

JONATHAN FRANZEN AND THE PARADOX OF ACCEPTING DENIAL

MALIA SIMON

Is it Too Late to Save the World? Jonathan Franzen on One Year of Trump's America" is headlined in *The Guardian* as a reflection on Donald Trump's presidency. However, the actual essay takes far more stock in reflecting on the idea of essaying itself—more specifically, the essay as a vehicle for self-confrontation, honesty, and realism. While politics is surely one of the proxies through which Franzen expresses the need for realism, it's not the crux of his piece. Instead, his essay can be understood as a contemplation of human denial at large.

Indeed, in this pursuit, Franzen is both essayist and one of his essay's subjects. He challenges both Democrats and Republicans for their climate change idealism or denialism while applying the same confrontation to himself by exposing compulsions and avoidances in his own life. And yet, Franzen eventually comes to discuss his own inner turmoil—and ultimate regret—over a confrontational climate change essay he wrote in the past. Curiously, this regret ensues not because he disagrees with his past arguments, but because his bluntness lacked due “sympathy for the other people I was angry at” and even “forgiveness” for climate change escapists. This apparent paradox could be disillusioning for readers: How can it be that he both believes in his earlier essay and is ashamed of it? Nevertheless, exploring how this paradox plays out in the essay at hand illustrates a philosophy of its own: Franzen's essay is more than a challenge to denial. It is just as much a challenge to the bifurcation of people into realists and escapists, as well as the rigidity of realism itself.

Franzen begins his essay by supposing a definition of an essay as “something ventured on the basis of the author's personal experience and subjectivity.” He soon builds on that definition, calling the essay form an “honest self-examination and sustained engagement with ideas.” By these definitions, the ideal or “real essay” stands as the antithesis to denial. Where denial is crafty, the essay is honest. Where denial is a quick-fix like Kierkegaard's ‘busy-man's perfect drug,’ as Franzen references it, the essay is sustained and suited for the psychologically mature. Franzen undertakes to achieve this “real essay” in live-action by approaching personal transparency in the very piece he is writing. He designates roughly the first half of his essay for this task, and he challenges the denial of the rather unsightly aspects of himself all under the guise of seamless storytelling. Franzen exposes his cigarette addiction and admits to the “compulsive” and “morally inferior” nature of his bird-listing hobby. Even further, he is honest about how the hobby became an avoidance mechanism from the election reality, retelling how he had gone on a birdwatching trip during the election and only discovered the news of Hillary Clinton's imminent loss through “texts from friends.” Even on the smallest scale, the description of his relationship with his editor Henry

Finder offers a look into Franzen's uncertainty and meekness to the point of "hoping he'd registered" in Henry's consciousness in "some small way." The succession of these personal micro-confessions would seem to firmly exhibit the position that denial ought to be challenged in order for us to become responsible citizens of our own psyches.

And yet even throughout this section, there is a hint of push-back coming from the author, one we will see in full form come the conclusion of his essay. Even as Franzen bluntly confronts his denial-inducing behaviors (cigarette-smoking, birdwatching, etc.), there is a tonal suggestion at the notion that they're also *okay*, human, permissible. The description of his compulsive birdwatching is subtly self-endearing as he playfully re-creates the thought process: "[t]here was nothing to be done but go birding." He verges toward cuteness by sharing a slight disparagement of himself, declaring "I am what people in the world of birding call a lister." A reader might see this self-deprecating cuteness as "I'm odd, but there's something universal about that." And, by extension: denial is ridiculous, but the silliness of trying to remain in denial gives us character. The same self-deprecation plays out in his honesty about trying to quit smoking. Franzen again re-creates his own irrational thought process with humor when he says, "I quit cigarettes for the second time in 1997. And then, in 2002, for the final time. And then, in 2003, for the last and final time." This is a real, raw exposition of himself. But it's also funny. Why is it funny? This is, in fact, not a trivial question. There is a certain subtle acceptance that only humor expresses: the idea that something can be weird and wrong but in the same sense also common and okay. The essay's fundamental friction is created by the suggestion that perhaps it's okay to be in a little bit of denial. In fact, perhaps it's okay to believe in the ideal of realism with every bone in your body and still be in a little bit of denial.

The second half of Franzen's piece is where the "personal essay," as a stand-in for confrontation and realism, extends into politics. He challenges Clinton's denial of what he believes to be the real reasons for her loss, repeating "Never mind that . . .," thereby emphasizing her avoidance of other factors that contributed to her loss. More explicitly, Franzen makes a firm challenge to denial and escapism in both camps on climate change: how the Republicans "[continue] to lie about the absence of a scientific consensus on climate" while liberal Democrats "[persist] in the fiction that collective world action could stave off the worst of it." These arguments are housed in the context of explaining an old essay he wrote—an essay of which he now feels ashamed. Notably, the arguments and criticism themselves are re-told with the firmness of a man who still believes in them. In fact, Franzen directly acknowledges this: "I really did want to change the climate. I still do."

At the same time, he admits the turmoil he went through during the writing process, expressing that something felt intangibly wrong about it. Despite still agreeing with the arguments in his old essay, he worried about his own judgmental attitude, and he was sickened to the point of "waking up in the night in a panic of remorse and doubt"

because the essay was a “mirror” and he “didn’t like what [he] was seeing in [it].” Here again, the paradox rears. The same confrontational attitude that his previous *New Yorker* essay seems to promote strikes him with remorse—and in this case, not playful, bird-listing remorse, but weighty, night-sweat-inducing remorse.

Ultimately, Franzen arrives at the most striking and explicit manifestation of the paradox: forgiveness—validation even—of those who wish to stay mentally removed from the thought of global warming. He writes, “I would especially have tried to remember all the people who need more hope in their lives than a depressive pessimist does, the people for whom the prospect of a hot, calamity-filled future is unbearably sad and frightening, and who can be forgiven for not wanting to think about it.” This final statement is paramount. It runs the highest risk of charging him as an impostor of his own beliefs, but for the same reason houses the essay’s deepest significance. In his ultimate reflection that he became entrenched in his own values, Franzen further suggests that it is possible to become obsessed with our own values, however “valuable” they may be. By retelling this essay within an essay, Franzen takes us through the process of his own denial, entrenchment, and “state of rage about climate change” until finally we see him come out the other side to a somberness and quietude, which enables him to present a new insight entirely.

We are led to the notion that it’s not merely denial that’s toxic, but rigidity and the unwillingness to shift out of our perceptual sets. Evidently, even realism can be rigid. And so the paradox holds ground. Should it deter readers into a knee-jerk reaction to cry hypocrisy, they would be missing a great truth behind it. There is truth to the idea that it’s psychologically healthy to be against denial in principle while also sometimes allowing it. The process of ridding ourselves of denial—thereby achieving complete truth or the “real essay”—ironically entails accepting that some denial is sure to exist. The adage “Everything in moderation, including moderation” expresses a parallel philosophy. It becomes valuable to consider that if ideals like moderation and realism did not sometimes disobey their own rules, they would definitionally not survive.

Finally, denial is not exclusive to one group, one political party, or one kind of personality. Denial is a communal property of us all. The world is not compartmentalized into realists and escapists, but rather a mix of people who are always both. Franzen’s ultimate demonstration is thus that he is always both.

WORKS CITED

Franzen, Jonathan. “Is It Too Late to Save the World? Jonathan Franzen on One Year of Trump’s America.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 Nov. 2017, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/04/jonathan-franzen-too-late-to-save-world-donald-trump-environment.

MALIA SIMON '22CC is a sophomore psychology student from California who lives a split life of academia and comedy writing. By day, she's conducting crowd behavior and applause research as a Laidlaw Research Fellow and reflecting on life's most serious matters. By night, she's making a deliberate decision to not take anything seriously at all: she is the co-president/head writer of *Columbia University Sketch Show*, and also writes satirical and silly content for both *The Federalist* and *The Blue and White*. As an additional note, she is a self-confessed application addict and has decorated one wall of her dorm room entirely with all her rejection letters (*The Morningside Review* not included if you are currently reading this).

UNVEILED YET OBSCURED: ASSIMILATION AND DIFFERENCE IN *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS*

SPENCER GRAYSON

Three women remove their long white veils to reveal chic, summery outfits that would not be out of place at a French Riviera resort. With almost clinical precision, one applies lipstick while another cuts off her braids. They watch themselves in the mirror, barely blinking, their motions accompanied by an ominous rattle.



Fig. 1. *The Battle of Algiers*, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 0:41:46.

This scene occurs midway through *The Battle of Algiers*, Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film based on Algerian rebellions against the French colonial government in the late 1950s. The film is famed for its pseudo-documentary cinematography and nuanced portrayal of wartime morality, and it has been used as both a guide for anti-terrorism warfare by the Pentagon and as a training film by the Black Panthers (Rainer). The verisimilitude of *Battle* is emphasized by its close connections to real people and events from the movement for Algerian independence. Saadi Yacef, a leader of the FLN—the Algerian National Liberation Front [*Front de libération nationale*—was a writer and producer of the film and starred in it as well (Rainer). When watching the film, the viewer is aware that he, along with the other actors portraying members of the FLN, are performing a version of their own experiences. Distinctions between reality and performance overlap, and acts of uncovering and exposition can function as further layers of concealment.

Battle's scene of three women changing their clothes directly follows a scene in which a group of Algerians, mourning the victims of a bombing by a French extremist group, is promised by the rebels' leader that "the FLN will avenge [them]" (0:41:26).

However, the first-time viewer is not yet aware of how this dressing room relates to vengeance. The story progresses with the Algerian women transformed to resemble Europeans, and then they are revealed as members of the FLN. By removing their *haïks*—a kind of veil that covers the whole body—and donning French clothing, they can breeze past police checkpoints and plant bombs in Algiers' European Quarter. The rattle that accompanied their process of disguise blends smoothly with the cheerful music playing in the cafés and dance halls they will soon reduce to rubble. In a comparable clash of expectations, the scene equates femininity with subversive, patriotic rebellion and stands out in a film that otherwise belongs to a long tradition of using masculinity as a symbol of explicit nationalism. How can gender influence definitions of patriotism in times of cultural and national upheaval? We can look at events like Algeria's decolonialization movement, or the aftermath of the *September 11* attacks, which, according to scholars Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, became a site of masculinity symbolizing docile patriotism rather than rebellion. How has subversion, and thus femininity, been overlooked in certain studies of the patriotism of oppressed groups?

