

Spectrum

2023 Wittenberg University



Spectrum 2023

Wittenberg University

Founded in 1986, *Spectrum* is a nonfiction collection of student work that highlights the talent and diversity of Wittenberg undergraduates. This annual journal enhances liberal arts education by publishing works from across the curriculum. Students from all departments are invited to share their research discoveries, academic insights, original ideas, or personal experiences with readers interested in broadening their own knowledge.

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Foreword

When I was in college, there were no computers. Well, there were computers, but they were not “personal.” I imagined them as room-sized things with punch-cards used by scientists to calculate complex math problems. The library catalogue consisted of small, neat cards in tiny, skinny drawers. And when I wrote my papers, I literally wrote them: longhand, in black ink on white, narrow-ruled paper. Then I typed them up on my spiffy manual typewriter, my pride and joy, won in the state spelling bee. I reconsidered some words or phrases, made a few changes as I typed, but mostly at that stage, it was just transcription, not really revision. It was not the kind of writing process that professors have embraced and encouraged in my thirty-four years at Wittenberg—the kind of thoughtful process that produces the excellent writing represented in this edition of *Spectrum*.

The selections you are about to read cover a broad range of disciplines in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. They reflect painstaking research, fresh perspectives, polished prose, and humane values. Some pieces offer more personal commentary on the ways of the world or on the writer’s own goals, dreams, reflections. These words have power—power to convince, power to teach, power to provoke, power to claim an audience. Each of these pieces evinces a voice that speaks through the page and asks us as readers to listen—to connect.

I love that sense of voice that marks the best writing. Sometimes I hear it in the first paper by a student who has been too shy to say

a word in class, but whose voice comes through, riveting and real, in their prose. Sometimes, the voice is there, but there's static, too, at first. Sometimes, uncertainty gets in the way until, over time, a writer's style defines and refines that voice. In my career, I have been fortunate to enjoy a veritable choir of Wittenberg writers' voices, from English 101 to senior honors theses, and everything in between. Those in this edition of *Spectrum* sing loud and clear; they engage us and ask us to view the world from their vantage for just a little while. I find their invitations irresistible—and I think you will, too.

Robin L. Inboden
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To Play Free or Not to Be? Oppression In Modern Childhood Caused by A Lack of Free Play

Claire Patton

“Play is the highest form of research” - Albert Einstein

The Power of Play: Introduction and Definition

Growing up as a child of the 2000s, my childhood oasis was my playroom. A room on the attic level of my house, it was a space filled with joy, calm, bliss, and—the best part of all—free play. American Girl Dolls, Playmobil, Doll House figurines, Lego, and every other loose toy I could imagine were all at the ready for whatever my creative druthers were that day. My toys all had a place to go in the playroom, and that made me feel secure in my play. I explored epic sagas that I created in my sets with vignettes ranging from pretend school and pretend businesses to interpersonal conflicts and real-life role-playing. In the hours I spent upstairs playing, letting myself turn off from the pressures of school and life, all I knew was that I was having fun. Playing became a part of my identity: it is ingrained into the fibers of my being. I remember those moments of free play were deeply soul filling.

I reflect quite fondly on the years I spent playing. When I described my experiences to my friends and acquaintances in grade school, I was disheartened to learn that others did not have the same opportunities. Although I escaped my busy schedule through free

play, many of my close childhood friends were already addicted to technology and forfeited their free time back to their parents or an over-busy schedule when they felt the slightest twinge of boredom. Free play is under attack. As a necessary and evolutionary response to early childhood, modern Americans should spend more time on free play.

It Is in Our Blood: The History of Play

There are many different components to the general term “free play.” To guide my investigation, I will use the definition I most agree with provided by Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds in their book, *The Play’s the Thing: Teachers’ Roles in Children’s Play*. Free play, according to Jones and Reynolds, consists of pleasurable activities that children (especially those aged 3-7) intrinsically initiate while following their own passions or interests (1). Free play can be practiced outdoors or inside, alone or in a small group, and with or without manipulatives. Free play should not include devices like iPads or technology with addictive screens, nor can it be the product of direct instruction from adults. Common forms of free play are make-believe (pretend or role play), rough-and-tumble, loose parts, pick-up sports, imagination time, or a mixture concocted by a creative child. All parts of free play are essential for the development of children in physical, cognitive, and social ways, yet it is the amount of time that children are playing today that is dwindling at a troubling pace. Free play needs to be defended and preserved to help children properly develop. I agree wholeheartedly with Jones and Reynolds.

Historically, children have always found ways to play. Even animals have been recorded to play freely, both independently and with fellow animals. Cambridge University behavioral scientists Patrick Bateson and Paul Martin authored a premier book on instinctual play in animals in their book, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity, and Innovation*. In one example, Bateson and Martin discovered that kittens exposed to open-ended toys (like feathers and string) were

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better at hunting live prey after 6 months than kittens who had not played with any toys. The same results continued in experiments with meerkats, rats, and bears (13). In the natural world, play provides mammals with a safe opportunity to explore boundaries, develop a sense of self, and find pleasure. What Bateson and Martin's work reveals is that there is an instinctual need to play as one of the deepest necessities for a child. It also reveals that depriving human children of play defies their very nature.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) is often credited as one of the first researchers to truly analyze children as developing humans and identify children's intellectual growth in stages. Ages 3-5, Piaget claims, are the years when most children engage in "sociodramatic play," where the greatest focus is on learning about the "experienced world" through "stories and images" (Jones and Reynolds 3). As Jones and Reynolds explain, Piaget's observations of children in their natural habitat helped him define the term free play to encompass many of the activities that children do for pleasure. Play is essential in the healthy development of children in the "preoperational stage," which encompasses children ages 3-5. Healthy development includes both physical development and cognitive development on the road from childhood to adulthood.

Play was not always scarce in America. In the early years of the United States, education varied based on a child's socioeconomic class and region. As educational activist, philosopher, and sociologist Nikhil Goyal pointed out in his book, *Schools on Trial: How Freedom and Creativity Can Fix Our Educational Malpractice*, there is a long history of inequality in education. Wealthy, white children often had tutors and governesses while poorer white children studied under apprenticeships or in one-room schoolhouses, yet America still had one of the most robust education systems of the time, with high literacy rates (Goyal 38). One note is that African American children were often restricted

from any access to literature or receiving any formal education due to their enslaved status. This also contributes to Goyal's overall perspective, which reveals the disparities caused between social classes were deeply troubling because they provided an unequal allocation of resources for all children (38). By limiting the opportunities for growth in minority communities, like people of color or the impoverished, upper-class children had more opportunities for success. Yet even with these difficulties, it would still be a better time to learn because nearly all groups of children, regardless of social status, still had consistent access to free play.

Compulsory schooling, a common theme in modern classrooms that deprives children of free play, has its deepest roots in a factory-like system. Joel Rose retells the tale of the origins of the current American education system that took shape thanks in large part to educational reformer Horace Mann, who viewed the public education of Prussia in Europe in 1843. After his trip, he strove to implement many of the practices he saw in his perfect vision of standardized American schools (Rose). According to Goyal, Prussian schools were based on factories to produce the next generation of laboring workers. They used bells between periods to mimic the shift changes and implemented strict rules for children to prepare them to be obedient citizens. Only children from the wealthiest .5% of families had schools that prepared them for other tasks, like decision-making; leadership; economics; and the skilled management of a factory, group, or military. Only five percent of children, from families in the highest social class, were exposed to the higher esteemed careers of medicine, finance, and law (Goyal 43). All this evidence suggests that the pyramidal scheme of authority in Prussia, rooted in an unjust education system, ensured that wealthy families would continue to amass more wealth and power by dominating the upper echelons of society and restricting lower-class families from upward mobility. The hierarchy began to undermine free play by asserting that the only role of most people

was obedience and not authentic learning, a key component of play.

Dave Neale is one of many who warn that the era of play is over. Neale extended this theory to coin the article “Golden Age of Play,” which refers to the active free play schedule of children born between the years 1900-1970. During this time, it was acceptable for children to practice free play as a part of their daily life. Many children grew up playing outside with their friends throughout the summer and school year. The golden age of play has become a term to describe the peak of free play in America. Yet I have noticed that those golden years are nothing but happy nostalgic memories for the parents and grandparents of today, whose children are over-scheduled, over-schooled, and overworked in an unsustainable way.

Many of these changes away from play started during the 1950s when the United States was engaged in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. American Congressmen feared falling behind in educating their youth (Barden). In 1957, the first manmade satellite, Sputnik, sent into space by the Soviets, made American Legislators fear they had lost their competitive edge in educating the young. Victoria Grieve, a history professor at Utah State University, described the children of this era as “Little Cold Warriors” as the title of her book. Grieve used this title to symbolize the children who suffered a childhood with increased levels of fear and less time playing because of the unstable political environment. Sadly, some of these political crises are still a factor in the childhoods of modern children.

During the Cold War, Senator Graham Barden, among other national political leaders, questioned how playing in kindergarten was the best way of making the next generation of world leaders. Instead of trusting the tried-and-true educational system,

Senator Barden proposed the “National Defense Education Act” in 1958, which prioritized Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (often abbreviated to STEM) over traditional schooling practices of the time, which were engineered for young children to have opportunities to play freely. Senator Barden also perpetuated the misconception that the reason Americans were falling behind was that Soviet children were working on math while American children only spent time finger painting in school. This misinformed logic dismissed the learning opportunities of painting and admiring the arts and it does not reflect the struggling Soviet education system. While the Space Race had Americans eventually prevail by putting the first person on the moon, the deep shift in the reason to educate youth in the subject du jour (at the time it was STEM) never rebounded from the Cold-War era policies enacted, which prioritized lecturing and logic, redistributing time away from free play.

The annihilation of play in schools that was first proposed in the Cold War continued with misinformed politicians into the early twentieth century. The infamous and comprehensive educational reform bill “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) was passed in 2002 under President George W. Bush. Reading the bill, it seems like a solid piece of bipartisan legislation. It attempted to provide for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background or ZIP code, equal rights to education. It placed test score results as a key factor for funding. NCLB was unsuccessful and damaged children in many ways that are still being felt. But in the long term, NCLB was especially detrimental to children by being detrimental to free play. Many experts have frowned upon the bill. Goyal describes NCLB as bringing a “tsunami” of regulations on public schools (60). Ronald Bishop describes its “hegemonic” presence in education as a severe hindrance to play (102). I agree. Under NCLB, states prioritized scoring highly on standardized tests over the needs of children since test scores were a key source of

funding (Jones and Cooper 1). While I understand supporters of NCLB's argument that the bill attempted to support all American Children from all backgrounds and provided more qualified and standardized results for the national educational system, it caused many more problems than the ones it tried to solve by not taking play seriously.

More funding to STEM programs, as many modern legislative initiatives (including NCLB) have encouraged, promotes critical thinking and life skills, both of which are highly coveted in modern workplaces (Brooks). But Goyal still notes that placing too much attention on STEM falsely assumes that all children have built the basic soft skills that are also highly revered and best achieved through free play (185). In my own play and observations, free play can have a symbiotic relationship with STEM, and the two are often intertwined. Exploring the natural environment, playing with open-ended toys, and building a sense of numeric logic are all examples of STEM and free play working together for a child. I have seen many schools do a fantastic job of integrating STEM toys and activities into a free classroom. It is the avoidance of play and the sequestering of curiosity that comes from an overbearing STEM curriculum that is most concerning. Sticking a child in front of an iPad for hours a day working on complex logic problems under the banner of STEM is not developmentally supportive for a child and makes students more reserved when they do explore the content at the appropriate age. With the numerous great opportunities to blend critical and creative thinking together, free play is primed and ready for a great reintegration into the mainstream with the support of the socially accepted ideas of learning behind STEM.

Many parts of free play help children develop. The best way to support a child is to give them a safe, nurturing space where they feel safe to explore the territory and their own sense of self. James

Block and Nancy King, professors of symbolic learning at the University of Delaware and social science writers, believe that play is necessary for children to properly develop into adults. Within the context of an elementary school, King and Block assert that free play, though it requires effort from the learning community, is worth the difficulty and should be implemented (143). I believe guidance by a teacher is still necessary to correct dangerous behavior by the child during play. Rough-and-tumble play is a style of play where children embrace physical contact within the make-believe world. Roughhousing helps children test the limits of aggression and develop a sense of self. It also helps children develop their sense of location, pain, and danger within a controlled environment. King and Block also define when the process of play begins, which is when participants set the boundaries of play. A group of children wishing to rough-and-tumble play together must consider when they will begin. What spaces are out-of-bounds? How can they stop? For young children, rough-and-tumble play can easily spiral out of control if a child begins to hurt another child or leave the boundaries defined in the safe playing space. It is the role of the teacher or supervisor to monitor the play but not to overstep and try to control the play. Though this is a difficult balance to find, letting the child feel free to explore is necessary to truly let the best growth happen.

