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Acknowledgements

The journal before you embodies the collective efforts and times of many devoted and passionate individuals. We, the SocialEyes eBoard members, would like to express our deepest appreciation to those who have shown us unyielding support and guidance throughout the year 2016-2017.

We would first like to thank Dr. Michael Malec and Dr. Charles Derber of the Sociology Department, who are the previous and current faculty advisors of SocialEyes. Both have skillfully guided the eBoard members and the journal in general. Their encouragement and expertise were invaluable throughout the school year. Thank you so much for your guidance!

We would also like to thank our graduate student advisor, Caliesha Comley, for her enthusiasm, attentive editing skills, and dedication to the successful launch of the journal. Caliesha is a third year Ph.D. student in the Boston College Sociology Department. Bravo to her for bringing back the tradition of editing workshop to SocialEyes!

Talking about the editing workshop, we would like to thank Dr. Andrew Jorgenson of the Sociology Department for leading the workshop. Your feedbacks and ideas gave us valuable insights into how we can better manage the journal in the future. We hope to have more of your brilliant workshops next year!

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Before thanking our staffs, we would like to acknowledge Minji Kwon, our journal designer, for her wonderful works on the cover and the overall design of the journal. Minji is a freshman in the Seoul National University Design Department, majoring in visual design. Her brilliant artistic sense and flexibility to work with our tight schedule helped us make this journal a success.

Finally, we are truly indebted to our zealous authors and editing staffs for their unwavering commitment to SocialEyes. Each very smart individual bravely shared their works, adroitly reviewed the paper, and gracefully accepted others’ opinions, which led to much powerful writing. Their hard work, intellect, and sociological insights were crucial to the publication of this issue 8.

“I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks...”

-William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night
Editor's introduction

Welcome to the eighth issue of SocialEyes. SocialEyes is the undergraduate journal published under the Sociology Department of Boston College. The journal was first published to not only showcase scholarly talent within the Sociology Department but to also create a forum for sociological discussion among the undergraduate community.

In this issue, our journal cover explains the theme. If you did not interpret the illustration on the cover already, it is depicting a human body trapped inside different frames. Due to distinctive shapes and sizes of the frames, the human body we see is distorted and in general, seems very uncomfortable.

In this society, especially in this time of political turmoil, we find many sociological issues coming up to surface, such as the racism, economic inequality, environmental issues, gender inequality, and discrimination based on religious belief. However, due to the uncomfortable nature of these problems, we tend to intentionally walk away from them.

Through our eighth issue, I hope the readers will be stirred to start a healthy dialogue on many sociological issues our scholarly works present.

Onward,

Jihyun Lee
Editor-in-Chief

Cover photo: “Trapped” by Minji Kwon
Dear Dov Charney,

Upon first glance, these American Apparel advertisements certainly did not strike me as shoe ads. If your aim was to sell shoes, why was it necessary to make the images sexual? American Apparel ads are provocative, racy, and over the top, yet you still manage to get away with them. Your propagation of the dehumanization of women is ironic, considering your company’s mission is to break the pattern of labor exploitation. American Apparel prides itself on reasserting ethics and good values in the labor industry as well as creating a healthy environment for its workers. The company tries to bring humanity and respect back into the workplace, and yet it is degrading women in its ads. Through this particular series of shoe advertisements, you create a sense of threatening patriarchal power.

While your ads may capture the attention of potential consumers, they ultimately represent something more than effective advertising. These images create a violent juxtaposition, portraying women as less-than-human objects, and men as hegemonic heterosexual figures.

Let me enlighten you as to how these images affected me, a 21-year-old female. In the first ad, my focus is drawn to a woman’s flawless, curvy body that is minimally covered by a red, skintight dress (Figure 1). It seems as though her garment has been lifted to expose her rear to the man positioned behind her, providing him with direct access to her body. One could even interpret the man’s shoe as a phallic symbol, which would pose a more serious concern, implying that the male was an intruder. This intrusion could be sexual or emotional. Is American Apparel promoting sexual assault and violence through this “shoe” advertisement? What bothers me most is that the male places his shoe on her bottom as if she is a footrest made for...
his comfort and temporary use. She is subservient and would even succumb to the man’s command if the bottom of his shoes were coated in mud.

The female kneels and the man stands behind her, indicating masculine superiority. Although their faces are not in the shot, their body placement suggests that the man is nowhere in her field of vision, only he can perceive what is happening and only he can control what is to happen. Violence ensues from this scene, as the man puts his shoe on the woman’s bare bottom. What comes next, perhaps a kick? As Jean Kilbourne argues, the combination of sex and violence is so widespread that it appears “normal” to anyone who engages in modern-day media (Kilbourne 286). The relationship between sex and violence is perpetuated and normalized by the media. You support her claim by communicating that being a male grants one the right of authority over women, dominance that justifies violence. I found this image to portray the message that it is acceptable for men to kick women in the rear; it is normal to tame them as if they were animals. However, American Apparel’s focus is supposed to be on the marketing of shoes. Why, then, is the woman’s backside such a prominent feature? In fact, the only visible part of the woman’s shoes is a minute part of the shoe back and heels. Even though the man’s leg, foot, and shoe take up merely a fraction of the frame, his control still governs the situation. Mr. Charney, females are not objects for men to use at their leisure and disposal; rather they are beings of equal authority and ability.

In figure 2 the woman stands, hands on her hips, resembling a mannequin, inanimate and merely used for display. Stationed, leaning against a wall, a man tugs the woman’s dress up
and spreads his fingers wide across her thigh. The lack of motion and statuesque posture of the woman insinuates that she is not thrilled about being involved in the act. Stereotypically, the male initiates and owns the situation. Once again, the female is deprived of her ability to see the male, submissive and obedient to her commander. His legs are spread apart as the woman stands, feet together, in front of him. The woman’s long, slender legs capture the viewer’s attention rather than the seemingly extraneous shoes located at the bottom of the image (Figure 2).

In the third image, placing the American Apparel logo in front of the male’s genital area is strategic for an underwear ad...not a shoe ad. Lying on her back or upside down, the woman has her legs opened wide apart for the male’s pleasure. Although her legs are cut off from the knee up, it is still assumed that she is wearing the flaming hot, red dress. His hands grasp her ankles in a gesture of complete dominance. His button-down shirt, tie, and dress pants imply he is a professional individual, one who exudes supremacy, wealth, and success. Is this potential position of corporate power really enough to justify the situation? The woman is positioned with no possibility of liberation. She is confined, helpless and vulnerable. Do you truly think this is a fair or accurate representation of American women (Figure 3)?

Dismembering the woman’s body parts in these ads and placing her in subordinate positions denigrates her as a human being. Pieces of her body are colonized for consumption. Ads like these influence the tendency of women to intently focus on specific parts of their bodies and seek to improve their overall ascetic. They constantly remind women that they should work for sleek legs, a taught rear, and a flat stomach. Your ads imply that females are commoditized and each part of their body contributes to their ultimate value. This pressure is inundating.

Considering that the fourth image attempts to empower women, it does not fit the series quite as well. American Apparel suggests to its potential consumers that women are good for something: sexual gratification. You chose to feature this ad as if you’re trying to reconcile the male dominance present in the other three ads in the series, but happen to accomplish quite the opposite.
The American Apparel logo in this image is printed in red, whereas the other three are printed in black. Red matches the female’s dress and is an enticing and passionate color. This is the only ad that draws attention to the female’s supposed dominance, or so you want viewers to believe. The male lies comfortably on the floor as the woman kneels, arched like a cat, in between his legs. Controlling the situation does not make her any more authoritative, as she remains merely an object to be used sexually. Placing her on top of the man puts her in a position of control, but only in a sexual way; it simply confines her to her presumed gender role. The woman is portrayed as aesthetically pleasing for the male, meant for his enjoyment, merely an object to be used sexually at the man’s discretion. This American Apparel series evokes pathos. The provocative portrayal of sexuality forces uncomfortable feelings upon the viewer. To appeal is to entice and interest, but not to offend. There is beauty in the female body and in human interaction, yet this must be styled in a respectful way (Figure 4).

I understand that sex sells, but in what way is sex related to these shoes? Would buying these shoes empower males to enhance their sense of hegemonic masculinity and dominant position in society? I gather this prospect is appealing to some men, but not only is it unlikely, it is a disrespectful and irrational supposition. There is a voyeur within all of us, but these ads are too extreme, they embolden the binary existing between males and females to an unrealistic extent. Stand up against our existing misogynistic advertising culture and your apparel will appeal to an entirely diverse world of clientele; your decision will contribute to an unprecedented level of overall success.

Sincerely,

Marissa Venuto

REFERENCES


Different Patriarchies, Same Feminism:
The Struggle to Achieve and Maintain Intersectionality

Christina King
Christina is a junior from Southern California in the Sociology Department and Social Work School. She is pursuing a career as a trauma clinician, and is interested in using an intersectional framework in both her work at the Women’s Center and in future UGBC and social work placements. This paper was originally written with the support of the Amanda V. Houston Travelling Grant, supervised by Professor Zine Magubane in the sociology department. It is beyond grateful for all of the support she has received from friends, family, and professors in this undertaking.

Introduction
This exploratory study focuses on women’s experiences with race, socioeconomic status, and gender, the differences between women in historically racialized patriarchies, and the methods for implementing intersectional feminism in traditionally oppressive systems. Utilizing interviews from women across racial and age lines in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Johannesburg, South Africa, this study reveals conflicting narratives of what it means to be a woman in the 22-year-old democracy. Using Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s “color-blind racism” as a theoretical framework, the research reveals that women from different racial and ethnic groups failed to recognize the most significant issues for other social groups, though common ground was expressed in terms of modern gender oppression. Further, a phenomenon referred to as “Black gratitude” recurred amongst Black respondents, illustrated by women’s emphasis on gratitude for
racism that was at least an improvement from apartheid.

In the words of Justice Albie Sachs of the South African Constitutional Court, these feminists are certainly different than ones who “divide neatly into two classes, those who are anti-appearance and those who enjoy dressing attractively and with flair” (Sachs, 1990). Surrounded by a culture in which submission to men was described as respect by one interviewee, the question of how to improve the gender equality movements in South Africa and beyond proved to be increasingly complex given the environment and issues addressed. The numerous patriarchies, tribes, races, ethnicities and social positions of the women interviewed highlighted a number of hindrances to the intersectional feminist movement, especially within the historical context of the new democracy.

**Historical Background**

To paraphrase the words of Imam Omar Rashied, a text is only as intolerant as its reader. In Apartheid South Africa, then, the Bible became as discriminatory as the Dutch Reformed theologians who supported the separation of races, just as God separated the water from the land. Finding a holy command for their own discrimination against Black South Africans, the National Party government used this model as a springboard for their legal structure, most cruelly implemented under P.W. Botha’s 1977 Total Strategy (Gobodo Madikizela, 2003). Building upon socio-economic inequalities already existing from a history of domination, this Strategy utilized countless laws that strengthened the Apartheid government’s micro-management of Black and Colored lives. Interracial relations were policed through the Immorality Act and Mixed Marriages Act, education with the Bantu Education Act, and even real estate with the Group Areas Act (Gobodo Madikizela, 2003). Botha’s infamous reign reshaped Black life in South Africa for decades.

In particular, the Group Areas Act legalized and executed community demolitions, one of the damaging methods of splitting up Black families. Likewise, while Blacks were sent away to rural townships and informal settlements, white suburbs remained a hotbed of economic activity for service level jobs. Without consistent or affordable transportation, Black men were forced to move away from their wives and children for months, even years, at a time. This separation forced women to become the center of their separated communities because the government ensured that Black families could not travel with the male suburb.

---

1 In the South African context, white, Black, and Colored (Mixed Race) are the three major racial categories which I will refer to throughout this study. White refers to those with primarily European ancestry, Black refers to those with primarily African ancestry, and Colored refers primarily to those who are of multiracial ancestry; “Women of Color” will be used to refer to both Black and Colored women, while “Colored” will refer only to the South African racial category. Throughout, white will remain uncapitalized and Black and Colored will remain capitalized. It has been used this way in literature because Black and Colored connote social, cultural and ancestral groups in different ways than white is referred to in this context.
laborer. This left women, children, and elderly as the only township residents under these laws. With the trouble of sending money back, visiting children, running churches, and controlling households, women were forced to bear many traditionally male roles, becoming financiers, single parents, church board members, and backbones of their broken families. Though church bishops, priests, and pastors were still male roles, a majority of the work, organization, and implementation was accomplished through female labor. In the words of South African poet, Antjie Krog, “there is a lot of anger about women—because women do not have the authority, but often they have a lot of power” (2000).

February 11, 1990, marked the rapid decline of the Apartheid system in many ways as Nelson Mandela was freed from 27 years of imprisonment (Gobodo Madikizela, 2003). Just four years later, after 46 years of separateness, Mandela went from wanted political prisoner to national liberator president, initiating a number of changes with his reign. The hero himself “spoke in strong terms about the importance of eliminating gender discrimination,” noting the significance of such a change for the reconstruction of a nation (Magubane, 1996). Due to the leadership of activists like Mandela, women in South Africa now have the most explicit rights on the entire continent, including protections through the Commission on Gender Equity and the Office on the Status of Women in the President’s Office (Magubane, 1996).

The new South Africa initiated commitment to gender equality through one of the world’s most progressive and inclusive constitutions. Protecting citizens from discrimination on any account, the document was naturally designed to build a “non-racist” society in the aftermath of Apartheid, however, Justice Sachs had a larger vision for democratic equality. The Justice considered “one of few proudly non-racial institutions in South Africa [to be] patriarchy” (Magubane, 1996). This belief became the foundation for his advocacy during the Constitutional conventions in the early days of the new democracy. The new South Africa was intended to be different, and thus the constitution states a non-racist and non-sexist order as the national identity. Though a momentary win for feminists globally, the promises of race and sex nondiscrimination have yet to be achieved nearly two decades later. As will be demonstrated by the results of this study, there is still much work to be done in the fight against racism, sexism, and colonialism in the new South Africa.