The process of unveiling in *Battle* allows women to play an indispensable role in the war. This idea is paradoxical: as political philosopher Frantz Fanon describes, much of France's strategy to domesticize and subdue Algeria was also centered around unveiling. Fanon's book *A Dying Colonialism* recounts the methods used by the Algerian revolutionaries in their fight to dismantle French colonial oppression. In the first chapter, he describes how the French attempted to demonize the veil, and in doing so presented Algerians as a primitive culture that required colonial oversight:

The dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered. . . . It described the immense possibilities of woman, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object. . . . Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture. (38-9)

Some Algerian women began to unveil, which the French regarded as a sign of submission to European morals: "the flesh of Algeria," both literal Algerian bodies and metaphorical Algerian autonomy, was consequently "laid bare," free to be exploited by the French (Fanon 42). By Fanon's analysis, the veil represented the struggle of Algeria to maintain its cultural and national identity. And it certainly did to some extent. But, as shown in *Battle*, the veil—and its absence—could also represent women's rebellion, a refusal to allow French colonialists to define the terms of female Algerian liberation. Women now Europeanized in appearance played critical roles in the FLN, assimilating to French values while actively undermining them. When French

officials tortured militants and learned of the importance of European-passing women to the FLN's actions, they could no longer define assimilators and rebels based on appearance: the demarcations between European and Algerian shattered as every civilian became a potential conspirator (Fanon 61). Consider a later scene in *Battle*, in which Colonel Mathieu, the French officer charged with dismantling the FLN's leadership structure, shows his colleagues footage of police checkpoints in the Casbah—the Arab quarter of Algiers—taken directly before the bombings. As the footage plays, he expounds upon the near impossibility of discovering the perpetrators:

It's a faceless enemy, unrecognizable, blending in with hundreds of others. It is everywhere. In cafés, in the alleys of the Casbah, or in the very streets of the European quarter. . . . Among all these Arab men and women are the perpetrators. But who are they? How can we recognize them? ID checks are ludicrous. If anyone's papers are in order, it's the terrorist's. (0:56:37-0:56:48, 0:57:22-0:57:41)

The film's use of dramatic irony proves the colonel's point. As Mathieu says "recognize," an unveiled woman briefly appears in the footage, smiling in response to the flirtations of a French guard. The audience knows she is an FLN member, the one who planted a bomb in a dance hall, but the guard does not. She has been misconstrued as fully assimilated. And yet Mathieu has also ignored the *veiled* women in the footage, women who could just as easily have been concealing weapons. A scene earlier in the film shows a *baïk*-clad woman carrying a revolver, determining the best moment to attack a policeman, and handing off the weapon to a male rebel (0:14:27). She is the primary operative, while the man is told: "You just have to pull the trigger." Critically, his instruction is to pull the trigger, not to kill the policeman: his function is symbolic rather than active, facilitated by the female operative's ability to conceal and carry a weapon between Algerian and French spaces.

If a woman chose to wear her *baïk*, she was explicitly resisting French attempts to overpower her; if she chose to Europeanize her appearance, she could further undermine the French's social and racial hierarchy that placed their understandings of feminism and freedom above those of Algerian understandings. Thus, the unveiling and veiling of Algeria blurred the differences between assimilation and differentiation in the movement for independence: "Removed and reassumed again and again, the veil has been manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle" (Fanon 61).

Representative of both submission to and rebellion against oppressive agendas, the veil was crucial to the maintenance of Algerian identity amidst the crisis of French colonialism. Because a culture's uniqueness can be so quickly identified by its clothing traditions, garments are often the center of culture wars. However, their symbolic

significance is complicated by the historical moment's current crisis and the effect of the crisis on the oppressor's attitudes toward a specific garment. Fanon defines the veil in colonial-era Algeria as an instrument of camouflage and struggle, but Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai discuss another garment in their article "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots:" the Sikh turban. This turban is also intertwined with the dichotomy between assimilation and differentiation, but it served a very different purpose during a comparable crisis: America after the 9/11 attacks.

Following the 9/11 attacks, American Sikhs experienced horrendous racial profiling and violence, their turbans mistaken for those worn by some Muslims and Arab Americans; this discrimination occasionally escalated to murder, as in the case of Balbir Singh Sodi on September 15 (Puar and Rai 137). In response, Sikh activist groups sought to differentiate Sikhism from Islam for the (white) American eye, as well as to incorporate Sikh culture into ideals of American nationalism. They covered *gurdwaras*—Sikh places of worship—in American flags, sent lawyers to D.C. to confer with senators on the many Sikh contributions to American society, and carried out other methods of damage control meant to remove the association between Sikhism and the demonized "Other" that had been intensified by the events of 9/11 (Puar and Rai 137-8). While white Americans viewed the turban as a symbol of "the revived, erect, and violent patriarchy of the East, of Islam, and of the Taliban; the oppression of Afghan women; the castration and the penetration of white Western phallic power," they aimed to clarify the turban as a mandatory mark of the Sikh religion (Puar and Rai 137). By promoting discourse on Sikhs' contributions to American society, they sought to introduce the turban to mainstream American patriotism, a patriotism that Puar and Rai classify as distinctly masculine with their uses of phallic imagery.

By positioning themselves within the nationalism and Otherism that followed 9/11, American Sikhs employed the turban as a symbol of both differentiation from Islam and assimilation with America. The imperial state demands "docile patriotism," submission to its ideals without regard to the effacement of cultural identity that such docility will incur; in the two historical moments with which I am concerned, the imperial state takes the forms of colonial Algeria and post-9/11 America. In both moments, a garment of the group being oppressed by the state is vilified and treated as a primitive regression from the state's march of progress; in response, the oppressed group instrumentalizes the garment toward assimilation with the state. But in *The Battle of Algiers*, the women's assimilation is in fact a deliberate manipulation, its true nature veiled, if you will, from the eyes of the oppressor. In contrast, the Sikh assimilatory attempts were genuine rather than staged: they sought not to throw off the mantle of the imperial state but to achieve solidarity with it. Docility is demonstrative in both instances, but female docility, and consequently patriotism, is weaponized for anti-imperialist ends. The women present themselves as subdued and agreeable—they barely speak throughout the entire sequence—and their faces are unnaturally still. But

this docility functions as a subversive means of control. The French sought to subdue Algerian women indirectly by constructing a narrative in which the French were the liberators of women oppressed by the men of their nation, and this obsession with control granted Algerian women influence over the colonizers' perceptions of them (Fanon 38).

Puar and Rai effectively analyze certain dynamics of masculinity and patriotism, but there are several points in their article that demand further consideration of feminine subversion through veiling. They wish to deconstruct patriotism as a system of docility and heteronormativity supported by the state. In doing so, they mostly ignore the woman's place in such a system and do not cover the role she can occupy in dismantling it and achieving a different kind of patriotism altogether—a role visualized by *Battle* and clarified by Fanon. Puar and Rai anticipate this demand in their footnotes, acknowledging their erasure of “the subjectivities of women and the multiple acts of veiling and unveiling,” along with the part Fanon's theories could have played in complicating their thesis of heteronormative masculine-driven patriotism (140). As this footnote acknowledges, despite their interest in the state's demand of its citizens to become docile patriots, Puar and Rai overlook the mechanisms of resistance among women, who often present a special challenge to the state. As Fanon observes, “Hiding the face is also disguising a secret. . . . This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself” (43-4). In contrast to Puar and Rai's association between performances of docility and garments of the Other, Fanon argues that the sexual denial implied by the garments of Algerian women is an act of disguise as well as rebellion. But taking off those garments to assume a Europeanized appearance, as I have discussed, replicates rather than negates such acts. Fanon's study emphasizes that Algerian women had the unique ability to perform assimilation while remaining differentiated from the oppressor, negotiating multiple layers of explicit and implicit concealment.

Through their analysis of the myriad uses of cultural garments and how such uses relate to power, rebellion, and separation from the state, Fanon and Puar and Rai engage with the complexities of gender presentation, sexuality, patriotism, and cultural agency in times of crisis. These texts illuminate the unique power held by *Battle's* three women, their cultural and sexual autonomy self-bestowed through a performative unveiling: they are the women of the Other, triply veiled from the oppressor, and in their separation from the masculine state can more fully embody a revolution against it.

WORKS CITED

- Fanon, Frantz. “Algeria Unveiled.” *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 35-67. Web. <http://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Frantz-Fanon-A-Dying-Colonialism.pdf>.

Puar, Jasbir K. and Amit Rai. "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots." *Social Text*, vol. 20 no. 3, 2002, pp. 117-148. muse.jhu.edu/article/31948.

Rainer, Peter. "Prescient Tense." *New York*, 12 Jan. 2004, nymag.com/nymetro/movies/reviews/n_9697/.

The Battle of Algiers. Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. Janus Films (The Criterion Collection), 1966. Kanopy.

SPENCER GRAYSON '22CC studies English. She is especially interested in devotional poetics and intersections between literary narratives and scientific writings. She is the Managing Editor of *The Columbia Review*, the oldest college literary magazine in the nation, and spends her free time obsessing over Marilynne Robinson.

A “HYMN TO HIM”: HENRY HIGGINS’S MASCULINITY IN *MY FAIR LADY*

JILLIAN HARRISON

To revive an old-fashioned Broadway musical in 2019 demands a great deal of reimagination. The director must present a novel, somehow revolutionary vision that warrants a retelling of the story. The revival must also address and resolve the outdated gender stereotypes inherent to a play or musical written decades ago—perhaps most glaringly obvious in the archetypical ingénue character. An icon of the Golden Age of American musical theater, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe’s *My Fair Lady* (1956) is no exception. It tells the story of Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl who takes speech lessons from professor Henry Higgins, a phonetician who promises to pass her off as a proper English lady. Throughout their lessons, Eliza learns and transforms, while Higgins, despite his reluctance, finds that he’s “grown accustomed to her face.”

It has traditionally seemed that Eliza is merely Higgins’s project, a victim of the patriarchal and stratified society that shapes her. Such misogynistic characterizations, however, would not be tolerated as easily in 2019. Bartlett Sher, director of the 2018 Broadway revival, must do right by Eliza—and, according to *New York Times* theater critic Jesse Green, he succeeds. In his review, Green applauds Sher for reintegrating the original “feminist argument” from George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1914), the source material for *My Fair Lady*.

Though Sher problematizes and, according to Green, resolves Eliza’s past depiction as “a puppet” rather than “hero,” neither Sher nor Green gives the same attention to Henry Higgins. Revived in the era of the #MeToo movement, which Green calls “the current climate of re-examination,” *My Fair Lady* seems to offer a prime opportunity to reexamine not only women’s roles, but men’s. After all, the #MeToo movement wouldn’t accomplish much if we only considered women’s behaviors. Furthermore, the very premise of *My Fair Lady* depends on a masculine contest: Eliza is the subject of a bet between two men. Higgins makes a wager with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can pass Eliza off as a duchess after six months of his tutelage. Higgins’s ambition to flex his phonetic muscles is more than a trial of his abilities; it is an attempt to prove his competence to another man—an example of a “homosocial enactment” between men, a concept that sociologist Michael Kimmel describes in his essay “Masculinity as Homophobia” (27). As men interact with one another in the marketplace, Kimmel explains, their homosocial competition gives rise to a masculine identity that requires “tangible goods as evidence of success” (27-29).