Happy and Healthy Play

Modern children also have the highest rates of childhood anxiety (among other mental health issues) and overweight children ever recorded. Since the end of the golden age of free play, public schools have shifted the way they operate. In their book, *The Power of Play*, Franklin and Theresa Caplan note that, whereas elementary schools in the golden age of play had extended recess outside and a shorter school day and year, modern school days are getting longer and less active (1). Obedience, patience, and

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structure: these values are a part of both the golden and modern classrooms. The Caplans and I agree that they have become orders for conformity that deprive children of the time to explore the creativity that they are naturally born with.

There are palpable dangers to the mental health of modern children experiencing less free play, both in school and outside of school. The issue is rooted in children losing time playing. Esther Entin of *The Atlantic* wrote a piece entitled, “All Work and No Play: Why Your Kids Are More Anxious, Depressed” which shares that children born in 1997 spend “18 percent more time at school, 145 percent more time doing schoolwork, and 16 percent more time shopping with parents” than children born in 1981. This explicitly states that children are spending more time on activities proven to be less developmentally appropriate and less essential, but Entin also suggests that the time spent doing these activities would be better spent playing. As Entin notes, the reallocation of children’s time to more structured activities might be a root cause of their other mental health struggles. Entin’s interview with Peter Gray, a developmental psychologist and anthropology research professor at Boston College and author of the book *Free to Learn*, reveals that “five to eight times as many children and college students reported clinically significant depression or anxiety than 50 years ago” (Gray).

In recent years, the rate of childhood anxiety has continued to rise. According to Tori DeAngelis of the American Psychological Association, “About 11.6% of kids had anxiety in 2012, up 20% from 2007. But during the pandemic, those numbers nearly doubled, such that 20.5% of youth worldwide now struggle with anxiety symptoms.” This rapid increase is an urgent cry from children and healthcare professionals alike that action is needed to protect the mental health of children. I do not think it is a coincidence that the decline in the golden age of play coincided

with the rise of anxiety and depression in children.

Anxiety in children and a lack of free play show some signs of correlation. While anxiety is a complex conglomerate of symptoms hailing from many different genetic and natural factors, I believe that free play in young children can help reduce an individual's likelihood to be diagnosed with anxiety as a child. Free play is, by no means, a cure for anxiety and it will not guarantee results for everyone. Yet I still think it is worth investigating free play for a healthier childhood. I agree with Helen Dodd and Kathryn Lester, two British-based psychologists that are currently studying the link between adventurous play and reduced childhood anxiety in their conceptual model in their paper entitled "Adventurous Play as a Mechanism for Reducing Risk for Childhood Anxiety." Dodd and Lester believe that "children's risk for anxiety might be reduced by providing children with ample opportunity to play in an adventurous way." They continue by pointing out that "half of all anxiety disorders begin before the age of 11" and note that there is a "plausible link" between adventurous play and reduced childhood anxiety (Dodd and Lester).

Another health issue is the rise in children who are overweight and out of physical shape. Obesity in children comes from a multitude of complex factors including genetics, illness, socioeconomic background, upbringing, and more. Not all children who are overweight are unhealthy, and vice versa. I am not trying to argue there is a linear path between obesity and a lack of play, but overall, what I generally believe is children who are more physically active lead healthier lives and free play will be advantageous to their physical fitness. Outdoor free play is a great example of how to naturally re-integrate physical activity into children's lives. In a separate article, also by Gray, entitled "Play Out, Don't Work Out," Gray believes that the stigma around young children working out is unhealthy and that it would be better for children to instead devote

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their time to free play, which is a naturally active activity. Gray notes that many causes of illness and death, including “all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type-2 diabetes, many types of cancer, dementia (including Alzheimer’s disease), anxiety, depression, sleep problems, obesity, bone loss, bone breakage from falling, and many other things” are all a result of a lack of exercise. Gray and I believe that encouraging children to play with what interests them is one of the best ways to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle. I believe it is also worth noting that play, by my aforementioned definition, must be enjoyable, so children who play by physical exertion will be more inclined to play longer than participating in an organized and forced athletic event. Gray also noted that playing allows children to release their natural energy in a productive and safe space, which is better than energy bursts or over-regulated sporting activities.

Play in Action

Play is worthy of studying esoterically, but perhaps more importantly, children deserve to play in whatever ways they can. For parents concerned that free play would result in less physical activity than organized sports, scientific studies, like the Norwegian studies of children conducted by Wiium and Säfvenbom, have shown that children are more active when they explore and play on their own than in sports practices. Children are natural energizers who will keep moving at a pace that interests them. Letting them sprint, frolic, jump, trot, and pause at their own pleasure lets them get their physical activity in and build an internal sense of drive.

Ronald Bishop, current culture and communications professor at Drexel University and a former child grateful for his childhood filled with free play, notes that the “marginalization of unstructured play” is due to adults “devoting so much energy to ensuring that children perform well in school or on the athletic field” that they

are forgetting about the needs of the child (17). Bishop believes in the power of pick-up games, where children come together and make up their own league of sports or activities without regulations like a sports league or requirements to play. He remarks that many of his fondest childhood memories were with his neighbors playing pick-up games like baseball or “tennokey” (Bishop 178), a tennis-hockey hybrid game that spawned from what materials he and his friends had available. How valuable is a first-grade baseball trophy if it was earned by a team of children who had no interest in the sport? It is especially troubling that children could have spent that structured time learning naturally by having a good relationship with each other and developing social skills instead.

Concerned parents are starting to notice their children not playing the same ways they once did. Some are trying to help bring back free play in the only way they know how: more structure. Bishop notes that one group of parents went as far as to form an informal play league where the children were herded together by their parents to “play” on a field. It was not successful: the children were all interested in disparate activities like twig collecting, make-believe, or even cloud watching. Their parents, desperate to recreate the fond memories they once made, forced them to begin playing sports and running around. Playing is not free if it is forced, and the children were described as “miserable” throughout the meetings of the league and went back to playing in the ways they wished (Bishop 27). The actions of these children are prime examples of the systemic need for play overhaul: children will play no matter what, but they need to feel safe in playing in ways that please them, not their parents.

The tragedies of groups of parents like the pick-up play league trying to support their children while uninformed are not alone. They want to do what is best for their kids. In a world with higher crime rates, it can seem dangerous to send children outside.

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Parents can be accused of negligence or bad parenting for not being a “helicopter parent” (Vigdal and Brønneck) when it is the overbearing presence of parents in children’s lives that contributes to their elevated levels of stress and anxiety. Advocating for play may also feel scary when other families are vying to help their own children win competitive places in preschool or get a head start on life. The competitive slough of early childhood is counterproductive and backward. For example, parents who worry about their children falling behind in reading may not know that they are teaching their children material that is developmentally inappropriate. As the author of “Children’s Play: The Roots of Reading” put it, “Before a certain age, they simply are not capable of the level of reasoning necessary for formal instruction in reading” (Zigler 2). Any attempt will be frustrating for the parent and child, both unable to get the desired result of literacy because the child’s brain has not developed fully. Play is a stronger foundation to assist in reading.

The way a child plays now is forced and artificial if it is present at all. Many children are only given time to play as a last resort for exhausted parents or after a fully scheduled day when the children are too tired. Coached and over-regulated youth sports, longer time spent in school, less time outside, and more of a focus on STEM in public school systems are draining away the autonomy of the child and their very right to be free.

To be clear, not all modern classrooms are devoid of play. As King explains, “classrooms include play because most participants in elementary schools are young children, and young children are playful” (143). Children are naturally resilient to the pressures of oppression from compulsory schooling. It provides hope in the modern world that, when given the opportunity, children will play. Yet overall, the lack of play is still a toxic force. Contrasting experiences like Lyz Lenz and her wildly rambunctious childhood

to the mundane and blasé life of her children does emphasize the overall shift away from supporting early play.

Children learn best through play. Lessons and direct instruction are just not developmentally compatible with young children. Educators like Elizabeth Jones and Renatta Cooper correctly assert that children learn more through uninstructed time together than any lesson they could ever produce. Hands-on learning leaves a bigger mark on the natural progression of children than a lecture or a lesson ever could.

Fixing Play: Alternatives for a Better Future

This year, I met Nichole Gay, a local educator at the Open Air Village School (OAVS) in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Her school, founded in 2020, serves children ages 3-7 and functions as a preschool and daycare. The name “Open Air” is an accurate descriptor: the campus—including the classrooms—is outdoors and students spend the majority of the day embracing the environment, regardless of the weather. While there are many teachers and support staff on hand to ensure a safe learning environment, most students learn independently or with fellow students. In my observations, students learned through play. They pretended to bake cupcakes out of the mud, bartered sticks and twigs as payments, chatted amongst themselves in worlds they created, played a game of freeze tag, and made a play gym into a castle and a picnic bench and a sailboat at once. This type of free play is essential, developmentally appropriate, and perfect for young children.

Other wider initiatives also are trying to bring free play back into the lives of children. Global School Play Day (GSPD) is a perfect example of how to bring free play back into the elementary school classroom. A grassroots movement started by educator Eric Saibel

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in 2015 after noticing a lack of free play in the traditional school day, GSPD strives to reserve the first Wednesday in February to have children play freely. The goal of districts, schools, or classrooms that decide to implement GSPD aims to let children play. Now a global movement, over 500,000 children from 75 nations have participated in the day-long celebration of childhood. The goal is to bring “joyful” learning experiences to all students as an “essential element of learning” (Saibel).

I had the opportunity to be a student-teacher in a first-grade classroom during the 2021-2022 school year. The class was brimming with 25 young and rambunctious personalities and lots of energy. Consistently, they struggled to focus with direct instruction from their teacher, often having mass meltdowns in the middle of lessons. First grade is too young of an age for children to suffer the wrath of a full-length school day without a break to truly be a child.

GSPD was a much-needed salvation in the classroom I observed. Even though it was only one day out of the 180 days in the busy public school calendar, it is a step in the right direction. In my observation of GSPD, children were allowed to bring in any toys or activities from their homes that brought them joy, even if they would not necessarily be considered educational. Students brought in materials including paper and writing utensils, building blocks, sensory buckets, racecars, and dolls. These types of toys are considered a part of “loose parts play” (LPP) and are perfect for children (Gibson et al.). LPP is the philosophy that open-ended products help better foster creativity in young children. Using the LPP mindset, a box of blocks or a bag of beads is a better investment toy than a formulaic toy like a specific set or linear game because it provides more opportunities for a child to role play and fills in the blanks to control their own perception of reality. Not all LPP toys need to be expensive: twigs, sand, and grass are

natural resources available to most kids that are a great frontier of learning through free play.

From my own home playroom, I brought in a couple of my favorite doll babies, strollers, and pretend food to share. Seeing the next generation of young children enjoying the same toys that brought me so much joy reinvigorated my passion for free play and made me realize what a tragedy it is that they do not have more of it routinely.

All members of the classroom community that brought their toys consented to spread them around in various stations and had the opportunity to experiment with the tools their classmates brought in. By rotating in stations, everyone got to play with their own toys and share in the learning experiences from other backgrounds and cultures. I watched as students who were socially isolated, developmentally behind, or struggling with the rigor of the first-grade curriculum flourished when allowed to express themselves through play. The interpersonal communication skills, sharing, and even the patience that they learned far surpassed anything they would have accomplished during one traditional day.

After GSPD, my mentor teacher, Mrs. Johnston, continued to keep the spirit of free play alive. She even implemented “emergency recesses” (Johnston) where, if she lost complete control of the indoor learning environment during a lesson, she would escort the kids outside to the playground for unscripted and unrestricted free play. “The way a child’s brain works,” she explained, “Is not to be cooped up in a classroom at all. It is to play.”

I am forever grateful for the opportunity to play freely as a child. My toys accompanied me on my greatest adventures and the skills I learned through play are sown into every fiber of my being. When I look to the future, I am concerned that the direction of free play

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is heading down, but I have hope that children will be resilient and follow their natural drive to play. Modern technology has commingled with nature to create a utopian scene for a child to begin playing. I am ready for the play in its renaissance era.

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The Vase You'd Always Pronounce "Voz"

Kira Frieson

You shattered a vase, the night that you left
And I'm stuck with all the tiny pieces
I let it sit, hoping you'd come fix it
But you didn't, so I just threw it out
It was way beyond repair anyways
The worst part is the glass stuck in my foot
Wherever I walk, a blood trail follows
Quite the burden, but I can't get it out
My heel drags leaving a red trail, your mess
If that weren't enough, it hurts like a bitch
Sometimes the pain is sharp, stealing my breath
I hold back tears waiting for it to pass
Sometimes it's dull to the point of madness
It will ache to the point of obsession
And I wonder if it's all in my head
And throughout all of this, I think of you
It's wrong, but I hope there's glass in your foot

Ross Bleckner and *The Arrangement of Things*

Charlotte Sarchet



Figure 1: *The Arrangement of Things*.

