

# Journal of Undergraduate Anthropology



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The **Journal of Undergraduate Anthropology** aims to create a place for those pursuing anthropology to share their research and view that of their peers. Founded at Binghamton University in 2011, the **Journal** is an annual online publication.

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## **Table of Contents**

### **Ethnographies**

Hansori: Language, Culture, and Social Relationships

By Hayoon Kim

*Page 7*

A CouchSurfing Ethnography: Traveling and Connection in a Globalized World

By CiCi Siyue Liu

*Page 13*

Youth Dating Culture in Urban Vietnam: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influence

By Alexa DiFiore

*Page 22*

The Panoptic Gaze of Post-9/11 "Security Theater"

By Daniella Schocken

*Page 38*

### **Literary Research**

Archaeological Implications of Gender in the Prehispanic Southwest

By Kelsie Martinez

*Page 46*

The Living Dead: Euthanasia, Sacrifice and the Emerging Metaphysics of Secular Society

By Rund Abdelfatah

*Page 54*

Media(ted) Identities: Constructing and Caring for Female Adolescent Sexuality  
In the United States and the United Kingdom

By Kimberly Faith Wachtler

*Page 64*

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Photographs contributed by: **Katharine Khanna** at Brown University and Binghamton University's **Samantha Bolan** and **Olivia Tonin**.



***Edinburgh Winter Carnival***

Katharine Khanna, Brown University

## note from the editor

In anthropology, as within any academic field, worthwhile research is often ascribed to professors and independent researchers. Meanwhile, undergraduate anthropologists across the country write thousands of pages each year, dedicating their time to the study of people.

This year's submissions highlight varied topics from youth dating culture in Vietnam to implications of gender in archaeology. The result of this hard work is often underestimated. Each year undergraduate students provide new lines of inquiry in the field, most of which subsequently disappear on university hard drives.

The Journal of Undergraduate Anthropology stresses the importance of this research and creates a venue for the thought-provoking material to be disseminated on a national scale. We are proud to present this year's issue, which draws on some of the most promising young anthropologists.

Cordially,

Natalia Chapovalova

Natalia Chapovalova

Editor-in-Chief

## HANSORI: CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Hayoon Kim  
Brown University

### *Abstract*

The goal of this ethnography is to explore the social dynamics of Hansori, a traditional Korean percussion ensemble group at Brown University. After observing and interviewing both Korean American and Korean International students to contrast their approaches to social relationships, I identified three factors that influence the way members form and maintain relationships with one another: language, primary and secondary socialization, and the musical component of the group Hansori.

It is a chilly Sunday afternoon, and the sky is already turning a little darker as I approach the Pembroke Field House. Even from a block away, I begin to hear the familiar beat of the percussion—the low, rumbling bass of the buk travels farthest, followed by the high-pitched, shrill noise of the kwenggari. Upon entering the building, I am greeted by a large circle of students, each seated cross-legged on the carpeted floor behind his or her instruments. The building is poorly insulated, but people are wearing short-sleeved shirts and appear to be quite warm. In fact, samulnori is quite a physically rigorous routine, and the energy and the heat is almost palpable in the otherwise frigid space. As I get comfortably seated, the head kwenggari player clangs on his instrument to quiet everyone down. “Let’s try the chilchae one more time,” he proposes, and instantly, all eyes focus on him, awaiting his signal to begin the run-through.

Hansori is a musical ensemble group here at Brown University, dedicated to the learning and performing of samulnori, a traditional Korean percussion ensemble of four different instruments. The name “Hansori” is a combination of two words, han (one) and sori (sound), and signifies the creation of a unified sound through the collaboration of each individual player. At present, Hansori consists entirely of Korean students. Out of the twenty-three official members on the roster, three identify themselves as Korean Americans (KA) and the rest as Korean Internationals (KI). The group is open to non-Korean students as well, and there have been several members of different cultural backgrounds in the past.

There are several key terms and concepts that are crucial to the understanding of this ethnography. First, the sunhoobae dynamic refers to a traditional Korean social hierarchy in which a sunbae (someone who is higher in terms of age grade; for instance, a junior is higher in age grade than a sophomore, regardless of their biological ages) leads and looks after the hoobae (someone who is lower in terms of age grade), who in turn treats the sunbae with respect. An overlapping but distinct concept is that of unni, nuna, oppa, and hyung. While the first two terms literally mean “older sister” and the latter two “older brother,” these terms are generally used towards people who are older than oneself regardless of kinship. Simply put, while sunbae and hoobae are markers of age grade, unni et al. are markers of biological age. In addition, a unique aspect about the Korean language is that there are two distinct forms of speech. Jondetmal, or the

honorific form, is used toward people who are of a higher pecking order. Banmal is the casual form, and is used exclusively toward people with whom one feels most comfortable and/or superior.

The goal of this ethnography is to explore the sunhoobae dynamic in the specific context of Hansori. Initially, I aimed to focus on how the Korean language affects social relationships. I hypothesized that language plays a primary role in shaping social relationships and creating hierarchies. In order to test this hypothesis, I interviewed both Korean American and Korean International students to compare and contrast their approaches to their sunbaes. Through this research, I discovered that while language plays an important role, other factors—such as primary and secondary socialization, as well as the musical component of the group Hansori—also influence the way members form and maintain their relationships with one another.

### ***Related Research***

Anthropologists and linguists have long noted the importance of language in social life. As John B. Thompson observed, “every linguistic interaction...bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce” (Thompson 1991, 2). Scholars have been especially interested in code-switching, or the concurrent use of multiple languages, and how speakers choose which language to use in a particular situation. It is worth noting code-switching need not involve two different languages, but can also take place with multiple strands of one language (Hymes 2003). This is the case with the honorific and casual forms of Korean—although there is only one language involved, different social circumstances call for different forms of Korean. Recently, with more Korean and Korean-American scholars taking interest in the field of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, there has been an increasing amount of research done on precisely this topic. M. Agnes Kang’s study of Korean-Americans’ approach to the sunhoobae hierarchy is a particularly instructive example—in this research, Kang addresses how Korean culture delineates social relationships in the context of age and power and how this practice is perpetuated through the use of language (Kang 2003).

### ***Method***

First, I conducted participant-observations by attending and participating in several rehearsals throughout the semester. I looked for patterns of behavior, especially with regard to social interactions among individual members. In addition, I conducted interviews with the official members on the roster, as well as with five other non-members or prospective members of the group. The questions were open-ended and allowed room for both personal and impersonal responses so that respondents could modify their answers depending on their level of comfort. Every interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. Due to the way in which I conducted my interviews, I was able to modify and/or improvise questions based on the individuals’ responses. Conversations lasted at least twenty minutes, most ranging from thirty to forty-five minutes, and several over an hour. The interviews were recorded verbatim and typed into a computer as the interview took place. However, since most respondents were more comfortable in Korean (not a single interviewee responded entirely in English), all interviews were translated.

Based on my interviews and fieldwork, I observed a clear, although by no means antagonistic, divide between the Korean International community and the Korean American community here at Brown. For instance, every KI student I interviewed was more comfortable with Korean, and most of our conversation transpired in Korean. In contrast, the KA students spoke mostly English, interrupted by several Korean words or phrases only when there were no satisfying English equivalents. Also, every KI student I interviewed expressed familiarity and a high level of compliance with the traditional sunhoobae hierarchy, while the KA students confided that they were less comfortable with the dynamic. There are several factors that account for this difference: language, socialization, and the element of music.

### *Language*

As I had hypothesized, research confirmed that language is certainly an important factor in shaping social relationships. Most significantly, there was a correlation between the form of Korean used (jondetmal or banmal) and the level of intimacy and closeness experienced. Almost every respondent noted that using jondetmal creates a sense of barrier because it makes the speaker more cautious of what they are saying. “With people I use jondetmal to, I pause and think at least once more before I say something,” one interviewee said. Another echoed this comment, claiming that she “cannot really become close” with people she uses jondetmal with because “there is a line that you can’t cross.” Conversely, the use of banmal brings people closer because “when you use banmal, you feel more comfortable talking to them, and because the way you talk becomes more relaxed, you feel more like friends.” To this, another student added, “you can joke around, be playful, and be more honest, when you’re using banmal.” However, some questioned the causal relationship between the two. A senior inquires, “do you use banmal with those you already feel close with? Or do you become closer because you are using banmal? I’m not sure which comes first.” (Interestingly, the senior happens to be concentrating in philosophy). The overall consensus is that there is a reciprocal relationship between the use of banmal and the level of intimacy—there needs to be at least a certain degree of closeness between individuals for them to switch from jondetmal to banmal, and in turn, this decision helps them feel even closer to one another.

There is also a difference in the Korean and English approaches to the sunhoobae dynamic. When addressing sunbaes in Korean, one usually resorts to jondetmal. On the other hand, when talking to sunbaes in English, there is no honorific equivalent. Thus, when using English, people view the relationship as more egalitarian and “peer-to-peer” rather than hierarchical. For instance, one freshman said that although he recognizes older KA students as sunbaes, he “cannot express respect the same way” as he does with sunbaes with whom he speaks Korean. During this particular interview, several Korean students walked by. While the freshman bowed to a KI sophomore and greeted him in a respectful manner, he waved and exchanged playful banter with a KA senior. His behavior is not an anomaly—a Korean American student also reports that his relationship with English-speaking sunbaes and Korean-speaking sunbaes are quite different. “I wave to the KA sunbaes and I just say ‘hi,’ but I bow and

use *jondetmal* to the KI sunbaes,” he says. Thus, the fact that English lacks an honorific form impacts the way students distinguish their relationships with KA and KI sunbaes.