Fittingly, *My Fair Lady* begins in a literal marketplace. The spare scene of Covent Garden at night, spotted with bundles of flowers and the women who sell them, springs to life as well-heeled Londoners emerge from the opera house. The men banter

with each other, and one knocks over a basket of Eliza's flowers, prompting her exclamation of a Cockney, decidedly downmarket "Aaaooowww!" It is here, among the commotion of the marketplace, that Higgins first meets Eliza and strikes up his bet with Pickering. Eliza is the connecting piece of their homosocial exchange. She is the "tangible goods" that will prove Higgins's success to Pickering—and more broadly, to his professional peers, ie., other men. Thus, Higgins's intentions regarding Eliza fit Kimmel's observation that "[w]omen become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale" (33).

In this sense, Higgins seems perfectly congruent with Kimmel's understanding of marketplace manhood. However, if Higgins's character is a clear example of old-school masculinity at work, why does Sher not regard him as a character who needs revision just as Eliza does? Perhaps it is because other aspects of the show obfuscate Higgins's masculinity. Green points out that "for all of the wrangling over abuse and objectification in *Carousel*, *Kiss Me Kate*, and other midcentury titles, *My Fair Lady* is a totally different beast, a satire of class and gender privilege rather than a harrowing drama or lightweight romp about them." While a drama might make the audience interrogate masculinity, a satire supposedly does the job for us.

This interpretation helps explain Green's observation that "*My Fair Lady* always seemed egalitarian enough, but perhaps too cool and refined for its own good." Already self-aware, the show has not demanded or invited close examination. As the focal point of the show's satire of gender and class privilege, Higgins himself is too refined for his (and perhaps our) own good. The genteel Englishman abstains from pursuing women and passes his days studying in the serenity of his ornate home. Higgins's proper mannerisms embody his class and gender privilege, concealing deeper truths about his character's masculinity.

Sociologist Melanie Heath labels practices like Higgins's abstention from women as "soft-boiled masculinity," a term that Tristan Bridges and C.J. Pascoe use in their essay "Masculinities and Post-Homophobias?" to address how "new masculine practices can sometimes work to conceal existing forms of inequality, but perhaps in new ways" (412). This language makes explicit an implication of Green's commentary. Relative to the brazen prototypical masculinity of characters in other musicals (for instance, the abusive husbands and overeager young bachelors common in Golden Age musicals), some of Higgins's more insidious masculine practices go unnoticed under the guise of satire. Perhaps, as Bridges and Pascoe put it, "[w]hat we are seeing is not necessarily a kinder, gentler form of masculinity, but a 'soft-boiled' masculinity, discursively repackaged in light of feminist critique and challenge" (413). That is, the satiric frame of *My Fair Lady* makes Higgins's masculinity more tolerable, but not any gentler.

This soft-boiled masculinity is perhaps most prominent in Higgins's ambiguous sexuality, called into question by his mannerisms, dismissive treatment of Eliza, and homosocial exchanges with Pickering. Considering Higgins through the framework of

Kimmel's and Bridges and Pascoe's scholarship reveals a gap in his masculinity, a characteristic he is missing that sets him apart from the male leads of other musicals. Kimmel highlights the "relentless test" of masculinity (41) and the simultaneity with which a "boy becomes gendered (masculine) and heterosexual" (31). Linking these two ideas, Bridges and Pascoe argue that "masculinity entail[s] repeatedly signaling power, competence, emotional stoicism, heterosexuality, and dominance" (415). Henry Higgins possesses and relentlessly tests all but one of these qualities: his heterosexuality.

Higgins's sexuality is unclear and scarcely acknowledged even in earlier incarnations of the show (including the popular 1964 film) that were more suggestive of a love story between Higgins and Eliza. To make sense of Higgins's ambiguous sexuality, we turn to what Bridges and Pascoe call "sexual aesthetics:" the "interests, material objects, styles of bodily comportment, language, opinions, clothing, behaviors, and more . . . [that] allow us to put our sexual identities on display—even when we are not being 'sexual'" (418-419). It is notable that Higgins practices certain gay aesthetics. His self-imposed status as a lifelong bachelor is a quality typical of contemporary closeted gay men. In the song "An Ordinary Man," his serenely spoken, measured phrases of quiet, solitary life are interrupted with chaotic orchestrations as he exclaims over the horrors that come when you "let a woman in your life!" Perhaps his exclamations express a dismay not only at the nature of women but at the social expectation that he should be in a heterosexual relationship with one.

This potential gay aesthetic is often overshadowed by a musical theater audience's expectation for a romantic or sexual connection between Higgins and Eliza. After Eliza leaves him, Higgins airs his grievances about women (read: Eliza) to Pickering in "A Hymn to Him"—a song also titled "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?" His absurd question prompts chuckles and eyerolls from the audience. It seems so typical of a straight man's failure to understand women, but it is just as indicative of another sexual aesthetic. The immaturity that Higgins expresses in the song is a key sexual aesthetic. Here, and in other instances of his frustration, boasts, and mansplaining, Higgins is incredibly childish; as Green concisely puts it, "[h]e is a baby." These childish behaviors paint him as a pre-sexual being, thus rescuing him from being read as a homosexual one.

One particular sexual aesthetic further contributes to the difficulty of deciphering Higgins's sexuality. Soon after they make their bet, Pickering seeks assurance that Higgins will not take advantage of Eliza while she is under his care. Green summarizes their exchange:

It was [Shaw] who had Pickering ask whether Higgins is a "man of good character where women are concerned"—to which Higgins in essence responds: There's no such thing. Higgins, for all his brutishness, understands that relations between the sexes have been hopelessly muddled by social

constructs of gender and class; as a wealthy intellectual he can try, as Shaw did, to abstain from the mess entirely.

Here, a “man of good character” is a double entendre, implying a question not only about the quality of Higgins’s sexual interactions with women but also, perhaps, their very existence. To these questions, Higgins responds evasively and inconclusively. To borrow a phrase from Bridges and Pascoe, the exchange paints Higgins as “sexually illegible” (419), especially when combined with the other sexual aesthetics that mark Higgins as not conclusively heterosexual.

Considering this perspective, it becomes evident that Higgins is an example of a specific discursive behavior: “anti-fag discourse.” Bridges and Pascoe use this term to describe the gendered performances of “feminist-identifying men” who “[perform] gay masculinity, but strategically [frame] that performance as ‘straight’” (419, 418). These men “wear being read as sexually illegible as a badge of honor rather than an insult” (419). For all of the gay aesthetics that Higgins possesses, the gentlemen who craft and interpret his character manage to frame him as straight. Shaw and Sher (as well as Lerner and Loewe) seem to purposefully paint Higgins as sexually illegible and craft him in this mold, distancing him from the abusive and objectifying behaviors typical of the leading men in musicals of that period.

Bridges and Pascoe make the crucial point that in anti-fag discourse, “men are attempting to authenticate their masculinities” (419). Since Kimmel’s work tells us that such discourse often occurs homosocially—a point that Bridges and Pascoe suggest but do not explicitly make—it is true of all of their examples. It is certainly true of Henry Higgins, whose own sexual aesthetics become most evident in his exchanges with Pickering about his intentions with Eliza. Nevertheless, it is also from these attempts to authenticate a seemingly feminist masculinity that the danger of anti-fag discourse arises. Bridges and Pascoe recognize that “these young men claim identities as ‘allies’ or ‘feminists’ that render any discussion of how their behavior might entail a gendered form of sexual inequality as impossible, or at the very least, unfair” (419). Higgins’s apparent dedication to improving Eliza’s standing in life while professing no sexual interest in her serves to “discursively distance [himself] from masculinities that have earned a bad reputation among feminists”—a tell-tale sign of anti-fag discourse (419).

The danger of missing Higgins’s possible anti-fag discourse is, as Bridges and Pascoe point out, that Higgins may seem to “transgress gender and sexual boundaries,” but he does so “in ways that do not only leave those boundaries intact, but also simultaneously symbolically reinforce them” (419). Higgins’s academic interest in Eliza may change her place in society as a certain class of woman, but the motivation behind his mentorship only reinforces his standing as a heterosexual man. The very thing that makes us ignore Higgins’s sexual illegibility and gives him a pass is precisely what demands that we critique him. His motivations not only warrant but demand critical

discussion. But *My Fair Lady* leaves no room for such discussion, and instead, it enables Green to ignore anti-fag behavior.

Green writes that “history—even if it took 100 years—would eventually start to outgrow its brutes.” Praising Sher’s revival, Green seems to think that we can right the historical wrongs of gender by selectively correcting female-gendered performances without devoting the same attention to male performances. However, our close examination of Higgins’s masculinity reveals a different take. If we pay attention only to female performances, history does not truly “outgrow its brutes,” and nor do we. Instead, those brutes remain tolerable, even likeable, despite their dependence on the same gendered structures that held them up a hundred years ago.

WORKS CITED

- Bridges, Tristan and C. J. Pascoe “Masculinities and Post-Homophobias?” *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, edited by C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 412–423.
- Green, Jesse. “Review: Whose ‘Fair Lady’? This Time, Eliza’s in Charge.” *New York Times*, 19 May 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/theater/my-fair-lady-review-lincoln-center-lauren-ambrose.html>.
- Kimmel, Michael. “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Sage, 1994, pp. 119-141.

JILLIAN HARRISON '22CC is pursuing a double major in Economics and Psychology. On campus, she is involved in groups like the CU College Democrats and Columbia Musical Theater Society, and she works as a research assistant in the Lab of Intergroup Relations and the Social Mind. In her free time, you can find her waiting on line at Absolute Bagels or sitting in a green chair in Milstein watching *The West Wing*.

“NO LEZBROS”: EXPLORING ATTITUDES OF STRAIGHT MEN TOWARD MASCULINE LESBIANS

ROBERT M. LYNCH

A 2009 study titled “Attitudes Toward Stereotypical Versus Counter-stereotypical Gay Men and Lesbians” tests whether heterosexual men and heterosexual women’s attitudes toward homosexuals “would vary as a function of three factors: (a) the sex of the participant, (b) the sex of the homosexual target, and (c) the homosexual target’s masculinity or femininity” (Cohen, Tuttle, and Hall 276). In the sample of fifty-three heterosexual college students, participants were asked to read the personality surveys of two fictitious homosexual students, either two men or two women. In each pair, one exhibited “masculine” qualities—“interests and extracurricular activities, personality traits, and an academic major that are more commonly associated with heterosexual men” (276)—and one exhibited “feminine” qualities—the same criteria, but those most often associated with heterosexual women. Though participants read only descriptions of either two women or two men, the descriptions were identical across “masculine” and “feminine” targets. The respondents were asked to rate the likability of each fictitious homosexual student from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). While the women studied showed a “nonsignificant preference for the feminine gay man over the masculine gay men” and a smaller preference for the feminine lesbian than male participants, the heterosexual men studied had a greater preference for gender role conformity, “strongly prefer[ing] the masculine gay man” and preferring the feminine lesbian (279).