In the mid-twentieth century, the wild popularity of American movements like Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art shifted the center of the artworld from Paris to New York City. By the 1980s, lasting legends like Andy Warhol kept the glamor of the “art-star” ever-present while drastic economic reforms by the Reagan administration revamped New York’s previously suffering economy. Artists flocked to the city, domestic and international alike. Individuals like Jean-Michael Basquiat and Keith Haring brought a sense of radical vitality to the East Village through the

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new, earnest, and vibrant movement of Neo-Expressionism. At the same time, Neo-Geometric Conceptualism, led by artists like Jeff Koons, Barbara Krueger, and Ashley Bickerton, lampooned the rampant consumerism of the booming city. These figures utilized the capitalism that they critiqued, their lives becoming performance pieces demonstrating the failings of modern society. And into this tumultuous, rapidly adapting environment appeared Ross Bleckner. Influenced by both the changing attitudes and the artistic innovations of his peers, Bleckner emerged on the New York art scene as a young innovator. Like the Neo-Expressionists, he was inspired by the high emotionality of older art movements. Like Neo-Geometric Conceptualist artists, he took a postmodern approach to his work, rejecting established conventions of representation and rationality in artmaking. In his piece *The Arrangement of Things*, Bleckner combines elements of previous and current American art movements to create a visually captivating and emotionally engaging image.

Macabre and melancholic, Bleckner's oeuvre communicates his view of modern life. Coming of age in 1950s and 1960s America as a self-proclaimed "hyper-emotional" man who struggled with accepting his sexuality, Bleckner experienced trauma in his formative years.¹ He describes attending psychoanalytic sessions from grade school through high school, largely addressing his suicidal thoughts and urges.² At the recommendation of his psychiatrist, Bleckner kept a personal journal—a habit he continued through his forties. Writing became an outlet for his emotions, and during college, so too did artmaking. As with his journals, at the heart of his creative endeavors were "sadness, insecurity, fear, and feelings of rejection."³ Unlike journaling, Bleckner's interest in painting came from his family. His mother,

1 Ross Bleckner, "Oral History Interview With Ross Bleckner, 2016 July 6-8," interview by Linda Yablonsky, *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*: 22.

2 Bleckner, "Oral History Interview With Ross Bleckner," 5.

3 *Ibid.*, 18.

Ruth Bleckner, was a homemaker in an unhappy marriage. Feeling tied to her family commitments, Bleckner recalls her feeling despondent and depressed. Bleckner states, the “only time I saw her happy” was when she was painting.⁴ Touched by his mother’s experience, Bleckner turned towards painting himself. He claims, “For me, art wasn’t a visual or aesthetic thing—it was an emotional necessity.”⁵ His works’ characteristic pensive and somber tones are also accredited to his mother, him having “moved toward melancholia through [his] mother’s sadness.”⁶ Throughout his substantial collection of works, Bleckner’s most consistently found themes are “the transience of beauty, the fragility of life and the loss of love”—all deeply personal and emotional concepts.⁷

Bleckner fully embraced art in his undergraduate years at New York University, changing his major to art during his junior year.⁸ He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1971 then further pursued art at the California Institute of the Arts, where he would receive his Master of Fine Arts in 1973. His early works were largely completed in Minimalist and Conceptualist modes, before Bleckner later transitioned into a style emulating the ideals of Constructivism.⁹

Exposure to Op Art guided Bleckner’s career. The 1965 exhibition “The Responsive Eye,” held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, was reportedly the first exhibition that Bleckner attended. Featuring works by Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely,

4 Ibid, 10.

5 Kristine McKenna, “Art: In the Foreground: Ross Bleckner Presides over the New York Art Scene Both as a High-Profile Arbiter of Taste and as a Painter of Pure Abstraction,” *Los Angeles Times* (*Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1991), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-12-08-ca-82-story.html>.

6 Bleckner, “Oral History Interview,” 10.

7 Helen Harrison, “Lives in Art: Building up, Taking Apart; an Artist’s Investigation of Loss and Memory,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, January 2, 2005), <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/02/nyregion/lives-in-art-building-up-taking-apart-an-artists-investigation-of.html>.

8 Bleckner, “Oral History Interview,” 27.

9 “Ross Bleckner,” Petzel Gallery, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.petzels.com/publications/ross-bleckner>.

among others, the exhibition was a collection of works from the short-lived but widely popular American movement Op Art.¹⁰ Op Art, a shorthand for “Optical Art,” was popular from the early years of the 1960s until the end of the decade. Often rendered in black and white, and made to create the impression of swirling, vibrating, or warping, Op Art contributed to the 1960s fascination with psychedelia. Using rhythmic patterns, stark contrasts, and abstract shapes, Op Artists relied on geometric principles and mathematical precision to confuse and engage their viewers.¹¹ These same tactics are frequently found in Bleckner’s works. His Stripe series, one of his first technically mature series, clearly bears the influence of this style. This aptly named collection was created in the early 1980s. These works utilize vertical (and occasionally horizontal) patterns of lines. Bleckner reports that he “wanted to deal with the loosening of states of consciousness” with these paintings.¹² Trying to control the viewer’s experience, Bleckner employs optical illusions. Knowing that there is a physical, scientifically backed sensation caused by patterns and repetition, Bleckner elicits an objective, consistent response in his viewers. Additionally, the purpose of his optical illusions is to create the sensation of blurred vision, which he symbolically connects to “that blur of consciousness, which... has to do with.... the idea of holding on to your reality.”¹³ He extrapolates that one’s perception is “tentative... just like health” and “just like morality,” connecting the abstract concept of “blurriness” back to his recurring themes of loss and death.¹⁴

A movement with a more subtle influence on Bleckner’s art is Abstract Expressionism. Originating in the late 1940s, Abstract

10 “Moma Through Time,” MoMA, accessed April 27, 2022,

<https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma.through.time/1960/the-responsive-eye/>.

11 Shelley Esaak, “Why Does Op Art Feel Like It’s Moving?,” ThoughtCo (ThoughtCo, February 24, 2019), <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-op-art-182388>.

12 Bleckner, “Oral History Interview,” 37.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

Expressionism is an evolution of the Surrealist movement in Europe. Building on the idea of “automatism,” the primary function of Abstract Expressionist art is to convey the feelings of the artist. Emphasizing freedom, spontaneity, and self-expression, artists working in this mode often use bold colors, abstract designs, and chaotic methods. Both in color-field painting and action painting (the two major subcategories of the style), the idea of the “allover painting” persists. In an “allover painting,” rather than including a foreground and background, or a subject surrounded by white space, Abstract Expressionists treat each inch of their canvas as equally important. Both this concept and the idea of art as catharsis are adopted by Bleckner: a fact especially visible in his Stripe series.

Like other followers of Neo-Geometric Conceptualism, Bleckner employs the technique of geometric abstraction to evoke self-reflection in his viewers. Combining elements of Pop Art and Minimalism, Neo-Geometric Conceptualist artists reject symbolism and personal expression, instead using their artworks to hold a mirror up to society.¹⁵ Critiquing the industrialism and consumerism of the late twentieth century, artists working in this mode insert artistic variation into the strict geometry of earlier movements, like Op Art, to challenge the expectations of the public and provoke viewers into searching for further meaning.

One applauded piece in Bleckner’s Stripe series is his painting *The Arrangement of Things*. By merging Op Art, Neo-Geometric Conceptualism, and principles of Abstract Expressionism, Bleckner creates an abstract work that effectively expresses nostalgia and longing. When subjected to formal analysis—a method of art analysis focusing on the aesthetic elements of a work rather than the social or cultural contexts—the deceptively simple appearance of the artwork is deconstructed, revealing the many precise

¹⁵ Tate, “Neo-Geo,” Tate, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/neo-geo>.

The Arrangement of Things

elements and technical details that contribute to the painting's poignancy. Influenced by various time periods and multiple schools of art, *The Arrangement of Things* does not easily fit into one category but instead captures the complexity of the artist's tumultuous time period.

Created from 1982 to 1985, *The Arrangement of Things* is an oil on canvas painting measuring eight feet by thirteen and a half feet.¹⁶ The artwork is entrancing—the longer one views the piece, the more complex the piece becomes. Confusing the eye and demanding attention, the black and white vertical lines stimulate the perception of motion. The swatches of color cause the viewer to refocus again and again as their eye darts from one section of the painting to another. As an all-over painting, the style of the work encourages the viewer to observe the full piece at once, which, in combination with the illusionism of the stripes and the movement of the color blotches, keeps the viewer's rapt attention. Other elements contributing to this effect include repetition and unexpected color gradation, as well as the interaction between the soft color stains and the hard lines of the stripes. The canvas almost seems to emit light as the dark geometric verticals fade into the background, leaving the bright white verticals to shine forward. There is a distinct impression of depth as the pattern melts behind the color blotches, adding intrigue and visual complexity.

The Arrangement of Things, created at the end of the 20th century, is colored by the philosophical struggle between modernism and postmodernism. Modernism, developed in the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, was a reaction to the advent of industrialism. When artists recognized that traditional conventions of art making were incapable of accurately

¹⁶ Ross Bleckner, "The Arrangement of Things," *The arrangement of Things – Works – Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/34747>.

portraying life in the modern era, they sought new imagery, materials and techniques to extend the possibilities of art. This experimentation led to groundbreaking movements, beginning with Impressionism. Radical artists like Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet pushed the boundaries of fine art, questioning both the traditional techniques and traditional subjects deemed worthy by European academies of art. Impressionism paved the way for non-figurative and conceptual art movements, eventually ending with Abstract Expressionism and, debatably, Pop Art.¹⁷ But by the 1970s, modernism itself had been outpaced. A new school of thought was developed: Postmodernism.¹⁸ Unlike modernism, which is guided by the idea that scientific and philosophical exploration can uncover truth, postmodernism abandons hope of universal truth or absolute knowledge.¹⁹ Characterized by skepticism, irony, and a focus on the individual experience over the collective, postmodern art comes in a variety of forms. Conceptual Art, Appropriation Art, and Installation art, as well as other contemporary movements, evolved out of these ideas, each using unconventional methods to convey life in a more genuine manner. Bleckner began his Stripe series shortly after the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism took place, causing some critics to interpret these works as earnest delves into scientific abstraction, and others to read the collection as a sardonic pastiche of modernist art—namely the works of Bridget Riley.²⁰ Art critic Kristine McKenna describes Bleckner’s artistic philosophy as “an irony so unremitting that it tipped into nihilism.”²¹ Bleckner himself provides this insight: “the stripes in my abstract paintings have always functioned” as an “idea or an image stretch[ed] out and let [to]... collapse back into itself” Just as postmodernism is the result of modernist thought taken

17 “Modern Art Movement Timeline,” The Art Story, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.theartstory.org/section-movements-timeline.htm>.

18 Tate, “Postmodernism,” <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism>.

19 Tate, “Postmodernism.”

20 “Ross Bleckner,” Skot Foreman Gallery, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://skotforeman.com/artist/ross-bleckner>.

21 McKenna, “Ross Bleckner Presides over the New York Art Scene.”

to its furthest extent, Bleckner's famous stripes are the result of pushing representational art to its breaking point. He extrapolates on the nature of his abstract work, saying, "[the stripes] are confrontational in that they collide with what is represented in my other paintings."²² This sentiment, suggesting that the existence of more traditional, figurative artworks in Bleckner's oeuvre lends additional meaning to his abstract pieces, parallels postmodernism deriving meaning from modernism. Taking a clear stance on the side of postmodern thought, Bleckner declares that "ambivalence is more true... than an iconographic identity"—showing that he favors individual interpretation over the idea of one universal meaning.²³

Ross Bleckner's place in American art history is not clearly defined. Some critics laud him as one of the artistic geniuses who redefined the New York art scene, while others view his work as derivative. McKenna accredits Bleckner with having "played a central role" in "reopening a door" for painting, which she claims had been "firmly shut" in the 1970s and "had a double lock" by the early 1980s.²⁴ Others attribute his rise to fame to the bloated art market and his ability to "appea[l] to middlebrow tastes," viewing Bleckner's wild success as a fluke only possible in the 1980s. Like Bleckner's work, his impact is ambiguous; it is left for the viewer to interpret.

22 Aimee Rankin and Ross Bleckner, "Ross Bleckner." *BOMB*, no. 19 (1987): 22–27.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40423542>.

23 Rankin and Bleckner, "Ross Bleckner."

24 McKenna, "Ross Bleckner Presides over the New York Art Scene."

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The Actualization of Self Through Others

Abigail Gerstanzang

According to German philosopher Hegel, “Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized” (1949:398 cited in Fanon 2016). In their works, theorists Frantz Fanon, W.E.B Du Bois, Herbert George Mead, and Erving Goffman explore the concept of one’s sense of self and demonstrate ways that the self is actualized through others. Although each theorist approaches the idea of self from a different angle, all of their works support the notion that self can only be defined through other people.