It is also worth exploring what the sunbaes think about the use of *jondetmal*. Older students felt that when someone uses *jondetmal* to them, it imbues them with a sense of responsibility towards the speaker. One junior explained, “when hoobaes use *jondetmal* to me, I’m inclined to feel a sense of obligation, and I feel like I need to look after them.” In fact, this is a crucial component of the sunhoobae dynamic—for the sunbaes to take care of the hoobaes. Many KI students claim that they feel more of a connection to the Korean International community precisely because of this component. “When I look at a KA hoobae, it’s like, he’s just some other guy that I know. But if someone joins KISA [Korean International Student Association], I feel like I need to take care of that person,” one sophomore explains. “And because I feel that cultural sense of duty to take care of him, it’s easier to become closer.”

### *Role of Socialization*

Interviews and fieldwork revealed a marked difference between the Korean American respondents and the Korean International respondents that could not be explained by language alone. It appears that in addition to language, socialization also plays a significant role in shaping social relationships. For instance, the Korean American students who were first exposed to the sunhoobae culture at Brown, say that they had a difficult time adjusting. “It was really hard my first year. I was really uncomfortable with using *jondetmal* with people who were only a year older than me,” one student confides. “Honestly, I think if you’re within a couple years difference, I don’t see why you have to use *jondetmal*.” Another student who shares a similar experience went as far as to describe her first months as a “shit show,” because she could not understand why the Korean international community was so hierarchical.

In stark contrast, students who spent most of their formative years in Korea report the opposite. This is most evident among students who have lived in Korea all their lives, and left for the first time to attend Brown. In trying to explain why the sunhoobae dynamic is so prevalent in Korea, many referred to the overarching Confucian emphasis on social hierarchy. “It’s a fundamental part of Korean culture,” one student muses. “So I guess that’s just what I’m used to.” He continues on to cite an extreme manifestation of egalitarianism as his “biggest culture shock” when he first arrived in the States. “The Dean was reprimanding this kid for something, I don’t even remember, and the kid started yelling and talking back. I had never seen something like that before,” he recounts. “People don’t do that kind of thing in Korea.”

As the president of Hansori observes, there is a difference even among the Korean International students in the way they approach the sunhoobae system, depending on the timing of their arrival to the States. There exists a third group—a group with which I associate myself most strongly—of students who are technically Korean International but have spent much more time in the United States. We occupy a liminal space between the Korean International and the Korean American communities. Although we are fluent in both languages, the fact that our primary socialization took place in Korea and our secondary socialization in the States puts us in a complex and ambivalent position. A junior who first came to America six years ago explains

that in Korea, because of the dominant culture, she “really felt” a sense of respect when she addressed her sunbaes. In other words, back in Korea, her expression of respect through the use of *jondetmal* was authentic. However, her own perceptions changed during adolescence. While she continues to use *jondetmal* towards the sunbaes here in the States, she now senses a “performative aspect” to her interactions with them.

### *The Element of Music*

The unique nature of the group Hansori—the fact that it is a specialized, musical group—adds another layer to the way social relationships are formed. “Usually, when sunbaes tell hoobaes to do something, their authority is kind of arbitrary,” one student explains. “But in Hansori, sunbaes teach hoobaes and pass on their skills, their knowledge, their experiences. So the feeling of respect is more intensified and genuine, because the sunbaes are good at something that the hoobaes aren’t yet capable of.” Another student, who attended a fine arts high school in Korea, also notes the importance of music. “I think in art, there is this sense of pulling up from above,” she muses. When asked to elaborate, she ponders for a minute. “Whether it’s dance, or painting, or music, it really matters which sunbae you learn from and you become the closest to. Because art is really subjective, and their influence is reflected in your work.”

In addition, participating in an ensemble inevitably brings people closer. Most importantly, as the name of the group suggests, there is a huge emphasis within Hansori on playing and performing in unity. If even one person makes a mistake or does not play up to par, it can cause a breach in the group’s harmony. “Nobody wants to be that one person. You feel really bad,” one student says. As a result, all members put forth their best efforts. This stands in stark contrast to the way students participate in other groups—for instance, KISA activities revolve around mixing and mingling with other students. However, in Hansori, there is pressure for every single person to try and perform their best, creating a heightened feeling of unity and connection. This may account for why Hansori members seem very intimate and close with one another, something a non-member noted with a hint of envy.

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

From this research emerged three elements that contribute to the formation of social relationships within Hansori and also in the broader Korean community at Brown. Findings from this ethnography highlight the importance of socialization, both primary and secondary. In learning how to become integrated and fully-fledged members of our society, we learn the cultural rules, whether it is egalitarianism in America or social hierarchy in Korea. The subject also engages the debate of universality. As evidenced by this research, the nature of social relationships is not universal. On the contrary, the ways in which we form and experience social relationships are largely dictated by culture.

Despite my initial hypothesis that language is the most critical factor, my interviews and fieldwork revealed that socialization and music also play key roles in shaping Korean and Korean American social relationships, especially within the context of Hansori. Additionally, very interesting patterns manifested themselves throughout my fieldwork and interviews, including gender differences in the approach to social hierarchy, Korean-American cultural

conflict and negotiation, and Korean-English code-switching, to name but a few. Although I was not able to cover everything in this ethnography, it is my hope that this project will serve as a starting point for further research.

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### **Senegal, West Africa**

Samantha Bolan, Binghamton University

## A CouchSurfing Ethnography: Traveling and Connection in a commodified World

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CiCi Siyue Liu  
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*"Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a  
change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the  
ideas of living." -- Miriam Beard*

### **Abstract**

The past decades have seen significant expansion in the markets for commercial tourism, offering high-cost accommodation, luxury services, and resort getaways for the Western consumer. In the context of high expenditure-and-profit tourism, forms of alternative tourism distant from the commercial arena have emerged globally. Examples include Hospitality Exchange and the CouchSurfing Project. This ethnographic study analyzes the CouchSurfing Project as an emerging social and cultural phenomenon, and seeks to determine the shared meanings, values, and social interpretations of CouchSurfers that undergird this community. Mixed methodologies were employed, including participant-observation, informal dialogue, and structured interviews. Results demonstrate that members participate in CouchSurfing for much more than the goals of cost-free accommodation. Moreover, this ethnography demonstrates that participants are motivated by a shared desire to form meaningful connections and local friendships, deepen cultural understanding, and ultimately pursue personal and intellectual growth through their platforms as travelers and CouchSurfers.

### **Introduction**

The practice of leisure traveling and tourism is not a new phenomenon. The earliest form of tourism can be traced as far back as the Babylonian Empire where people congregated at holy sites, while centuries later Victorian era gentry travelled to enjoy life and the culture of Paris, Venice or Florence. In the last century, the development of air travel and cars has dramatically altered the movement of people around the earth, and traveling for business and leisure has become increasingly available to people across socio-economic means. Subsequently, the markets for commercial tourism expanded exponentially, and offer high-cost accommodation, luxury services and resort getaways for the Western consumer.

In the context of high expenditure-and-profit mass tourism, different niches of low-budget travelers have emerged that are expanding around the world. Among these are traveling communities such as Hospitality Club and CouchSurfing, which offer free accommodation to travelers in more than 130 countries around the world. These exchanges, which involve host and traveler, usually consist of a traveler residing in the home of the host, sleeping a few nights on a sofa or guest bed, and leaving after a few days with no monetary profit for either party. Some people question the practice of welcoming a stranger into one's home, but for others this seems like an interesting and appealing idea.

The purpose of this ethnography is to explore and analyze the culture of these hospitality exchanges, with a focus on the organization and practice of the CouchSurfing Project. Specifically, in this research I seek to determine the shared meanings, values, and interpretations of members that make the CouchSurfing Project possible. Moreover, I will explore the motivations, intentions and rationale of members for engaging in this social practice. Finally, I will investigate how relationships are constructed and facilitated through this exchange of hospitality and culture. Through analysis of the information gained from conducting participant-observation, informal dialogue, and structured interviews, I will argue that members of this community are bound together by a desire to pursue cultural understanding, human connection, and personal and intellectual growth through traveling.

### **Literature Review**

CouchSurfing is a non-profit organization that seeks to “internationally network people and places, create educational exchanges, raise collective consciousness, spread tolerance and facilitate cultural understanding” (CouchSurfing 2011). As a network of hospitality and exchange, CouchSurfing connects travelers with local hosts who offer free accommodation around the globe. Created in 2003, CouchSurfing now has more than a million members in over 230 countries, and parallels hospitality networks such as Hospitality Club, GlobalFreeloaders.com, and Tripping.com. Much has been written on the nature of online communities, but a hospitality network such as CouchSurfing occupies a unique niche in internet communities because its interactions take place both online and offline.

Much of the literature on CouchSurfing has been focused on the online world of CouchSurfing—namely, analyzing how the internet and online platform of CouchSurfing facilitates the friendships and trust levels of its members. Lauterbach et al. (2009) argues that the CouchSurfing network displays a high degree of reciprocal interaction that is enabled by an online system of references that allow individuals to vouch for one another. The online CouchSurfing platform implements a reputation system that includes personal references (from surfers and hosts to each other), physical verification, and vouching. Lauterbach et al. suggest that these kinds of reputation mechanisms, with vouching in particular, are essential for making users feel comfortable with online interactions and continuing the cycle of participation. In addition, Rosen et al. (2011) explore how the use of online networking resources such as CouchSurfing.com can generate trust, sense of belonging to a community, and encourage face-to-face encounters. They find that members of online communities feel a greater sense of belonging when they have participated in offline engagements.

