell" (Herring). Indeed, a 2012 survey from EEDAR found that games with female only leads did not sell as well compared to ones with male only leads. It becomes difficult to place the blame entirely on the developer when the consumers are less willing to play games with female heroes. Of course, we already know that women are willing to play games featuring male protagonists. The problem here arises mainly from men who do not want to spend money on strong female leads, despite the games often receiving high reviews. A second example of consumer bias is the notion that sex sells. A sample of 399 games comparing the influence of sexualized females pictured on game box art revealed that sales were higher on average for games featuring non-central sexualized females (Near 252). Consumers need to be more open minded on their purchases and look at games based on their entertainment quality regardless of the protagonists gender and not because the half naked girl on the box cover caught your eye.

In summation, women represent nearly half of the total gamers, yet face a completely male dominated community to participate in. The large majority of video games do not offer female protagonists for the player and fall into the trap of utilizing submissive, weak women in need of rescue. Female video game characters are largely designed with sex appeal in mind to appeal to the male fan-base. Unrealistic body proportions and revealing, tight clothes have become the norm for female characters, irrespective of their impracticality in the setting. In order to rid the sexism plaguing the video game industry, the media must make an effort to stop portraying females as sex objects in their reviews and using them for means of advertisement. Game design corporations need to not only offer equal employment opportunities for women immediately, but also go above and beyond to incorporate more into their teams in order to offer less objective game content. Finally, responsibility also lies in the hands of the consumers who should lose their sexist fear of playing as a female and simply put money out for the best game available. Following these solutions will create an improved, more comfortable environment for the video game community and attract more female gamers, something all men and women desire.

Works Cited

- "Consolidated Sales Transition by Region". Nintendo. 2014-01-28. Web. March 3 2014.
- Dill, Karen, and Thill, Kathryn. "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions." *Sex Roles* 57.12 (2007):851-864. EBSCO. Web. March 1 2014.
- ESA. "Top 10 Industry Facts." *Entertainment Software Association*. Jan 2013. Web. 25 Feb 2014.
- Fullerton, T., Fron, J., Pearce, C., and Morie, J. *Beyond Barbie & Mortal Kombat New Perspectives on Gender and Computer Games*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011. Print.
- Haines, Lizzie. (2004). "Why are there so few women in games?" *Manchester: Media Training Northwest*. International Game Developers Association, 2004. Web. March 3 2014.
- Herring, Will. "51% of HD-gen games feature female protagonists." *GamePro*. Electronic Entertainment Design and Research, 26 Aug 2010. Web. 4 Mar 2014.
- Ivory, James. "Still a Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games." *Mass Communication & Society* 9.1 (2006). *Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*. Web. March 3 2014.
- Jansz, Jeroen, Martis, Raynel. "The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games." *Sex Roles* 56.3-4 (2007): 141-149.
- Martins, Nicole, Williams, Dmitri. "A Content Analysis of Female Body Imagery in Video Games." *Sex Roles* 61.11 (2009): 824-836. EBSCO. Web. Feb 27 2014.
- Morawitz, Elizabeth and Mastro, Dana. "The Effects of the Sexualization of Female Video Game Characters on Gender Stereotyping and Female Self-Concept." *Sex Roles* 61.10 (2009): 808-823.
- Morrison, T. G., Kalin, R., & Morrison, M. A. "Body-image evaluation and Image Investment Among Adolescents: A test of sociocultural and Social Comparison Theories." *Adolescence* 39 (2004): 571-592. EBSCO. Web. Feb 27 2014.
- Mou, Yi, Peng, Wei. "Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Popular Video Games." *Handbook of Research on Effective Electronic Gaming in Education*. Hershey: 2008. 922-937.
- Near, Christopher. "Selling Gender: Associations of Box Art Representation of Female Characters With Sales for Teen- and Mature-rated Video Games." *Sex Roles* 68.3-4 (2013):252-269.
- Yao, Mike, Mahood, Chad, and Linz, Daniel. "Sexual Priming, Gender Stereotyping, and Likelihood to Sexually Harass: Examining the Cognitive Effects of Playing a Sexually-Explicit Video Game." *Sex Roles* 62.1-2 (2010): 77-88. NCBI. Web. Feb 27 2014.