FRANTZ FANON

In his work “Black Skin, White Masks,” theorist and philosopher Frantz Fanon (2016) studies the idea of self through the lens of a black man born in Martinique and a black man living in France. As a black man living in a French colony, Fanon struggles with the two dimensions of self that black men face. He suggests that there is one dimension which identifies with other black men, and they have another dimension which identifies with white men. Black men speak and behave in one way around other black men, but have to act completely different around white men, creating a division of

the self (Fanon 2016).

Fanon (2016) explores the concept that the self is created and actualized through others as he discusses how black men become “more white” through visiting France and learning the French language. In Fanon’s mind, language holds an enormous amount of power, as language can change an individual when they embody the language of another. Language is so powerful that the change which occurs in a person once they speak French is almost genetic (Fanon 2016). The notion that the language one learns to speak can alter the person, suggests that the self is perceived by others based on the language the individual is speaking. Language is an outward expression to be observed by others; therefore, if language has the power to alter one’s self, then the self is actualized through those surrounding the individual.

Another idea that Fanon (2016:396) explores is that ontology—the philosophical study of being—does not understand the black man, and a black man is only black through the lens of a white person: “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.” He argues that ontology left out black men as “beings”—it has focused so much on white men that black men are simply another entity that exist in relation to the white men. This limits black men to two conflicting frames of reference: that of his customs and how he was raised and that of the civilization which effectively destroyed those customs by imposing itself on him (Fanon 2016). The sense of self that the black man possesses is one that conflicts with his culture and has been essentially defined by the white man.

In addition, Fanon (2016:397) touches on the struggle of black men who experience life as a triple person: “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.” Here, Fanon refers to a moment on a train filled with white people, and on this train, he is hyper aware of his sense of self in relation to the white

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people. He can feel their judgment and their interpretation of him, and in this situation, he objectifies himself. Fanon breaks himself down into his physical body which is occupying space on the train, his race which the white people are observing, and his ancestors which have given him his ethnic characteristics that are being interpreted by the others on the train. On the train, Fanon (2016) is aware of his sense of self purely because of the presence of others, supporting the idea that self is actualized by others.

Finally, Fanon (2016:398) explores the idea presented by Hegel that man is only human based on how hard he tries to get another to recognize him: “Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him.” Each sense of self wishes to be absolute in that they want to be recognized as objective truth; moreover, when the self encounters any type of resistance from others it begins to experience desire, the desire to be recognized as its own being and individual. Fanon claims that white men experience this more fully, as white men are the neutral human, but black men experience this desire to be recognized as man, not a black man in relation to a white man, but just a man. Society has been built in a way in which black men are forced to define their sense of self through white men and through others; their self is not allowed to exist on its own (Fanon 2016).

W.E.B. DU BOIS

W.E.B. Du Bois is a black theorist with the experience of living in America as a black man. Du Bois (2016) also explores the sense of self that black people face and how the self is molded by white people. In his work “The Souls of Black Folk,” Du Bois presents the idea that black people go through life feeling like a problem, a label given to them by white people. White people often do not

directly tell black people they are a problem, but they say things such as “I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?” (Du Bois 2016:361). This treatment from white people categorizes black people as “other” and impacts their sense of self beginning from a young age (Du Bois 2016).

Du Bois (2016) recalls the first time he was treated as a problem—he was a young boy in a schoolhouse in New England when all of the children wanted to buy visiting cards and exchange them with one another, but when Du Bois went to exchange his card with a girl, she refused. It was in that moment that Du Bois realized that he was different than everyone else, and his world became clouded by a “vast veil.” This veil that Du Bois (2016:362) describes, “yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” The self-consciousness of black men, existent or not, is shaped by the other world, the people they are surrounded by. Due to the feeling of “other” that is imposed upon black people by white people, their sense of self exists in relation to other people (Du Bois 2016).

According to Du Bois (2016), black people experience a unique sense of self that he refers to as double-consciousness. Double-consciousness is “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in contempt and pity” (Du Bois 2016:362). The sense of self that black people experience is one completely dependent of the world surrounding them, as they must always keep in mind the way that others are perceiving and judging them.

Du Bois (2016) explains how it feels as if there are two souls, deeply entangled, one is an American and one is a black man. Throughout history, black people in America have been striving to find a way

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in which to turn this double consciousness into a single self. The black man does not want to get rid of either part of the self; he does not want to take away his blackness, as the African American has a message they need to spread to the world. He also does not want to strip away the American part of his soul and Africanize it because America has much to teach the world and Africa. The one thing that African Americans truly hope is for there to be a way that a black man in America can be both a black man and an American. At this time, African Americans were both black and American, but they were treated horribly by other Americans and not given the opportunities they rightfully deserved. The self Du Bois (2016) wishes for is one in which he can be black and American, without the hate and discrimination that he so often faces. It is almost as if black people wish that they could actualize their own sense of self instead of depending on others to define their self. Du Bois (2016:362) describes this self they are longing for as a “better and truer self,” implying that a self created through the image of others is not as desirable as a self which is purely created within.

The fight that African Americans experienced for freedom and political equality influenced the sense of self that they had, but the self changed even more once freedom was obtained. For decades, African Americans fought for freedom, they lived through “the Holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux Klan, the lies of carpet-baggers, the disorganization of industry, the contradictory advice of friends and foes” (Du Bois 2016:363). The fight for freedom consumed the souls of black people in America, resulting in “dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, [and] self-respect” once life improved for black people (2016:364). For Du Bois (2016:364) for the first time, “he began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another.” The black man wanted to experience his own sense of self, but even though freedom was obtained, he was now

faced with poverty and ignorance in relation to the white man. Du Bois believes that African Americans should be given time to work on their own social problems instead of trying to keep up with a world that has not had the impediments to advancement that African Americans have had. However, this is not the reality that African Americans received, as they still experience prejudice and oppression. That self-realization that black men hoped to obtain through freedom has effectively been reconstructed to reflect the social influence of white people on the now free, but still subject to prejudice, African Americans (Du Bois 2016). The sense of self that black people in America experience is one imposed upon them by those around them, both black and white.

GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

American philosopher and social theorist George Herbert Mead (2016), in his work “Self,” focuses on the definition of self and the way in which the self is connected to society. Mead explains the importance of language in developing the self, as language is a social process necessary for the self to emerge. The self is not something that an individual is born with, as it is not automatically there, “but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process” (Mead 2016:453). The social development of the self indicates that a sense of self can only be obtained through others, and it cannot exist unless others bring it into existence.

Mead (2016) explains the development of self through two stages, play and game. Play is the first stage of the development of self that children experience at a young age. During this stage, children are able to take on the role of another but are unable to take on multiple roles, and they are able to respond intelligently to any

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stimuli that approaches but their thoughts are unorganized as a whole. At the play stage, “the individual’s self is constituted simply by an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another in specific social acts in which he participates with them,” which suggests that the self is developing due to the influence of other people (Mead 2016:461).

The largest difference between the stages of play and game is that, during the game stage, “the child must have the attitude of all the others involved in that game,” meaning the child is able to understand the game as a whole and predict the actions and behaviors of each individual (Mead 2016:460). Mead (2016) gives the example of baseball—during the game, a child who is in the play stage will know their job and how to react to the play at hand, but a child in the game stage will not only know their own role, but the role of everyone else on the team and how they will each react to a series of different plays. At the game stage, the individual’s self is working towards full development, and “that self is constituted not only by an organization of these particular attitudes, but also by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which [one] belongs” (Mead 2016:460). This suggests that one’s social group has an influence on their sense of self.

Another concept which influences one’s sense of self is the generalized other, “the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self” (Mead 2016:460). The generalized other shares one attitude that includes the attitudes of everyone in the entire community. This means that each individual is influenced through the generalized other, resulting in the community convincing the individual to act in a way which will continue the beliefs and attitudes of the generalized other: “the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual

members; for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individual's thinking" (Mead 2016:461). The generalized other shapes the way that an individual thinks, feels, and behaves, evoking the idea that the self is created and maintained through others.

Mead (2016:465) also raises the idea that there are two dimensions of the self, the "me" and the "I": "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others, the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes." The "me" that Mead describes is a sense of self or a sense of who one is which is stable. This sense of self is created and sustained through others who have socialized the individual, meaning that others do in fact influence the self. The "me" is the part of the self that one is conscious of and that one recognizes as the self, and it is the part of the individual that takes on the roles and attitudes of others in play and game (Mead 2016).

The "I" is the other dimension of the self which is aware of the social "me," and reacts to the attitudes of others (Mead 2016). It is impossible to fully predict how the "I" will behave because it is a response to others, and one cannot predict the actions of others correctly every time. Even though the individual tries to interpret how another will react to a situation, they can never be certain, resulting in a spontaneous "I" that is ultimately unpredictable. The "I" is the part of the self which only exists in the present moment, it is not stable, as it is only temporary (Mead 2016). The "I" is an element of the self that is heavily influenced by the actions and behaviors of others, supporting the claim that the self is created and actualized through other people.

ERVING GOFFMAN

In his work “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,” sociologist Erving Goffman (2016) suggests that the self one presents is a performance to an audience. Goffman (2016:484) defines “performance” as, “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence over those observers.” The perceived audience affects the performer, suggesting that the presence of others defines the self. Goffman suggests the two types of performers are cynical and sincere. Cynical performers are those who do not believe their own performance, or they do not care about the audience’s perception. Sincere performers are those who believe in their own performance, and that their performance aligns with their own idea of self (Goffman 2016).

Goffman (2016) explains his idea of “front” in terms of how individuals present their selves to others. He defines “front” as, “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performances” (2016:484). “Setting” and “personal front” are different elements of “front.” “Personal front” can be broken down into “manner” and “appearance.” “Setting” is the scenic element of expressive equipment that typically does not change and it does not travel with the individual. “Personal front” are all of the other elements of expressive equipment that typically follow the performer. “Appearance” is the “stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer’s social statuses” (2016:485). “Manner” is the “stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation” (Goffman 2016:485). These different elements of front work together to help a performer communicate their sense of self with their audience.

Dramatic realization is another term Goffman (2016) uses to describe how one acts during an interaction with another. Dramatic realization is defined as the way in which the individual will “mobilize his activity so that it will express *during the interaction* what he wishes to convey” (2016:487). An example of dramatic realization would include the fact that businesses will sometimes up-charge a visible product to compensate for products that may not be as visible. In one instance, a funeral home may charge much more for the coffin than the actual value of the coffin because they do not charge for the other costs that go into the funeral, as they “cannot be readily dramatized” (Goffman 2016:488). Dramatic realization implies that the perception the audience has of the individual is so essential that it is necessary for the individual to dramatize what they wish to be perceived, thus influencing their sense of self.

Idealization is “one way in which a performance is ‘socialized,’ molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” (Goffman 2016:489). Idealization becomes reality when the performance “highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs” because the performance becomes believable to the audience and in turn the performer believes their performance (Goffman 2016:489). Through idealization, performers aim to make their audience perceive them in a way which fits into society’s standards. Here, the audience, other members of society, influence the performer’s self because there is an expectation to meet society’s standards.

Misrepresentation happens when the audience questions the sanctity of the performer and believes that they are putting on a false front. To avoid being misled by a performer, audiences will

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“often give special attention to features of the performance that cannot be readily manipulated” (Goffman 2016:491). Performers are deterred from purposefully misrepresenting reality because they will experience “shame, guilt, or fear” if they do so (Goffman 2016:491). This threat of “shame, guilt, or fear” is enough to deter performers from acting in a certain way, hence affecting their sense of self (Goffman 2016).

CONCLUSION

Fanon, Du Bois, Mead, and Goffman all explore the meaning of self in different ways. Fanon and Du Bois take on the view of black people living in a white dominated society and discover that the sense of self that black people experience is influenced heavily by those around them. Mead believes that the self is not innate to humans, but is created through socialization, meaning that other people in society have an influence in determining one’s sense of self. Goffman suggests that one expresses their self through performance and anticipated audience interaction which involves altering and shaping the self around what one wishes others to perceive. Though their approaches are different, when taken together, the work of these theorists suggest that the self is a social concept, shaped and actualized through others.

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Why I'm Single

Joanna Perkins

My Love Life Peaked When I was Four.

When I was four years old, I met my soul mate. He was funny, cute, a good listener, and my mom hated him. His name was Ratty, and he was a bargain bin Halloween store plastic rat. I loved him as much as any child can.

When I was ten, my mom threw Ratty away. I've never recovered.

Accidental Deaths are Hard to Plan

My parents had a love-hate relationship. There was only enough 'love' to cause a few pregnancies. Divorce was taboo in our community, unless he cheated, so my birth created a four-year standoff between the two. My dad laughed and said my mom wouldn't dare divorce him. The following Monday, after dad declared this, my mom filed for divorce. But not permanently.