A large percentage of CouchSurfing literature analyzes the mechanisms of trust and community building through online interactions. However, an overemphasis on virtual networks and online trust mechanisms may overlook the fact that although trust can be recorded and used for prediction purposes in CouchSurfing, the real origins of trust are found and nurtured through human contact and relationships. It is also important to note that there does not exist a strict dualism between online interactions and offline experiences; rather, online communication operates in a feedback loop with offline interactions. Rosen et al. describe CouchSurfing as a

community that has “merged the virtual and physical,” whose interactions take place in both realms. Therefore, the internet provides the platform with which to begin establishing CouchSurfing relationships (through creating personal profiles, seeking hosts, etc.), but its ultimate value lies in facilitating offline interactions for direct human engagement. After experiencing the physical interactions of surfing or hosting, participants then voluntarily return to the online platform to create new connections. These offline interactions create energy and potential that is channeled into the online community in order to generate more energy and potential, thus reaffirming and reproducing the cycle of CouchSurfing experiences. Therefore, if one seeks to determine the origins of trust and engagement in the CouchSurfing community, one must turn to the motivations and interests of members in the community. This current ethnography seeks to contribute to the literature by further developing an understanding of the values and personal interests of CouchSurfers, and how these values foster relationships of trust, a sense of belonging, and continuing participation for CouchSurfing members.

### **Method and Material**

In this ethnography, I employ methods of participant-observation, informal conversations, and formal interviews order to investigate how CouchSurfing members “view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and how they see themselves” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 13). I resided with seven different hosts over a total time period of five weeks, attended weekly CouchSurfing meetings, initiated informal dialogue about CouchSurfing, and conducted five formal interviews.

During the course of my research, I used the CouchSurfing database to search for hosts, communicate with hosts, and subsequently resided in his or her home for a period of days. By participating as CouchSurfer-researcher, I was able to obtain a number of advantages that could not have been found otherwise. Foremost, my role as CouchSurfer participant helped me gain access to the homes of CouchSurfers, through which I was able to obtain firsthand experience of the social interactions, expectations, and negotiations that comprise a surfer-host relationship. Furthermore, my role as CouchSurfer helped me build rapport and connection with my hosts who I subsequently asked for more in-depth interviews. These interviews were crucial in providing in-depth personal accounts of people’s experiences of CouchSurfing, which were used for further analysis. Through the role of researcher, I focused more intently on observing and analyzing the social behaviors, expectations, and interactions of CouchSurfing participants. These roles allowed me the flexibility to pursue different avenues of information and experiences of CouchSurfing, adding valuable perspectives to this research.

### **The CouchSurfing Experience**

It is helpful to first give a general overview of the mechanisms and functioning of CouchSurfing. To begin with, the request for a place to stay—which often manifests as an available couch, extra guest room, living room for sleeping bags, etc.—is initiated by the CouchSurfer to his or her potential host by sending an online message through the CouchSurfing platform. If the potential host finds the message and surfers’ profile to be interesting and agreeable, and has space to host the surfer in his home for the requested number of days, he will

confirm the couch request. Both parties will then determine a time and place to meet upon the traveler's arrival in the host's city, which could range from either meeting at a central train station, or the traveler going directly to the host's home.

### *Online Profiles and Connections*

Through navigating the online platform with access as a CouchSurfing member, I found that there were certain expectations and norms that govern members' actions in both the online and offline sphere. In order to become an official member of the CouchSurfing community, one must start by creating an online profile on CouchSurfing.com. A profile offers the space for members to upload pictures of themselves, and write about their personal interests, philosophy on life, favorite music, movies, books, etc. Members can also choose to fill in information such as "Types of People I Enjoy.," "CouchSurfing Experience," "One Amazing Thing I've Seen or Done," and "Locations Traveled." These profiles function as the essential platform from which members seek connections, find couch hosts, gain information about CouchSurfing social events, and write personal references for people they have surfed with or hosted.

Most CouchSurfers regard an empty or highly incomplete profile as taboo and something to be avoided. In fact, my couch hosts often relayed to me that they preferred to only host people who have complete profiles with information and photos. Saila<sup>1</sup> is a 33-year old Finnish female CouchSurfer who currently works as a sign-language-interpreter. For Saila, the important thing is that "the profile page must be filled...it must be filled properly, because if you don't get any kind of idea, image of the person, you are hosting a question mark, ad stranger. You need to get a picture of the person, a feeling." A similar logic applies to couch surfers as well—a couch surfer would also like to know that their potential couch host is someone who they can trust and feel comfortable living with for their stay. With the use of the online profile and personal reference system, couch hosts and surfers are able to gain a better idea of the person with whom they will be sharing living space and time, and no longer feel like they are hosting a total stranger.

Furthermore, Petya, a 28-year-old host who is ethnically Russian but currently lives and works in Germany, responded to my question with the following statement: "So it's risky...The life is risky, you know? Every time if you go outside it's risky. Some idiot can drive with car on you, or some shit can fly from the sky on your head." From the interviews, couch hosts communicated similar perceptions that it would be highly unlikely for someone to go through the trouble of creating a profile in order to steal possessions from another's house; that there was not so much of value to steal either way; and that life is risky on many fronts, so why worry so much about it?

### *Roles and Expectations of CouchSurfing*

As in any social relationship, CouchSurfing hosts and surfers must be aware and understanding of the norms and roles they each play within the CouchSurfing setting. Norms can be understood as social attitudes of approval and disapproval, and what is acceptable and what is not in a society or a group (Sunstein, 1996). There are norms about littering, dating, when to

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been altered to ensure the anonymity of interview subjects.

stand, when to sit, when, how, and with whom to express affection, how to speak to your boss, etc. The usefulness of a set of norms can be analyzed through their effectiveness, or lack of, in serving social functions. It is important to note that CouchSurfing norms are constructed through building relationships in one-on-one or one-one two interactions, rather than emerging from a formal group setting or community structure.

Primarily, CouchSurfing norms function to encourage dialogue, and the building of personal relationships between surfer and host. A fundamental expectation of both actors is that their relationship should be built upon a foundation of mutual respect, honest interactions, and the exchange of time, company, and dialogue. When asked what she thought makes a “good or bad couch surfer and host,” Saila replied: “I think that it’s mainly about sharing. We all get to have these nice conversations and share our experiences...I don’t want to feel like I’m used as a hostel or just some free place to store stuff. [When I accept a surfer], I need to do some adjustment of my life, and if I don’t get anything in return it feels like there is something missing, and it’s unequal.” We see that the feeling Saila describes is not mere disapproval for not following social conventions, but a deeper sense of discomfort at being “used” as a functional utility, rather than regarded as a person with whom one enters into mutual dialogue, understanding, and relationship.

Florian, a 44 year-old man from Germany, described a situation where he felt uncomfortable with a surfer who stayed a week at his place, but was always out of the house, returning late at night, causing them to have “almost no opportunity to eat together or really get to know each other.” In this situation, very little dialogue, personal time, and company was shared between these two parties, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort caused by unmet expectations. In the situations mentioned above, the couch surfers had broken the social contract implicit within CouchSurfing. Specifically, they did not behave according to the social expectations of the CouchSurfing community, which regards with utmost importance the pursuit of dialogue, personal engagement, and the building of mutual relationship within CouchSurfing interactions.

### *Motivations and Benefits of CouchSurfing*

It is important to note that CouchSurfing does not operate as a “freeloading” phenomenon in which the traveler obtains free accommodation and the host gains nothing in return. Instead, both parties are motivated by specific interests and values that drive them to participate in CouchSurfing, and to gain from the surfing or hosting experience. A fundamental characteristic of CouchSurfing relationships is the lack of monetary exchange—although CouchSurfing members are motivated in pursuing low-budget traveling. Accordingly, the primary motivation for the CouchSurfing relationships no longer lies in a promise of financial gain or material consumption, but rather in the creation of social value. Moreover, members of the CouchSurfing community engage in surfing and hosting relationships not for hopes of monetary profit, but for pursuing cultural understanding, personal connection, and emotional and intellectual growth.

Maija, a 24-year old Finnish couch host and surfer, explained that from hosting travelers, she gains “interesting knowledge of different cultures...and practical knowledge such as baking

and cooking different dishes. Also, often the surfers have visited other cultures and know about them, so then you can have this comparison between not just two cultures, but more.” Here Maija demonstrates her desire to learn from the people she hosts, and perceives that the benefit she gains from hosting lies in her increased knowledge of different cultures, people and culinary skills.

When asked why she hosts, Saila stated that it is her own way to keep up the traveling spirit. Even though I’m not traveling myself, I can host people who are traveling in Finland, so we can share traveling experiences. And of course, I get to keep up my language skills. It’s nice to help people to have a cheap place to stay, but not only that...it is meeting the people and having the conversation that is my priority.” Again, we see that Saila’s primary gains in participating in CouchSurfing does not involve increased financial means, but instead in engaging dialogue, the opportunity to practice language skills, and meeting interesting people around the world.