Perhaps the study’s finding that straight men prefer men and women with traditionally gendered behaviors is unsurprising considering existing gender theory on men and masculinity (Cohen et al.; Halberstam; Pascoe and Bridges); however, the results were not entirely predictable. The straight men studied showed a higher likability rating for the feminine gay man depicted in the study than for the masculine lesbian, despite liking the masculine gay man more than the feminine gay man (278). Since neither feminine gay men nor masculine lesbians adhere to traditional gender roles, one would think men would default to favoring masculine behaviors supposedly like their own, thus preferring masculine lesbians to feminine gay men. Indeed, the authors suggest that research on similarity indicates that individuals would give a higher likability rating to those who are most similar to them: men to those who are masculine regardless of gender, and women to those who are feminine. In other words, wouldn’t straight “bros” enjoy having “lezbros” with similar interests and personality traits?¹ Why is that the straight men studied only seem to like masculinity when it’s in a male body?

Various gender theorists consider why people, men in particular, may believe there is an inherent link between masculinity and maleness. In “An Introduction to Female

Masculinity: Masculinity Without Men,” queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam notes how “complex social structures” have “wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination” (348). Sociologist Michael Kimmel explains these “complex social structures” by showing how and why this link between masculinity and manhood—what Halberstam calls “maleness”—came to be in his essay “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” In this work, Kimmel refers to the classic Freudian Oedipal model to show how masculinity and heterosexuality become linked in the minds of young boys:

the fear of the father’s power terrifies the young boy to renounce his desire for his mother and identify with his father. . . . The little boy’s identification with father (becoming masculine) allows him to now engage in sexual relations with women (he becomes heterosexual). (34)

In this model, masculinity and heterosexuality are actually created together. The Oedipus complex necessarily links masculinity with heterosexuality; the same process creates both concepts. As Kimmel explains, the interdependency of these traits could explain why straight men might be uncomfortable with homosexuality.

It’s important to note that Kimmel defines homophobia as more than a fear of gay men; instead, homophobia is “the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man” (37). All men, Kimmel argues, live with the ever-present insecurity of being outed as feminine in some way, and, as a defense, resort to what he calls exaggerated masculinity (37). Kimmel writes that “Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine” (30) and “must be proved” (28). In this way, male gender role conformity is essential for asserting one’s manhood.

One of the ways heterosexual men “prove” their masculinity is by differentiating their identities from others perceived as less masculine. Kimmel notes that “Women and gay men become the ‘other’ against which heterosexual men project their identities” (37). In an attempt to further protect their status as masculine, straight men dominate women and gay men, whom they believe embody femininity. Kimmel also contends that “one of the centerpieces” of masculinity is “putting women down” (37). The feminine can be dominated because, as Halberstam argues, coming of age as a woman “is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression” (350). This circumstance gives men the perfect “other” to dominate and form an identity in opposition to. In this way, both male and female gender role conformity work in tandem to reinforce the fragile manhood of the straight male. So, masculine women, who are obviously not gender conforming, threaten the perceived link between masculinity and manhood. Female masculinities are dismissed, Halberstam explains, by being “framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (348). This notion that female masculinity is the antithesis

to male masculinity may help explain why the study revealed straight men's dislike of masculine women.

If straight men feel compelled to assert manhood through displays of masculinity involving dominance over women, the presence of masculinity in a female body poses an enormous threat to men's ability to do so. If female masculinity were more readily acknowledged, masculinity could lose its inherent link with manhood, leaving men with no way to assert it as their own—after all, “masculinity must be proved” (Kimmel 28). This perceived threat could explain the tendency identified in the study for heterosexual men to prefer the feminine gay man over the masculine lesbian; the presence of female masculinity is a potent threat to the straight men's sense of self. The feminine gay man, while perhaps slightly loosening the link between manhood and the repudiation of the feminine, does not threaten to erase the association of masculine gender performance with manhood, because masculine men can feel more like men by contrasting themselves to him. Although the study's straight male participants were likely unconscious of their bias, it is entirely possible that such insecurities made them uncomfortable with the thought of a masculine female and negatively affected their opinion of her.

Based on this analysis, it would seem that the heterosexual men who participated in the study directed a greater level of homophobia at the masculine lesbian than the feminine gay man. This runs against the conventional wisdom that in everyday life, straight men's homophobia seems to be directed mostly at gay and/or feminine men. Tristan Bridges and C.J. Pascoe state as much in their essay, “Masculinities and Post-Homophobias?”, citing studies by Herek and Moskowitz et al. to note that “Men are . . . more likely to direct this homophobia at gay men, rather than lesbians” (414). Why, then, would the straight men in the study by Cohen et al. seem to direct more homophobia to the masculine lesbian? The answer, perhaps, is that the mitigating factor in straight men's opinions of masculine lesbians is not homophobia, but misogyny.

If masculinity is associated with power and domination as Halberstam asserts, which would make anyone “masculine” harder to dominate, then female masculinity threatens the entire patriarchal system by jeopardizing men's ability to subordinate women. While both feminine gay men and masculine lesbians are subject to homophobia, the masculine lesbian is also subjected to misogyny. Although feminine lesbians are also subject to both systems of oppression, the misogyny they suffer manifests as sexual objectification. Bridges and Pascoe observe that men tend to be more “accepting” of sexually attractive lesbians; they quote a high schooler from their research who said, “To see two hot chicks banging bodies in a bed, that's like every guy's fantasy right there” (416). If the men in the study were picturing more conventionally attractive feminine lesbians—which is likely, due to a perceived cultural link between femininity and female attractiveness—then the higher likability rating for the feminine lesbians can be called into question. The tendency to sexually objectify

plus a perceived ability to dominate the feminine may have played a significant role in the straight men's opinion of her. However, the masculine lesbian, by virtue of her masculinity, is more difficult to oppress, dominate, and objectify, perhaps leading the men in the study to fear or despise her more than any other homosexual target. Because her status as a woman precludes her from appropriately exhibiting masculinity in the minds of the men studied, an aversion to female masculine lesbians may be more attributable to misogyny than homophobia.

Further evidence for this misogyny comes from the fact that the men in the study actually liked the masculine gay man more than the feminine lesbian. If the men in the study were indeed picturing conventionally attractive feminine lesbians, then they should have reported higher likability ratings for the feminine lesbian than the masculine gay man. After all, she is an object of potential sexual gratification to the male respondents while the gay man is not, and neither exhibits the masculine traits they would look for in a potential friend. The simplest and only obvious explanation is that misogyny accounts for why the results were the opposite of what one might expect based on cultural perceptions and previous research findings.

However, one could take this analysis of the study's results even further. If masculinity is linked with both manhood and with heterosexuality, and masculinity requires proof, then male heterosexuality must also require proof. Halberstam notes that "female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire" (357). If female masculinity threatens to break the link between masculinity and manhood, then lesbian masculinity goes a step further: it breaks the link between masculinity and heterosexuality, preventing men from "proving" their straightness through sexual domination. This explains why lesbian masculinity may be more threatening than heterosexual female masculinity. While the presence of a masculine heterosexual female threatens the ability of men to assert their manhood, this does not get at the root of men's insecurities. Kimmel claims that it is a sexual, rather than a gendered, insecurity at the heart of why men feel the need to assert masculinity: "Homophobic flight from intimacy with other men is the repudiation of the homosexual within—never completely successful and hence constantly reenacted in every homosocial relationship" (34). Because the repudiation of the homosexual within is never fully successful, men spend their lives "exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity" in order to assert their heterosexuality (Kimmel 37). Taking this into consideration, a masculine lesbian is the most terrifying combination possible for a heterosexual man, as she simultaneously threatens both his gender and his sexuality.

The study's conclusion states that the goal of the researchers was "to shed new light on the attitudes that heterosexual men and women have about gay men and lesbians" and that the results show that while "tremendous strides have been made in recent decades to understand, accept, and embrace individuals of different sexual orientations, there is still more work to be done" (Cohen et al. 280). It's clear the brunt of this work needs to be taken on by straight men. As Kimmel tells us, "Peace of mind,

relief from gender struggle, will come only from a politics of inclusion, not exclusion, from standing up for equality and justice, and not by running away” (42). Rather than succumb to the insecurities that cause them to propagate oppression, heterosexual men need to find their sense of masculinity from within.

NOTE

1. “Lezbro” is an informal term popularly used online and in *Lezbro: Don’t Cha Know*, a short film that describes straight male-lesbian female friendships.

WORKS CITED

- Bridges, Tristan and C. J. Pascoe “Masculinities and Post-Homophobias?” *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, edited by C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 412–423.
- Cohen, Taya R., Deborah L. Hall, and Jennifer Tuttle. “Attitudes Toward Stereotypical Versus Counterstereotypical Gay Men and Lesbians.” *The Journal of Sex Research* vol. 46, no. 4, July 2009, pp. 274–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490802666233>.
- Halberstam, J. Jack. “An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity Without Men.” *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 348-358.
- Kimmel, Michael. “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Sage, 1994, pp. 119-141.

ROBERT M. LYNCH '21GS is a junior studying political science who originally hails from New Jersey. He is a former NCAA Division 1 rugby player and graduated from community college after his playing career was cut short by injury. At Columbia, he is a member of the General Studies Student Council's Election Commission and is involved in club sports. In his free time, Robert is an avid sports fan, and he enjoys fishing and losing money trading options. He enjoys tracking financial markets and plans to pursue a career in finance after graduation. He would like to thank his UW professor Glenn Michael Gordon for helping to improve his writing tremendously.

BUYING INTO THE NEOLIBERAL TRAP: VINTAGE NOSTALGIA AND THE SHOPPER'S DILEMMA

MALIA SIMON

Let's imagine Sally, the twenty-first-century American consumer. This shopper is equipped with individual likes, dislikes, a developing concept of her own personhood, and a natural inclination toward wanting to wear this concept well. She is out clothes shopping and meanders into a small thrift store. A flannel shirt catches her eye from its spot between other items three sizes too large, or else some strange color of brown or gray. She tries it on for size, and it fits perfectly. More notably, though, she's never seen anything quite like it. The shop is independently owned rather than a chain—not to mention this was their only shirt in this design. She won't see herself coming and going. This is Sally's shirt.

Imagine her a week or two later. This time, she enters a chain store like Urban Outfitters or Brandy Melville and finds their Vintage Line: that is, clothing manufactured to resemble that of thrift stores or smaller, boutique-like businesses. Amidst the throbbing bass of pop music and buy-one-get-one-half-off signs, there is a section of the store in which twenty-five different iterations of Sally's shirt hang. The flannels are faded, the jeans are reminiscent of 1970's and 80's silhouettes, and only one article of every piece is sold, simulating the "authentic thrifting" experience she had but a week ago. One might expect her to be turned off by such a conspicuous counterfeit of her experience, with small-brand aesthetics blithely adopted by big-brand designers. And yet, these clothing lines thrive. Vintage simulation seems to be contemporary fashion dynamite. I find myself noticing the trend nearly everywhere, popping up in more and more chain stores, worn by more and more of the Sally's of today's marketplace. And I feel it in myself—I like it too. There is something so distinctly appealing and cool about this big-brand trend from the position of an American consumer. I can only wonder why, despite our relative cognizance of the pretend game, do we like it so much?