Advanced Level Winner

PATRIARCHY AND ONE DIRECTION

Rachel Alvey

Introduction

After a successful stint on the UK talent competition *X Factor* in 2010, boy band One Direction emerged as a global phenom. The five members have garnered millions of fans in their four years of existence. They boast 18.5 million Twitter followers, in addition to those who follow on their individual accounts (Twitter, 2014). In 2012 the group came in second behind Adele in worldwide album sales and spent 50 weeks in the Top 40 charts in America (TicketNetwork Inc., 2012). *Midnight Memories*, their newest album, was released November 25, 2013 and debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 Chart (Caulfield, 2013). *Up All Night* and *Take Me Home* also debuted at the top in 2011 and 2012 respectively (Caulfield, 2013). This level of widespread popularity is not easily achieved. In fact, the group was the first to hit such success with their first three albums since The Monkees in 1967 (Caulfield, 2013). Interestingly, the only other pop groups since 1991 to make half-million dollar sales in a single week are boy bands *NSYNC and The Backstreet Boys (Caulfield, 2013).

Record-breaking acclaim denotes a vast reach and acceptance of the material One Direction produces. Their music, augmented by videos, concert films, and a social media presence, has created a loyal fan base. *Midnight Memories* especially serves to prove this as it had the best-selling first week of all their albums (Caulfield, 2013). Despite its popularity, the content upholds the patriarchal structure of society and the media. Naturally

with five male members a female perspective will likely not prevail. Still, many of the album's dominant features are decidedly sexist in nature. There is a strong focus on female physicality and a negligence of other aspects such as intelligence and personality. Female submissiveness is another running theme. Lastly, the songs on *Midnight Memories* perpetuate the idea that male sexuality is uncontrollable even at the cost of women. Though these elements may not be closely critiqued by the public they work to reinforce a patriarchal ideology.

Analysis

In the past few years pop music has received criticism for the sexualization of women in lyrics and music videos. For example, Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines" sparked major controversy after the hyper-sexual music video debuted (Green, 2014). One Direction has avoided this type of blatant sexuality. However, there is a subtle but overarching emphasis on the physical appearance of women. The track "Little Black Dress" epitomizes this idea by reducing the female subject of the song to her attire. She is never named, or even defined outside of what she is wearing. A "little black dress" is personified to represent the woman wearing it. This alone shows the concept of the male gaze. In a patriarchal society, women "live lives of spectacle" (Brannon). The male narrator of the song clearly views the female subject as such a spectacle. Lyrics like "I wanna see the way you move for me, baby" and "can't stop lookin' at you" demonstrate a male gaze. Patriarchy demands that "any pleasure derived is in a male context" and women are merely the vehicle of such pleasure, never to experience any themselves (Brannon). The narrator assumes the woman is putting on a show for his entertainment. In addition, she is objectified through the focus

on her outfit. She is painted as a physical object void of any non-physical characteristics. "Midnight Memories" achieves a similar objectification by obscurely referencing a woman as "five foot something with the skinny jeans". Again, there is a materialistic focus. "Why Don't We Go There" goes as far as to compare a woman to a drug. He wants to be addicted and "feel the high". These subtle references are perhaps more supportive of patriarchy when compared to something as controversial as "Blurred Lines". Content that must stand up to criticism - even if sexist - is at least brought to the public's attention. Since One Direction's music is not overtly sexual in nature, the patriarchal ideals present may slip beneath the audience's radar.

Female submissiveness crops up in media and popular culture quite regularly. The stereotypical roles assigned to females are those of the dominated, not the dominators. This meek female character is depicted in the track "Diana". Though it is the only song on the album to name the subject, she is in a state of distress that seems it can only be fixed by a man. The narrator asks that she "let me be the one to lift your heart up and save your life". Regardless of what caused her woes it implies the solution is a heterosexual, romantic relationship. The woman is referred to as "lonely", "crying", and "fallen" in contrast to the male hero who could be her salvation. This heroic nature is mirrored in "Through the Dark" with lyrics such as "I will carry you over fire and water for your love". On the surface, it seems like a promise of dedication and admiration. Still it insinuates that, yet again, the woman is at the mercy of a man to improve her situation. The use of pet names such as "baby" and "girl" also trivialize women, and are used in half of the songs on the deluxe version of *Midnight Memories*. These are descriptors usually assigned to helpless or

naïve people. It strips women of their independence and competency. Patriarchy relies heavily upon men holding roles of power, guiding the weaker sex. This manifests in the album through male ownership of women. In “Does He Know?” it overtly states “tonight you’re mine, baby”. There is consistent reference to the other man in her life, or her previous owner. She is an object to be transferred among men, defined by their influence upon her passive life.