Furthermore, people who choose to participate through CouchSurfing share a desire to travel outside conventional or commercial paths of tourism, such as those found through pre-made tour packages, cruise ships, or seaside resorts. When posed the question why he chooses to travel through CouchSurfing, Petya from Germany explained that “through [CouchSurfing], you get to know with the local people...the local people help you and show you the place. The real place, not like...well, you see the place with your eyes, and you get some new answers, [and] some specific points of view from the local people.” Here we see Petya’s desire to travel and get to know a place through the “locals’ eyes,” an experience which he perceives as more interesting and potentially fulfilling than traveling alone or living in a hostel. Many CouchSurfers, instead of pursuing high-cost accommodation or luxury services, share a desire to explore a land through a local’s eyes. They seek to make personal and authentic connections, as well as to build meaningful relationships with people they encounter through traveling. In the CouchSurfing realm, value is not gained by pursuing profit or commodity, but rather by the ability of people to make meaningful and reciprocal social connections.

In addition, when asked if she perceives a difference between the kind of traveling done through CouchSurfing and conventional tourism outlets, Saila confirmed that she did. Through a travel agency, Saila said, “you are lacking the actual connection to local people... you’ll have a dinner..several dinners in local restaurants, but you won’t get to know local persons probably. Well, you can know some salesman or something like that, but not the person how they live” [sic]. Even more, Saila stated that she thinks “actually it’s a completely different type of person who does the travel agency traveling than the CouchSurfing traveling. Travel agency travelers probably don’t even miss...they are not missing anything; they don’t suffer about not having local connections as a CouchSurfer or budget travelers. I think they really need to get connected. I think it’s about connections, yea.”

As we can see from the above statements, the kind of person who participates in CouchSurfing seeks alternatives to large-scale touristic experiences and enjoys experiencing culture from a ground-up local point of view. Moreover, he or she does not gain enough satisfaction from

merely taking photos of architecture or frequenting popular tourist cafés; rather, she or he forms memories and emotional connections to a city through meaningful experiences with other people. The traveler ceases to solely pass by the surface of a town with photos and consumer products as markers of time; instead, he takes with him friendships and memories that emotionally connect him to the locale. For the CouchSurfer, it is not what ones buys or takes photos of, but rather who they meet, how they connect, and the emotional memories within conversations and interactions that meaningfully complete a traveling experience.

### ***Conclusions and Discussion***

Ultimately, CouchSurfing is more than just a system of free hostels around the world. While budget travelers can and do value the free accommodation provided by their hosts, this research demonstrates that CouchSurfers seek more than temporary hostels. Instead, CouchSurfers are motivated by a desire to make local connections, experience different cultures, and learn from the people and ideas they encounter through traveling. Rather than using money as exchange value in their interactions, CouchSurfers use shared dialogue, mutual relationship, and the experience of meaningful engagement as the primary indicators of value within CouchSurfing.

At the end of our interview, Petya told me: “CouchSurfing...It is a program...for traveling, for getting to know new people. Just for living. It’s not a goal, you know? The goal is to be better. In mind, to get better. To know yourself better, that is the aim, I think so...because that is what we need to achieve in life.” Coming from the heart, these words resonate of the meaning created through this community. For Petya and many others, actions of sharing couches and traveling are not just the ends of an experience, but the means to relationship. For these people, CouchSurfing offers a valuable means to pursue cultural exchange, personal and emotional growth, and increased connections with fellow human beings.

The social phenomenon of CouchSurfing raises important questions about tourism and traveling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further research is needed to situate CouchSurfing within the spheres of globalization and modernism. Specifically, investigations should evaluate the viability of CouchSurfing as a mode of “alternative tourism” in the current era. Additional studies could compare and contrast CouchSurfing with other nonconventional paths of travel, such as through organic farms stays like WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), which functions as an exchange of labor for food and accommodation on the organic farm. Finally, studies should also investigate whether people from different countries and cultures are more likely to participate in CouchSurfing, and explore the socio-cultural reasons for why this is the case.

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### **Interviews**

- SH 02.12.11. Interview with Saila Heittonen on December 2, 2011.
- MR 29.11.11. Interview with Maija Rantaharju on November 29, 2011.
- JR 29.11.11. Interview with Jarno Rantaharju on November 29, 2011.
- FH 19.10.11. Interview with Florian Hensberg on October 19, 2011.
- PB 29.10.11. Interview with Petya Bednarek on October 29, 2011.



***Student Demonstration in Paris***

Katharine Khanna, Brown University

## Youth Dating Culture in Urban Vietnam: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influence

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### *Abstract*

This paper attempts to research urban youth's attitudes and behaviors concerning dating (the process, PDA, typical dating spots and behavior) and opinions towards "hot issues" in contemporary Vietnam, such as pre-marital sex and co-habitation. My research question focuses on what the term "dating" means among youth in urban Vietnam, and the various influences that affect youth's dating and sexual lives. Through an extensive literature review, I learned that there is an overall lack of information and discussion about sex in Vietnam. There is also a general idea from parents, the government, and school that youth are "not supposed" to have sex.

I was surprised to see that the sexual behaviors reported through my online questionnaire differed, in that they existed, from those reported in previous articles and by my own interviewees. I ultimately conclude that in order to handle various influences from society and media, youth must communicate amongst each other. They would be surprised to learn that they share similar sexual attitudes and concerns. I also conclude that sex must be talked about and understood in the Vietnamese society at large (the government, schools, and parents) in order to create an open and comfortable atmosphere for youth to learn about sex from trusted sources, rather than relying on foreign websites and friends' experiences.

### *Introduction*

More than half of Vietnam's population is under the age of 25 (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2010), yet this is the age group that is most neglected and misunderstood. Urban Vietnamese youth have to constantly adjust to a new, modern lifestyle, while also adhering to traditional values encouraged by family, school, and the government. Constant shifting of social values and expectations causes natural human social interactions to become difficult and confusing, especially in regard to romantic relationships.

This study has two main aims. One is to explore the attitudes of youth in urban Vietnam toward dating (such as the process, expected boy/girl interactions, and desirable traits in significant others) and the activities associated with dating (public displays of affection, the club scene, sexual activities, "co-habitation", etc). The second, primary goal of this study is to understand how these attitudes are affected by both traditional values and new, foreign influences. The many conflicting discourse and public attitudes about sexuality that create confusion among Vietnamese youth can be seen through my primary and secondary research.

As I began my research, I quickly realized that dating could have divergent meanings. Today, in Western societies, dating involves any amount of sexual activity (whether kissing or intercourse) outside of an official romantic relationship, and the opportunity to do so with multiple people. However, these Western practices are still virtually unheard of in Vietnam's

urban societies. In prior decades, “dating” did not exist in Vietnam; choosing a spouse was a parental decision and the individual had little say in the matter. Although family opinion and behavior still appear to heavily influence the individual in Vietnam, there is a slow but steady shift toward individual desire being a large component in dating. Therefore, what does “dating” consist of for youth in contemporary Vietnam?

### ***Methodology***

I chose to focus on urban Vietnam because of its conflicting influences shaping youth’s attitude towards sexuality. The cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) are exposed to modern forms of media, through which many young people receive information and ideas about sex, and are affected by intense urbanization and foreign cultures (mainly those from the West and Korea) more than anywhere else in Vietnam.

My research consisted of individual interviews, focus groups, an anonymous online questionnaire, and literature review (although I will not discuss the literature review or questionnaire at length in this paper). The online questionnaire contained personal questions about sexual behaviors that were not asked during interviews, as well as opinion questions similar to those in the interviews. I emailed this questionnaire to all the members of the English club at the University of Economics in HCMC, all my interviewees, and students I met briefly at coffee shops and shopping areas in both HCMC and Hanoi. It should be noted the questionnaire was in English, limiting respondents to those with high-level English skills and possibly creating a language barrier. I was lucky to receive 57 total responses from participants generally aged 18 to 22.

Many semi-structured informal interviews and focus groups were conducted with Vietnamese students in various bubble tea restaurants and cafes. My research focused on heterosexual youth specifically, because homosexuality in Vietnam is a significant issue in itself and would involve a separate study. Student interviewees generally ranged from ages 18 to 23 (27 female and 13 male). All notes were recorded through typing and a tape recorder was not used during interviews.

### ***Discussion***

Sections of this discussion are derived from themed questions I asked in my online questionnaire and during various interviews and focus groups. These include: the definition of dating, the distinction of modern dating from traditional dating, opinions about premarital sex and co-habitation, effects of foreign influences on Vietnamese dating, thoughts about Vietnam’s club scene, and sources of information for youth about sex and dating. It should be noted that there are exceptions to conclusions made in this section; this data only reflects a portion of urban Vietnamese youth’s general attitudes and perceptions on dating. In addition, pseudo names are used in order to protect the identity of participants and easily refer to the different interviewees, except in the case of professionals and scholars.

#### ***What is dating in Urban Vietnam?***

I gathered from interviewees and survey responses that dating involves purposely going somewhere to get to know a person better, which is similar to dating in America. Popular dating

spots in urban Vietnam are coffee shops, restaurants, bubble tea shops, parks, and the cinema. However, some youth explained that the park is not a good place for couples to go at night because of the darkness, which can insinuate sexual activity. Two young people, in separate interviews, said that they see many “movies” at the park (referring to sexual activity). The park is also dangerous at night because it becomes a place for drug use.

