Through Gendered Lenses

The Gender Studies Honor Society

Gender Studies Program—University of Notre Dame 2015

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About the Artist

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About the Editors

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Acknowledgements

This edition of *Through Gendered Lenses* marks its sixth year of highlighting gender scholarship at the University of Notre Dame. The number of those responsible for the success of the journal extends far beyond the breadth of this page, and it is with sincere gratitude that we honor their contributions and commitment.

*Through Gendered Lenses* would not exist without the Gender Studies Program, which both educates the scholars within these pages and creates a platform upon which gender can be theorized, researched, discussed, and depicted. Abigail Palko, Associate Director of the Gender Studies Program, and Pamela Wojcik, Director of the Gender Studies Program, deserve significant acknowledgment for their involvement. Immeasurable recognition is due to Linnie Caye, Program Coordinator, whose sage advice and familiarity with various channels, timelines, and procedures guided the production of the journal. Her invaluable insight was enormously helpful, and the Honor Society is truly grateful.

The Honor Society is indebted to its many generous benefactors. We are grateful to the Boehnen Fund for Excellence in Gender Studies, the Genevieve D. Willis Endowment for Excellence, and the alumni and allies who sponsor the Gender Studies Program at the University of Notre Dame. Their continued support afforded these scholars the opportunities to pursue their research and allowed for the creation and maintenance of this journal to spotlight their endeavors.

The scholars featured in this journal deserve special thanks, as well as all who submitted their work to *Through Gendered Lenses*. Many
students are toiling in creative and advanced projects, and these six essays represent only a fraction of the innovative and thorough compositions we received. Countless others across campus continue to refigure and reexamine gender in new and notable fashions. We appreciate all these efforts and hope this edition inspires next year’s inquiry.
Letter from the Editor

The year 2014 proved to be monumental in the realm of gender studies. Emma Watson launched her HeForShe campaign to raise awareness about men’s issues and the roles that men play in fighting for gender equality, and celebrities such as Taylor Swift and Beyoncé publicly declared their support for feminism. States overturned bans on gay marriage, and the issue of campus-wide sexual assaults was actively pursued on the government’s policy agenda.

Gender extends far beyond the pages of this journal, permeating every aspect of our world. As such, the scope of Through Gendered Lenses has no boundaries; topics range from discussion of homosexuality in Ireland, to the disparity between men and women in STEM fields, to the place of women in the Catholic Church. Thank you, truly, to the students featured within this journal for fearlessly delving into complicated and controversial topics, actively researching complexities that frame society, and setting an example of passionate scholarship. Thank you, humbly, to the readers and Gender Studies students for your unwavering support, appreciation for research, and engagement with peers. It is our hope that this sixth edition of Through Gendered Lenses provides fresh insight into both historical and contemporary issues relating to gender, and serves as a springboard for future exploration.

Katie Lee, 2016
Editor-in-Chief
The Gender Studies Program

The Gender Studies Program is an interdisciplinary academic program in the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue a major (full or supplementary) or a minor. The field of Gender Studies analyzes the significance of gender—and the cognate subjects of sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and nationality—in all areas of human life, especially in the social formation of human identities, practices, and institutions.

The Gender Studies Program gives scholars the methodological and theoretical tools to analyze gender and its cognates in their intellectual endeavors and to apply the insights they gain to disciplines in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It also provides its students and alumni with an intellectual framework in which the analysis of gender and its cognates can be creatively and critically applied to their personal, familial, professional, and civic roles. In the context of the Catholic identity of Notre Dame, Gender Studies facilitates the study of the intersection of gender and religion in the shaping of ethics, culture, and politics. Alongside our diverse array of courses drawn from across the university, our summer internship and academic-credit internship programs emphasize the holistic and practical life applications of a Gender Studies education at Notre Dame.

If you would like more information about the Gender Studies Program, please stop by our office in 325 O'Shaughnessy Hall or visit our website at genderstudies.nd.edu.
Iota Iota Iota: Undergraduate Gender Studies Honor Society

Iota Iota Iota, or Triota, is an Undergraduate Honor Society composed of sophomore, junior, and senior Gender Studies majors and minors. The Notre Dame chapter of Triota was formed in 2006, and its members are the Gender Studies Program’s top students as demonstrated by their overall academic performance. All members have earned at least a 3.5 GPA in Gender Studies and a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0. As the primary unit of undergraduate student service and leadership in the Gender Studies Program, Triota offers gender studies students multiple opportunities to engage their interests in gender issues beyond the classroom setting. Members of Triota contribute to an environment of academic excellence, encourage undergraduate research and scholarship in Gender Studies, foster relationships among students and faculty, promote interest and awareness of gender issues, and academically represent the Gender Studies Program. Through Gendered Lenses is their main project throughout the year. Additionally, members of Triota promote the Gender Studies major and minor at various campus events and host study breaks during finals week for all undergraduate majors and minors.

If you are interested in becoming a member of Triota, please visit our page on the Gender Studies website, genderstudies.nd.edu, to learn more about us or to download an application.
Triota Members 2014-2015

Kristin Brennan 2016
Monica Daegele 2015
Celanire Flagg 2017
Daniella Grover 2016
Rachel Hughes 2015
Katie Lee 2016
Lex Lorenzo 2015
Faith Mayfield 2015
Melyssa Moors 2015
Lauren Morisseau 2015
Michael Nolan 2015
Nora O'Sullivan 2015
Kristin Rice 2015
Shannon Sheehan 2016
Christopher Torres 2015
Minor Characters, Major Repercussions:
An exploration of the role of feminist secondary characters in young adult literature

Eleanor Reynolds
Eleanor Reynolds (class of 2015) is a Marketing major with a minor in Studio Art from Lake Forest, IL. Her essay was written for a class on the young adult novel, taught by Angel Matos. Eleanor is interested in the portrayal of gender in constructed media and its effects on modern audiences. She would like to thank Professor Matos for his invaluable guidance and spellcheck for kindly calling attention to her tendency to make up words.
The feminist stereotype is alive and well in young adult literature. Rejoice: female characters are independent, strong, smart. But beware: this discussion is not an appraisal of the Katniss Everdeens and (fortunately) the Bella Swans of the YA world. Rather, consider those just left of the spotlight: the secondary characters. These women are widely overlooked in their merit, but more importantly, in their shortcomings. Because, yes, while they are often witty and confident and liberated, these characters are also impulsive and naïve and feverish just the same. They are shallow in characterization, perhaps understandably, due to their role as secondary to the protagonist. But their surface representation fosters deep indoctrination of a feminist manifesto, and its subsequent downfall. While the inherent role of the secondary character may arguably be to foster a primary character’s development, they do not and cannot exist solely for that reason. Just as the protagonist is affected, so, too, are the readers. And in their portrayal, these characters serve not only as catalysts for the main character’s growth, but ends in themselves. In novels such as Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* and John Green’s *Looking for Alaska*, the female secondary character has become a ruse for the non-fictional feminist, a trope that promotes feminism as mere differentiation in categorization rather than an attempt toward contemporary gender equality.

Before this argument goes too far, let’s have a quick refresher on these two novels we have come to love, hate, or somewhat recognize from the movie adaptations or the endless quotes-in-fun-slash-inspiring-fonts forever circling the Internet. Published in 1977, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson is the story of a boy and a girl in a small rural town who create an imaginary forest kingdom in attempt to escape the struggles of the real world. The novel is told from the
perspective of Jesse Aarons, who meets neighbor Leslie soon after she moves next door. Jesse is an artist, and has trouble living up to his father’s expectations for him. When he meets Leslie, he begins to realize that not everyone is meant to fulfill the same roles. Leslie is a tomboy. She is not afraid to compete against the boys in class – and then win. She is the picture of anti-femininity, but the poster child for feminism. Leslie does not act in a way that is expectant of young girls, but makes her own rules. She is female, but more importantly to her, she is human. It is Leslie who introduces Jesse to the wonder of Terabithia, and subsequently, his own value and purpose. It is also Leslie who ultimately dies because of her own unwise decisions, leading Jesse to more fully embrace maturity.

John Green’s *Looking for Alaska* evokes similar feminist traits in its female lead. This novel, published in 2005, chronicles the life of Miles “Pudge” Halter as he enters boarding school. Fellow classmate Alaska, the fearless, beautiful, outspoken girl across the hall, heavily assists Pudge’s eager journey toward enlightenment. Alaska is delicate in composition, but hardened, knowing, in content. She is a leader, the leader, her every move calculated. As she pertains to feminism, Alaska is outspoken about her feelings toward gender equality. “‘She has great breasts,’ the Colonel said, without looking up from the whale. ‘DO NOT OBJECTIFY WOMEN’S BODIES!’ Alaska shouted” (Green, 59). In a largely male-dominated novel, Alaska is the beacon for equality, both in her blatant support for it and in her role as the strength in Pudge’s life and the novel as a whole. Unfortunately, however, Alaska’s life ends before the story does. She is ultimately killed in a car crash, a death completely resultant of her own actions.

*Looking for Alaska* is about a teenage boy at boarding school trying to figure out the world and his place in it. *Bridge to Terabithia* is
about a boy in grade school trying to figure out the world and his place in it. Both are drastically assisted by the quirky and sagacious girls next door, and both ultimately experience the deaths of these girls, these forces of change and enlightenment. How sad for these fictional boys. How earth shattering and detrimental to any advancement in gender equality for their very real readers. Because while they are not the stars of their respective novels, these secondary characters are the facilitators – their characterizations and actions are the means by which the protagonists grow. This growth is nothing but accelerated by the literal expiration of these girls – a fact that bodes disastrous in terms of the message it sends about the modern woman and her worth.

While the irrefutable and necessary asymmetry of representation in novels serves to enhance understanding of one or two protagonists, its resultant flattening of other characters can support a reading that these secondary extras are solely that: extra and not individually worthy. Even more problematically, this notion can support a reading that these minor characters do not influence the reader. In his book *One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, Alex Woloch explores the attention paid to primary and secondary characters in realist fiction. He seeks to explain “how the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative’s continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe” (Woloch, 13). More plainly, Woloch is interested in how characters’ interactions with each other define a narrative in scope and meaning, and how each character gains its own meaning, or lack thereof, in the process. In a fairly unprecedented move, Woloch ponders the effectiveness of the characters – especially the minor ones – as realistic in behavior, rather than merely effective in plot. He argues
that in order for the protagonist to come across as robust, the supporting characters must be equally and oppositely as distorted, a “caricature...concentrated on a few features or a small segment of the personality to the neglect of much that would make a the figure a full human” (Woloch, 43). This idea is certainly the case in young adult fiction, though unfortunately the flatness has simultaneously initiated sameness in characterization, especially of female characters.

Leslie’s characterization in *Bridge to Terabithia* demonstrates a flatness that condemns femininity rather than flattering it. To badly quote your run-of-the-mill teen romance, Leslie is just *not like other girls*. She is uninterested in fashion, typical girlishness – so uninterested, that her gender distinction takes a second glance from Jess (See fig. 1). “The person had jaggedy brown hair cut close to its face and wore one of those blue undershirtlike tops with faded jeans cut off above the knees” (Paterson, 18). But that second look would never bother her anyway. Because Leslie is too busy reading books and making observations and demonstrating an understanding well beyond her spry ten years. She is smart, but more importantly, she is wise – perhaps too wise for girlhood? I am not arguing that girls who don’t like pink are against feminism. I do, however, question Paterson’s decision to allow Leslie to act so stereotypically masculine, especially as the characterization seems to act as the stimulus for her sagacity. She has dismissed all frivolity in pursuit of a higher knowledge. Yes, Leslie rejects gender norms, and more power to her for that. But does her rejection and subsequent wisdom not also somewhat evoke condemnation of typical femininity? For the average grade school reader, it may. And if the notion is even possible, the result likely does more harm than good.
While Green’s portrayal of Alaska Young is fairly superficial, his fixations on her death through content organization strategy and use of “before” and “after” sections suggest her importance as mere event rather than character. Alaska is stereotypical in her atypicality. Her feminism is not for the sake of furthering the feminist cause – how could it be, considering her ending? – but instead for the sake of differentiation. Moreover, the defining moment of the novel is her death. And it is not only a mere moment, but also the cause for building excitement and intrigue in the reader – the chapters are not traditionally numbered, but function as a countdown, albeit unlabeled, to her impending expiration. This outright preoccupation with the end, even prior to Pudge’s introduction of Alaska to the reader, conditions the audience toward a passive dismissal of Alaska as equally as existent, or not, as the protagonist. Though the countdown is not given explicit purpose as a death clock until Alaska’s actual death, the mere presence of it suggests an impending event. And this recognition, in
conjunction with the black and red coloring of the book’s back cover narrative insight into the “before” and “after,” clearly suggests a tragedy, while also clearly suggesting the centrality of the tragedy (See fig. 2). So, based on pure paratext\(^1\) alone, which is more important, which defines her more: Alaska’s life, or her death?

![Figure 2. Back cover of *Looking for Alaska*. The red, black, and white text in combination with the use of smoke to divide paragraphs suggests an ominous plot (cover photo found on Google images).](image)

This distortion of secondary characters, while justifiable, rejects the reader’s understanding, and interpretation of these fictional beings. In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal writes, “That no one has yet succeeded in constructing a complete and coherent theory of character is probably precisely because of this human aspect. The character is not a human being, but it resembles one” (Bal, 80). It is human nature to seek faces in artwork, in combinations of colons and parentheses. Just as reflexively, we look for humanity in fiction. Does this mere admission that characters are not real cause any palpable difference in terms of

\(^{1}\) Paratext, defined by Gérard Genette, is that which accompanies the plain text of literary work, “a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author’s name, a title, the preface, illustrations” (Genette, 261).
how people view them? Would the teenage frenzied pseudo-rivalry between “Team Peeta” and “Team Gale” be any more subdued were the supporters to be explicitly reminded of the fictitiousness of the cause? No. When the argument for shallowness of secondary characters is insistent upon reader recognition that all characters are figments and thus should not be taken as wholly relatable, the lines between realism and allegory become too blurred. And to expect this level of recognition in young adults, untrained in the acute notions of fiction and narrative theory, is perhaps the most unrealistic aspect of it all. Involuntarily, these characters hold meaning, and their meaning only intensifies, becomes more acutely fixated, with lack of breadth in characterization.

In regard to concentration of meaning, while Bridge to Terabithia’s Leslie Burke starkly personifies fearlessness, her downfall is just as starkly resultant of the trait. Leslie is smart, kind, and generally lacking in flaws. Through her creation of an imaginary kingdom, she becomes the impetus for Jess’s transformation, growth. Leslie is admired for her courage and wisdom, yet she falls for perhaps being too headstrong, too tenacious. Leslie is a tragic hero, and the reader is meant to pity her. However, the reader tends to pity her only in the sense that such could just as easily happen to him or her. Her strength became her one weakness, her rejection of the norm literally, almost sickeningly comically, caused a freak accident – she dies due to a fall from the rope swing that takes her and Jesse into Terabithia. This message is utterly problematic for young readers. Not only must Leslie die in order for Jess to realize his full potential, but she must die as a result of her own characterization. What was previously admired subsequently became Leslie’s greatest flaw, causing confusion and perhaps an outright rejection of feminine strength for Paterson’s audience.
The notion of this fairly recent feminist archetype can perhaps be traced to the intentions, known and subconscious, of the authors themselves. In *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, author Maria Nikolajeva discusses the relationship evident between the (generally) adult author and child or young adult reader. She argues that the inherent power an adult author has in influencing his or her young reader often leads to a tendency toward normative roles of adult over child. The books “we sometimes call masterpieces” work “both to empower the child and to protect him [sic] from the dangers of adulthood” (Nikolajeva, 21). While Nikolajeva focuses primarily on the relationship between adult and child, perhaps the same can be said for the notion of feminism in young adult fiction. As authors wish to enliven yet preserve their young adult audience, they simultaneously wish to encourage feminism, though not without (maybe unintentionally) pointing out its infeasibility in the real world. It is as if these authors are commending feminism while cautioning against a total disregard for gender norms. Leslie dies because of her own fearlessness, a generally male trait. Were she to act more warily, in a more feminine and timid way, her accident would have been completely avoided.

This acknowledgement without encouragement is present in the ultimate demises of both Alaska in Green’s *Looking for Alaska* and Leslie in Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*. Plainly, both girls largely dispel the femme fatale archetype, and, plainly, both subsequently die as a result of generally feminine, and especially negative, traits. Alaska is the victim of her own impulsion and Leslie falls to her false-perceived invincibility. Just as Nikolajeva argues for the tendency toward a kind of cautionary encouragement, these authors are quite similarly admitting feminism while simultaneously admonishing it.
Much of this elevation and resulting fall from greatness can likely be attributed to these novels’ tendencies toward a male gaze. First coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey in her 1973 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the ‘male gaze’ refers to the narrative explanation and interpretation of female characters as men see them. While Mulvey is primarily concerned with this notion in film, the idea is similarly as present in YA fiction. Where she explores the use of visual and audial representation, the notion can be likely as experienced through pure text.

“Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey, 7).

How often have readers, especially young readers, encountered the standard boy-meets-girl, boy-falls-hopelessly-for-girl, boy-then-gets-to-know-the-girl storyline? While perhaps not always the central action, this theme is – to be gentle – not unfamiliar to the YA genre. “And now is as good a time as any to say she was beautiful. In the dark beside me, she smelled of sweat and sunshine and vanilla” (Green 19). In *Looking for Alaska*, protagonist Pudge falls for barely-acquaintance Alaska within one brief meeting. Instantaneously, Alaska has become an object for Pudge, a playground of sights and smells – and maybe intellect, too, but where is the sensory value in that? Within a few pages, Green has managed to offer an abridged Alaska, a mysterious Alaska. “‘Sometimes I don’t get you’ [Pudge] said. She didn’t even glance at me. She just smiled toward the television and said, ‘You never get me, that’s the whole point’” (Green, 54). For Pudge, the desire is not in wanting to
know Alaska, wanting to solve the mystery, (It’s called *Looking for Alaska*, not *Finding Alaska*) but in the allure of such a beautiful and impossibly unknowable object – a propensity toward the game, not the player.

