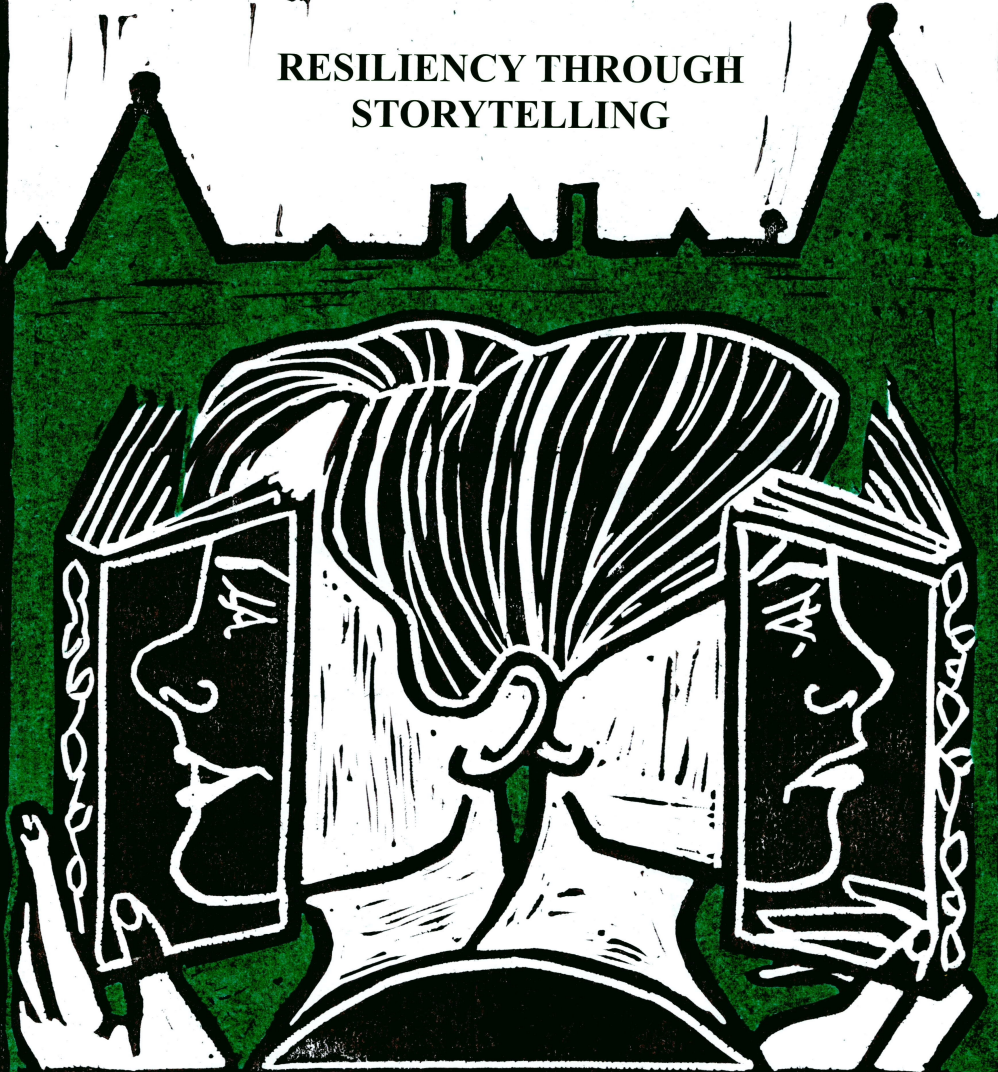


VOLUME 6

SPRING 2021

# ROOTED IN RHETORIC

RESILIENCY THROUGH  
STORYTELLING



WRITING AND ARTWORK BY STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG DEPARTMENT OF RHETORIC,  
WRITING, AND COMMUNICATIONS

**VOLUME 6**

**SPRING 2021**

**ROOTED IN RHETORIC  
RESILIENCY THROUGH STORYTELLING**

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# Table of Contents

*Foreword*.....4

*Introduction*.....6

## *Research Essays*

### **Andi Pankratz**

What Oralism Ignores: The Compounding Trauma of Language Deprivation in the  
Deaf Community.....7

### **Brandi Delaine**

Healthcare in Canada:  
Use with Caution Indigenous Women.....15

### **Nicola Donovan**

Community Integration of British Migrants in France (and Canada).....22

### **Nina McIntyre**

Surviving and Thriving in the Pandemic:  
Kindness as the Key to Resiliency.....38

### **Sarah London**

Alone and Crazy: Negotiating Identity through Comedic Self-Narration in *The  
Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.....48

## *Rhetorical Analyses*

### **Carla Dyck**

The Power of Storytelling in Feminist Consciousness-Raising.....61

## **Cassidy Rempel**

Neoliberal Ideologies Behind Self-Care.....71

## **Noah Douglas-McKay**

Rewriting the North American Mythos: An Ideological Analysis of Kent Monkman's  
Artwork.....84

## **Serge Desrosiers**

We Need Stories, Indigenous Stories.....92

### *Critiques*

## **Anna Schaible-Schur**

“Elementary, My Dear Watson”:

A Narrative Critique of Queerbating in the BBC's *Sherlock*.....96

## **Will Bertazzo Lambert**

The Florida Project, The Walt Disney Company and Disillusionment:

A New Historicist Critique.....111

### *Memoirs/Stories*

## **Roberta Godin**

The Severed Cord.....123

## **Sofia Reimer**

The Window//Alone Again.....128

### *Journalism*

## **Autumn Sfatcos**

The Ingredients Behind the Label.....130



## *Speech*

### **Sarah Seroy**

Replace *The Lord of the Flies* with *the Marrow Thieves*:

A Call for Increased Indigenous Representation in Schools.....146

## *Reviews*

### **Kristi Loeb**

Giving it Their Best Shot: The Hidden Complexities Faced by Infectious Disease

Communicators.....153

### **Will Bertazzo Lambert**

Pieces of a Woman: A Film in Fragments.....162

# Foreword

**Written by Serge Desrosiers**

*It's time for a story.*

Now, for me this story started in a classroom in March. Our teacher came in wearing long and yellow rubber gloves, holding a bottle of disinfectant spray in each hand. In complete seriousness, he said that this would most likely be our last class. We laughed a hopeful little chuckle sprinkled with the tiniest bit of nervousness. He went on to say that his colleagues in the USA were already shut down. With absolute horror he spoke about learning to teach remotely. We laughed some more, less hopeful this time and more than a little concerned. The class continued normally after that. A week later, he was proven right. Classes were cancelled. As far removed as I believed

Winnipeg was from the rest of the world, Covid 19 had officially become reality.

So, here we are. A year and a bit later. The shock of the abrupt change has worn off. The rebellious gratification of showing up to work from home or online class in a fancy top and pajamas has lost its pleasure. Now, we rush to escape the confines of our too familiar walls to soak in heat waves. Even the introverts are okay with leaving the house. Truly, these are some dark days.

But, we made it. Not all the way clear yet, but the Bombers are coming back. Like the groundhog in spring, the local sports team has emerged and announced no more weeks of lock-down.

Fingers crossed.

Now, once as before, we beleaguered students are again confronted with a monumental challenge. We may have to return to class. In person.

I know, I know... please stop crying, I am ill-equipped to deal with so much emotion after so little socialization.

We will be okay. Remember, not even a global pandemic could stop us! Not even enforced isolation and increased digitization could destroy our communal spirit. Look no further than this collection of essays for hope. And what a collection it is! There are rhetorical critiques of art and

video, spotlights shined into the darker corners of healthcare and self-care, a myriad of voices speaking of resiliency, and so much more. Even when the content of these essays is grim, they are still examples of weary spirits who showed up and did the work to try to make the world a better place. If this is what these students can accomplish while surviving, just imagine what they will accomplish when they're thriving.

So, pull up a chair, lounge in the sun – or shade – and turn the page.

*We have plenty more stories to tell.*

# Introduction

Written by Anna Schaible-Schur

Honours Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications Student

“Resiliency Through Storytelling” is the sixth volume of *Rooted in Rhetoric*, an academic journal published by the Rhetoric, Writing and Communications department at The University of Winnipeg. “Resiliency Through Storytelling” highlights student writings from various departments, including Rhetoric, English, Linguistics, Theatre, Geography, and more. This volume’s selection of student writing ranges from research essays, rhetorical analyses, and critiques to stories, speeches, and reviews.

The theme “Resiliency Through Storytelling” expresses this past year’s challenges, as well as the underlying importance of communication in our societies. The students featured in this

volume demonstrated resiliency by producing work, exploring ideologies, and critically engaging with new concepts, all while studying during a pandemic. The student’s stories and writings connect readers, create dialogue, and expand worldviews.

Thank you to the students who submitted their pieces to the journal. Thank you to Dr. Andrew McGillivray, Dr. Helen Lepp Friesen, and Dr. Shawn Moi for advising on and facilitating this volume. We are grateful to the Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications department for funding the journal and supporting students’ work.

# **What Oralism Ignores: The Compounding Trauma of Language Deprivation in the Deaf Community**

*Andi Pankratz* is a hard of hearing student who graduated from Red River College's Deaf Studies Program in 2019 and are currently completing an honours bachelor degree, double majoring in linguistics and theatre. They hope to participate in making theatre and performance art that is accessible to the Deaf community.

The Deaf community occupies a unique position because it is a found community. Most Deaf children are born to hearing parents, so they are not born into the same type of culture. While there are some generationally Deaf families, many Deaf people only find their language and community later in life, although some never do. Some hearing parents believe that they can mitigate any negatives relating to deafness through oralism and

raise their child to function only in a hearing society. This attitude results in a large spectrum of cultural involvement and language use within the Deaf community.

Due to the position and nature of their community, Deaf children are at a high risk of being language deprived, resulting in possible trauma later on. The Deaf community is a mostly found community due to 96% of Deaf individuals being born into hearing families (Macchiarella 2). As a result, Deaf culture is passed down primarily through community interaction, specifically through schools for the Deaf. Both Deaf culture and American Sign Language (ASL) have formed in the early schools for the Deaf in North America (Holcomb 113). Deaf people may grow up without a strong connection to their family or their ethnic culture, especially if they



have been raised attending mainstream schools (i.e. schools for hearing children), where they are taught using oralist methods, or their family has not made attempts for meaningful connection and inclusion (Holcomb 65-67; Anderson 353-358). As stated by Jean Moog, former principal of the Central Institute for the Deaf, a deaf person is not born with an automatic connection to the Deaf community (Tranchin 37:44-38:20). However, she fails to mention that avoiding the Deaf community will not protect a Deaf individual from the systematic traumas and issues the Deaf community faces.

Language deprivation is a huge and prevalent problem in the Deaf community. The human brain undergoes a critical period of language acquisition and

development before age five (Hall 961-965). When a Deaf child's only language exposure is to spoken language through oralist methods, they will often not receive the exposure needed to form a full first language (Hall 961-965; Hall et al. 761-776). Deaf children born to hearing, non-signing families who later learn sign language for their child, are often given inadequate language exposure if the child's language exposure is limited to the family. The language use of beginners still does not resemble natural language (Hall 961-965; Hall et al. 761-776). In these cases, the deprivation is typically less severe, and if exposure to Deaf signers is included in these children's lives, they are typically shown to not be deprived at all (Hall 961-965; Tate 8). On the other hand, there are many different

reasons hearing parents opt for oralist methods. Many hearing parents are told that the window for language acquisition is longer for signed languages than spoken languages (Tranchin 11:50-13:38). This statement is untrue and is based on the incorrect belief that sign languages are not full languages, resulting in children being language deprived in their early years during efforts to give them the ability to speak and read lips. If that fails and the parents then try to teach the child sign language, the child may be unable to master it because it is too late for first language acquisition. These children may struggle with literacy because their brains are not equipped for language. Meanwhile, their non-deprived peers typically do not experience a significant delay in literacy compared to hearing children, as language

transfer between ASL and written English can take place as it does with any second language (Hall 961-965). Language deprivation can be both a trauma and disorder in and of itself if the case is severe enough. Language-deprived adults are often never able to grasp the concept of grammar. Although they may learn ASL later in life, they may be unable to use it to its full extent as the language center of their brains no longer activates, instead, the visual center of their brain activates (Hall 961-965). Language deprivation often leads to aggressive behaviours as the child cannot express themselves, often compounding the trauma they may already be experiencing. They may become anxious, restless, and violent. Language is necessary for normal social development, acquiring and processing ideas and

concepts, and academic and vocational performance. Language-deprived individuals will often struggle to form healthy relationships, understand social norms and boundaries, and conceptualize certain events (Macchiarella 19-24; Tate 7-9).

Deaf individuals who are language deprived have also been found to have a higher risk of experiencing physical abuse, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, and child neglect (Macchiarella 19-24). Many factors contribute to this risk. These children are often not taught independence, but to follow the lead of adults they trust. They may not conceptualize what they have experienced or may not form meaningful bonds with family members whom they would otherwise potentially reach out to. Information on abuse is not

made accessible to them, and they may not have the linguistic abilities to describe what has happened to reach out for help (Macchiarella 19-24; Tate, 7-11). These children often cannot understand or process their compounding trauma, and their lack of communicative abilities limits treatment. Language deprivation can contribute to “Information Deprivation Trauma,” (Johnson et al. 318-319) and regardless of language skills, Deaf people often experience “oppression-based trauma” (Johnson et al. 318-319). Mental health treatment for Deaf individuals often does not display cultural competency, and showcases a lack of information regarding how Deaf culture and the Deaf experience affect an individual, resulting in misdiagnoses and harmful, unnecessary

treatments (Tate 12-16; Johnson et al. 317-330).

Trauma relating to language deprivation is often the result of oralist teaching methods' primary or exclusive use. A turning point for oralism in Deaf education was the Milan conference in 1880 (Harvard University). The Milan conference for Deaf educators voted that oralism was the best way to educate Deaf children (Harvard University). Before this, there were many schools for the Deaf around the world that taught using sign languages. This conference effectively banned the use of sign language in the classroom worldwide for a century. The result was that generations of Deaf people were language deprived and subsequently despondent and traumatized (Zimmer). Only recently has ASL begun to be

reintroduced. Despite the availability of schools for the Deaf that teaches the curriculum in sign language, as well as the improved academic performance from these schools compared to Deaf children taught in mainstream schools, the popularity of oralism is still prevalent. The Milan conference's effects on the Deaf community have shifted the public perception of Deaf people in a way that is often used to justify oralist teaching methods.

A self-fulfilling prophecy found that the historically low academic performance of language deprived students is often used to argue that Deaf students are less academically capable, and rather than suffering the effects of language deprivation, it is better for them to be a dysfunctional member of the hearing

society (Hall 961-965). Instead of fostering a meaningful education in ASL, it is considered preferable that the Deaf community speak to ask for help while trying to navigate the world (Tranchin 11:22-11:41). This viewpoint is exemplified in the documentary *For a Deaf Son* as it is stated that at the time, the average Deaf student graduated high school with a fourth-grade reading level (Tranchin 18:40-18:51). One mom in the documentary concluded that this meant she had very little to lose sending her child to an ASL school because then her child would have the ability to fully communicate with her at least, rather than with no one at all (Tranchin 40:30-41:26). However, most of the hearing parents in the documentary used this premise to justify their oralist teaching choices, often

combined with the previously mentioned belief that their children would learn sign language at a later date. These reasons given by the parents, audiologists, and educators in the documentary for why a Deaf child needs to speak are that the child needs to have the option to talk to strangers on the street and to order at McDonald's (Tranchin 35:40-35:57). These reasons show that the expectations these parents, pro-oralism audiologists and educators have for what Deaf people are capable of are harmful. Additionally, there is no mention of the benefit to the child's literacy or academic performance, as that benefit does not exist (Hall 961-965). There is also no mention of being able to engage in deep thought, conversation, have the cognitive function necessary for a fulfilling career, or have the ability to form



meaningful relationships. The perception that Deaf people live incomplete lives is strong enough that these parents, educators, and health care professionals view it as preferable to have a deaf child be dysfunctional in a hearing society than be a functional, culturally Deaf, self-actualized person.

The Deaf experience cannot be avoided through oralism; rather, oralism has caused certain forms of trauma to become a Deaf experience that are all too

common. When given language access, Deaf people can live full and complete lives while also receiving the benefits present in the Deaf community. The Deaf community can be improved when Deaf individuals are given full access to natural sign language and can have pride in their community and identity. Deaf individuals can (and do) thrive when given access to language, something that all children deserve.

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## Healthcare in Canada: Use with Caution Indigenous Women

*Brandi Delaine* is a Métis student who came back to the University of Winnipeg during the pandemic. She is taking a B.B.A. and hopes to work with not-for-profits once she graduates. She wants to bring awareness to Indigenous issues and bring light to their successes.

Canada's healthcare system is built upon racism. It lacks consideration of Indigenous wants and needs. Furthermore, the news about healthcare that Indigenous people receive is rooted in the anti-Indigenous language. Upon searching for an article about Indigenous health from a non-Indigenous source, one will discover only a snippet of the actual story. Indigenous people living on ancestral land within Canada often have to leave their community to receive the most

comprehensive medical care. When departing their home community for medical treatment, Indigenous people are subject to racial profiling and judgement, which leads to subpar healthcare. Problems Indigenous peoples face within the Canadian healthcare system stem from the colonial mindset that was used to create the structure of the healthcare system. Racism is also embedded within the minds of many healthcare providers who have likely grown up hearing that Indigenous people are the inferior to other races. This essay will shed light on the ways in which Indigenous women's healthcare in Canada is second-rate, leading to new trauma within the Indigenous community by asking the following question: what measures does Canada need in order to

implement to change the type of subpar healthcare that Indigenous people receive?

Racism has been engrained within Canada's healthcare system for decades, with promises of improvement left unfulfilled. Brett Forester explains that "racism against Indigenous people in health care is a documented part of Canada's history. Segregated 'Indian hospitals', tuberculosis sanatoria and forced sterilization of Indigenous women are some examples." There have been countless examples of systemic racism that emerge in our newspapers. Social media sites, however, are modern platforms where the whole story is often shared. Racism within the healthcare system is not a new problem, but a problem that has existed throughout the history of

healthcare in Canada. This paragraph shows that Indigenous people have endured systemic racism throughout the history of Canada's healthcare system.

The mainstream media typically does not provide full or proper coverage on stories about Indigenous racism in the healthcare system. Kathleen Martens, from the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), gives a real-life example of the maltreatment of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian healthcare system through the testimony of Sarah Morrison. Martens quotes Morrison's lawyer, Michael Patterson, who says that Morrison, and other clients in similar positions, "are in pain, have not been offered counselling, and continue to suffer emotionally and psychologically, with

feelings of ‘anxiety, loss of the will to live, shame, embarrassment, grief.’” Morrison’s experience is a heartbreaking example, serving as a reminder that these are real people, stories, and racial encounters that cost Indigenous people their lives. With the rise of Indigenous networks, social media outlets, and Indigenous reporters, people are slowly beginning to approach these challenging topics with empathy and compassion.

Upon researching this topic, it is apparent that Indigenous sources have Indigenous people’s best interests in mind. Not only do APTN stories pay great attention to details in order to provide a well-covered story, but they also include tones of compassion. Indigenous women are beginning to share their encounters

with Canada’s racially biased healthcare providers with less fear of judgment and, in turn, are met with empathy and understanding. A possible solution to the problems Indigenous women face within our Canadian healthcare system starts with hearing firsthand experiences from victims. This sort of candidness will hopefully start bringing forth change to Canada’s healthcare system.