### *The process*

Many of the youth I interviewed explained that most couples are generally friends first. When two people begin to have feelings for each other, they decide to spend time together away from the friend group. This is sometimes a long process, as Tran (20 years old) explained: “When you meet the guy for the first time you have a date with him in the US, but in Vietnam you need to know him for a long period of time, maybe 1 or 2 months, before officially dating” (Interview # 6, personal communication, May 6, 2011). Interviewees also implied that the common dating process in Vietnam is indirect; there is usually a lot of texting before one officially asks the other on a date, and boys usually ask a friend of the girl they like if she has a boyfriend before actively pursuing her. Some youth also explained that a boy may buy gifts for a girl on a special occasion, such as Women’s Day or another holiday, and when the girl accepts the gift, she accepts his “love”. I noticed that the word love was commonly mentioned when discussing dating; dating was usually described as a process to find love or to formalize love that already exists.

I discovered a few common trends in the dating process among urban Vietnamese youth. For example, boys generally ask girls on dates, stemming from “Vietnamese culture [in which] girls should be shy and not show her feeling... active girls are criticized in the old culture” (Focus Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011). However, this is changing as current youth magazines encourage girls to make the first move, and some of the girls I interviewed reported asking their current boyfriends on dates before he had a chance to ask them. Another general expectation for boys is that they have to pay for everything, although many girls told me they would rather split costs or even pay themselves. Other common dating behaviors are further explained through the discussion of two common dating “rules” below.

*Rule 1: “In Vietnam, we don’t kiss before we are boyfriend/girlfriend.”*

The above quote from a 20-year-old man from Ho Chi Minh City is a common belief among Vietnamese youth. Phung, a 19-year-old girl, believes that, “a kiss is just for a person you have feelings with. Some do if they can’t help it, but its bad,” (Focus Group # 4, personal communication, May 8, 2011). There are, of course, variations to this rule: one 22-year-old told me that he once held hands and kissed on a first date but did not do either with his current girlfriend until five years passed (Focus Group #1, personal communication, May 4, 2011).

Almost all interviewees said they would never kiss someone they met for the first time at a club, unless they were drunk and by accident kissed a friend. Li, a 25-year-old woman from Hanoi, told me that in Vietnam “you can kiss a person you know, but not strangers. When I got drunk and kissed my friend he texted if I was ok, but after that there was nothing. We stopped talking because he thought I was easy” (Interview #3, personal communication, April 24, 2011).

This “rule” eliminates many dating practices that are common in the United States, such as “hooking up” (kissing or having sexual activity outside a relationship) and “friends with benefits” (conducting sexual activities with friends but not advancing the relationship). In addition, couples in the U.S. can go on “breaks” and date other people due to long distances or other conflicts, but this generally does not happen in Vietnam. Vietnamese youth watch many American movies and are confused by these dating practices. Those who try to apply these Western concepts to their own life in Vietnam often face criticism and questions. It should be noted that I am in no way advocating Western dating practices, but rather explaining the complications that arise from the heavy influence of American culture-- which directly contradicts many traditional Vietnamese practices and beliefs-- on Vietnamese youth.

*Rule 2: Dating is exclusive.*

One 19-year-old girl stated, “in Vietnam, when two people are dating it means they are boyfriend and girlfriend” (Focus Group # 4, personal communication, May 7, 2011). Of course there are exceptions to this rule as well, but they apply more for boys than girls. For example, Hoa reported during Focus Group # 5: “if you are a girl dating with a lot of boys, they call you a bad word. But there are no words for boys [who do this]. It is more acceptable for boys, and that’s stupid” (personal communication, May 8, 2011). Many of the young men I interviewed thought dating multiple people was normal and important for finding the most suitable significant other. Pham even compared dating to ice cream, saying “there are so many different flavors, you have to try a lot before you decide which one is best” (Focus Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011). However, it should be kept in mind that dating in this context does not involve kissing (as discussed above). Only those “affected by overseas culture do that, but real Vietnamese people never do” (Thu, personal communication, May 9, 2011). I received a similar response from Dat, who said that individuals who date many people “think like Western people, but this is a small portion of people in Vietnam” (Focus Group # 1, personal communication, May 3, 2011). When asked what makes these people think like Westerners, he responded that many are obsessed with Western movies. These people “don’t think love is important, they want lots of experience. They need special feelings, not love.” At the end of many focus groups, students asked me why characters in Western movies have sex immediately after meeting each other.

*Modern Vs. Traditional Dating in Vietnam*

Dating did not exist in Vietnam a few decades ago. Thu validated this notion by stating, “there was no dating in the past, your parents ask you to marry a man. Maybe the first time you meet him is on the wedding day, so you try to love after marriage” (Focus Group #7, personal communication, May 9, 2011). Now, love and personal choice heavily influence dating in urban Vietnam. Today, dating is possible without parents’ permission, as I learned from many young women who told me they hide their relationships from their parents. Hai, 18-years-old, thinks that “nowadays when people date they usually hide their boyfriend or girlfriend because they don’t want to bother parents, its hard to get permission. When [youth] introduce boyfriend or girlfriend to mom or dad, that means they want to get married” (Focus Group # 4, personal

communication, May 7, 2011). However, this is certainly not the case in rural areas, as Pham explained: “In cities like HCMC and Hanoi, [youth are] more affected by Western culture, but rural areas are affected by tradition and [youth] don’t date without the permission of parents. In very old villages, it is still believed that a boy and girl shouldn’t touch before marriage,” (personal communication, May 11, 2011). This traditional idea is consistently challenged by urban youth’s increase in PDA.

*PDA among urban Vietnamese youth.*

As previously mentioned, Confucianism holds a heavy influence on dating attitudes and behaviors in Vietnam. According to Confucianism, sexual relations should only occur after marriage, and men and women are not allowed to be physically close unless they are married. However, when I asked *youth* the biggest difference between modern dating and dating during their parents’ generation, many discussed the increase in public displays of affection, or PDA. Couples today can commonly be seen embracing in parks, coffee shops, and on the street.

Despite this increase in PDA, many of the youth I interviewed reported feeling uncomfortable with the concept. One 19-year-old girl, Tra, explained that this stemmed from her own parents’ lack of PDA. Tra stated: “even common actions for couples, like hugging or kissing, parents don’t do in front of children” (Focus Group # 4, personal communication, May 7, 19). Many members of the focus group agreed with Tra. Tra later said that it is hard to show love toward another person in Vietnam, especially because she feels awkward expressing love to her parents.

All the youth I interviewed considered handholding acceptable, but some explained that more than hand-holding (kissing, groping, etc) is very rude and causes others to feel uncomfortable. Excessive PDA also has a negative influence on young children. Therefore, many youth concluded that there should be a happy medium regarding PDA, and were not sure if they would partake in PDA themselves.

*Generation 9X, or ‘90s kids.*

Li, who was born in 1986, was the first to introduce me to the generation of youth known as “generation 9X”. During our interview, she explained that everyone is weary of those born during the 1990s because they are risky and don’t really think about their behaviors. She told me that she is really open, but “they think differently. In high school I had a lot of friends who had sex, but they knew the consequences. Kids now are *not* afraid of the consequences. I knew I might get pregnant [if I had sex], and was afraid of my parents, but kids now don’t care” (personal communication, April 24, 2011). Thu, also born in the 1980s, told me that she thought, “there is a big gap between ‘90s kids and ‘80s kids – they [90s] are more selfish and spend more money” (Focus Group # 7, personal communication, May 9, 2011).

I also found that the third and fourth year university students I interviewed born in the early 1990s thought that high school students and first year university students were even more sexually liberal than them. Older ‘90s kids explained that teens now are very open and think about sex all the time. Vien, a 21-year-old, thought “young people in high school have it easier to come together [be sexually active], they are affected too much by American culture” (Focus

Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011). Hoa explained in a separate interview that high school students are influenced more by Western culture because they were exposed to Western movies at a younger age. Vietnamese youth appear to have trouble relating to the attitudes and behaviors of those who are two years younger than them because dating attitudes and behaviors are changing every few years.

*Virginity: A Women's Issue?*

Ms. Le Thi Ngoc Bich, a specialist on advising and counseling victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking, made it clear throughout our interview that Vietnamese men prioritize virginity in a wife or girlfriend (Interview # 1, personal communication, April 19, 2011). Ms. Le has many male clients who are worried that their girlfriends or wives are not virgins. Some married men even bring their wife to counseling to find out whether or not she is a virgin. Ms. Le got the sense from her clients that if a man even suspects that his wife is not a virgin, he will continually ask her about it and attempt to make her feel ashamed. Ms. Le said that some clients who have children ask their wives questions such as "if you weren't a virgin before you married me, are these my kids or someone else's?"

The idea of a girlfriend or wife with another man is so repulsing and unforgivable that one man asked his wife who wasn't a virgin before marriage to find him a virgin with whom he could have sex. The distressed wife called Ms. Le, who explained that if she complied with her husband's wishes, she will not only be committing an illegal act, but her relationship with her husband will be forever changed. Women are familiar with this general attitude of men, and have asked Ms. Le how to become a virgin again due to concerns about their new boyfriends discovering their secret and breaking up with them. Ms. Le explained that these cases are not popular, but are nonetheless present in Vietnam. Cases such as these are not restricted to Hanoi; Ms. Le's clients are not all originally from Hanoi, and some call her from other parts of Vietnam.

Ms. Le further explained that some men with wives who had previous lovers feel entitled to drink excessively and/or have affairs. If the woman confronts her husband about these activities, he will tell her they are the result of her faults. In happy marriages, the issue is generally not discussed, *but* if something goes wrong the blame is placed on the wife if the husband knows she had sex before marriage. In general, wives with previous partners are often blamed for anything that goes wrong in their marriage.