This tendency toward fictional women as devices rather than people is further instantiated in Nathan Rabin’s theory for the “Manic Pixie Dream Girl.” Again, originally argued in reaction to popular movies (think Zooey Deschanel as Summer in *500 Days of Summer*), this trope envelops romance in YA fiction. “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl (hereafter MPDG) exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures” (Rabin, 2007). In a line, Rabin has summed up the endings of *Looking for Alaska*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, and countless other YA works. Consider the final lines of Green’s novel: “So I know [Alaska] forgives me, just as I forgive her. Thomas Edison’s last words were: ‘It’s very beautiful over there.’ I don’t know where there is, but I believe it’s somewhere, and I hope it’s beautiful” (Green 221). How hopeful and trite and exactly what Rabin is describing. At the risk of sounding morbid, Alaska has breathed life into Pudge, and unfortunately, that breath was also her last.

In an effort to further affirm the presence of the MPDG and its hold on YA fiction, consider *Bridge to Terabithia*. Written in 1977, exactly 30 years before Rabin’s essay, Paterson’s novel does not quite fit as nicely into the ideal as does Green’s, though the parallels are justifiably as astonishing. And, lest one forget, Paterson primarily answers to Katherine: yes, a woman author who has subscribed to the male gaze and its subsequent rendering of the feminist agenda. The idea of feminism – even mere gender *ab*norms – as problematic is so ingrained in contemporary society that even the most affected and
supportive cannot help but reject its pragmatism. In her narrative, Leslie is confident, a tomboy. Though more of a pal than a love interest, she is a spark just the same. “For hadn't Leslie, even in Terabithia, tried to push back the walls of his mind and make him see beyond to the shining world—huge and terrible and beautiful and very fragile?” (Paterson, 188). And just the same, her spark catches in Jess but cannot equally remain in herself. Leslie dies to transform Jess, her casualty a seemingly necessary obstacle toward Jess’s growth.

It is the adolescent romance narrative that has become the primary culprit for this abject reading of the female character. In 1990, Linda K. Christian-Smith conducted research on the readers, the young female audience of teen romance. In Becoming a Woman through Romance, she reported her findings on both the audience and the common themes of the books. Most obviously, she found the novels to “reflect society's image of acceptable female behavior and inculcate such norms in their readers” (Margolis, 1993). Interestingly, however, she found that the primary audiences for these books were reluctant readers, or girls who were low-performers in class. Their interest was based in what she termed “Hi-low books, materials that are highly motivating...but control vocabulary complexity and general text difficulty” (Christian-Smith, 99). And, perhaps most contrarily to previous beliefs, these girls were specifically drawn to romance novels for their depiction of competent, rather than passive, young women. “The girls’ femininity more often featured testing boundaries rather than transcending them” (Christian-Smith, 115). With low expectations for reality, these girls found clarity, strength in the romance novels of female aptitude, however subject to male interaction.

When considering the secondary narratives of Leslie and Alaska, it may similarly be argued that, while their competence attracts
a female reader, their damning ineptitude perpetuates the infeasibility of feminism. *Looking for Alaska*, in a minor way, does involve romance and a girl acting capably. Alaska portrays strength and keenness, and also happens to have many male admirers. She is arguably a role model for these low-performing teenage readers. And while Green's language and narrative complexity may transcend the average teen paperback, it *still* is a teen paperback. As such, it is arguably just as likely to fall into the hands of these easily impressionable readers. Yet, where other young romance novels may preserve heretofore-accepted female behavior, *Looking for Alaska* suggests that any deviance is futile, or worse. Perhaps neither stance is especially worse than the other, but would a teenage reader more easily read into the happily-ever-after narrative of an average high schooler, or the tragic fall of the self-proclaimed outsider? In a society where disaster is far more newsworthy than blessing, the author must exercise caution in use of his or her calamitous power.

Perhaps, however, authors may intend for secondary characters to serve as examples of precisely how not to live. In her article *Junior Fiction: A Feminist Critique*, Sharon Wigutoff discusses her 1980 study of gender roles in realistic fiction for “young people ages nine to 14” (Wigutoff, 5). She admits difficulty in recommending some novels because frequently “fully drawn, commendable central characters often share pages with flat, stereotypical secondary characters” (Wigutoff, 6). And she is not discussing fluff novels in these cases, but works by such esteemed and award-winning authors as Lois Lowry and Betsy Byars. Wigutoff agrees that some authors may use minor characters as accounts of the unjust, or perhaps not to make a commentary at all. But, regardless of their intent, these authors must recognize that, when they write, they inherently are making a
commentary. “The problem comes when sexism or racism in a story is presented uncritically, in a manner that validates its existence by not questioning it in some way” (Wigutoff, 6). This concern is exactly why Leslie and Alaska cannot act and think in the way they do, and then die seemingly as a result. Whether the authors choose to recognize it or not, their fictional narratives are a reaction to and an interpretation of non-fictional truths. By esteeming these characters for their feminist merits, making them objects of desire and inspiration, Green and Paterson are praising feminism. Yet, what do Alaska and Leslie’s endings say about these authors’ thoughts on the future of feminism and its existence in the contemporary? They are critical, but not of the correct phenomenon. In a backwards way, these authors are arguing for the norm rather than the progressive through the female secondary characters in their narratives.

Regarding feminist goals, I reject the desire to “have it all.” In fact, I reject the term outright for glamorizing what should be a given. Because, when a woman thinks about “having it all,” she thinks about a stable career, maybe a family, and maybe not to be treated as if these aspirations are so dreamy. These authors are offering confusing stances on feminism, and encouraging a more normative, submissive view of women as a result. Through their use of feminist, ambitious female characters, Green and Paterson are admitting to the approachability of these women at the very least. However, by also not blatantly admonishing the deaths of these characters, Green and Paterson are appearing to support the infeasibility of feminism. Gender equality is not for sure just yet, and until humankind can live without, to quote Alaska, “the patriarchal paradigm,” (Green, 34) admirable female characters, however secondary, cannot die on their own account, because to do so is to reject the cause. The excellent and inspiring
nature of these characters is for naught; these authors have backpedaled where they could have flown.
Works Cited


On Feminist Theology and God’s Love

Julia Buff
Julia Buff is a member of the Notre Dame class of 2015, and is majoring in both Marketing and Theology. She is from Brooklyn, New York, and is the second of five children. She is interning with the Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin after graduation and starting work in Creative Strategy at an advertising agency in New York shortly thereafter. Her siblings, parents, and dog, as well as pizza and bagels, are immeasurably important to her.
The Catholic Church’s treatment of women, both today and in past millennium, has been rife with controversy and turbulence. While it should be noted that this is clearly not the intention of the Church, humanity, especially womankind, has suffered in a Church that has denied the full humanity of women and suppressed their voices. The patriarchal tradition is oppressive to women everywhere, who are primarily valued for their bodies’ capacity to produce children and whose voices and experiences have been forgotten and silenced throughout the history of the Church. In this context, how can women truly know that God loves them? Feminist theology recognizes the social sin of sexism and articulates women’s experiences and hopes for the future. Women such as Kwok Pui-Lan, Delores Williams, and Elizabeth Johnson articulate their understandings of feminist theology, Christianity, and God’s love in nuanced ways that reflect their historical backgrounds and Christian experiences. A transformation of the Church and of Christianity is necessary in order to answer this question for women in a way that will genuinely enable all of humanity to fully flourish and grow in God’s love.

The genesis of sexism in Catholicism can be traced back to biblical texts, both as a result of the nuances of the texts themselves and of problematic interpretations of various passages. One need only look at the first book of the First Testament in order to begin to grasp the ways in which biblical texts have been construed to dominate women. Tertullian, in his work On the Apparel of Women, speaks directly to all women when he claims that each woman is an Eve, saying, “You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man” (Book 1, Ch. 1). This sentiment continued to
flourish in Christianity, nourished by Christians such as St. Ambrose, a
doctor of the Church who is reported to have said, “Adam was led to sin
by Eve and not Eve by Adam. It is just and right that woman accept as
lord and master [the one] whom she led to sin” (Gnanadason, 70). This
understanding of the story of Adam and Eve has historically been used
as justification for the patriarchal structure of Catholicism and
Christianity as a whole. At the same time, the experiences of women in
the First Testament frequently go ignored. There are numerous
examples of passages where women are raped and exploited for the
self-interest of men: Genesis 19:8, where Lot offers his own daughters
to the men of Sodom to be raped, II Samuel 13, when Amnon raped his
half-sister, and II Samuel 11, where David utilizes his power to take
advantage of Bathsheba and have her husband killed, to name but a
select few. Women are remembered as having participated in the
original sin, but traditional interpretations of the First Testament
overlook men’s violent and oppressive treatment of women.

The Bible has been used to “promote the sin of patriarchy,” as
for “centuries interpreters have exploited [its] androcentrism to
articulate theology, to define the church, synagogue, and academy, and
to instruct human beings, female and male, in who they are, what roles
they should play, and how they should behave” (Trible, 233). This
continues into interpretations of women’s roles and experiences in the
Second Testament. Despite Jesus’ lived example, where he unceasingly
treats women with respect, dignity, and compassion, androcentric
verses abound in the Second Testament: for example, 1 Timothy 2:11-
14 refers to the creation story, claiming, “A woman should learn in
quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to

Other exegeses of this passage seek to redeem it, such as that of Phyllis Trible in “The
Pilgrim Bible on a Feminist Journey,” but those are by far the minority and more modern
interpretations.
assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” The agency of women is denied again in Ephesians 5:22-23, which states, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” Jesus’ example of respect and compassion towards women, including Martha, who serves him, Mary, who listens to him, and Mary Magdalene, who is the first to his tomb, frequently fails to be remembered by Fathers of the Church and traditional interpretations. Indeed, history has failed to even record the name of the woman at Bethany whom Jesus so highly praises when he says, “Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Matthew 26:13). It is clear that God deeply loves women, as God so loves all of humanity, but far too frequently Christianity and the Church have failed to live out and to communicate this love.

Early leaders and thinkers of the Church promoted patriarchy by holding up the passages that are damaging to women in the Bible and disregarded the positive and loving example that Jesus lived. Certain sayings by such men go even beyond the sexism present in the Bible in ways that make the aforementioned passages seem mild. St. John of Damascus, for example, stated that “woman is an evil animal, a hideous worm which makes its home in the heart of man” (Cronau, 82). In the sixth century, at the Council of Macon, it was argued whether women have souls; some Church Fathers at the time conceded that “women may possibly be permitted to rise as men at the resurrection” (ibid.). Even Thomas Aquinas, one of the most well regarded Doctors of the Church, referred to women as being of a “defective and
misbegotten” nature, continuing on to say that “the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition” (Summa, Question 92). To question the existence of women’s souls, the capacity for women to be resurrected, and to refer to women as defective or as animals and worms is to deny their humanity and to fail to live out the love of God.

While the tone used towards women has changed over time, detrimental sentiments towards women continue still in the modern patriarchal Church. Pope Francis, though he has spoken of wanting women to play a larger role in the Church, remains steadfast that women do not belong in the priesthood, and “has repeatedly embraced the traditional Catholic view that a woman’s role is in the home” (Moss and Baden). Pope Francis claimed that Europe is “a grandmother, no longer fertile and vibrant,” but “elderly and haggard,” an analogy that demonstrates a sentiment that women who may no longer bear children are not relevant or useful in the world (BBC News). While Pope Francis has expressed that women have a larger role in the Church outside of the family, “he seems to have trouble articulating that role in non-maternal terms, or at least in terms that are not circumscribed by the familial” (Moss and Baden). Elizabeth Johnson describes the Church as “an ecclesial community where official voice, vote, and visibility belong by law only to men” (109). Furthermore, Church writings on the “dignity of women,” such as Mulieris Dignitatem, are written by men and without women’s voices. The purposeful exclusion of women from positions of influence in the Church and the determination that women’s primary role is in the family demonstrate an attitude that denies the full humanity and capacity of women. A community structured this way cannot possibly fully flourish when it silences and oppresses half of its members. It does not follow in the example of the
love of Christ, who spoke with all women with love, respect, and compassion,\(^3\) and commanded his followers not to “lord it over” \(^4\) others, presumably including women.

Women of all backgrounds are increasingly raising their voices in protest of the Church’s present and historical treatment of women. These sentiments and calls for action and change are as diverse as the women who compose them, but they universally maintain that the present damaging, patriarchal structure must evolve. Only then can God’s love for all begin to be more fully articulated. When speaking of women’s experiences in the Church and in history, it is necessary to take into consideration factors such as race, class, and specific historical epoch as well, as no one woman’s experience can be universalized. Myriad nuances contribute to the way individuals experience reality and react accordingly. Elizabeth Johnson presents the example of cruelty to a black slave woman in the Antebellum American South, who is marginalized and abused not merely due to her sex, but as a result of her race and the economic system of slavery as well (“The Maleness of Christ,” 111). It is clear that, in striving to understand women’s experiences and to conceive of a Christian future where all may fully be accepted and included in the life of the Church, one must not ignore factors such as race and class.

As Kwok Pui-Lan, an Asian theologian, duly notes, there is no truly “universal” language when it comes to representing womankind (67). She states that the “lifting up of every voice, the celebration of diversity, the affirmation of plurality” all contribute in order to help glimpse the “amazing grace of God in all cultures and all peoples” (ibid.). Pui-Lan describes the significance of religious plurality for Asian

\(^3\) John 4:1-30, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 13:10-17, for example
\(^4\) Matthew 20:25-26
women, especially Christians who view their identity in relation to, not in conflict with or in spite of, the indigenous traditions of their homelands. She speaks of the arrival of Christianity in Asia from the perspective of a people whose cultures, ancestors, and gods and goddesses were condemned by the missionaries. Pui-Lan is opposed to what she refers to as a “religious imperialism” that is present in Christianity, as well as Christianity’s normalized sexism and the vehemently exclusive way its members speak about truth, revelation, the Bible, and Christ (68). She proposes that feminist theologians should “begin to redefine our Christian identity without using such expressions as ‘uniqueness,’ ‘special revelation,’ ‘highest fulfillment,’ or ‘outside the Church, no salvation’” (68). In this way, God’s love can be shown to all, even and especially those whose identities are fundamentally affected by and integrated into their indigenous traditions.

Pui-Lan likewise warns against the dangers of an inclusivist position, which acknowledges that truth and wisdom may be found in religions other than Christianity while maintaining the central belief in Jesus Christ. This belief, Pui-Lan challenges, pigeonholes other religions and fails to adequately respect them. She states that, “women of color have always found any inclusivist attitude to be patronizing because it tends to overlook real differences” (69). The third way, past inclusivism and exclusivism, that Pui-Lan speaks of is a pluralistic theology of religions. She presents the yin-yang philosophy as a way for envisioning relationships between numerous religions; Christianity is not mutually exclusive of other religions, but it and they are “correlated, interdependent, and interpenetrating” (69). Such an understanding enables humanity to share in religious heritage with honesty and integrity. Pui-Lan argues that, “as women trying to
transform the world religions for the sake of our own salvation, we have an obligation to empower each other by sharing what lies beyond patriarchy in our own traditions” (70).

Womanist theology is emerging among African-American Christian women. As Delores Williams puts it, a “womanist is a black feminist or feminist of color,” an identity which is “a way of affirming themselves as black while simultaneously owning their connection with feminism and with the Afro-American community, male and female” (“Womanist Theology”). The distinction between womanism and feminism enables womanist thinkers to participate in feminism while taking into consideration the idiosyncrasies of history, culture, and issues particular to black women. Womanists, according to Williams, are universalists in a way that entails loving men and other women, whether sexually or not, as well as dance, food, music, the spirit, and themselves. In womanism, there is no place for homophobia, colorism, class hierarchy, or competition for male attention. Womanists respect sexual preference, and acknowledge that color variety is part of what makes humanity connect with one another. Williams quotes Alice Walker in saying that “nor do women compete for male attention when they ‘...appreciate and prefer female culture...value...women’s emotional flexibility...and women's strength’” (“Womanist Theology”). At the same time, womanists recognize that genuine community building cannot occur when men are excluded.5 Womanists live lives of love through acceptance and community.

Delores Williams continues on to note the significance of mothering and nurturing for the womanist. This is not exclusive to women who bear children, but is characterized by black women who have nurtured “great numbers of black people in the liberation

5 With Williams’ added caveat of “except for health”
struggle” (e.g., Harriet Tubman), as womanist “emphasis upon the value of mothering and nurturing is consistent with the testimony of many black women” (“Womanist Theology”). She suggests that these indispensable dimensions of Afro-American history could be used to provide resources to shape the measurement of quality of justice in communities. Mothering and nurturing, in other words, could be used to effect the transformation of history and of justice in black communities. Williams states that they could additionally be used to “gauge the community’s division of labor with regard to the survival tasks necessary for building and maintaining community” (ibid.).

Christian womanist theological methodology builds off of the communal values of womanism. For Williams, it needs to be influenced by at least four elements: a multidialogical intent, a liturgical intent, a didactic intent, and a commitment both to reason and to “the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in the construction of theological statements” (“Womanist Theology”). Similar to Pui-Lan’s call for a pluralistic theology of religions, womanism’s multidialogical intent calls for advocacy and participation in dialogue and action with multiple and diverse social, political, and human communities. These necessarily are concerned with human survival and the assurance of productive quality of life for the oppressed. The liturgical intent of womanist theology “will be relevant to (and will reflect) the thought, worship, and action of the black church...[but] also allow womanist theology to challenge the thought/worship/action of the black church with the discordant and prophetic messages emerging from womanist participation in multidialogics” (ibid.). This aspect of womanist theology questions parts of the black church tradition that, like other forms of Christianity, are harmful to women or depict negative portrayals of blackness, darkness, and economic justice. These harmful
facets of tradition must be omitted or radically transformed by the black church. The Bible, too, must be scrutinized. Finally, the didactic aspect of womanist theological method assigns a teaching function to this theology, which “should teach Christians new insights about moral life based on ethics supporting justice for women, survival, and a productive quality of life for poor women, children, and men” (ibid.). This entails black folk wisdom, such as Brer Rabbit literature, and black women’s moral wisdom, expressed in their literature, being given authoritative status. Ultimately, womanist theology must articulate and teach the plentiful ways in which God reveals the prophetic word and action Christian living entails.