Many Indigenous women live in remote communities and are required to leave if they want comprehensive healthcare. There are, however, remote communities fortunate enough to have a nursing station. The nurses at these stations are not Indigenous, and they are hired by Health Canada. The nurses frequently misunderstand their patients’ cultural



practices, resulting in the nurses judging their patients. These circumstances result in Indigenous women receiving suboptimal care or, in some cases, no care at all. Off-reserve health centres often isolate Indigenous people. The COVID-19 pandemic increased this problem. Isolation and racism have become the perfect storm and are causing a new health crisis within the Indigenous community.

Joyce Echaguan's is an Indigenous woman whose encounter with the Canadian Healthcare system lead to her death at 37 years old. Maritza Zuluaga tells this story:

before Echaquan passed, she managed to get on her phone, go on Facebook Live, and record the last moments of her life. In the

video, you can hear hospital staff taunting her while she let out desperate cries. You can hear 'helpers' utter despicable slurs in French like: "You're stupid as hell." Another can be heard saying: 'She's good at screwing, more than anything else. And we're paying for this. (Zuluaga)

Echaquan was killed because healthcare workers disregarded her medical history. She died while workers taunted her and made racist remarks about her. The only reason this problem came to light was because Echaguan live-streamed her own death. Without Echaguan's courage, a situation with this level of discrimination would have been swept under the rug. With more access to social media sites and

the ability to live-stream these events, Indigenous women can ensure the whole truth is told.

Healthcare providers at all levels of the healthcare system often disregard Indigenous women. Indigenous women are treated as second-class citizens within the healthcare system because of the colour of their skin and the racial biases that come with it. Indigenous women are often left fighting for their basic healthcare rights—the rights that are easily available to non-Indigenous people. Because the Canadian healthcare system does not educate its employees about Indigenous culture, Indigenous women are slipping through the cracks. Birth alerts are a healthcare procedure that shows discrimination against Indigenous people.

Birth alerts occur when the government plans to take an Indigenous child from his or her mother. When the mother gives birth, Child Family Services is informed so they can come and take the child. Birth alerts are an unjust practice that

has required intense advocacy to get the health care systems to end this unlawful practice. In the meantime, the unlawful and harmful device has broken up families, created barriers in health care, and disrupted proper positive relationships supporting parents and children, says Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. (Marelj, McKenzie and Breille)

Slowly, the government is learning that these alerts are not helping women and children but, instead, are traumatizing them. Even though British Columbia banned birth alerts in 2017, and later Manitoba followed suit in July 2020, they are still being used in some parts of Canada (Marelj, Vikander). Marelj and Vikander state that “in November 2020, for example, a newborn was taken from its parents after a nurse stated that a father used the word “shake” while consoling his baby.” Birth alerts are creating a whole new set of generational trauma that is overwhelming Indigenous communities. Indigenous youth make up ninety percent of the children under the custody of Manitoba Child Family Services (Marelj, McKenzie and Breille). Banning birth

alerts and deeming them unconstitutional is a step towards lowering this number.

The numerous problems Indigenous women face within the Canadian healthcare system must be addressed.

Reconciliation has been a main discussion point in political parties’ campaigns.

However, it is rare that politicians actually take action to change the system.

Healthcare workers must be educated on Indigenous culture so they can provide culturally appropriate care to Indigenous people. If you are not an Indigenous woman who has dealt with the Canadian healthcare system, you will never understand the full extent of this trauma.

Every Canadian has the responsibility to listen to the traumatic experiences Indigenous women have had with the

Canadian healthcare system. Non-indigenous Canadians must listen to these experiences without passing judgment so

they can learn from past experiences and feel empathy towards Indigenous women.

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# Community Integration of British Migrants in France and Canada

*Nicola Donovan* is a final-year student in Interdisciplinary Linguistics. A qualified and ex-practicing Solicitor who has always been interested in language, Nicola decided to return to university to study Linguistics upon moving to Canada in 2017. Nicola is interested in the interface between language and the law, although she intends to study Speech Language Pathology after graduation to commence a second career as a Speech Language Pathologist.

English is so ubiquitous today that it is difficult to find a corner of the world where the language is not spoken to some degree. The prevalence of English opens up the world to Anglophones to visit, live, work, and study in many different countries. Two popular destinations for British migrants are France and Canada. France is geographically close to the United Kingdom (UK), with a similar

culture and way of life, and has the official language of French, whereas English is the official language of the UK. Canada, in contrast, is very far from the UK, but the two countries share a language and a large portion of history, if not necessarily as much in the way of contemporary culture.

If integration in the host country is primarily based on language, British migrants ought to find it harder to integrate in France than in Canada, which is not necessarily the case. Therefore, it is contended that the successful integration of migrants into a local community in their host country is based on a complex interaction of factors. Language is just one, and by no means the most important factor. In terms of my positioning regarding this topic, I am a UK citizen,



born in England, where I have lived for most of my life. I speak French and have lived in France twice. I have lived in Canada since December 2017. English and French are both official languages in Canada, albeit English dominates most of the country.

### **British Migrants in France**

The UK's accession to the European Communities in 1973, which later became the European Union (EU), afforded UK citizens the right to freedom of movement. This meant that citizens could live, work, and study without restriction, and without having to register with local authorities in the other EU Member States. Accordingly, it is difficult to be accurate concerning the number of British people living in France as the

population is "too volatile" for this type of statistical analysis (Recchi qtd. Ferbrache 739). Nevertheless, according to the UK government, of the 784,900 UK citizens living in the EU on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, 152,900 were in France (Office for National Statistics). Excluding Paris, a significant number moved to rural areas and the south of France.

In this regard, the "phenomenon" of British migration to France commencing in the 1980s differed from previous migration patterns in two ways (Ferbrache 737). Firstly, it involved migration to rural, rather than urban areas (737), driven by the marketing of rural French properties to the British (Buller & Hoggart qtd. Ferbrache 740). Following rural depopulation in France, these properties were no longer in

demand and became available and affordable to the British, especially when compared with the UK property market at the time (Buller & Hoggart qtd. 739-740). Secondly, British people moved to France for “hedonic,” rather than income or employment-related reasons (737).

Thus began the trend of lifestyle migration, popular with British migrants, defined as a “relatively privileged search for a new life abroad” (Lawson 58-59). According to Lawson, this migration was primarily undertaken in search of a better lifestyle and opportunities, rather than economic or political hardship in one’s homeland (58-59). The popularity of British lifestyle migration to France is partly driven by the idealized and romanticized view of French rural life that

British people often hold, considering it akin to how life used to be in the UK (Ferbrache 740). An interesting point regarding the privilege attached to lifestyle migration is the observation that the term “expatriate” often used to describe British people, has “complex colonial histories...suggest[ing] an innate sense of privilege for transnational migrants in relation to indigenous populations” (Kunz qtd. Miller 2). Whilst expatriate is often used to describe people from countries with a history of colonialism, people from elsewhere are more likely to be called migrants.

### **Integration**

Michelle Lawson, a UK-based author and university lecturer, describes how British lifestyle migrants are obsessed

with community integration, considering it their “moral obligation” (58, 60).

However, integration has traditionally been a problem for British migrants in France, given their difficulty and/or reluctance to adapt to the French language and culture. There is also a tendency to live in British “ghettoes” (Lawson qtd. 60). Alongside the desire to integrate, these difficulties can create “a site of conflict” between how some migrants wish to be seen and their outward behaviour (Lawson 60).

Consequently, a two-tier system of British migrants has developed - ones who make an effort to integrate and the others who do not, with the former sometimes “condemning” the latter for importing British food and speaking little French (Benson qtd. Lawson 25). This system

resonates with Ferdinand de Saussure’s “provincialism” and “intercourse” dichotomy (qtd. Edwards 77-78). Whilst those migrants who do not attempt to integrate are not geographically “immobile,” they nevertheless display provincialism, remaining loyal to British communities and traditions despite living in France. Michaela Benson, a sociologist, and ethnographer based at the University of London, UK, found that many British migrants in areas of the Lot, France, could maintain an active social life without learning French (57). In contrast, the first type of migrant engages in intercourse, keen to integrate and communicate with the French.

Given this two-tier system, those migrants who cannot speak French attempt

to overcome the language barrier by displaying how well-integrated they are in other ways. For example, they may register a French vehicle or pay taxes as a resident of France (Lawson 65-66). Benson's subjects similarly displayed pride regarding registering with the French authorities (52). British migrants in Spain were keen to define themselves as "committed settlers" distinct from temporary visitors (O'Reilly qtd. Lawson 25). It seems, therefore, that integration can sometimes be "more symbolic than practical" (Hayes qtd. Lawson 60).

Whilst some migrants make significant efforts to integrate for reasons of self-identification, others feel too "different" from the locals to achieve anything more than a "superficial and

unrewarding" level of integration (Smallwood qtd. 61; qtd. Lawson 26).

Instead, the migrants choose to remain closer to more familiar people and culture, providing them with a more positive sense of self-identification. Similarly, Salman Rushdie describes how many migrants struggling with their changing lives, alongside dealing with their "otherness" and sometimes hostility from the locals, seek solace by "retreat[ing]...behind the walls of the old culture" (356).

### **Language**

There is a commonly held belief that British migrants in France do not speak much French (Lawson 71).

Lawson's study found a lack of effort on the part of some migrants, giving up learning French once "real life [got] in the

way” (72). Another subject described learning French as “a mountain you’re never gonna climb,” so you should “forget” about it (72). As such, the subject diverts responsibility from himself in regard to becoming competent in French. He distances himself from British migrants who do not learn French, painting himself as someone learning the language at an achievable rate, rather than not learning it altogether (72).

Although this subject considered himself and his wife fairly well-integrated, and claimed his limited knowledge of French was “sufficient” to get by, they describe a situation when they attempted to buy pastries in a local patisserie, and the server could not understand them (72). Here, the couple passes responsibility for

the miscommunication back to the server, claiming that speaking French to her was like “talking to [a] wall,” the inference being that she should have been able to understand them (72). Although this couple was invited to many local events, including family weddings, the wife nevertheless commented that it was “hard to be fully integrated without the language” (67). Their descriptions of the events they attended often depicted them as outsiders, being treated “like royalty, guests of honour,” and “freaks” at one of the aforementioned weddings (66-67).

Interestingly, British migrants choose to live permanently in France without performing everyday tasks in French. That Anglophones are able to reside somewhere without speaking the

dominant language is a direct result of English being the worldwide lingua franca. There are, it seems, no “domains of necessity” for some British migrants in France, such that they are not required to use French even in the most crucial parts of their daily lives (Edwards 91-92).

Benson also describes how most of her subjects, especially those who were retired, had tried to learn French but underestimated its difficulty, which resulted in problems communicating with the locals (57). Overall, successful integration was based on a combination of the individual’s desire to integrate, their linguistic abilities in French, their opportunity for interaction, the welcome given to them by the locals, and the existence of shared interests (Benson 56).

According to Ferbache, employment is a further relevant factor (742). Benson found that it was not necessarily those who spoke fluent French who best integrated. Shared interests, which provided both the motivation and opportunity to speak French with the locals, was the leading overall indicator for successful integration, often transcending the language barrier (Benson 56-57). While undoubtedly important, language was “not the primary factor” in terms of acceptance; “inclination and effort” were more important in this respect (59).

### **Cuisine**

Another important part of culture is food, possessing a symbolic quality that can signify “the strength of...attachment” to one’s homeland culture (Bundy 1081).

Interestingly, nearly all of Lawson's participants denied using the two local British food stores or British foodstuffs in general, although several admitted obtaining British food products via other means (Lawson 68). It is fascinating to wonder who is keeping these stores in business if not the British, potentially linking this tendency to the aforementioned dissonance between how some migrants wish to be seen and their outward behaviour. Further, one subject criticized migrants who sought out British foodstuffs, although she attended various events where British food was of central importance (68). She and her husband justified attendance at these events, as they were popular with the French and enabled them to reciprocate, sharing British culture

with the locals, representing another way to fulfill their moral duty to integrate (68-69).

In a study of seventy British migrant households in Toulouse, France's fourth biggest city, all subjects admitted purchasing British food (Bundy 1082-1083). This practice was linked to three types of food acculturation: (1) maintenance, where British food was considered reassuring due to its quality, familiarity, providing emotional comfort, and being an easy option; (2) hyperculture, where food had symbolic value regarding one's "Britishness," with "hypercultured" individuals wishing to share British food with the French; and (3) hybridity, a "best-of-both-worlds" scenario, adopting some French foods, representing an idealized

view of the French lifestyle (Bundy 1083-1084). These three acculturation outcomes could also apply to other aspects of culture, including language.

All of Bundy's acculturation outcomes relate to Lawson's lifestyle migrants' attitudes towards food. Regarding the maintenance outcome, some subjects expressed shame at using British food to cope with life in France (Bundy 1083), perhaps similar to Lawson's subjects' denial of buying British foodstuffs, despite probably accessing British foods. Subjects demonstrating hyperculture wanted to share British food with the French, like Lawson's couple who attended British food events, and those expressing the hybridity outcome, who had an idealized vision of life in France akin to

many lifestyle migrants.

Unsurprisingly, those shopping in specifically British stores, seen as "unadventurous" and "safe," mostly identified with the hyperculture outcome (Bundy 1088). Bundy's subjects were not, however, lifestyle migrants, having moved to France for employment and were mostly there temporarily (1082). Without choosing to emigrate and perhaps without lifestyle migrants' overwhelming desire to integrate, combined with the temporary nature of their stay, Bundy's subjects may have had a different attitude concerning British foodstuffs while living in France.

### **Brexit: What Happens Now?**

Since Brexit, some pro-Remain UK citizens living in the EU have experienced "a sense of shame and



dislocation” regarding their British identity, viewing the UK as progressively typified “by xenophobia and insularity” (Higgins 277). Whilst Higgins’ research does not specifically focus on France, as a study of 909 British nationals residing in the EU Member States, it will likely be fairly representative of the experiences of British migrants in France (277). Aside from a few jokes and one aggressive encounter, neighbours and colleagues in their host EU countries have been “supportive” (282). Only time will tell what impact Brexit might have on the sense of belonging and integration of British migrants living in France. In the long-term, not feeling as integrated following Brexit may result in British migrants, perhaps more likely

“Remainers,” choosing to leave France for good. Although, it is claimed that a person’s attachment to a place in which they feel they belong can strengthen when they feel “threatened,” such as following Brexit (Miller 9). In any event, whether migrants would choose to return to the UK, or move elsewhere, is another matter.

Practically, the UK’s departure from the EU in January 2020 already impacts British migrants in France. They must now apply for a new residency permit regardless of how long they have lived in France. Further, scholars predict a significant fall in the value of UK citizenship, representing a 30% downgrade once the full impact of Brexit, especially on the right to freedom of movement, is known (Kochenov qtd. Mindus 38). This is

likely to result in its removal from “the elite club of...top-quality nationalities” (38). Rights based on national citizenship are often exportable and transcend national borders (38). This potential downgrade of UK citizenship is interesting, given Rushdie’s discussion of the metaphorical doors and literal land frontiers open to him when travelling using his British, rather than Indian passport (Rushdie 367). At this stage, the long-term impact on UK citizens travelling both within and outside Europe remains to be seen.

### **British Migrants in Canada: A Brief Comparison**

I was unable to locate much research on British migrants in Canada, perhaps given that a lot of the studies have thus far been carried out on “visible”

immigrants, described as those with a different “appearance, language, religion, or customs...from the cultural majority” in the host nation (Newbold et al. 722). As countries sharing a language and a significant amount of history, it is often thought that Canada and the UK are culturally similar, such that it might be relatively easy for a British person to adapt to living in Canada. This may be supported by the fact that in 2017 the UK government found that North America, comprising the United States and Canada, was the second most popular destination for British migrants, more popular than the EU and second only to Australia and New Zealand (Office for National Statistics). Of 4,921,300 British migrants, 13% were

living in Canada at the time (Office for National Statistics).

A 2014 study of sixteen steelworkers who migrated from Scotland to Hamilton in the 1960s and 1970s found that despite cultural similarities between Canada and Scotland, the migrants nevertheless had issues adapting to life in Canada primarily linked to their difficulties forming adequate support networks (Newbold et al. 720). Again, these migrants were not lifestyle migrants, but their experiences pertaining to integration are similar to those of lifestyle migrants.

Neighbourhoods in Scotland were thought to be closer than in Canada, both in population density and social networks (727). The migrants did not find the “urban

village” life they were used to in Hamilton, given the geographical and sociological differences (731). Although not altogether surprising given the size difference between Canada and Scotland, this may have come as a shock given the perceived cultural similarities.

The steelworkers tended to spend more time with other Scottish migrants, finding it easier to form friendships with them than with their Canadian neighbours and co-workers (729, 731). According to the Canadian-born daughter of one of the migrants, it is perhaps natural to gravitate towards the familiar (729). Friendships borne out of shared sporting pursuits were often also formed with fellow migrants (730). Newbold et al.’s findings, therefore, have something in common with those of

Benson - that shared interests, likely resulting in some sort of friendship, are the best indicator of integration amongst British migrants in France (56-57).

In a workplace, rather than social setting, the experiences of skilled British migrants in Vancouver were a mixture of good and bad, and despite their advantage over other migrant groups, in terms of ostensibly having “the same...language and...skin colour as the majority of the host population,” they still experienced difficulties integrating into the labour market (Harvey 658, 667). Accordingly, it is not necessarily easier for a British person to integrate into life in the Canadian workplace. It may not be easy for them to integrate into Canadian social life despite speaking the dominant language, and

having some historical and cultural overlap with Canada.

## **Conclusion**

Rushdie describes how anyone who has transcended a “language frontier” to speak a new language undergoes a fundamental change, altering their “thought, imagination, and play” (374). This idea equally applies to crossing a cultural frontier, even if the language remains the same. In a cultural environment that is different from one’s own, one must learn the new culture like one learns a new language. It can be equally difficult to adapt to a distinct culture as a different language. Despite speaking the dominant language, British migrants in Canada face similar challenges to integration as their counterparts in

France. In contrast, not speaking fluent French is not in itself a path to the successful integration of British migrants in France. Shared interests are more important than a shared language. However, language does remain important, such that one may not feel fully integrated without speaking the dominant language. Further, other aspects of culture, such as attitudes towards the homeland's cuisine, can also positively or negatively affect integration depending on individual attitudes.

It would be interesting to further examine the integration experiences of

“non-visible” British migrants in Canada, given that research on this group is currently sparse. Insofar as British migrants in France are concerned, a report would be beneficial once the effects of Brexit are more fully known. Nevertheless, the reality is that various aspects of culture, including language, work together to make somebody feel integrated or not, and their interaction will vary among individuals. A variety of other factors, differing from person to person, and sometimes outside the migrants' control (e.g. acceptance by the locals), are also significant (Benson 61).

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## Surviving and Thriving in the Pandemic: Kindness as the Key to Resiliency

*Nina McIntyre* is a student and writing tutor at the University of Winnipeg on the cusp of graduation. Creative writing and editing have been the focus of her studies, and she is thrilled to be interning with At Bay Press this spring to finish her degree.