It's worthwhile to explore the appeal of vintage clothing in the first place before we come to an understanding of why its big-brand simulation thrives. This appeal, while manifested in the high-waisted jeans and graphic T-shirts, is one I suspect goes beyond physicality and taps into a deeper-rooted nostalgia.

It thus becomes important to consider just how far our economic environment extends into our collective psyche. In the article "Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics," psychologist Jeff Sugarman introduces the idea that our new economic sphere is doing nothing short of "reformulating personhood, psychological life, moral and ethical responsibility, and what it means to have selfhood and identity" (104). The economic shift Sugarman refers to is neoliberalism, the breed of capitalism

characterized by a “radically free market in which competition is maximized, free trade [is] achieved through economic deregulation [and] privatization of public assets . . . and monetary and social policies [are] congenial to corporations” (104). But, as Sugarman contends, neoliberalism is much weightier than just economic policy. By extension, the state of the modern Sally is such that she views *herself* as enterprise cascading into what Sugarman, using Richard Sennett’s words, says is a “corrode[d] character” (103). By jumping from one career to the next and not forming character “through discovering and defending communal values and civic virtues” (106-107), we forgo the possibility of ever truly developing a “sustained narrative” (106) of ourselves.

Neoliberalism within the clothing industry seems to have, in fact, generated a paralleled loss. As Sugarman states, citing Susie Orbach, “The buying and wearing of brands has become our way to belong, find our place, and lend coherence to our identities” (106). Less and less often, clothes shopping gives the experience of an individualized “sustained narrative,” in which we let our likes, dislikes, and inklings play until we find our way to a special item. The feeling that Sally experienced—we’ve bought our shirt—is fading. Instead, we’re buying *everyone else’s shirt*, living everyone else’s narrative, walking everyone else’s footsteps into a store that looks the same and plays the same pop track in all its five hundred locations. Our narrative is neither individualized nor sustained. As neoliberalism extends into shopping, our primary activity is to jump from promotion to promotion of what’s trendy in order to polish the marketable enterprise of ourselves ad infinitum.

The appeal of vintage clothing becomes clearer. Collective gravitation toward vintage is more than fashion “coming full circle;” it is fashion coming full circle for a reason. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that things do not boomerang back unless here is some collective yearning for them. It seems that the “sustained narrative,” the feeling that we possess a coherent self-identity, is exactly what we’re missing as people in today’s shopping world. Vintage and boutique-like style has made its way into the current American imagination by means of nostalgia for a sense of individuality that economic environments of the past once offered. It does not even matter if we were alive for such a time. An invocation of nostalgia for an age without neoliberalism is inherent in the pieces themselves. The single-copy flannels and the faded or strangely cut jeans offer a sense of personalized choice and uniqueness that can appeal to anyone living in today’s market. Buying into this trend is our way of satiating such a nostalgia: we temporarily lay our mourning to rest by clinging to a sense of identity that was once more accessible.

And yet, it seems necessary to take one step further in order to gain an even broader vantage point on the landscape of neoliberalism. Another fundamental element of the developing definition of neoliberalism is its very elusiveness (an elusiveness which stems in part from trying to define an era while we’re living it). Jeremiah Moss, in his book *Vanishing New York*, admits that he himself didn’t fully understand neoliberalism before he began writing. Moss describes neoliberalism, referring to Rebecca Solnit’s

language, as “that shadowy shark devouring cities across the globe” of which “few of us are aware” (103). In the gradual post-Reagan shift in policy, the scholarly effort to pin down neoliberalism has been hazy because “[n]eoliberalism has managed to make itself invisible” (Sugarman 104). It is what Political Theorist Wendy Brown, citing Alexis de Tocqueville, calls “‘gentle despotism’ . . . even as it continues to travel under the sign of democracy and imagine itself ‘free’” (179).

It only follows that the “shadowy” nature of neoliberalism allows it to seep into nearly all regions of our lives, even in epistemologically inconspicuous ways—that is, even into regions we *think* are immune. Yes, neoliberalism intrudes most stealthily on the very regions that house our own rebellion to it. As big-brand stores like Urban Outfitters catch on to the appeal of vintage, they gradually become our source for the trend. Temporarily laying our nostalgia to rest by purchasing an Urban Outfitters Vintage Line T-shirt is a perpetually self-defeating practice. The nostalgia that feels so distinctly *ours* in the game of neoliberalism—our own response and reaction—is in fact another foothold for big business that makes the existence of actual boutiques less and less possible. Therein is the central irony. The popularity of the vintage trend is not merely a result of our mourning for the past, but also of the suggestion that we’re challenging something. The “coolness” of the trend comes from the idea that we are part of the counterculture while we literally wear this identity on our sleeves. But, just as Brown observed on today’s “glut of information,” we are only under the “illusion of knowledge, freedom, and . . . participation in the face of their opposites” (179). What truly happens in the fashion sphere is that we inadvertently pass our urge to challenge into the very hands of our adversary, who channels that urge to make a profit.

What’s more, the profitable sentiment of wistful nostalgia is not exclusive to challengers within the fashion sphere; it comes from theorists who also have something to mourn. Brown contends that our twentieth-century education system “appears as something of a golden age for public higher education” (180). Although she makes a statement to disown the rose-colored goggles (conceding that the system did not “[realize] perfection [and] was absent the usual cruel exclusions from Western humanism” (180)), she rhetorically expresses semi-intangible wistfulness for American ‘yonder-years’: “It was a time in which a broad, if not deep college education [became essential] . . . [when a] basic familiarity with Western history, thought, literature, art, social analysis, and science was integral to middle-class belonging” (180). And perhaps we all have something of this intangible sort to mourn. Moss’s book likewise mourns the “soul” of New York City. In a somber retelling of Mayor Ed Koch’s inauguration speech, which marked a turning point into neoliberal policy, Moss pauses to ask us to “imagine being there.” He invites us to engage our senses: “The air is cold and the sky above City Hall is pigeon gray” (107). In doing so, Moss goes beyond reporting the significance of Koch’s speech and instead bring us into the romantic, dreamlike nostalgia of a narrative experience. His process invokes a preoccupation that

approaches fetishization of a New York that, as Steve Fraser described it, “once admired the feistiness of seamstresses and stevedores and the hustling shrewdness of the family businessman” (109).

While calling on a better America of the past helps expand our vantage point, we cannot fully escape the “shadowy” mechanism of neoliberalism. Of course, this perspective does not come from the ill intentions of theorists, nor does it even seem like a fault. Nostalgia seems to have a certain inevitability, one from which we can’t expect ourselves to separate even if we tried. Even if we *could* separate ourselves, perhaps it’s not our responsibility to do so. There is truth to this intangible loss of soul for which critics lament. In fact, I conjured it myself by telling the story of Sally’s first experience in the thrift store, and I stand by the value in it. Having the sentiment may not leave us with a real burden to bear, but instead with the understanding that American nostalgia itself is a hungry emotion that clings to any semblance of the past. This becomes dangerously lucrative for neoliberalism: the past is all too easily manifested in product.

Even if we don’t hold ourselves responsible for the imperceptible way our nostalgia is turned to profit, one last item lingers. The same big-brand companies that profit off vintage lines *also* successfully sell their own branded clothing. It would seem, then, that big-brand stores aren’t wholly pretending to be something they’re not, but instead capitalizing on both identities. How is it that both vintage simulation and brand-flaunting could thrive next to each other at the same time? Thus, we come back to the initial question, which plainly concerns awareness of the pretend game. What do we have to say for the many of us who are wholly cognizant—maybe even resentful—of big-brand stores’ appropriation of thrift-store and vintage style, and yet we like it anyway? Those of us who have, like Sally, been privileged to experience both the real and the simulated, and yet we still purchase the simulated one? This is the very heart of the psycho-economic game of neoliberalism, wherein two polar opposites flourish via symbiosis. In the coexistence of the nostalgic “good old days” and sexy elitism, each gives more weight to the other. It seems reasonable to conjecture that brands like Urban Outfitters owe much of their leverage—and position as a wearable status symbol—to the appeal of their Vintage Lines. And just the same, the Vintage Line is made appealing and given fashion credibility by being in the very context of an already popular big-brand store. We are left to consider that our collective interest in the trend may not be *despite* of our cognizance of the imitation game, but in fact *because* of it. It’s not just that we miss what once was. It’s not just that we turn toward vintage fashion trends to quell this longing. It’s that we like it better when it comes in a branded box—one that tells us we are powerful, cool, and attractive, one that comes with the stamp of a pre-made identity. Even while we miss the true individuality of developing our own “sustained narrative,” maybe we also like when it’s handed to us. Maybe we would rather play make believe.

It's here that we realize that neoliberalism is much more of a barrel than we perhaps took it to be. Not only is it self-propagating, but it is also propagated by the antithesis of itself. The entire concept of a specific Vintage Line makes it so that the appeal of escaping neoliberalism is compartmentalized, sectioned off into its own special area while maintaining the ultimate reigning status of the brand. And we make our contributions endlessly, continuing to buy both. Still, however, I maintain that none of this is to say we are necessarily to blame. It is merely worth considering that our relation to neoliberalism is much beyond victimhood, even for those of us who consider ourselves challengers. In fact, we are more intimately intertwined with it than ever: in our dislikes, our likes, our oblivion, and our awareness.

WORKS CITED

- Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books, 2017.
- Moss, Jeremiah. *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul*. Dey Street Books, 2018.
- Sugarman, Jeff. "Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics." *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2015, pp. 103–116.

MALIA SIMON '22CC is a sophomore psychology student from California who lives a split life of academia and comedy writing. By day, she's conducting crowd behavior and applause research as a Laidlaw Research Fellow and reflecting on life's most serious matters. By night she's making a deliberate decision to not take anything seriously at all: she is the co-president/head writer of *Columbia University Sketch Show*, and also writes satirical and silly content for both *The Federalist* and *The Blue and White*. As an additional note, she is a self-confessed application addict and has decorated one wall of her dorm room entirely with all her rejection letters (*The Morningside Review* not included if you are currently reading this).

LOOKING AT LESIONS: LEPROSY AS A CASE STUDY

KIMIA HEYDARI

A few years ago, I worked at a leprosy care facility associated with the Center for Research and Training in Skin Diseases and Leprosy at Tehran University. I spent my days shadowing the doctor who treated patients and learning about multidrug therapies, the cure for leprosy that the World Health Organization and pharmaceutical company Novartis distribute free of charge in countries like Iran (WHO). This ‘cure-all’ drug renders leprosy non-communicable and non-infectious, which means that it’s no longer a widescale public health threat. However, our research at the center focused on treating permanent damage from the disease that had occurred before drug administration; namely, we looked at patients’ leprosy lesions and disfigured limbs.