Womanist theological language is rich in its imagistic content and reason, and female imagery, metaphor, and story are integral to it. It seeks to answer, for black women, the famous question, “Who do you say God is?” Black womanists’ love of the spirit is reflected in their interpretations of and experiences with biblical stories that involve poor and oppressed women specially encountering divine emissaries of God, such as the spirit. Some black Christian women regard themselves to be Hagar’s sisters, and encourage others to do the same. Christian womanist theologians can focus on the salvation story in a way that “emphasizes the beginning of revelation with the spirit mounting Mary, a woman of the poor” (“Womanist Theology”). This is rooted in a story about Sojourner Truth, who was told by a white preacher that men and women could not have equal rights because Christ was not a woman, to which she refuted, “Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin’ to do wid Him!” (ibid.) The way womanist theologians speak of God can be in a theology of the spirit that is well

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6 Williams’ *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenges of Womanist God-Talk*, offers an enlightening and empowering interpretation of Hagar’s story in Genesis 16:1-16 and Genesis 21:9-21, for example.
developed. Harriet Tubman, too, took strength from the spirit before her liberation missions. These examples are but a small sample of the grounds womanist theology has for developing a theology of the spirit and speaking of God in a way that is informed and inspired by black women’s political actions. Womanist theology will continue to grow and develop as it adds voices, and will “one day present itself in full array, reflecting the divine spirit that connects us all” (ibid.).

Elizabeth Johnson, a white American feminist theologian, argues that the historical maleness of Christ is construed in a way that distorts the good news Christ came to bring. While Jesus of Nazareth was inarguably male, she claims that his sex is “a constitutive element of his historical person along with other particularities such as his Jewish racial identity, his location in the world of first-century Galilee,” and is not “essential to his redeeming christic function and identity” (Johnson, 108). She points to three manners in which Jesus’ maleness is interpreted in distorted ways. The first asserts that, as Jesus is believed to be the revelation of God, the Christ symbol has been understood in a manner that points to maleness as being essential to divine nature itself. This has been taken in the history of Christianity to mean that Jesus is “the incarnation of the male Logos and revealer of a male Father-God, despite the evidence in scripture and tradition that the mystery of God transcends all naming and creates female reality in the divine image and likeness” (108-109). Johnson’s second description of distorted interpretation describes the belief that, as men’s bodies more physically resemble Christ’s, men are more closely identified with Christ than women are. Men’s capacity for being christomorphic

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7 This is evident in relatively recent Church documents. For example, Inter Insigniores speaks of the importance of Christ’s maleness when it states that the priest, in the celebration of the Eucharist, takes the role of Christ “to the point of being his very image.” The role of Christ cannot be taken by a woman, the argument follows, because she would
surpasses what is possible for women when the maleness of Christ is interpreted as having been fundamental to his divine nature. Finally, Johnson argues that, if maleness is necessary for the christic role, women are “cut out of the loop of salvation, for female sexuality was not assumed by the Word made flesh” (109).

Each of the aforementioned distortions of the nature of Christ’s maleness is deeply problematic and harmful for women, and it is “short-sighted to single out sexuality as always and everywhere more fundamental to concrete historical existence than any of the other constants,” such as race, class, historical conditioning, culture, etc. (111). Women are, in this manner, viewed as being less close to God and to Christ than men are, as men can more fully participate in the divine nature solely by virtue of the fact that they, like Christ, are male. This construal of Christ’s maleness has been and is used to marginalize and exclude women in the Church. It has led to androcentric construction of gender differences in a Church that views women as passive because the patriarchal tradition deems them to be submissive. Johnson speaks of traditional understandings of gender complementarity, which is narrow and restrictive as it claims to determine the qualities each gender should cultivate, as well as the roles that each gender should perform. She states that complementarity is naïve with regards to “its own social conditioning, its reliance on stereotypes, and the denial of the wholeness of human experience which it mandates,” and that “this position functions as a smokescreen for the subordination of women since by its definition women are always relegated to the private, passive realm” (110).

lack the “‘natural resemblance’ which must exist between Christ and his minister” and “it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ.”
Johnson seeks to move past this restrictive and damaging view of humanity and gender by celebrating one human nature that is composed of “an interdependence of multiple differences” (110). Such an understanding of humanity and of distinctions between individuals enables us to celebrate the plethora of ways in which one can be human. Envisioning sexuality and gender in a manner which takes into consideration all of the nuances of an individual’s nature allows a more accurate conception of men and women’s relationships to one another. Johnson acknowledges that sex discrimination must not be overemphasized while racial and class prejudices are forgotten, but rather, sexuality must “be integrated into a holistic vision of human persons instead of being made the touchstone of personal identity and thus distorted” (111). Ultimately, Johnson argues, the anthropological model of one human nature must be understood in a manner that allows connection through distinctions and celebrates diversity as something that is positive and valued by all. Differences, rather than being seen as “regrettable obstacle[s] to community, can function as a creative community-shaping force” (112).

Johnson’s proposal for renewed anthropological understanding entails a new understanding of Christ, whose true example and story could never be used to justify patriarchal dominance and androcentric teachings. Had a woman preached the way Jesus did, with a message of compassionate love and service, she “would have been greeted with a colossal shrug,” as that is “what women are supposed to do by nature” (112). She refers to the cross as the kenosis of patriarchy, which self-empties “male dominating power in favour of the new humanity of compassionate service and mutual empowerment” (112). The maleness of Jesus is significant not because it reflects God’s character or divine nature but because more men
should be like Jesus. Johnson argues that Christ is linked to the very creation of the world through New Testament wisdom Christology that depict Christ as Sophia’s child, prophet, and even her incarnation.\(^8\) Such a Christology of Jesus Sophia invalidates male dominating language about Jesus that refers to him being the eternal male Logos or son of the Father, instead allowing articulation of Christology in strong female metaphors. Distinction on the basis of sex, for Christ, is not necessary, for all are one in Christ Jesus. Biblical passages, such as Galatians 3:28\(^9\) and Acts 9:1-15,\(^10\) as well as the baptismal liturgy communicate the “reality that the fundamental capacity to be icons of Christ is a gift not restricted by sex,” as “women are the Body of Christ” (114). Should the equal human dignity of women be justly and fully recognized in the ecclesial theory and praxis, the question of Christ’s gender will become irrelevant.

The history of Christianity, specifically within the Catholic Church, has distorted Christ’s example of love towards women in a manner that has denied the full humanity of women, suppressed women’s flourishing, and failed to articulate God’s love for women. Christ’s example is one of love, respect, and support for women’s voices and experiences. Women of various backgrounds and cultures respond to the treatment of women in Christianity in manners that individually reflect their experiences, but represent common sentiments. Johnson speaks of the need for a community of one that celebrates its differences, as Pui-Lan expresses a desire for a humanity that is empowered through sharing of religious heritage. Williams, too, urges

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\(^8\) Johnson cites Luke 11:49, Matthew 23:34, and John 1 when making this claim.
\(^9\) “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
\(^10\) Where Jesus explicitly identifies himself with those who are persecuted, both men and women, without distinction or qualification.
for communication with and participation in diverse communities. All women answer the question of God’s love for women with a call for change in Christianity in manners that reflect Christ’s love and lived example. Only when the Church evolves in a way that empowers and enables women to live fully in Christ will God’s love, for both men and women, be fully lived on Earth.
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Manufactured Masculinity: Observing Constructions of Heteronormative Masculinity within a University Weight Room

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Sean Tenaglia (Class of 2016) is majoring in American Studies with minors in Education, Schooling, and Society, and Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy. He wrote this paper in the Fall of 2014 as an ethnographic study for his “Schooling Masculinities” course, taught by Professor Kevin Burke. His primary research interests include examining constructions of masculinity in schools, particularly within athletic and social settings. Following graduation, Sean plans to pursue a career in education.
As Lil Wayne raps “guns turn you boys into pussies, sex change” in the background, twenty-something year-old men lift heavy objects and put them down. The eyes of these young men are constantly shifting. Some look at themselves in the mirrors that line the walls. Others glance quickly at their counterparts. In the weight room of a large Catholic university, the theme of “looking” is not only paramount, but also perpetual. In this space, the weight room’s users—predominantly men—are simultaneously doing the looking and being looked at. However, they are not alone. In fact, they are joined in the act of observation by an unexpected and often ignored outside party.

Although he has been dead for nearly fifty years, a priest remains a very real presence in the weight room. His portrait, which hangs halfway down one wall in the room, has immortalized him in this space (see Appendix Photo 1). While the painting may often go unnoticed by young men who are busy performing their lifting routines, the priest’s presence establishes the ideal form of masculinity to be conducted in the weight room. In the portrait, he sports a sleeveless forest green vest, akin to something a military drill sergeant might wear. Even on a predominantly Catholic campus, you would be hard-pressed to find any priest wearing such an outfit. He also sports a scowl on his face that seems to convey a look of disappointment. One could almost picture him over a half century ago yelling at one of his young charges to “Do better!” and finish his repetitions. A plaque beneath his portrait lists him as a “priest, scholar, strongman, and friend.” It also states that he coached a national collegiate championship weightlifting team, and was “rated the fourth strongest man in the world” by one of the leading weightlifting authorities of the early twentieth century. Most importantly, the positioning of the portrait casts the priest’s eyes
downward on the subjects of the weight room. Even if it goes unnoticed, “Big Brother” (or in this case, “Big Father”) is certainly always watching.

I begin my ethnographic study with this anecdotal description of the priest’s portrait because it illustrates the “ideal” form of masculinity to be performed in the weight room. Of course, the priest has been gone from the university for several decades, and there are no coaches or gym teachers present in the weight room to direct and guide routines and appropriate behavior. Nevertheless, the same routines of heteronormative masculinity are performed day in, day out in the space. Self-regulation and self-policing of “appropriate” masculine behavior is performed and reinforced by the (mostly) young men who make use of the space. Recent research in the field of gender studies has acknowledged the presence of multiple masculinities and possibilities for subversion of normative gender structures (Connell). While I certainly accounted for these subversive possibilities in my research, it was very rare to witness anyone transgress the “ideal” form of heteronormative masculinity.

In the university weight room, bodies are constantly on display. Whether or not they measure up, the vast majority of the men who use the space attempt to create and display this idealized, heteronormative body- lean, sculpted, and muscular. I have already touched on the importance of “looking” in the weight room. This theme was prominent in my research, as several anecdotes will later illustrate. The differentiated use of space, as well as the complex process of rule-making and breaking, also emerged as central motifs within my observations. Through the act of “looking,” the repetition of specific lifting routines, and the process of unspoken rule making/breaking,
young men in the university weight room perform an “ideal” form of heteronormative masculinity and isolate anyone who seeks to challenge this “ideal.”

**Literature Review**

Recent research, particularly within the field of gender studies in the last twenty years, has examined the construction, definition, and subversion of masculinity. Much of this research serves as a framework for this paper. While not everything from these studies and surveys is pertinent to my own research, I nevertheless utilized several of their arguments and observations to shape the structure and findings of my own ethnography.

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* is one of the foundational texts of queer theory and challenges the assumed dichotomous systems of sex and gender. Butler elucidates the idea of gender performativity, which involves the “repeated stylization of the body.” In this sense, gender is always “a doing,” an action that is constantly performed and changing (Butler 34). She also notes that if sexuality is culturally constructed, then the idea of a “normative” sexuality is impossible (Butler 42). Butler dismisses the idea of a gender binary, arguing that performativity provides for a broad spectrum of gender performances. Although I mainly observed performances of heteronormative masculinity, I nevertheless utilized Butler’s theories to frame my ethnographic research within the weight room.

In *Masculinities*, R.W. Connell confronts normative gender roles by arguing that there are multiple forms of masculinity that will grant power to different people depending on their unique setting and cultural context. This concept of multiple masculinities has become a
foundational piece of subsequent research within the field of gender studies, and it certainly framed my own observations in this paper. Building off the work of Butler, Connell makes the important point that if masculinity is expressed as a bodily performance, then gender becomes vulnerable when that performance can no longer be sustained (Connell 54). As my analysis will reveal, this concept is particularly important within the space of the weight room. When young men fail to perform a particular exercise or number of repetitions (“reps”), their masculinity comes into question among their peers. Connell also notes throughout the course of her research that masculinity does not exist “except in contrast with femininity” (Connell 68). Our assumed dichotomous gender structure posits biological males and females against one another. Thus, when a man appears “less masculine,” such as by lifting lightweight dumbbells, he becomes associated with femininity. This issue also comes into play in my own observations.

Michael Kimmel’s *Manhood in America* offers an exhaustive history of the construction of manhood in our nation. Drawing on many sources and his own observations, Kimmel notes that “men have no history,” meaning that few studies and books have focused on the experience of being a man in America (*Manhood* 1). Although he recognizes Connell’s concept of multiple masculinities, he focuses on describing the “dominant version of masculinity in America,” which has primarily been built on the “fear of being dominated” (*Manhood* 5). Importantly, Kimmel describes manhood as “homosocial” with “the evaluative eyes of other men always upon us” (*Manhood* 5). Homosocial regulation and “looking” are constantly occurring within the weight room space.
In constructing the history of manhood in America, Kimmel notes that around the turn of the twentieth century, manhood was replaced by masculinity. As Connell argues, masculinity became naturally “contrasted with femininity” and had to be “constantly demonstrated” (*Manhood* 89). The life of Charles Atlas was echoed by the portrayal of Superman/Clark Kent, leading to the idea that “muscles were the key to national salvation” (*Manhood* 153). By the end of the twentieth century, standards of muscularity had become so entrenched in the national culture that many men developed muscle dysmorphia, or feelings of insufficiency pertaining to their own bodies (*Manhood* 246). Kimmel cites a survey in which half of the respondents report body image disturbances (*Manhood* 247). The faulty belief that everyone must “look like Greek gods,” combined with the fear of being judged inadequate by one’s peers, has led to many problems, particularly among young men (*Manhood* 247). These problems and fears are constantly observed within the space of the weight room.

Kimmel continues his exploration of masculinity in *Guyland*, which examines “psychological insights and sociological analysis” for males between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six (*Guyland* 22). My observations of college-age students in the weight room fit nicely with Kimmel’s analysis and studies of college campuses. At these ages, men are “directionless and clueless, relying on their peers to usher them into adulthood and validate their masculinity” (*Guyland* 43). Once again, he finds that there are “more possible identities” within masculinity, but that men “risk everything if they fail to conform” (*Guyland* 17, 51). The men in my research risk being labeled as “unmasculine” if they fail to conform to the expectations of the “gender police.” One point that I feel is particularly relevant to my observations
is the idea that girls live in Guyland, but they “do not define it, and must contend with it” (Guyland 15). Females are certainly allowed inside the weight room, but when they do enter the space—which is rare—they most certainly become outcasts and must subject themselves to the “look” of males.

Michael Atkinson and Michael Kehler explore the construction of masculinity in high school locker rooms in their work, “Boys, Gyms, Locker Rooms and Heterotopia.” Their research consists of observations and interviews with boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen in Ontario, Canada. Although their research takes place with a younger age group and outside of the country, I still believe there are several important concepts within their analysis that help to frame my work. They explore the concept of heterotopia, or a space outside of mainstream society in which “identities are enforced in both traditional and nontraditional ways” (Atkinson and Kehler 74). The high school locker room becomes a heterotopia for boys who are “forced to publicly confess their deficiencies on a regular basis” within an “unregulated, protected, adult-free zone” (Atkinson and Kehler 79, 81). In these secluded spaces, dominant males can exert heteronormative, hegemonic views of masculinity over their peers. High school locker rooms are certainly a very different space than a college weight room, but I still feel that the concept of an unregulated heterotopia is very applicable to the space in which I conducted my observations. The authors also note that when physical activity becomes associated with the “right” kind of masculinity, those who do conform to these masculine ideals can become labeled as “stupid jocks” (Atkinson and Kehler 84). This point is important because it recognizes
that the concept of an “ideal” masculinity harms relationships and opinions for all those involved.

Several ethnographic studies served as models upon which I could structure my own research methods and analysis. Barrie Thorne’s observation and analysis of gender interactions among elementary school students in Gender Play was particularly useful. In her observations, Thorne focused on the concept of “borderwork,” or “interactions across or based on gender boundaries” (Thorne 64). One of the key motifs she discovered in this analysis of borderwork was the use of “pollution,” or the threat of kisses or “cooties,” by girls to gain power and emasculate boys (Thorne 83). Pollution is not necessarily an issue within my research, likely because college students are well past puberty and beyond the “fear-of-cooties” phase. Nevertheless, these concepts of borderwork and pollution shaped my observations of those rare occasions when members of both genders interacted within the weight room.

Building off the work of researchers before her, C.J. Pascoe investigates the relationships between gender and sexuality within a high school setting in Dude, You’re a Fag. In her observations, she notes that students within the high school hold each other accountable for “doing gender” correctly (Pascoe 13). Of particular interest and relevance to my own research were her observations within gendered spaces in the school. In her research within the school’s weight room, Pascoe finds that “masculinity is assumed to be synonymous with heterosexuality” in such a gendered space (Pascoe 85). This finding corroborates my analysis of the college’s weight room. Within this predominantly male space, conversations and behaviors assume and construct heteronormative ideals of gender and sexuality.
Kevin Burke’s ethnographic research within an all-male, Chicago area high school serves as a final model for my observation methods and analysis. Burke sat in as a student to conduct his research, and interacted with students in all of the spaces they would visit throughout the course of a typical school day. Although in a slightly different environment, as a student at this large Catholic university, I am able to sit in and blend in within the weight room to conduct my own research. Burke’s analysis of girls as “squishes” and the “abjectified other” is particularly useful to my observations. The high school acted as a “buffer,” or a “protected space from the abject other,” as boys were relatively free from all interactions with females during the school day (Burke 106). This idea does not apply directly to my observations within the weight room, but the room certainly acted as a separate male space. Whenever a female does enter the space, she is playing by rules of the males surrounding her.