Sociological Background
A prominent South African academic, Charles Villa-Vicencio argued that “even where a constitutional or legal framework for human rights is instituted, those who were excluded are unable to embrace the opportunities that the new dispensation offers them” (2009). Considering cultural, economic, familial, religious, and other social factors, one respondent described women’s power as continuing to teeter between African and woman, illustrating both promising victories and maintained oppression in the new South
Africa. Before proceeding, a number of terms will be defined and contextualized to frame interview responses and analysis.

**Intersectionality**

Defined by American civil rights advocate, Kimberle Crenshaw, in the 1980s, intersectionality was officially introduced in her work on violence against women of color in the United States. Noting that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference...but rather the opposite — that it frequently conflates and ignores intragroup differences,” (1993) Crenshaw describes hierarchies of privilege and oppression even within gender and racial groups. For example, women’s rights are often conceptualized as a homogenous concern, missing the differences between liberation for Black women versus white women versus women with disabilities, and so on. In this way, Crenshaw describes how “women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism,” thus coining the term intersectionality (1993).

**Intersectional Feminism**

Concerned with advocacy for gender equality through personal, social, economic, and political spheres, feminism has been increasingly criticized for its focus on white, straight, and otherwise socially normative women. Crenshaw developed a theory that supports a feminism that recognizes difference within groups thus preventing tension among groups, an intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1993). By recognizing the varying intersections of oppression and privilege between Black and white women, straight women and queer women, queer women of color and queer white women, and so on, “difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction” (Crenshaw, 1993). Considering the fact that racism and sexism intersect in identities, but rarely in anti-racist or feminist practices, intersectional feminism poses the possibility of reaching social empowerment and reconstruction by honoring difference rather than denying it.

**White Privilege**

For the purpose of this study, I will specifically be concerned with intersectional identities of race and gender, though each individual stands at the crossroads of various means of oppression and privilege. Specifically looking at antiracist efforts, white privilege is one such example of how social capital is often overlooked within feminist circles. Defined as “the power and ability to willfully ignore the other,” Professor Zine Magubane of Boston College illustrates the gaps between women’s movements, LGBTQ+ movements, and anti-racist movements in South Africa (2013). More specifically, “black feminists have been expressing frustration at the seeming blindness of feminist theory to their histories and experiences” (Magubane, 2013), which points to the reality that liberation
movements often enforce social hierarchies, domination, and control in their wake. Depicted throughout this study in a number of ways, the overwhelming lack of awareness white women had in regard to women of color’s issues is an example of white privilege at play in society.

**Color-blind Racism**

Having defined aspects of structural and overt formations of sexism and racism globally, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offers a social process “color-blind racism.” Though Bonilla-Silva writes from the perspective of the United States after the Civil Rights Movement, the history and theory parallels South Africa’s dichotomy of persistent racist structures and proclaimed democratic equality. In the South African context, racism is minimized and even denied as the cause of Black and Colored oppression, creating large rifts between white, Black, and Colored women within the formation and action of South Africa’s intersectional feminism. By asserting the causes of prejudice and institutional discrimination to be factors periphery to race (merit especially, but also biology, status quo, preference, etc.), racist structures persists but prevailing discourse ignores race, hence racism, blind to color. Communities will tend to use seemingly non-racial tools and rhetoric to maintain racist structures as constitutionally equal. Racism in this theory is covert, in that it is racism maintained by white women and even by women of color despite their own experiences. This new racism is a “powerful ideology that justifies contemporary racial inequality and thus [helps] maintain systemic white privilege” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This theory is organized into four subcategories: abstract liberalism, naturalization, the biologization of culture, and the minimization of race. Abstract liberalism refers to the use of logic to remove oneself from responsibility of racial inequalities. In everyday interactions, abstract liberalism is like white denial. If you were born after Apartheid it must have nothing to do with you, if you do not personally practice methods of discrimination then you cannot be in a racist society. The “myth of meritocracy” is a tool of abstract liberalism that is often evoked to rationalize racist structures of society. Especially in systems promising progressive and radical equality of all citizens, the belief that hard work and skill result in equivalent opportunity for achievement often covers existing racism or sexism. Abstract liberalism blames structural ills on individual flaws and understands the persistence of Black townships, for example, as individuals’ failure to work hard enough to free themselves from poverty, rather than the system’s failure to support oppressed populations.

**Naturalization**

Naturalization is another color-blind tool, encountered in phrases like “that’s the way it is” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Used to justify various racial realities, including housing segregation, social separation, and the like,
naturalization assumes that racialized groups prefer being amongst themselves, living amongst themselves, or being away from other racialized groups because that is inherent in their nature. For example, some white respondents in this study referred to Black peers’ behavior as exclusive, stating that they would rather be with other Black or colored students because it was more comfortable. In this way, historical and current realities are chalked up to naturally occurring phenomenon rather than politically created inequality and racism.

**Biologization of Culture**

The biologization of culture runs along the same lines as naturalization. This process works to rationalize struggle as a result of presumed cultural practices that are “fixed features” of a specific group (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). For example, one respondent refers to Black persons as “a race of handouts,” blaming mass poverty in Black communities on the presumed fixed laziness of the entire race. Speaking instead of a “culture of poverty” or a “culture of lazy” than of Black people in particular, the biologization of culture functions to blame the outcomes of racism on the victims of racism, again denying white complicity without ever using the word race.

**Minimization of Race/Racism**

Minimization of race, or the minimization of racism, refers to a belief that discrimination has all but disappeared because all are equal under constitutional democracies. Bonilla-Silva argues that in general white people are more likely than Black people to hold this belief, though the results of this study suggest a more complex story. Discussed more specifically in the study’s results, the minimization of race proves especially salient in societies that have equality written into their very structures, resulting in cognitive dissonance between persistent race or gender inequality and the sworn structure of equality nationally.

**Black Gratitude**

With these four color-blind techniques in mind, this study reveals a phenomenon I refer to as Black gratitude. Similar to the minimization of race, Black gratitude refers to the emphasis Black women have placed on their comparatively better racial standing since the end of the Apartheid regime. Preferring to avoid, or even deny, the existence of current racist structures and inequalities, numerous respondents claimed that matters had so improved that there is essentially racial equality. Valuing their relative social position, respondents likely to be oppressed by the intersection of sexism and racism often minimized the role of racism in their responses, noting their gratitude for President Mandela and the new democracy. Additionally, Black gratitude can also refer to the abstract liberalist claim that hard work, resilience, and individual attitude can overcome inequality, blaming the outcomes of structural oppression on individual failings.
The myth of meritocracy pervaded a number of responses. Personal stories of individuals’ success and resilience were used to refute claims to existing racism or even sexism. Black gratitude was reflected in the data as an additional form of color-blind rhetoric, suggesting that Bonilla-Silva’s examples of white color-blind rhetoric have been so structurally and historically embedded that even Black communities enforce, internalize, and minimize their oppression. This term will be used to demonstrate the difficulty of achieving an intersectional approach to gender equality when existing inequalities are denied.

**Method**

This exploratory study researched what factors have facilitated struggle for the feminist movement in South Africa. Interviews of about 10-20 minutes were conducted in various locations throughout Cape Town, Pretoria, and Johannesburg, South Africa, utilizing accidental sampling at the Universities of Cape Town and Pretoria, justice centers, outdoor malls, various township churches, and local mosques, and other locations.

In general, interviews began with basic demographic questions, followed by inquiries regarding how the respondent’s life might be different as a woman from a different race, in a different social location, or as a man. A majority of respondents were asked about their connections with women unlike themselves if they identified as feminists, and how they would define the feminist movement. The conversational style of interviews resulted in different questions for every participant. Questions focused on issues of conflict between different feminisms, variances between different social classifications, and changing issues for those who experienced both life under Apartheid and life under democracy. In this way, women from various age cohorts, races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses (coded as SES), and religions were interviewed as a means to understand the intersections of both current and historical tensions between women nationally. Throughout the study, interview questions varied with the encounter of unexpected factors, information, and opinions regarding feminism, though all explored women’s experiences through their roles in relevant social settings (household, university, occupational placement, etc.), the impact of race, ethnicity, and social class on their roles, as well as the impact of gender on their livelihood.

**Coding Process**

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, individual respondent’s answers were carefully examined to determine major themes, emphases, or points of tension. Accounting for varying levels of both English language and education on feminist issues, what one woman may have referred to as “the African patriarchy” may be described as “a culture where men are in charge and women do as they are told,” by another respondent. This is just one example of the variations in answers that may have been coded in the same way.

Next, the various codes derived
from each interview were grouped and compared across interviews from different age ranges, races, and the intersections of the two. In this way, women’s experiences were coded into common themes and concerns across all 29 interviews, illustrating variations, misunderstandings, and rifts between women of differently intersecting identities. Narrowed down to the 9 most common answers from all respondents, these can be used to reflect trends in larger intersectional feminist discourse in South Africa and beyond, revealing challenges for collectivization, unity, and a powerful liberation movement.

Results
Chart 1: Responses by Racial Category

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</table>
INITIAL REPRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The charts represent the coded data from all 29 interviews. All respondents identified as women, while five women identified as white, fifteen as Black, and nine as Colored. Eleven women were in the 18-22 age category, or “Free Borns,” who never lived under Apartheid; twelve women in the 23-35 category, who experienced Apartheid up until their teenage years; two women as the 36-59 age group, who experienced Apartheid through their teenage years and on; and four in the 60+ age group, who were closest to experiencing Apartheid during its entire implementation. Due to lacking data for all racial groups, age range 36-59 has been stricken from this analysis, a limitation to be addressed in future studies. Additionally, white women are missing from the 23-35 age range while Colored women are missing from the 60+ age group, again demonstrating limitations of this data.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THEMES

Yes a Feminist

A majority of participants were explicitly asked whether they identified
as feminists and how they would define feminism. No white woman interviewed said they would identify as a feminist, while over half of Colored women and almost a third of Black women claimed to be. Respondents gave various definitions and understandings of feminism, from “gender equality” to “man-hating,” and variations were distributed across race and age lines. An aversion to perceived radicalism of feminism was repeated by numerous respondents. This was particularly prevalent among younger women, as about half of 36-60+ women said they would identify as feminists, compared with about a quarter of 22-36-year-olds. For women who may have experienced a longer Apartheid legacy (26-60+ year-olds), radicalism may be identified with liberation or freedom fighting, while for younger women, radicalism may be related to violence or trouble. This suggests that generational gaps exist in even the vocabulary of the feminist movement, where some women see “feminism” as different than “equality,” but congruous with “radicalism.” However, all Colored women between the ages of 18-22 considered themselves

**Chart 3: Responses by Age Group and Racial Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 18-22 white (n=4)</th>
<th>Age 23-35 white (n=0)</th>
<th>Ages 60+ white (n=1)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Black (n=5)</td>
<td>Black (n=3)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colored (n=2)</td>
<td>Colored (n=7)</td>
<td>Colored (n=0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes a feminist</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat a feminist</td>
<td>4 0 0</td>
<td>0 2 3</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things as Easier for Men</td>
<td>4 3 2</td>
<td>0 3 3</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape Culture</td>
<td>2 2 0</td>
<td>0 0 3</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing as Oppressive</td>
<td>1 1 0</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialized Inequality Exists</td>
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<td>0 2 6</td>
<td>0 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiered Inequality Exists</td>
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<td>0 0 2</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Work is a Serious Issue</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and SES overlap</td>
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<td>0 1 4</td>
<td>1 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/ SES as the Cause of Racial Differences</td>
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<td>0 2 0</td>
<td>1 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Culture as Dated</td>
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<td>0 2 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ Gender are Equal</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
feminists, reflecting a willingness to be considered “radical” not present in other younger respondents. As is suggested in further analysis of responses, Colored women were the most likely to recognize the existence and intersections of racism, classism, and sexism in their society, revealing a Colored resistance to the myth of equality and color-blindness perpetuated by white South Africans and, as the data revealed, internalized by Black women.

Somewhat a Feminist
For the response of “somewhat,” women noted their interest in gender equity, not equality, as certain jobs or sports were better suited for male bodies. In other words, while gender equality was viewed as a means of denying the differences between genders, gender equity was represented as a recognition of the differences between genders that also promotes a fair society for all South Africans. A number of women explained that they would somewhat consider themselves feminists, but not full feminists, as they did not view themselves as radical as their idea of feminists. In the words of one respondent, she was a “feminist in her own right,” neither man-hating nor radical, but interested in equity for women in her culture and tradition. One Muslim woman noted that many aspects of the feminist movement conflicted with her religion, including the liberal nature of the bra-burning movement. Nevertheless, she was passionate about respect and equity for women, creating her own Muslim feminism in response to movements she saw as too flamboyant or radical.

This perception of radicalism also created hesitance and various definitions of feminism across cultures, races, and ages. All but one white respondent qualified that they were somewhat a feminist, illustrating the distance between white communities and assumed radicalism. Additionally, the history of understanding “radicals” as those who ended Apartheid may also account for the increased number of Black and Colored feminists when compared with white data, alongside the fact that a majority of white participants were in the 18-22 age group, represented as less “radical” across all races in the data.

Things are Easier for Men
In a number of ways women identified that matters were easier for men, whether in terms of job opportunities, power within the home, or dominance in religious traditions. For white women, almost every respondent described men in terms of being “more attractive” to employers, having “more fun” at university, caring less about grades and performance, or as a force against the “more vulnerable” gender of women. Similarly, two-thirds of Colored women noted the ease with which men achieve occupational goals, men’s sense of being “entitled” to anything, the danger of being a woman alone at night, and other factors that compared the increased livability of men’s lives. Half of Black respondents gave similar examples, describing cultural, religious, and racial mechanisms that create a society in which men are seen as “superior,” even through violent means. Overlapping with factors that contribute to rape culture, these responses primarily focused on economic, educational, and familial inequalities between men and women.
Regardless of race, women most easily connected on the issue of gender inequality, over 50% in any race, whether a Muslim engineer or a Black domestic worker, noting that matters were easier for men. Further, within the 18-22 age bracket, all white and Colored respondents and two-thirds of Black respondents recognized gender inequality, revealing a promising basis of connection for national feminist movements. Nevertheless, this study also reveals that there is lacking recognition and acknowledgment of issues relevant to specific racial experiences, suggesting that white women, in particular, were attuned to experiences of sexism but not racism. Demonstrating a failure to recognize the intersections within women’s experiences, there is room for improvement in building a feminism that goes beyond homogenized oppression of women and rather supports all women at all levels of inequality.