Young women's current attitudes toward sex are therefore shaped by the idea that there are negative consequences if virginity is not saved for one's husband. However, if a girl loves someone and believes there is nobody else for her, she wants to give him everything she has – her soul *and* her body. Many men ask their girlfriends to have sex with them to prove their love, but women are weary because the man may not marry her after they have sex. Both Vietnamese men and women (but mostly men) believe that once a woman loses her virginity, she cannot seriously date anyone else because she already gave so much of herself to another man. In a separate interview with Dr. Le Thi Qui, the Director for Gender and Development in Hanoi, I learned that this belief is so ingrained in Vietnamese culture that many women become

prostitutes after having sex with a man who does not become their husband; they believe their situation is hopeless (Interview #2, personal communication, 2011).

Men's virginity, on the other hand, is hardly discussed. In fact, "experience" is encouraged and rewarded among male peers, creating a sense of brotherhood. During Ms. Le's nine years of counseling, *no* female clients complained about boyfriends or husbands having sex before marriage. Men do not have to save their virginity for anyone. As Pham explained, "guys don't care about virginity, they don't have anything to lose" (Focus Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011).

Through my interviews, I realized that virginity has largely become a physical issue rather than a moral one; women must remain virgins in order to bleed when they have sex on their wedding night. The blood demonstrates a woman's virginity to her husband. Many of the youth I spoke with remain virgins due to fear of traditional values rather than a personal choice to follow traditional customs. I am not suggesting that youth should go against tradition and have sex, but instead demonstrating a clear double standard in which men may lose their virginity whenever they choose, but women may not. One 18-year-old, along with many of her peers, was very angry about this double standard and said, "most boys are selfish when dating, if they want sex and you say no, he says you don't love him. But when they marry, they need virgin wives. I hate boys" (Focus Group #3, personal communication, May 7, 2011). This obsession with virginity affects dating and sexual activity among youth because girls are expected to generally give everything to one boy. Therefore, a girl is expected not to have many serious boyfriends or sex before marriage.

#### *Youth Opinions on "An com truoc keng", or Pre-marital Sex*

Hong, Duong, and Huong (2009) explained that the Vietnamese frequently use the phrase "*an com truoc keng*", which translates to "eating before the bell." In the decade after the Vietnam War, people lived on collective farms and a bell was rung to commence many activities (p. 162). The authors explained that "eating before the bell" meant getting pregnant before the wedding, which was acceptable as long as marriage followed the pregnancy. However, in my research, respondents told me that the phrase simply means having sex before marriage.

It should be noted that statistics on pre-marital sex in Vietnam, including those from my own research, are usually not accurate. In Ms. Le's experience as a counselor, the age that Vietnamese people are having sex is much lower than what is reported. Youth are having sex before marriage, but would rarely openly admit the fact because of the stigma attached.

#### *Why some youth disagree with pre-marital sex*

*1. Tradition.* Many respondents did not only identify with Vietnamese tradition specifically, but noted Asian tradition and identity as reasons why they were against pre-marital sex. One 20-year-old woman simply stated, "I never do that, it's not our culture," while a 22-year-old woman who had had pre-marital sex acknowledged that she knew "participating in pre-marital sex is not good for a girl, particularly in Asian culture. We can not control that" (online questionnaire responses, 2011). These instilled traditions and beliefs derive from the Confucian ideal that women must remain virgins until marriage.

*2. Family influences and social opinions.* A 21-year-old female student at the University of Economics reported in my online survey: "I think sex before marriage is not a bad thing, but my

family and the others always say it is not good... They say the girl can lose something or her whole life if she has sex before marriage. That's unfair." Families often relay the idea that women who have sex before marriage have more to lose than men. For example, there are many stories of men refusing the responsibility of unplanned pregnancy, forcing women to take care of the baby themselves. An example of the many negative consequences young women associate with sex can be seen in the quote from Tran below:

"When I got to University, my mind changed because I need to follow the new trend... if you love someone in a period of time you cannot resist your temptation and that [sex] just happens. How can you control your feelings at that time? But my mom influences me more, advising 'you can have sex before marriage but be careful because you are the one who loses more than the man. Like you can get pregnant if you don't have safe sex, and you are the girl so you are more sensitive, if the man leaves you with the big one [pregnant] how can you stand on your feet again? And be careful of STDs'" (Interview #6, personal communication, May 6, 2011).

Chieu, a 21-year-old living in Ho Chi Minh City, explained that her family uses negative stories of women who had pre-marital sex as a warning to other girls in the family. Chiu has an aunt who had sex at the age of 18, and now the whole family looks down upon her. When I asked how the family discovered she was no longer a virgin, Chiu replied that the family knew her aunt had a boyfriend, and she did not deny having sex when members of the family questioned her about it. Now, "people in the family use her as a lesson to teach other girls how not to act, I'm sick of hearing these stories...she had the freedom to live however she wants, but can't stop people from criticizing her" (Focus Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011). There were no negative consequences as a result of pre-marital sex in this story; the only criticism had to do with Chiu's aunt's boyfriend being poor. However, once Chiu's aunt became known for having pre-marital sex, she became discriminated against within the family.

*3. Fear of future husband.* Many young women I interviewed were afraid to engage in pre-marital sex because of the difficulty involved in finding another husband if they did not marry the person to whom they lost their virginity. Tran even told me, "you can be hurt or beat by your husband when he discovers you are not a virgin anymore... family happiness can't exist if your husband knows your secret" (Interview #6, personal communication, May 6, 2011). At least three different young women mentioned reading stories about boys who convinced their girlfriends to have sex, but disapproved of her once they were married. Thus, the idea that sex should only exist within the realm of married life is instilled in the minds of Vietnamese girls from an early age. A young woman named Hai explained to me, "if you want to have sex, just get married then do it" (Focus Group # 4, personal communication, May 7, 2011). This quote is intended for girls, as it has been previously demonstrated that men do not need to remain virgins until marriage.

Some young men I interviewed reinforced this double standard. As one 21-year-old man stated, "In Vietnamese culture, when a woman has sex before she gets married... she is not a good woman... if she is not a virgin she should tell me before marriage, it depends on the

situation of why she lost it” (Focus Group # 7, personal communication, May 9, 2011). His friend Phuoc, who was also in the focus group, agreed that he might be accepting of his future wife not being a virgin if she gave him a “good reason” for losing her virginity. Thu (the only girl in this focus group) asked what constituted a good reason or excuse for a woman losing her virginity, to which Phuoc answered “an accident when exercising.” He was referring to accidentally tearing the hymen through an activity that is not sexual intercourse.

Another group of young male participants in this study were angered and concerned about the double standard regarding virginity. One twenty-year-old male student at the University of Economics wrote on my anonymous online questionnaire that:

“it’s [pre-marital sex] totally fine. The traditional Vietnamese gentlemen always prefer a virgin. Why ? Because they’re conservative, cocky, arrogant and possessive. They want their ladies to completely belong to them and be theirs... maybe, the most important thing the ladies desire is making decisions about their own lives. They can do whatever they want like sex and enjoying the ecstasy. So not only is this my opinion, it’s a equal right for ladies.”

This student later went on to report that he would never participate in pre-marital sex because he is homosexual. This man’s sexual orientation may be the root of his anger towards Vietnamese men because of the stigma associated with homosexuality in Vietnam. However, heterosexual men are also angered about women’s subordinate social position in terms of pre-marital sex. Another male student (age 20) wrote on the questionnaire:

If you have sex with your girlfriend, what would happen if you broke up with her? You’re a man so you will receive no harm, but she will remain un-genuine. In other words, she will have to hide that in order to get married. You know, men are selfish. They want to marry a virgin but he also want to try the feelings when having sex in their teenage. In conclusion, if you have sex before marriage, you deserve to be a sinner with this girl.

This student wanted the stigma towards pre-marital sex to be equal for men and women. I was surprised to find that some young men who wanted to have sex before marriage did not act on it for the woman’s sake. One 19-year-old boy reported on the online questionnaire, “I am a man, I don’t want to spoil the lives of any girls at all.” Other men reported that they would not care whether or not their wives were virgins. However, it is important to note that even if a boy does not care if his girlfriend or wife is not a virgin, his family might. In Vietnam, many generations live under the same roof and young people must listen to the opinions of their parents and elders.

*Why some youth accept pre-marital sex, but would never partake*

Even youth who are generally open to new practices and want to engage in pre-marital sex would not do so in order avoid upsetting their families, or possible in-laws. As Pham (a male interviewee) explained, “the sex thing affects not only two people, but also others, like the family” (Focus Group #8, personal communication, May 11, 2011). Two female participants of the online questionnaire considered sex a biological need and “not a big deal at all”, but would not participate in pre-marital sex in Vietnam for their own emotional safety. Another young

woman stated during Focus Group #8: “we are still impacted from our culture even though we are open-minded. We can’t change other’s thinking, so we have to play on the safe side and won’t do it [pre-marital sex]” (personal communication, May 11). Many young women are afraid of judgment and criticism from family and society, and therefore would not participate in pre-marital sex even if they wanted to.