Along with submission is an atmosphere of shame surrounding women who do act upon social or sexual desires. “Why Don’t We Go There” not only asks a woman to submit and “give in tonight” and “don’t say no”, but also implies there will be social consequences for sexual expression. The lyrics read “the secret’s safe with me, there’s no right time or place”. These lines communicate that under no circumstances would a woman practicing sexual autonomy be acceptable. Rather it is something that should be hidden. “Little White Lies” supports this assertion. The chorus repeats “you say you’re a good girl, but I know you would girl” highlighting the concept that good, respectful girls are sexually reserved.

In contrast, male sexuality is not to be controlled. Frequently, the male narrators of the album are overtaken by their physical desires. This is most obvious in “Alive”. The male subject is so consumed by his lust that he seeks medical help. The entire first verse speaks to the uncontrollability of his desire to “be with every girl I meet”. Further still, the second verse validates this uncurbed desire. As long as he feels “alive” it is all right. However, the woman questions what her friends would think of her actions. This again reflects the societal, patriarchy-induced judgment women face in regards to sex. The female character

of “Little White Lies” exhibits the same type of hesitation and seeks to set boundaries. The narrator chooses to ignore all of her rules and “watch them break tonight”. The basic theme of the song implies that a woman must craft lies to hide her desires yet a man can be proactive and overt. Patriarchy allows men to take what they want when they want it, regardless of whether or not it is consensual. This is particularly troubling when seen within the context of rape cases. Men are not always held accountable for their actions, and blame is placed on the female victim. Such was the case with Matthew Barnett of Maryville, MO who recently took a plea on the rape charges filed against him (Pearce, 2014). Before the case was reexamined, the victim and her family withstood an onslaught of criticism (Arnett, 2013). Pop music tends to steer clear of heavy subjects like rape, but the themes it reiterates contribute to a culture that forgives a rapist and blames the victim.

Conclusion

Through a feminist lens, there are various issues to tackle with *Midnight Memories*. First, the male gaze keeps the focus on women’s physical appearance. This is coupled with the expectation of female submission and sexual modesty. The work also claims that male sexuality cannot be curbed, and acts made in lust are excusable. All of these elements combine to create a text that demonstrates cultural hegemony. The lyrical content belittles women in various ways, yet One Direction has a predominantly female fan base. They were named the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry Top Global Recording Artist of 2013 (International Federadtion of the Phonographic Industry, 2014). They’ve won 42 awards for their work as a band, and have received countless other nominations (Ace Show Biz, 2014). So in spite of their patriarchal bias they continue to

drum up support and admiration. Women and girls are participating in their own subordination. They accept the sexist viewpoint as a norm and do not question the content of One Direction's music. Nicola Dibben asserts that music not only makes a social statement but also "can encourage the listener to adopt a position towards this content" (Dibben, 1999). Thus, the women listening may not challenge the ideas posed but instead embrace them. Heteronormativity, for example, is prevalent in the album. Focus on male/female relationships ostracizes those who have a different sexual orientation. Regardless, that doesn't demand that all fans of the group are straight. Some may enjoy the music even while they are being marginalized. *Midnight Memories* may not be as lewd or explicit as other pop albums are, but it still strongly supports the patriarchal norm. Dibben notes that "popular music affirms the dominant economic order in such a way that it represses and controls listeners while creating the illusion of freedom and choice" (Dibben, 1999). One Direction's fan base is notoriously devoted, which may lead them to even more willingly accept the ideas they sponsor. Without questioning these ideals the pervasive, anti-feminist culture that exploits women is reinforced. It may seem like a catchy string of hit singles – but they have much larger societal implications.