When I was ten, my teenage sisters started fighting. They came at each other with enough hormonal rage and fanfare to rival the World Wrestling Federation. The fights were mostly superficial, but every now and then someone got sent to the hospital. After Patricia threw Christina off a porch and gave her a concussion, my mom had enough of being a single parent. She went over to my grandma's house, picked up my dad, and drove to Tennessee. A week later they came back, married again.

Don't get confused, they still hated each other. Dad had a brain tumor from sniffing paint thinner for years. When it came out, he couldn't take Viagra anymore. Without that pivotal part of "making up," they never seemed to find common ground.

My mom tried all sorts of ways to passively kill him. The surgery for the tumor had left holes where his brain was unprotected. Sometimes you could see his pulse under the thin bald scalp. Whenever I had company over, he told them that the holes in his skull were where the Devil sawed off his horns when he was kicked out of Hell. Any hard knock there would mean an easy brain bleed. I suppose she thought if things didn't work out this time, she could be a widow and, in our religion, be able to marry again.

She'd change up the furniture, supply him with booze, and wait for him to get ready for bed before turning the lights out. Then he'd stumble drunkenly into whatever traps were set. Once, I think she even loosened the bolts on the upstairs banister. He fell a lot, but never hit his head.

Despite dad's pre-existing medical issues, every so often they'd shout at each other about chores. Mom worked long hours at a title agency and dad was on disability. I remember him drunkenly pleading to her for understanding on nights when he didn't do any chores. He always told her he felt sick.

She'd yell back, "Yeah, well I'm the one who's sick! Sick of you!"

Before I was fifteen, he was diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer, liver failure, and melanoma. Absolute overkill, in my opinion. My mom went on benders in some type of self-medicating escapism. My parents' marriage taught me that, if you were unhappy, the only ways out were death or single motherhood.

After he died, mom came on a trip with me and my husband. Drunk in the hallway, she told me, "I tried for years to kill him, but in the end, it was the damn cancer that won."

God Sent a Blizzard the First Time, What Would He Send Next?

There was a blizzard on March 8th, 2008. It was my wedding day, and I was a pregnant teenager.

The tiny VFW Hall on the East side of Springfield was the only place I could afford to rent out. My soon to be mother-in-law refused to bring my fiancé back to town for the ceremony, even though the roads were cleared off before noon.

“I won’t risk my child for you!” Ginger, my mother-in-law, would scream into the phone at me every so often. I’d just hand the phone off to a family member, and eat pimento and cheese finger sandwiches while she screamed. Grandma Aggie had made over a hundred for the reception. I’d answer a call, eat a finger sandwich, and say, “Yes, we will try again tomorrow,” hang up, throw up, rinse, and repeat. All day. I ate every damn sandwich, and we ended up going to Save-A-Lot to make a cheap sandwich buffet at the actual reception.

Andy and I were married the next day, by a drag queen, with a man dressed in a grim reaper robe next to me. I’d wanted a Sci-Fi themed wedding. I walked down the aisle to the “Imperial March” from Star Wars, since my brother refused to wear a Vader helmet. The drag queen and reaper were family friends. One stepped in out of kindness, the other was boycotting the wedding. You can guess which was which. Overall, it was a trashy shotgun wedding with far too many characters competing for the title of drama champion.

My discount David’s Bridal \$99 dress barely fit. The wedding food massacre must have given my son enough calories to “pop” out, because his small butt was pressing out under the white silk. It made the cause of the hasty union obvious in every photo.

Though my favorite image from the wedding was when my husband accused me of not knowing how to cut a cake. At my wits end, pregnant, and wanting some damned buttercream icing, I

brandished the knife at him. Just as they snapped a picture of us cutting the cake.

Even ten years later, I'm still appalled my mother-in-law wore black shoes with a lavender suit.

The Curse of March 8th

Year 1

That missed wedding date haunted me for years. On our one-year anniversary we had wine and a room at the Hampton Inn, where we'd had our one-night-only honeymoon. The year since the wedding was the most peaceful of our entire marriage. We had a beautiful son, a house, new car, and steady jobs.

I'd thawed the top of our wedding cake, as was tradition to eat a year after, and was excited to be able to eat it this time. However, fate had other plans and this trip wasn't even a full night.

At 2 a.m., with half a bottle of wine in me, I had to leave because my sister was in labor. I spent the rest of our "vacation" taking photos of "the beauty of birth." The "beauty" in this case was watching the doctor cut my sister's perineal muscle for my nephew's huge head. I still can't eat pork rinds.

Year 2

The year after my nephew was born, my husband hit a kid on a bike. The kid was fine, but I was in the back with a boob out trying to calm my teething baby.

"Oh no, did we hit a dog?" I said, hearing the yelp.

"No. It was a kid on a bike," My husband said calmly.

"Um, You should call the police."

"Yeah." He dialed on his cell, moving robotically and slow, "Hello. I'm on the corner of Selma and North Limestone and I hit a kid on a bike."

It wasn't until the cops arrived that I realized my boob was still out.

Year 3

This year, I went into false labor with my daughter and spent the weekend in the hospital. My mom came up to check on me. She was wheeled into the room by a nurse in a hospital wheelchair, using a trash bag like a suitcase. The blankets inside hid the Steel Reserve beer cans. She was so drunk she fell over my IV cord and ripped it out. An hour later I sent apologetic glances at the other gravid women, as my mother cussed and screamed at the cops escorting her out.

Year 4

On this date, I filed for a dissolution. I used money from my meager 401k retirement to hire a lawyer so I could make my ex-husband pay child support. He ruined my credit taking his new girlfriend out on vacations. Ones he had promised me when I was sixteen and naive. He had told me on the previous Christmas, our daughter's first, that he had a mistress. I found them a couple days later at the same Hampton Inn where we had our honeymoon and anniversary. The joke was on them this time, though. I had booked that hotel because my friend Michelle was the night receptionist and got us a discount. Since no one would take me there to cause a Jerry Springer level lover's brawl, I called and asked Michelle to set an automated wake up call for every hour until check out. They didn't get much sleep, and not for any fun reasons.

He'd destroyed the house, the car, and our marriage. He was violent, mad at his own betrayal and hoping to find a way to get rid of me. I lived in fear but tried to avoid the social ostracization divorce would cause. He kept this cycle going until I couldn't handle the financial strain.

So, I filed for divorce, and he went through and destroyed my

most valued possessions. He crushed my laptop screen I used for my writing and emotional support. He carved into the top of the antique desk my grandma had left me. He tore up the three-thousand-dollar furniture set I'd gotten for the house. I thought after that I'd be free.

I found out I was pregnant again the week after our dissolution. My tubal ligation had failed. Then of course, his mistress announced her pregnancy two weeks after I did.

Year 5

I went to Pin-Ups & Pints, a strip club. I had an amazing time. I gave a beautiful, tattooed woman \$20 for a private dance. We talked about *Harry Potter* in the back room. She gave me her number, but I never called.

The date never stood out after that. Curse broken?

A Series of Unfortunate Men

I met Clark at Superfly Comics and Games' anniversary party. I was there with one of his friends. I'd drank and the dude, Travis I think, said something about one of my friends being hotter, so I ditched him.

"Oh my god. I want your skin," was my opening line to Clark. We had the same Star Wars tattoo, a Mythosaur skull. We dated on and off for about a year. He was a nerd, older even than my ex-husband, but was funny and enjoyed doing community service with me. He moved in for three months. He left when I asked him to skip game night because my daughter was just home from the hospital. He told me he didn't want kids and moved out that weekend. He married a woman with three very young kids last year. They're already separated. I guess he changed his mind, again.

There was some minor dating too, never more than a few months.

Why I'm Single

Colby used me to lose his virginity. I met people from dating sites, everyone a new horror. These people never met my kids, I'd learned from Clark to keep their hearts safe.

There were also good men. Kyle, who remains my best friend and has an amazing partner. Harrison, a wonderful man who is especially good friends with my kids. I tell people we didn't work out because I don't have an opening anywhere near large enough to fit the reproduction equipment he's sporting. I try to be a good wing woman. No, it's never actually worked, but I have fun. I felt safer as a friend while working through my many emotional issues.

My daughter, barely five at the time Clark left, told me "Sometimes men are dumb." I am convinced she's much smarter than me. My current beau, Dan, carried her to the ER when she broke her arm. She has decided "So long as the cat likes him, we're good."

Natural Comedic Timing

My children have an amazing sense of irony and slapstick humor.

I took my son to GameStop as a reward for having some medical tests done without a fuss. As we were checking out, I saw my boy go pale. He looked at me in panic, displaying the telltale pre-vomit face only a redhead of his complexion can properly convey. I hurried to leave, thankful there weren't any other customers to get in the way. Unfortunately, the cashier ran out after us.

"Hey, hey, hold on," the cashier called to me as I reached the end of the sidewalk. "Are you single?"

"Yes." I could see the white lipped struggle on my kid's face. He was about to blow.

"How could a hot gamer lady like you be single?" He smirked as he pulled out a vape pen. It took me a second to even realize he was attempting to flirt.

And that's when my son threw up on his shoes. I didn't even look down, I just sighed and watched him squeal in disgust.

Without a word, I turned and left. If you couldn't handle vomit, you were too weak to handle my life of toddlers and mental illness.

“Well, She's Not Wrong”

My daughter's first cussing experience was saying “Fuck the Patriarchy.”

I never corrected her; never said she couldn't say it. She knew when the “P” word came up, cussing was acceptable. Her father left before she was a year old, so I never had a doubt she was going to have issues with men. I was her only role model and I had issues with any kind of relationship. I wanted dearly to be better for her, but all I could do was take care of us and try to improve.

When she was just four, I joked that she would marry the new British heir-apparent and become a princess.

“Eck! I'm ALREADY a princess,” spat my demoness, her blond curls bouncing indignantly around her plastic tiara.

In the evenings she loved for me to read from a book my best friend's sister had gotten me after my divorce. It was called “Why I'd rather Date my Dog,” and I'll be real, it was funny and had some good points. I'd be happier with a dog than a husband.

Once we had an apartment with a yard, we found Bella, a miniature schnauzer who didn't like her foster home. Bella makes herself vomit with anxiety, just like me. She fits in perfectly here. Except when we are fighting over who gets to cuddle Dan.

It's Genetic.

My grandmother was my idol. Stories of her wild ways were magical. One of my favorite love stories comes from her and my grandpa.

See, my grandma was an orphan and married young. When a woman came and said she wanted her husband, she said, "Take him!" and raised her kids alone. When she met grandpa, who had been married at least four times, she told him she wasn't going to take anyone's shit ever again.

Early in their marriage, my grandma was pregnant with my mom. Chaos and kids were abundant, and she was a farm wife. She got sidetracked one day after making breakfast and feeding the hogs and brought grandpa cold coffee. Agitated, he threw the mug at her, splashing her apron.

I can see the look she would have made. Blond hair in a bun, eyes an angry green, face splotchy with rage, but a thin smile on her lips. She picked up grandpa's mug and walked over to him. He took the mug, suspicious but waiting. And as grandma went to pour him a cup, she moved an inch and dumped the entire boiling pot into his lap.

He had on steel worker's pants, but he still got scalded. They were married over forty years, until he died quietly in bed next to grandma.

I Have Good Aim.

When I was eleven a boy groped me in a swimming pool. He was behind me, so I brought the back of my foot up to kick him. He needed fifty-six stitches to his scrotum, and then he was sent to juvie. He was a repeat offender, so he ended up staying there until he was an adult. I hope he got help, but the experience got me to get lessons from my dad on self-defense. Mom stopped the lessons

after he round housed kicked me into my first concussion. One of many, but it helped later.

Taking after my grandmother, I found my divorce empowering. I learned how to defend myself better. I learned how to shoot, to disable and break bones. Guys at the range are flirty until they see what I can do, then I become a “crazy bitch.”

Now single, free, with a sitter and a need for cash, I would go to bars. I learned the first night that drunk men were easy marks. I conned them out of money, claiming things I could do better. Darts, pool, shooting, knife flips, arm wrestling, etc. My size and big baby blues made people underestimate me, and I won significantly more than I lost.

You see, it was mostly about saving face. It would be punching down for a man to win so well he embarrassed me, but he did want to win. Then you just had to nail timing and BOOM! You twisted their hand to the table.

The bad thing was that drunk men could also get angry. Not just “I’m a man” angry, but murderous. I got into a few scrapes, lost a tooth, broke a jaw, and bloodied my nose a dozen times. I gave back too though, and I know at least two men I put in the hospital while defending myself. I’m not proud of what I did before I got into a better therapist. But I’m not sorry for defending myself and providing for my children.