**Rape Culture**

Defined by United States’ feminists in the 1970s, rape culture is “a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women” around the world (WAVAW Rape Crisis Center, 2014). Exemplified in a number of covert and obvious ways, rape culture includes mention of women’s general fear for their safety, the hyper-sexualization of women in media, or the normalization of violence, among other anecdotes. Touching upon these themes, respondents’ mentions of rape culture varied greatly, including everything from one respondent’s experience of a friend who had been raped, to the description of the “scariest thing” being a group of men walking toward a woman at night. According to the results, about half of white respondents, about a third of Colored respondents, and about a third of Black respondents recognized rape culture in their experiences. Additionally, a majority of responses revolved around street harassment, college campus violence, or domestic violence, illustrated by the recognition primarily by 18-35 year-olds. The 60+ age group also recognized these factors of safety and sexual violence in their communities, illustrating the widespread nature of this factor.

**Clothing as Oppressive**

Whether Muslim women's hijabs, traditional Zulu clothing, or age and race-based expectations for women’s clothing, a number of respondents noted the oppressive nature of some fashion norms within cultures and religions. A number of non-Muslim women expressed their concerns over the perceived forced conservatism of the hijab, and likewise, Zulu clothing expectations were described as an entirely different “persona” for one “city girl.” Clothing was further described as a way for women to both “show respect” and be deserving of respect. Additionally, one respondent described the expectation of older women of color to cover up at a certain age, a norm not enforced for white women.

About half of white women addressed the issue of oppressive fashion while few to no Black and Colored women did, illustrating the outsider view of white women regarding women of color. For example, one white respondent described Muslim women as “being told what to do,” specifically noting the extreme restriction she saw in regards to the burka. Another white
woman noted how unfair she thought it was that Muslim women had to dress so conservatively while men did not, especially in the summer heat. Nearly every Muslim woman I spoke with identified as Colored, and only one of these women ever mentioned the issue of oppression as a result of clothing. On the other hand, Black women from Zulu families did identify oppression from the friction between traditional culture and the modern day, illustrating varying perspectives on clothing between women of different backgrounds.

**Domestic Work Identified as a Major Issue**

Almost a quarter of Black respondents spoke about the hardship of domestic work, a historically Black occupation that often leaves Black children alone while their mothers attend to white families. Bluntly, one respondent asked who came to take care of her kids when she left every morning to care for her boss’ white children. In this way, women across the age spectrum recognized the impact of domestic work on Black families from the perspective of grandchild, child, parent, or grandparent. Still, only black women spoke on this widespread plight within their community, again demonstrating a lack of awareness or empathy from less involved Colored or white women.

**Referred to Rural Culture as Dated**

Along the same lines, Black respondents specifically cited rural, Black African culture to be in “old ways.” Mentioning stereotypical gender roles, the prizing of men over women, and the emphasis of conservatism and subservience, the power of traditional norms were emphasized as a source of gender inequality. Additionally, all of these remarks were from women between the ages of 18 and 36, suggesting tension between aged tradition and the younger generation even within a single racial category.

**Racialized Inequality Exists**

Identified through statements that matters were “easier” for white people, including that there are greater “opportunities” or “power” for white persons, respondents noted ever-present inequality and rampant racism in the new South Africa. One respondent described the pressure to perform white culture in privileged “white spaces” and “white structures,” even to the extent that she felt coerced to reject Black culture for the purpose of assimilation. This respondent specifically noted that the first question folks in Cape Town ask, after noting one’s racial identity, is, “where are you from?” One’s response to this question would reveal either a Black, Colored, or white neighborhood, one’s socioeconomic status, and so on, leading to value judgments by other university students.

It is significant to note that every respondent between the ages of 18 and 22 identified a tie between race and socioeconomic status, and nearly three-quarters of these respondents noted that racialized inequality still exists. This reflects a rise in awareness of the existence of racism by the new guard of activists and citizens in South Africa, suggesting that color-blind rhetoric has proven less appealing to Free Borns. However, when broken down further into racial groups, only a quarter of white women ages 18-22, less than half of Black women, and all of Colored women noted racism as a cause of inequality.
As will be further explained in the following three themes, white and Black resistance to name racism as an intersection of inequality suggests the power of “raceless racism” in South Africa, perhaps less prevalent in Colored communities as they have maintained relatively stable privilege and oppression since the days of Apartheid. It is also significant to recognize that, though limited by a small sample size, all Black women ages 60+ identified the existence of racial inequality and the tie between race and socioeconomic status. Varying from data that suggests the internalization of color-blind structures, there is a wide range of women that includes those who most recognize the persistence of inequality created under Apartheid. Especially considering the roles of Black women over the age of 60 as community leaders and decision-makers in Black church congregations and townships, those who played large roles in resisting the Apartheid regime would naturally include a diversity of thought, including those who do and do not see the struggle continuing today.

**Race and Socioeconomic Status Overlap**

Noting racialized privileges in their society, another respondent described white communities as “owning the world” while Black communities sustained an “eroded sense of self” due to the history of Apartheid and structural violence. Nearly all Colored women and nearly half of Black women identified racist structures or history as the cause of existing inequality. Older women were also more likely to identify these inequalities because they experienced discrimination under Apartheid. As a result, though many women mentioned the existence of inequality, recognition of racism as a perpetrator of inequality has been coded separately to represent persons who saw the correlation of race and poverty without recognizing racism as the cause of the connection.

One woman identified the phenomenon of “Black poverty,” yet attributed this reality to a culture of laziness and a “race of handouts” rather than a structure of racism. Only one white woman recognized the racist root of inequality while half recognized a correlation between race and socioeconomic status. In other words, all but one white woman claimed cultural differences, social norms, or preference of lifestyle were causes of racialized inequality, defaulting to the biologization of culture and naturalization to identify the cause of inequality. This is especially significant considering that a quarter of Black respondents used such color-blind rhetoric to explain the intersection of race and class issues while no Colored respondents did, reflecting the prevalence of color-blind racism perpetuated by white women and internalized by Black women. This was further exemplified through Black women’s comments that reproduced the myth of meritocracy, anecdotally mentioning a resistance to “give up,” a willingness to put oneself out there, and a “can-do” mindset to achieve success. Respondents exhibited a belief in color-blind rhetoric through such comments, as well as statements affirming equality since Mandela’s rise or inequality as strictly raceless and class-based. Colored women, however, were most likely to recognize the intersections between racism and classism, perhaps reflecting a lesser internalization of color-blind rhetoric as a result of their middle-status as neither Black nor white citizens.
**Tiered Inequality Exists**

Diving deeper into the specifics of South Africa’s racial hierarchy, a third of Colored respondents described racial inequality as “tiered,” alluding to the Apartheid history that privileged white persons most, Colored persons “in the middle,” and Black persons the least. The data suggest that this racial hierarchy is most understood by the women experiencing it, suggesting a lack of recognition and understanding from women of different races, even among non-white women. Similar to previous themes, these comments suggest that while Black women may have internalized the denial of racism or are more concerned with gratitude, Colored persons have sustained resistance to the connections between race, class, and gender inequality. Colored respondents proved to be most vocal about the intersections of oppression and feminism today, demonstrating friction between calls to subvert the social order, white denial of privilege, and Black gratitude that affirms color-blind myths.

**Culture or Socioeconomic Status as the Cause of Racial Differences**

Many respondents identified cultural or socioeconomic factors as the cause of overall inequality, often eliciting identical responses to Bonilla-Silva’s examples of the biologization of culture. One white woman described the biological laziness in Black communities, describing them as a “race of handouts” when explaining the tie between Blackness and poverty. Additionally, when comparing the differences between white Afrikaner and white English South African women with those between white and Black South African women, another respondent said differences in lived experiences were “more about culture than race.” Similarly, Black women specifically cited “Zulu expectations” as more powerful than their Blackness, especially in terms of expectations of conservatism and household power. Including norms of conservative dress, polygamy, and gendered roles for cooking and cleaning, clan norms were cited by a number of women.

Approximately a third of Black women stated that power differences were cultural more than they were racial. On the one hand, these responses may be a testament to the strength of tribalism within South African society, illustrated by one respondent’s Zulu identity holding more personal significance than their Black identity. On the other hand, however, Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind racism may be at work in these results. An idea enforced by white supremacy, the biologization of Black culture, and not systemic and intersecting racism and sexism, is what becomes the cause of disproportionate Black poverty and violence. This thought process works to blame the victims of racism while maintaining white dominance in the process. Results of this study reveal a denial of racism by both white and Black women, suggesting a conflict between democratic equality and structural racism, as well as the white imposition of color-blind rhetoric that is internalized by Black women.

**Claim that All Races and Genders are Equal**

Similar to the color-blind rhetoric, a number of women stated that matters were equal between either men and women, between all races, or both. Often citing Nelson Mandela or
the country’s progressive constitution as proof of equality, respondents stated that women now “have a voice” or that matters have improved so extraordinarily since the days of the National Party that they could only express gratitude. One-third of total respondents claimed that matters were relatively equal for all genders and/or races, illustrating the power of both color-blind ideology and the belief that, “at least things are better,” or can be improved through enough hard work. Almost half of Black respondents claimed that matters were relatively equal across gender and race, illustrating this internalization of the denial of racism and demonstrating a structure in which other forms of inequality can be discussed (gender inequality, class inequality, etc.), but intersections, especially with racism, cannot. Black South Africans “behave according to the freedom that Mandela the president has given,” in the words of one respondent, demonstrating the existence of covert white supremacy in the understanding and structure of women’s daily lives.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations in this study, as well as possibilities for further research and development. First, an increased sample size, especially in white participants and those over the age of 22, would improve the study. The data was especially limited by the small number of women between ages 36 and 59, specifically within each racial category. Second, further information on women’s socioeconomic status, religious preference, and marital status could prove helpful in dissecting responses. The possibility of male respondents also introduces an opportunity for further understanding of the gender inequality noted by this study. Third, quantitative measures for respondents (e.g. a poll alongside interviewing) can be considered for future analysis of correlation, causation, and significance of the answers provided.

Conclusion and Implications for the Intersectional Feminist Movement

The findings in this study offer implications for the South African intersectional feminist movement, along with its hindrances. First and foremost, the increasing identification with the term feminist among older women suggests a divide between generations and the movement. Alongside data that suggest some younger women fear being associated with “radicalism,” the variances between different age groups illustrate a divide between Free Borns and those who experienced Apartheid firsthand. Young Colored women were more than willing to identify themselves with resistance to recognized forms of structural oppression, suggesting an intersection with race. Therefore, the widespread shared concerns and rhetoric around sexism and racism illustrate an opportunity for growth toward wider feminisms that can bridge the gap between the direct action of the past and both radicals and moderates of the present.

Second, the theme of color-blind racism, its rhetorical devices, and different understandings of racialized inequalities in South Africa recurred throughout this study. The denial of certain oppressions perpetuates large rifts in any intersectional movement, especially considering South Africa’s historical and present institutional racism.
and white supremacist structures. South Africa’s history of Apartheid has left residual covert forms of racial control. Further evidenced by belief in equality due to the claims of democracy and seemingly color-blind laws of South Africa, the internalization of white denial and the phenomenon of Black gratitude illustrate additional gaps between white, Black, and Colored communities. Though intragroup homogeneity cannot be claimed, the data suggest a denial of white women, the “gratitude” of Black women, and the sustained middle ground of Colored women, which fosters a hotbed of tension when attempting to collectivize and organize intersectional identities.

This study illustrates the need to address issues beyond the white, straight, middle-class patriarchy. It is critical to create intersectional feminisms that prioritize the acknowledgment of differences between and within groups of women, creating a basis for action and change against the various structures that control women’s identities. Though a Muslim woman’s balance between religious expectations and some Western rights may seem unlike a white woman’s pressure to burn her bra or become a corporate employee, a foundation for connection can only be formed with the respect for and recognition of various oppressions, cultural preferences, and social norms. By depicting the power of color-blindness has to shape experiences through denial, internalization, and misrecognition of oppression, this study leaves room for the building of intersectional feminisms on various levels and amongst all genders worldwide.
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Imagine Prisons without Bars

Tizzy Tiezazu

Tizzy is a graduating senior from the Morissey College of Arts and Science, with a specialization in Sociology and International Studies. “Imagine Prisons without Bars” was her first paper in college, on restorative justice. Since then, she has been pursuing a career in criminal justice reform. She sends her thanks to the staff of SocialEyes, who continuously strive to open the eyes of all students.

The demand for new prisons in the U.S. consistently outpaces crime and population rates. Despite stagnant crime rates, our current political climate advocates for industrial prison growth (Travis, 2014). With 2,300,000 prisoners, U.S. prisons already account for a quarter of all global inmates; approximately 40% of those prisoners are black. These individuals are supposed to be rehabilitated, educated, and released but, once incarcerated, convicts often face a different reality, which often results in high rates of recidivism. Black inmates face particularly challenging obstacles when attempting to re-enter general society. In 2005, black prisoners maintained the highest recidivism rates, with 80% of them returning to prison over the course of five years (Durose, 2014). Their race, in addition to their criminal-marked records, limits opportunities that could otherwise help support them in reestablishing life outside of prison. Black convicts have particular difficulty organizing stable lives for themselves after incarceration. If the primary function of prison is to deter crime and improve the welfare of the general public, then the criminal justice system is failing. Our prison system remains our primary strategy for controlling criminal behavior, but unfortunately, it has failed to heal inmates and their relationship with their communities effectively. Prisons emphasize control and punishment over re-integration; therefore character formation and moral development is not part of the average prison routine.

Black convicts face enormous obstacles when searching for work, compared to their non-black job competitors. Devah Pager of Northwestern University conducted an
experiment in which she sent identical resumes bearing stereotypically “white” and “black” names to various labor jobs across Milwaukee. In the end, the conclusion of the experiment reflected a profound racial bias among employers: white workers with a criminal history fared better than black workers without any criminal history on the job market, reflecting an even deeper racial prejudice. “When people think of Black men they think of a criminal. It affects the way Black men are treated in the labor market. In fact, Black testers were likely to be asked up front if they have a criminal record, while whites were rarely asked” (Pager, 2003: 959). For example, 5% of black job applicants with criminal records received callbacks from prospective jobs, while 17% of white job applicants did (Pager, 2003). Even if there’s no reason to be suspect criminal activity, black men are more likely to be labeled as potentially problematic employees, and less likely to be hired. There are many factors in addition to criminal history that can define his or her job capabilities, so where is our country’s ambition for a more convalescent judicial system?