**Methodology**

In order to observe constructions of masculinity within a weight room setting, I chose to perform five one-hour observation sessions within the university’s weight room. As far as I could discern from my review of the current body of literature on masculinity, there has been very little research pertaining to gender roles in a weight room space at the college level. Thus, I am glad to be able to add to the current body of literature in gender studies, while also exploring a potentially new area of research. Before I elucidate my observation methods, I would just like to say a few things about the space in which I performed my ethnographic research. The university’s gymnasium was built in the 1930s, and its Gothic architecture serves as a reminder of the relative age of the building. However, despite its age, it remains a
popular destination, and at any time of day, one may find the basketball
courts, swimming pool, and weight room packed with students. A
newer fitness and recreation center was built in the 1990s and sits on
the opposite side of campus. Featuring an open layout and brand new
facilities, the space offers students a workout experience quite different
from what they would find at the older gymnasium. Ultimately, I chose
to perform my observations in the older gym as opposed to the fitness
center because I felt that the weight room was a traditional space in
which masculinity would constantly be on display. Although some of
the equipment certainly has changed, the size and secluded position of
the space has not, allowing me to observe masculinity as it also could
have been on display decades ago. I acknowledge that a major
limitation of my research is that my findings are not necessarily
generalizable to other workout spaces, including the one on the other
side of campus. I believe, however, that many of the behaviors and
interactions I observed are still applicable to students of this age group.

My five one-hour sessions of observation were performed on
three Monday nights and two Wednesday afternoons. The weight
room is open daily from 7:00 AM to 8:30 AM, and 3:30 PM to 11:00 PM.
In my experience, the room’s peak hours are in the afternoon before
dinner (4:30 PM-6:00 PM), and a couple hours after dinner (8:00 PM-
10:00 PM). Thus, in order to maximize my observations, I chose to
perform my research during these two windows of time. I acknowledge
that this method does not account for how interactions and behavior
may change at different times of the day when varying numbers of
students may be utilizing the space. Nevertheless, I am confident that
my decision to observe during these time periods granted me a large

11 The Monday dates were November 3, 10, and 17; the Wednesday dates, November 5
and 12.
enough sample to discover findings and come to conclusions that are
typical within the space of the university’s weight room.

Originally, I planned to conduct my research by sitting on the
near wall of the weight room near the staff attendant. I thought that this
position would grant me the widest view of the space and allow me to
observe nearly every action taking place. It did do this, but I felt too
removed from the action. I could barely hear conversations, and
sometimes it was difficult to see just exactly what someone was doing
on the far side of the room. Thus, after my first session of observation, I
chose to conduct my research while working out on my own. I took
field notes in between my exercises, pretending to be logging
repetitions and exercises in my notebook. This decision to essentially
become a “spy behind enemy lines” allowed me to immerse myself in
the space of the weight room and get “up close and personal” with my
subjects. Of course, this change in methodology limited my research by
restricting my observations to whatever was directly in front of me at
the time. I may have missed some important interactions or
conversations while performing my own repetitions. However, I feel
that the benefits of this methodological change easily outweigh the
limitations, as I was able to conduct much more thorough research, as
my analysis section will soon illustrate.

There are several other limitations that certainly impacted my
ethnographic research in the weight room. By literally inserting myself
into my own observations, I naturally biased my findings to what I
directly could witness or experience. Also, as a regular user of the
space, I have established a typical routine of exercises and repetitions
in the weight room. My personal biases to specific workout routines
would compel me to associate myself with some users and cast
judgment upon others. Particularly in those instances where observations were based more on critical judgments, my own biases certainly shaped my findings. Many of my friends utilize the weight room as well, which always presented an interesting dynamic whenever I observed them in the space. Once again, my personal biases may have given my friends “a break” when they did something I would have considered unusual or inappropriate by another one of my subjects. Finally, as a predominantly male space, the weight room has a noticeable lack of interactions across gender boundaries. I would have liked to observe more interactions between genders to see how masculinity changes, if at all, around females. My analysis will illustrate those rare instances of cross-gender interactions in the space.

Analysis

Over the course of my five hours of observation, I saw and heard a lot of things within the university’s weight room. I begin my research with very few expectations or set decisions, hoping to see as much as possible within my observation time. Over the course of my research, several major patterns began to appear. Ultimately, the act of “looking,” the use of space within the weight room, and the process of rule-making/breaking emerged as the central motifs of my ethnography. Through various anecdotes, this section will elaborate on these motifs and discuss several important “sub-patterns” that emerged throughout my research.

“Looking”

As the introduction to this ethnography illustrated, nearly every action and behavior within the university’s weight room is based on the act of “looking.” Whether looking at oneself, the other males
around you, or the few females who entered the space, eyes are constantly locked on someone in the weight room. As a researcher conducting observations in the space, I experienced a form of “meta-looking,” watching people who were watching other people. The process of looking becomes tied to performances of the “ideal” heteronormative masculinity.

This process of looking starts and ends with the mirrors that line all four walls of the weight room. These mirrors certainly perform a very important function within the space. Users performing various exercises, especially complicated lifts, can utilize the mirrors to make sure that their form is acceptable. For some lifters, the mirrors serve as a safety feature, helping them to maintain their balance, such as when performing a squatting lift. Despite their functional utility and importance, however, the mirrors instead become conduits through which masculinity is observed and policed. Many users look at themselves when lifting, focusing on the movement and growth of their own muscles. In one instance, I observed a man in a black tank top who could not stop looking at his arms, even when resting between sets of triceps pulldowns. This example illustrates the narcissistic potential inherent in mirrors lining the walls of a weight room. In a way, they almost create a form of “self-homoeroticism,” as the act of looking becomes tied to an attraction of sorts to one’s own muscles and body. However, because the weight room and lifting process is so tied to masculinity, the act of looking at one’s muscles becomes an expression of the “ideal” masculinity. If you can see the definition of your muscles, and at the very least think you are getting “bigger,” then you can present yourself as masculine. As Kimmel notes in *Manhood in America*,
once you feel that you look like a “Greek god,” you can apply the hypermasculine traits associated with these divine beings to yourself.

When someone’s eyes are not locked on a mirror or focused on a lifting routine, they are on a constant swivel to look at something, or someone. At nearly every moment in the weight room, no matter how sneaky or unintentional it may be, somebody is looking at somebody else. In this predominantly male space, men cannot hide from the “evaluative eyes of other men” (*Manhood* 5). The “gender police” of *Guyland* are a constant presence in the weight room, establishing the acceptable norms of masculine behavior and activity at all times. For example, when a young man performed an exercise routine that involved jumping up and down on a bench normally reserved for heavy chest press routines, I observed at least five separate pairs of eyes locked on the man. Although he was not forced out of the space and no one said a word to him, the sheer influence of that many eyes focused on one person was very noticeable. Their unspoken message that this was not an acceptable exercise through which to demonstrate one’s masculinity appeared to ring loud and clear throughout the weight room.

Clothes and appearance become indelibly tied to the act of looking within the university’s weight room. In general, the clothing worn in the space is composed of typical workout gear—Under Armour, Nike shoes, etc. Rarely are flashy colors or outfits seen in the space, which just reflects the conformity to the masculine ideals established in the weight room. Tank tops and sleeveless cutoff tee shirts are not only acceptable, but also commonplace in the weight room. These clothing items, which expose the arm muscles, aid and abet the process of
looking and allow dominant males to display their masculine, muscular bodies for all to see.

Particularly within the context of the process of looking, it is important to note those rare occasions in which interactions occurred across gender boundaries. I found it interesting that the majority of the weight room attendants during my hours of observation were female. Thus, for a significant period of time, they are the only members of their sex in a very male-dominated space. The fact that they sit near the door, far away from the action of most of the males working out, highlights Burke's discussion of the "abjectified other." They maintain their distance, preventing any threat against masculinity from taking hold. In one separate instance, a girl walked into the space to return a medicine ball. She quickly walked to the far end of the room to return the ball to its rightful place, but could not leave the room without first being subjected to several pairs of eyes. In the weight room, Thorne's "borderwork" is tense and brief as males seek to eliminate any threat to their masculine world.

Use of Space

Throughout my observations, the differentiated use of space emerged as a major pattern that emphasized the ideal performance of heteronormative masculinity. Before I get into a more detailed description of which spaces were utilized more often, I would like to first return briefly to Atkinson and Kehler’s discussion of heterotopia. I would not necessarily label the weight room as a heterotopia, mainly because its users actively choose to utilize the space, in contrast to the high school students in their research who were forced to participate in physical education classes. However, it remains a relatively
“unregulated, adult-free zone” in which masculine identities are generally conveyed by dominant males to all users of the space.

At least in my own observations, it became obvious to me who were the “regulars” in the weight room and who were the “outcasts.” The “regulars” were generally larger, more fit men who moved about the space with an air of confidence about them. The “outcasts” were generally smaller and appeared more uncomfortable or unfamiliar with a set workout routine. Members of both groups rarely interacted, but when they did, the tension surrounding the definition of ideal masculinity was palpable. For example, in one instance, a smaller student, whom I would place under the “outcast” category, was attempting to perform an incline bench press and dropped the bar on his legs. A “regular” came over and asked, “You need a spot bro?” The “outcast” responded with a quick “no thanks” as his face turned red and he tried to hide his embarrassment. This interaction illustrates the idea that any signs of weakness or inadequacy within the weight room instantly call into question one’s masculinity. With people like the “regulars” constantly watching, there is no escape from the performance of masculine ideals.

Certain exercises and weight stations were clearly established as “fan favorites,” so to speak, of the men who work out in the weight room. The four bench press stations, the three squat racks, and the dumbbell rack along the far wall of the room were almost constantly in use throughout my observations. These stations, which are mainly associated with low repetition, high weight exercises, seem to be perceived as the easiest route to masculinity. Heavy weight = big muscles = “true masculinity.” Or so, that is how the vast majority of men in the weight room perceive it. What is most interesting about these
exercise stations is that they are all located in roughly the same area of
the weight room, along the far wall. Thus, when students gravitate
toward these stations, it creates somewhat of a segregation of the
space.

Observing what the young men do not use in the weight room
can be just as important as focusing on those stations that are utilized
most often. Inflatable balancing balls and yoga mats, which are
generally associated with women, sit along the far wall and went
relatively untouched. Only one student made use of a balancing ball
during my period of observation. The weight machines that sit near the
entrance of the room and away from the popular lifting stations also
were rarely used during my research. These machines, which allow
users to press weight while seated, seemed to carry a certain stigma to
them. By opting for these seated exercises over bench presses or
squats, users actively pass up an opportunity to express their
masculinity. While a bench press allows you to show everyone how
much weight you can lift, a seated chest press, in effect, hides the
weight you are lifting. Thus, the general attitude toward the machines
seems to be, “If you can’t lift a lot or don’t know what you are doing, go
use them.” Anyone who actively chooses to use the machines risks
having his masculinity called into question and being labeled an
“outcast.” In one instance, I saw a young man use a machine as his rest
station in between sets of heavy-weighted deadlifts. By associating the
machines with rest, hidden weight, and inadequacy, the users of the
weight room imply that you cannot be truly masculine if you use them.
In a way, the machines become the source of “pollution” that Thorne
discusses in *Gender Play*. Despite the lack of girls in the space, the
weight machines perform the same emasculating function for the
young men in the weight room. As I have already discussed, the routines and exercises utilized by the majority of students create a spatial tension within the room. It is when these routines are broken, which is rare, that the gaze of the masculine “gender police” becomes even more powerful.

Rule Making/Breaking

Within the weight room, there are certain rules that are written out and expected of all users. For example, there are several signs posted throughout the room that read, “Please use a spotter and clips for all pressing lifts.” I cannot count the number of times I saw this rule broken in my brief stint of observation. Whether due to indifference or the fear of calling out someone publicly, I never saw an attendant enforce the rule. I cite this example because I think it illustrates an important reality about the construction of masculinity in the weight room. The bench press is one of the most popular lifts in the space, likely due to the fact that it involves high weight and emphasizes the bulk of a man’s chest and arms. If a man can bench press a lot of weight without the backup of a spotter, he can fully demonstrate his masculine physique and demeanor. By allowing this rule to be constantly broken, the weight room attendants and users avoid any uncomfortable situations that would challenge someone’s masculinity.

While the making and breaking of written rules is important, I paid more attention in my observations to the unwritten rules that were constantly shaped and enforced by the weight room’s users. One of the unwritten rules that I discovered over the course of my research was the idea that you do not talk in the room, unless within a group. If someone is lifting by himself, he should be left alone- end of story.
Many lifters passively promote this unwritten rule by wearing headphones and listening to music, blocking out any outside distractions. All that should matter in this space, according to this rule, is concentrating on your body and lifts to emphasize your masculinity. This rule can be transgressed, however, when lifting in a group. On one occasion, two students joined a lifter who was performing a clean and jerk.\(^{12}\) The lifter shouted, “Cool, I have fans now!” and proceeded to laugh and joke about proper lifting forms. As this example illustrates, lifters can demonstrate their masculinity by joking and poking fun at their own lifting abilities. The lifter in this example had a rapt audience ready and willing to watch his body on display. In a separate instance, a spotter yelled “C’mon, one more rep! I know you got it in you!” at his friend who was bench pressing. Although this shouting drew a few sets of eyes, including my own, the words of encouragement were considered acceptable. As long as talking reinforces someone’s masculinity and strength, it seems to be allowed within the space.

Another unspoken rule within the weight room is to avoid contact and interactions with other lifters as much as possible while going about your own routine. Lifters are expected to go about their own business and keep their distance as much as possible. However, when two men attempt to use the same station, the potential for conflict is created. Two students entered the room one night and immediately moved toward a bench press station, which unbeknownst to them, was being used by someone getting a drink of water. Rather than confront the two students, the original lifter moved to a different station and skirted around an uncomfortable situation. This example illustrates the general reality within the weight room that it is better to

\(^{12}\) This lifting maneuver is not allowed according to a written rule posted on the walls, but I witnessed several occasions in which the rule was transgressed.
adjust your routine than to potentially make a scene and become an “unmasculine outcast.” On another occasion, a young man grabbed a handle from a row station to use for pulldowns on an adjacent station. As this happened, another lifter came to use the row station, only to see the handle removed. Once again, rather than challenge the other man, the lifter said, “I’ll just use this one,” and picked up an alternate handle off the ground. Certainly in some spaces, conflict and aggressive behavior are viewed as ideal aspects of masculinity. However, within the confines of the weight room, conflict avoidance seems to be the behavior of choice. As Kimmel notes in *Manhood in America*, self-control is a central tenet of masculinity. By avoiding uncomfortable situations, the weight room users can focus on their own exercises, bodies, and masculinities without the fear of being labeled an “outcast.”

**Conclusion**

Considering the heteronormative form of masculinity performed in the university’s weight room and outlined in this paper, one may feel quite bleak about the prospects for subversion and change within the dichotomous gender structure. It is normal to feel this way, as the pressure to conform to expected norms of masculinity within this space certainly constricts and limits the expression of alternate gender views. As a researcher trying to be as objective as possible, I will admit that I found myself frustrated with the somewhat homogenous repetition of my observations. Nevertheless, I take comfort in those few occasions that challenged and transcended this “ideal” expression of masculinity. As some of my anecdotes illustrate, it may not be easy, but there are subtle ways to subvert hegemonic masculinity in this space.
For a hopeful outlook on this issue, I would look outside of the weight room to other spaces in our society that have already experienced challenges and changes to the dominant form of masculinity. Some scrawny, “nerdy” men have made billions of dollars by inventing gadgets that have transformed our daily culture. In several male dominant fields, including sports, openly gay men are starting to make inroads and become accepted as no different from any other athlete. I think it is important to recognize that the weight room is a predominantly male space that has been institutionalized for decades with the “ideal” form of heteronormative, heterosexual masculinity. As a result, it will take a longer period of time to break down long-standing gender boundaries and see dramatic change in the construction of masculinity within the space. Call me optimistic, but I believe that at some point- maybe not for many years- the weight room will play host to various accepted forms of masculinity.

One of the major frustrations associated with my research was the lack of interactions across gender boundaries within the university’s weight room. It would have been very interesting to examine constructions of femininity, in comparison and contrast to masculinity, in the space, and study the complex “borderwork” interactions that define and construct gender. This may have been better observed in a space such as the newer fitness and recreation center, but I am still glad to have had the opportunity to observe performances of the “ideal” masculinity in the older gymnasium. I believe that my research will serve as an interesting point of comparison for potential future studies in other weight room spaces. Particularly with young boys turning to unregulated supplements and steroids at a rapidly increasing rate, future studies of weight room
facilities will be crucial to developing a better understanding of these dangerous tendencies (Quenqua).

Ultimately, I think it is important to remember that bodies and gender are indelibly tied together. In the weight room, strong, muscular bodies demonstrate masculinity. Weak, small bodies are labeled as unmasculine. Connell notes that “no one is an innocent bystander” in our gendered world (Connell 86). Our bodies are on constant display, and our peers constantly police our behaviors and appearances. It may very well take conducting research in a hypermasculine environment such as the university weight room for us to realize that we are not only always being watched, but also watching ourselves.
Works Cited


“Occupation: Housewife”
Women’s Roles in Magazines During WWII and the Cold War: The Feminine Identity
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Introduction

The year was 1954. Zetta Wells was a beautiful blonde married to famed explorer Carveth Wells. She had a fascinating career of her own as a successful radio and lecture manager who looked after the business interests of many famous people when she met her husband-to-be. Carveth Wells came to Zetta as a client, fell in love with her and married her—on Zetta’s condition that she be allowed to keep her exciting job and prized independence. After they were wed, Carveth began taking exciting trips across the world to climb mountains in Russia, Turkey, and Mexico to fuel research for his best-selling book, Kapoot. Zetta, unwilling to stay behind and miss out on the action, followed her husband on his thrilling and turbulent adventures. It was on top of a mountain that Zetta decided to fundamentally change her life and permanently join her husband’s side. She realized that being Carveth Wells’ wife was worth more to her than any amount of success she could win on her own. When they returned from Mexico, Zetta closed her office. She was free to follow her husband to the ends of the earth—and that is exactly what she did.13

This anecdote of Zetta Wells appears in Mrs. Dale Carnegie’s 1954 article titled, “How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead.” It appeared in Coronet magazine, a general interest digest for the American family. In her piece, Carnegie exemplifies the popular Cold War American ideal of the feminine and domestic woman. In a time when Americans craved normalcy, stability, and a return to traditional gender norms disrupted by World War II, Carnegie outlined the importance of the female role: to be subservient. Immediately after World War II, females were expected to forgo their wartime jobs and return to their former roles as dutiful mothers and supportive housewives.