The last one was close, and I ended up being hired for InstaCart. This guy wanted to play chess. I wasn’t very good at it, but I played with the owner of The Horseshoe Sports Bar and Billiards on Fridays. We had the board out and he’d swaggered up. He used the excuse that it was “loud” so he could spit in my ear. He wanted to play chess and wager for a kiss. Rolling my eyes at Stephanie, the bartender, I said I would for \$20. He was gross, but it was worth the money. Kids needed winter coats.

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I used the Queen's pawn opening. Two moves and I took his queen and had him in checkmate. I was honestly surprised but impressed with myself. I grabbed his cash and ignored whatever words he was saying.

Then he put his too soft, skinny, nicotine-stained fingers on my shoulders. I tried to shrug him off, but he pressed himself against me, and made me notice a very delicate weakness of the male anatomy. The kind most men seem proud of, that dangly bit they harass people with and wave around when they piss.

This time, boot clad, I gave a man eighty-seven stitches. He might have only really gotten "7-8" stitches, I don't know. I overheard the stitch count from the ER nurse, and I'd like to believe I critically won the fight. The cops made me go to the hospital pending investigation. Bruises were forming on my shoulders, so they didn't arrest me, but there was paperwork.

Eighty-seven for this loser, plus fifty-six for the slimy teen, equals a possible 145 stitches total. Not bad. I bought my daughter the same boots. She might need them. The world is dark and lonely some days, but Dan is patient and slow. I hope that the things I've done to improve my kids' lives mean that one day I can trust again, and she won't ever need to use her new shit kickers.

The Dakota Access Pipeline: An Intersection Between Race, Class, Religion, and the Environment

Emily Malick

Everyone has something they believe in, and hopefully, something they would fight for. For some, this might require some thinking: what could be so integral to a human that one would sacrifice for it? That one would loudly protest for it, risking negative feedback, defamation, arrest, or violence? For a large group of people in recent times, this was a pipeline. The Dakota Access Pipeline was a huge topic of discussion and dispute in 2016 and in the years to follow. The controversy and protests were often framed in an environmentalist lens, constricting the true power and meaning of the fight for the people affected the most: the Native Americans, specifically the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North and South Dakota. Despite environmentalism being a common theme, there are more expansive connections to be made through these protests. The fight against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline involves more than environmental concerns. It includes issues of religious infringement, environmental racism, and the classist context of the location and community targeted; the fight exposes the intersectional ties between race, class, religion, and the environment.

First, an understanding of the term intersectionality must be established. The term originates in sociology “coined in 1989 by

professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ with one another and overlap” (Coaston, 2019). It is a relatively new term that has been in practice for years prior to its official coining, but it has been met with some pushback, mainly due to the misunderstanding of the scope of the word. The idea is that all issues are intersectional, weaving a web through oppressions and injustices that cannot be removed from one another and, in fact, feed each other. The Dakota Access Pipeline is an issue of environmentalism, racism, classism, and religiocentrism; these realities cannot be separated while maintaining a full understanding of the situation. The idea that the pipeline is solely an environmental issue removes the history of how environmental disasters disproportionately affect people of color and those in the lower class. This issue also cannot be separated from the history and the treatment of Native Americans in the United States, nor can that history be removed from the devaluing of Native American land and spirituality. The web is forever entwined.

Part of this web is the intersection between the environmental and religious aspects of Native American culture in the context of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Religion itself is a way that Native American spiritualities have been pushed into a one-note box that ignores the complexity of their culture: “With over 550 federally recognized Native nations, speaking more than two hundred different languages, and practicing traditional lifeways keyed to the full range of American landscapes, diversity must be the first word” (McNally, 2020). The expectation that Native American spirituality and religion is the same as a religion like Christianity is almost as damning as the assumption that it is blatantly different. The expansiveness of Native American spirituality is not unique and neither is the concept of spiritual land: Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Mecca are all considered sacred and are held in high regard not just

in their respective religions but by others as well. What is different in the United States, however, is the difference in treatment between religions. The First Amendment is valued highly but seems to work for Christianity and other more recognized religious beliefs than it does for Native Americans. Cases in the court system, including the major Supreme Court decisions of *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association* and *Employment Division v. Smith*, found that First Amendment rights were not infringed upon in cases of Native American spirituality and led to the restriction of the Free Exercise clause (McNally, 2020). These decisions had lasting effects which contributed to decisions made about the legitimacy of the Dakota Access Pipeline along with other pipelines being built on Native American land. Many cases were attempted with an infringement on the First Amendment only for Natives to be left out of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993 and for the Dakota Access Pipeline to begin construction in 2017 via executive order.

Another piece of the intersectionality web is environmental racism. The chosen location of the Dakota Access Pipeline itself can be considered an act of racism that is entwined with the environment and the negative effects of human interaction that occurs with that prejudice. According to Ramon Jacobs-Shaw, “When marginalized racial and ethnic minority communities are disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards (such as oil pipelines) compared to more privileged groups, this is known as environmental racism, and it’s a type of institutional racism” (Jacobs-Shaw, 2017). There have been many recent instances of environmental racism, from the disaster response of Hurricane Katrina to the Flint, Michigan water crisis (which is still ongoing). The Dakota Access Pipeline is one example in a long line of injustices the United States government has perpetrated against Native communities by affecting their environment and,

by extension, their livelihood. A water source that is used by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, for example, also affects the land, animals, and agriculture around the tribe. If an oil spill were to occur, it wouldn't just affect the drinking water, but it would be a detriment to food sources when it comes to growing and hunting.

Not only is the physical land, and everything involved, being attacked by environmental racism, this is reflected in governmental policy as well. Along with the executive order by Donald Trump in 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency's budget was threatened in favor of more defense spending which adversely affected "the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, which aims to meaningfully address environmental public health concerns in at-risk communities" (Jacobs-Shaw, 2017). The poisoning of the water would lead to damages in almost every facet of the livelihood of Dakota Natives. This detrimental environmental racism is not the only oppression left in the intersectionality web.

The final piece left to be discussed is the classism displayed in these environmental decisions. Since the beginning of colonialism in the United States which led to the oppression of the Native Americans, Native people have been plagued with financial struggle. The value placed on the economy in the United States put the Native Americans, sequestered on their own land with poor education and job opportunities, at a large disadvantage. This is similar to the economic disadvantages other minority people experience. As author Karen Bell explains, "Industry and government may choose to locate hazards in working-class communities because they are the least able to mount an effective opposition due to a lack of finances, time, skills, contacts, representation and information" (Bell, 2019, p. 164). Lower-class people often cannot afford to hire lawyers, lobbyists, or experts to defend themselves and

their neighborhoods from detrimental environmental disasters. Politicians also listen to middle-class voters more, as they have a higher likelihood of voting in elections. Middle and upper-class communities are also more educated than lower-class communities and are able to use their knowledge in order to, for instance, fight against a pipeline being built properly. Karen Bell also details the ignorance of the struggle of the lower-class:

The concerns that residents express in an area do not necessarily link to class issues, according to my experience as a community development worker. It is often the safer agenda that people propose, focusing on what can be seen in the here and now, rather than raising the issues that need to be addressed to really make their lives better, such as a redistribution of wealth and the elimination of toxic production. In addition, concerns raised often reflect dominant norms and debates in society at that time. (Bell, 2019, p. 166)

This is important to think about when looking at Native American culture as well as the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The land was deliberately chosen in an area where lower-class people live, with a history of losing court cases about similar issues, and (thought to be) a secular and specific issue that wouldn't gain traction in mainstream politics.

A subject as complicated as the Dakota Access Pipeline is a complex web that is difficult to unweave and sometimes even harder to understand, yet intersectionality provides an important lens to begin unpacking the different aspects of the issue. The difference in treatment of Native American religion and spirituality, as well as their spiritual land, is very stark when compared to other religions, especially Christianity, in the United States. This

The Dakota Access Pipeline

can also be reflected in the classism Native Americans experience because often they lack the funds and knowledge to adequately fight their court cases or hire lawyers who will do so for them. This same phenomenon can be seen in the lack of success in fighting environmental issues like pipelines, fracking, and deforestation. Additionally, these environmental issues, that often lead to disasters, are racially motivated, as there is also a parallel between minorities and being lower-class. The Dakota Access Pipeline perfectly shows the web of intersectionality and how the connections cannot be removed from one another. There is no one true reason why this pipeline would go in the exact location it did, despite popular environmental concerns, and why Native Americans would have difficulty fighting back. There are many other instances of issues that lie at the intersection of religious infringement, environmental racism and classism within minority communities: for example, the Flint Water Crisis, hurricane and tornado relief sites, radioactive dumping sites, landfills, and more. The Dakota Access Pipeline is just one example of how a deeper understanding of intersectional issues could prompt non-natives and people from outside of the affected community—even outside of the country—to care, offer aid, protest, and capture the attention of the media to spark real change.

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Reagan, Religion, and the Rise of AIDS

Isabel Travis

Ronald Reagan was a witty and personable Republican politician and a compelling public speaker, which drew the attention of a burgeoning constituency that mixed social, economic, and religious conservatism. This new Religious Right—a coalition sharing conservative political and religious ideals—supported Reagan en masse, turning out in large numbers to vote for him. This meant they had power in America, both in that the president agreed with many of their stances and that they helped put him in that role in the first place. However, this rising power was not always to the benefit of all Americans, especially those the Religious Right condemned. The timing of this rise was unfortunate, as the AIDS crisis required strong leadership in both voice and money. President Ronald Reagan embodied the values of the Religious Right voting bloc, which inhibited his response to the AIDS crisis and led to deaths of many Americans.

To understand the Religious Right in the 1980s, one must look further back in American history. Prior to the rise of this movement, most American voters considered it taboo to explicitly combine politics and religion. However, the 1960s changed a great deal about American life. Civil rights legislation passed, the Vietnam War and protests against it were underway, and the birth

control pill, among other social changes, allowed for the advent of the sexual revolution. These societal upheavals caused concern among many conservatives. Conservative activists including Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, and Howard Phillips and televangelists like Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham took advantage of this conflict to build a coalition that would have power as a political voting bloc. Throughout the 1970s, small-government conservatives and evangelical religious leaders found common ground and made connections, seeking out ways to draw themselves closer in the minds of constituents and parishioners. A prime example of this is the case of Bob Jones University.¹ In 1970, the IRS decreed that an organization practicing segregation was, by definition, not charitable, and therefore ineligible for charitable tax-exempt status. Bob Jones University, a religious institution, practiced segregation. Small-business conservatives felt that this was gross government overreach on the part of the IRS and evangelicals understood this to be an attack on their faith. Paul Weyrich attributes this action on the part of the IRS one of the key factors that drew these two movements together by providing a rallying point that was relevant to both political and religious conservatives.²

Each side of this newfound coalition benefited significantly from their growing bond. Religious conservatives gained respectability and access to mainstream political processes that would otherwise be difficult for them to achieve. Political conservatives got fervently devoted voters who had emotional and moral reasons to make it to the polls.³ These voters, while skewing older initially, also had television shows, schools, universities, and churches that allowed their message to be spread to younger people, ensuring that they could maintain a population large enough to stay relevant.⁴ The

1 Matthew Avery Sutton, "Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars of the 1980s," in *A Companion to Ronald Reagan*, ed. Andrew L. Johns (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 204-216.

2 Sutton, "Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars," 204-216.

3 Ibid.

4 Stephen D. Johnson, Joseph B Tamney, and Ronald Burton, "Factors Influencing Vote for a Christian Right Candidate," *Review of Religious Research* vol. 31, no. 3 (Mar., 1990): 291-304, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511619>

primary focus of this coalition was where their interests most strongly overlapped: domestic social issues like abortion rights, homosexuality, and prayer in school, paired with less government oversight and regulation that gave businesses and churches alike more leeway to do as they preferred. These issues collectively were referred to as “family values” and they provided a common rallying point based on a shared notion of morality and decency.⁵

Reagan might have been seen as a poor fit to receive the support of such a movement. A former actor in his second marriage, Reagan was running against former Sunday School teacher and fellow evangelical Christian, Jimmy Carter. Reagan, further, had a gubernatorial history of passing laws that ran counter to the Religious Right’s message, such as the 1967 law sponsored by Democratic representative Anthony Beilenson, which expanded abortion rights in California in cases involving rape, incest, or health concerns.⁶ However, the Religious Right saw something in him and his past. For example, Reagan was president of the Screen Actors’ Guild, the Hollywood union for actors, during the 1940s. He was called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, where he made a positive impression as a clean-cut and reasonable anti-Communist.⁷ Beginning in 1953, Reagan worked with the General Electric Theater, a program sponsored by the General Electric Company to build positive relationships with customers and workers. This was an instrumental time for him to become a conservative face to the public, not only on the weekly Sunday evening program, when he “visited the plants and walked the factory floors,” meeting workers personally as he “articulated the values of personal liberty and individual responsibility.”⁸ Then in 1964, Reagan was asked

5 Sutton, “Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars of the 1980s,” 204-216.

6 H. W. Brands, *Reagan* (New York: Doubleday, 2015) 159-162.

7 Brands, *Reagan*, 35-89.

8 *Ibid.*, 122-128.

to give a speech for Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. Reagan's speech, "A Time for Choosing" gave the audience "something to cheer about" with its optimistic message for the future and launched him into the political sphere.⁹ Reagan's political reputation continued during his time as governor, where he remained an engaging speaker with his finger on the popular conservative pulse. For example, he condemned student protestors at California universities, saying "[it] does not constitute political interference with intellectual freedom for the tax-paying citizens, who support the college and university systems, to ask that, in addition to teaching, they build character on accepted moral and ethical standards."¹⁰ Reagan knew the talking points that established him as a steady leader on the political right.