The difference between interactions and experiences in and out of prison leads to a disparity in the meaning of certain symbolic interaction. For example, the essentialist belief that black men are violent and confrontational is inflated in jail; it is no longer a problematic stereotype. It is an established strength that aids black prisoners in establishing a sovereignty of self against violent or abusive inmates or guards. To cop-out of a fight would be a “sissy” move, resulting in assumed loss of manliness, respect, and independence. Think about it. Men, regardless if they’re incarcerated or not, police each other using the same traditional conventions of masculinity as a means to identify and correct improper behavior (Kimmel, 1994)). In prison, this has potential to bring about feared, aggravated attention. One can easily become a victim of assault or rape if as someone who will not defend him or herself. Therefore, it is crucial for new detainees to guard themselves upon their arrival. This function of violence is unnecessary outside of prison and is condemned unless as a last resort. Instead of serving as a defense mechanism, violence is used as a performance to reaffirm one’s power (e.g. fighting over a woman or parking space). This is because outside of prison, there are people, institutions, and laws that prioritize fairness and facilitate non-violent conflict resolution. Available conflict solutions can consist of fleeing, arguing, contacting the police, mediators or lawyers, locating friends and family. But who or what protects inmates? Is it appropriate to deprive prisoners of their liberty, in addition to the shame and isolation a sentence bestows upon them? Persons who are incarcerated for extended periods of time become deeply ingrained in the intensely violent culture. Imagine the issues that can potentially arise if an inmate is released without re-adjusting to a less-violent society outside of prison. The principles of life-or-death are learned
habits for survival in jail, but when applied outside of prison, they heighten the potential of recidivism.

Prison life is distinctive in that everyday living is a combination of custom and prison ethics. It is contrived of a coercive power dynamic, contrived of only a few actors. It is the unequal power relations of armed guards, high-power inmates, and lower birds. They must compete every day over terrible food, sanitary resources, private time, personal space and entertainment. These concentrated social transactions are more controlled than that of life outside of prison, yet this is the environment in which individuals are under the most surveillance. Once released, inmates face the issue of shedding the spatially based, defensive survival tactics of prison. An example of one such mismatched social interaction occurred between David, and a friend’s family member, Spike. One day, Spike was insulted by the fact that David wouldn’t break his gaze and threatened to “put him out.” I didn’t understand why at the time, but I was later told that in prison, eye contact is a measure of status. If you don’t make eye contact, you’re disregarding the person’s presence, but an extended period of eye contact indicates a desire for confrontation. The Thomas Theorem states that hypothetical situations, defined as real are real in their consequences (Thomas, 1928: 571). We can see that Spike saw David as posing a real threat and nearly acted on it. My friend, who was utterly fascinated by his behavior and is also not one to back out of a fight, could have chosen to escalate the situation. That would have brought about serious consequences for the both of them: Spike, who was on probation at the time, would have most likely returned to prison, and my friend could have been hurt. If the same exchange had occurred in jail, an altercation would have ensued to resolve the issue. For those on the outside, prison is considered a place for scum and failures. No one wants to go to jail; that would be shameful and inconvenient, and that is enough deterrent for some. Inside, inmates don’t have the means to be self-reflective: there’s little personal space, and much of one’s time is spent defending oneself. Alone time is important because it is where we define and reflect on our moral codes and criticize ourselves. When one knows one is being watched, we tend to suppress deviant attitudes because we are aware there is the potential for stigmatization. One does not abstain from deviant actions because one understands them to be wrong. By design, it is hard to be self-reflexive without relating to previous social experiences. Therefore inhumane treatment from others serves to imitate societal rejection as a means of social control. As Spike shared the details of his prison experience, he paced an eight by six perimeter that only he could see. In his mind’s eye, he was still in his cell, and the surrounding space was his territory. Anyone intruders were a potential threat and would need to be incapacitated. There is an assumption within American society that every individual is calculative; in other words meaning there is intent behind all actions.
There is also an ignorant belief in American meritocracy— that all Americans are equipped with relatively equal means of social mobility, and also equally face the distribution of punishment for transgressed actions. If someone is non-white, his or her legal transgressions are often attributed to the willful intent of the criminal. But what leads a person to commit a criminal act? Our current judicial system fails to hold judges responsible for recognizing social factors such as race, socioeconomic status, gender and existing laws when adjudicating criminal charges. Separating truth and dishonesty is difficult even without the obscurity of the politics around race, gender, disability, socioeconomic, sexuality, etc. Understanding the cognitive thought process of another individual is complicated and challenging because language and life experiences can be entirely disparate. Instead, it is much simpler to rationalize that across all playing fields, good things happen to good people, and bad people eventually will get reprimanded. Melvin Lerner, a progressive American political activist, conceived the Just World Theory where he states predictability and calculation determines an individual’s guilt (Lerner, 1980). Crimes would not be labeled as unsafe or hidebound if general society 1) didn’t think they were 2) was capable of empathizing with the justification provided, or 3) acknowledged justifications from marginalized subcultures as legitimate. More often than not, inmates are discredited and distrusted, often reducing them to modes of certainty. For example, an inmate crying out from pain or psychosis would be an indicator that he might be in pain. More believable would be blood gushing from a wound. This can be reflected in television shows such as Judge Joe Brown, and forensic shows such as Law and Order where proof of innocence is determined solely by physical evidence. Convicts today are assumed to be driven by calculative motives and therefore openly rejecting assimilation to society. Our understanding of prison is rooted in the belief that prison is the place for justice. If this understanding is to be publicly challenged, then the general public must also see its inefficiency in helping prison residents get back on their feet once they are released. Unfortunately, our system reflects an aversion to providing education of moral codes as a means of adjusting behavior because it is regarded as an ineffective means of improving behavior.

A controversial critique of our judicial system is that it provides equal treatment for all. I will focus on racial inequality, and prison’s notorious “colorblindness.” Research suggests that the criminal justice system is in actuality not colorblind. African-Americans makeup only 30% of this country’s populace but account for 60% of prison inmates (Recidivism of Prisoners of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005, Bureau of Justice Statistics). Neutrality seems ideal for a place of judgment, but it reinforces racial domination by disregarding the socio-historical impact of race relations here in the U.S. (Tatum, 1992: 5)). An asymmetric system then
will overlook linked objectives such as a large displaced population looking to improve their economic mobility. This does not mean the majority is to blame. I would argue that the majority is instead ignorant of the costs of socio-economic mobility for minority groups. Social currents demand assimilation, which requires distancing oneself from one’s culture, family values, and culturally recognized methods of reaching success.

Dr. Beverly Tatum, a highly specialized psychologist, applied her multi-step theory of racial identity development to her classroom to exemplify the steps it takes to recognize such disparity. She had her students keep diaries in which they expressed their initial views on race and how race shapes their lives. Then after studying race through various modes such as in-class dialogue and socio-political studies, Tatum had them reflect on their previous thoughts and discuss if they felt any different. She recognized that a crucial step towards improving identity development would be creating a space for dialogue. This would allow everyone involved to compare differences in their experience, including unequal circumstances, limited opportunities, and unbalanced support. Simply being told statistics and anecdotes is not enough to convince and educate the public about concealed, dishonorable historical events, the myth of meritocracy and its effect on domestic policies today (Tatum, 1992: 6-7). We should push for accurate, integrated learning especially when it comes to acknowledging systemic flaws, and their designs, which often cater to the white populace. Connie, a student in Tatum’s class, admitted feeling less guilty about racism as an Italian-American when she began seeing racism as a system of advantages and not outright detestation. She altered her limited perception that fostered resentment, to a healthier, re-integrative one in understanding the black experience (16).

Most people of color acknowledge the discrimination they face and hate the additional conflicts their skin color brings about. I personally am acquainted with certain members of my community who believe that the majority of whites still actively work to oppress people of color. Conversely, those benefitting from white privilege are unable to discuss race relations because it is seen as a sensitive and potentially discourteous topic. These social “facts” are not completely false in that they are based on collective experiences, some which pre-exist this generation. Instead, an external social pressure is imposed on us all. This inability to create dialogue is the largest blockade in creating inter-racial relations. I will note that prison is a great intersectional point of social control for all because age, gender, race, religion and class all work together to define a system of oppression. That being said, one can argue that prison is completely “blind” because every inmate is equally miserable and under attack from rival social groups.

Being imprisoned is inconvenient because one’s life outside
of prison must be suspended. One can quickly lose one’s place in society, and lose sight of one’s aspirations without incoming earnings, family support and humane treatment. How can someone work on assimilating back into society upon release, when social and financial circumstances become more disabling? It can become a vicious cycle for the desperate. The effect of prison on one’s social life is one thing. Often overlooked are the changes in an inmate’s definition of adequate personal space, body rhythms (e.g. sleep cycles, dining etiquette), and physical appearance. There is a certain self-awareness needed to adjust to prison life without forgetting life on the outside; the longer one is incarcerated, the more difficult this becomes. The fact is, educating white students about race and relatedly, prison dynamics, will changes attitudes in ways that go beyond the classroom boundaries. As white students move through their stages of identity development, they take their knowledge and engage in dialogue with friends, co-workers, and peers. (Tatum, 1992: 2) Despite cultural and economic differences, an educated public is more likely to come to a more solid, efficient system of instilling better habits in deviants, especially once incarcerated.

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The United States of America accounts for less than five percent of the world’s population but roughly 25 percent of the world’s incarcerated population. And while we boast an alarmingly high rate of 707 incarcerated persons per 100,000, an increase of sevenfold since then-president Richard Nixon started his War on Drugs in 197, countries that are most politically and culturally similar to America average only 100 imprisoned persons per 100,000 citizens (Travis 2014: 37). How does such an unprecedented phenomenon of mass incarceration begin and snowball? As with many systemic operations of oppression in this country, it seems to have strong racial roots, which are as equally ugly as they are disguised. Racism within the last several decades often takes a color-blind approach: a defense used by those accused of racism insisting a blindness to skin color: often, a slap in the face of objective truth. There are four elements that summate how American political elite have successfully hidden behind a racist veil while appearing neutral: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of
Color-blind racism has reached unprecedented levels in today’s America, but it found itself relevant under Nixon and Reagan, as well, as their rhetoric and policies that sowed incredible damage in poor communities of color were not necessarily overtly racist; rather, language was manipulated, and people suffered from it. Just as many conservatives tried to hide the racial implications of certain policies passed during the War on Drugs in the 1970s under Nixon and their intensification in the 1980s under then-president Ronald Reagan, conservative rhetoric today continues to deny the lasting effects of these policies and of racism in general in the criminal justice system. If this rhetoric is allowed to continue, more and more people will be unfairly disenfranchised as Americans, and as human.

The concept of abstract liberalism essentially defines Nixon’s presidency. He communicated his ideologies to Americans that on the surface appeared to focus on economic policy and political liberalism but were laced with racial undertones. During his 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon dedicated 17 speeches completely to the topic of law and order, although there was no notable increase in crime. In an infamous television ad, he called on Americans to embrace order and reject the actions of civil rights activists (Alexander 2012:46). With an increasingly racially divided lower-class, Nixon’s campaign strategy was a success. He won the poor, white vote by convincing the demographic that the failing economy was due to poor, black drug users who sponged American tax-dollars. Nixon even admitted himself that his bigoted dialogue was “all about those damn Negro-Puerto-Rican groups out there.” In effect, he successfully created a welfare contest: white, blue-collar workers were deceived into thinking their economic woes stem from poor black Americans who did not want to work (Alexander 2012: 47). A large portion of the law and order rhetoric blamed drugs as the crippling factor in society and suggested that unprecedented drug use dominated communities of color. But John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s domestic policy chief in 1968, verified the real intentions of the Nixon Administration, citing black people as one of the administration’s two enemies, the other being the antiwar left, a different discussion to be had. As reported by Vox (Lopez 2016), in a 1994 interview, Ehrlichman explained:

*We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be...black, but by getting the public to associate the ... blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing [it] heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes... vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.*

Nixon officially declared America’s first War on Drugs in 1971. In effect, the flow of federal funding told American law enforcement agencies, both state and local, to increase the sheer number of drug arrests, encouraging
agencies to perform searches such as stop-and-frisk or random vehicle checkpoints, much of which was concentrated to communities of color (Anon 2012). Under Nixon, this was abstract liberalism at work - policies disguised as fair, perhaps normal, yet were coded with racial bias. Consequences of these policies can still be seen today. For a recent example, the Justice Department’s investigation of the Ferguson police department found that vehicle stops, arrests, situations where arrestees were jailed for more than two days, and uses of force all fell disproportionately on Ferguson’s black population (Andrews, DeSantis, and Keller 2015).

While Nixon used abstract liberalism to appeal to his white base, Reagan intensified anticrime and antidrug rhetoric, continuing Nixon’s tactic of abstract liberalism but adopting an equally and uniquely powerful form of cultural racism: convincing white voters that black Americans participated in, essentially, a less civilized culture dominated by drugs and crime. His administration was tremendously successful in this aspect. Due to an increase in black opportunity following the Civil Rights movement, the Republican Party used “racially coded ‘get-tough’ appeals on issues of crime” (Anon 2012) to ease anxieties of lower-class whites who felt threatened, in effect luring them to support the Reagan administration. The crackdown on drugs intensified, falling especially and disproportionately on black Americans. And although drug use between blacks and whites has always been similar, in the late 1980s under Reagan drug-related arrest rates were about six times higher in the black population than the white population, as reported by Jeremy Travis (2014), president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The incarceration rate between white and black Americans started to separate in the 1970s before a more dramatic separation in Reagan’s 80s, directly correlating to a continual War on Drugs, as Graph 1 shows. A major reason for this disparity was the fact that mandatory minimum sentences for crack were incredibly harsher than they were for cocaine. The reason: cocaine had the reputation for being more sophisticated and was used primarily by middle-class white communities while crack, cheaper and smokeable, invaded communities of color. Reagan’s War on Drugs proved even more detrimental than Nixon's. Noam Chomsky elaborates on the effects of Reagan’s drug policies that only intensified what began with Nixon: “You don’t go into the suburbs and arrest the white stockbroker sniffing coke in the evening, but you do go into the ghettos, and if a [black kid] has a joint in his pocket, you put him in jail” (Kaufman 2014).