The doctor who served as my mentor explained that the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae* nibbles away at the soft tissue inside and outside a patient’s body. Because of how *Mycobacterium leprae* disables a patient’s nervous system, leprosy sufferers cannot always fully register pain. Patients often came to the clinic with irreparable burns and lesions caused by unintentionally leaving their hands on the stove. Since they felt no pain, their flesh could burn or deteriorate extensively before they noticed the damage.

In a low voice, the doctor reminded me, “What you will see will not be pleasant. You do not have to stay in the room.” The nurse led an emaciated woman into the room. Wrapped in chador, the Islamic veil that some women wear in Iran, Zahra sat by the side of the bed.¹ From my seat beside my mentor, all I could see of the woman were her hands, with stubs instead of fingers. After applying pressure on Zahra’s fingertips for circulation checks, my mentor explained to Zahra, “While there is minimal blood flow in your fingertips, there is no sensation in them. Be careful not to burn yourself again. Pick up these gloves at the pharmacy so you can wear them when you cook. Try not to leave your hands on heated surfaces like the stove.”

Zahra’s fingertips were not the main issue that my mentor had to address; it was the lesions on her forearms and legs that had brought her to the clinic. My mentor had to ask a few times for Zahra to loosen her grip from the heavy cloths and chador she held around herself. What hid beneath Zahra’s chador was deeply disturbing to view. I scuffed my eyebrows together and averted my eyes toward the door, silently praying that Zahra would not recognize my reaction at the sight of her leprosy lesion.

Psychology can easily explain why I turned away in repulsion from Zahra’s lesion: psychologists argue that a lesion is indeed a site of pain, which is an intolerable sensation. Accordingly, in his research paper regarding the emotions that human beings experience when looking at lesions, psychologist Tom Kupfer argues that when

observers see an injury they vicariously feel the injury (959). Vicarious pain is the sensation of pain that another person's lesion inflicts on the person viewing it. One might justify turning away in repulsion from a lesion as a result of a biological reaction of sharing the unbearable suffering of others.

However, I argue that turning away from the lesion is not as simple as a biological response of a knee-jerk. Besides, if Zahra felt no pain, a psychologist's model of vicarious pain—the sympathetic sharing of suffering—only scratches the surface in explaining the reason I turned away from her lesion. There is a much more complicated reason that Zahra's lesion was repulsive. Even though I stopped looking at it, I still felt deeply disturbed. I tried to reason that down the line, I would get used to what I saw. This was the beginning of my desensitization, a process that some in healthcare undergo to become used to the sight of lesions. Yet what belonged inside Zahra's body was leaking on the outside, transgressing the border that her crippled skin was supposed to cover up. Could it have been the borderlessness of the lesion that made me turn away? And how does this borderlessness feed societal measures in stigmatizing leprosy?

Theories regarding the concept of abjection further unveil reasons that I found Zahra's lesion repulsive. In her book *Powers of Horror*, philosopher Julia Kristeva defines the abject as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). My repulsion in turning away from the lesion relates to how my body, confined within my skin, became threatened at the sight of a leprous lesion, one that was not enclosed by the borders of Zahra's skin: her lesion was abject.

Intact skin allows for the creation of borders that tell where one body stops and another starts. These clear borders collapse when encountering the sight of a lesion. The leprous lesion threatens the meaning that society associates with skin, the border that separates individual bodies and identities from one another. In her article “Corporeal Cuts,” gender studies professor Margrit Shildrick focuses on how our understanding of self changes with surgical and non-surgical incisions. However, with regards to lesions brought on by bacteria in dermatological diseases such as leprosy, she peripherally notes that “weeping, bleeding, leaky skin is a matter of some abhorrence” (33). What bleeds is fluid and can thus travel beyond the borders of one's skin. Shildrick's “leaky skin” reveals that what is supposed to stay contained inside one person's body can threaten another person's skin and body. And upon viewing Zahra's lesion, my view of my own body, bordered in by skin, collapsed.

Zahra, the human being with the lesion, faded into the background of my vision, as my most important task at hand was to avoid the sight of the leprous lesion that threatened the borders separating my body from hers. Zahra collaborated with my repulsion toward her lesion: she continuously pulled the heavy cloths of her chador over her body, trying to make herself and her lesion as small and invisible as possible. Sociologist Erving Goffman offers multiple definitions of stigma, including that of the ancient Greeks, as “bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about

the moral status” of stigmatized people (1). What Goffman refers to as a bodily sign—in this case the leprous lesion—is what Shildrick calls “a matter of some abhorrence” (33). Goffman makes the stark observation that “we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human” (5). In this line of thinking, I come to “believe” that a person with leprosy is “not quite human.” But is it that I “believe?” Or am I under the influence of an impulse to cut off the abject?

Reacting in repulsion toward the abject lesion, while also reifying the border between self and other, transforms the affected human body into an object, something that is no longer a human being. This reaction of turning away perpetuates the belief that those suffering from the visible lesions of leprosy are not only not human, but that they are objects to be pushed and maintained outside the borders of society. The repulsion toward the leprous lesions intensifies the persisting stigma surrounding leprosy.

Fueled by repulsion toward the abject, this personal decision to turn away from leprous lesions and objectify those who carry them has lifetime consequences for people affected by leprosy. In his book *People Are Not the Same*, scholar Eric Silla uses first-hand accounts of leprosy sufferers in Mali to shed light onto the experiences of those living with the lesions, disfigurements, and other effects of the disease. Silla illustrates an exceptional facet of leprosy, noting that “Unlike fatal or short-term afflictions, leprosy last[s] a lifetime, steadily limiting one’s ability to work and live with others” (73). In contrast to “fatal” and “short-term” diseases, leprosy leaves its sufferers as objects of abhorrence, psychologically scarred for the entirety of their lives.

Although my mentor and other individuals who undergo medical desensitization training may not show extreme reactions toward leprous lesions, my own decision to turn away was a choice that many in society will mirror when coming into contact with leprosy. With every action there is a reaction. Explaining the action of turning away from the lesion without discussing the reactions of the people who bear the leprous lesions is impossible. In covering their lesions, those who suffer from leprosy protect themselves from becoming objects that repel onlookers.

My mentor explained to me how unwilling the patients were to force themselves out of their homes, risk presence in public, and travel to the leprosy center. More often than not, when patients did seek out medical aid, their limbs were already so deformed that there was little the center could do but prescribe topical ointments. Beyond our patients’ lost sense of pain, their reluctance to seek out treatment for their lesions resulted in care that could not meet their bodies’ deteriorated state. Using first-hand accounts, Jacqueline J. Bonney discusses why leprosy patients can be extremely reluctant to seek medical aid. Bonney reveals that “[p]eople affected by leprosy find it difficult, for example, to get treatment for non-leprosy related disorders from private hospitals if they have visible signs that mark them out as having leprosy” (98). Even though their treated leprosy is no longer infectious, those with visible signs of leprosy—the lesions that Goffman calls stigma—often cannot be treated outside of

leprosy colonies, plots of land removed from cities that house those suffering from leprosy.

Sometimes people remain in leprosy colonies at their own will, as evidenced by Bonney's example of a man who did not want to work outside of a colony because "[h]e dreaded someone commenting, dreaded the possible confrontation and the possibility that people might find out he had leprosy" (99). Some sufferers of leprosy lesions decide to remain within these separate communities as a way to protect themselves from becoming objects of repulsion again. But remaining separated from society keeps many from seeking out aid for their lesions. Untreated, their lesions worsen, and they are constrained to a lifetime of disability in leprosy colonies.

On a regional and global scale, the World Health Organization has long prioritized the reintegration into society of those suffering from leprosy (Lockwood). Leprosy is no longer infectious and the lesions that the disease leaves on patients' bodies should not trap patients outside the borders of society. Those experiencing these second-hand effects of leprosy do not deserve to remain in substandard living situations: that is unjust. We must work toward a society that is welcoming to rather than repelled by those suffering from leprosy.

Besides moving hospital wards and care centers, reintegration depends on how individuals in society decide to approach the abjection that arises from the sight of the lesions. In coming into contact with the abject leprosy lesion, the human inclination is to reify the borders between self and other that the lesion endangers as quickly as possible. Immediately averting the gaze from the leprosy lesion is the fastest and most efficient way of doing so; however, this reaction wreaks havoc on the lives of those with leprosy. Philosopher Josh Dohmen furthers Kristeva's concept of abjection, stating:

The abject, by dissolving imaginary boundaries, returns the subject to the level of imaginary identification, reveals the ambiguity of one's borders, the incompleteness and contingency of one's identifications, and can thus contest and even revise one's identifications. The danger, though, is that in response to the abject one instead reconsolidates one's imaginary boundaries, violently rejecting, and thus performatively recreating, that which is abject. (769-770)

Dohmen's view of boundaries and borders, such as those of the body, is that they are "imaginary," meaning that they are made through the thoughts and actions of human beings. Repeated human action and thoughts have shaped our boundaries out of ambiguity, conjuring repulsion for those identifications contingently deemed abject. Repulsion to the abject is not a predetermined reaction. Dohmen sees encounters with the abject as opportunities to "contest and even revise one's identifications" (769). The abject, though disturbing, is an opportunity to contemplate and redefine, rather than to immediately reinstate, the borders between oneself and the other. Redefining

borders is a process that takes contemplation and time and is hindered by immediate responses of repulsion. Attempting to understand the abject allows for the possibilities of non-alienating responses toward the abject. The abject will continue to threaten human beings and their view of the borders that separate their bodies from others. Besides expanding their awareness about the abject, onlookers bear the responsibility to consciously revise their reaction toward the abject, in order to reevaluate and improve their reactions over time.

Day in and day out, I worked, wondered about lesions, and went on guilt trips about my reactions toward lesions belonging to the first set of patients. For a while, when I explained my reaction toward Zahra's lesion to family and friends, they did not discourage me from doing so. In fact, most did not think it was a big deal. I still wonder if my mentor—the doctor—felt no repulsion toward the lesions or if she was able to process her repulsion in an alternative way that I did not yet know about. After desensitization training, would I be able to do the same? And was my guilt telling me that I should have known better and not reacted the way I did?

I still struggle to answer these questions, but my guilt led me to investigate alternatives to turning away in repulsion from the sight of a lesion. In reflecting on my response to the patients' abject lesions, I was forced to recognize my contribution to the subconscious perpetuation of the stigma that surrounds leprosy. I was caught off guard as I read and reread the following verse: "I will gift another pair of earrings to the beautiful leper woman" [زن زیبای جذامی را، گوشواری دیگر خواهم بخشید] (Sepehri 215). This verse from twentieth-century Iranian poet Sohrab Sepehri's "A Message on the Road" [و پیامی در راه] challenges the definition of the borders of society, namely the position of the diseased and disfigured: here, the "leper woman" who is burdened by lesions. The word "leper" in Sepehri's poem still reminds readers about the leprosy lesions that the woman bears. Furthermore, his conscious inclusion of "leper" is a unique move toward freeing this term from the historical stigma that accompanies it in many languages, including Farsi. Sepehri ascribes to Dohmen's ideal that abjection is based in imaginary boundaries and can be revised. He offers earrings, objects of beauty, to the woman, the human being whom he views as beautiful and worthy of beauty. More importantly, in Persian culture, earrings are metaphors for reminders. The Persian axiom "آویزه گوش کن" translates into "hinge a piece of advice to your ear." Sepehri first unhinges the history of constant repulsion and objectification that the woman has endured because of her lesions and then hinges a reminder about the woman's personhood. In contrast to the cloth that our patient Zahra continuously hid herself with, the earring, both literally and metaphorically, encourages the woman to uncover herself and be present in society despite the leprosy lesions she suffers from.