Some of the young adults I interviewed were only accepting of pre-marital sex if it occurred right before marriage. Engagement ensures a safe relationship, and pre-marital sex was seen as a good “test” for ensuring happiness in marital life. Other youth were accepting of pre-marital sex among non-engaged couples as long as love was involved. One 21-year-old female respondent from my online questionnaire boldly associated sex with love, and not necessarily with marriage: “If I find the true love of my life . . . I can give him everything without hesitation. I think sex is a part of love, it’s important as much as love itself in our life.” Young women who publically separated sex from marriage created shock among others. During one focus group, when Thai said, “I don’t care [about having premarital sex], that doesn’t mean a boyfriend will be a husband,” her friends were surprised and strongly disagreed (Focus Group # 5, personal communication, May 8, 2011). Most of the youth who were accepting of pre-marital sex explained that it was necessary for the relationship because it enhanced understanding and love, while others believed sex to be a natural instinct. However, even the youth that advocated pre-marital sex never found it acceptable for two people to have sex if they only knew each other for a short time.

#### *Foreign influences on pre-marital sex*

Many Vietnamese youth watch American movies that display sexual intercourse as a casual event. Thu stated during Focus Group # 7 that “Easterners are affected because they see Americans do it and think they can do it” (personal communication, May 9, 2011), but this situation leads to complications. Sex is far from casual in Vietnamese society; therefore, American sexual behaviors cannot be easily transferred to Vietnamese youth. Japanese culture is also influential. A current popular craze is Japanese Manga, which sometimes consists of cartoon characters having graphic sex.

#### *What About Other Sexual Activities?*

The stigma against pre-marital sex in Vietnam is clear, but what about other sexual activities such as oral sex or sexual touching? It should be noted that a large portion of interviewees were not sure what I meant by sexual activities besides kissing and sex. However, those who *did* know what I was referring to explained that such sexual activities were acceptable whereas sex was not “because other people won’t know [about it] and we will pretend we didn’t do it,” (Focus Group #6, personal communication, May 8<sup>th</sup>). Oral sex and sexual touching seemed to be generally accepted as long as it did not lead to sex. Chieu concluded Focus Group #8 but claiming “you can do whatever you want, just protect your virginity!” (personal communication, May 11, 2011).

#### *Youth Opinions on Sống thử, or Co-habitation*

Many of the youth I interviewed explained that *Sống thử* is when an unmarried couple lives under the same roof like a married couple. This is a “hot topic” in Vietnam because although co-habitation, or living together before marriage, is common in Western societies, Vietnamese students who do so are regarded negatively. Co-habitation is more common among students who have immigrated to cities from rural areas. These young adults do not live with their parents and therefore have more freedom. Vietnamese youth who live with their family, on the other hand, have difficulty moving away; “if you do that, your neighborhood will think you are a very bad girl” (Focus Group # 7, personal communication, May 9, 2011). It should be noted that most of the youth I interviewed lived with their family.

Many youths acknowledged that co-habitation was a positive practice in that it enabled a couple to understand each other more and test the love in a relationship, but almost all of the young people I spoke with explained that this is not an acceptable practice for Vietnamese youth. Two young girls from Ho Chi Minh City reported through my online questionnaire that co-habitation may be a good idea, but they would only try it if they lived in another country. Again, women suffered more in this situation because of the assumption that cohabiting couples engage in sex. Therefore, if the couple does not eventually marry, the woman involved will have trouble finding a man who will accept her and is left with a shattered image, while men can exit a life of co-habitation virtually unharmed.

#### *Most Desired Qualities in a Significant Other*

An overwhelming majority of youth reported that faithfulness was the most important quality in a boyfriend or girlfriend, while disloyalty (in terms of cheating) was the worst. I found through interviews that some young men held on to Confucian ideals in that they valued women who were “cute, but not too smart” and “don’t think too much” (Focus Group #7, May 9, 2011). Hoa, who was in the same focus group, explained, “There is the opinion that if a girl is naive, innocent, and babyish, the boy will like her more.” However, other young men are moving away from traditional Confucian ideals by valuing faithfulness over virginity. One 20-year-old male student even reported through the online questionnaire that he wanted a girlfriend who was modern rather than one who followed “outdated” views-- someone who “dares to break the rules.”

#### *The Influence of Clubs and Bars on Youth Dating*

During our interview, Ms. Le categorized youth who go to clubs into four categories (Interview # 1, personal communication, April 19, 2011). The first group of club-goers is comprised of youth who have money and a family that does not care much about them. Some of the youth I interviewed mentioned this group, explaining that many young people go to the clubs to show off the money they have. The second group consists of well-educated, open-minded youth with foreign friends (such as many of the SIT Vietnamese student volunteers and homestay siblings). The third are youth who are stressed about work and/or school and go to clubs to relax, and the fourth are beautiful girls seeking rich men. Of the youth I interviewed who frequented the clubs, the majority belonged to the third group.

During interviews, I learned that most students only go to clubs with friends. As Phung told me during Focus Group # 5, “people usually assume that playgirls and boys hang out at the bar. If you go for a friend’s birthday or something its okay, but if you go frequently people think you are kind of a player” (personal communication, May 8, 2011). Many other young people explained that bars and clubs are places to relax and release stress with friends, but they can be bad because “bad” boys and girls with money go there to do drugs. One 19-year-old boy mentioned during Focus Group # 3 that many “social evils” (drinking, sexual activity, drugs) take place at bars and clubs because the government does not manage them well. He then went on to say, “the environment there is quite bad and complicated. You can go there when you are mature enough” (personal communication, May 5, 2011). When asked whether dancing at clubs was acceptable, the majority of youth said it was “totally fine”. However, Tran emphasized “if the boy tries to approach you and wants to touch you by dancing close with you its not okay” (Interview #4, personal communication, 2011).

Many of the students who filled out the online questionnaire and participated in interviews and focus groups reported that they had not had the chance to go to a club. This is primarily because many of the students still lived with parents who were disapproving of the club atmosphere. Parents’ disapproval of clubs and staying out late make it difficult to go to a club or bar at any age, as demonstrated by a 25-year-old graduate who had a curfew of 11PM.

### ***Limitations***

A main limitation in my research is the population studied; the majority of youth surveyed and interviewed were from the same university and the same city (Ho Chi Minh City), and thus not necessarily generalizable to the entire Vietnamese urban youth population. It would be helpful to address youth who migrated to urban cities from rural areas, as well as high school students.

In addition, changes could be made to the questionnaire to create less confusion among participants, such as the phrasing of many of the questions involving personal sexual activities. This report mainly focuses on the youth’s perspective (with the exception of two interviews with scholars). Therefore, it would have been informative to survey the opinions of parents.

### ***Conclusion***

My findings are mainly consistent with previous studies, revealing that attitudes toward pre-marital sex remain conservative, even if actual behaviors do not fit these “attitudes.” However, my findings did differ from those of Hong, Duong, and Huong’s conclusions concerning sex among Vietnamese youth. The authors (2009) state, “Sex wasn’t something associated with emotional bonds or responsibility” (p. 113), whereas the responses I received from many young people were the complete opposite. Many would only have sex themselves if they were in love, and generally accepted pre-marital sex only if the parties involved were responsible for their actions.

Results from my online questionnaire demonstrate that certain sexual behaviors considered unacceptable or something that “never” happens in Vietnam actually *do* occur among youth. Instead of being ignored, these changes in sexual behavior among youth need to be

acknowledged and addressed. Knowledge of youth's attitude and behavior regarding sexuality is essential in order to develop and implement successful reproductive health programs. With increased understanding about and acceptance of sexuality among Vietnamese youth, sexual questions and concerns can be adequately addressed and discussed.

I intend to not only inspire discussion among adults and youth, but also among youths themselves. Many of the young women I interviewed said they would never have pre-marital sex-- not necessarily because of personal beliefs, but because of fear of others (i.e., future husband and families of both parties). However, most of the young men I interviewed did not care whether or not their future wives were virgins. Many young men also explained that they did not have premarital sex out of respect for women, and because of an understanding of the double standard that exists for women regarding virginity. I am in no way suggesting that tradition be changed or ignored, but simply reporting valuable information that has been gained through my research. Many young people have similar attitudes and beliefs, but are afraid to act on these desires out of adherence to established tradition. This creates a moral dilemma that would be easier to address with more open communication about sex.

***Recommendations: Let's Talk About Sex, Baby***

*With Family.* When youth were asked where they received information about sex, the general response was absolutely *not* from parents. "The talk" about sex that occurs between parents and children in America does not exist in Vietnam. As Pham explained during Focus Group #8, "the only protection from our parents is [being told] not to do it"—a statement to which everyone in the focus group nodded in agreement (personal communication, May 11, 2011). However, whether or not parents accept it, Vietnamese youth are having sex. Youth often search information about sex online, which can be incorrect. Therefore, sexual education for *both* parents and children is necessary. Parents should be educated about sex so that they are able to relay the information to their children. Youth are more likely to listen to their parents about sexual facts and health than to trust unknown sources.

*In School.* Even though my background research indicated that sex is not usually discussed in school, I was surprised to hear from many students that they learn basic information about sex through school. There has been a recent development and advancement in sex education in Vietnam. For example Dr. Le Thi Qui gives lectures about sex at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi and explained that students really enjoy the lectures and are curious to learn more. However, there is still a moralistic aspect to these lectures – one lecture teaches that sex must originate from love. Dr. Le finds it difficult to give these lectures because many parents are against sex education (Interview #2, personal communication, 4/22).

Tran, a 20-year old student at the University of Economics, stated "in school, when people mention adult issues about sex or how you can give birth to children, the teacher usually avoids the answer" (Interview #6, personal communication, May 6, 2011). Teachers generally try to only use biological terms when discussing sex. However, Tran went on to say that now teachers are more open, and her younger brother has books about the topic with more social information and less biology. She also mentioned having one teacher who was very liberal,

telling students that Vietnam needs a sexual revolution like Korea or Japan in order to reduce the sorrows for women.