More specifically, Ronald Reagan’s drug wars that he declared in both 1982 and 1986 were allegedly in response to the crack epidemic in impoverished communities of color. The problem: the epidemic had not even begun yet; it snowballed in 1988. Nonetheless, America again saw an increased in law enforcement funding and strictness in federal drug laws, both
yielding historically unprecedented incarceration rates for low-level drug offenses. From 1980-2000, the most drastic change in incarceration rates was in drug-related offending, as it increased more than 10-fold in the 20-year span (Travis 2014:42). By 1997, drug offenders made up roughly one-fifth of the state prison population and almost two-thirds of the federal inmate population (Travis 2014: 120). And, unsurprisingly, a disproportionately large percentage of these convicts were black. But Reagan’s rhetoric intended to deflect this reality. As happened many years after Nixon’s legacy, evidence surfaced years after Reagan’s reign that revealed the racial implications behind his administration’s policies. As reported by Salon (Haney-Lopez 2014), Lee Atwater, political director of Reagan’s 1984 presidential campaign, admitted himself that:

You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger’... By 1968 you can’t say “nigger” - that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.

The fact that this is a documented quotation may surprise some, but the same tactics that Ehrlichman and Atwater detail here are not just history. They are still happening today. In postmodern society, particularly in regards to mainstream media, the naturalization of socioeconomic realities and minimization of racism have succeeded with abstract liberalism and cultural racism as potent ideological methods that have allowed a racist system like mass incarceration to operate. Bill O’Reilly has one of the most influential voices in American politics, his voice often echoing the living rooms of conservative Americans for hours on end; The O’Reilly Factor is one of the most watched cable show in the United States. It was difficult to discover his opinions on mass incarceration (and thus the opinions of his followers), as the topic is rarely discussed in his show. What was uncovered, though, is quite frightening. In one interview he urged for imprisonment of roughly ten percent of the population - “only selected, very bad people” - if America is to see a decrease in crime (Bordelon 2014). That would be 31 million Americans. When a fellow Fox News correspondent challenged O’Reilly’s claim, he cut to a commercial break after getting his last word in: “the more people you take off the streets, the less crime there is. And that is irrefutable” (Bordelon 2014). Now, this claim turns out to be quite refutable. Reports have shown no clear correlation between high incarceration rates and sizeable crime reduction (Travis 2014:342). But what is scarier than his fabrications is how he naturalizes the racism that pervades systematically in structures like the criminal justice system. In one of his Fox segments, he explained how black Americans kill more people than whites or anyone else, enough evidence
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for him to reject racism as a motivator in criminal justice policy: “what’s the beef if black Americans are committing crimes out-of-proportion to other ethnic groups, why is there a racial component to their presence in prison? Why?” (Poor 2016). By saying this, O’Reilly, in effect, normalizes widespread segregation, economic inequality, unequal educational opportunity, and other phenomenon that provide sound basis as to why crime happens where it does and how. He steps a toe into a polluted ocean, only to declare it clean to millions of Americans who will take his word for it. And to add salt to this century-old wound, his words are often verified not only by Fox News but by ultra-conservative sites like Breitbart, who was responsible for reporting this segment in particular. And within this naturalization is a minimization of racism. Since O’Reilly is overwhelmingly popular, let us continue with him. In a segment where he addresses the “anti-police movement” in America, he ridicules experts who have raised their voices to police brutality and mass incarceration and blames drug use as the sole factor of violence in a place like Chicago, ending the segment: “America is not a place where minority people are targets of organized injustice. Thank God most of us seem to know that” (Anon 2015). He ignores centuries-old inequality and criminalizes communities of color all the while explicitly verbalizing that they do not face injustice, which is a hypocritical statement in itself, embodying naturalization and a minimization of racism, thus escaping questions that attempt to identify pernicious discrimination in the criminal justice system. He ignores the past and closes his eyes to the present. Though O’Reilly is not a politician and thus not directly responsible for shaping policy, he succeeds Nixon and Reagan as, essentially, a PR rep: deflect the questions to help things continue to operate as they do.

While the intention of this piece was to highlight the role colorblind racism plays in mass incarceration, the real effects this criminal system has on American society must be emphasized. One in four black men born since the late 70s has gone to prison at least once by their mid-30s. Seven out of 10 black teenagers who dropped out of high school have ended up in prison. In what Harvard sociologist Devah Pager calls an expected marker in the transition adolescence to adulthood, prison has become something to expect for many young, black men (Coates 2015). And this new norm, which finds its roots in the harsh drug laws established in the 1970s and 80s, yields consequences that extend well past the life of the prisoner him or herself. Several years ago it was reported that over fifty percent of fathers in the state prison system are the primary breadwinners for their family (according to the National Research Council), meaning many family’s essential source of revenue is cut off. If families are to stay in touch with an incarcerated relative, as well, life only become costlier, as families pay for phone time, travel costs and legal fees from their own, already-thinning pockets.
Homes with absent fathers who are in prison have also shown to produce an increase in delinquency and problematic behavior among their children, most notably young boys; around 1 million black children living in America in 2000 had a father in prison (Coates 2015). In addition, the effects incarceration has on an individual from a societal perspective (Travis 2014:7), discluding issues of mental health, seem endless:

**High rates of incarceration are associated with lower levels of civic and political engagement among former prisoners and their families and friends than among others in their communities. Disenfranchisement of former prisoners and the way prisoners are enumerated in the U.S. Census combine to weaken the power of low-income and minority communities. For these people, the quality of citizenship—the quality of their membership in American society and their relationship to public institutions—has been impaired.**

In essence, there is a socioeconomic chasm that has divided black and white America. Cultural differences and stereotypes are paradigms that reinforce themselves every day in this country, and are only further emphasized, and normalized, by mainstream, mostly conservative, rhetoric. When someone is surrounded by mass poverty and experiences its vicious, cyclical nature, they are more inclined to sell drugs, steal something, or find some other any other way to get fast money to stay alive. And often it is young, black men who find themselves in this position, as discriminatory policies - many of which have contributed to mass incarceration itself - have decimated poor communities of color. Not only are your chances of being in this position higher if you are black because of disastrous policy, but you are also more likely to get caught for it by the same system that put you there, a system that would be unable to maintain itself if it were not for the incredible success of some American political elite in designing a prison system that criminalizes blackness while promoting a colorblind ideology.

In a 2008 study, half of white Americans said black Americans had achieved racial equality. Only 11 percent of black Americans in the survey concurred. In the same study, roughly 75 percent of black Americans said racism was still a major problem in America. Only a third of white Americans concurred (Travis 2014). If colorblind racism continues to dominate rhetoric surrounding systemically oppressive systems like mass incarceration, this chasm of understanding will only widen, further normalizing conditions like segregation and socioeconomic inequality that lead to crime and, in effect, promoting such a phenomenon as mass incarceration as a necessity to keep our country safe. If we continue to hide from the truth, blood will only boil higher until reactionary measures intensify and revolution becomes inevitable. The clock is ticking.
THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND EFFECTS OF COLOR-BLIND RHETORIC IN AMERICA'S HISTORY OF MASS INCARCERATION

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▲ Graph 1: Disparity in incarceration rates between black and white Americans by decade
Introduction

Environmental injustice can be found at multiple levels in the production and disposal of plastics. Environmental injustice is defined as “a situation in which a specific social group is disproportionately affected by environmental hazards” (Brulle & Pellow, 2006). Race, class, and gender are some of the factors that affect one’s experience of environmental injustice. Beyond planetary harm, the use of plastics perpetuates the inhumane treatment of people, and further research is required to track the long-term effects of plastics on landfills.

In March of 2016, I watched a video where Lauren Singer, a New York University alumna, explained her “zero waste lifestyle.” This lifestyle essentially means that she does not produce any trash that goes to landfills - whatever trash she does produce, she deposits into a small glass jar. She explained that one of the biggest steps is “to get rid of the plastic” (Singer, nd.). This led me to examine the waste I create in my own life, and I discovered that most of it is plastic. Through my newfound curiosity in the zero waste lifestyle and my enrollment in this class, I started considering the environmental justice implications of such a plastic-heavy lifestyle.

The Production & Disposal of Plastics

One type of plastic cannot fulfill the myriad purposes required of it – manufacturers customize the material based on the final product’s characteristics. 92% of plastics are...
thermoplastics, which are categorized by their ability to melt, and 8% are thermosets, which cannot be reverted to their original form (American Chemistry Council, 2005). Most plastics are synthesized by the combination of chemicals, originating from oil, natural gas, or coal, to produce polymers (American Chemistry Council, 2005). Within the family, some polymers include nylons, polyesters, and polyethylenes (American Chemistry Council, 2005). Each polymer has specific features: polyesters can be low temperature melting adhesives or high temperature-resistant automobile parts, while polyethylenes can be rigid or flexible (American Chemistry Council, 2005). Additives such as plasticizers, lubricants, and flame retardants can also be added to plastics to impart further desired qualities (American Chemistry Council, 2005).

Given the extensive process of producing plastics, from refining raw materials to adding final specializing ingredients, the potential for pollution and violation of rights increases with each step.

Plastic is lauded for its ability to be recycled into other plastic products; however, according to Tom Szasky, CEO of TerraCycle, a recycling company, half of what people put in their recycling bins is not recycled, but diverted to regular garbage because unrecyclable materials are mistakenly put in the bin (Winter, 2015). The various triangular labels on plastics contribute to the confusion of recyclability. Products are labeled with resin identification codes, including PET/PETE #1 (polyethylene terephthalate), HDPE #2 (high density polyethylene), V/PVC #3 (polyvinyl chloride), LDPE #4 (low density polyethylene), PP #5 (polypropolene), and PS #6 (polystyrene) (CalRecycle, 2015). The most commonly accepted materials for recycling are PET and HDPE, while LDPE and PP are sometimes accepted, depending on the recycler (Greenopedia, 2016). PVC and PS are not accepted at all (Greenopedia, 2016). However, recycling can be puzzling to navigate because of the six plastic codes and city waste management differences – meaning that plastics usually go to the waste stream either via the individual disposing the plastic product or waste management sorting it. In 2013, Americans generated 33 million tons of plastic waste, of which only 9% or 2,970,000 million tons of plastic were recycled (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2016).

An out of sight, out of mind approach to plastic disposal and incineration poses a serious threat to human and ecological health due to the probable leaching of toxic liquids and release of fumes. The anaerobic nature of landfills prevents plastic from easily decomposing. However, even if anaerobic bacteria were to decompose plastic, toxic chemicals from the product bleed into the soil and groundwater, affecting the people who live around the sites. When plastic is incinerated for waste-to-energy production, the byproducts created include carbon dioxide, water vapor, and non-toxic ash. Five of eight landfills in Japan contained Bisphenol A leachate from plastic wastes such as synthetic leather (Yamamoto et al., 2001), although other research
gives suggests that the leachate may come from a different source. Research performed by Robert G. Hunt in Kansas shows that because less than 0.2% of plastic waste biodegrades after ten years, the contribution to leachates is not significant (Hunt, 1995). However, Hunt’s research demonstrates that combustion through incineration causes significant harm to the environment and the people living around the area. The manufacture of 1000 pounds of plastics produces 1500 to 2000 pounds of carbon dioxide, but incineration generates 3100 to 3400 pounds of carbon dioxide for the same amount of plastics. As previously noted, most of these incinerators exist in disenfranchised and disempowered communities of color, signifying that these areas will have the highest concentrations of air pollution via the carbon dioxide emissions.

Environmental Injustice

Environmental justice is compromised in the production and disposal of plastics because the polluting industries are mainly located in impoverished minority communities, causing harm to people who do not have the political power to fight back or prevent adverse health effects. The Environmental Protection Agency describes environmental justice as “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” and that fair treatment dictates that no one group, through policy or economic disempowerment, should bear a disproportionate share of negative health and environmental impacts (Brulle & Pellow, 2006). Additionally, Robert D. Bullard writes that environmental racism occurs when “people of color are disproportionately harmed by industrial toxins on their jobs and in their neighborhoods” (1996). Unfortunately, environmental injustice still contributes multiple threads to the United States’ tapestry. Race and class are generally at the forefront of environmental justice issues related to plastics, but findings revealed that being female increases the chances of experiencing inequity.

Race

Mossville is a community in Louisiana, where “African-Americans are twenty percent more likely to live within four miles of an industrial site that releases toxins, forty-one percent more likely to live within two miles, and fifty percent more likely than Caucasians to live within one mile of a polluting facility” (Hines, 2015). Vinyl chloride, which is used for PVC plastics, is produced by multiple Mossville production plants, which “has the highest concentration of vinyl production facilities in the United States” (Hines, 2015). During vinyl chloride production, dioxin, an extremely toxic carcinogen that causes “cancer, respiratory illnesses and infections, reproductive system issues, damage to the immune system, and disruption of hormonal functions in males and females,” is released as a by-product (World Health Organization,
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2010; Bertazzi et al., 2000; The National Academy of Sciences, 2006). Dioxin is dangerous because it accumulates in the body, increases in concentration through the food chain, and remains in the body’s tissues for over 10 years (World Health Organization, 2017). In the case of Mossville, Louisiana, the law did little to protect the people. The Clean Air Act, passed in 1970, dictates that companies with industrial facilities must cap their emissions within the top twelve percent of the industrial sector, and Mossville’s plants were in accordance (Hines, 2015). Though the threshold was environmentally unjust, nothing could be done because the plants were complying with national laws. When the journal was published, Mossville’s case was still pending with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Such a case demonstrates that the plastics industry continues to unfairly target communities of color. By purchasing and using plastic products, people can unknowingly contribute to environmental racism.