However, the primary reason the Religious Right was drawn to Ronald Reagan was that he talked the evangelical talk. According to historian Darren Dochuk, "Reagan used language drawn from the evangelical lexicon."¹¹ During his campaign for governor of California, Reagan was open about his conversion experience as a born-again Christian. He specifically said he "accepted the Lord as [his] personal savior," echoing the phrasing of popular evangelical Christian leaders like Billy Graham.¹² When discussing in an interview how he intended to govern California, he mentioned he could not "conceive of anyone trying to meet the problems we face today without help from God."¹³ Reagan knew how to appeal to evangelicals using their own words. Ronald Reagan also had warm personal friendships with evangelical religious leaders such as Pat Boone, Jerry Falwell Sr., and Billy Graham that dated

9 Ibid., 137-138.

10 Ibid., 156.

11 Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011) 263-264.

12 Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 263-264.

13 Ibid.

back to his early time in office as governor.¹⁴ Further, the type of economic plan Reagan favored—small government and supply-side economics—made religious and economic conservatives feel confident that they would have the freedom to craft local policy to suit them. In the end, the reason the Religious Right supported Reagan was because he publicly supported them as he rose first to Governor of California and then to President of the United States in 1980.

While all this was happening, another major change was quietly affecting the world and, eventually, American life. This was the disease now known as human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or HIV/AIDS. HIV evolved from simian immunodeficiency virus, which affects monkeys and chimpanzees, and likely jumped to humans as a result of hunting for bushmeat. The first recorded case of HIV in a human dates back to samples taken from a man who died in 1959 in Central Africa.¹⁵ Through the 1960s and 70s, several cases of AIDS emerged in Europeans who had spent time in Africa. The first known cases of AIDS in the western hemisphere were a series of 12 cases of Kaposi's sarcoma, "a rare skin cancer usually found in older Eastern European men," which was found in Haiti between 1979 and 1981.¹⁶ While AIDS likely had come to the Americas a few times, it petered out because there were not enough opportunities for it to spread through human populations.¹⁷ America would not get so lucky again.

1981 was when AIDS started to be seen and recognized by medical professionals in the United States. In Los Angeles, California, five

¹⁴ Ibid., 269-271.

¹⁵ Mary Carmichael, "How It Began: HIV Before the Age of AIDS," *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

¹⁶ "Timeline: 25 Years of AIDS," *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

¹⁷ Gina Kolata, "Boy's 1969 Death Suggests AIDS Invaded U.S. Several Times," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1987.

men who were “active homosexuals... were treated for biopsy-confirmed *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia,” a rare disease related to strong immunosuppression.¹⁸ This was significant enough to alert the Centers for Disease Control, or the CDC, who published the information in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* in June 1981. The report concluded that there was “an association between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact and *Pneumocystis pneumonia* in this population.”¹⁹ Indeed, due to the relative fragility of rectal tissues and the viral load in seminal fluid, penetrative anal sex was an easy way to spread HIV, which then attacked helper-T immune system cells, allowing the body to be compromised by opportunistic diseases. The long incubation period where HIV was not displaying symptoms in the people who had it allowed it to spread undetected. The gay community in Los Angeles had been infected. As the MMWR mentions, none of the reported infected knew each other or had any “common contacts.”²⁰ By this point, the disease had spread too far to be stopped. Moreover, there were other cases cropping up in other American cities like San Francisco, New York City, and Atlanta, especially in gay communities.²¹ In the beginning of the 1980s, scientists and doctors were seeing the beginning of a pandemic like nothing they had ever seen before. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, it was “truly a new disease.”²²

While many of the early victims of AIDS were gay men, other communities were also particularly at risk. AIDS spread via blood in addition to sexual contact, meaning that other affected communities included intravenous drug users who reused or

18 “Pneumocystis Pneumonia — Los Angeles,” *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*, Center for Disease Control, June 5, 1981.

19 “Pneumocystis Pneumonia — Los Angeles,” *Mortality and Morbidity Report*.

20 Ibid.

21 “Interview: Jim Curran,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS 2005-2006.

22 “Interview: Anthony Fauci,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

shared needles and hemophiliacs who required blood-based clotting products to live. Babies of infected individuals could contract HIV in utero or during birth. And, of course, sexual contact did not have to be between men to spread HIV.²³ However, the early infection of gay men at a time when their personal and sexual liberation was already controversial meant that the entire disease was strongly associated with homosexuality. Much of the American public saw AIDS victims as dirty, dangerous, and morally impure by association, no matter how they contracted the disease. For example, Jerry Falwell is quoted as saying, “AIDS is a lethal judgement of God on America for endorsing this vulgar, perverted, and reprobate lifestyle” and “[w]e cannot continue to allow our leaders to pass laws protecting the homosexual lifestyle,” referring to both civil rights for queer people in general and measures to protect them from AIDS in particular.²⁴

Among the clamor from religious organizations and the general public as a whole, President Reagan’s voice stood in stark contrast. That is, Reagan was notably silent on the issue of the growing AIDS crisis. He did not even utter the word “AIDS” in public until 1987, though federal health departments like the CDC and Department of Health and Human Services were actively involved in working to resolve the emergency. Health officials and AIDS activists both believe that this silence contributed to negative public reaction and stigma surrounding the crisis. Reagan could have directed funding efforts from the federal government or provided a calm voice to cool the vitriol against victims of AIDS, for example. However, Dr. Donald Francis, an epidemiologist who worked for the CDC researching the disease during the crisis, says of the Reagan administration, “their simple-minded approach had no room for

23 “Interview: Anthony Fauci,” 2006.

24 Mark R. Kowalewski, “Religious Constructions of the AIDS Crisis,” *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 91-96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711343>

complex concerns like AIDS.”²⁵ Dr. Francis was perturbed that an administration ostensibly “for the people” was allowing many of those people to die due to lack of concern from the government.²⁶ Dr. Jim Curran, a researcher with the CDC’s Sexually Transmitted Disease division called Reagan’s lack of response “an open neglect” and a “failure” on the part of Reagan and his administration, referring both to Reagan’s unwillingness to discuss the crisis and general defunding of health and human services in general, which continued through his entire administration.²⁷ Larry Kramer, a playwright and AIDS activist involved in grassroots movements like Gay Mens’ Health Crisis and ACT UP, went so far as to call him “Adolf Reagan” as he believed Reagan “responsible for the death of more gay people than anybody in the world.”²⁸

However, it was not a matter of not knowing AIDS existed or its effects. In a telegram from 1982, early in Reagan’s first term, the Department of State to the Embassy in Haiti advised Americans in Haiti to “avoid promiscuous sexual behavior, illegal IV drug use and to use blood or blood products only in a life saving situation.”²⁹ Though at the time it was considered a “rare disease,” it was still considered risky enough to avoid.³⁰ The CDC was also working hard on programs to reduce risky behaviors related to AIDS. By 1985, the CDC was reasonably certain of how exactly HIV was spreading, and so created a plan to stop it. The plan was to reduce HIV transmission by “hiring teams of people, educating at risk populations of urban areas, testing them for antibodies, and

25 Donald P. Francis, “Commentary: Deadly AIDS policy failure by the highest levels of the US government: A personal look back 30 years later for lessons to respond better to future epidemics,” *Journal of Public Health Policy* Vol. 33, No. 3 (August 2012): 290-300.

26 Francis, “Commentary: Deadly AIDS policy failure,” 290-300.

27 “Interview: Jim Curran,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS 2005-2006.

28 “Interview: Larry Kramer,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

29 “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Haiti,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988*, Volume XLI, Global Issues 2, Part 1. (Washington: Government Printing Office), Document 2.

30 “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Haiti,” Document 2.

counseling them on ways to prevent further spread.”³¹ This plan would have cost an estimated \$37 million, which Dr. Francis and others at the CDC felt was a considerable but necessary sum to deal with the growing health crisis. This allotment was, however, entirely denied in such a manner that Dr. Francis and other CDC officials working on AIDS understood to mean “[l]ook pretty and do as little as you can.”³² That is, researchers from the CDC working on the AIDS crisis were to not put too much effort or funding into the work they were doing as it had been deemed a low priority. Indeed, underfunding of HIV/AIDS issues was a common complaint among researchers and activists.³³

This perspective on funding was contrasted with the position of Margaret Heckler, Reagan’s Secretary of Health and Human Services, who said in a 2006 interview “we could not have gained anything more by increasing the cash expenditures... this was not a problem that money could solve; it was a problem that the scientists could solve.”³⁴ It is important to remember that the Religious Right was not only concerned with the religious aspect of their name, but were concerned that they were not the only conservative faction in Reagan’s ear. In addition, “Reagan’s key advisors generally tried to insulate the president from religious activists.”³⁵ That’s not to say evangelicals were not “enjoying unprecedented access to the presidency and the White House,” just that they were not Reagan’s only concern.³⁶ 1984 was an election year and Reagan intended to stay. To do so meant not making too many waves in the direction of evangelicals and being branded a zealot. Reagan’s first priority was to the fiscal conservative notions of small government and supply-side economics that were popular

31 Francis, “Commentary: Deadly AIDS policy failure,” 290-300.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 “Interview: Margaret Heckler,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

35 Sutton, “Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars,” 204-216.

36 Ibid.

with both the Religious Right and other conservative factions. This extended to how AIDS was dealt with under the Reagan administration. Members of his administration, Heckler included, supported his fiscal philosophies, driving policy in that direction. Heckler even says that her “first step” and “most serious priority” upon hearing about the advent of AIDS was to talk to the White House Chief of Staff because “this was potentially going to go over the budget.”³⁷ Behind the scenes of the Reagan administration, AIDS was claimed as “the number one issue at the Department of Health and Human Services,” but any effort to combat it had to be made within the constraints of the budget-cutting fiscal conservatism Reagan championed, which lay implied as the true top priority.³⁸

In public, Reagan did not make a great deal of effort to address the crisis his subordinates were working on. The first time Reagan even publicly alluded to AIDS was in a press conference in 1985 where he was asked about children with AIDS being allowed to attend public school. Reagan stated that he could “understand both sides” of the issue, despite the fact that AIDS was—by that point—almost entirely known not to spread through casual contact, as a way of hedging his bets just in case. In responding to the question, he did not even say the word “AIDS.”³⁹ His first speech on the subject was not given until almost the end of his administration, in 1987. The speech, given to the American Foundation for AIDS Research, or amfAR, had Reagan touting the successes of his administration, including money spent on research, the advent of the treatment drug AZT, and the possibility of a vaccine very soon. He then went on to soothe some fears about transmission of the disease, firmly stating that “AIDS is not a casually contagious disease” and discussing administration plans regarding the disease going

37 “Interview: Margaret Heckler,” 2006.