It has been a year now, living through the pandemic lockdown. For many, it has been a year of uncertainty, isolation, and loss. Yet despite the challenges, communities have found ways to connect over the internet, friends and family have found ways to come together despite being physically apart, and businesses have found ways to stay open while their doors have been closed. How well people and communities cope in

difficult times can be linked to their level of resiliency, and it turns out that kindness is a key factor.

So, what does it mean to be resilient? In their book, *Building Resiliency: How to Thrive in Times of Change*, Mary Lynn Pulley and Michael Wakefield define resiliency as the “ability to recover quickly from change, hardship, or misfortune. It’s associated with elasticity, buoyancy, and adaptation” (Pulley and Wakefield 7). They believe that resiliency can be developed by modifying one’s thoughts and actions in nine key areas: “acceptance of change, continuous learning, self-empowerment, sense of purpose, personal identity, personal and professional networks, reflection, skill shifting, and your



relationship to money” (Pulley and Wakefield 9). Well, that sounds like a lot of work! Does it really take modifying your thoughts and actions in *all* nine areas to make a difference? I don’t think so. I believe it only takes one action, and that is kindness.

The ancient Greek author Aesop once said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted” (Baker 34). Kindness is not new. It is a concept and an enduring human quality that has lasted throughout the centuries. Despite the recent push to re-brand kindness as cool (using the hashtag “It’s cool to be kind”), ask any middle grader, and they will tell you that being kind is not, in fact, *cool* because being *cool* requires a certain degree of coldness, detachment, or

aloofness. On the other hand, kindness requires the opposite of detachment - it requires connection, and connections are what build strong communities.

So how do we qualify what kindness is? In his book, *Kindness and the Good Society: Connections of the Heart*, William Hamrick suggests that kindness is “one modality of our primordial situation,” whereby it cannot exist without the reciprocity of others (3). In other words, kindness is a primal, instinctive human condition that requires a giver and a receiver. It’s like a guitar; only when someone strums its strings can it fulfill its purpose as a musical instrument. Without the player, it is just a decoration. It is in the interaction, the giving of the fingers to the frets and strings that create a harmonious

tone, and the receiving of the reverberations inside the hollow space of the guitar, that makes music. Music is made when a musician and an instrument come together through the act of playing, just as kindness is revealed through an act of kindness. Kindness is an action. An act that Hamrick argues has three qualities: “the action must be intentional, in the sense of being purposeful... the action must also be voluntary,” and the action is “done *for* a certain person(s), and not simply aimed *at*, or done *to*, them” (8). For example, if I open the door to a building and someone happens to follow in behind me, opening the door was not an act of kindness because I was not intentionally opening the door for them. However, if I see that someone is behind me and

deliberately hold the door open *for* them, it can be considered an act of kindness.

Now that we know that kindness is an action directed towards and *for* someone else, where does resiliency fit in? It might seem like an act of kindness benefits the receiver alone, but there are advantages for the person giving as well. In her article, “The Neurobiology of Service: How 1+1 Can Equal 3,” Dr. Sheila Ohlsson Walker claims that there are biological benefits for the giver as well. When you commit an act of kindness, it produces many short-term and long-term benefits. The body releases an “upward spiral of biochemicals,” which include: “oxytocin (the “love” hormone, important for human connection), serotonin (induces positive mood states, higher levels combat

depression), dopamine (linked to novelty, excitement, and adventure), and epinephrine (provides fast and immediate energy)” (Ohlsson Walker “The Neurobiology of Service”). An act of kindness then is two-fold. There is nothing lost in kindness, whether money has been given, or deeds, or time because it has been given freely, but there is much that is gained. What remains are the good feelings that have been acquired by giving.

Dr. Ohlsson Walker is not the only one who’s discovered the benefits of kindness. In their study “Encouraging Flourishing Following Tragedy: The Role of Civic Engagement in Well-Being and Resilience,” researchers Jill Hayhurst, John Hunter and Ted Ruffman discovered “that people who were flourishing had

significantly higher levels of civic engagement - across every variable [they] measured - compared to people who were just doing ok” (81). It did not matter how much they contributed, or who they contributed to, from simple acts of kindness like helping a neighbour to volunteering with a professional organization, or whether they had previously helped or were simply planning to get involved, “both past engagement and future commitment predicted well-being and resilience” (Hayhurst et al. 81). Instead of just standing by and feeling helpless, acts of kindness create “feelings of effectiveness” because people can focus on what they can do, not what they can’t do (Hayhurst et al. 81). Hayhurst also discovered that “civic intentions are linked

to people's civic identity — their values and beliefs about themselves as citizens,” and getting involved bolsters a “positive social identity” (Hayhurst et al. 81). So, if you are feeling down, just planning to do something kind for someone else will give you a boost. Acts of kindness, taking the time to contribute to another person's well-being, however large or small, have lasting benefits for both the giver and the receiver.

This brings me back to surviving and thriving in the pandemic: In times of uncertainty or isolation, all it takes is one small act of kindness to make someone's day. It will give you a sense of purpose and belonging. It will give you a boost of natural, feel-good biochemicals, and it will give you a sense of empowerment by focusing on the things you can do. After

all, we can't control the situation, but we can control how we respond to it. So rather than just making it through another day, I challenge you to get creative, look for opportunities to make a difference in someone's life, and you'll see that kindness is the key to your resiliency. It has been a year now, living through the pandemic lockdown. For many, it has been a year of uncertainty, isolation, and loss. Yet despite the challenges, communities have found ways to connect over the internet, friends and family have found ways to come together despite being physically apart, and businesses have found ways to stay open while their doors have been closed. How well people and communities cope in difficult times can be

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# **Alone and Crazy: Negotiating Identity through Comedic Self- narration in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel***

Sarah London is a Rhetoric & Communications student at the University of Winnipeg who will maybe graduate soon. She watches too much TV and is a regular in the Winnipeg stand-up scene. Whenever possible, she relates her research to her only interests: comedy and television.

*“I’m officially losing my mind.... Now, I’ll  
be alone and crazy. The famous mad  
divorcee of the Upper West Side”  
— Miriam “Midge” Maisel*

## **Introduction**

*The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*,  
created by Amy Sherman-Paladino,  
follows Miriam “Midge” Maisel as she

struggles with the fallout of her marriage  
and discovers her talent for stand-up  
comedy. I analyze Midge’s use of  
comedically performed self-narration, or  
her stand-up comedy performances, as she  
grapples with a chaotic time in her life.  
While not obviously autobiographical,  
personal narrative stand-up comedy is  
autobiographical performance. Through  
analyzing a selection of Midge’s stand-up  
routines, or *sets*, chronologically, I argue  
that she uses stand-up as an  
autobiographical performance to negotiate  
identity after her orientation is thrown off;  
(Gilbert 317).

I use identity theory from the  
works of Charles Taylor and Dana  
Anderson to explore context, and Midge’s  
struggle with identity. I use research on

stand-up and autobiographical performance to explore Midge's rhetorical action: using stand-up material as a space to express and negotiate her identity. My analysis will use Taylor's concept of orientation towards the good; that is an "essential link between identity and a kind of orientation" (Taylor 28). I will use figure-ground pairings to show how Midge shifts her focus on elements in her act as it develops, reflecting her progress towards a new orientation. Using stand-up to track Midge's reorientation works because "[c]hanges in life are likely to be reflected in changes in material" (Keisalo, "Perspectives..." 126). First-person identity constitution is interested in how writers portray themselves rhetorically in the first person to persuade (Anderson 14).

Therefore, identity constitution can be correlated to the use of self-narrative to understand oneself.

### **Season One Synopsis**

Season One of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* follows Midge, a twenty-six-year-old, upper-middle class housewife who's married to Joel Maisel. Family is important to her: she has two kids and is close with her parents who live in the same apartment building as her. Midge's perfect life is turned upside down when her husband, who's been pursuing stand-up as a hobby with Midge's help, suddenly leaves her for his secretary. Midge drunkenly stumbles into performing a stand-up set at the Gaslight. The Gaslight is a dingy, downtown basement club where she's encouraged to pursue her newfound

talent. Midge spends the season struggling to reconcile and accept her identity as a housewife, a comedian, and a mother.

### **Figure-ground theory**

Figure-ground theory defines the substance of a joke. It is a combination of a focus, or *figure* in the metaphoric ‘foreground’, and an idea or context as the ‘background’ or *ground*. The figure-ground pairings reverse and change joke-by-joke. The order of the figure and ground presentation relies on the premise that: “[t]o establish or re-establish a ground, it first needs to be presented or represented as a figure” (Keisalo, “Perspectives...” 120). Keisalo says stand-ups must introduce themselves to ground elements of their identity for the rest of the presented material; and further, “figure-

ground reversal of material and stage persona are used to lead audiences deeper into the comedian’s world” (Keisalo, “Perspectives...” 120). I use figure-ground theory as a framework to show how Midge emphasizes certain elements of her life on-stage to express and negotiate her identity because, as Anderson says, telling our own stories is an exercise in emphasis (3).

### **Episode One, Part One: “Pilot”**

In the pilot opening, Midge’s identity and orientation are laid out explicitly in her wedding speech which essentially adheres to the definition of stand-up comedy as a “performer being on-stage alone, addressing the audience directly with original material” (Keisalo, “Perspectives...” 117). Midge stands in a ballroom and into a microphone says, “this

day has been long in the planning. Anyone who knows me knows - I plan. At six, I decided Russian literature would be my major. At twelve, I found my signature haircut” (Sherman-Paladino 2). These adventures were simply “preamble to [her] ultimate destiny” of acquiring a husband and becoming a wife, setting her trajectory as housewife (Sherman-Paladino 4). At her wedding Midge is presented as a figure: the figure-ground pairing of Midge and her life-plan carry the set without reversal; never again is the figure-ground of a set so consistent and directly correlated to her stability in her identity. and therefore, her comfort placing herself as the focus of self-narration.

Individual self is formed “from our internalizing of social roles and meanings”

(Crabbe 8). Midge aspires to be the conventional housewife, who she and her family believe is a moral and good position. This is a pivotal consideration given one “of the most basic aspirations of human beings... [is] the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value” (Taylor 42). Crucial to Midge’s identity is familial substance: her parents, her nuclear family, and the labels that come with it of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ are her North star.

When we first meet Midge, she is fully oriented towards the good: personally, culturally, socially: there is nothing unintelligible about her identity. As we move through the first season, we watch Midge question and negotiate her

identity which is governed by doxas, defines as the “features that a culture holds as foundational or intrinsic to selves [such as] gender... or family relationships for example, often most powerfully influenced the ongoing process of self-interpretation that forms one's identity” (Anderson 9).

#### Episode One, Part Two: “Pilot”

Midge’s second set happens at the end of the pilot, when she stumbles drunk into the Gaslight after her life explodes: Joel has left her. She’s lost her ‘wife’ identity, and her identity as housewife and mother are threatened. Identity markers ground us by giving us frameworks, but when we lose these identities, we no longer know “what the significance of things” are for us anymore (Taylor 27). A disoriented Midge starts her set with

questions, “So many questions spinning in my head. Why did he leave? Why wasn’t I enough?” (Sherman-Paladino 55).

Comedians “are able to be more honest on-stage than off, and many have said that doing comedy has allowed them to become more open, less shy, more confident and comfortable with themselves off-stage” (Keisalo, “Perspectives...” 126). Midge exemplifies this, saying, “I’m sorry. I’m a little drunk. It’s all gone. Everything I had counted on is gone.... So, my life completely fell apart today. Did I mention that my husband left me?” (Sherman-Paladino 56). She has a level of comfortability with the audience and immediately presents the elements of her identity which are up for negotiation, introducing herself as a figure and laying

out the ground of her life falling apart. In her next joke she reverses it, putting herself as the ground and focuses on her identity as “wife”: “I was a great wife. It was fun. I planned theme nights. I dressed in costumes. I gave him kids... I loved him. And I showed him I loved him” (Sherman-Paladino 56-57). Anderson says “[i]dentity matters less as something that one “is” and more of something that one does... to an audience through the expression of who or what one is” (4). Figure-ground pairings “are temporary and unstable, dependent on culturally and socially informed perspectives” (Keisalo, “Picking People” 66). Midge articulates her “wife” marker, using socially acknowledged criteria to grade herself in the past tense, toying with

her acceptance of the re-orientation that has been forced upon her.

#### Episode Two: “Ya Shivu v Bolshom Dome Na Kholme”

In a failed attempt to negotiate her identity within her family, Midge hosts a family dinner for her parents, Joel, and her in-laws. It ends explosively when she learns Joel has no money and his father owns their apartment. Midge, furious, escapes to the Gaslight where she loops the audience in, saying “my life completely fell apart today” (“Ya Shivu” 00:45:55-00:46:13).

Through telling our own story we take on certain identities and reclaim control by infusing our narrative with a sense of humour and irony and choosing what we focus on. This combination of

rhetorical actions allows stories to be simultaneously vulnerable and safe for the telling (Kehily 27). Midge feels a need to negotiate through self-narrative; running from her apartment that represents her old orientation, to the Gaslight where she is discovering her new one. There is a link between spatial orientation and moral orientation that helps us know what we think is good, meaningful, and important (Taylor 28).

This forced re-orientation has already shifted her identity, “I used to be delicate. I was delightful. I was a goddamn flower. I smelled like roses, and sunshine shone out of my ass.” (“Ya Shivu” 00:48:05-00:48:15). By “reconstructing her past self in that joke, she provides a point “of audience recognition and

participation for humour” (Kehily 27).

This nod to a past-self confirms she has changed and brings forth questions about her old orientation: was it constricting?

### Episode Three: “Because You Left”

Performing autobiography is a great medium for Midge to freely explore her shifting identity because comedians achieve a working paradox: they get “to both hold up a moral standard and fail at it, while still avoiding hypocrisy and shame” (Keisalo, “Picking People” 73). The unique rhetoric of humour “in its ability to undermine its own power with the “only joking” disclaimer” (Gilbert 319) is used so Midge can address being a bad mother and not wanting to be a mother-- controversial statements--as part of her negotiation.



Comedic self-narration allows Midge to position herself to reflect on motherhood and have the following revelatory moment on-stage: “I mean, are there exceptions? What if some of us are just supposed to travel a lot? Or.... talk to adults our entire life? Oh, I never thought about any of this before tonight” (“Because You Left” 00:37:02-00:37:16).

She starts with a figure-ground pairing of herself and motherhood, she then puts herself as the ground and the idea of motherhood as the figure, cloaking the controversy in humour for the audience and allowing herself a revelatory moment: “the figure-ground reversals promise both the revelation of the inner self and the re-evaluation of particular features... something usually hidden is brought out

and found to be funny rather than repulsive” (Keisalo, “Perspectives...” 131).

As Midge negotiates her place as a mother, she presents her messy, evolving, and complex priorities to the audience. Midge does what Keisalo describes as actively “*doing* and performing [her] individuality, against the inescapable society” (“Picking People” 69-70). This moment of negotiation is critical, for “when people have something they thus regard as true *about* themselves, they also have something they can be--and are often expected to be” and Midge is a mother, she has children, these social groups constitute large parts of her identity (Anderson 11).

Episode Seven: “Put that on Your Plate!”

After accepting her venture into comedy, Midge tries different stage-names and in episode seven, she uses the WASPy name, Amanda Gleason representing a surface level attempt to disconnect her new identity from her familial substance, which is impossible because identity is constituted from all the pieces and values that create a self. Plus, it conflicts with her material which references her Jewish mother. In this set, Midge focuses on negotiating her place as a stand-up separate from family:

I'm gonna give my mother a night off... from my mind.... I love my mother, I really do. I just, I wish that sometimes she would just... relax....she wants everything to

seem perfect, to look perfect. She's like a Jewish Dorian Gray. She's so focused on me, and I don't understand it, because so what if I work? So what if I get divorced? So what if I'm alone? Why do women care about how people look at them or see them? (“Put that on Your Plate!” 00:45:03-00:45:55)

Midge delivers quick figure-ground pairing shifts between herself and her mother as the focus. Through her questions, Midge tries finding which parts of her environment are significant and meaningful (Crabbe 8); the problem is her environments feel very different to her and are therefore difficult to reconcile.

Especially considering, we are “incapable

of functioning without some sense of self definition [based in]... culture, society, and world [we] inhabit” (Anderson 9), and ‘single-working comedian mom’ was not a popular identity marker for an upper-middle class lady in the fifties.

Identity “is sometimes a matter of choice, sometimes a matter of acceptance” (Anderson 9). By the end of episode seven Midge has chosen a comedic identity: a heightened version of herself and almost accepted her new orientation as a working mother and comedian.

Episode Eight: “Thank You and Goodnight”

In Midge’s final moment of comedic self-narration of the season, she moves from negotiating to explaining her new orientation.

Midge starts her set with a recap, saying her husband left her several months ago for his secretary but “the other night he came home... for some clean underwear and a fuck. Actually, just for the underwear. I threw in the fuck for free” (“Thank You and Goodnight” 00:54:15-00:54:28). Her familial substance remains a part of her identity but in a different way: her material now focuses on re-framing her family dynamic.

Identity, in terms of what we experience, is “a person's ability to articulate a sense of self or self-understanding” (Anderson 6). In Midge’s new act, she articulates the messiness of her family situation while simultaneously reifying her identity as a wife and mother to her kids and husband: her new

orientation. Midge settles on the stage name “Mrs. Maisel” therefore embracing the new orientation she negotiated onstage. To be Mrs. Maisel, instead of Amanda or Miriam, implies she has found comfort in her new orientation. The features Midge used to orient herself now comprise only parts, not the whole of her identity. For example, we see Midge reconcile her complicated familial substance and her comfort in her comedy when ends her set with, “[b]ut if we didn't have husbands, what would we have to talk about?... That's it for me. My name is Mrs. Maisel. Thank you and good night!” (“Thank You and Goodnight” 00:59:18-00:59:30).

Expressive power is important in defining our own life-plans in modern times (Taylor 25). Performing self-

narration through comedy allows Midge the opportunity to question and ultimately define her new life-plan. Midge enlists “[t]he rhetorical strategy of identity, the influencing of others through the articulation of our sense of who we are” (Anderson 4) as the driving strategy of her stand-up material. For Midge, articulating and negotiating her identity generates her comedic material in season one. Midge ends the season transformed from the person she was before Joel leaves her. Through comedic self-narration, Midge determined “what [she is] by what [she has] become” (Taylor 48). Midge has successfully reoriented herself by negotiating her identity through comedic self-narration, becoming a comedian and mother who values humour, family, and

her newfound ability to transgress societal norms. She is “alone and crazy;” of course, I mean ‘alone’ in the sense of being a strong, independent woman, and ‘crazy’ only in the eyes of her neurotic, Jewish parents.

Perhaps others, in particular comedians, authors, and artists, who find themselves in similar situations of identity destabilization could remember how powerful a tool performance can be to create a safe and vulnerable space for negotiating identity.

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# The Power of Storytelling in Feminist Consciousness-Raising

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*"What are the words you do not yet have?*

*What do you need to say?*

*What are the tyrannies you swallow day by*

*day and attempt to make your own,*

*until you will sicken and die of them,*

*still in silence?"*

-Audre Lorde (303)

Each of us has a story to tell.