Moreover, the minority workforce in areas marked by larger proportions of landfills, incinerators, and materials recovery facilities (MRF) often hold these jobs in unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, suggesting that the disposal and recycling of plastics have negative consequences despite the appeal of recycling. For example, the Northwest Incinerator, which acts as both an incinerator and MRF, exists on Chicago’s heavily African-American West Side (Pellow, 2004). Although it is a clean MRF, meaning that it only accepts pre-sorted recyclables and subsequently limits workers’ exposure to waste products, there are still various inequalities that exist at the site. The jobs are dangerous, temporary, and oppressive. Workers must hand-sort recyclables in extreme weather, presenting the possibility of cuts, toxic substance exposure, and frostbite (Pellow, 2004). Pellow also writes that when workers are injured, they must go right back to their jobs because the recycling centers operate on a day-to-day payroll with informal accounting (2004). Although there are some white volunteer workers, most paid workers in these recycling centers are African-American, Southeast Asian, and Guatemalan, which are racial minorities in the United States (Pellow, 2004). Landfills are also disproportionately located in communities of color. According to Robert D. Bullard, all five city-owned sanitary landfills were located in mostly African-American neighborhoods in Houston from the early 1920s to the late 1970s (1994). These findings indicate that plastic consumption perpetuates the mistreatment of minorities, who, historically, hold less political power to change their communities.

Gender Another example of environmental inequality surprisingly originates from gender. Although plastic chemicals such as organic solvents, phthalates, BPA, and flame retardants are known to cause harm to the reproductive system, little research has been performed to study the effects of occupational
hazards (Hougaard et al., 2009). A 11-year study conducted in Denmark investigated “whether employment in [the plastics] industry is associated with increased risk of hospital contact due to infertility” for both men and women (Hougaard et al., 2009). Hougaard et al. hypothesized that women working in the plastics industry would have a higher infertility rate as opposed to people outside the industry. They acknowledged that women would be more likely to seek infertility help given their biological nature, which creates a small bias and shortcoming of the study. However, when compared to economically active women from the same socioeconomic group, the results demonstrated a higher risk for women in the plastics industry seeking hospital contact for fertility issues, while there was no increased risk for men (Hougaard et al., 2009). They concluded that “working with plastics may carry a reproductive hazard for women,” but could not investigate further, given the crude exposure measure that only tracked the women’s industry, occupation, socioeconomic status, age, and hospital visits (Hougaard, et al., 2009).

A study conducted in Canada revealed similar results. Robert DeMatteo et al. found that women are “at disproportionate risk due to the types of jobs they perform in the plastics industry and their particular biological vulnerabilities” because women are more likely to perform more labor-intensive roles (2012). On the other hand, men are more likely to perform trade or supervisory roles, limiting their exposure to the actual plastic chemicals (DeMatteo, 2012). The researchers found five main issues within the plastics industry that threaten the health of people. Worker interviews and reviews of hygiene reports showed that exposure-containing measures are virtually nonexistent because inspectors paid more attention to exposure numbers and occupational exposure limits than workers’ health complaints, working conditions, and workers’ symptoms (DeMatteo et al., 2012). Secondly, a review of the 55+ common substances used in the plastics industry ascertained that at least 35 are potential carcinogens and endocrine disruptors, made worse through synergistic effects of multiple substances mixed together (DeMatteo et al., 2012). DeMatteo et al. also write that workers in the plastics industry “carry a body burden” of contaminants related to plastics that far exceeds that of the general public, with women developing breast cancer and reproductive problems at elevated rates because of their workplace exposure (2012). Lastly, the plastic substances with endocrine-disrupting chemicals were discovered to have adverse health effects at minimal levels, which increases the plausibility for the link between women working in the plastics industry and serious health problems (DeMatteo et al., 2012). Endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) are stored in body fat. Because women have higher fat-to-muscle ratios than men, it is likely that more EDCs will build up in their bodies over their lifetime (Cantarero & Aguirre, 2010). Consequently, the EDCs found in plastic substances disproportionately endanger
women whether they work in the plastics industry or not because exposure can occur through the use of everyday plastic products. However, the production of plastic is environmentally inequitable to women because they must bear the most detrimental effects of the EDCs. Thus, using plastic products carries the possibility that we continue to endanger women as long as stricter chemical controls are not in place.

Social Class
Class was also examined as a factor affecting the production of plastics. Certain areas of Canada produce more plastic products, such as the Windsor-Essex County in southern Ontario (DeMatteo et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, the Windsor-Essex county is an impoverished area within Canada. A plastic production plant is an example of a locally unwanted land usage (LULU) because of the pollution it generates. LULUs follow the path of least resistance: “rural communities, poor communities, communities whose residents [have] low educational levels, communities that [are] highly Catholic, communities with fewer than 25,000 residents, and communities whose residents [are] employed in resource-extractive jobs like mining, timber, or agriculture” are least likely to resist and push back corporations placing hazardous sites on nearby land (Cole & Foster, 2001). The 2011 National Household Survey in Canada disclosed that Windsor had the highest concentration of low-income residents living in low-income neighborhoods (Simcoe, 2013). Women make up the largest demographic of Windsor-Essex County’s plastics workforce (DeMatteo et al., 2012). Plastics production and its consequent pollution are already linked to an economically disempowered area, but in a patriarchal society, poor women are further disadvantaged. They have no choice but to take the jobs in order to support their families.

Conclusion & Future Research
Research indicates that environmental injustice is still very much present, particularly in workplaces where plastics are produced and disposed. Plastics have to be manufactured at plants that process different kinds of polymers, typically at the expense of poor, minority, and/or female workers. Post-consumption, plastics must go to landfills, incinerators, or even MRFs depending on their separation and sorting. Our disposable, one-time culture of plastic usage has much more serious implications than just harming the environment; we cause harm to economically and politically disadvantaged people. Based on this research, it would be ideal to find data for the direct links between plastics and the industry workers. Furthermore, options beyond petrochemical plastics should be explored for sustainability purposes, such as bio-additives or renewable materials. Lastly, the characteristics of decomposing plastic (such as its leaching properties) must be studied for an extensive amount of time because they take hundreds of years to degrade.
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Introduction

Environmentalism has become a prominent social force in America ever since Rachel Carlson wrote the book Silent Spring in the early 1960’s. Following her book, consciousness rises among citizens concerned over the health of the environment and, specifically, toxic and chemical pollutants such as DDT. Yet, even with this increased public consciousness over the harmful effects of industrial activities, the problem of hazardous pollution has only shifted, not resolved. This literature review aims to examine the evolution of environmentalism in the United States and how the result of this movement’s progress has not been equitable. For the purposes of this essay, “environmentalism” will signify individual/group efforts coalescing outside policy-making circles for the purposes of enhancing local environmental quality. This paper aims to elucidate its multiple contentious dimensions, including: whether pollution impacts are disproportionately distributed, the public acceptance and interpretation of environmentalism across demographics; and, finally, theories and the potential for social change regarding sustainability. Since this paper seeks to approach the issue with an angle of justice, emphasis is placed on power dynamics throughout.
History of Environmentalism & Connections to Unjust Power Dynamics

Mertig and Dunlap (2001) describe the predominant environmentalism model in early 20th century America as an ideology of conservation. This means that early environmentalists favored sectioning off land from human contact (other than tourism) to safeguard the ecosystems and resources (Mertig and Dunlap 2001). While this approach preserves cultural and spiritual values of nature, it is less inclusive than the new social movement (NSM) preservationists (Mertig and Dunlap 2001). Formed in response to concerns prompted by Silent Spring, these groups seek ecosystem services which preserve the health of the environment more expansively (Lee 2006). Contrary to conservationism, preservationism relies on managing people and the environment rather than a parceling of land, as in a hands-off approach (Mertig & Dunlap 2001).

Yet, Carlson’s book tends to prompt ad hoc responses, which means social groups would fight pollution insofar as it affected them; and, once the aims were achieved, these advocacy groups dissolved (Chambers 2007). Goldman’s (1996) Socio-Economic Status analysis may afford a glimpse into the reasons why the preservationist movement did not live up to its expansive, sustainable potential.

Obviously, a community’s ability to respond to pollution will depend on multiple factors (which will be addressed in the “Solutions” section in more depth). For now, cohesiveness and economic/political power are the main factors considered, elucidating why white people, richer and already entitled with rights for more than ten years by the 1970’s, could respond quickly by relocating either hazards or themselves (Goldman 1996, Pastor, Sadd, and Hipp 2001). Unfortunately, once wealthy citizens took care of their own problems, pollution was ‘out of sight and out of mind’ and they ceased to concern themselves with “other’s problems” (Chambers 2007; Lee 2006). This fact, combined with what Goldman (1996) calls a “politics of fear,” fostered a shift back towards conservationism in privileged areas. The conservation agenda was more palpable since it prevented the destruction of hiking and outdoor activity areas; and, doing more (e.g. regulating business or enforcing CERCLA) might wreck their economic advantage or constitute “waste” tax-money (Goldman 1996; Mertig & Dunlap 2001).

Goldman (1996) hypothesizes that legislation has historically been a means to assert the rights of whites over and above the ‘other’ who threatens an aspect of their livelihood (e.g. ‘illegals’ who ‘steal’ jobs). For the environmental movement, this would look like the increased siting of toxic waste facilities in minority communities. Goldman (1996) contends that this politics of fear allows ‘technocrats’ in power to promote individualism and passivity to maintain the status quo and squash change. From this premise (that people make decisions primarily governed by fear), the slip of
white middle-class folks into the bottom rung of society (following the macro-SES change from a ‘diamond’ post-WWII, to the ‘hourglass’ seen today) made them prone to yield to economic considerations for their personal security (Goldman 1996). The statement made by Goldman when using the word ‘technocrat’ suggests in its emphasis on the institutional mindset behind the economic pursuits in legislations regarding the waste handling (e.g. richer, typically white folks have money to pay for infrastructure to send their waste elsewhere – the poor have less of a means to fight back and get manipulated into docility, partially as a result of education – Mohai et al 2009). Stated another way, the ideology of elites works to promote an economic rationalism which paints the world in a particular way which invokes a sense of inevitability while flattening considerations of justice, particularly in how it pits groups against each other in a competitive economic model. This created a social system where those with resources may relocate their pollution and waste to poorer areas – after all, richer communities produce the most waste (Lee 2006). However, since the articles examined so far are qualitative and theoretical, it is necessary to look into quantitative studies which can track these trends over time and speak to whether an unequal distribution of pollution exists, and along what lines.

Pollution Distribution
- Characterized Best by Race or Class? Why the Confusion?

Many studies conducted document and track the polluting toxic/hazardous waste sites in the United States and their distribution (Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009, Denq, Constance, and Su-Shiow 2000, Jones & Rainey 2006, Pastor et al 2001). These are critical not only to establish a problem’s existence but also how power dynamics may play into siting trends. While earlier studies spoke to the racial distribution of impacts, Denq et al (2000) believes class is the most accurate predictor of environmental injustice. By examining Texas and Louisiana, Denq and his team found three tendencies within communities receiving high relative quantities of pollution sites. His findings back up a class-leaning conclusion since people in affected areas have (1) lower property values; (2) fewer residents with college degrees; and (3) more jobs in the manufacturing sector (Denq et al 2000:95). Using a “Weberian theme of analysis,” we can see that not only does class correlate, but also communities seem targeted based on their ability/will to oppose the site – e.g. if people, relying on manufacturing jobs, know little about the political system, or don’t own their residence, they cannot do much to fight pollution (Denq et al 2000). Although this analysis is interesting, samples from Louisiana and Texas likely over-report the number of people working in petrochemical industries and thus they fail to account for times when people aren’t dependent on pollution sources (e.g. Hartford case study in Chambers 2007).

Denq et al (2000) correctly points out how the issue of race in siting
decisions has been murky at best for two reasons. First, distribution is inherently relative; so by manipulating units of analysis different results arise along with confusion and social/political paralysis (Denq et al 2000; Mohai et al 2009). For example, an ‘area’ can be unitized as city limits, zip codes, counties, etc. which yields different results especially when race breakdown is calculated relatively.\footnote{For instance, a population which is 15% black is “predominantly black” if surrounded by an area that is 3% black, but would not be if the surrounding area was 30% black (Denq et al 2000:84-5).} Mohai et al (2000) points out how these variables have been manipulated by private-interest groups to attain desired results. Second, “cause” is very hard to delineate since trends cannot speak to intent and not all studies (e.g. Denq et al 2000) are longitudinal. Thus, Mohai (2009) goes beyond Denq (2000) in recognizing that racial siting patterns can and do occur regardless of intent.

However, the difficulty in discerning racial components follows from its intersection with other components pertaining to social power dynamics. For example, white flight left many minorities in the homes with less value and worse conditions (Mohai et al 2009). This trend is treated more comprehensively in Pastor et al (2001), who underwent a 30-year longitudinal study in Los Angeles County using census and city planning data. While its location is limited, Pastor et al’s (2001) study speaks to causation mechanisms in location trends more than other works. While not conclusive in determining causation, this study demonstrates trends in decisions regarding the location of waste treatment and waste-producing facilities: how they typically arise in poorer communities (somewhat backing up Denq et al’s (2000) conclusions), and the white flight which followed, evincing that people with resources and capacities would choose to relocate, leaving poorer minorities behind. While this conclusion aligns with the class-based approach of the other two works, Pastor et al (2001) highlights the need to remain cognizant that environmental racism exists. As Mohai et al (2009) points out, new research is critical for prodding interest in the field as well as prompting intervention. Hence, this paper turns its focus to consider the questions: why is toxic distribution so unequal and what is the most effective/sustainable way to fight this injustice?

Pollution Effects - Public Mindset & How Their Responses are Motivated or Prevented

In the history section, a couple of theories presented can speak at least partially to why this distribution pattern exists in society (i.e. “whiteness” and “fear” for Goldman (1996), or, a limited “conservation” view for Mertig and Dunlap (2001). Goldman (1996) discusses his theory within the broader context of capitalism since he writes in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union; he also examines how the universal concept of the ‘proletariat’ (a critical mass of people exploited by the
capitalist system) has been bastardized by individualism into a “fractious identity politics” by society (1996:126). This means certain populations unite over a sense of identity-based on race, gender, class, etc., but since this paper operates under an assumption that consciousness and proximity are two key determiners of movement formation, locality as a source of identity politics may provide the foundation to form a solid coalition foundation. This assumption is backed up by Mohai (2009) who highlights the importance of the public environment, in which people receive and interpret information, for motivating movements and their responses to local conditions. Hence, the academics interviewed by Heimann (1996) not only view issues differently from the people who live in poor environments and conditions but also discuss them different terms (Burningham and Thrush 2003). With the public consciousness well-established as important for coalitions, it follows that an environmental discourse holds perhaps equal importance for unifying groups around a common issue by discussing it in a common way. These considerations lead Mohai (2009) and Heimann (1996) to identify local groups as the most significant forces in environmental movement formations; they know the issues most directly, and their ideal structure provides a platform for community discussion while holding top-level institutions accountable through an empowering, unified common response (Mohai 2009; Heiman 1996).