Carnegie herself was the perfect example of the 1950s housewife. She was the former secretary, turned business partner and second wife of Dale Carnegie, famous American writer and lecturer. Mrs. Carnegie, who suspended her own career to help her husband wrote, “If you have a job or career of your own, would you be willing to give it up if it would advance your husband’s interests? If not, you are more interested in promoting yourself than promoting your husband. Helping a man attain success is a full-time career in itself.”\textsuperscript{14} Cold War media in the form of women’s magazines pushed traditional ideas of femininity on women who had been exposed to the work force, even in traditionally male-dominated occupations, during the war just years before. Carnegie’s article, among many others in well-known magazines of the time, provided an insight into the popular American mindset of gender roles perpetuated by the media in early Cold War culture: masculine men and subordinate women.

During the Cold War, popular women’s magazines were filled with images and articles of the perfect housewife, consumer, and mother. Powerful images of the strong Rosie the Riveter and patriotic victory gardens faded, only to be replaced with advertisements of more traditional female gender roles. What had happened? Women had been rushed back into the home after World War II to make room on the job market for returning soldiers. Formerly employed females working in primarily male-dominated fields like were now bombarded with promotions of domesticity, such as ads for picking the perfect new appliance for their kitchen.\textsuperscript{15} However, the expectation that women would simply return to their lives prior to the war during the Cold War era was met with varying attitudes. Some women were content to

\textsuperscript{14} Carnegie, “How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead,” 65.
return to their homes after years of wartime work, while other women felt the pressure of becoming the perfect wife and struggled to comfortably return to prewar normalcy. Lastly, some women met the reversion with resistance, and even resentment.

One leading feminist author and activist addressed the struggle that some women felt. Betty Friedan, a famous author, activist, and feminist, lived from 1921-2006. She is often credited with helping start second-wave feminism that mobilized the debate for female equality in the family, the workplace, sexuality and reproductive rights, and legal issues. She also founded and was elected the first president of the National Organization for Women, or NOW, in 1966, which lobbied for Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act. In 1963, Betty Friedan published her controversial book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she claimed to identify the largest growing feminine problem of the 1950s: the struggle to be the perfect woman. Friedan noticed something was inherently wrong when, “[i]n the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture”, yet many women she spoke to did not find their lives fulfilling after their exposure to the public sphere in World War II.16 Friedan alleged that she heard echoes of the problem all over—from college dormitories, semi-private maternity wards, PTA meetings, and luncheons of the League of Women Voters.17 She insisted that educated housewives were unhappy and discontent with their lives, but could not make sense of their unrewarding marriages and instead remained quiet in their struggle to understand their own dissatisfaction with the

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traditional female norm. Friedan asserted that, the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported—from the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* to *Good Housekeeping* and CBS television. Friedan provided as evidence newspaper stories and magazine articles from the 1960s which all seemed to claim the same thing: the discontent of the American woman. However, Friedan only paid attention to the magazines reporting “the problem” and not at the numerous articles promoting higher education, independence, or new jobs in various other magazines.

When I told Lois Banner, the iconic women’s historian and feminist scholar, that I was working on women’s magazines from the World War II and Cold War Era and how Betty Friedan interpreted the problem without a name, she said to me, “Betty Friedan was wrong, but she was also right. You’re going to find a complex answer”. Lois Banner was correct; Friedan had failed to explore all reactions to the sudden gender shift. As the media attempted to revert back to traditional gender norms during the initial Cold War period, magazines held a variety of responses from acceptance to anxiety to outright rejection. While Friedan noticed the females who, or one reason or another, did not embrace society’s reversion to traditional gender norms after World War II, she failed to analyze the women who were

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18 Paraphrased from Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* 14-16.
20 Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 20
21 Friedan lists the editorial contents of a typical issue of McCall’s (July, 1960) which includes pieces such as: a lead article on “increasing baldness in women,” caused by too much brushing and dyeing, a short story about how a teenager who doesn’t go to college gets a man away from a bright college girl, and a story called “Wedding Day.” *The Feminine Mystique*, 29-30.
22 Lois Banner, personal communication, South Bend, IN, October 30, 2014
completely content to accept Cold War gender norms as a domestic wife and mother.

In addition to Friedan, other historians have also discussed the 1950s woman and societies attempt to revert back to the traditional female role. Historian Jane Sherron De Hart, depicted the shift back to normalcy in her chapter of *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, “Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality, and National Identity in Cold War America”. She argued that the public urge to revert to the domestic feminine identity prior to the war was overwhelming with the growing standards of conformity, consumerism, and containment.23 Similar to De Hart, American historian Joanne Meyerowitz also published a chapter pertaining to containment in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, “Sex, Gender, and the Cold War Language and Reform”. Meyerowitz’s chapter argued that the Cold War containment of communism had domestic corollaries in the containment of women within the home and the containment of sex within heterosexual marriage.24 Meanwhile, American studies professor, Susan J. Douglas noticed the emergence of “the problem without a name” in the push for 1950s normalcy in her book, *Where the Girls Are*. In her book, Douglas discussed her own the mass media in its role of second-wave feminism, but not World War II.

This article explores the shifting gender roles between World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, as seen in popular women’s magazines. It explored how the female public received the change. During World War II, the wartime emergency push magazines to stray outside the female norm, but returned to traditional gender roles once

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the war ended. At the start of the Cold War, women’s magazines perpetuated the image of the ideal mother and housewife through articles, short stories, and advertisements. With wartime over, these magazines promoted the reversion to a prewar style of femininity. Cold War femininity rallied around the homemaker, the mother as domestic goddess. However, females had a multitude of reactions in response to the pre-war feminine stereotype. While some women were content to pursue their domestic dreams, plenty of women felt societal pressure to return home and others continued to follow their own career aspirations outside the home. This paper will argue how women’s magazines attempted to reinforce femininity throughout the nontraditional gender roles of wartime emergency and into the Cold War era as society pushed for the return to normalcy in the 1950s and why women responded with attitudes of content, discomfort, and outright rejection.

**World War II**

As the United States entered World War II, the call for male soldiers and female support disrupted traditional gender arrangements and sexual norms. The mass exodus of men into the military left women to balance out numerous roles as they moved into the work force and filled previously male-dominated occupations. Most commonly, women contributed domestically, either by rationing supplies or donating to overcome shortages; magazines ran articles reminding women to limit their use of certain items, such as their cosmetics, so chemicals could be used elsewhere.\(^{25}\) Other women participated in the war effort by taking

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\(^{25}\) Lucille Egelhoff, “Do You Waste Cosmetics?,” *Good Housekeeping*, 114, no. 3 (March 1942), 76.
up extra work, either as nurses and volunteers or factory workers and riveters.

The shift in gender roles was new to Americans; prior to World War II, women had seemed content and in their domestic spheres as wives, homemakers, and mothers. However, the war allowed women to experience a new atmosphere of independence. With men off to war, many women had the opportunity to experience the public sphere of work. As evidence of growing female independence during the war, *Good Housekeeping* published “Out On Your Own”, an article giving females advice on how to have a “free mind” and behave in public in a new town. “Out On Your Own” advised women to make themselves more cosmopolitan, fall in with local customs, and register appreciation for new friends in a new city. The war was liberating and empowering for women in the sense that females now had the opportunity to take on multiple roles, as wage earners as well as wives and mothers. Popular culture icons like “Rosie the Riveter”, a female factory laborer, sprang forward as an inspirational poster for women. Magazine ads were filled with images of determined women workers and had headlines like “Women Teach Industry Recipe for Protection” or showing a smiling riveter captioned “Miss America, 1943.” The campaign worked—over six million women joined the workforce during the war, two million of them in heavy industry. Women held one-third of the home front jobs. However, while the female gender role did shift, popular magazines still promoted femininity during the war. The image of a riveter Miss America juxtaposed the idea that women working in the public sphere could still maintain an air of

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26 Henrietta Ripperger, “Out On Your Own,” *Good Housekeeping*, 114, no. 3 (March 1942), 12.
femininity. Similarly, “Women Teach Industry Recipe for Protection” evoked a sense of homemaking and domesticity in a very nontraditional line of work.

Evidence of changing gender dynamics and was particularly evident in women’s magazines. The female role had evolved; it was now entwined with patriotism in a time of national emergency. While many magazines tried to reinforce traditional gender norms, as soon as the United States formally entered the war, the magazines adopted a pro-war effort stance in support of the war effort that seldom wavered.28 Naturally, editors still ran regular advertisements for common necessary household items like cleaning supplies and baby food, but magazines exploded with war-related articles. Scholar Nancy A. Walker explained,

> virtually all aspects of magazine content—including advertising, fiction, and editorial columns as well as nonfiction articles—instructed readers on ways to assist in the war effort: planting “victory gardens” to counteract food shortages, writing encouraging letters to absent husbands, and coping efficiently and cheerfully with product rationing and shortages.29

Editors and writers simply could not ignore the profession of growing roles and identities that women managed in society. The female was no longer simply a housewife or a mother, but a jack-of-all-trades. However, these new roles did not blossom out of an ideological commitment to seek better opportunities for women, but out of a necessity inspired by war.

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Walker attributed the explosion of war and shift in the feminine identity to the federal government. The most overt and far-reaching attempt to influence readers’ values originated not with magazine publishers or editors but with the federal government. Immediately after the United States entered World War II, three agencies exerted considerable influence on the women’s magazines to support the war effort—specifically, to encourage women to cope effectively with rationing and shortages, to do volunteer work, and, to a lesser extent, to enter the labor force. The War Advertising Council, the Writers’ War Board, and the Magazine Bureau of the Office of War Information issued guidelines that affected the content of fiction and nonfiction features and the copy and illustrations of advertisements. Full-page advertisements for nursing suggested that women could find work in hospitals and schools, and emphasized the arrival of the Magazine Bureau.

Almost immediately, examples of how women could contribute to the war effort, both inside and outside the home, flooded magazines. Between July 1942 and April 1945, the Magazine Bureau published the monthly magazine *Magazine War Guide*, which was sent to hundreds of magazine editors. Most editors embraced the *Magazine War Guide* and referenced the periodical in their own articles.

However, wartime fraught magazines with a balancing act when it came to traditional female gender norms. On one hand, females were still concerned with femininity and fashion, yet shifting women’s roles pushed females towards the public sphere and the realities of war. In one article of 1944 *Good Housekeeping*, “The Army Life For Me”, Mrs. John English, wife of Lieutenant John English, wrote about her

31 Do You Want To Be a Nurse?” *Good Housekeeping*, 114, no. 3 (March 1942), 42.
experience, “I love my Army life. I wouldn’t trade it for any other. I’m sorry for the people who sit at home with steam heat, bathrooms, and rugs on the floor. They don’t know what they’re missing!” Good Housekeeping also featured an article, “Women Without Men” that focused on the mental and physical state of women who lost their husbands in war and gave guidance how to lead a normal life despite the loss.

Despite the emphasis on war-related articles and newfound female independence, women’s magazines during World War II still embraced femininity. Magazines like Vogue featured militaristic fashions, including shoe advertisements for those “Duty-Full Days.” Elizabeth Pope wrote an article on wartime fashion titled, “What Is a ‘Well-Dressed’ Woman?” in which she outlined the importance of stylish clothing. Pope provided advice from prominent designers and figures in the fashion world on matching hats with different hair colors, knowing your body type, and keeping neat and well groomed. Females, despite their 1940s self-sufficiency, still wanted to feel feminine in keeping up with current trends and styles shaped by wartime rationing.

**Cold War Magazines and the Happy Homemakers**

Years after World War II, the United States was wrought with occupational instability and disrupted gender norms. As soldiers returned home, much of the American public sought normalcy and stability. Without war as a factor, and thus the need for women in the public sphere, traditional gender norms crept back into society as

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33 Mrs. John English, “The Army Life For Me” Good Housekeeping, 118, no. 3 (March 1944), 50.
35 Advertisement: Natural Poise (Wohl Shoe Company).” Vogue (September 1942)

media reinforced pre-war roles. Women were expected to help their husbands in a traditional way: inside the home as domestic wives and mothers.

As the 1940s became the 1950s, the postwar emphases on consumerism, home ownership, and the nuclear family intensified. Women's magazines during the Cold War tended to promote traditional gender roles that had been disrupted during the war years. Magazines like Coronet, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping published articles and guidelines on how to be the perfect wife. The sudden influx of domestic columns was the media's attempt to recapture the pre-war female. Women's magazines continuously perpetuated the stereotype and image of the doting wife and mother. It seemed that women, according to magazines, had few interests and abilities outside the home.

The Magazine War Guide and other propaganda sources did not explicitly pressure women to leave their war work for the kitchen after 1945, but did advise editors to press the issue in more subtle ways. Postwar attitudes reinforced the ideal of the domestic woman, stripping away progress females had made during World War II. Historian William Graebner weighed in, “During the war, Americans were nationalist, and pragmatic, while immediately after the war they were private, familial, idealistic, and domestic.” Walker further explained the shift,

[w]hen World War II altered family patterns by taking millions into the armed services and drawing many women to jobs in defense plants, magazine articles both supported and attacked the new roles women took, while applauding women's home-

37 Walker, Women’s Magazines, 17.
38 Walker, Women’s Magazines, 16.
39 Walker, Women’s Magazines, 16. From Graebner's The Age of Doubt
front contributions to the war effort. After the war the magazines reflected Cold War anxieties while touting the rising consumer culture.⁴⁰

Magazines also focused on women’s purchasing habits. In an era of conformity and consumerism, magazines placed advertisement after advertisement. *Vogue* in particular consisted of pages of advertisements, enticing women to purchase new items for their kitchens. Promotion of family values, policymakers believed, would assure the stable family life necessary for personal and national security as well as supremacy over the Soviets.⁴¹

Much like the anecdote of Zetta Wells, Carnegie also promoted the ideal of the subservient wife by providing rules on how to stop nagging your husband, as well as guidelines on helping your husband to work at his top efficiency. She set forth numerous guidelines and anecdotes on how a wife can both help and harm her husband’s opportunities for promotion. Carnegie perpetuated the Cold War housewife stereotype by continuously placing the female in a subordinate role to her husband and family. It is the wife’s job to make sure her husband is happy and does her best to further his career.⁴² In addition to Carnegie’s article in *Coronet*, the July 1952 *Ladies’ Home Journal* ran articles titled “There’s a Man in the House”, “Making Marriage Work”, and “Diary of Domesticity” that explored how females could improve their relationships with their husbands.⁴³


⁴¹ Sherron De Hart, “Containment at Home”, 125.

⁴² Carnegie, ”How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead,” 65.

⁴³ “Table of Contents” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 69, no. 3 (July 1952), 3-59.
In addition to advising wives on their marriages, Cold War magazines also weighed in on women’s career choices. The magazines were asked to point out the need for workers in traditionally female fields such as secretarial work and teaching, and to replace discussions of child care centers with articles on juvenile delinquency, “one of the social ills blamed on working mothers after the war which contributed to the postwar conservative reaction against working women.”44 This kind of public thinking led women to abandon male-dominated jobs and to seek characteristically feminine jobs. One author, Robert J. Knowlton, went so far as to run an experiment asking husbands to record their wives’ day-to-day activities. In turn, Knowlton kept a schedule of his own wife’s household duties and created a timed list, “3 to 5:30 p.m.: Out with baby in the carriage. (One hour of this time is spent in shopping and can be called work; the rest constitutes gossiping and enjoying the fresh air)”.45 From his experiment, Knowlton insisted that housewives had it easy when it came to housework, claiming, “contrary to what your wife has most likely been telling you for years, she has an easy job” and, “I learned the hard way how easy it was to run a house.” He criticized those females who chose to keep house by deemphasizing the work they did, claiming perhaps her child was not properly trained or that women engaged in outside activities, either for pleasure or profit. He advocated that husbands should return from work early to catch their wives watching television or lounging in bed. Knowlton claimed that housewives were lazy and had no excuse to leave work unfinished with luxury modern appliances. He claimed that women

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should not waste time ironing unnecessary items like underwear or pillowcases and that they should invest in a table on wheels to go from the dining room to the kitchen to save trips. Knowlton’s negative attitude towards the female decision to stay at home would resonate later among second-wave feminists in the 1960s.

**Occupation: Housewife**

Women’s public reaction towards Cold War femininity in the media was diverse. In reality, females had a variety of choices in response to the pressure of Cold War gender norms. Reactions ranged from acceptance, to anxiety, to rejection. Despite Friedan’s findings, the female stereotype as domestic goddess was far from negative for all women. As Lois Banner said, the female reaction to women’s magazines was far more complex than Friedan had made it out to be in *The Feminine Mystique*. In 1963, at the start of new-wave Feminism, Friedan explained the state of women:

They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights — the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. Some women, in their forties and fifties, still remembered painfully giving up those dreams, but most of the younger women no longer even thought about them. A thousand expert voices applauded their femininity, their adjustment, their new maturity. All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.\(^\text{46}\)

\(^{46}\) Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 11.
As a second-wave feminist, Freidan could not understand why some women were content in their roles as homemakers. While Friedan’s claims were accurate for some, they were not true for all women, as some females genuinely embraced and enjoyed the life of domesticity. Friedan only looked at the negative aspects of Cold War culture, claiming that Americans could “no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.’” Friedan made women’s options seem hopelessly limited in the 1950s, but the reality was that women’s magazines offered other choices and attitudes. In turn, Friedan attempted to portray the female that was stuck in her role as a housewife. She argued that women were being fed a vision of the ideal, but unfulfilling, female achievement:

Meanwhile, other females of the Cold War era embraced their homemaker role.