While the lesion is abject and disturbs the borders between self and other, it belongs to a human being. In reifying the borders of our own identity through our repulsion toward abject lesions, we suppress the identity of those who bear lesions. Sepehri states that he will gift *another* pair of earrings. This repetition is an attempt that must be

continued over and over again in order to transform skin into something other than the absolute border of one's body. Sepehri involves the reader in an activity of border crossing that reaches out to those suffering with leprosy. By understanding that Sepehri has made gifts of earrings before, readers are caught in his cycle of repeated border crossings, and they cannot immediately turn away from abject lesions in repulsion. In fact, this conscious repetition challenges and reconstructs borders in a manner akin to the desensitization training that some doctors and others involved in healthcare undergo.

Sepehri sets an example for Dohman's view of abjection, demonstrating that the abject is an opportunity to redefine borders rather than to reinstate them. By acknowledging societal abjection toward the lesions of those suffering from leprosy, Sepehri challenges and changes the borders of beauty in order to accommodate the reintegration of a woman who has been marginalized and objectified because of her disease back into society. Sepehri invites those uninvolved in medicine to realize the ways in which their repulsion toward leprous lesions subconsciously perpetuates the stigma surrounding leprosy.

Based on the knowledge of abjection that I currently have, I wonder how different Zahra's visit to the leprosy center would have been had I controlled my reaction to the sight of her lesions. The guilt I felt after turning away from her lesions—and from her as a human being—served as a guide that directed me to explore abjection and the underlying mechanisms that go into the moment of repulsion.

Understanding abjection is no 'cure-all' treatment for leprosy like the Dapsone that the World Health Organization distributes globally. However, awareness about and the embrace of abjection helps people realign their biases and adjust their reactions toward their surroundings. Looking at lesions with a knowledge of abjection helps us realize how thoroughly we have drawn, retraced, and highlighted the borders between bodies. Knowledge about the abject is crucial because it not only allows us to recognize our repulsions in vivid light, but also helps us realize that repulsion toward the abject is under our control and that we are the ones who define borders in the first place. We are responsible for our actions and are not helpless at the sight of abject entities. In de-stigmatizing diseases with visible markings on the body—leprous lesions in particular—we can start reconsidering the ways in which we respond to the abject and to other people.

NOTE

1. Patient's name is not disclosed; Zahra is a pseudonym.

WORKS CITED

- Bonney, Jacqueline. "Responding to the Socio-Economic Implications of Leprosy." *Leprosy Review* vol. 82, no. 2, 2011, pp. 98-102.

- Dohmen, Josh. "Disability as Abject: Kristeva, Disability, and Resistance." *Hypatia*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2016, pp. 762-778, doi:10.1111/hypa.12266.
- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Penguin Books, 1974.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Kupfer, Tom R. "Why Are Injuries Disgusting? Comparing Pathogen Avoidance and Empathy Accounts." *Emotion*, vol. 18, no. 7, 2018, pp. 959-970, doi:10.1037/emo0000395.
- Lockwood, Diana N J. "Leprosy Elimination—a Virtual Phenomenon or a Reality?" *BMJ*, vol. 324, no. 7352, 2002, pp. 1516-1518, doi:10.1136/bmj.324.7352.1516.
- Sepehri, Sohrab. "A Message on the Road" [و پیامی در راه]. *Eight Books* [هشت کتاب]. Trans. Kimia Heydari. Gofteman Andeeshe Moaser Press, 2010.
- Shildrick, Margrit. "Corporeal Cuts: Surgery and the Psycho-Social." *Body & Society*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2008, pp. 31-46, doi:10.1177/1357034x07087529.
- Silla, Eric. *People Are Not the Same: Leprosy and Identity in Twentieth-Century Mali*. Heinemann, 1998.
- "WHO and Novartis Extend Agreement to Treat Millions of Leprosy Patients with Free Medicines." *World Health Organization*, 15 Sept. 2016, www.who.int/neglected_diseases/news/WHO_Novartis_agreement_to_treat_leprosy_patients/en/. Accessed 21 Nov. 2018.

KIMIA HEYDARI '22CC is a John Jay Scholar and studies English and Biology. She grew up in Tehran and Toronto, and likes to leave a paper trail of Persian poetry as she moves from one place to another. She is a peer fellow at the Writing Center at Columbia, teaches alongside Peer Health Exchange in Harlem, and leads tours at the Hirshhorn Museum of Modern art in DC.

LAND USE REGULATIONS: RACIAL OPPRESSION BY ANOTHER NAME

LUCAS MELO

Maximum lot coverage (including garage area): 40% of lot area,” “30% Encroachment rule,” “Maximum building height (one story): 17 feet.” These seemingly mundane regulations are in effect in my rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Warm Springs, California (“Single-Family Residential Zoning Standards for Additions”). Collectively, these rules are known as land use regulations (LURs), which can also regulate zoning, density limits, and minimum setbacks. Throughout America, they determine how individual plots of land will be used, from the appearance and location of a building to whether it will be used for residence or commerce. City governments claim that these regulations foster growth while preserving community character.

However, LURs often have more insidious intents. By restricting development, they also make cities less affordable for low-income minority residents, thus reinforcing racial segregation. We have made little progress in Black-white residential segregation over the decades, with segregation declining at “a very slow pace” since its peak “around 1960 or 1970” (Logan and Stults 2). Today, “the typical white lives in a neighborhood that is 75% white, 8% black” while “the typical black lives in a neighborhood that is 45% black, 35% white” (Logan and Stults 3). Exclusionary LURs have endowed the racial bias of white homeowners with the legitimacy and power of supposedly race-neutral government regulation, allowing them to avoid confronting their prejudices while perpetuating a system of racial oppression.

Governmental forays into regulating the spatial distribution of residents can be traced back to the early twentieth century. In his book *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein writes about the history of government-enforced segregation. The most infamous of these segregation tactics was a process known as redlining. The Federal Housing Administration refused to insure mortgages (effectively cutting off home loans) for people living in the predominantly African American communities, which were drawn in maps as red (undesirable) by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (64). However, redlining was preceded by the more extreme policy of racial zoning. Baltimore introduced racial zoning in America in 1910 by prohibiting either race from buying a home in a block that was majority owned by the other race; this law was imitated throughout the South (Rothstein 44).

The spread of racial zoning, however, should have come to an abrupt end with the *Buchanan v. Warley* decision of 1917. The Supreme Court struck down a racial zoning law in Louisville, Kentucky, not because it was racially motivated, but because the Fourteenth Amendment protected property rights, effectively ensuring the right of white homeowners to sell to African Americans (Fischel, *Zoning Rules!* 79). Though the

decision allowed some southern state courts to strike down similar laws, many cities ignored the decision (Rothstein 46).¹

Alas, the *Buchanan* decision did not bring an end to racial zoning; instead, it spurred racial LURs to evolve into economic LURs. For example, Chicago's 1923 zoning ordinance targeted Black communities specifically for high-density housing and manufacturing, segregating them into hazardous regions with lower incomes (Shertzer et al. 236). Such zoning translated "into economic disparities" (219). Although these laws never explicitly state the words "black" or "white," they have the same effect as previous racial zoning laws, constraining low-income minorities to undesirable industrial districts. This tactic was endorsed by the Supreme Court in the 1926 decision of *Village of Euclid v. Amber Realty*, in which the exclusion of apartment buildings in zoning was deemed to be constitutional. The decision was riddled with racial bias, with Justice George Sutherland writing that "the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district," and that they "come very near to being nuisances" (Rothstein 52-53). Justice Sutherland's coded words reflect the racist sentiments of white homeowners by indirectly associating African American and immigrant families, through their apartment homes, with parasites that harm the neighboring white communities. The barely disguised racial animosity contained in the decision shows that the Supreme Court intentionally gave cover for cities to preserve explicitly racist zoning laws in the form of implicitly racist economic zoning.

Exclusionary zoning regulations continued even after the *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision of 1948 made private racial covenants—clauses in a home's deed that banned the sale of the home to African Americans—unenforceable (Whittemore 16). These exclusionary zoning regulations failed to achieve their legal goal of maximizing total land value; however, Edward L. Glaeser and Bryce A. Ward, in studying Boston's LURs, note that minimum lot sizes are connected to the density and demographics of communities (277). Communities with higher minimum lot sizes, a type of LUR, were whiter and more educated. Boston is not unique: multiple studies nationwide have linked land use controls with the exclusion of African American residents.² This gap between the stated goal of exclusionary zoning regulations and their true effects indicates that the real intent behind them is not economic exclusion, but rather racial segregation.

However, the Supreme Court has not used such evidence to overturn exclusionary LURs. In *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation*, the Supreme Court decided in 1977 that Arlington Heights' exclusionary zoning ordinance was legal since there was no proof that the council members themselves intended to exclude African Americans. This decision came in spite of the fact that the ordinance was passed under explicitly racist pressure from white residents who admitted they were trying to keep African Americans out of their community (Rothstein 54). The Supreme Court established the precedent that a plaintiff needs evidence of

discriminatory intent to prove Fourteenth Amendment violations (Whittemore 20). This decision from our constitutional democracy's highest legal and moral authority enabled residents to cloak their racism in abstracted regulations—distancing whites from their own implicit bias. It has also fed the harmful belief prevalent today that because our laws today do not explicitly segregate by race, they are necessarily colorblind. This view has been endorsed by the Supreme Court in decisions such as *PICS v. Seattle School District* in 2007, which determined that school integration in many communities is unconstitutional unless it can be proven that the government is responsible for present-day segregation (Rothstein and Badger). This understanding conveniently ignores the history of economic zoning targeting racial minorities, a practice which continues today.

Even still, many argue that exclusionary LURs are only intended to increase property values and lack any discriminatory intent. The most notable economics scholar of LURs, William Fischel, states in his comprehensive book on zoning that “*Buchanan v. Warley* was remarkably effective in halting the spread of legally compelled segregation schemes” and kept “explicitly apartheid regulations off the books” (Fischel, *Zoning Rules!* 79-81). However, there is a long way between apartheid and complete integration. Although explicitly segregationist laws were repealed by the 1960s, as Fischel and others have noted, the Supreme Court has allowed exclusionary zoning ordinances that are segregationist in all but name.³ As the City and Regional Planning researcher Andrew Whittemore writes, municipalities use zoning to maximize property values, “screen[ing] out anything they perceive to be a ‘quality-detracting user’ . . . [which] may well be informed by prejudice” (17).