Now that a theory of group formation has been established, looking at distinct categories (generalizable by race, class, and/or proximity to pollution) and how their responses differ may elucidate commonalities in diversity. Accordingly, Burningham and Thrush (2003) collected data from focus groups in the UK who lived in areas affected by pollution and/or poverty. Their sample of “disadvantaged persons” covers “all semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and pensioners… [and] those entirely dependent on the state long term, through sickness, old age, unemployment or other reasons” (2003:520). Though conducted in another country, many British towns share analogous traits to American cities which are in “urban deprivation: high unemployment, poor housing, low level of education, and a high proportion of single-parent families… ethnically diverse, ” (Burningham and Thrush 2003:522) – these traits are akin to the urban areas across the United States (New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Baltimore, etc.). Something which may hinder its applicability comes in the focus groups’ composition. Namely, groups were typically one subset of the overall population in a given area (e.g. single mothers, older men, etc. – Burningham and Thrush 2003). At any rate, the biggest surprise arose in the contrasting languages used by the people interviewed and others, the so-called “environmentalists”; the former didn’t use the academic language of “environment” when discussing their concerns (e.g. unsafe neighborhood/living conditions). This is something Mohai (2009) highlights as a factor
that hinders these communities’ ability to understand and relate to the dry, detached language of NEPA reports in America. In addition to this breakdown in the discourse of advantaged and disadvantaged people, Burningham and Thrush (2003) also discuss the resentment of latter group towards structures of power.

According to Burningham and Thrush (2003), many people interviewed had petitioned the government to change the conditions they saw as problematic. Without institutional responses, people feel disempowered since they lack the resources to individually effectuate change and no one seems to listen to them. Thus, a trend in England identified by Thrush and Burningham (2003) finds a connection to Jones and Rainey’s study (2006), providing a means to contextualize these results within the United States. Working from a sample size of over 250 participants, Jones and Rainey (2006) looked at the Red River Community (RRC) in Tennessee, one of the most polluted areas and rivers in the country – a fact which may make Burningham and Thrush (2003) more applicable than first interpreted. Aligning with Burningham and Thrush’s (2003) conclusions, the socially disadvantaged population (minorities in this case) had more local and overall concern for the environment than advantaged populations; and they felt less control in solving their issues since they lacked trust in, as well as the means to sway, institutions which are supposed to secure their rights to a livable environment [i.e. provide ecosystem services to resolve specific problems from their surveys and interviews] (Jones & Rainey 2006). Since most qualitative, first-hand reports indicate empowerment as an underlying factor in attitudes towards the environment and the institutions accountable for it, power remains critical in finding a sustainable solution. Heiman (1996) correctly points out, racism, as a systematic force, operates implicitly more so than overtly. This is to say, it manifests in subtle limitations on people’s choices or power rather than an overt willingness to cause harm by businesses/government. So, what is to be done?

Solutions

- Theoretical & Concrete Approaches to Minority Empowerment & its Limits

As highlighted in the discussion of Burningham and Thrush (2003), public discourse is an important component of coalition building both to find commonalities among people (e.g. discuss issues beyond the word “environment” to get at the totality of the concerns of people considered socially disadvantaged) and to prevent resentment. Something they point out is how many of the people in these polluted areas have low-skilled manufacturing jobs and thus, to reduce their area to a polluted ‘dump’, or, to propose the solution of removing all those job opportunities (and waste created thereby) would alienate those people while also failing to take into account their views and proposed solutions (Burningham and Thrush 2003:531; also see Jones and
Rainey 2006 who analyze local pride and job breakdowns). Inherently, this idea corrupts a top-down approach which solely considers cause-effect relations between pollution and health impacts – it is a question of meaningfully including those communities in the institutional process (Heiman 1996).

Empowerment has been a central idea in this paper -- whether it comes down to its diminution during the regulatory approach which reproduced environmental inequality (Goldman 1996; Heimann 1996), or, how its existence (or lack thereof) has shaped community ideologies and responses (Jones and Rainey 2006). Now, this paper turns its focus to the proper application of empowerment and how that has/can concretely manifest in the domestic social movements.

Chambers (2007) specifically highlights a successful grassroots formation in the Hartford Environmental Justice Network (HEJN). Here, “success” means “an organization’s ability to achieve a response by public officials to the issues of its agenda” and also the sustainability of a movement (Chambers 2007: 28-9). After white flight (a 50% drop in that section of the population in the last 10 years), Hartford has been solidified as the dumpsite for approximately 70 nearby towns in a contract without an expiration date (Chambers 2007:33, 35). While this sounds like a common narrative for poor urban communities with such a dense minority population, something changed in Hartford to turn this story around. Hartford’s Environmental Justice Network (HEJN – then known as “ONE CHANE”) began fighting against that landfill site, located in a black neighborhood – though, the reasons motivating its response had to do with the rising health problems in the neighborhood, not racism (Chambers 2007). While the conclusion is ready to be drawn, the vocalized injustice which motivated such an effective outcry prevented the shady business deals conducted through local government which established a functionally permanent dumpsite in Hartford without public consideration. Although not perfectly generalizable (e.g. no one here relied on jumps at the landfill unlike sample populations examined by Denq et al 200 and others), the HEJN model evinces a potential for local activism to galvanize environmental support (e.g. through concerns over water/air quality from a landfill) to empower currently disadvantaged communities (Chambers 2007).

HEJN was founded and continues to be led by, poor non-whites, its goals (though they may change) will always rise from those who are marginalized by society and thus constitute the primary stakeholders in all issues of justice, from social to environmental (Chambers 2007). Thus, an entity like this sustains itself by doing exactly that: keeping a focused aim which adapts and/or expand according to needs (Chambers 2007). Through this, minorities also gain technical training and leadership experience which empowers them within the economic movement in addition to their enhanced political/
social power (Chambers 2007). Lastly, since this group is a ‘network,’ HEJN has been able to galvanize support among other groups interested in justice (e.g. churches or social justice organizations) and even create environment jobs within their group (Chambers 2007). However, this HEJN model also makes it clear that minority leadership is intrinsically needed, considering its failed attempt to expansion in New Haven. The out-reach group there was majority affluent and white; in turn, that HEJN branch could not effectively relate to common struggles or garner enough community support and it soon closed (Chambers 2007). Still, at the end of the day, HEJN’s far-reaching influence stems from their efficacy in political institutions which further legitimizes them. Thus, taken together, the essential components of an effective, sustained public coalition pursuing environmental justice are: empowering groups currently marginalized (including through leadership positions), providing skills-training for member retention and effective campaigning, and, basing goals in equality to ensure an expansive network (Chambers 2007).

**Conclusion**

- **Results, Limits, Areas for Future Study**

It goes without saying that theory and practice rarely line-up exactly; hence, there are real limitations to Chambers’ (2007) HEJN model. First, conditions tend to prompt ad hoc rather than sustainable responses/groups. For example, the movement to stop a hazardous waste site in Mobile, AL succeeded but the group dissolved after its stand, meaning it failed to sustainably protect the public’s interest (Chambers 2007). Second, assuming that more entities like the HEJN form, Lee contends, the problem of ‘rich cities’ may be resolved, but not that of ‘poor cities’ (“where economic growth is outpaced by population rise”) since they lack the economic and governmental capacity to solve environmental concerns (Lee 2006:11). While this consideration may not seem relevant for domestic environmentalism, it seems hypocritical and neglectful to ignore a majority of the world undergoing industrial and post-industrial transitions while claiming to have a justice focus. Hence, Lee (2006) is highlighting a paradox which ultimately undermines the long-term success of domestic trends – namely, since consumption is inevitable, industrial factories will exist somewhere. If they’re eradicated from American cities, they will go to another country with less regulation, no means to adapt to pollution and more dependence on any wage for their livelihood (Lee 2006 – similar trends noted domestically in Denq et al 2000; Mohai et al 2009). Although Lee recognizes his framework is oversimplified, it provides a foundation for approaching the inevitable issue in the coming century: how can people across the world increase their standard of living without further exacerbating the climate or their environment? Are there ways for an HEJN model to be expanded internationally? Obviously, this topic and the questions it prompts are too grand to find answers in such a limited scope.
But, the fact of a locality’s importance in coalition-building – both to have informed stakeholders and unite under a common tie and pride (Chambers 2007; Jones and Rainey 2006; Burningham and Thrush 2003) – evince that the best solutions are those that come from within communities to empower them under self-direction (Heimann 1996). Though a vague conclusion is all that can be mustered on such a complex issue, something is lucidly clear; without continually raising these questions or challenging institutions which breed passivity and rampant individualism (making them inevitable) ignorance and injustice will continue to fester. (Mohai et al 2009; Goldman 1996).
REFERENCES


On Losing Our Religion: The Modern Essentializing of Buddhism in America

Cora Ives

Cora is a graduating senior from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, studying math and philosophy. This paper was originally written while abroad in Kathmandu, Nepal, studying the intersections of Buddhism and the modern age at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute. She cannot express her thanks enough to the editors of SocialEyes, who made this opportunity possible.

Western Buddhism has been critiqued by many for being a washed out, western commodity, now as commercial as the public figures propagating it to the masses. Robert Sharf compares the deritualization, demythologization and individualization of the tradition to a product being advertised by charismatic dharma teachers (Tricycle 2007). In America, many come to Buddhism as a result of watching celebrities promise that meditation will make you a healthier, happier person who is more engaged with the community and a productive employee. As an American, and a huge music aficionado, I explored just how Celebrity-- the phenomena of idolization of individuals, particularly musicians, affects the way Buddhism is perceived and understood in the United States. The musicians included in this essay portray Buddhism as a practice based on meditation for the purpose of self-actualization that leads to social action, and their influential power over modern-age consumers leads to an understanding of Buddhism as such. It is tempting to demonize the new Buddhism arising from in the west, as something entirely new and misrepresentative of the tradition. Carole Cusack calls the spread of Buddhism through Celebrity “specifically modern and Western” (Cusack 2012). I hope to impress the complexity of this issue; that underlying the western spin of Buddhism, some roots of the tradition are clearly exposed, while others are discarded for the sake of congruency with western culture.
Buddhism and Celebrity

It is commonly accepted that the roots of Celebrity are Christian. In the past, westerners looked up to saints as role models, hoping to emulate their impoverished, aesthetic, God-fearing lives. After the Enlightenment and Romantic period, these values were no longer desirable neither to the rationalists, looking for a more valid basis for their choices, nor to the romantics, whose idea of personal identity built upon personal fulfillment and fantastic luxurious lifestyles (Cusack 2012). It not only became old-fashioned to attach oneself to God and the saints, but also to any form of identity building blocks-- belonging to family, to community, or to a church meant belonging to a group, which clashed with the idea of individuality. Group identity, which decades before defined the individual, now inhibited the development of personal identity.

Today, in the process of shedding old constructs, we create more abstract systems of identification and thus dislodge the traditional manners of identity. We use technology and other new institutions to receive validation. We constantly are seeking new ways to define ourselves, thereby creating a transnational community of people who share ideologies rather than cultural or social ties. This search, according to Philip Cushman, leads us to an experience of lacking “personal conviction and worth.” This lacking encourages us to consume even more to make up for this feeling of loss. This model Cushman defines as the “empty self;” one who must constantly consume in order to quell the insatiable desire for meaning or purpose (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012).

A vital component for his model is the romantic valorization of fantasy, of the life that we could lead if we have certain products and vast amounts of wealth (Cusack 2012). Such fantasies are crucial for the creation of a modern individual’s identity—“it aids in imaginative speculation about the gratification novel products might bring and encourages limited desires” (Campbell 2005). Celebrities—the saints of the modern era—function as subjects of fantasy, living out the dreams of consumers, representing the physical embodiment of our own desires. They are the role models of the modern era that we wish to emulate.

In the modern world, celebrities are crucial components from influencing our choices as consumers to bringing awareness to social issues. They play an important role in the way we view the world and on how we choose to engage with it. Without ever meeting these people directly, viewers develop a connection with them, which can lead viewers to adopt the perceived attributes of the celebrity (Cusack 2012). The number of westerners who converted to Buddhism after interaction with celebrity Asian Buddhist ambassadors and celebrity western converts is evidence of the influential power Celebrity has on those who view them as prominent role models (Cusack 2012).

Many musicians who actively promote Buddhism to their audiences tend to be adherents of the Nichiren
branch, noted for its emphasis on the Lotus Sutra. It is known for reducing Buddhism to a relatively simple set of ideas (Tricycle 2007). The primary practice is meditation and recitation of the name of the Lotus Sutra as a mantra (one need not read or understand the sutra itself). Rituals are not emphasized, nor is the belief in karmic cause-and-effect or reincarnation. Nichiren Buddhism has a contentious history with other branches of Buddhism, as it focuses on accumulating worldly possessions and encourages aggressive evangelizing. Both of these things are not compatible with many other Buddhist practices, which encourage followers to let go of worldly ties and pleasures and discourage evangelical practices (Keane 2007).

But many musicians who have practiced meditation seem to take evangelization very seriously. Rivers Cuomo, lead singer of Weezer, began meditation practice when he began to notice his life of drug abuse was affecting his music ability. He fully converted to Buddhism, practicing the dharma and observing the Five Precepts. He also writes about his experiences and incorporates Buddhist themes in his music. The song “We Are All On Drugs” has Buddhist themes in every stanza (Keane 2007). Perhaps, the Nichiren emphasis on evangelization is what makes Buddhist musicians comfortable incorporating their views into their music.