The suburban housewife—she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy; it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife—freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine and fulfillment

As portrayed in her book, Friedan rejected the idea that a life of domesticity could be genuinely fulfilling. Meanwhile, magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal, Coronet,* and *Good Housekeeping* tended to be

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47 Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* 27
conservative in their views of domesticity and motherhood. The majority of their audience consisted of homemakers and women involved in volunteer work. These magazines in particular catered to and encouraged their audience by promoting the female as domestic. It was widely expected that after a woman’s marriage, she quit work and turned to Good Housekeeping or Ladies’ Home Journal for advice on how to make casseroles, make her marriage work, and make purchases for the home.49 Some women, like Mrs. Dale Carnegie, were perfectly content in their roles as doting wives and mothers.

In 1949 Ladies’ Home Journal published “Occupation—Housewife” by Dorothy Thompson.50 The article illustrated the woe of a woman who was filling out an official questionnaire. When the woman came to the query, ‘Occupation’, she sighed and despondently told her acquaintance, ‘I have to write down ‘Housewife.’ When I write it I realize that here I am, a middle-aged woman, with a university education, and I’ve never made anything out of my life. I’m just a housewife.” Her acquaintance responded by bursting into laughter and replying that the woman was not simply a housewife, but a business manager, cook, nurse, chauffeur, dressmaker, interior decorator, accountant, caterer, teacher, private secretary—or philanthropist. The acquaintance continued to justify her point as she told her friend, “[y]ou are one of the most successful women I know.” Thompson continued the article by describing exactly what housewives had to offer, “to do what this woman did with her husband’s modest income was a feat of management, showing executive ability of a high order”. The housewife was a craftsman, chef, tailor, and secretary, and educator for her family. Thompson argued that millions of women, all

49 Walker, Women’s Magazines, 3.
over the United States, were contributing as much to the well-being of their families by the services they render and the brains they mobilize, as are their income-earning husbands. Thompson rationalized and advocated for the female as homemaker based her specific set of economic skills, but noted that many housewives lament, “but I never earned any money”. She retorted, “Who can hire, at any price, a substitute for a mother? Who can find a housekeeper who thinks twice about every purchase, weighing value against available cash?” Thompson argued that the domestic female was invaluable to a familial unit and that the 1950s woman should have no reservations about her occupation: Housewife!

In addition to Thompson’s article, Jennifer Colton’s also wrote a persuading piece on the benefits of domesticity. In her 1951 article “Why I Quit Working” from Good Housekeeping, Colton provides a perfect example of the female who attempted a career, but returned to homemaking with pleasure. 51 Colton acknowledged that her job was often an alibi for her discontent, “my job, and the demands it made on her, were my always accepted excuses for everything and anything, for spoiled children, my neglected husband, mediocre food; for being late, tired, preoccupied.” Once she stopped working, Colton realized she had a newfound sense of normalcy with her children, leisure in a second cup of coffee, intimacy with her husband, and role as housewife. She explained her sense of gratitude, “I’m glad I had the experience of working. What else could make me so acutely conscious of every blessing and so humbly aware of the potentials of my new role?”

A Strange Stirring

However, women did have options if they felt the call to be a domestic housewife was too limiting. For some, the sudden push towards normalcy and domesticity proved to be too exhausting. Friedan was correct in her analysis of the anxiety that some women felt to be perfect. As Friedan explained such a woman:

[s]he has no identity except as a wife and a mother….When a woman tries to put the problem into words, she often merely describes the daily life she leads. What is there in this recital of comfortable domestic detail that could possibly cause such a feeling of desperation? Is she trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur, expert on interior decoration, child care, appliance repair, furniture refinishing, nutrition, and education?

She believed that women were valued by society, or perhaps undervalued, for their mere roles as homemakers. A feminist herself, Friedan thought the Cold War women should be involved in politics, higher education, and careers.52

While magazine articles generally did perpetuate Cold War feminine ideals, they also gave women an outlet for their restless feelings of dissatisfaction. Friedan was correct to a certain extent—many women did feel the growing pressure and anxiety to become the perfect female, but it was far from their only option. In one 1957 article, “What Is ‘Normal’ Married Love” from Coronet, the author portrays the issue with a fictional character, Janet. In the article, Janet described her uneasiness at the marriage counselor’s desk: “I don’t know what is

52 Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 44-45.
wrong,’ she said desperately. ‘I should have a perfect marriage.’” 53
Janet felt like she was failing to live up to the societal norm of “sexual perfection” or the “perfect sex life” that she read in about. Janet was fearful that her marriage did not live up to the modern sexual ideal and, as a result, felt inadequate when it came to pleasuring her husband. Author Paul H. Landis described the norm of perfection that married women tried to attain during the Cold War and the tension they felt, “it was obvious that there was an undercurrent of anxiety and discontent within her that was threatening to destroy what she has built and wipe out the compatibility and love she shared with her husband.” Landis reassured readers that Janet’s problem was not an unusual one; many women worried about the so-called sexual “norm” and “standard.” In fact, Janet exemplified what Friedan called the problem of the 1950s, a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States.54

The Other Path

In contrast to the acceptance displayed in articles like “Occupation: Housewife”, females also had the option to resist popular ideals. While some women felt uncomfortable with Cold War femininity, other women flatly rejected the standard and opted for other lifestyles. Like Friedan, historian Joanne Meyerowitz also noticed a strange stirring. “[w]hile in many cases Cold War thought did indeed reinforce traditional gender roles and the heterosexual martial norm, in other notable cases it also seemed to subvert them”55 Popular magazines considered their readers to be homemakers and housewives; the female who worked was exceptional. While the

54 Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 11.
magazines remained focused largely on women’s role in the household, attitudes towards women’s employment outside the home and patterns of such employment underwent dramatic shifts. Magazines now had to cater to a multitude of women as a 1948 Census Bureau study found that seventeen million women were in the paid labor force, half of them married.

Magazines like *Mademoiselle* regularly offered specific advice on obtaining entry-level positions addressed to the college student or recent graduate. The magazine was marketed to a younger, more middle-class woman and was self-proclaimed as “the magazine for smart young women.” The term “smart” referred not only to the dominant fashion emphasis of the magazine but also to its appeal to the female college student and college graduate. The ideal *Mademoiselle* reader of the period began reading the magazine as she chose a college to attend and a wardrobe to take with her, used it as a job-hunting guide when she graduated and followed its advice when she furnished her first apartment. In 1952 the magazine published “Women in Flight”, an article in which an experience airline hostess gave advice to younger women in the work force: “[m]ake up your mind to stick on the job six months. It may take you that long to find out you really enjoy it.” The hostess also provided job information, such as height and weight requirements and other particulars, “to qualify for any airline, a hostess must be single (she’s asked to resign when she marries) and she must pass a rigid physical examination.” Stewarding for an airline like Delta was no easy task; young women were also expected to travel,

train, and forfeit family life. A career as an airline hostess was a full-time commitment and alternative to the domestic ideal.

In addition to young, single women in the work force, *Women’s Home Companion* ran an article for wives, “The Married Woman Goes Back to Work”, in 1956. The piece was reassured married women of their occupational choices and suggested, “today, for example, almost half of all women in the country between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four are working. They are mothers and homemakers.” The surge of married women in the workforce, it claimed, was due to several factors; first, money: the “extras” a working wife brings into the home soon become part of a fixed standard of living and become a habit. A woman who worked could bring home a supplement income to her husband and allow a family to purchase both necessities and luxuries. The second reason women gave was prestige; “women, no less than men, need to feel successful. Success as a housewife is not easily measured.” A job, unlike homemaking, could be measured in dollars. Returning to work was not a simple decision for women; many families had to weigh the pros and cons of a mother entering the work force, for example, what skills did she possess and could she take time off in the event of an emergency? Nonetheless, magazines did encourage career-driven females who wanted to pursue their aspirations by providing apt information and accessible resources.

In addition to work, some young females chose to go to college. Among the popular magazines *Journal of Home Economics* in particular seemed forward-thinking as it acknowledged not only the working female and how to integrate oneself into the world of business but also higher education. In varying degrees, the magazines ran articles on

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issues of wide cultural significance beyond the home, though always selected according to the editors’ perceptions of women’s roles and interests. Beryl Pfrizer, who was not interested in getting married, wrote, “there is no place on earth where a single woman is safe from the rudest, least answered question ever asked: ‘Why aren’t you married?’” The question came in various forms and in multiple locations: at cocktail parties, art exhibits, class reunions, business lunches, and political rallies. She explained, “[i]t is as if, ever since the animals clambered onto the ark two by two, there’s been something subversive about a loner.” Pfrizer was tired of her worth being placed in her marital status and became justifiably defensive to the timeless relationship question. In order to combat mothers, doting aunts, and comparative strangers, she invented a list of six rude answers to the one rude question. Pfrizer’s list included witty, and self-described “catty” remarks like, “When the questioner is a married woman you don’t know well, and don’t care to, try this: ‘Confidentially, I prefer having affairs.’ Then let your gaze wander to the man you know is her husband and ask innocently, ‘By the way, who’s that attractive man in the gray suit?’”

Pfrizer approached her article with humor and gave unmarried females a sassy alternative to an uncomfortably rude situation. In accordance with Pfrizer’s article and the 1960s, Historian Susan J. Douglas recalls her own experience; “we girls came to believe that we were freer from

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63 Beryl Pfizer, “Six Rude Answers to One Rude Question,” McCall’s, (July 1960), 44.
64 Pfrizer had humorous other rude responses including: “An unmarried friend of mine has great success with: ‘Oh, it’s a long story. It takes about three hours, but I just love to tell it. Let’s go sit down somewhere comfortable.’ The questioner invariably remembers she was just leaving.
constraints than our mothers; that we were modern, riding a wave of progress, less old-fashioned; that, for us, anything was possible”

Conclusion

The shift of the feminine ideal according to magazines during World War II and through the 1960s was complex. Females underwent drastic changes between the independence of the public sphere and the femininity of the private sphere. During World War II, the acceptance of the working female was born out of necessity and emergency and not a female desire to subvert longstanding gender roles. In turn, wartime magazines attempted to promote prewar gender roles and reassure women that there were still inherently feminine while working their nontraditional jobs. After the war and into the Cold War era, much of society craved normalcy and the return to traditional gender roles. However, the push for domestic bliss was met with a variety of disjointed attitudes including acceptance, anxiety, and resistance. Women’s magazines reflected women’s complicated feelings by running ads and articles to reinforce different female opinions. In her 1963 book, second-wave feminist Betty Friedan failed to explore the multitude of responses. Friedan was too blinded by her bashing the image of the 1950s housewife to see the positivity that some females held towards the subject. She saw the housewife as a negative aspect of womanhood and claimed women felt a trapped anxiety in their homes. Various magazines prove that different audiences of females responded in accordance to their own values and aspirations.

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The Gender Gap in STEM Fields: An Issue of Inequality, Not Biology

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Monica Daegele is a senior Chemical Engineering major and Gender Studies minor. During her time at Notre Dame, she has served as the Producer for Loyal Daughters and Sons, Director of Gender Issues for Student Government, a Sexual Offense Services Advocate, and a proponent for the retention of women in STEM fields. Her academic interests and community involvement have focused on issues pertaining to sexual assault prevention, LGBTQ inclusivity, body image, sex trafficking, and sex inequality.
The female interest and involvement in science is not a 21st century phenomena. Women have been involved in scientific research and discovery since the origin of modern science itself. But, as the academy system formed in Europe in the mid 1600’s, women’s place in science diminished; as the prestige and honor of science increased, the participation of women decreased (Schiebinger 2002). The formation of scientific academies removed scientific thought and exploration from the home, where it had previously been, and placed it into the public sphere of universities. Because women were not admitted to universities, they were thereby further excluded from science.

There has been quite a bit of discussion recently about the presence and retention of women in science, math, and engineering fields. Women now make up almost 60 percent of undergraduate university student populations. However, the proportion of women majoring in most STEM areas is far below 50 percent. While women represent over half of those majoring in the biological sciences, they receive 18.2 percent of the computer sciences degrees, 18.4% of the engineering degrees, and 43 percent of the awarded mathematics and statistics degrees (NGC Project). Further, women represent 47 percent of the total US workforce, but only 13 percent of the engineering workforce, 14 percent of Physics Department faculty, and 25 percent of the computer and mathematical sciences workforce (NGC Project; Urry 2008). This difference between men and women in educational and occupational participation in STEM fields has been called the gender gap. Many have called for significant changes in order to rectify this “leaky pipeline.” But for others, equal representation of the genders seems unnecessary and unlikely. In his notorious statement that sparked an instant debate, President of Harvard Larry Summers suggested that intrinsic differences between male and female aptitudes
for science, as well as motivation to be involved, account for the large gender gap in disciplines such as physics and engineering. The term gender gap not only encompasses the fact that fewer women are involved in such fields, but also that when they do enter into STEM areas, they continually hold less prestigious positions, receive fewer grants, and are awarded fewer awards and prizes. While many countered his claims, there were also those who defended Summers and his argument.

The current debate surrounding equity within STEM fields has fumed for years now. With all of the impressive academic work that has already been discussed and published surrounding the topic, why, then, am I- an undergraduate student- choosing to write about it? The answer is simple: I have been personally impacted and influenced by the unequal representation and treatment of women within engineering. As a Chemical Engineering major, I have directly experienced many of the cultural issues associated with the lack of retention of women within STEM and, more specifically, engineering. While never explicitly told that men are better than women at engineering, it has been implied throughout my academic career. An example of this inference is the fact that almost ninety percent of my engineering professors have been men, even though chemical engineering has the highest percentage of female participation with respect to the other engineering disciplines. This lack of female representation among faculty sends a clear message: very few women survive within engineering. Further, my male colleagues have asserted their knowledge and intellectual talents in a more dominant manner than the females. Men are expected to be more naturally inclined towards the scientific and mathematic principles of engineering. This gives them a sense of confidence in their abilities that contrasts with
the self-doubt that many women experience. During my freshman year, the male members from a engineering group project heavily resisted assigning me, the only female, difficult tasks because they felt they could perform them better. Implicit biases, such as this, affected me in many ways as I struggled with my engineering and math classes. As the personal doubt and anxiety levels increased, I found myself unable to perform at the level I knew I was capable of achieving. Soon enough, I was not only questioning my own intellectual talents, but those of my entire sex. The confidence that the men experience must result from superior intellectual capabilities, right? There must be a cognitive difference between the sexes if, in general, the men attend class less frequently than the women and yet achieve at similar or higher levels? This line of thinking was very new for me, as I had never felt that my status as female made me intellectually inferior to males. But more importantly, it was disturbing. As an advocate for gender and sex equality, I felt hypocritical for questioning and limiting the abilities of females everywhere.

Therefore, in this paper, I aim to explore the rationality behind the notion that men are more naturally gifted at and more interested in engineering because of their affinity for mathematic and scientific principles. Essentially, I aim to investigate the intellectual equity within various STEM fields because if men have superior intellectual talents and higher motivations, then we cannot object to the inequitable gender representation. However, if men are not superior, then we are disabling and hindering the women, which is inequitable. Intellectual equity is a term I have coined myself. It encompasses notions of cognitive sex differences, thus intellectual equality between male and female brains. However, it also moves beyond this discussion because it also addresses the definitions of “high achieving” and “success” from a
gender analytic perspective. Assigning specific, gendered attributes to the definitions of “accomplished” and “success” has created an androcentric, hegemonic male lens through which we categorize and judge the extent of an individual’s ability.

**Biological Determinism**

“The fact that more men than women have exceptional abilities in mathematical reasoning and in mentally manipulating 3-D objects is enough to explain a departure from a fifty-fifty sex ratio among engineers, physicists, organic chemists, and professors in some branches of mathematics.”

- Steven Pinker, *Hot Buttons*

Biological Determinists such as Steven Pinker, Doreen Kimura, and Simon Baron-Cohen have spent many years researching sex differences. These sex differences are the direct result of the selective, evolutionary pressures placed on both sexes, which ultimately led to the different roles and abilities of the sexes. Specifically for cognition, these differences are the result of biological occurrences such as prenatal and current levels of hormones, chromosomal makeup, and genetic expression. As Pinker explains, “the human body contains a mechanism that causes the brains of boys and the brains of girls to diverge during development,” which ultimately leads to cognitive differences (Pinker 2002). Baron-Cohen theorizes that the two different pathways of development, which come about from varying testosterone levels, lead to two different types of brain: male (systematizing) and female (empathizing) (Baron-Cohen 2003). Systematizing, or male, brain advantages include using and constructing tools, hunting, trading, power, social dominance, expertise, aggression, and leadership. The
advantages of an empathizing, or female, brain include making friends, mothering, gossiping, social mobility, and reading and understanding others. An individual’s brain type is the direct result of the amount of prenatal testosterone present in the brain. A high level of testosterone will lead to a male, or S type, brain because it develops the right side of the brain faster, which is associated with high systematizing ability (Baron-Cohen 2003). Doreen Kimura agrees with Baron-Cohen’s categorization because she claims that prenatal androgen levels are “most certainly” a factor in adult spatial abilities (Kimura 2007). This conclusion stems from experiments performed on rats. When the male rats were castrated at birth, their testosterone stopped flowing from their testes to their brain. This caused a decrease in the growth of the right hemisphere of the brain. Behavioral tests then illustrated a less developed spatial systematizing ability among the castrated rats (Baron-Cohen 2003). Further, female rats treated with testosterone at birth illustrated faster spatial learning skills. They performed equally to the non-castrated male rats. Therefore, prenatal testosterone levels are said to be large determinants of systematizing ability, which affects performance on mental rotation, spatial ability, and mathematical aptitude tests (Baron-Cohen 2003).

Neuropsychologist Doreen Kimura has been one of the leading researchers in the field of sex differences for the past thirty years. Her writings have become some of the most documented and cited evidence of sex differences. In addition to claims about the correlation between prenatal androgen levels and spatial abilities, Kimura states that the male-female difference in math reasoning and spatial abilities is present across cultures (Kimura 2007). Her analysis of the effects of hormones on brain structure and functionality are based on experiments she ran over the course of many years on rats. These rat
studies concluded that male rats are superior to female rats in learning mazes. Additionally, these sex differences “can be reversed by hormonal manipulation in early postnatal life,” as illustrated by the rat castration experiments that Baron-Cohen also cites (Kimura 2007). Finally, Kimura claims that despite women’s increased access to higher education, these cognitive sex differences have not changed significantly over the past forty years (Kimura 2007). Males continually outperform females on mathematical aptitude tests, which largely influences the lower representation of women in STEM fields (Kimura 2007). According to Kimura, there is strong evidence that supports the claim that the gender gap within STEM fields is due to “innate talent and interest differences between the sexes” (Kimura 2007).