Rather, each of us has many stories to tell—overlapping stories of oppression and hope, of the multiplicity of self, and of our journeys to freedom. In learning to tell our

stories, we can gain courage. As expressed

by Audre Lorde,

I have come to believe over and

over again that what is most

important to me must be spoken,

made verbal and shared, even at

the risk of having it bruised or

misunderstood. That the speaking

profits me, beyond any other

effect. (302)

During the second wave of feminism,

Adrienne Rich wrote about the awakening

consciousness of women. Rich dared to

use herself as her subject of study,

claiming her personal experience as a

writer as valid in her exploration of the

oppression of women (267). Decades later,

feminists such as Stacey Sowards and

Valerie Renegar continue to write about

gender inequality and the importance of bringing ourselves and our stories to the act of consciousness-raising. In this essay, I will explore the value of storytelling as a rhetorical strategy in feminist consciousness-raising to discover and amplify our voices, navigate and claim our identities, and spur our audiences to action.

Historically, the experiences of women and gender-diverse people have been readily dismissed. In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision,” Rich employs the important rhetorical strategy of using her own stories as valid evidence to make her point. By sharing her stories, Rich can demonstrate how female writers felt oppressed by the patriarchy they faced at that time. Among second-wave feminists, people would often

share stories, usually in small groups, to raise awareness of their common plights and oppressions, to build solidarity, and to generate political strategies (Sowards and Renegar 353). In her essay, Rich uses narrative to share her journey of awakening consciousness through examining how her voice evolved in her poetry throughout her writing career. She notes that it took decades for her voice to become her own, and in sharing her own experience, she urges female writers to examine and learn from their own experiences.

Voice is an important rhetorical consideration in autobiographical consciousness-raising. Smith and Watson state that “although life writing is published as words on a page, readers



experience those words as the narrator talking to them, to persuade or demand, to confess or confide, to mourn or celebrate” (79). In her essay, Rich notes that Virginia Wolf, despite challenging patriarchy, still uses a careful measured tone to appease the male audience who would critique her. Rich challenges this approach, suggesting that women need to claim their own voices. According to Smith and Watson, “coming to voice” meant articulating an emergent subjectivity outside or against the repressive constraints of asymmetrical gender relationships” (85). Therefore, when writers use their authentic voices, they add credibility to their words. Lorde, a black, lesbian poet, shares her close brush with death that taught her the following lesson:

[death] might be coming quickly now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else’s words. Moreover, I began to recognize a source of power within myself.

(302)

Through this claiming of voice, Rich, Lorde, and other writers of this time collectively forged a new path of feminism (Rich 269).

While the predominantly white, middle-class feminists of the second-wave made strides in fighting patriarchy, third-wave consciousness-raising is focused on developing a critical awareness of our

cultural context (Sowards and Renegar 536). In discussing the role of voice in modern-day life writing, Smith and Watson suggest that “more recent testimonial narratives continue to be characterized by the call for witnesses to come forward to attest to injustice, oppression, and violations of human rights through voicing their stories” (85). New voices encompass a broad diversity of experiences, including ethnic, social and economic perspectives that allow feminists to understand the impact of patriarchy on situations beyond their own (Sowards and Renegar 544). Third-wave feminism is described as “a set of beliefs, actions, goals, and positions concerning gender oppression in our culture rather than a movement for and about women”

(Sowards and Renegar 545). The scope of those who can claim the title of a feminist now includes men, gender-diverse people, people of colour, and people of any socioeconomic status—a much wider scope than the stereotypical white, middle-class second-wave feminist of the past. However, the rhetorical strategy of storytelling is carried forward importantly.

Within the broader scope of feminism, people have the freedom to explore identities through sharing with others. Alison Rooke details the Sci:identity project in “Telling Trans Stories,” in which 18 transgender youth explored their identities through science and creative engagements (65). At the heart of the project was storytelling. Interestingly, the youth began sharing their

stories in a group together, and later to a wider audience (Rooke 67). Like second-wave feminism, this transition from sharing stories with a small group to sharing stories with a large group helped the transgender youth within this project make sense of their experiences before raising awareness on a larger scale. Rooke shares that “in the act of giving an account of their personal experience to another, the participants produced meaning and understanding for the other individuals involved” (67). The group of transgender youth who took part in this project also took place on a larger platform. The program “developed capable, informed and skilled trans youth, who were willing and able to participate in existing spaces of representation” (Rooke 78). Some of the

youth became involved in LGBTQ advisory groups with law enforcement and health departments. Some of the participants’ parents found that they, too, had a better understanding of their children’s identities and developed clearer communication strategies to advocate for their children in schools and beyond (Rooke 78). Although science and psychology add insight to the transgender experience, personal stories are forms of evidence in and of themselves. Rooke states that “crucially, this storytelling is relational. One’s experience is converted into authority through social interaction with others” (70). This project demonstrates that we are experts in our own identity, and sharing our stories claims that authority.

In writing, identity, or the autobiographical “I” can be difficult to define. It is comprised of the narrating “I” of the present, with the narrated “I” of the past (Smith and Watson 72-73). For feminists, the sense of one’s self may have evolved considerably over time. Smith and Watson explain that “as one narrative, and its narrative moment and occasion, displaces another, stories from the past may be rerouted through different narrating “I”s, who assign different meanings, affective valences, and effects to events, stages in life, conflicts, and traumas” (75). In addition to the evolving identity, one may have multiple identities at any given moment in time. In “Identity as a Balancing Act,” Helen Buss argues the importance of “problematizing”

identity in women’s memoirs (62). She describes identity as fluid and multiple and suggests that to seek a fixed identity is to emulate masculine concepts of autonomy (Buss 62). Buss explains that “through its continuous weaving of self and world, self and history, self and significant others, the memoir sets up the “meaningful narrative” that Weir says can make complex identities capable of both freedom and responsibility” (63). Through the act of writing ourselves, we become aware of the complexity of who we are.

While consciousness-raising sometimes focuses on oppressed identities and shared stories of marginalization, stories of affirmation are equally important. Jones and Adams suggest that autoethnography, telling our stories with a

social or political purpose, is a “queer research method” which “provides a pragmatic, accessible way of representing research, a way that devotes itself with ‘grounded, everyday life” (197). While it is important to raise awareness about the marginalization certain identities experience in their everyday lives, Jones and Adams argue that we should embrace affirmation stories as equally relevant to scholarly storytelling (196). These stories may “provide a counterpoint to the balancing act of telling of loss and pleasure, despair and hope” (Jones and Adams 197). In the multiplicity of identity, stories of oppression can also be stories of resilience, and one can claim an identity of being oppressed, the identity of being resilient, or both. Jones and Adams

propose that “my experience—our experience—could be your experience. My experience—our experience—could reframe your experience. My experience—our experience—could politicize your experience and could motivate, mobilize you, and us, to action” (198).

Consciousness-raising and activism, therefore, can be motivated by hope as much as by oppression.

The options for engaging one’s audience to action, then, are abundant. We can share stories of discrimination or stories of triumph. Rather than being shared in living rooms, as was formerly done, modern feminism has diverse platforms and spaces to share personal experiences. Feminists can share stories through books, anthologies, and

magazines, to name a few (Sowards and Renegar 541). These stories awaken consciousness by exposing readers to experiences they would not encounter in their own lives (Sowards and Renegar 541). Pop culture is another avenue where women are often portrayed as strong, capable and adventurous (Sowards and Renegar 544). Movies, television shows, and music reach a wide audience. While the feminist messages may not be overt, these platforms effectively raise consciousness about discrimination and oppression towards women (Sowards and Renegar 544). Women can connect their own experiences of overcoming obstacles with those of the female characters they see through pop culture outlets. Stories, then, remain an essential strategy for

engaging people's hearts and minds about issues may otherwise be dismissed for being too radical or political.

Consciousness-raising today looks different than it did in the second-wave of feminism. Gender discrimination has become harder to recognize, as many believe gender inequalities were rectified decades ago (Sowards and Renegar 539). However, if we listen to each other's stories, we will find, perhaps more covertly, the threads of struggle and inequality, as well as triumph and liberty that weave through our lives. Rich reminds us that "until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves" (270). The stories we tell each other may "center on a moment when the writers needed

feminism, when they came to a feminist consciousness, or when they were able to overcome some personal obstacle” (Sowards and Renegar 542). Lorde implores that “where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those

words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives” (304). These stories have the power to help us discover our voice, navigate our identities, and take steps towards making the world a more accepting and inclusive place for everyone.

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## Neoliberal Ideologies Behind Self-Care

*Cassidy Rempel* is an honours Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications student at the University of Winnipeg. She is finishing her degree this spring and will be attending Ryerson and York Universities in the fall to gain an MA in Communication and Culture. Cassidy is interested in analyzing rhetorical strategies, discourses, and ideologies—particularly within health related areas.

Self-care is a relatively new trend that invites individuals to prioritize their mindfulness, spirituality, and overall wellbeing. While at a glance the idea appears relatively harmless, even positive, it is really laden with neoliberal ideologies that feed into capitalistic forms of power. Self-care is only necessary because the system of western capitalism encourages individuals to overwork themselves, yet instead of questioning this exploitative

system, people cope with it by practicing ‘self-care.’ Dian Squire and Z. Nicolazzo define self-care as “relaxation tactics one must complete in light of the ongoing stressors, anxieties, and duress of increased work demands . . . these tactics are often additional tasks one must take on, as they are not incorporated into daily life” (4). This essay will begin by introducing a neoliberalism framework; then it will explore the relationship between neoliberalism and self-care, and discuss the rhetoric behind the ideologies of self-care in order to show that self-care is rich with ideologies that exploit labour workers and ultimately benefit the ruling class. In order to analyze the discourse surrounding the neoliberal ideologies of self-care, this essay will analyze speeches from two self-

proclaimed life coaches who advocate for the importance of self-care: Tiffany Peterson and Alexandra McCormick. The point of this essay is to educate those who practise self-care on the systemic issues that self-care represses.

Before I connect neoliberalism to the rhetoric of self-care, it is necessary to offer a brief framework of neoliberalism. In *Feminism for the 99 %*, Cinzia Arruzza et al. writes that neoliberalism has “weakened labour rights, ravaged the environment, and usurped the energies available to sustain families and communities—all while spreading the tentacles of finance across the social fabric” (17). Wendy Brown similarly describes neoliberalism, claiming that it enacts “a radically free market [with]

maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic de-regulation, elimination of tariffs and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long term resource depletion and environmental destruction” (“Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy, para 3). The key aspect relevant to this paper is that neoliberalism focuses on individual or corporate gain rather than on larger systemic issues.

The main overarching neoliberal ideology that is evident within self-care rhetoric is that of individuality. According to Dian Squire and Z. Nicolazzo, self-care “dehumanizes [individuals] without

attending to the systemic problems . . .” (“Love My Naps, But Stay Woke: The Case Against Self-Care” 5). The same issue is also argued by Faah Godrej, who writes that self-care works “to occlude rather than illuminate systematic injustice” (“Gandhi, Foucault, and the Politics of Self-Care” 908). This happens because the rhetoric behind self-care encourages individuals to be “self-governing subjects” (Godrej 907). Now, this is not inherently bad. It is true that individuals do need to take care of themselves and make time to do things that bring them pleasure. With that being said, however, the rhetoric is still masking systemic problems. One way it does this is by telling individuals to place their own importance above others’. Because of this self-focused perspective,

individuals are isolated within a localized perspective, turning a blind eye towards groups of others who also need help.

In the *YouTube* video “The Importance of Self Care: Why It’s Necessary for Health & Wellness,” the self-described wellness and lifestyle coach, Alexandra McCormick, compares prioritizing oneself in daily life to prioritizing oneself on an oxygen-deficient plane. McCormick says that on planes, the flight attendants say to put your own oxygen mask on before helping someone else since you cannot help someone else if you cannot breathe (3:45). The point of contention within this metaphor is this: if you are on a plane and have to wear an oxygen mask, individuals know what the root of the problem is, so prioritizing

yourself works; however, if you cannot gather time to yourself in order to breathe in your daily life, prioritizing yourself does not work because it ignores the systemic cause of the problem. The problem, at a glance, appears to be a busy lifestyle; however, the root of the problem is the capitalistic conditions that make a busy lifestyle seem mandatory. This is true because of social support for a busy lifestyle and the rising levels of competition over resources, both of which limits our time, and the social acceptance of leisure time. This feeds into dominant forms of power because it suggests that the problem is, in fact, that individuals are simply busy. This neoliberal discourse of ‘looking after oneself’ ultimately masks

the fact that individuals are busy because capitalism requires them to be so.

The message to ‘prioritize oneself’ is further problematic because it overlooks the people whom we are prioritizing over ourselves. To go back to McCormick’s plane metaphor, it does make sense for an individual to put her own mask on before helping her child, for instance, because she can better help her child if she herself can breathe. Again, this makes sense on an individual level if we don’t actually think about the cause of the problem stemming from something larger. In other words, the idea that you have to help yourself before you can help others works in close relationships but cannot be an overall mantra. If we are unaware that everyday people are ‘lacking oxygen’ (to continue

the metaphor), we are not making an informed choice to prioritize ourselves over them. It is important to note that many personal issues cannot be overcome by purely working on ourselves—helping others is often the key to helping ourselves since numbers have the power to set up conditions for equality.

Sara Ahmed (quoted in Inna Michaeli's article, "Self-Care: An Act of Political Warfare or a Neoliberal Trap") argues that "[i]n directing our care towards ourselves we are redirecting care away from its proper objects, we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for . . ." (54). The job site, *Indeed*, has an ad that I think explains this problem well. The ad says, "we help get jobs" with a large space between the words 'help' and 'get.'

Eventually, the words 'the driven' fill in the gap, ultimately sending the message "we help the driven get jobs." This discourse masks systemic problems in a similar way as the discourse of self-care. However, instead of saying 'help yourself before you help others,' it says, 'those who help themselves will receive help.' This more clearly illuminates the ideology of this message because it clearly shows that this rhetoric neglects systemic issues. If only those who have the means to help themselves can receive help, then no one will help those who lack the means to help themselves. For instance, someone who grows up in poverty may not have a good education because she spent her school years working to support her family. However, a capitalistic system only values

those who have helped themselves and, as a result, achieved certain qualifications: a university education, job experience in a related field, etc. Those without the means to help themselves, therefore, will not receive help in a capitalistic society. To connect this back to the idea of self-care, consider the following thought: if the trending message is to take care of yourself, no one is taking care of others. A culture so full of competition surely cannot be sustainable in the long term.

The neoliberal ideology that individuals must focus on themselves is saturated within self-care discourse. Faah Godrej writes that when individuals focus on self-care, they cannot do so without disregarding collective engagement” (908). He adds that the result of this is that

individuals begin to obsess over self-care, and they begin to reduce “every social problem into a personal quest” (908). This suggests that neoliberal ideologies are so embedded within self-care discourses that the more someone engages in self-care rituals, the more selfish she may become. By neglecting the systemic issues that make self-care necessary, individuals will begin to see life events in the context of how it benefits their own narrative. For instance, instead of questioning why individuals work so exhaustively that self-care is not a natural ritual, people may merely feel that it was ‘in the cards’ for them to come across a self-care blog, and focus on bettering their own conditions while ultimately feeding into forms of capitalistic powers.

Self-care discourse says that it works for all because “everyone has time for self-care—even if it’s 10 minutes” (McCormick 6:09). But, as demonstrated in the example of the *Indeed* ad, not everyone can help themselves in a way acceptable to capitalist standards. This message, however, says that prioritizing oneself is not selfish because everyone else has the time, and therefore the means, to help themselves. This makes individuals more willing to prioritize themselves, when in fact, the message is purely ideological.

This discourse that you can care for yourself in 10-minutes further disregards the need for work-life balance by normalizing a hectic work schedule—a core value of a successful capitalist

society. However, it is important to remember that the issue of constantly working is what blossomed the need for self-care—people do not have the time to take care of themselves. People say this constantly and are on the brink of an important issue; however, the neoliberal ‘individual focus’ leads us to discredit why people struggle to make 10-minutes of time to do something they enjoy: capitalism. Self-care does not encourage individuals to limit work and make more time for pleasurable activities; instead, it teaches individuals how to work tirelessly without burning out. In the words of Godrej, self-care rhetoric places an “emphasis on ‘responsibilizing’ citizens to optimize their potentials” (907). More than that, this discourse can make someone with

a balanced work-life schedule feel guilty. If someone feels overwhelmed with her workload and turns to self-care videos to try and become more mindful of her habits, she will likely be exposed to this rhetoric about making 10-minutes of time for enjoyment in the day. However, if this individual has many free hours to herself a day, she will likely feel like she is not working hard enough. This itself feeds into a capitalist ideology because it tells her to work harder, but it could further lead to feelings of guilt and self-doubt—some of the feelings self-care are meant to eliminate.

It is important to remember that self-care is meant as something that will allow individuals to maximize their working ability without burning out.

McCormick argues that self-care is “necessary to thrive” (6:05). She also compares her recommendations to those of the economically successful—for instance, saying getting seven to eight hours of sleep a night is important because studies show that “one to three percent of the world’s wealthy get more than seven hours a night” (5:40). This rhetoric suggests that self-care is not merely intended to make individuals feel good for the sake of feeling good. It is meant to refresh individuals so that they can ‘thrive’ or work harder.

The rhetoric of self-care is further problematic because it says that if you work tirelessly, you deserve to pamper yourself. In other words, after working for the benefit of the ruling class, you should put your money back into the economy to



benefit the ruling class. Not only does this discourse further encourage exhaustive work, but it also encourages consumption in the marketplace. More specifically, consumption from the beauty industry. According to Inna Michaeli's article "Self-Care: An Act of Political Warfare or a Neoliberal Trap?" buying beauty items is considered to be a form of self-care. The beauty industry latches onto the trend of self-care, sending the message that buying face-masks, getting a manicure, or shopping for new clothes is an act of self-care that individuals—particularly women—deserve.

The message people who work hard deserve to treat themselves praises individuals for having a hectic work-life and prevents people from questioning the

system. If someone is constantly being told that she deserves to be rewarded, she will believe that working around the clock is an accomplishment of which she should be proud. This belief prevents individuals from questioning why they need to work so frequently in order to be accomplished. Self-care discourse wraps itself in a sort of circular motion, saying that once you work yourself to the point of exhaustion, you deserve to be pampered; once you're pampered, you have no excuse for not being able to continue your exhaustive work lifestyle. This discourse benefits the ruling class and the system of capitalism by sending the message that people should feel proud of their hard work. A key problem with this message is that it defines 'hard work' only as work that benefits the

ruling class: a hard day of work taking care of one's children or yard does not fall under the category of tasks that are worthy of self-care.

More than just telling individuals what counts as 'work,' self-care rhetoric also tells people what is pleasurable. Self-care usually comes in the form of consumption: having a spa day, going out to dinner, or something along those lines. McCormick provides a list of activities people can do that do not cost money—write in a journal, cook, read, exercise (5:03). However, all of these things require some sort of investment. When some people can hardly afford to feed their family, they will not have the money to cook for pleasure or buy books and journals. This rhetoric, therefore, feeds

into higher forms of power because it is exploitative and tells individuals that pleasure comes in the form of commodities.