Bibliography

- (2014, April 21). Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/onedirection>
- Ace Show Biz. (2014, April). *One Direction Awards*. Retrieved from http://www.aceshowbiz.com/celebrity/one_direction/awards.html
- Arnett, D. (2013, October 24). *Nightmare in Maryville: Teens' sexual encounter ignites a firestorm against family*. Retrieved from Kansas City Star: <http://www.kansascity.com/2013/10/12/4549775/nightmare-in-maryville-teens-sexual.html>
- Brannon, N. M. (n.d.). *The Patriarchal Gaze*. Retrieved April 14, 2014, from <http://www.tulane.edu/~femtheory/journals/paper7.html>
- Caulfield, K. (2013, December 4). *One Direction Scores Historic Third No. 1 Album on Billboard 200 Chart*. Retrieved from Billboard: <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5812384/one-direction-scores-historic-third-no-1-album-on-billboard-200-chart>
- Dibben, N. (1999). Representations of Femininity in Popular Music. *Popular Music* , 331-355.
- (2013). On *Midnight Memories* [MP3]. J. Bunetta, J. Ryan, D. Jones, D. Poynter, T. Fletcher, C. Falk, et al.
- Green, G. (2014, February 4). *Blurred Lines: Porn or Pop? The Perpetuation of Patriarchy in Pop Music Video*. Retrieved from Rewind & Reframe: <http://www.rewindreframe.org/blurred-lines-porn-or-pop-the-perpetuation-of-patriarchy-in-pop-music-video/>
- International Federadtion of the Phonographic Industry. (2014, February 26). *One Direction are officially the biggest global recording artists of 2013*. Retrieved from News: <http://www.ifpi.org/news/One-Direction-are-officially-the-biggest-global-recording-artists-of-2013>
- Pearce, M. (2014, January 9). *'The case is closed': No rape charges in Maryville, Mo., case*. Retrieved from Los Angeles Times: <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/jan/09/nation/la-na-nn-maryville-rape-charges-20140109>
- TicketNetwork Inc. (2012, December 17). *2012: The Year of One Direction*. Retrieved from http://www.ticketnetwork.com/concerts/one-direction-infographic.aspx?utm_source=BlogPost_2013.01.08&utm_medium=1d_infographic_teaser&utm_campaign=1DInfographic

CONTRIBUTORS

Austin Allen is a UMKC student who recently changed his major to Spanish and French Education. His goal is to one day become a teacher. He enjoyed his English 225 class more than he ever thought possible.

Rachel Alvey is twenty-one years old and is currently studying Interpersonal and Public Communication at UMKC. After graduation she hopes to work in communications for a sports organization or a non-profit. Aside from school, she loves to catch a hockey game or spend time with her family, friends, and dog.

Hannah Bartee is a military child who has lived in Weston for three years. She will be attending college this fall.

Clarissa Engel is pursuing a degree in Sociology with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. Outside of school, she spends her time tutoring with Get Smarter Prep, playing soccer, and relaxing with friends.

Jonah Graves is a six-year medical student, planning to graduate in 2019. He is from Lee's Summit, Missouri.

Eliana Hudson is a sophomore double majoring in Interpersonal & Public Communications and English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She is interested in education reform, women's studies, social activism, and making the perfect grilled cheese.

Cindy Jiang is currently in the six-year BA/MD program and is working toward a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree. She is set to graduate in 2019. Cindy is very passionate about Gifted Education and has written proposals for bills to support it. In her spare time, she likes to read, peruse the internet, and watch many different TV shows.

Bridget Mohn is from Excelsior Springs, Missouri. She is currently studying Computer Science with the hopes of becoming an agent with the FBI.

Amanda R. Selck

Daniel Stucky has been passionate about jogging and gaming for as long as he can remember. He finds both activities to be relaxing and great time killers with friends. Daniel intends to pursue a career in bioinformatics, a fusion of his two favorite studies: biology and computer programming.

Vivek Vallurupalli is a student in UMKC's six-year medical program and is very passionate about becoming a physician. Although he grew up in St. Louis, he really enjoys what Kansas City has to offer. Vivek's hobbies include sports, TV shows, and movies. He

was inspired to write on this topic in his Discourse 200 class after noticing a trend in several popular brand-name companies making advertisements that were discriminatory and outright offensive to the elderly population.

TEACHERS

Crystal Gorham Doss

Sheila Honig

Liz Jacquinot

Alli Jordan

Steven P. Melling

Kathy Miller

Ben Moats

Sarah Polo

Mary Woods