On face value, it is likely that both Fischel and Whittemore are correct that communities do use LURs to raise their home equities and exclude minorities. Anthony Downs confirms their arguments when writing about President George H.W. Bush's Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing, of which he was a member. According to Downs, the maximization of home equity, along with the fear of “invasion” of white communities by undesirable low-income families, and the associated racial hostility that accompanies this sentiment, are two of the major motivators for exclusionary LURs (Downs 1115). There is empirical evidence for both of these intents, as well: studies have shown that communities with large numbers of poor or minority residents in their surrounding areas were more likely to have less new land zoned for residential purposes, indicating an implicit bias against these groups (Ihlanfeldt 274). However, as Whittemore shows, these two reasons are linked because raising the cost of living within a city also makes it less affordable for most racial minorities. Therefore, exclusionary LURs have become self-reinforcing: as racial minorities are constrained by the exclusionary LURs of wealthy white suburbs and pushed into low-income urban ghettos, negative racial biases among white residents are reinforced. The cycle perpetuates racial segregation. The effect is to create barriers between urban minority communities and white suburbs, as minorities are

excluded from job markets, home equity, and other wealth-building opportunities that would allow them entry into the suburbs.

I have seen this conflation between property prices and racial resentment first-hand at a city council meeting in Dublin, California, close to my old home in Fremont. In the meeting, white and Asian homeowners complained that a new housing proposal would turn their city into “the next San Leandro,” referring to a much poorer and predominantly Latinx and African American community on the other side of the East Bay Hills. While they viewed the development as a threat to their property values because of the impact on traffic congestion and local school quality, their comments show that these fears arise from a strong internal racial bias. However, race was never explicitly mentioned in the meeting; the San Leandro comment was as far as the residents went. The discussion still obviously fanned the flames of racial resentment, even if it was unsaid. Such is the beauty of exclusionary LURs.

The cumulative impacts of exclusionary LURs create powerful systems of oppression that reinforce and exacerbate racial inequality and the subjugation of minorities. For one, these LURs have been influential in perpetuating and intensifying the racial income and wealth gaps. The suburbanization of whites spread competitive jobs geographically throughout regions that are less affordable to the poor, thus impeding minorities from attaining incomes that would allow them to enter the suburbs (Rothstein and Badger). Instead, middle- and low-income minorities have been constrained by LURs to rental housing in poorer communities, thus excluding them from homeownership, one of the largest sources of wealth in America. As homes have appreciated over the last several generations, white families have accrued wealth, while pricing out minorities (Rothstein and Badger). Therefore, exclusionary LURs, combined with highly regressive subsidies for the whiter middle and upper classes, such as the mortgage interest tax deduction, have become major drivers of today’s inequality.⁴

By zoning low-income minority communities as industrial areas, cities have also exposed African Americans to dangerous environmental hazards. A 1983 analysis by the US General Accounting Office found that nationwide, “Blacks make up the majority of the population in three of the four communities where the landfills are located” (1). A prominent example in my region is the predominantly Black public housing community of Bayview–Hunters Point in San Francisco, which shares its name with the adjacent Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, a decommissioned nuclear Superfund site. Exposure to these harmful environmental pollutants create long-lasting, often fatal health damage. By disproportionately placing polluting industries next to communities of color (or vice versa), cities are implying that the lives of people of color are valued less than those of whites. Affluent white suburban communities can leverage wealth and institutional power to demand that LURs locate industry far from their homes. That necessitates placing industry next to African American and Latinx communities instead. And thanks to the *Arlington Heights* decision and the

history of oppression, residents are unable to pose a challenge based on racial discrimination. The voices of these white suburbs, and therefore their lives, are given precedence over those of communities of color, thus giving people of color a lower status.

The impact of exclusionary LURs on education follows a similar pattern. Contrary to popular belief, since the immediate aftermath of *Brown v. Board*, school segregation has only worsened: “In 1970, the typical African American student attended a school in which 32 percent of the students were white. By 2010, this exposure had fallen to 29 percent” (Rothstein 179). Perhaps more shockingly, as Nikole Hannah-Jones notes in her article “Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City,” one of the most segregated school districts in America is not in the South, but the Northern metropolis of New York City. This racial hypocrisy was not lost on Kenneth Clark, the first Black person to earn a doctorate in psychology at Columbia University, who “charged that though New York had no law requiring segregation, it intentionally separated its students by . . . building schools deep in segregated neighborhoods” (Hannah-Jones).

Rather than harming white students, school integration makes everyone better off. Hannah-Jones notes data from multiple studies that show that “as Black test scores rose, so did White ones” and “Black adults who had attended desegregated schools were less likely to be poor, suffer health problems and go to jail. . . . [T]hey even lived longer.” But racial fears on the part of affluent whites have excluded people of color from their high-performing schools, compounding racial segregation. White parents’ desire to provide the best opportunities for their children belies a racial bias against schools with students of color. Once again, the lives of white children are placed ahead of the lives of Black children. Hannah-Jones points out that even Kenneth Clark chose to put his children in a school in an affluent white community. He is quoted as saying that his children “only have one life,” but Hannah-Jones adds, “so do the children relegated to this city’s segregated schools. They have only one life, too.”

Yet exclusionary LURs ignore these children. By preventing African American families from accruing wealth, living in healthy neighborhoods, or sending their children to the same high-quality public schools as white suburban families, exclusionary LURs act as a primary tool for the perpetuation of African Americans’ social status as a lower caste, one that has persisted since Jim Crow, and before that, slavery. These systems of oppression are derived from a legal framework that grants white homeowners unwarranted advantages over African Americans, that implies that white lives are more valuable than Black lives.

Because of this history of explicit and implicit racial exclusion, “colorblind” policies can never be enough to reduce segregation and give African Americans equal standing in the housing markets. More is necessary. As Hannah-Jones concludes, “[t]rue integration, true equality, requires a surrendering of advantage.” Without surrendering this advantage, the unconstitutional, segregationist land use regulations imposed by

the government—a legacy of slavery—will never be remedied. If white Americans insist on preserving their advantage, they will also preserve the unequal treatment of African Americans upon which the nation has rested since its founding.

NOTES

1. Racial zoning practices existed well into the 1960s in West Palm Beach and the Orlando suburb of Apopka and survived as implicit law as late as 1987 in Kansas City and Norfolk (Rothstein 47).
2. Kevin Ihlanfeldt's scholarly review finds that jurisdictions with a higher proportion of white residents adopt more restrictive community LURs (270). Rolf Pendall's analysis similarly finds that communities with LURs had lower proportions of African Americans. Most recently, Princeton University researchers Jonathan Rothwell and Douglass Massey also found a negative correlation between the restrictive zoning densities and racial integration (790-791).
3. Additionally, Fischel's economic approach provides a valuable perspective on the incentives to exclusionary LURs. In his paper "Zoning and Land Use Regulation," Fischel states that residents have no incentives to oppose new LURs, since they only affect new residents and development. Repealing LURs is even less desirable, since it would lower home values while transferring most of the advantages of higher wages and employment to neighboring municipalities (421).
4. Beyond inequality, economists have done extensive research on the impact that LURs have on the national economy by limiting growth because of their impact on housing costs. By increasing the cost of urban housing, LURs reduce national mobility, making it harder for people to move to more productive areas with higher paying jobs and quality schools. This effect reduces productivity and income growth, since people get raises by switching to better job matches. In economies with loose land regulations, the agglomeration economies of high-income, high-productivity cities attract people from poorer regions, leading to income convergence, greater productivity, and intergenerational mobility. According to a recent analysis by Hsieh and Moretti, if just New York, San Jose, and San Francisco adopted median LURs, the entire country's GDP would be 8.9% higher, while employment in New York would increase by 1,010% (24). Unlike what many cities promise, LURs actually limit the extent of their economic growth.

WORKS CITED

- Downs, Anthony. "The Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing: Its Behavior and Accomplishments." *Housing Policy Debate*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1991, pp. 1095-1116,
www.innovations.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hpd_0204_downs_pt1.pdf.
- Fischel, William A. "Zoning and Land Use Regulation." *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics: Civil Law and Economics*, vol. 2, 2000, pp. 403-42,
www.dartmouth.edu/~wfischel/Papers/WAF-zoning%20ELEpdf.pdf.
- . *Zoning Rules!: The Economics of Land Use Regulation*. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2015,
<https://www.lincolninst.edu/sites/default/files/pubfiles/zoning-rules-chp.pdf>.
- Glaeser, Edward L., and Bryce A. Ward. "The Causes and Consequences of Land Use Regulation: Evidence From Greater Boston." *Journal of Urban Economics*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2009, pp. 265-78,
www.scholar.harvard.edu/glaeser/files/the_causes_and_consequences_of_land_use_regulation_evidence_from_greater_boston_2009.pdf.
- Hannah-Jones, Nikole. "Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City." *The New York Times*, 9 Jun. 2016,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/12/magazine/choosing-a-school-for-my-daughter-in-a-segregated-city.html>.
- Hsieh, Chang-Tai and Enrico Moretti. "Housing Constraints and Spatial Misallocation." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, May 2017,
www.nber.org/papers/w21154.pdf.
- Ihlanfeldt, Kevin. "Exclusionary Land-use Regulations within Suburban Communities: A Review of the Evidence and Policy Prescriptions." *Urban Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2004, pp. 261-83, doi:10.1080/0042098032000165244.
- Logan, John and Brian Stults. "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census." *Diversity and Disparities Project*, Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences, 24 Mar. 2011. Brown University,
<https://s4.ad.brown.edu/Projects/Diversity/Data/Report/report2.pdf>.
- Pendall, Rolf. "Local Land Use Regulation and the Chain of Exclusion." *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 66, no. 2, pp. 125-42.
- Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing, 2017.
- Rothstein, Richard and Emily Badger. "The Color of Law." SPUR, 4 Oct. 2017, Oakland, CA. Live Guest Interview.
- Rothwell, Jonathan and Douglas Massey. "The Effect of Density Zoning on Racial Segregation in U.S. Urban Areas." *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 44, no. 6, 2009, pp. 779-806. Sage Journals,
www.journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1078087409334163.

- Shertzer, Allison, Tate Twinam, and Randall Walsh. "Race, Ethnicity, and Discriminatory Zoning." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2016, pp. 217-46. American Economic Association, www.pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/app.20140430.
- "Single Family Residential Zoning Standards." *Plans and Guidelines*, City of Fremont. www.fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/36302/R-1-Zoning-Standards.
- United States General Accounting Office. *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*. General Accounting Office, 1983, www.gao.gov/assets/150/140159.pdf.
- Whittemore, Andrew. "The Experience of Racial and Ethnic Minorities with Zoning in the United States." *Journal of Planning Literature*, vol. 32, 2017, pp. 16-27. Sage Journals, www.journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0885412216683671.

LUCAS MELO '22SEAS is pursuing a major in Computer Science with a focus on applications to biological research. Born in Brazil, he now lives in the East Bay, California with his dog and family.