These songs and the personal anecdotes of the musicians’ encounters with Nichiren Buddhism are what audiences hear and incorporate into their daily lives. Many critique this, since Nichiren is essentialized in such a way that makes it contentious with more traditional schools of Buddhism yet is acceptable to western culture. It almost seems that the modern “Buddhism” propagated by western musicians is just a watered-down version of the larger tradition shallow enough for a western audience to accept. Yet, it is important to remember Nichiren Buddhism has been a tradition for almost 800 years. And it cannot be forgotten that Buddhism from the beginning was a missionary religion, using monks as a method of transmission to new countries. While discouraging evangelizing, much took place in order for Buddhism to spread. There are roots of tradition in this modernized practice, and to delimit this transition as a strictly modern-born religion is not so easy.

**Buddhism and Punk Culture**

The punk genre has developed into a subculture, including diverse forms of fashion, music, dance, visual art and ideologies. The broad range of punk expression has been surmised in five principles: a DIY ethic that encourages the individual to make their own identity, because anyone else who would try is ultimately inadequate; the frustration and anger that impels the individual to speak his or her own mind; a skepticism of authority, and a drive to call out and destroy oppressive institutions; a sense of masochism that will allow the individual to endure or even seek out pain in order to make their message heard; and pursuing a life most pleasing to the individual (Kahn-Egan 1998).
Punk encourages individual creativity, radicalism, and non-conformity. It empowers one to make their voice heard and inspires them to make a difference in their community.

Many punk bands use social activism as a tool for radical change in their local and global communities. Jared Gomes, songwriter and singer of the band (hed) p.e., has been credited for writing songs that touch on several important social issues, such as political corruption and extreme nationalism. He is also an active blogger, expressing support for social liberal politicians, and critiquing the war in Iraq. He supports President Obama because he “[gives] the blue-collar guy a chance.” He also believes that being politically involved, and raising his voice to injustice is his personal responsibility. “I’m playing my role as a human being who cares for fellow human beings, who wants to see a better world for children…” he says in an interview with Newstimes (Huffington Post 2011). To Gomes, being an activist is the reason he was put on this earth and the motivation that underlies his music and writing. Bringing injustice to the forefront is the core of his work.

Other punk rock movements raise awareness to injustice on a global level. The punk band Street Dogs supports Free Tibet—an organization dedicated to the freedom of Tibet from China (Huffington Post 2011). They believe that the punk subculture is about “standing up for freedom, oppression and doing something positive.” They donate the profits of their shows to Free Tibet and use a portion of their mic-time to inform their audiences about the current plight (followed by chants of “change your attitude for freedom/join the fight today” (Huffington Post 2011)). They have expressed distaste for the modern outlook on social issues, and the general lack of action in the punk community. In an age where connecting with the world has never been easier, the modern era seems apathetic to the injustice happening all around them. Street Dogs recognize that they are in a position to impel social action and urge their listeners to engage in social causes in any way possible, through signing petitions or volunteering. “I’m just a regular guy,” vocalist Mike McColgan admits, “[but] when I open my mouth, I can make a difference” (Huffington Post 2011).

Noah Levine, dharma teacher and former punk rocker, recognizes also that the punk movement seems to lack the push to be involved socially. Punk expresses a strong dissatisfaction with the world, and using aggressive wisdom and fierce language, they bring awareness to these problems. But often, the punk movement will stop at awareness—they are not impelled to act against injustice, but simply are angry with it. And moreover, in the process of dealing with that anger, punk individuals engage in self-destructive behavior; drugs, and crime are very closely associated with the punk community (Fisher 2009).

It is here, with Noah Levine, where we see Buddhism engaging with a community that strongly encourages individualism, endorses counter-cultural ideas and enjoins political and social activism. He preaches that Buddhism and
the punk subculture were both founded upon dissatisfaction with the world. But Buddhism goes even further by not only recognizing the problem (suffering) but also identifying concretely its causes and offering a solution. In Buddhism, Levine (2007) argues that the goal of the Buddha was to empower each individual to find the truth him or herself, to question sources of authority, including the Buddha himself (Fisher 2009), and to use their insights to better benefit the wider community. It begins on an internal level with meditation practice. Levine preaches that meditation acts as a rebellion against some of the tendencies that create inner suffering. He also sees true compassion—putting others before oneself—as the ultimate radical act, as we have to go against our most primitive survival instincts for the sake of true happiness. Internally, we can show compassion to ourselves by embracing pain and using it as a tool to find the truth. He then goes further to say that as we go against our afflictions by practicing detachment and generosity, we create a positive social change. We work, like a Bodhisattva, for the benefit of all beings. From the internal revolution, the external revolution naturally comes. Focusing on finding the truth and cleansing our mind naturally brings about positive social engagement; our inner rebellion against greed, for example, will make us more generous, naturally resulting in fighting poverty, the result of corporate greed. Social engagement, then, is the expression of one’s own awakening, one’s own rebellion against greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Noah Levine suggests that the Punk culture has something to learn from Buddhism and the Dharma, and with books like Dharma Punx, he has effectively introduced his version of Buddhism to the Punk community. To Buddhism, he includes the aspect of social involvement, which is exemplified by engagement in the cause for social change (Note that such involvement for Buddhist monks is usually discouraged (McMahan 2008)). He also refers to the idea of a Punk Bodhisattva, who seeks inner truth and the expression of this findings are meritorious actions. This is an interesting interpretation because, in Santideva’s The Way of the Bodhisattva, the first steps of the path are the merit making deeds, accumulating relative Bodhichitta by benefitting the community, and then going into meditation once one has accrued enough merit. Reversing the steps, and emphasizing meditation over the practice is not unique to Punk, as such development seems to be a side effect of Buddhism’s interaction with modern culture. He also refuses to acknowledge that ego-clinging is a source of suffering—he names greed, confusion, ignorance and attachment as causes of suffering, but never connects selflessness to this concept. In punk culture, the self is glorified, and creating your own identity separate of others is a central idea. To talk about Buddhism as an idea that discourages the relative building of the self would create too much tension for punks interested in Buddhism.

Alternatively, while the Buddhism of Punk culture doesn’t seem
to mesh well with the Tibetan tradition and similar branches of Buddhism, we can view his emphasis of meditation and single practice as an embrace another Buddhist school— the Zen tradition. The idea that meditation, as the central practice, along with the wisdom found in zazen can give rise to the compassion needed to benefit all sentient beings is an ancient concept rooted deep in tradition. Again we see here that there is a blending of traditional ideas with modern lifestyles. But it cannot be ignored Noah Levine uses Buddhism as a tool to enhance the lives of the Punks, encouraging counter-cultural behavior while taking away its self-destructive tendencies. Instead of embracing all of Buddhism as a philosophy (let alone a religion), he takes the parts of Buddhism that interest his audience and calls it the essential message of the faith. He portrays Buddhism in such a way that connects to an audience already primed by ideals of rebellion and social action. By essentializing the faith in this way, Buddhism becomes a tool for individual self-actualization and is not embraced as a counter-cultural belief system.

Adam Yauch: A Modern Traditionalist

A particular celebrity who did not follow the same Buddhism trend was Adam Yauch, lead vocalist and songwriter of the Beastie Boys. After visiting Nepal twice, he devoted himself to the fight for Tibetan freedom. He was a social activist on many fronts, from women’s rights to the 9/11 attacks, but his support for Tibetan liberation is particularly interesting because his goal was to create a reciprocal relationship between Tibetan and American culture. When interviewed he said “We are able to help the Tibetans to gain their freedom… but I think the really significant part of it for [the western world] is we have a lot to gain from the Tibetans… understandings of compassion and of nonviolence are things that we really lack in our society” (Huffington Post 2012).

Yauch organized the Tibetan Freedom Concert series, which brought together large acts over a wide spread of genres to raise money for the Milarepa Fund, an organization started by the Beastie Boys to give royalties from their record Ill Communication to the Tibetan monks who helped record it, and which grew to focus attention on the Tibet struggle against China (Pollicino 2012). Among the musical acts, Yauch also coordinated several speakers to inform the thousands of attendants about the Tibetan struggle. Palden Gyatso, Dechen Wandu, Robert Thurman, and other monks and Tibetan activists to share their personal experiences with imprisonment and torture, and to encourage others not to buy Chinese-imported goods (Stolder 1996). The Tibetan Freedom Concerts were not only a way to provide assistance from America to Tibet, but also a way for Tibetan culture to speak to an American audience. Yauch, unlike Noah Levine and other celebrities, did not want to be the mouthpiece through which Americans learned about Buddhism and Tibetan culture. He wanted to let Tibetans present themselves, without being edited by a western sympathizer.
ON LOSING OUR RELIGION

His aversion to the limelight came across in his conversations about Buddhism as well, outside of social work. After becoming a Tibetan Buddhist in 1996, and cynical with other celebrities selling their religion, he was quietly public about his practice. In Rolling Stone’s interview with him, Yauch admits that spirituality is a privilege and that he is unqualified to impress his ideas on others. The strongest argument he makes for Buddhism when he tells the story of his friend, Palden Gyatso, a Buddhist monk who was captured and tortured for thirty-three years. “After everything that’s happened to him, he’s laughing all the time and joking around. He enjoys his life. He doesn’t harbor any negativity toward the people who did that to him—he actually feels compassion for them. He’s a strong example to me of what Buddhism can do” (DeCurtis 1998). This interview would be read by millions of subscribers to the Rolling Stone, and not only would they read Yauch’s critique of how religion is portrayed through Celebrity, but also would turn readers’ attention to Buddhism as exemplified by Tibetan monks rather than using his own life as an example. Even in a personal interview, he continues to try and inform readers about Tibetan Buddhism as it is, not essentialized to a minimal set of practices.

Adam Yauch’s engagement and public relationship with Buddhism is strikingly different from other celebrities in the modern era. He was deeply engaged in Tibetan Buddhism, and not ashamed to share his faith with those who asked. At his core, he was a social activist, and it is clear that Tibetan liberation, not the propagation of his faith, was the motivation behind his actions. Nonetheless, his actions spoke to how he was portraying Buddhism to his audience. He portrayed Buddhism as a faith, not just as an instrument to enhance one’s daily life. His method of spreading Buddhism was indirect, as he steered the deliberation of Buddhism to those immersed in Buddhist culture. He did not focus on his personal transformation as a result of his newfound practice, or dilute essential or select parts of the religion in order to sell it to the greatest number of people. He saw Buddhism, in all of its parts, as a solution to the problems in western culture, and let Tibetan Buddhists present their Tibetan Buddhism to a western culture, hoping for change.

Conclusion
In this modern era, Buddhism is portrayed to the western world bound by certain economic and social principles, and the faith has had to evolve to face this new environment: tiptoeing between a variety of extremes, softening traditional eastern aspects of the faith, and ultimately constructing certain ideals beyond tradition to make Buddhism palpable for a western audience. Much of this transformation has been accomplished by celebrities, who use Buddhism, especially meditation, as a tool for self-actualization and as a starting point for social action. This is the Buddhism that many practitioners in America adhere to, thanks to the celebrity role models.
who introduced it to modern western culture and from whom they created their practice. Musicians in certain circles take Buddhism and instrumentalize it to help their audiences find happiness and give back to their communities. While celebrities propagate a non-Western religion, roots of the eastern tradition unravel with the translation from east to west. Celebrity, as a distinct sphere of influence, is merely one of the lenses for transmission of Buddhism to the modern western consumer, and from this lens, a spectrum of beliefs arise with blends of old and new intertwined. Whether it’s right or wrong, good or bad, this topic remains controversial. But after all, what is punk without controversy?

REFERENCES


STAFF BIOS

**Jihyun Lee** is an editor-in-chief of *SocialEyes*. Originally from South Korea, Marie is currently a senior, pursuing a major in Sociology and a second-year graduate student in the school of Social Work, concentrating in the older adults population. A member of *SocialEyes* since 2015, she is grateful to everybody who worked diligently to publish the Issue 8.

**Jonathan Leuthner** is the Managing Editor of *SocialEyes*. From outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he is graduating this May with a Sociology major and American Studies minor. He wants to thank the motivated authors and editors for their late-night dedication to Issue 8 of this still-young publication, and wish everyone luck in their future, and ever-important, endeavors towards shaping a more just world.

**Byun-Hun Kim** is the associate editor of *SocialEyes*. He is a junior majoring in English and minoring in Managing for Social Impact. Byung-Hun found his interest in sociology through taking Latin American Sociology class his sophomore year. He is interested in learning about how to approach issues with positive social impact in mind.

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Kara Murdock is an editor of SocialEyes from Hopkinton, MA. She is a member of the class of 2018 double majoring in Psychology and Sociology. In addition to SocialEyes, Kara volunteers in the Arts and Mind Psychology Lab on campus and at a nursing home in South Boston as part of the 4Boston service program. She worked with author Jonathan Leuthner on his piece entitled “Mass Incarceration: Causes, Consequences, and Embedded Racism” this year.

Kiana Labrecque is an editor of SocialEyes. She is a member of the class of 2018 and is a double major in Sociology and Theology. She is from Endwell, New York. She worked with Hyewon Han on the paper “Environmental Injustice in the Production and Disposal of Plastics”. This is Kiana’s first year as an editor, and she is proud to have contributed to Issue 8.

Juliana Hillis is an editor on the SocialEyes staff. She is a member of the class of 2018 in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences and is majoring in Sociology. In addition to SocialEyes, Juliana is the Secretary of BC’s Italian Club and serves on the Leadership Team for LINKS. This is her first year as an editor, and she worked with author Marissa Venuto on her piece entitled “What Are You Selling: the Shoes or the Sex?”
Sianay Chase is an editor for the *SocialEyes* journal and is a senior in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences. Sianay is originally from Burlington, Vermont and studies Sociology and Political Science. She worked with Christina King on her piece, *Different Patriarchies, Same Feminism: The Struggle to Achieve and Maintain Intersectionality*. Sianay is grateful that a journal like *SocialEyes* exists on campus and thanks all the authors for their hard work.

Minji Kwon is the only designer for the *SocialEyes* and a freshman in the Design Department of the Seoul National University. Minji is from South Korea and studies Visual Design. She has multiple experiences in exhibiting her works in collaboration, as a member of a school club, *MUJI*. In one particular exhibition at the gallery *Armway*, Minji displayed two works on magnolia. She is excited to have the opportunity to do design works for *SocialEyes*. 