However, more recent neuroscience has refuted previous erroneous assumptions surrounding sex differences. Neuroscientists Margaret McCarthy and Anne Konkle have sought to clarify the very definition of sex difference, meaning what is “fundamentally and permanently different” versus “what is a hormonally modulated response... a parameter that varies in meaningful ways in response to changes in adult circulating hormones” (Konkle & McCarthy 2005). The role that estradiol, a form of estrogen, plays in enhancing synapses in the hippocampus is irrefutable. Behavioral studies aimed at assessing the correlation between these physiological changes and spatial ability have presented evidence for an enhanced cognitive ability in reaction to the increased estradiol levels in the hippocampus. As a result, this estradiol effect has been translated into a sex difference in cognition. However, Konkle and McCarthy disagree with such claims because the term “sex difference” should only apply to variables that are independent of hormonal fluctuations. If sex differences are supposed to be organized early in life, mainly prenatally, then an outcome that is
solely achieved by altering steroids in adulthood does not fully fit the
definition of a sex difference. It is this very distinction that is missing
from many of the studies that have claimed to have found cognitive sex
differences. Yes, males have been shown to learn spatial skills at a
slightly faster rate than females. However, with time, both sexes
perform equally well. McCarthy and Konkle note that this difference is
one of “acquisition, not steady-state performance” (Konkle & McCarthy
2005). Furthermore, the support for difference in spatial ability
between males and females is partly methodological because when pre-
trained, the sexes perform similarly (Konkle & McCarthy 2005).
Ultimately, this type of neuroscience being done by researchers like
Konkle and McCarthy is finding that claims about sex differences in
cognitive outcomes are the product of problematic assumptions.

Other researchers have gone so far as to claim that there are no
differences in cognitive abilities between men and women. Melissa
Hines, a Neuroscientist at the University of Cambridge, argues that
there is no consistency between high levels of prenatal androgens and
superior visuospatial and math performance (Hines 2004). Rather, she
states that, with respect to mathematics, “there is some evidence that
increased androgen prenatally impairs performance” (Hines 2004).
While Hines concedes the possibility that androgens increase
visuospatial and mathematical abilities during the early postnatal
period has not been ruled out, “such influences cannot be assumed to
exist” (Hines 2004). Psychologist Janet Hyde performed a meta-analysis
of the evidence from studies citing a higher performance of males on
standardized math tests. She concluded that the difference itself
between male and female scores was very small, with high overlapping
between the distributions of male and female scores (Hyde 2014).
Further, when looking at studies done in other cultures, there is no
evidence of a sex difference in mathematical ability. Girls in the United Kingdom routinely outperform the boys on exams assessing mathematical ability and scientific understanding. A study conducted in South Africa found that there was “no sex difference in university math majors’ mean achievement” in the math classes (Caplan & Caplan 2004). In fact, there was some indication that the women achieved higher than the men (Caplan & Caplan 2004). Similarly, in Holland, a study conducted of students aged 13-16 years old found no gender differences in math achievement (Caplan & Caplan 2004). Given the conflicting evidence regarding cognitive differences between the sexes, it becomes impossible to determine whether or not intrinsic, biological differences exist at all.

Even granting slight differences in ability, there is no understanding about the correlation between heightened ability and success. If these women are to have had a lower ability than their male counterparts, it certainly did not affect their accomplishments. The true relevance of a slightly higher score on a mental rotation test is unfounded and unknown. Given this, it cannot be said that advanced spatial skills directly correlate to productivity, innovation, and competence within STEM fields. The existence of a skill or ability does not necessarily indicate success in that area. There are many other variables that influence an individual’s capacity to achieve in a given field, like determination, curiosity, creativity, and diverse perspective. In fact, Psychologist Dr. Randall Reilly of the University of Colorado Department of Psychology and Neuroscience has analyzed which type of cognition may be more important for current success in the sciences. In contrast to past notions that the secret to success in science is perseverance, Reilly claims that the “ability to juggle the many demands of being a scientist are seemingly more important these days,
than perseverating on one important deep problem” (Reilly 2013). Accomplishment is not solely a function of ability and to categorize people based on this assumption is disabling to those who have additional capabilities that could be essential for success in a given field. Even if there are cognitive differences, they are minimal and their correlation to career success and achievement is largely undetermined.

**Cultural Disablement**

“The elitist, hierarchical climate of science contributes to the gender imbalance in participation in science…it is unappealing to many women raised in American society.”

-Megan Urry, “Are Photons Gendered?”

Without a definitive, significant, biological distinction between the cognitive abilities of the sexes, the unequal representation of women in engineering must be primarily analyzed as the result of social and environmental factors. American cultural messages relayed onto the impressionable minds of young girls demotivate and disempower them from pursuing a career in the STEM fields. Gender socialization, in America specifically, creates different appropriate spaces and activities for boys and girls. While most agree that girls are given many more opportunities than ever before, the gender division within children’s toys and activities has an undeniable impact on interest and skill development. On average, US boys spend about 97 minutes a day playing video games, while girls only play for 49 minutes a day (Hyde 2014). Gender socialization raises boys to play video games and build LEGO’s and tells girls to play with Barbies and play “House.” Many studies have discovered connections between video game play and higher mental rotation performance. In fact, one study
found that after playing video games for about ten hours, women improved their performance on a mental rotation test (Feng 2007). If video games help to improve one’s performance on a mental rotation test, then the difference in time spent playing video games growing up largely explains a gender gap in mental rotation and spatial skills (Hyde 2014). When certain activities improve specific skills by further developing particular regions of the brain, the individuals engaged in these activities benefit from the enhancement of the skills. If these activities are gendered, then the skill itself becomes gendered as well. Therefore, the sociocultural factors that tell girls to play with Barbie dolls rather than play a game of Halo, an action-packed video game, are disabling the development of spatial skills, which impact their ability to perform equally to men on various cognitive assessments. The differences between men and women— in terms of intellect— may be, largely, the products of socialization and environment.

Despite the progress made by feminists regarding women’s rights and opportunities, most women are still culturally socialized to be polite, socially oriented, cooperative, sympathetic listeners. Unfortunately, these tendencies or patterns of behavior are not prevalent within various fields of science that are characterized by intellectual arrogance, aggression, lack of emotional understanding, cutthroat tactics, and individualist mentalities. When women have been socialized to be feminine, this hostile, masculine environment not only feels foreign, but also makes them feel out of place (Urry 2008). Within certain STEM fields as well, women are still given junior status, not as talented as their male counterparts, but “good enough” to keep around (Gornick 2009). Because the environment within STEM fields is so masculinized, differences in leadership style or behavior are interpreted as feminine and inferior (Urry 2008). As Megan Urry, the
Chair of the Department of Physics at Yale University, describes her experience with a fellow Physics Faculty member, “He could see that I was not like him...he assumed my behavior meant I was less able” (Urry 2008). Within STEM fields, women spend a considerable amount of effort worrying about every word spoken, action taken, and behavior expressed, so as to not come off as incompetent and inadequate. Gradually, such a “chilly” climate will affect the women, until it pushes us out.

Another unfortunate impact that the STEM culture has on women is its impairment of capability. As previously stated, when science and math are only viewed as “male” or “masculine,” femininity, by its definition as contrastive to masculinity, is incompatible with the abilities necessary for success in STEM fields. For example, if femininity is depicted as unsuited for extraordinary math ability, there are direct effects on how women perform in mathematics. One study, in particular, that investigated the relationship between gender-identification and math performance concluded that high gender-identifying women always scored lower on math tests in contrast to low gender-identifying women, who scored comparatively to men (Danso et al. 2007). In fact, the divergence in performance between men and women is particularly visible around puberty, when the girls who underachieve have much narrower views of femaleness and boundaries for women than those girls who continue to achieve at the same level (Caplan & Caplan 2004). In view of the definition of femininity as opposing mathematical ability and performance, it is no surprise that so few women choose to pursue math as an academic interest. Furthermore, as the number of women in high-level math courses decreases when women enter college, these women begin to feel unwelcome and out of place within the courses. There has been
much evidence that shows that women have lower self-efficacy and higher anxiety than men in regard to mathematical problem solving (Caplan & Caplan 2004). The combination of lack of confidence and stress surrounding math skills creates additional psychological barriers for women to overcome in order to achieve at higher levels.

There is an irrefutable and growing body of evidence that illustrates the effect of stereotype threat on test performance, achievement, and interest within STEM fields. Research shows that women experience negative test performance outcomes on mathematics tests when certain cultural negative stereotypes are activated within the context of the test taking. This phenomenon is known as “stereotype threat” and it has been applied to the underperformance of many minority groups. A study conducted by Catherine Good, Joshua Aronson, and Jayne Ann Harder sought to understand stereotype threat theory with respect to women in upper-level college mathematics classes. Women in the first testing condition, which invoked stereotype threat by including a statement describing the test as a measurement of mathematical abilities, performed lower than the men. However, the women in the second testing condition, which reduced stereotype threat by stating that the test had never shown gender difference, not only outperformed the women from the first testing condition, but they also outperformed the men from both testing conditions (Good et al 2008). Furthermore, the study found that the men in the stereotype threat condition answered more problems than the men in the non-threat condition. Furthermore, the women in the non-threat condition were more accurate in their responses than the women in the threat condition and the men in the threat condition. However, despite higher accuracy, women in the non-threat condition were still less confident in their answers than the men. Based on the
results from the study, even the most intelligent and high-achieving women suffer from stereotype threat.

While stereotype threat has been proven to affect women of the highest mathematical ability, the extent, or reach, of its influence is difficult to universalize. A study conducted by Amy Kiefer and Denise Sekaquaptewa set out to analyze the effect of implicit gender-math stereotyping on women's performance. Implicit gender-math stereotypes correspond to “less explicit math identification, less favorable attitudes towards mathematics, and lower reported performance” (Kiefer et al 2007). In order to examine implicit stereotypes, the study analyzed if women with stronger or weaker implicit stereotypes experienced greater performance differences between threat and non-threat conditions. The study results found that the less women possessed implicit gender-math stereotypes, the better they performed. This suggests that women with strong gender-math stereotypes are chronically influenced by these stereotypes, despite the threat or non-threat conditions.

Given the existence and impact of stereotype threat on female performance on mathematics tests, many have questioned if stereotype threat truly impacts all women or solely women who agree with the stereotype. A study conducted by Pascal Huguet and Isabelle Regner examined whether or not an individuals’ belief in a stereotype increases her susceptibility to stereotype threat. By examining both boys and girls in middle-school, Huguet and Regner explored how stereotype threat operates among younger girls, who may not have as much exposure to negative stereotypes. The students were divided into two groups: one in which the test was described as a geometry test, to induce stereotype threat, and the other which was described as a drawing test, to remove stereotype threat. The results of the study
indicated that even the girls who denied the negative gender stereotype suffered from stereotype threat under the geometric diagnostic condition. In fact, on average the girls’ beliefs were counter-stereotypic. However, the girls in the drawing ability condition outperformed the girls in the geometry condition and both groups of boys. This illustrates that stereotypical knowledge may prevail over counter-stereotypic beliefs, meaning that girls and women may not be able to buffer themselves from the effects of stereotype threat. In fact, according to a study performed by Daryl Wout, Henry Danso, James Jackson, and Steve Spencer, both high- and low- gender identified women underperformed on tests that concerned confirming that a negative stereotype was true of the self (self-threat), whereas only highly-gender identifying women underperformed when group-threat, concern over confirming that the stereotype is true of the entire gender, was present. Therefore, stereotype threat can be invoked “independently of self and group threat,” thereby adding an additional dimension to an individual’s susceptibility (Danso et al 2007). Despite an individual’s degree of identification as woman, she is still vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat.

By analyzing various studies related to stereotype threat and its negative impact on the performance of women in mathematics, it can be concluded that not only does stereotype threat impact the performance of all women despite personal beliefs regarding gender differences, but that implicit stereotypes, which are also the most difficult to eradicate, have the strongest impact on performance. Therefore, it is very difficult to overcome or neutralize stereotype threat. Given the prevalence of negative stereotypes for women in mathematics, and other STEM related fields, stereotype threat must be taken into account when analyzing data surrounding male and female
performance on mathematical aptitude or ability tests. If cognitive ability is measured by testing performance, then the resulting gender gap is significantly influenced by the effect that environment has on the individual. For women in STEM fields, this environmental influence is often negative. Unfortunately, the current STEM environment that undermines female testing performance through stereotype threat, discourages and disables female participation because of the unpleasant climate, and interprets femininity as different and, therefore, inferior, seems unlikely to ever reach intellectual equality between the genders.

Based on the information provided above, what can we ultimately conclude about the discussion surrounding equity within STEM fields? Well, the biological determinists would state that an analysis of the gender gap itself is unfounded and unnecessary, for as Steven Pinker claims, “inequality of outcome cannot be used as proof of inequality of opportunity unless the groups compared are identical in all of their psychological traits” (Pinker 2002). As mentioned, there are certain biological bases for sex differences. However, the role that these sex differences have in cognition is controversial. Neuroscientists such as Margaret McCarthy and Anne Konkle show that the rules used to understand sex differentiation of reproductive aspects of the brain cannot be applied to the analysis of cognitive differences. Along with other Psychologists and Neuroscientists such as Janet Hyde and Melissa Hines, there are insignificant cognitive sex differences, and any significant differences have been shown to be easily improved. However, there are many irrefutable cultural and environmental factors that influence the gender gap in both cognition tests and STEM fields as a whole. In order to break down the gender gap within STEM fields, women must explore intellectual pursuits that oppose those that
have been socially-deemed appropriate, outperform men in order to counteract the notions of inferiority, and actively work to negate environmental effects such as stereotype threat, exclusivity, and discouragement. These are extremely large demands, thus it is no wonder that various fields of science, math, and engineering do not yet have an equal representation of women.

The current environment of STEM fields is disabling the progression and hindering the retention of women. I have witnessed some of my most accomplished female engineering peers decide to not pursue a career in engineering. Despite their high-achieving talents, the lack of encouragement, lack of recognition, and lack of personal investment from professors has left them miserable and wanting out. Others have developed moderate to severe anxiety issues, which have impacted their testing abilities, confidence levels, and degree of involvement within the community. Clearly, the STEM culture has far-reaching impacts. Additionally, establishing equal representation of women in science, math and engineering fields does not solely influence academic endeavors or STEM industries. It has strong political implications. By allowing this culture and system to continue to exist as it currently is, we are failing to give women an equal opportunity to pursue and excel in these fields. The lack of equal female representation in science and math represents a greater political and economic gender inequality. Attempting to validate the intellectual and occupational limitations placed on women by pointing to a minimal, if any, difference in biology is the definition of discrimination itself. Without a concrete, definitive biological basis explaining why women cannot and should not pursue science, math, and engineering related fields, the current unequal representation of women in these areas is
not the result of male brain superiority. It is the result of gender inequality and it must be addressed as such.
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Policing Indecency: Queer Interactions with the Irish State in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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Ireland during the late 20th century was the black sheep of Western Europe, in regards to government treatment of homosexuality. It was the last major state in the region to legalize same-sex sexual relations when it did so in 1993, eleven years after legalization in the penultimate major territory in the region, Northern Ireland. The relatively outdated treatment of homosexuality that defined Irish LGBT policy for decades is widely attributed among scholars to the critical role that Catholicism played in early state-building period in Ireland (Conrad 2010, 125). Yet today, a vast majority of Irish citizens are supportive of gays and lesbians, with 90% of respondents to a 2010 Irish Times survey stating they would think “no differently” of a person if they came out (Irish Times 2010). Given this shift, issues such as legalization and severe state homophobia no longer define Irish debates on homosexuality. Rather, the modern discussions revolve around the marriage question.

Not only do these types of issues no longer define Irish political discourse, however; they appear to be notably absent. From observation of the debates over the April 2015 referendum on same-sex marriage in Ireland, it seems that the pro-LGBT camp rarely reflects on the past. Yet to do so is to ignore a deep history of state homophobia. As will be explored in this paper, Irish nationalists pursued homosexual witch-hunts at various points in the late 19th century, and this antagonism towards homosexuality continued during the state-building period of the early to mid-20th century. Later incidents of police violence toward gay men would define the gay Irish experience in the following decades. Even when this police treatment subsided, however, the judiciary was rarely sympathetic to homophobic street attacks on effeminate men. Indeed, it was the seeming spike in homophobic attacks in the 1970s – and consequent
lack of government response – that triggered the first gay pride parade in Dublin, as well as the filing of the European Court of Human Rights case that led to the decriminalization of homosexuality (Tin 2008, 253).

With this past in mind, this paper will explore the history of homophobia in Ireland, with special focus on homophobia’s manifestations within government and law enforcement structures, as a means of contextualizing the modern situation of LGBT politics in Ireland. To frame this discussion, the theoretical history of the origins of homophobia will be explored, followed by a discussion of the ideology of state homophobia – an ideology that has proved highly influential in the history of the Republic of Ireland, as well as in many other states. This will lead into an overview of government discrimination experienced by the Irish gay community – both direct and indirect.

**Origins of Homophobia**

Homophobia as a concept did not emerge until the early 1970s, and thus to apply such a term to a long history of systematic discrimination of men who have sex with men (MSMs) is a retrospective act.\(^{66}\) However, understanding this history, especially in the era of the 20\(^{th}\) century and beyond, through the lens of homophobia theory can be incredibly helpful in creating a cohesive narrative for why societies – and especially the state – acts as it does towards sexual manifestations of same-sex attractions.