38 *Ibid.*

39 “Timeline: 25 Years of AIDS,” 2006.

forward.⁴⁰ One element of the public health response to AIDS as a sexually transmitted disease was sexual education for young people. In his comments on sexual education, Reagan said that “if children are taught their own worth, we can expect them to treat themselves and others with greater respect...wherever you have self-respect and mutual respect, you don’t have drug abuse and sexual promiscuity, which of course are the two major causes of AIDS.”⁴¹ He then went on to say, “after there is a moral base, then you can discuss preventives and other scientific measures.”⁴² The language used here indicates that Reagan prioritized the imparting of moral norms above accurate information on sexual health. This is reminiscent of the family values of the Religious Right. Notably, despite being disproportionately affected by the AIDS crisis, gay people were not specifically mentioned in this speech. As such, it’s implied that they fall under the umbrella of a “sexual promiscuity” that “self respect and mutual respect” would prevent, which echoes the views espoused by Religious Right leaders like Falwell.⁴³

Reagan used a presidential declaration to declare October 1987 AIDS Awareness and Prevention Month. A great deal of this declaration is the unsurprisingly brief explanation of what AIDS is, how it is spread, and governmental measures underway to prevent it from spreading forward. However, two paragraphs have language reminiscent of what the Religious Right was saying at around the same time. For example,

The Surgeon General has told all Americans that the best way to prevent AIDS is to abstain from sexual activity until adulthood and then to restrict sex to a monogamous, faithful relationship. This advice

40 Landon Parvin, “President Reagan’s American Foundation for AIDS Research Speech.” Speech, May 31, 1987.

41 Parvin, “Reagan’s American Foundation for AIDS Research Speech,” 1987.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

and the advice to say no to drugs can, of course, prevent the spread of most AIDS cases. Millions already follow this wise and timeless counsel, and our Nation is the poorer for the lost contributions of those who, in rejecting it, have suffered great pain, sorrow, and even death...⁴⁴

He continues in the next paragraph discussing what type of sexual education would be needed to prevent AIDS's continued spread:

Parents have the primary responsibility to help children see the beauty, goodness, and fulfillment of chastity before marriage and fidelity within it; know the blessings of stable family life; and say yes to life and no to drugs. Educational efforts should be locally determined and consistent with parental values. Educators can develop and relay accurate health information about AIDS without mandating a specific curriculum on this subject. Parents and educators should teach children not to engage in premarital sex or to use drugs, and should place sexuality in the context of marriage, fidelity, commitment, and maturity.⁴⁵

Not only do these quotations completely bypass the question of the efficacy of his administration's efforts—or at times lack thereof—in dealing with the AIDS crisis, but they claim that most people who get AIDS have it as a result of their own lack of socially acceptable decision making. This echoes the same type of sentiment as Jerry Falwell and others when they claimed that AIDS is the natural (or supernatural) response to decision making that did not follow

⁴⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 5709 -- AIDS Awareness and Prevention Month, 1987," September 29, 1987.

⁴⁵ Reagan, "Proclamation 5709," 1987.

socially acceptable norms, such as not keeping sexual activity reserved for monogamous heterosexual marriage. Moreover, the section on education expresses that sexual education should be “locally determined and consistent with parental values” and created “without mandating a specific curriculum on this subject.”⁴⁶ This is Reagan using this declaration to keep the federal and perhaps even state governments as uninvolved in the issue of sexual education for children as possible. The “parental values” on that “locally determined” level allow the religious beliefs of parents to influence what their children learn at school with regards to their health. This would appease conservatives who are in favor of religious moral teaching above scientific fact and small government types alike, while also being able to claim it as a positive action on behalf of his administration. This declaration embodies Reagan’s stance on AIDS—that it is primarily a problem for people who are not following moral standards and, regardless, not something the federal government should be involved in.

Ronald Reagan was the perfect representative of the Religious Right. He believed in small government with more power to the free market and less to public safety nets, which were conditions the Religious Right preferred. He spoke of his conversion and other matters of faith in language they understood. However, the same qualities that made him a good president for the Religious Right meant that he was ill-suited for the AIDS crisis. He left health care underfunded, did not acknowledge the crisis until late in the timeline, and when he did so, he spoke using language similar to the evangelicals who believed AIDS was a natural consequence of “lifestyles” they did not approve of. His actions, or lack thereof, were not sufficient to guide the nation through a difficult period and many people died because of this. In the end, the very qualities that the Religious Right prized in Reagan condemned others to death by inaction.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

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Breathe

Kaleigh Dulin

Just breathe

That's what they tell you, right? I shake
wanting for air as my head spirals
my grip on the covers slip
in between one beat and the next I untether
my mind begs for release

A sudden release

the ache eases as my lungs breathe
still I'm untethered
even as I shake
I'm not going back. Distantly, I feel something slip
will it ever stop spiraling?

Unending spiraling

will it ever stop? The world, my head, I need something to release.
With a slip
the air stops I no longer breathe
my fingers shake
somewhere far away, somewhere from where I am untethered.

Within me, my lungs are still untethered
above me, a fan spirals
counting my breaths as they shake
in, out, in, release
slowly, slowly I breathe.
It slips.

A stupid slip
up, up I drift once again untethered
my grip lost on my breath.
I release;
I embrace the spiral,
but everything, every part of me shakes, shakes, shakes.

Dimly, I wonder if there was ever a time that didn't shake
for a moment there's no spiral
for a moment the hold on my chest releases.
Less untethered
than before, less spiraling
than before, A shaky breath.

The spiral quiets with the shaking,
the untethered's hold slips,
my chest releases; just breathe

Tragedy and Death: The Greeks Did It Better

Kai Reeves

Death, dead bodies, and mourning are all things one could find in a classic Greek tragedy. Though this is not seen in theatre today, it should be. The Greeks had a healthier relationship with death and evidence for this was observed through their theatre practices. The representation of death in Greek tragedies should be incorporated in modern theater because it is healthier for the human mind and helps one enter the stage of acceptance more quickly.

First, it is important to understand how the human mind deals with death. There is the common train of thought regarding the five stages of grief: bargaining, anger, denial, depression, and acceptance. These stages do not follow a particular order, and many people bounce back and forth between them. Sometimes, more than one can be felt at once. Though these stages of grief are not a universal rule, they are a well-tested and verified theory, which in the realm of science, means they have been extensively researched and validated. They are a very helpful tool when it comes to understanding grief, as the majority of people experience some version of these stages. Grief is complex, and it is a phenomenon the field of Psychology continues to research significantly. According to Sherri McCarthy, who teaches Psychology and practices grief counseling at Northern Arizona University, “There’s

an overall pattern of how humans deal with forthcoming death” (qtd. in Friedman).

Medical professionals take these theories into account when delivering news of either imminent death or death that has already occurred. Professionals are trained to use straightforward language. This teaching ranges from the EMS level all the way to physicians. In an article written by Emily Friedman, she introduces Dr. Michael Grodin, who is not only the director of medical ethics at Boston University School of Medicine and Public Health, but also trains residents on how to deliver the news to patients that they are dying. He says, “doctors must be as straightforward as possible when delivering the news...Don’t use euphemisms. You have to use the words ‘terminal illness’ and explain it’s quite serious.” (Friedman). According to the same article, “Grodin teaches his students to say ‘died’ and never ‘passed away’ in situations of emergency room traumas” (qtd. in Friedman). This is something also taught at the EMS level when interacting with patients’ loved ones. Grodin states, “It’s not a doctor’s job to take away hope but to try to provide support and be realistic as possible” (qtd. in Friedman). All this to say, evidence from medical professionals and medical practice suggests that straightforwardness is best when it comes to death and dying.

The Greeks understood this human need for straightforwardness when it came to funerary practices. According to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, ancient Greeks believed that upon death, the spirit of the person left in a small breath or puff of wind (2003). This left only the body which would then be prepared by loved ones—primarily women. The entire process was split into three parts: laying the body out (prothesis), the funeral procession (ekphora), and the cremating of the remains or interment of the body. The Met states:

After being washed and anointed with oil, the body was dressed and placed on a high bed within the house. During the prothesis, relatives and friends came to mourn and pay their respects. Following the prothesis, the deceased was brought to the cemetery in a procession, the ekphora, which usually took place just before dawn. Very few objects were actually placed in the grave, but monumental earth mounds, rectangular built tombs, and elaborate marble stelai and statues were often erected to mark the grave and to ensure that the deceased would not be forgotten... Fulfilling these rituals properly and diligently were of utmost importance in Greek society, as an improper burial was “an insult to human dignity.” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003)

This was also done in an effort to protect the deceased from bad luck and misfortune during their transition to the afterlife (Honeycutt, 2015). These funeral practices and rituals can be compared to those practiced today: there is the visitation (laying the body out), funeral procession and ceremony, then burial or cremation. This practice that has stood the test of time made many appearances on the Greek stage as well.

Greek tragedies depicted death quite often, hence why they are known as tragedies, and it was common practice to depict death off stage and then have the body be presented on stage with mechanisms of moving said bodies around stage being invented for that purpose. Usually, this was done towards the end of the play, however, a notable exception to this is Sophocles’ *Ajax*. During the play, the Trojan War is taking place, and the hero dies in the middle of the play (Lueger, 2016). According to Eleni Kornarou, “the action of the second half of the play revolves around the body of the dead hero and the issue of his burial” (30). Though the death

occurs in the middle of the play, it is a typical example of how death is depicted in a Greek tragedy.

Another example of this occurs in another of Sophocles' tragedies, *Antigone*. In the play, Antigone's brother Polyneices dies, but he is not given a proper burial. This is because the king, Creon, orders the body to be left untouched and unburied. Antigone wants to bring honor and fortune to her brother's spirit, so she attempts to break the law and bury his body. She does this even though the consequence for burying the body is stoning. Creon finds out the body is gone and sends guards looking for it. A guard tells Creon Antigone buried the body, and when questioned, she admits to it unapologetically. Lots of arguing ensues with Antigone's sister and her lover, Haemon (who is Creon's son), trying to convince Creon to let Antigone live. Antigone is led away, and later hangs herself.

Upon finding her, Haemon tries to stab his father out of anger, he misses, then stabs himself. It is noted that

Haemon embraced her as she hung then the unhappy boy, in anger at himself, lent on the blade while he was conscious he embraced the maiden, holding her gently. Last, he gasped out blood, red blood on her white check. Corpse on corpse he lies. He found his marriage. Its celebration in the halls of Hades. So he has made it very clear to men that to reject good counsel is a crime. (Sophocles, 232)

These lines are spoken by the Messenger—a staple character in Greek tragedy who delivers the news of death—and therefore the audience is hearing all of this. The last part about “rejecting counsel being a crime” is in reference to Creon's actions angering the gods. His orders and unwillingness to compromise led to unsuccessful offerings, and many people were fearful as this was a sign the gods

were angry. The Messenger's words are graphic, yet they include a romantic description of death. The two lovers dying at each other's side, their corpses laying on each other, their wedding being celebrated in Hades: there is a certain poetic air to the scene. Though, as beautiful as it may seem to the audience, the play also shows the real, not-so-pleasant effects death can have. Haemon's mother kills herself after hearing about this and Creon considers suicide now that everyone he loves is dead, ultimately caused by his actions. These encounters between characters and their reactions to death feel real and portray complex human emotion. They show the grief and the love that surrounds death. Sophocles included some of the tragically beautiful moments that come with death and the declarations of love that can accompany it. Though this play by no means glorifies death or suicide, it takes a lot of the fear and unknown out of death. These characters, along with the Greeks, knew what awaited them after death and they were not afraid of it.

This straightforward approach to discussing death, as well as the common acceptance of it, helps lessen the fear that is natural for humans to feel about death. This way of keeping it in the open air and not making it a taboo is much better for the understanding and processing of death. Oddly enough, these are great lessons to teach children. Helping take the fear out of death by putting it plainly and helping provide hope for an afterlife (depending on individual beliefs) can really help kids with understanding this big, complex idea that many adults struggle with. When it comes to having the answers to life figured out, the Greeks were paving the way.

Yet somehow, after the Greeks, people and theatre went backwards. In the following centuries, death was being depicted on the stage less and less—except in specific theatres that did horror and gore shows, but those hosted smaller, more niche, audiences. Eventually, death became barely discussed and, when it was, it was

brief and offstage. Modern theatre today has much more variety in the types of shows put on, but in almost none of them will a dead body be brought on stage. For example, take a more recent play, *The Wolves* (2016) by Sarah Delappe. This play involves the tragic death of a character, #14. This death occurs off stage, and then it is mentioned in the last scene. Even the discussion of the death is brief and indirect. The audience is forced to put together the pieces themselves. Though this is not inherently a bad thing, it lacks the directness of Greek theater. The team members are in various stages of grief or other complex emotions, and they barely interact with each other. Some conversation is made and some small happy moments are able to occur, but no one wants to “go there” and talk directly and openly about #14’s death. Returning to the idea of straightforwardness, it would have been beneficial for the audience if there had been more direct communication and/or representation of the death as they would have been able to process the death more quickly. This would help the audience get up to speed so they could share the emotions of the characters instead of trying to put it all together.

Just think how interesting it would be for *Romeo and Juliet* to have the two lovers’ bodies lying on stage for the rest of the show as a testament to their love and the tragedy that befell them. What if *Hamilton* showed Phillip getting shot and dying in the hospital? Then, while Eliza and Hamilton are mourning, his body could reappear, symbolizing their nightmares caused by grief and trauma. *The Wolves* could show #14 flatlining in the hospital and the team spending a moment around her body. Or it could show the funeral, bringing attention to the aftermath and emotions felt when the “festivities” are over. Modern theatre could be improved and deepened by more of a direct approach and portrayal of death.

Representing death on stage, the way the Greeks did, is better for

the mind in regard to acceptance and it helps audiences connect to the characters more, putting everyone on the same page, with the same information, at the same time. Though death is a controversial, and often scary, thing, the human mind responds well to directness as evidenced by the straightforward approach of medical professionals. On the modern stage, placing death in the spotlight as the Greeks did can help eliminate the taboo. If there is one thing modern theatre needs more of, it's death.

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Sincerely,
The *Spectrum* 2023 Team