This rhetoric can further be seen in Tiffany Peterson's three-part video series "Self Care = Success!" In the third part of this series, Peterson teaches her viewers that while people typically think success will bring happiness, the opposite is actually true. She says that happiness achieves success, which is why self-care is so important to becoming successful (2:40). However, the discourse here feeds into capitalist ideals because it indicates that being happy in itself is not a form of success. Self-care feeds the idea that there is a unanimous definition of success: economic success. If someone tells you he

is one of the most successful men in North America, you likely will not assume that he lacks money but has a happy family and a beautiful garden, for instance. This ideology that success only comes in the form of profit discredits those who have aspirations outside of building a financially viable career.

A final issue I will discuss is the overarching rhetorical themes that make self-care so appealing. People often speak about self-care as an opportunity or responsibility. This is where self-care discourse often targets the base of systemic issues. In Peterson's video "Part 1: Self Care = Your Success!," she says that it is important for one's mental health to list what they are grateful for (7:07). For instance, having a good job, being able to

walk, having strong relationships.

Gratitude lists such as these begin to touch on systemic issues because they say, 'I am lucky to have this or be able to do this because not everyone can.' However, this is far as self-care wanders into the realm of systemic issues. The point of this list is to focus on individual gratitude: 'because I am able to do or achieve so much, I have a responsibility to be happy, and an opportunity to know [my]self [and] improve [my]self.' In other words, self-care says an individual should celebrate the social or physical issues that do not negatively affect them instead of focusing on the actual systemic issues behind the problems.

In conclusion, this essay has explored the rhetoric's behind the

neoliberal ideologies of self-care to expose the ways that self-care exploits the working class and benefits the ruling class. It is important to note that the attempt of this essay is not to discourage people from practicing self-care. Because the neoliberal model of capitalism is working individuals to the point of exhaustiveness, self-care is a tool that can help individuals relax and

gain better balance in their lives. Although self-care is not inherently bad, it is not purely good either because it is laden with ideologies that disregard systemic problems. The point of this essay, then, is to help those who practice self-care understand the systemic issues that self-care ideologies repress.

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## Rewriting the North American Mythos: An Ideological Analysis of Kent Monkman's Artwork

*Noah Douglas-McKay* is a second-year geography major from Winnipeg, Manitoba. His family background includes Scottish and Cree ancestry. In his spare time, he loves to write, draw, write poetry, and play video games.

Kent Monkman is a Cree artist belonging to Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba, Canada. He is renowned for work that mirrors and subverts the techniques of classical European and American painters to express “the complexities of historic and contemporary Indigenous experiences” (BIOGRAPHY). Monkman’s work is rich with allusions. Within his art, one can often observe biblical imagery and mythological

creatures intermingled with historical events and references to other artists’ creations. Though the medley of characters and stories that Monkman draws from might seem bizarre, there is an underlying connection between all of them. When combined, these Greco-Roman, Christian, Western European, and colonial North American elements create the Western ‘mythology’ of Canadian and American history. The mythology both influences and is influenced by the hegemonic ideologies of these countries. Monkman seeks not only to present the dominant Canadian ideology to his audience, but also to disrupt it with the aid of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—Monkman’s “gender-fluid alter ego” whose trickster-like presence “reverses the colonial gaze to

challenge received notions of history and Indigenous peoples” (BIOGRAPHY). The final result is a collection of works that reconfigure the North American mythos in ways that encourage audiences to reflect on their own assumptions and beliefs about Indigenous peoples.

### **Methodology**

As described by Sonja Foss in her book *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, ideological analyses delve “beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values and assumptions it suggests” (237). As such, this essay aims to analyze the ideological content of Kent Monkman’s 2014 painting, *Expelling the Vices*, and thereby gain a broader understanding of Monkman’s methods for expressing and contending

with ideologies. Identifying the ideologies within this painting requires examining both the presented elements—superficial aspects of an artifact from which significance can be derived—and suggested elements—metaphorical or referential aspects that can be interpreted from the presented elements (Foss 243-244). By recognizing patterns in the suggested elements, one can note the ways in which an ideology has shaped the artifact, either consciously or unintentionally (Foss 245-246).

### **Presented Elements**

The central figure of *Expelling the Vices* is Kent Monkman in the persona of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle; riding on horseback and cracking a bullwhip. Miss Chief is nude except for thigh-high boots

and appears enraged. Around her, six White men in American military uniforms are cowering and have fallen over one another, some toppling into the shallow stream below. One soldier bears a wooden club and leans over a box of money. Another holds a dish into the river as though panning for gold while a snake emerges from his mouth. A third uniformed man, who appears to be American military commander George A. Custer, fires two guns in Miss Chief's direction from a reclined, frightened position behind other fallen soldiers. A Catholic priest is also present, fleeing the violent scene with a bible in hand. Behind the human figures is a leafless tree, and in the distance, Mt. Rushmore looms over a rocky, forested valley.

## Suggested Elements

*Expelling the Vices* communicates many of its themes through allusions to historical events, religious iconography, and classical Western art. For instance, one evident reference within the painting is to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, in which Lieutenant Colonel Custer—who can be seen in the bottom right of Monkman's painting—and his entire troop of American soldiers were killed in a confrontation with Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors under the leadership of Chief Sitting Bull (Urwin). Based on this, it can be inferred that Miss Chief represents the Lakota warrior Crazy Horse, with her position on horseback and adjacency to Mt. Rushmore likely being a subtle reference to the incomplete Crazy Horse



Memorial in South Dakota—a monument that, much like its neighbour Mt. Rushmore, has been criticized by some Indigenous activists as a defilement of the mountains (Pasley). Before the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the United States government broke a treaty that protected the territories of Indigenous bands west of the Missouri River, partly to allow White goldminers to access the mountains that were sacred to the Lakota (Urwin); Monkman references this through the gold-panning soldier with a snake in his mouth—a symbol of deceit. When depicted by other artists, such as in *Custer's Last Stand* by Edgar Samuel Paxson in 1899, Custer and his soldiers are often the noble and glorious centrepieces, with their Indigenous enemies encroaching

from the edges in a faceless mob. However, In *Expelling the Vices*, Monkman places an Indigenous figure in the center and the American soldiers in the periphery - reversing the narrative of who was standing their ground and who was violently encroaching.

Another major allusion in Monkman's painting is to the Cleansing of the Temple, a biblical tale in which Jesus wields a whip to chase merchants and money changers out of the Temple in Jerusalem (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, John 2:13-16). Many artistic representations have been made of this narrative, among the most famous of which is *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* by El Greco from 1568—a painting that likely

influenced *Expelling the Vices*. Monkman alludes to this biblical tale with the whip that Miss Chief wields, and the soldier guarding a box of money. In *Expelling the Vices*, the surrounding mountains are the ‘temple.’ Miss Chief/Crazy Horse defends the sanctity of the space from ‘money lenders’ such as the soldiers, clergy, gold panners, and mountain carvers who would desecrate the space.

The final prominent allusion in *Expelling the Vices* is towards the 1502 *Triumph of the Virtues* by Andrea Mantegna. Monkman’s work references the alternate title of Mantegna’s painting: *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*. In Mantegna’s painting, the goddess Minerva is shown chasing monstrous ‘vices’ out of a swampy garden.

In addition to sharing a title, Monkman and Mantegna’s works are similar in composition: Both have water along the bottom edge, a tree on the left edge, and mountains in the background. Where the faces of Mt. Rushmore are situated in Monkman’s painting, Mantegna’s painting features a trio of divine figures encircled by clouds. Based on this comparison, it is likely that Miss Chief is not only embodying Crazy Horse in *Expelling the Vices*, but also the goddess Minerva as a defender of her sacred place from sinful invaders.

## **Proposed Ideology and Functions**

### **Served by the Ideology**

In *Expelling the Vices*, Monkman confronts the colonial ‘manifest destiny’ ideology of Canada and the United States,

which encouraged settlers to expand into Indigenous territory and justified the inherently violent actions taken by the military and government to secure the land for White Canadians and Americans (Heidler). Monkman responds to this ideology by depicting Indigenous resistance at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, a short-lived but impactful victory against American imperialism. Rather than simply repeating the story of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, Monkman reworks the entire mythos surrounding the event. Taking the attention away from Custer, he personifies the Indigenous warrior as Jesus and Minerva, both Western symbols of protection and resistance against aggression and sin. The land around Miss Chief, already scarred by

Mount Rushmore, is both the Temple of Jerusalem and the Garden of Virtue. Like each of the figures she personifies, Miss Chief's own act of violence is defensive, meant to rid her sacred space of encroachers. In essence, Monkman demands that Canada and the United States recognize themselves as comparable to the villains of their own mythologies—the Vices, the money changers, the ones who bring strife to a safe and holy place.

Monkman incorporates a distinctly Indigenous component into his work—Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Miss Chief can be compared to the 'tricksters' who appear in Cree stories, as well as many other Indigenous cultures, as rule-breakers and practical jokers (Robinson). Through their tricks and defiance of the social status

quo, tricksters “reveal (and occupy) a realm in between [the structures of society], one that demonstrates how social norms can be challenged, redefined and overturned” (Robinson). This is why Miss Chief frequently appears in the often bizarre scenarios of Monkman’s paintings. Her presence, not only as a trickster but also as the likeness of Monkman himself, personifies the artist’s effort to ‘trick’ the audience and reveal truths that are contradictory to the hegemonic ideologies of Canada and the United States.

### **Contribution to Rhetorical Theory**

Monkman’s work does not merely dispute hegemonic colonial narratives of North American society, it upends the artistic framework upon which the narratives were built. By communicating

in the language of European storytelling and iconography, rhetoricians like Monkman ‘translate’ an Indigenous perspective on history into a format that those ingrained within Canada and the United States’ dominant ideologies can understand. It is a key example of how an artist can invert the unspoken assumptions within the Western mythos of how heroes and villains are portrayed. In larger conversations about decolonization and ideological conflict—both significant topics within the field of rhetoric—it is necessary to examine the contributions of Indigenous rhetoricians, and artists, who have continually challenged their audiences to reflect on the hegemony of Western culture in art and storytelling.

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## We Need Stories, Indigenous Stories

*Serge Desrosiers* is a 3rd year Rhetoric Student, minoring in English. His research has revolved around Metis history and Indigenous representation. He enjoys writing stories and thinks they can be a powerful tool for effecting change. He intends to incorporate storytelling in his academic pursuits.

Can you imagine a world without stories? How would you navigate your life without tales of wisdom and warning? Would you believe in heroes and villains? Would you believe in love and hope? Stories have the power to connect us. They teach us lessons that transcend the borders of race, nations, and time. They fill our lives with spirit.

Indigenous peoples have long had a rich oral tradition. Elders and spiritual leaders were master orators long before settler colonials came to Turtle Island.

Thanks to the resiliency of Indigenous peoples against the dogged attempts of assimilation, their traditions of storytelling are alive and thriving today.

Indigenous stories, written or oral, are important. They are necessary to share the wealth of knowledge and history of some five hundred million Indigenous peoples across the world. But Indigenous stories are also important because of the Lie of Indigenous Deficiency. It is a pervasive colonial narrative that Daniel Heath Justice seeks to dismantle in his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. To quote Justice from his book:

“Rather than see lower life expectancy, employment, and education rate, and higher rates of homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide as being

rooted in generations of sustained and intentional colonial assaults on all aspects of our lives and identities, **we're** blamed for our supposed lack of basic human decency. Depressed? In despair? Can't be due to centuries of sustained oppressive social structures and racism - must be our supposed lack of mental fitness ( 2-3).” This lie has been the dominant narrative for far too long, and Indigenous creatives everywhere have raised their voices in defiance. Decolonization is a growing trend. It has even reached more popular genres like fiction, fantasy, and science fiction. Collectively, we are writing a new narrative.

Well, to be more accurate, we are revealing the truth that colonization tried to hide. The truth that Indigenous people

matter. Their lives matter, their happiness and sadness matters, their cultures matter, their love and anger matters. Their stories matter.

But not all stories are created equal. With the Lie of Indigenous Deficiency, we can see how a story can poison people with hate and bigotry. Nothing worth doing right is ever easy, and I'm sure there are many stories behind that saying. With that in mind, it is important to note that the idea of literature can be problematic. This is another thing that Justice explores in his book, as he states:

“Every time we privilege the literary, we run the risk of doing violence to the specific relational contexts of the oral.

Reading can be a very isolated and

isolating experience; sharing stories orally is done in the context of living dynamic peoplehood [that's] one reason why it's so significant to Indigenous communities, where so much knowledge is transmitted between living people, not mediated by objects like books (Justice 25)."

Still, books are a major way of communicating with people. But we must be wary that in our pursuit of the respect of our literary peers, we do not become crushed under the pressure of validation. As Justice explains:

"...The more evidence we bring to bear to affirm our literariness, the more we risk becoming tangled in narrower and narrower definitions until we find ourselves mimicking the exclusivist arguments of the colonizing culture that

has so long insisted on our literary invisibility in the first place (Justice, 20)."

We know metaphors. We know symbolism. Those are two examples of knowing stories without written words necessarily. It is an important part of decolonization to understand that there are stories in everything. Justice continues,

"To this end, our literatures include a wide array of other kinds of texts, such as cane baskets, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, gourd masks, sand paintings, rock art, carved and painted cedar poles, stones and whale bones, culturally modified trees, and so on. While serving many cultural and ceremonial purposes, these items also communicate stories and ideas, and while the conflation may be controversial to some, it doesn't



seem much of a stretch to think of our literary traditions as being broadly inclusive of all the ways we embody our stories in the world (Justice, 23).”

Justice goes on to describe a framework of how to judge the value of a text. He asks four questions of any literature:

**How do we learn to be human?**

**How do we behave as good relatives?**

**How do we become good ancestors?**

**How do we learn to live together?**

These are powerful, guiding questions not just for Indigenous authors, but also for non-Indigenous writers, and for all audiences. The days of artists claiming neutrality are over. There is a certain privilege that comes with sharing art with others, and part of any privilege is responsibility. What lessons should be passed on with that kind of power? We need to be better than sharing stories of hate. We need to take our inspiration from Indigenous creatives, and spread stories of hope, resilience and spirit.

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# **“Elementary, My Dear Watson”: A Narrative Critique of Queerbaiting in the BBC’s *Sherlock***

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Since its inception over 100 years ago, the Sherlock Holmes stories have captured its audience’s attention. But no adaptation of the remarkable detective and his loyal companion Dr. John Watson garnered as much discussion as the internationally acclaimed BBC television series, *Sherlock*. Despite praise for its witty writing, the show received accusations of queerbaiting online, from

Tumblr posts to lengthy YouTube video essays. Although there are various definitions of the concept, I define queerbaiting as hinting at LGBTQ+ relationships between important characters to attract diverse audiences and press, without ever openly portraying the relationship. This trope undermines LGBTQ+ narratives, by diminishing their storylines to subtext in popular media. Eve Ng also notes that queerbaiting is “primarily of male/male pairings” (“Between Text, Paratext, and Context”). By analyzing the BBC’s *Sherlock*, is it possible to determine the presence of queerbaiting and its impact on the narrative? What narrative elements contribute to queerbaiting in *Sherlock*? Is queerbaiting a product of the author’s

intent, the artifact, or the audiences’ interpretation of the text?

According to Sonja Foss, “narratives organize and shape the stimuli of our experience so that we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions we encounter in our lives” (319). Because narratives provide such a fundamental framework to peoples’ lives, applying a narrative critique to the concept of queerbaiting will answer the questions I have posed. The amount of queerbaiting in the modern entertainment industry, with *Sherlock* as only one example (others include *Supernatural*, *Teen Wolf*, *Riverdale*, etc.), is a testament to how many people are exposed to narratives with queerbaiting tropes. Through this rhetorical critique, I argue that

queerbaiting perpetuates heteronormative storytelling. Moreover, I maintain that the most important narrative by-product that affects queerbaiting in *Sherlock* is the degree of interaction between the writers and fans online. Because of the history of the other adaptations and fan storytelling online, I will analyze *Sherlock* by looking at the narrative’s influence beyond the show itself: in mediums such as interviews and ad campaigns. The power of online interactions, heteronormative default narratives, and the lack of LGBTQ+ representation are especially prevalent themes within this paper. This marginalization of LGBTQ+ storylines is detrimental to queer identities.

Queerbaiting needs to be addressed in

order to eliminate its troubling effects on creators, stories, and viewers.

### **Context**

*Sherlock* ran from 2010 to 2017 and centered on the relationship between a modern Holmes and Watson, portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman respectively. From the very first episode, the sexuality of the two main characters was called into question when John asks Sherlock about his relationship status. Sherlock's sexuality is left purposely ambiguous. Melissa Hofmann argues that the "purposefully polysemous dialogue, normalization of gayness, lead actors' intense chemistry, and clever intertextuality, cinematography, and scoring" suggest a romantic undertone to the pair's relationship ("Johnlock Meta and

Authorial Intent"). For example, other characters on the show frequently mistake Sherlock and John for a couple and Sherlock rarely corrects the characters. As the episodes went by, some viewers were left with the impression that John and Sherlock were secretly in love with each other. Hand holding, physical closeness, and their obvious concern for each other's wellbeing crossed the line of friendship for many viewers. From these speculations, the "Johnlock" fandom was born. As the show would not outwardly satisfy the demand for gay content, frustrated fans started inventing their own narratives of Sherlock and John as a queer couple. Hofmann notes that "fans shipped Sherlock and John—that is, made them an explicit romantic couple—since the first

episode aired in 2010, . . . creating vast outputs of fan fiction, fan art, fan vids, plot theories, and textual analysis in favour of the pairing known as Johnlock” (“Johnlock Meta and Authorial Intent”).

Once the producers and writers of the series noticed the extensive homosexual depictions of Sherlock and John online, they started queerbaiting as a marketing tool to target their interested audiences. *Sherlock* did not air every year; instead, it would go on multiple-year hiatuses. This extended lack of content meant that viewers had plenty of time to congregate online to theorize about the characters and invent their own storylines. The vast amount of content surrounding Johnlock became free marketing for the show. LGBTQ+ audiences were hopeful to

see mainstream characters depicted as queer, and their anticipation of the show confirming their beliefs ensured their return as viewers. Because *Sherlock* was gaining so much attention without having to confirm or deny the relationship between the two leads, the writers, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, never had to authenticate the romance. Another controversial topic within the *Sherlock* fandom came from the obvious queer-coding of the villain Moriarty. Much like a Disney villain, the suggested queerness of the antagonist is seen as a part of their corrupt nature. Judith Fathallah argues that even if a viewer did not think *Sherlock* was guilty of queerbaiting, the amount of “queer disruption” between characters “[could] be read as ruptures in the

performance of heterosexual masculinity” (491). Thus, even from a straight point of view, *Sherlock* does not adhere to strict heteronormative storytelling.

### **Narrative Criticism**

Narrative criticism is an effective rhetorical tool used to make sense of the world around us. Sonja Foss explains that “each of us constructs a life story that defines who we are and allows us to see meaning in our lives, so even our identities constitute stories” (319). In other words, narratives are an essential form of human expression. This demonstrates their importance in the context of queerbaiting. As stated by Foss, narrative criticism allows an audience to identify the objective of a story and to understand the ways it functions within a society (320).

Further, it analyzes the features of a story to assess how the objective is realized in the narrative and then evaluate its pervasiveness in the broader public. Of the many objectives in *Sherlock*, this paper will focus on queerbaiting and the parts of the narrative that accomplish it. This focus seems appropriate because “the objective of [a] story informs the storyteller’s design and construction of the story” (Foss 327). I concentrate on the characters, specifically John and Sherlock, the degree of interaction, the production of the series—from the writing to the setting—and the ways queerbaiting influences the perception of the narrative in the outside world.