\(^{66}\)It is important to note here that discrimination against lesbianism is rare in the history of Western society. This lack of antagonism does not result from any sort of tolerance, however. Rather, it was due to a common assertion that women did not possess sexuality – a wholly other form of oppression. See Lochrie (1999) for an overview of scholarly understandings of this history.
The establishment of the idea of homophobia, which became widely exposed in 1972 through a publication of psychologist George Weinberg, is itself essential to understanding the history of how society deals with homosexuality. Prior to this moment, the homosexual was the person who was sick or disordered, due to supposedly unnatural inclinations. After the injection of Weinberg’s ideology into Western society, “society itself was phobic or sick,” and was unnatural in its repression of the healthy, independent homosexual (Wickberg 2000, 47).

The injection of this new term into social discourse was not initially quite successful outside of the psychology community, where it quickly helped to reframe homosexuality in a way that contributed to various psychological associations’ de-pathologization of same-sex attraction. Many gay activists admit to not being familiar with the term in the 1970s, despite some prominent activists’ efforts to push the term into the Western far left’s rhetoric. Some out gays and lesbians who were aware of it initially pushed back against the term, some quite heavily. Writing in 1977, one article discusses the opposition of some gay and lesbian men and women to mass use of homophobia, as to them it focused too much on the personal aspect, characterizing opposition to queers as “an individual neurosis, a personal eccentricity” (Bentley 1980, 301). To them, homophobia was thoroughly rooted in social oppression at a broader level.

The concept of homophobia became more ingrained and salient among the gay community when it began to be viewed as rooted in the state, or at the very least society, during the 1980s. Arguably one of the most influential factors in this shift was the AIDS crisis in the decade, which brought about widespread discrimination towards those with same-sex attraction – especially gay and bisexual men – and
required a word to describe such discrimination (Wickberg 2000, 50). This need was filled by homophobia, though it is worth noting that AIDS and homosexuality were much less strongly linked in Ireland than in other countries. Due to the remarkable media coverage of the issue, and the early linkage of AIDS and homosexuality when the syndrome and its corresponding virus first came to fore, any man who confessed to having the disease was quickly ostracized due to his supposed same-sex sexual tendencies, in a way that painfully mimics the historical treatment of lepers. Feelings of discrimination were not limited to how gay persons related to the general public, however; they also arose due to commonly held beliefs of government treatment of the queer population. Although government and police had traumatized the gay community for centuries, the population has been hyper-cognizant of such treatment since the Stonewall riots. Thus, when the U.S. government failed to find a suitable treatment for HIV/AIDS in a swift manner, many in the gay community felt that the government was systematically attempting to prevent their health recovery as a manifestation of ingrained homophobia. This distrust of how the government manipulates queer bodies continues to this day in many Western contexts, and is critical to understanding how homophobia came to be understood in a systematic and physical context in the history of Western gay rights.

**Political Homophobia: Queer Interactions with the State**

The way that homophobia manifests itself in governance requires additional exploration and analysis from the more basic analysis of social instances of homophobia. Theories of governance vary, but in the modern world a Lockean social contract theory – that is, government is meant to preserve humans’ natural state of peace and
protect its citizens – has come to be quite widespread, especially in the West. With this theory in mind, operating under the assumption that homosexual sexual encounters are normal, the government would have a duty to protect persons’ right to partake in such. Of course, historically – and still in many countries, and even U.S. states, today – this is not the assumption on homosexuality that governance operates under. Governments in some cases will view same-sex sexual relations as an attack on social mores and society as a whole, and thus must defend its citizens from it. This represents a more Hobbesian point of view – that is, government must protect its citizens from their own vices. This view, coupled with a belief that homosexuality is morally wrong, explains why governments seek out and imprison men who have sex with men, as they are supposedly protecting these men from themselves.

This type of state-endorsed persecution – often through the form of imprisonment – is referred to for the purposes of this paper as political homophobia, which again is a uniquely separate phenomenon than social homophobia. Political homophobia is purposeful, especially when practiced as a strategy of the state itself. For some political scientists, homophobia in the political sphere is not something that inherently arises from religious belief. Rather, it is “embedded in the scapegoating of an “other” that drives processes of state building and retrenchment” (Weiss and Bosia 2013, 2). The most frequent weapon utilized against the crime of homosexuality by the state is show trials, which the state can manipulate drastically to achieve its goals (Weiss and Bosia 2013, 41). Such a circumstance allows the state to frame homosexuality as it sees fit, most often painting the defendant as falling victim to the threatening foreign vice of same-sex attraction.
In the specific context of these sodomy trials, a Foucauldian lens is particularly helpful at understanding why many societies carry out these trials so publicly, and so drawn out, to the point that it hearkens back to Michel Foucault’s discussions of public torture and punishment. In these discussions of Foucault, he notes that public execution “did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power... It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted” (Foucault 1995, 48-49). As Foucault proceeds to note, this is why the ceremony of execution required such pomp and circumstance, as well as visibility; absolutely nothing could be obscured in the ceremony for the law to triumph. In the modern day, of course, public execution and torture are not necessarily present in Ireland and the West, at least in such a visible way. Trials, though, especially those of gay men and others for crimes of sexual indecency, are often utilized as a means of putting the body on display for the public. Foucault himself notes that even though society has generally moved away from violent punishment, modern systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body: “even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use ‘lenient’ methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue” (Foucault 1995, 25).

Thus, even though sodomy trials are not necessarily as extreme as public executions, they function as a well-publicized spectacle. The defendant is othered and made out to impugn the very morality upon which society is built, and by doing so the trial assists in the creation of a cohesive state identity, and a corresponding state-imposed morality. As the most visible face of state-endorsed political homophobia, it is these trials that gain the most attention among the public, and therefore possess a critical importance in the history of
many states’ active campaigns against homosexuals, as will be seen in
the Irish case.

**Britain and Ireland: Oppression of Homosexuality in the Colonial Era**

The modern strand of Irish nationalism, which emerged in the mid to late 19th century, was linked with severe homophobia from the start. The origin of this linkage is not concretely established, though it is probably accurate to say that this connection exists due to the political movement’s formative years occurring in the Victorian age, widely acknowledged as placing a heavy emphasis upon sexual morality (Ferriter 2009, 23). From the 1880s onwards, this homophobia came to be used as a political weapon, building upon the overwhelmingly conservative nature of Irish culture, at least on sexual issues.

The Dublin Castle scandals in the late 19th century and early 20th century are indicative of this. Irish nationalists at the time accused various British officials and staff within the British governance – centered around Dublin Castle - of partaking in gay sex, with nationalist reports from the time nearly suggesting riotous orgies. These accusations were meant to capitalize on Irish opposition to homosexuality as a means of building anti-British sentiment. Leaders of the nationalist movement at the time attempted to paint homosexuality - generally referred to as “buggery” or “indecent behaviour” - as a foreign vice that must be expelled from Ireland (Duggan 2012, 14). The language of expulsion of evil, interestingly, appears to borrow quite heavily from the way that Catholic history discusses St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland. Quotes from nationalist newspapers surrounding two of these trials in 1884-1885
evidence such patterns. In the coverage of one trial, in which a British official prosecuted the owner of a nationalist newspaper for libel over accusations of sodomy – which resulted in a ‘not guilty’ verdict, implying the accusations were true – one nationalist paper, the Cork Examiner (now the Irish Examiner) congratulated the owner in his “victory in the cause of public morality” (Cork Examiner 1884, 4). The same article placed great emphasis on Mr. Cornwall’s “hasty flight” to Scotland, where he would be more welcome – implying that somehow homosexuality was more prevalent in Great Britain. Indeed, when Oscar Wilde was put on trial for the same type of accusations a decade later, the same paper described Wilde as simply a victim of the rampant sodomy culture that plagued London at the time, continuing the portrayal of homosexuality as a purely foreign disease (Cork Examiner 1895, 2). What is intriguing about this pattern, however, is that, unlike most rhetoric at the time, Irish nationalism thus placed the pathology of homosexuality within societal trends, rather than the individual.

This is not to say that the British tolerated homosexuality, or that utilizing homophobia as a political tool was limited in use to only Irish nationalists. The prosecution and treatment of Irish nationalist Roger Casement in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising is the clearest evidence of this, and also highlights how much focus Victorian morality placed upon policing the body. In the trial of Casement for treason following the uprising, the British government prosecution circulated a plethora of diary entries, which have come to be known as the Black Diaries. These diary entries detailed an extensive history of sexual encounters with other men “with the same economical tone in which he might have recorded his daily expenses” (Tin 2008, 253). While for many years the authenticity of the diaries was questioned by Irish nationalists, due to the aforementioned portrayal of
homosexuality as foreign, scholars today assert that the diaries were, most likely, accurate and legitimate (Ferriter 2009, 67). In doing this, the British government was able to make an example of Casement, and reassert state hegemony, hearkening back to the theories of Foucault mentioned earlier. The more immediate purpose of the government in exposing this, however, was a belief that by demonstrating a willingness by Casement to undermine the moral mores of society, he could also be expected to possess no qualms at political treason. Similar to the use of prior sexual histories of women in rape trials in the 20th century to discredit the plaintiff, the government also most likely believed such exposure would help to invalidate the authenticity of Casement’s testimony. Arguably, the government succeeded in these goals, as Casement was ultimately executed by hanging. What is intriguing about the state’s treatment of Casement, however, is not just what happened during the trial, but also what occurred afterwards. Post-execution, Casement’s body was put through a rectal examination by a medical officer who recorded that he found, “unmistakeable [sic] evidence of the practices to which, it was alleged, the prisoner in question had been addicted” (Ferriter 2009, 67). While not the public execution to which Foucault speaks of, this act is an ultimate representation of the state controlling its citizens through the body, as through violating the bodily integrity of the person the state reasserts its sovereignty. Yet in a way, this private examination – which was widely disseminated after it was completed – does represent the public spectacle of Foucault. While it suggested Casement was a homosexual, the state was not entirely sure of this – and, likely, neither was the public. Without such “unmistakeable evidence” of gay sex acts, the state would not have been able to definitively assert the moral high ground that its authority rested upon.
Homophobia in the New State

By the late 1920s, it became clear that the widespread persecution of homosexuality in Ireland would continue quite robustly in the Irish Free State. This indicated that Irish nationalism had come to acknowledge that homosexuality did, in fact, exist among the Irish public, though the precise source of this ‘indecency’ was still disputed. One record of nationwide offences from 1928-1928 indicates that 86 prosecutions of men for homosexual offences had occurred, with the vast majority found guilty – although one official from the time notes that these are only “a small percentage” of actual offenses occurring, indicating this growing acknowledgement of homosexuality in Ireland (Ferriter 2009, 161).

This acknowledgement would transform into a more proactive course of action in the coming decade of the 1930s, as the Free State reasserted itself as a Republic. Under the leadership of revolutionary Éamon de Valera and his party Fianna Fáil, the morality of the new nation became more solidified into legal codes. In the new 1937 Constitution of Ireland, women were told that their place was in home and family life, for instance. On issues of “deviant” sexuality, a nationwide directive to combat homosexual acts had yet to occur. However, in this time period, local police task forces on morality began to arise, with a major goal being the arrest of perpetrators of homosexual offences. In Cork, for instance, documents from the late 1930s indicate that the chief superintendent of the Gardaí in Cork had put in place a “special vice squad” since 1935, with its aim to decrease the number of sexual offences in the area; the most alarming trend, supposedly, was the rising number of arrests for sodomy (Ferriter 2009, 169).
By 1945, trials of men for homosexual offences had become more commonplace, partially as a result of the aforementioned push to combat offences relating to sexual morality. However, the government still struggled to establish a uniform trend of harsh punishment as the result of these trials, and thus, they were not significantly publicized by the government or media. The reason for this was two-fold. First, some forces within Irish society, most likely religious leaders, were still of the mindset that homosexuality and other ‘deviant’ sexual behavior did not exist to its fullest possible extent in Ireland, and therefore should continue to be hidden from the public (Ferriter 2009, 218). Furthermore, the law that was usually involved in such cases - an 1885 Act of Parliament, carried over into Irish legal code, criminalizing any “physical intimacy” between two men – was too broad of a code, and thus incredibly difficult to apply in judicial decisions (Boyd 1986, 190). Indeed, many gay men who lived through the period of 1940-1967 (the latter year being when England and Wales legalized consensual sex acts between two men) consider the treatment of Irish gay men by the police to be better than their English and Welsh counterparts, and attribute this better treatment to the hesitancy of the Irish police to utilize such a broad and unwieldy law (O'Carroll and Collins 1995, 15).

Homophobia and the Gardaí: Reigning in the Vice

As worldwide social norms outside Ireland began to shift in the 1960s, however, efforts to arrest and prosecute men engaged in sexual activity with other men appear to have become much more pronounced. Between 1962 and 1972 there were 455 convictions of men for crimes related to homosexuality, with numbers for the latter years of that period being higher (Hug 1999, 207). Indeed, the time period from the late 1960s through the early 1980s was a horrific era
for gay men in Ireland. After being arrested, often by undercover policemen in gay cruising areas, those arrested were forced to undergo what was essentially public humiliation in the form of a trial; one man, for instance, was forced by a judge to vividly recount an act of fellatio twenty times in front of an entire court (Tin 2008, 253). The general tone of court proceedings at the time were so homophobic that legal advisors to those arrested generally encouraged pleading guilty, as the way the laws were used made the charges “too hard to fight” (Boyd 1986, 190).

The increase in prosecutions of gay men in this time period, coupled with the consequent horrifying and embarrassing trials, was one of the major motivations for David Norris, the well-known barrister and gay rights activist, to file a case in 1974 with the High Court of Ireland, alleging that by criminalizing homosexuality the Irish state was in violation of Norris’ right to privacy. In a speech in 1993, Norris explicitly outlined this, noting, “By 1974, partly as a result of our experiences in the courts and partly because [we] found the whole notion of being labeled criminal offensive, we decided to go on the offensive” (O’Carroll and Collins 1995, 19). Despite initial failure in the Irish courts, where the judge decided in favor of that state due to its “Christian” character, Norris ultimately would find success in the European Court of Human Rights, in 1988, by arguing that Ireland was in violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which focuses on, again, a right to privacy. However, despite this decision, the Dáil still had to legislate this change – a change which finally took place in the 1990s, after pressure from a gay rights movement that found the origin of its passion in the government treatment of gays and lesbians in the aftermath of two hate crimes in the 1980s.
Hate Crime: the Charles Self and Declan Flynn Murders

In January of 1982, a gay man, Charles Self, was found dead in his home; it quickly was realized that the last he was seen before his death was in a gay cruising area, from which he left with another man (Ferriter 2009, 499). As details became more publicized of the murder, the gay community, and indeed much of society, was understandably shocked and outraged. However, what spurred even more anger within the gay community was the response of the Gardaí to the crime. After many gay men allowed themselves to be questioned and interviewed by the police about the incident – as they were advised to do by many of the leading gay and lesbian advocacy groups at the time – it quickly became apparent that the Gardaí were more interested not in solving the crime, but instead compiling what was essentially a file for “some 1500 homosexuals” in Dublin (Hug 1999, 213). In the aftermath of this revelation, the gay community from 1982 onwards understood its relationship with the police to be, effectively, one of one-sided intimidation and harassment, if this was not the understanding prior to the incident (Boyd 1986, 192).

Further weakening of whatever trust gay men had in the state came in the aftermath of another murder, that of Declan Flynn, which occurred in September of 1982. Flynn’s attackers were a group of teenage boys, who boasted in their trial that they had already injured at least 150 other “poofs” in the year prior – indeed, their defense rested not on not killing Flynn, but rather on the fact that they were “mistaken” that he was queer, implying that they would not have killed him had they thought him a heterosexual (Tin 2008, 251). The fact that they had gotten away with such a high volume of attacks is unsurprising. Gay men in the period who would attempt to report such queer bashing described being “laughed and jeered” out of police...
stations (Ferriter 2009, 499). Indeed, what was unique about this case was not the details, but rather, the result of the trial in Dublin’s Central Criminal Court. The judge, in announcing that the sentences given to the five perpetrators were suspended, wrote that “this could never be considered murder”; adding further injury to the result, a few months later, when one of the attackers appeared again before the same court for theft of a vehicle, he was given six months in prison – which, although a short sentence, was six months longer than what he was given for assisting in a man’s murder (Boyd 1986, 195).

The anger felt in the aftermath of the ruling - an anger further inflamed by the later ruling on theft – would help to encourage what is now viewed as the first pride parade to have ever occurred in Dublin. And while no direct link can be drawn between such a parade and the final legalization of homosexuality in 1994, it is highly probable that much of the public opinion shift that occurred among the Irish public in the late 1980s was a result of the increased public visibility of the gay community – a visibility that clearly arose as a response to the homophobia of the Irish state.

Conclusion

As in essentially every area of the world, homophobia in Ireland is clearly ingrained in the history of the state. Police have actively sought out and detained those engaging in even the slightest gay activity, and prosecuted them – some with the broader political goal of making an example of such persons in order to limit “deviant” sexual behavior in society, others simply as an extension of deeply ingrained personal homophobia. Even today, discrimination continues to occur, despite the advances of the gay (and now LGBT) rights movement in the country.
Yet despite this clear history of homophobia in Ireland and elsewhere, those on the opposite side of LGBTQ advocates in political debates have claimed victimhood. In the ongoing debates surrounding the upcoming same-sex marriage referendum, they assert that the label of “homophobe” is being used a way of persecuting them for personal religious beliefs about marriage. Certainly, there is some space for a debate of whether homophobe is an adequate descriptor of those who oppose same-sex marriage. LGBTQ activists may be alienating otherwise supportive religious people when such a label is thrown at any and all religious persons.

At the same time, however, almost any act or statement that prefers heterosexuality will be felt as an affront to a gay or lesbian person’s identity. Even if explained in the most caring manner possible, opposition to same-sex marriage is felt by many gay and lesbian persons as invalidating towards one of their intrinsic qualities. Especially after the long history of systematic persecution by society, commentary that comes across as degrading towards queer persons will unsurprisingly result in anger, and accusations of homophobia. For debates surrounding marriage to process civilly, the anti-gay marriage viewpoint must realize the harmful and violent history of gay and lesbian interaction with the state.
Works Cited


“London Correspondence.” Cork Examiner, 5 April 1895.