I use Riley Dunn’s narrative criticism of Todd Phillips’ film, *Joker*, as a

rhetorical model. Dunn states that “stories are truly character-driven” (1), which applies to my focus on the two main characters, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. These two characters are a prime example of fans analyzing the source material and applying their own narrative critique. Dunn agrees with Foss’s quote: “what sets apart a narrative from other forms of rhetoric is its creation of personal involvement or immersion in the act of narrative and the narrated world and the ability to feel lost in a story, relating to characters or events” (Foss 321). The immersion that people experience within a narrative contributes to individuals’ personal feelings toward a story. In the case of *Sherlock*, fans that have followed the many adaptations of the Holmes’

stories and feel connected to the characters may take the storyline more seriously or take the lack of queer representation to be personally offensive.

### **Heteronormative Narrative Elements**

To say queerbaiting is the fault of one person or one ad campaign is inaccurate. There are many elements that affect queerbaiting both within and outside of the writers’ control. People have long speculated over Sherlock Holmes’ sexuality, as the intertextuality of the show would suggest. In an interview with Eleanor Morgan for *The Guardian* in 2010, Mark Gatiss, one of the show’s writers, discussed the profound influence of the 1970 film, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, on both the BBC’s *Sherlock*

adaptation and his own life. Specifically, they write the following:

[*The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*] was a template or sorts for Stephen Moffat and me as we made our adaptation for the BBC . . . the relationship between Sherlock and Watson is treated beautifully [in the movie]; Sherlock effectively falls in love with [John Watson] in the film, but it's so desperately unspoken.

The 1970's detective movie is the most 'openly' gay depiction of Sherlock Holmes in history, and Gatiss's interview suggests that he would include elements of the movie in *Sherlock*. Although there are hints of similar dialogue in a couple of

*Sherlock* episodes, fans were disappointed that Gatiss and Moffat never took the opportunity to make the unarticulated attraction of Holmes and Watson in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* into a 'spoken attraction' in *Sherlock*. Once again, the heteronormative default of narratives in Western culture prevailed.

Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman's portrayal of the iconic characters, the intense musical compositions, the production team, the set design, the costumes, and the viewers' interpretations all play a part in the presence of queerbaiting. Because of these interconnecting factors, the question of queerbaiting's origin arises. Is this concept a product of the writers, the text, or the fans' analyses? I maintain that



queerbaiting is the result of all three aspects working together. Ng describes an idea of “reality, representation, and ideology” where the text can be seen to have various meanings to different people (“Between Text, Paratext, and Context”). Hofmann explains that the “charges of queerbaiting serve both to grant interpretive authority to fans and to hold the authors accountable for an explanation of intent” (“Johnlock Meta and Authorial Intent”). This relationship formed between viewers and writers is a testament to queerbaiting’s interconnectedness and the difficulty of textual authority alone in defining or locating it.

Hofmann quotes Alexander Doty by saying that “queer reading practices [should exist] alongside straight ones,” not

as “alternatives” (“Johnlock Meta and Authorial Intent”). That is to say, straight narratives should not be the norm to which audiences default. Queer narratives are just as valid as heterosexual storytelling and should not be subject to subtext in popular media. These two forms of narrative should work side by side. In *Sherlock*’s case, the heteronormative depiction of John and Sherlock should not be seen as *the* reading of the artifact, but as an interpretation, just like the interpretation of Johnlock. By constantly resorting to queerbaiting in popular shows, queer narratives are left in the dark as heteronormative stories bask in the limelight. If viewers are not exposed to diverse portrayals of love and LGBTQ+ relationships, queer narratives cannot be

normalized in a broader context. Because of the marginalization of queer representation, queerbaiting directly perpetuates heterosexuality as the ‘normal’ storytelling framework.

### **Degree of Interaction**

“Digital technologies have greatly expanded the options for forms of narratives available for analysis” (Foss 324). In the context of *Sherlock*, the internet has allowed for broader audiences to both watch and engage with the series. As Dunn suggests in his paper on *Joker*, this level of interaction between fans means that people are able to come together to discuss their interests no matter where they are geographically located (4). The power of online fandoms results in large communities of like-minded people.

The more fans react to a show the more traffic it receives on the internet (much to producers’ delight). “With the rise of social media, the producers, authors, and creators of TV shows are easier to reach than ever before” (Collier 114). This unprecedented access to a show’s creators is the next level of interaction for fans. Not only can viewers connect with other fans across the world, but they can also voice their feedback to the creators. With this level of interaction, there are downfalls: “As producers seek to cultivate fans for their properties through strategies such as queerbaiting, fandom and fan activities are becoming more entangled within capitalism and commodification” (Collier 3). The marketing strategies placed on queerbaiting narratives take away from the

immersion of the story and monetize LGBTQ+ individuals' hope for representation.

For example, during an ad campaign for the final season of *Sherlock* in 2017, the BBC released a trailer on Twitter that had definitive queerbaiting elements. The caption reads “Sherlock's back [and] he's in love. But who with? And what has he done to his best friends?” The 18-second-long clip goes on to ask Sherlock what his darkest secret is, before cutting to him saying “I love you” to the camera with John in the background. This ad was extremely effective in hyping up fans for the next season since they presumed that Sherlock admitted his feelings for John. In reality, Sherlock was forced to say “I love you” to another

character to prevent their imminent death.

Fans who subscribed to the Johnlock narrative were targeted by a capitalistic marketing strategy that played on their desires for mainstream LGBTQ+ representation.

Internet activity is the most important tool for a show's reach in modern media. The popularity gained by these interactions also encourages the queerbaiting present in the narrative. Some fans complained that as *Sherlock* became more popular, more instances of queerbaiting arose, as demonstrated by the season four trailer. Ng mentions that in season four, “one episode shows Holmes about to kiss a male character, Moriarty, before revealing that the moment was being imagined by a female fan”

(“Between Text, Paratext, and Context”).

In this scene, the writers, Gatiss and Moffat, break the fourth wall to address viewers who subscribe to the queer subtext of *Sherlock*. The scene left many fans feeling mocked, so they took to the internet to express their concerns and to write their own versions of the episode. Cassandra Collier notes that “[the] more producers utiliz[e] fan tactics to cultivate a wider audience, [the more] fans will navigate the ever-increasing producer presence, and carve out spaces for their own creative expression” (120). This need for creative expression explains why there are so many fan pages about alternate universes with a canonical Johnlock. The writers’ constant manipulation of fans’ expectations ultimately results in the

fanbase taking over the narrative and not respecting the creators’ intentions.

## LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION

When *Sherlock* first aired in 2010 only 3.9% of relevant characters openly identified as LGBTQ+ on broadcast television as reported by “the world’s largest LGBTQ media advocacy organization” GLAAD (“Where We Are on TV Report: 2010”). This scarcity of representation in relation to queer characters leads fans to take matters into their own hands. Viewers searching for queer representations look at the subtext of popular narratives for a hint of inclusivity. According to Collier, “queerbaiting often relies on subtext and narrative techniques to code characters as potentially queer to viewers ‘in the know,’ allowing queer

viewers a space to identify themselves within the show without needing to make an explicit statement regarding the issue” (2). In a time of little representation, LGBTQ+ fans and other viewers accused *Sherlock* of queerbaiting for not acknowledging the gay undertones of the show. A *Digital Spy* interview from 2010 demonstrates the writer Stephen Moffat’s awareness of the show’s sexual ambiguity by saying “[Moffat] always wanted to play on the confusion of Holmes and Watson’s relationship and never intended to confirm either character’s sexuality.” This is literally the definition of queerbaiting that Collier mentions above. Disappointed in the canon narrative, fans “turn to transformative efforts, expanding their works to examine and subvert larger

societal questions of sexuality, desire, and identity” (Collier 116).

Mark Gatiss identifies as gay and publicly advocates for LGBTQ+ rights. Because one of the two writers of *Sherlock* is part of the LGBTQ+ community, fans assumed that there would be more representation within the show. It seems as though the creators of *Sherlock* only used queerbaiting as an effective marketing tool, where fans came back to the series, season after season, in hopes of seeing their desires realized. Queerbaiting does not fulfil LGBTQ+ narratives, as it only hints at these relationships through subtext which is detrimental to queer people’s expression of self and socio-cultural identity. In order for LGBTQ+ individuals to have more visibility in society, there

needs to be more openly queer characters in the media.

The messages communicated in popular narratives such as films, television, and book series affect individuals' understanding of complex issues.

“[LGBTQ+ viewers] frustration stems from the fact that they get drawn into a story with the promise of representation, only to find that, once again, the creators of the series don't follow through with their allusions to a queer relationship” (Frenk 51). This frustration centered on representation generates heated debates and LGBTQ+ theories online, which can sometimes only make matters worse.

When “fans raise their voices to speak up for their own identity, their claims are denied by the creators, pushed to the side

as being ‘merely fans’ imaginations”

(Frenk 51). Defeated, fans pushing for queer narratives are left to criticize mainstream shows in the margins of the internet, as show writers deny fan theories while continuing to queerbait. By the final season of *Sherlock*, the 2016-2017 GLAAD report stated that 4.8% of mainstream characters were a part of the LGBTQ+ community, only a 0.9 % increase over the series' 7-year run.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of queerbaiting seems elementary at first, but upon deeper investigation, it connects authors and audiences in a constant battle for authority over the artifact. The most recent 2019-2020 “Where We Are on TV” GLAAD report states that 10.2% of characters on

TV series are LGBTQ+. This data demonstrates that television is becoming more inclusive. But the presence of queerbaiting in current media continues to perpetuate heteronormative storytelling. The *Sherlock* finale was left intentionally open-ended, leaving fans to speculate about the rest of the characters' lives. But as Ng states, "viewer demands for particular kinds of canonical narratives reflect a shift away from satisfaction with solely subtextual readings" ("Between Text, Paratext, and Context"). Fans are challenging series creators' heteronormative tendencies and demanding canon representations of LGBTQ+ narratives. By applying a narrative critique to the BBC's *Sherlock*, I determine that it is necessary to identify

and discuss queerbaiting so that fans can recognize it as an objective of a narrative, allowing them to call out the creators. Viewers who are more aware of queerbaiting are less likely to tolerate it and will eventually stop watching the accused shows. Because internet interaction plays such a vital role in a series' success, fans can promote change by encouraging a show's creators to diversify their narrative by calling them out online. Although stories are not limited to the author's sphere, it behooves writers to alter the canon. It may be too late for *Sherlock* fans, but a better solution to altering canon texts would be for creators to begin by writing LGBTQ+ inclusive storylines in the first place.

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# **The Florida Project, The Walt Disney Company, and Disillusionment: A New Historicist Critique**

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The concept of disillusionment describes a broad spectrum of feelings, from ones as simple as children losing their wonder for something that seemed larger than life itself, all the way to a corporation's attitude towards its own brand. Sean Baker's 2017 film *The Florida Project* appears to reflect the former example on a surface level, but a viewer watching through the lens of New Historicism will be able to see the latter as

well. The Walt Disney Company stands as the corporation in question and, despite having existed for nearly a century, Baker's work only comments on a period in the company's history that began roughly around the year 2000 and continues to this day. While conducting a New Historicist analysis on such recent events in media may be seen as unorthodox or even controversial, the occasional pushing of boundaries serves an important role in the growth of any critical theory. This approach therefore deserves to be taken for the advancement of New Historicism.

Disillusionment has long plagued the late Walt Disney's company, despite the enchanting tones of its arguably most recognizable films. Walt Disney

Animation Studios' efforts to stay successful through its traditional approach ended with the release of their 1999 film, *Tarzan*, often considered the final release of the studio's second golden age dubbed as the Disney renaissance by fans (Hughes, 3-4). The release of *Fantasia 2000* later that year began a trend of box office failures that would follow Disney's theatrical cartoons throughout the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While some success presented itself in the form of 2002's *Lilo and Stitch* and 2003's *Brother Bear*, most animated films released by the studio during this period such as *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Treasure Planet* and *Home on the Range* proved to be financial disappointments at best and bombs at

worst (Wang, 38). This led to widespread internal restructuring aiming to distance the company from the youthful enchantment that had previously formed its identity. Executives believed that magic, wishes, true love, happily ever after storylines, and other motifs at the core of Walt Disney's philosophy for animated features had become outdated. The founder's own nephew Roy E. Disney acted as one of the most upfront purveyors of this attitude, using his position as a long-time senior executive to enact such management shakeups by pressuring Disney CEO of twenty-one years, Michael Eisner, into resigning in 2005 (Holson). Disney replaced Eisner with former head of ABC Entertainment, Bob Iger, who led

the company down a path of noticeable rebranding.

Films made under Iger adopted a distinctly self-aware and, at times, sardonic attitude towards the tropes popularized by Disney's animated features. 2007's *Enchanted* began this trend by directly parodying several of Walt Disney Animation's fairy-tale adaptations, framing their ideals as naïve when set against real life's demands. The 2013 film *Frozen* also exemplifies this as it stars a princess who falls in love with a handsome prince whom she agrees to marry after one day – something generally considered a happy ending in Disney's classic animated films. *Frozen* comments on this cliché by showing multiple characters trying to change the protagonist's mind before

outing the seemingly charming prince to be a dastardly villain in the third act.

Similar subversions of the studio's previous tendency to show characters ready for marriage so early in their relationships can also be found in 2009's *The Princess and the Frog* and 2010's *Tangled*.

Not every animated release from the Iger era has been created with the explicit purpose of deconstructing Walt Disney Animation Studios' earlier storytelling, but each has featured some form of cynical commentary on the older films' tropes. Lines like “if you start singing, I'm going to throw up” (*Moana*, 56:33) exemplify the new standpoint introduced by the company's new management. Disney still partakes in

spirited whimsy, spontaneous musical numbers, and true love at first sight, of course, but it does so with a tongue-in-cheek tone that pokes fun at these practices.

As for *The Florida Project*, it follows 6-year-old Moonee, living with her rebellious young mother Halley in a disreputable motel in Kissimmee, Florida, near the famous Disneyworld theme park. Moonee goes through most of the runtime unsupervised, spending her summer roaming miles away from parental protection and engaging in various acts of mischief with her friends. The children in the film live in what any adult would recognize as a bad situation; they spend long periods of time without being looked after by their guardians in a harmful

environment where drugs, violence, and prostitution appear commonplace. But the children see their environment as a paradise where they can run and play to their hearts' content, their childhood innocence leaving them blissfully unaware of how bad their milieu really is. They want for nothing in this free environment, except for the enchanting fantasy sold by Disney. The Walt Disney Company regularly appears throughout *The Florida Project* as a distant, yet ever-present monolith. The Disneyworld theme park acts as a distant backdrop to several shots, and its influence weighs heavily on the characters even when off-camera. From the neon pink color and castle theme of the motel on "Seven Dwarfs Lane," where the protagonists live, to the numerous knock-

off Disney gift shops, director Sean Baker regularly reminds the audience of the deep impact the brand has had on the film's setting. But the film also places emphasis on the impact the company's fantastical worlds have had on the children as Baker subtly shows their idolization of Disney throughout the movie. The children play with Disney princess dolls, fantasize about living in beautiful castles, and go watch cattle at nearby farms as an alternative to the vastly more expensive safaris found at Disneyworld's Animal Kingdom park just a short drive away. The happy fairy-tale fantasy that once defined The Walt Disney Company remains present throughout the film, only to tie its characters to the theme of disillusionment.

This theme can be most evidently observed through the character Bobby Hicks, the middle-aged manager of the Magic Castle motel where Halley and Moonee live, who spends his days trying to make the establishment into something respectable. The rest of the staff seem to have given up on it, but Bobby spends the entire film attempting to give the motel a proper image. He appears to use his work as an escape from his unpleasant personal life, as shown through his strained relationship with his adult son and estranged ex-wife. By keeping the pool clean, repairing broken machinery, and chasing away elderly pedophiles, Bobby's job gives him the illusion of control in a life where he appears to have had very little. The film then destroys this illusion

when the situation at the motel hits a new low for reasons outside of Bobby's control during the climax. The Department of Child Services (DCF) tries taking Moonee into foster care, but she runs away as her mother fights with the social workers in front of everyone. Bobby can only respond by promising to fix one of the broken laundry machines, in an ultimately futile attempt to regain his former illusion.

The theme of disillusionment can also be seen through Ashley, Halley's friend and the mother of Moonee's friend Scooty. Ashley and Halley appear inseparable in the story's first half with the former going so far as to steal food from the family restaurant she works at to feed Moonee and her unemployed mother. Their interactions carry an implication that

they have known each other several years, possibly even since childhood as they try to maintain the innocent and carefree friendship they would have had as children. Whether by taking trips to the pool or touring the local nightlife together, the pair are seen trying to lead a lifestyle of two young women enjoying themselves, without a care in the world. But their roles as mothers ensure they do have something to care about, and as Moonee's negative influence on Scooty becomes increasingly clear, it begins threatening the young parents' friendship.

This plotline reaches its boiling point roughly halfway through the film, when Ashley correctly suspects Moonee, Scooty, and their friend Jancey burnt down some abandoned condominiums. This

moment catalyzes Ashley's disillusionment, as she realizes the irresponsibility in allowing children to roam wherever they please, left to their own devices like those in Disney movies. Ashley replaces her formerly close relationship with Halley with a sobering realization of how negatively the latter has affected her and her son. She sees her own pattern of stealing food from work not as the act of kindness between friends she once did, but as the result of exploitation from a manipulative and uncaring woman. Her embitterment soon reaches its peak when she finds out that Halley has been engaging in prostitution, at which point she decides to completely sever ties with her former friend and forbid Scooty from seeing Moonee.

Since Moonee serves as *The Florida Project's* main character, she can also be seen as the thematic centerpiece for the narrative's motif of disillusionment. As previously mentioned, she views her situation in a positive light, having no desires beyond playing with her friends and experiencing the fantasies created by the imagination of Walt Disney and his company. This state of mind creates two illusions: firstly, that her mother and the living conditions she has placed them in are not detriments to her well-being and, secondly, that going to Disneyworld will make her life better. The film expresses the latter more subtly, but Moonee's previously stated desire to experience the Animal Kingdom Safari as well as the way the cinematography frames the Magic

Kingdom theme park on the horizon implies that she aspires to visit the parks. In her mind, going to Disneyworld would be comparable to the happy fairy-tale endings that the company's films have promised her.

Moonee's character arc acts as the film's central focus, building up to her disillusionment during the climax. After Ashley confronts Halley about her prostitution, the latter proceeds to violently beat her in front of her son. Ashley, in turn, notifies the DCF of Halley's actions and they come to inspect her home. Despite Halley's best efforts to appear more responsible, the DCF social workers deem her unfit to raise Moonee and decide that they must take her daughter into foster care. But Moonee still believes that she

should stay with her mother and runs away. She immediately goes to see her friend Jancey at the neighbouring motel and tells her about the situation. Jancey notices her friend's distress and takes Moonee to the one place she thinks can make her happy. The end of the film shows the two girls running around The Magic Kingdom theme park at Disneyworld, laughing, playing, and being happy all while a bittersweet instrumental arrangement of Kool & The Gang's *Celebration* plays.

Bittersweet indeed describes the note on which the movie ends, as it leaves the audience with the protagonist and her friend enjoying themselves. However, the events leading up to this ending and the way the film presents its finale remind the



audience that this happy escapade only offers a temporary solution to Moonee's problems. Since she and Jancey presumably snuck into the park, the film leads the audience to the assumption that the staff will inevitably identify them and hand them over to the DCF, making Moonee live with a foster family after all. Although the viewers never see it, they will know that the events of the film's ending can only lead to the protagonist's disillusionment. Moonee will eventually have to realize the sad fact that her mother could not raise her properly and that no amount of Disney-branded fantasy will make her life better.

*The Florida Project* calls attention to the parallels between itself and Disney in many unique ways. Its setting, along

with the influence of Disneyworld on the characters, contributes to this, but the similarities it draws to the animation giant run far deeper. The film regularly shows interactions between the poor main cast of local residents and the rich tourists while peppering many nods and references to the Disney brand in the background. It even takes its name from the way Walt Disney referred to Disneyworld as "Project Florida" or his "Florida project" during its development (*Future Plans for "Project Florida"*).

That the film portrays disillusionment as its central theme draws some comparisons to The Walt Disney Company, but the deeper connections lie in just how it does so. *The Florida Project* relates its characters' thematic arcs to that

of Disney by having the protagonist's disenchantment target both a parental figure and the Disney brand. This reflects the disillusionment The Walt Disney Company expresses towards the image built during the prior generation, leading to a more jaded and cynical view of their children's entertainment and parting ways with Eisner, who held the role within the company most similar to parenthood.

Ashley can also be seen as an allegory for the Disney company as the way she goes from seeing her friendship with Halley as harmless fun to a harmful influence on her child reflects Walt Disney Animation Studios' change of attitude regarding their depictions of marriage. The fact that the studio dedicated the entire arc of the character Anna in *Frozen* to

experiencing negative repercussions for believing in these depictions supports this. *Frozen* punishes Anna for entertaining the idea of being able to love a person enough after only one day to justify marriage, something that the studio's earlier films regularly rewarded royal children for. This shows the studio believes what they once thought was harmless fun creates a negative impression on their child audience, which mirrors Ashley's arc in *The Florida Project* and cements the clear influence The Walt Disney Company's recent history has had on the film.

*The Florida Project* is appropriately named, not only because of the reference to a major component of its setting, but because of its uniquely Floridian perspective. The way the

presence of The Walt Disney Company personally affects the main cast could not have realistically been replicated in any other locale, as this presence appears much more prominently in central Florida than arguably anywhere else in the world. Most importantly, the influence of the Disney brand on the setting highlights the influence of Disney's history on the rest of the film. *The Florida Project* directly addresses its inspiration and in doing so,

allows audience members looking through the lens of new historicism to more easily understand its parallels to Disney. By using recent events in the legacy of such an old corporation that is beloved by so many, the movie creates a poignant resonance with its many viewers who grew up loving the Disney fantasy, especially the ones who have become disillusioned with it.

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## The Severed Cord

*Roberta Godin* is a second-year student at the University of Winnipeg in the department of Urban and Inner-City Studies. Roberta is a First Nations band member of Seine River, Ontario but was born in Winnipeg and has lived here all their life. Roberta's mother was an Indian Residential School survivor and raised her on her own. Roberta has several years of lived experience with absolute homelessness and has spoken at forums concerning first nations homelessness and the child welfare system.

Newborn apprehensions are not new to the child welfare system and until recently, the public was largely unaware of them. Much of the public became aware when a mother went on Facebook live and posted her newborn being apprehended shortly after she gave birth. The First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO), an organization that supports mothers who have had their newborns apprehended, supported this mother. The

media failed to provide the experience of the mother, information about what became of the baby and the nature of the baby's relationship with its mother. This is one story out of hundreds in which a mother was left powerless when her newborn was apprehended.

I was sixteen, living with my mom and I was pregnant. My mom helped me prepare for the baby. She knew exactly what the baby needed. My dad bought a crib and a playpen. My mom bought newborn clothing. We had baby shampoo, soap, receiving blankets, wipes and diapers. My mom bought all the sizes of diapers from newborn to size five. I even went to a special school for young mothers to learn life skills such as cooking, baking, machine sewing and hand sewing. There

was also a Family Relations course and parenting classes. The school had four infant areas where students had one class a day alternating in different labs: Infant lab 3-6 months, crawler lab 6-9 months, toddler lab, 9-15 months, and Walker lab 15-24 months so that we had hands on experience on how to care for a baby at different developmental stages. My baby had everything he or she needed, and I was excited and ready to be a mother.

I went to all my prenatal appointments and got along great with the doctor's nurse, but not so much with the doctor. At one of my appointments, the nurse suggested that we must inform Child and Family Services that I was going to have a baby since I was underage, and it was protocol to do this. I did not want to

because of the horrifying stories of children getting taken away from their parents and not being able to return. The nurse assured me that it would be fine and because I was comfortable with the nurse, I called Child and Family Services. About a week later I got a call saying that the doctor and Winnipeg Child and Family Services would like to have a meeting. I was nervous and the nurse reassured me that everything would be fine and that they just wanted to ask me a few questions. I trusted the nurse's judgement and I agreed. My mother and I drove down to the doctor's office and the nurse met us in the lobby and escorted us to a meeting room where the doctor and the CFS worker were already sitting. The nurse came in as well. The CFS worker told us that they were

going to apprehend the baby when it was born. I immediately busted into tears and mumbled over my crying, “Why? We have everything ready for the baby, we have a crib, sheets, all kinds of blankets, and tons of baby clothes. We even have diapers of all sizes. You can come look.” I could see the angry look on my mother’s face. The doctor had a look on his face that said “that’s not good enough”. The CFS agent said, “I will come and take a look after the baby is born.” The nurse had tears in her eyes and said to me when we were leaving, “I had no idea they were going to do this, Roberta.” I cried all the way home and throughout the rest of my pregnancy. My mother and I spoke to a lawyer and were told that there was nothing we could do until after the baby was born. I felt so

helpless and knew that this was not fair, so I asked, “So, that’s it, they can just take my baby?” The Lawyer replied, “Unfortunately, yes, they have all the power. Since your doctor is accusing you of having a multi-personality problem, we will get another doctor to give an assessment to prove that this is not the case.”

I got my assessment done at the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre and the Psychiatrist was angered by what I said, “Your doctor had no right to diagnose you with any kind of mental disorder, he is not qualified.” The Psychiatrist’s assessment said that I did not have any kind of mental disorders and that I was intelligent.

Shortly after, I gave birth. It was one of the happiest days of my life. She was so precious, so innocent and so vulnerable. I was to protect her and that was my plan. I named her Angelica because she was my angel. I was tired from giving birth, but I felt extremely pleased, and like a light spark inside me. I was filled with joy. Until one day, two Child and Family Services workers came with an infant car seat. I could feel my heart breaking and tears rolled down my face. My mom was standing near me, anger written on her face. The worker had no expression when she took my baby from me and strapped her in the car seat and walked out. It felt like someone ripped my heart out right out of my chest and it was like I forgot how to breathe. I wiped

my eyes and held in my tears and tried to push away the pain but there was this empty black hole in my soul. That was the most painful day in my life.

I got dressed and my mom and I packed up everything and went home. The house had an emptiness to it; like all the noise in the world went dead. Everything in Angelica's room was perfectly ready for her, but it looked like a black and white picture when I put her new baby gifts in her room. I sat there in my room feeling numb and wondering why this happened. There are thousands of stories like mine about newborn apprehensions and what the media fails to include in their reports is how painful it is for the mother and other family members and how damaging it is for the mother and the newborn. The bond



has been severed and there is no way to  
repair the damage. Take it from Angelica  
and I, it has been twenty-three years and  
our bonds are still broken. Today,  
according to the advocates at the First

Nations Family Advocate Office,  
newborns are still being apprehended  
meaning the untold stories of family bonds  
being broken will continue.

## The Window//Alone Again

*Sofia Reimer* is a Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications student hoping to get into the Creative Communications program at Red River College in the fall. She loves to swim, read, workout, and, most of all, cook! Since COVID began, her life has revolved around school and her little dog Biscuit, who keeps her very busy. She is looking forward to restrictions ending and getting back to a normal life.

I saunter into my new bedroom, lone suitcase in my grip. The alabaster room is empty – except for a twin-sized bed and a rickety bedside table with a lamp perched on it like a pigeon on a rooftop.

“I wonder how long this one will last,” I mutter under my breath.

“What’s that, dear?” My new foster mother, Marybeth, asks.

“Nothing, it’s great. Thank you,” I reply, forcing a smile.

This is my third foster home in two months. I wouldn’t say I’m difficult,

but I’m not afraid to speak my mind and I don’t like being treated like I’m some pathetic stray that needs to be rescued. I can’t stand the pity on their faces when I walk in the door. I look out the window, expecting a blank brick-wall view of the neighboring house. I’m pleasantly surprised by a breathtaking panorama of Omand Park and the frozen Assiniboine River.

“Maybe this time will be better,” I think to myself as I unpack my lonely life that I’ve fit into one battered suitcase.

“Jane! It’s dinner time!” Marybeth calls from the vast hallway.

I’m not hungry, but I don’t want to be rude. My gut groans in protest as I open the door and catch an undesirable whiff of meatloaf wafting from downstairs. I force myself down the creaky hallway anyways.

I go back to my room (cell?) as soon as I muster up an excuse to leave their table. The foster family's endless questions and bright smiles tire me. They probably mean well, but it's hard to feel at home when I know it'll be a matter of weeks before I'm whisked away to another home.

The windowpane casts an empty-looking shadow onto the stark white wall. I sigh and outline the straight contours of the shadow in my lined notebook. "I'm lonely too," the wind seems to whisper to me as I gaze out my frosted window and trace wisps of murmuring wind. Hours pass by as I stare at the ever so slow moving

shadow my window casts onto the wall of my empty room. Eventually even the sun dips behind the landscape and I'm alone again, with only my thoughts to keep me company.

I drift in and out of sleep at night. An eerie branch scrapes my windowpane and sounds *tap tap tap* on the glass. The sound follows me into sleep, and I dream that the tapping is a knock at the door. My mother, here to take me home. *Tap tap tap!* I wake up startled, my vision hazy as I rub the sleep out of my eyes. I realize as I see the empty walls, my shabby suitcase, and the night sky glowing dimly through the window, that I am alone again.

# The Ingredients Behind the Label

## A cause for natural ingredients in our makeup and skincare products

*Autumn Sfatcos* is in her third year in the joint Creative Communications program with Red River College and the University of Winnipeg. Upon completing university with her degree in communications and a creative communications diploma under her belt, she hopes to use her education to enter into a career of investigative journalism.



A fourteen-year-old girl puts mascara on for the first time; she is on her way to a big track and field meet with her high school. Throughout her day, she deals with itchy eyelids, swelling and puffiness

around her eyes. Bright redness surrounds either side of the corners of her eyes and eyelids. Instead of feeling beautiful and empowered by the makeup, she feels embarrassed and uncomfortable.

This story was my first experience with makeup.

Since I was fourteen years old, I have struggled with allergic reactions and sensitivities to makeup and skincare products. From drugstore products such as Maybelline and Covergirl to well-known brands such as Sephora and Mac Cosmetics, my experiences have been anything but pleasurable.

Since that incident six years ago, I have used various makeup and skincare products from multiple brands. Thankfully over the years through much trial and error

I have discovered brands that contain clean and natural ingredients that do not harm my skin. Although more expensive, paying the extra money for these products is worth it, as I know my skin will be happy, and I am protecting it from the harsh chemicals and discomfort.

Women and men worldwide devote millions of dollars and time towards cosmetic and skincare products every year. However, many Canadians struggle with allergic reactions and sensitivities to these products that cost them large sums of money. “A dermatology study published in 2010 found that more than a third of over 900 study participants had at least one allergic reaction to cosmetic ingredients” (Jaliman).

Tiana Rodgers, a 20-year-old university student that I interviewed in regard to her allergic reaction with eyelash extensions and other skincare products, said, “I felt ripped off by the product. I paid \$100 for eyelash extensions that had to get taken off within a day.”

As of 2014, Canada ranked number one in the prestige beauty market globally; Canadians are spending \$1.4 billion on these products on average yearly (npd). Makeup alone was the strongest performing category in Canada, with a 12 percent increase in sales, accounting for 35 percent of Canada’s category sales (npd).

Makeup and skincare are an important part of the lives of many Canadians. So, if makeup and skincare are

so prevalent within Canadian culture, as a consumer of these products, would you not want to know which ingredients could harm your skin?

Through my research, by analyzing the ingredients in different brands and listening to testimonials, I have proven my hypothesis that certain ingredients in makeup and skincare cause allergic reactions and sensitivities for users, resulting in discomfort and harm to their body. By considering Canada's Consumer Product Safety Act (CCPSA) and looking at products, analyzing them through the lens of Canada's Ingredient Hotlist and the "Dirty Dozen" list (12 popular chemicals used in cosmetics), I was able to identify

ingredients in makeup and skincare products that cause harm to consumers.

"U.S. researchers report that 1 in 8 of the 82,000 ingredients used in personal care products are industrial chemicals, including carcinogens, pesticides, reproductive toxins, and hormone disruptors" (*David Suzuki Foundation*).

The chemicals in these products are absorbed by the upper layers of skin and enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system.

Canadians have the right under the CCPSA to know what's in their products and access safe products for their bodies. The safety of products should be important to consumers and the Canadian Government, but it should also be necessary to the manufacturers of these products. They should provide safe

products to their consumers that won't harm their skin. This report sheds light on harmful ingredients] within makeup and skincare and the harm they can cause for our skin.

Ashely McLachlan is an Arbonne consultant who started selling the products because she wanted to find different skincare than what the hospital offered her premature babies. She said, "it started by wanting safe alternatives for my premature babies in the hospital, but I then realized that I should also be taking care of my body and my skin."

Rodgers speaks on her experience with an allergic reaction to eyelash extensions she received from an esthetician out of her home, saying that "it was awkward and embarrassing; I had to still

go out in public with my eyes swollen and puffy."

### **Canada's Consumer Legislation**

Federal agencies and departments are responsible for enforcing legislation regarding consumer product packaging and labelling and consumer product safety, among other things.

The CCPSA, administered by Health Canada, regulates a wide variety of consumer products on the market to keep Canadians safe regarding the products they consume daily (Affairs). The CPSA outlines certain principles that industries and manufacturers must follow regarding their products' production ("Canada Consumer Product Safety Act").

Enterprises must report to Health Canada incidents and product defects that could

result in death or harmful health effects to others. They must obtain safety records and information that indicates if their product meets the standards of the CCPSA.

The Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act is a criminal statute requiring that consumer products contain accurate and meaningful labelling information to help consumers make informed decisions on the products they buy (Canada Competition Bureau). The Act prohibits false representations on products. Specifications in Section 10 of the Act list mandatory label information – name, net quantity and dealer identity (Canada Competition Bureau).

Cosmetic and skincare products in Canada must meet the Food and Drug Act (FDA) and the Cosmetic Regulations

(C.R.) to be sold in Canada (“*Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist*”). Health Canada uses the Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist to communicate to manufacturers and consumers which substances are prohibited or restricted for use in cosmetics sold in Canada. Regardless of the status or the ingredient’s presence on the Hotlist, Health Canada is allowed to intervene. Prohibited ingredients cannot be present within Canada’s products (“*Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist*”). In contrast, restricted ingredients are permitted, but only if cautionary statements are listed on the product (“*Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist*”).

### **Skin Allergies - A Cause for Natural Products**

Some makeup and skincare ingredients cause skin irritation, and in severe cases,



allergic reactions, causing pre-existing conditions to worsen with exposure to chemical ingredients. Symptoms of a reaction to cosmetics and skincare include hives, redness, rash, itchiness, inflamed skin and small blisters as a worst-case scenario (Oxygenetix). Seven ingredients trigger allergic reactions and are recommended to avoid when consuming such products but are not prohibited; they are listed as follows: aluminum compounds, acids, fragrance, metals, emollients, sulphates and essential oils (Sole-Smith).

A study funded by the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) found that a protein called CD1A may play an essential

role in how cosmetics and skincare products could trigger contact dermatitis (allergic reaction) (Bryant). Further investigation still needs to be done to confirm if T cells specifically cause allergic contact dermatitis within consumers (Bryant).

In 2010, the David Suzuki Foundation invited Canadians to participate in a survey concerning toxic ingredients in cosmetics, referring to the “Dirty Dozen” list linked to various health concerns, such as allergic reactions (Gue). The “Dirty Dozen” ingredients are listed as follows: BHA and BHT, Coal tar dyes, DEA-regulated ingredients, Dibutyl phthalate, Formaldehyde-releasing preservatives, Parabens, Parfum (a.k.a. fragrance), PEG compounds, Petrolatum,

Siloxanes, Sodium laureth sulfate and Triclosan (Gue). Although these ingredients are not recommended for use in cosmetic and skincare products, due to the risk of possible harm, they are not prohibited from using under the Canadian Hotlist.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also lists classes of common allergens within cosmetics and skincare that people may adopt allergies to at any point in their lives; they are: natural rubber (i.e. latex), fragrances, preservatives, dyes or chemicals in dyes and colour additives and metals (FDA).

There are two common reactions to beauty products. Irritant contact dermatitis damages your skin and causes burning, stinging, itchiness and redness

(Jaliman). Irritant contact dermatitis is the type of reaction Rodgers had with the Neutrogena face wash and Bath and Body lotions. This reaction also related to the experiences McLachlan said many of her family and friends had using drugstore products. Unfortunately, none of McLachlan's family or friends were available for an interview at this time. The other reaction is contact dermatitis, a reaction involving the immune system that causes redness, swelling, itching and hives; the skin is red and raw (Jaliman). Even worse, it's possible to have a combination of the two, which is, what Rodgers had, as, over the first 24 hours of her eyelash extensions, the glue was causing her to experience symptoms from both reaction categories.

Unfortunately, “hypoallergenic,” “dermatologist tested,” “sensitivity tested” or “non-irritating” brings no guarantee as some companies do testing, and others do not (Jaliman). This is because there are no rules or legislation about how terms like these are used on a label (Jaliman). So, what can we do as consumers then? We must be mindful of ingredients on products and do our research before purchasing them.

### **Analysis of the Ingredients Behind the Labels**

Through an analysis of various makeup and skincare products, from Drugstore brands to retail stores, six out of eight products that I looked at contained at least 1 “Dirty Dozen” ingredient, where two of them contained more than two of these

ingredients. The products that I analyzed were from Tarte, The Ordinary, Mac, Bath and Body Works, Arbonne and Neutrogena.

I chose these products to analyze based on the popularity of use and the products mentioned in my interviews that caused the interviewees to experience allergic reactions or discomfort.

Due to lack of space, I will go over the most interesting findings that I came across while analyzing these products, as there isn’t room to touch on each product individually. The most exciting and troubling product that I came across was from Bath and Body Works. I chose to look at these products because my interviewee Rodgers had experienced reactions to them. The most surprising

thing was that I couldn't find an ingredients list for any lotions or soaps online, as that is where I had to look at the ingredients of products due to lockdown restrictions in Winnipeg. After searching their website, I figured out I had to search up the individual ingredient and scroll through a list of products that included that ingredient. While looking through the other products listed that included lemon, while searching for the Kitchen Lemon lotion, I noticed that no ingredients list for any soaps or lotions were listed, only candles and body sprays/mists.

After plugging in various scents, I still couldn't find any ingredient list for lotions or soaps. Off the bat, this didn't seem right to me. Why were there ingredient lists for products that don't

directly contact the skin (e.g. candles and body sprays), but products such as soaps and lotions used directly on our skin aren't listed? Especially during a lockdown when consumers need to shop online due to forced closures, consumers should have access to an ingredient list for all products while shopping online.

After going through this process online and not finding the ingredient information, I decided to go to the store. Luckily, even in the lockdown, I can still do this, as Bath and Body is considered an essential service. I walked into the store and asked the employee where the Kitchen Lemon lotion was. Next, I asked her why I wasn't able to see the ingredients list for it online. The employee didn't know, but she

said it might be because it's an American website. She claimed the Canadian store had nothing to do with the website except the online promotions that popped up. She then suggested calling the contact number linked at the bottom of the page if I wanted to find the ingredients for other products like these instead of coming in store.

Unfortunately, this trip did not give me the answers that I wanted to hear. So, I called the customer service number to talk to someone about my concerns. After waiting on hold for an hour, I chose the callback option in hopes that somebody could contact me soon.

The customer service line never called me back.

In my interview with McLachlan, I had asked her if she encountered any

problems with Arbonne products personally. She responded by saying, "not necessarily problems, but I didn't enjoy the deodorant because I had a burning sensation when using it after shaving."

Ashely's experience concerned me, as Arbonne prides itself in producing natural and quality makeup and skincare. I wondered why Ashely would have received the burning sensation, so I decided to look into this product more closely. While looking at the ingredient list, I noticed it included parfum/fragrance, a "Dirty Dozen" ingredient and Citric Acid, an ingredient that triggers allergic reactions. I thought to myself; this would explain Ashley's reaction to the product.

Next, I decided to call Arbonne customer service to inquire about these ingredients and ask them why the fragrance/parfum was there. Unfortunately, the call didn't give me the answers I hoped. The customer service representative stood by the product and said that Arbonne ingredients are very carefully put into their products and shouldn't harm my skin. She said that if I tried the product and had a reaction to call, she would gladly give me a refund.

The last product that I would like to touch on is the Neutrogena Fresh and Foaming Cleanser, which can be bought at any grocery or drug store. This product is claimed to be "dermatologist tested" and says it "removes dirt, oil and makeup without stinging or irritating"

("NEUTROGENA® Fresh Foaming Cleanser."). This surprised me, as Rodgers said she experienced "irritation, stinging and rashes" when using this product. When taking a closer look at the ingredients in this product, I uncovered two "Dirty Dozen" ingredients, Parfum and PEG-120 Methyl, and Citric Acid.

My findings emphasize the need for quality and natural cosmetics and skincare products, absent of chemicals. The products that I analyzed showed that some ingredients present within products, although not prohibited from use in cosmetic and skincare products, are still causing harm to those who use them. As shown by the two women I interviewed, many Canadian consumers put their skin at risk by using cosmetic and skincare brands

that still contain chemical ingredients. However, these chemical ingredients are “not recommended for use” rather than prohibited or restricted from use in cosmetic and skincare products. Stories such as Rodgers’ are just the tip of the iceberg, showing a need for more investigative work and digging into the ingredients in these products that are

causing harm to many Canadians everywhere. Not knowing if you have an existing allergy to the product or what the long hall of the use of chemicals could do to your skin, would you want to risk it?

As McLachlan said, “makeup should make you feel good, not cause harm and damage your skin.

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## **Replace *The Lord of the Flies* with *The Marrow Thieves*: A Call for Increased Indigenous Representation in Schools.**

*Sarah Seroy* is currently completing her second Bachelor's degree from University of Winnipeg, majoring in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications. She works as a Career Advisor for high school students. Inspiring others to follow their dreams motivated her to return to school, and one day make the shift to a career in the writing and publishing field. She is passionate about suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and Indigenous rights, and this degree would enable her to make more of a difference. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, blogging about books, and spending time with family and friends.

Hello, Tansi. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that those of us in Winnipeg are located on Treaty One Territory - the traditional lands of the Anishinabe (Ojibway), Ininew

(Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota peoples, and Homeland of the Métis Nation.

Do you remember the books you read in high school? I do. I'm actually a bit of a book nerd, so I enjoyed a lot of them. Some of them are still among my favourite reads. But, when I take a second to think critically about the books I read and I take inventory of the ones written by Indigenous authors, I can only find one;

*April Raintree* by Beatrice Mosionier.

That's it. There weren't many Indigenous characters in the books I read either, and whenever there was, they were presented in stereotypical or inaccurate ways. When we discussed these books in class, we never discussed the times they were written in, or the author's ignorance. Even

if these stories are presented with that discussion, as they should be, they still shouldn't be the only representations of Indigenous people that students see. Students should hear Indigenous stories from Indigenous authors.

### **Reflecting Student Diversity in Literature**

Schools should include Indigenous books in the main curriculum, not just in school libraries or as independent study options. Indigenous representation in books allows for Indigenous students to see themselves reflected in these stories. Books are powerful tools. As Kayla Briet mentioned in her TED Talk, *Why Do I Make Art?*, stories are time capsules that connect us to our culture and our heritage (2017). I made an art piece to represent

how books by Indigenous authors can teach about history, language, culture,



worldviews, and more.

**(Fig 1. Art Piece – Indigenous Books as a Time Capsule).**

Indigenous students can see themselves reflected in these stories, but only if they are portrayed accurately, and not just portrayed as drunk, dead, drumming, or dancing (McCue 2017). The few Indigenous characters included in the books I read in high school were not portrayed very well. For example, in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, the main characters take a trip to a savage reservation for their entertainment, where they are horrified by the brutal and violent ceremonies they witness. There's also a character named "John the Savage." In *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D Salinger, the only reference to Indigenous people is when the main character describes a museum display using a racial slur. I could go on, but you get the idea. These

stereotypes are offensive and wrong. But I knew that they were written at a different time, and I ignored them. But not everyone can do that. And they shouldn't have to.

Students deserve to read books that reflect their lives and showcase their culture. In his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Justice says

"[a]ll work by Indigenous writers adds to a deep, broad, ancient, and profound archive of Indigenous expression that affirms – indeed, insists upon – the right, responsibility, and capability of Indigenous artists to speak our truths into the world on our terms, for our purposes, for the continuity of our peoples and relationships in

all their diversity and complexity  
(209).”

This quote helps underscore the importance of Indigenous stories, and why they deserve to be heard.

### **The Power of Indigenous Literature**

Books by Indigenous authors can empower students and boost their confidence and self-esteem. These books can educate readers on Indigenous issues and relations within Canada, and can build a connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. When Indigenous students constantly see these stereotypes and misrepresentations in school, they can start to internalize that negativity. It can affect their confidence. And that’s not how school should make you feel. Including books by Indigenous authors helps show

Indigenous students that their stories matter and instill a sense of pride. It also introduces non-Indigenous readers to new perspectives and difficult topics, which leads to increased understanding and better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In addition to all these benefits, books by Indigenous authors can teach the same lessons and have the same impact as the books I read in high school did. They contain universal themes and experiences that all readers can connect with. *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline has themes of courage, perseverance, and family. *Strangers* by David A. Robertson explores mental health, friendship, and power. *Split Tooth* by Tanya Tagaq discusses love, violence, and survival. These are stories that

students can connect with, learn from, and be inspired by.

### **Indigenous Representation as a Tool for Reconciliation**

Including books by Indigenous authors can promote respect and understanding and help us work towards reconciliation. Including Indigenous books in classrooms helps meet several of the TRC's calls to action, including to "make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Students" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015), and "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual

respect" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015). If Indigenous languages are represented, the inclusion of Indigenous literature can also help with language revitalization efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Including books by Indigenous authors in the classroom can make such a difference, it's hard to believe it's not a widespread practice already. So, let's replace *The Lord of the Flies* with *The Marrow Thieves*. Let's replace some Shakespeare with Thomson Highway. Let's read *The Diary of Anne Frank* alongside *Genocidal Love*. Let's get books by Indigenous authors in the classroom. There are ways that you can help. Review the material you or your child are learning and think about Indigenous representation.



Speak to teachers, school trustees, or members of government and ask about increasing Indigenous representation. You can even consider donating books by Indigenous authors to your local school. If you need suggestions, check out CBC for

lists, or a great Canadian company called Raven Reads. There are a lot of amazing books by Indigenous authors out there. Indigenous voices and stories matter, and they deserve to be heard.

Thank you. Ekosani.

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## Giving It Their Best Shot

*Kristi Loeb* is in her fourth of five years at the University of Winnipeg and is double majoring in biochemistry and mathematics. Deeply interested in how the social and scientific intersect, Kristi hopes to incorporate science communication into a career in medicine.

Science communication is an incredibly vast field encompassing individuals whose backgrounds range from astrophysics to zoology. At its core, science communication is about communicating scientific concepts—be it novel therapeutics, long-understood theories, or controversial technologies—to members of the public. This demands not only deep understandings of the concepts in question, but also skills in communication. An effective science communicator must be able to explain the concepts to individuals who may fall

anywhere on the spectrum of scientific literacy. Infectious disease (ID) communicators have faced a variety of difficulties, many of which have shaped the group. Although the study that this literature review predates is focused on ID communicators, this review will include literature from the more general field because many of these findings apply to this subset. A basic literature search of science communicators quickly reveals much about this group: namely, that these individuals use their scientific rigour to continuously improve their communication. Although there is an abundance of studies focused on improving the efficacy of science communication, there is very little on the communicators themselves. Therefore,

much of the information relating to this group was gained second-hand. Rather than being able to use previous studies that observe communicators as they work in the field, I largely had to learn about these individuals through their own work.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge in ID communication is the sheer variation between individuals. This is exemplified in the concept of basic scientific literacy. Even though a 2014 study found Canada to be among the most scientifically literate countries, a questionnaire included in the same study found that 49% of Canadian respondents were unable to explain the basic concept of DNA, with 47% believing antibiotics work on viruses in addition to bacteria (Council of Canadian Academics 78-79). With even

the most fundamental concepts relating to infectious diseases being misunderstood by a significant portion of the public, ID communicators must be extremely adaptable to their audience. This need is amplified by various issues in medicine, such as the current racial inequities or historical atrocities committed in the name of medicine such as the Tuskegee syphilis study, which often limits trust in medical professionals (Nickel et al. 249, Alsan et al. 325). As a result, many communicators understand the importance of acknowledging the social context embedded within the information they are sharing. Recently, communicators have called for the implementation of inclusive science communication. This includes the principle of intersectionality and

acknowledges the biases present throughout the field (Canfield et al. 5).

Communicators have also become more vocal about those who endanger science communication. When Donald Trump took office, his presidency was marked by a belligerent opposition to science even though mistrust between scientists and politicians existed long before his election. Shortly after Trump's election, Peter Broks condemned the administration as an apparent failure of science communication, stating that "after decades of intensive sci-comm activity we now have a U.S. President that claims climate change is a Chinese hoax, a Vice-President who does not accept the theory of evolution, and an administration that is dismantling environmental protection"

(Broks 1-2). Another major hurdle faced by communicators is the growing anti-vaccine movement. Anti-vaccine sentiment has been around since Edward Jenner developed a smallpox vaccine in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the modern anti-vaccine movement largely grew out of a falsified 1998 paper that linked the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine to autism in children (Hussain 2). Despite the paper being debunked and retracted, and its author, Andrew Wakefield, losing his medical license, communicators continue to struggle with the ripple effects today. ID communication is also vulnerable to conspiracy theorists who contrive arguments such as physicians profiting off of dangerous vaccines. A 2017 paper noted the difficulty in

disabusing individuals of such notions, with interventions only succeeding before an individual picked up on a particular conspiracy (Jolley and Douglas 10).

These issues, though distinct, compound in such a way that makes even the most basic communication extremely difficult. A 2019 paper that discussed the post-truth reality of science communication described the inevitability of such problems, eventually stating that “at this point, probably the best that can be done is for scientists and their scientific associations to anticipate campaigns of misinformation” (Iyengar and Massey 7660). A similar paper described a catch-22 whereby the necessary countering of misinformation is also likely to contribute to confusion for those overwhelmed by the

volume of information, potentially reducing their willingness to listen to experts (Goldstein et al.). Further complicating efforts and reinforcing the need for intersectional communication is the fact that vulnerable communities are often more susceptible to misinformation than their more privileged counterparts (Nsoesie and Oladeji 4).

Social media plays a complex role in the work of science communicators. These platforms strongly contribute to the prevalence of misinformation by allowing users to post and amplify one another with little to no fact checking. Studies have shown that decades-old misinformation such as the falsified MMR vaccine-autism link continue to circulate on social media platforms despite being thoroughly and

continuously disproven by experts (Wang et al. 8). This is often tied to a distrust of experts that, as discussed earlier, may be earned through bad scientific practices or the result of prior misinformation.

However, some also view social media as a valuable opportunity for experts to communicate with the public directly. A recent study emphasized the efficacy of two-way communication and audience participation, particularly when combined with selfies or other means of identifying the person behind the account, as helping foster public interest and trust (Martin and MacDonald 20-24).

The differences between the public and scientific worlds—and the difficulties in bridging the two—is wholly embodied by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the

public was largely shocked when the cases grew in China and quickly spread to other nations, scientists were not. In fact, scientists were concerned with circulating novel coronaviruses in rural China as early as 2007 (Cheng et al. 683). Before the pandemic, ID communicators were aware of the inevitability of emerging pathogens and had attempted to prepare themselves and their audiences for significant outbreaks, knowing that the extant problems in ID communication would worsen under the pressure of a public health crisis. Heidi Larson, a professor of risk and decision science, stated in 2018 that “if a strain as deadly as the 1918 influenza emerges and people’s hesitancy to get vaccinated remains at the level it is today, a debilitating and fatal disease will

spread” (309). An ethnographic study that took place over January 2020 at the Science Media Center Germany (SMCG) noted a variety of methods that science communicators used to clarify the rapidly evolving situation in the earliest days of the initial outbreak, including the development of new methods to aid journalists in wading through the quickly growing body of research (Broer 11-12).

Nearly 14 months into the pandemic, ID communicators have repeatedly shown their strengths on an unprecedented scale. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease in the United States and considered a legend of ID communication, is one of many communicators to receive death threats for

his efforts (Stein). Others have faced professional consequences, such as Dr. Brooks Fallis—a physician who lost his position as interim medical director of critical care at a hospital in Ontario (Westoll and Ward). Even for those fortunate enough to avoid these troubles, the pandemic has had an incalculable effect—many of these individuals are first and foremost physicians and scientists and have been fighting for the education, understanding, and compassion required to make it through the pandemic in addition to working tirelessly in hospitals and labs. ID communicators have also continued to study communication during the pandemic and have documented the detrimental effects of political polarization and misinformation on communication efforts



over the last year (Hart et al. 679-697, Kim et al. 606-609).

As this review demonstrates, science communication has been extensively documented. However, the focus of science communication has almost exclusively been on the act of communication, leaving the communicators themselves to be considered secondary to their work. This means that people often ignore the tenacity, skill, and empathy found in effective science communicators. Studies

performed in the early days of the pandemic have shown how communicators began to adjust but have missed significant developments. Prolonged lockdowns, rapid vaccine developments, and a global death toll of 2.5 million have all had a profound impact on ID communicators (Dong et al.). After a year of ID communicators putting themselves on the line to get their crucial messaging across, it is beyond time that we pay the communicators themselves the attention they deserve.

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## Pieces of a Woman: A Film in Fragments

*Will Bertazzo Lambert* has been writing in-depth about entertainment media both in his professional life and his time in the University of Winnipeg's Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications program. He intends to pursue a career in entertainment journalism and criticism after graduation.

Vanessa Kirby's first Netflix Original starring vehicle since *The Crown*, *Pieces of a Woman*, takes the BAFTA Award-winning actor out of the royal edifices of her home country of England and into a quiet, middle-class home in Boston. Thankfully, neither the change of setting nor the need to maintain an American accent lighten the dramatic weight of Kirby's performance.

Her role in *Pieces of a Woman* casts Kirby as a woman in pieces after the loss of her newborn daughter. The child's

death punctuates a powerfully visceral 25-minute one-take scene depicting the birth in another star-making highlight of Kirby's talents as well as those of director Kornél Mundruczó and cinematographer Benjamin Loeb. The masterful coordination displayed in the frantic scene's camerawork is more than matched by Kirby's impeccable performance, acting through her many close-ups with a deliberately uncomfortable intensity.

The only problem lies in the fact that this scene comes so early in the film and leaves the audience with 90 more minutes that can't hope to reach the same bar. The rest follows Kirby as she copes with the grief of her loss and deals with the trial of the midwife blamed for the baby's death. The premise holds just as much

dramatic potential as the opening, but while the film maintains an impressive level of quality throughout, it also suffers from a few problems that prevent it from meeting the bar set by the birthing scene.

Vanessa Kirby never falters in her role despite the great lengths it asks of her, but a less engaging supporting cast restrains the overall performance quality. Co-star Shia LaBeouf is possibly the worst in this regard, as his performance consists almost exclusively of either awkward mumbling or shouting, which do little in helping him play opposite Kirby. Mundruczó may have realized this problem as well, considering how abruptly the script handwaves LaBeouf's character out of the plot, although that may also have

been in response to the recent abuse allegations against the actor (Dickson).

The only other notably strong performances come from Molly Parker, who brilliantly condenses a broad emotional spectrum into her few minutes of screen time as the midwife, and Ellen Burstyn, who plays the mother to Kirby's character. The latter's strong maternal presence exceptionally builds on the film's themes of motherhood, best exemplified by a heart-wrenching second-act monologue about the survival story behind the character's own birth during the Holocaust.

The cinematography is much more consistent. Mundruczó blocks and times nearly every shot to perfection, holding on to appropriate moments just long enough

to make the audience feel the discomfort of every unspoken judgment the characters hold against the protagonist. The change in colour palette that accompanies each of the story's major time lapses also goes a long way towards setting the mood and making each look at the movie's setting feel distinct.

But creative colour choices do not a good setting make, and the one in *Pieces of a Woman* feels aggressively at odds with itself. Despite the film's repeated insistence that it takes place in Boston, Mundruczó makes liberal use of outdoor shots of what is unmistakably Montreal, going so far as to include road signs and the city hall at certain points. While these details are minor enough that most viewers likely won't notice, the film has no chance

of fooling anybody who has spent a significant amount of time in either city.

Nothing about the story requires it to be set in Boston either, making the choice even more baffling.

The movie's distracting anachronisms only further confuse the setting. Kirby appears to be around her real age of 32, so her mother's anecdote of having been born near the start of the Holocaust suggests that the story takes place during the '90s or early '00s. This is further supported by the presence of an old-school film photo camera and a nearby store whose only business appears to be developing said film as major plot points.

On the other hand, the fact that smartphones, current vehicles, and AirPods are nearly always on-screen

means the film can't possibly be set much before the current day.

*Pieces of a Woman* appears to be in pieces itself at times due to a cast that struggles to match the caliber of star Vanessa Kirby and a few confusing

directorial decisions. But these lesser elements are thankfully only pieces in an otherwise tightly focused and emotionally resonant drama that's worth a watch for the opening alone.

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