Tran also discussed Dance for Life, a project to help prevent HIV and AIDS in which volunteers visit high schools and teach students how to use condoms. Programs such as Dance For Life are crucial in Vietnam because many young people do not know how to use condoms due to lack of information and stigma; a young person carrying around condoms is not viewed as being responsible, but rather as intending to partake in “social evils.” Phung explained during Focus Group #6 that “more and more people know about condom use but still think its strange and so western” (personal communication, May 8, 2011). Youth must become more familiar with condoms in order to learn how to protect themselves sexually.

*With Friends.* Many youth told me that they only discuss sex with close friends because it is a sensitive topic. However, even close friends may not be accepting of sexual activity. One young woman explained in Focus Group #4 that she wants to share her concerns and experiences with her close friends, but they tell her to keep those thoughts to herself. Peers are an important source of information for young people to ask advice about sexual health (such as topics of birth control) and sexual issues ranging from sexual orientation to pain during intercourse, especially when talking with parents or teachers is not an option.

With an influx of sexual information and images coming from foreign movies and the Internet, it is *extremely* important for youth to talk amongst each other in order to distinguish which “common” activities displayed in the media would be acceptable in Vietnamese society. A major problem in Vietnam occurs among youth who copy Western culture, but lack information about safe sex. Tran phrased this issue as “following the trend without a filter” (Interview #4, Personal Communication, May 7, 2011).

Youth attitudes towards sex are constantly changing and evolving. Urban youth dating and sexual behavior may completely change in a year or less after this very study is published. This is why further research and constant discussion about sexual practices and attitudes is necessary among individuals *and* societal institutions. Correct sexual information is a key component in addressing misconceptions about what causes social problems feared most by society (such as unplanned pregnancy and HIV/AIDS). These are not necessarily the direct result of pre-marital sex and co-habitation, but rather a consequence of the lack of information and community discussion about sex in Vietnam.

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#### Interviews

- Le Thi Ngoc Bich (professor at Center for Gender and Development), in discussion with the author, April 19, 2011
- Le Thi Qui. (professor at Center for Gender and Development), in discussion with the author, April 22, 2011. Hanoi, Vietnam.

"Li" (student informant), in discussion with the author, April 24, 2011

"Tien" (student informant), in discussion with the author, April 28, 2011.

"Tran" (student informant) in discussion with the author, May 6, 2011

#### Focus Groups

- Focus Group # 1. 3 May 2011. Two 20-year-old male students from University of Economics. Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 2. 4 May 2011. Six students, ages 22-23 from various universities. Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 3. 5 May 2011. Three 19-year-old students from University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 4. 7 May 2011. Six students, ages 18-19, from various universities. Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 5. 8 May 2011. Four female students from Hoa Sen University. Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 6. 6 May 2011. Five 19-year-old students from various universities. Ho Chi Minh City.
- Focus Group # 7. 9 May 2011. Three students, ages 22-23 from various universities. Ho Chi Minh City.
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***Istanbul, Turkey***

Samantha Bolan, Binghamton University

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The Panoptic Gaze of Post-9/11 "Security Theater"

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*Abstract*

In the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving in 2010, American news media was saturated with stories detailing travelers' reactions to newly implemented security procedures at screening checkpoints in major airports. The consensus among many bloggers and amateur videographers and photographers was that the AIT and pat-downs were an intolerable violation of airline passengers' rights. Evaluations about the success of protest efforts were mixed and often in direct conflict with one another. However, the evaluations tell an interesting story about the exercise of power in the "theater" of national security since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This paper aims to track that story through the various voices and media in which it is told, examining the broader historical narrative about the creation and role of the image in the relationship between subjects and the state.

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In late October 2010, the TSA released a one-paragraph "Statement on New Pat-down Procedures" that offered no information beyond the fact that pat-down procedures at airports across the country were going to change. No details were included in the statement as to what "new pat-downs" would entail (Transportation Security Administration 2010). On the weblog maintained by the TSA, "Blogger Bob"-- who insists that he is "a real person and not a pseudonym as some think" (Blogger Bob 2008) -- posted about "new TSA pat-down procedures" on November 11, 2010. In his post (Blogger Bob 2010a), "Blogger Bob" offers no description of the procedures; rather, he explains the conditions under which a pat-down would be necessary: "to resolve alarms that occur at a walk-through metal detector, if an anomaly is detected during screening with advanced imaging technology (AIT), or during random screening." Although "pat-downs are also given to passengers who opt out of screening by AIT or walk-through metal detectors," Bob reassures his readers that "there's nothing punitive about it." He also makes heavy allusion to "the failed terrorist attack last Christmas Day," making it clear that the TSA intended for new screening procedures to be seen by the public as a response to the threat of another "Underwear Bomber" striking with greater success in the future by concealing nonmetallic explosives beneath his or her clothing.

In spite of "Blogger Bob's" insistence, reporting on *Consumer Traveler* indicated that implicitly or explicitly enhanced pat-downs seemed like a punitive measure. Because images produced by AIT allow screening officers to search for weapons, explosives, or other concealed items beneath passengers' clothing, information that could otherwise be gleaned from a full-body scan must still be collected at a screening checkpoint from individuals who opt out of such scans. Given how invasive a pat-down must be to gain such information, travelers reported to *Consumer Traveler* that "they don't feel as though they have a real choice... [given that] additional screening makes you want to go through the scanner, as it is so much more

impersonal..." (Elliott 2010). However, another post from *Consumer Traveler* relates how, off-the-record, a reporter was "told unofficially that there were two standards of pat-downs. One for the normal situation where passengers are going through metal detectors and a different pat-down for those who refuse to go through the whole-body scanners" (Leocha 2010). The language utilized by the reporter – differentiating between the "normal" screening of an anomaly and the choice to "refuse" scanning – heavily implies that "a different pat-down" is a punishment. Although that may not have been the intent with which that information was relayed by the TSA, it was easy for the author of that post to convey his assumption as fact, given perceptions surrounding screening procedures<sup>2</sup>.

Interestingly, it was difficult – if not impossible – in December 2010 to find any information at all on the TSA's official website or weblog relating the exact nature of the new pat-downs, but any Google search on the subject at that time resulted in hundreds of pages – managed by news outlets and private citizens – detailing how open-palmed touches have replaced the back of the hand as a means by which screeners must establish that no prohibited items are being concealed under clothing. Such searches must involve a screener passing his or her hand along the inner thigh until it makes contact with the torso, a procedure that might involve contact with passengers' genitals through clothing. When citing public reaction to this perceived invasion of personal space and privacy, many journalists referred back to a series of three videos posted on YouTube and on the blog of John Tyner<sup>3</sup>. Tyner's videos "went viral"; they entered into widespread circulation on the Internet, in part because they had been shared on forum sites like Reddit.com and Fark.com, which encourage forum members to travel to linked pages and comment on their contents back on the forum. "Don't touch my junk"<sup>4</sup> became a sort of rallying cry to citizens resisting measures they felt were unreasonably and unjustifiably invasive, appearing everywhere from headlines to T-shirts<sup>5</sup> (Viral Prints 2010).

Recorded using his cell phone camera, Tyner's videos are of relatively poor quality; for the most part, the lens is pointed directly at a nondescript ceiling while the conversation between Tyner, his father-in-law, and employees of the TSA are barely audible over the noise of the airport terminal. In spite of the many articles that cite Tyner's videos, it requires effort on the part of the viewer to corroborate the account Tyner gives of his treatment at a screening checkpoint and the contents of his recordings. Nevertheless, it is clear from the recordings and Tyner's written account<sup>6</sup> that the TSA employees were unsure of what to do in a case like Tyner's. As a reporter for *Consumer Traveler* said, several passengers found that screeners were "upset" or "startled" by the choice to opt out of AIT, even though those passengers submitted to pat-downs (Elliott 2010). In the video, multiple levels of supervisors are brought to the screening

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<sup>2</sup> However, it is equally easy for the TSA to refute that assumption.

<sup>3</sup> For clarity's sake, it is necessary to affirm that this is, in fact, the title of the blog.

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is never uttered in as many words by Tyner or any other person in his recordings; rather, it seems to have been paraphrased from his initial warning to the TSA screener at his checkpoint: "If you touch my junk, I'll have you arrested."

<sup>5</sup> Also available, from the same site, are several other shirts satirizing or criticizing the recent actions of the TSA.

<sup>6</sup> Tyner stated on his blog that the meticulous detail of his post was meant to serve as a written record that might be admissible in court, in the event that the civil suit with which he was threatened were to be brought to trial.

area to speak to Tyner, who refused both screening by AIT and the enhanced pat-down. Then, the supervisors escort him from the screening area, as outlined by policies available on the TSA's website (TSA: For Travelers). However, Tyner both reported and recorded an interaction with a plain-clothes officer who attempted to detain him, insisting that Tyner "could not leave until [the screening] was completed" (Tyner 2010). With the threat of a hefty fine and a civil suit, the officer attempted to prevent Tyner from leaving the airport, in spite of no such penalties having been publicly posted on the TSA's website or blog<sup>7</sup>.

The appearance of TSA employees who directly contradict, through words or actions, the information provided to the public through channels like the TSA's website and blog, recurs in the narratives offered by individuals who unlike Tyner, make their recordings obviously rather than clandestinely. Luke Tait posted a video to YouTube that subsequently went viral<sup>8</sup> of a shirtless boy being screened by a TSA agent in the Salt Lake City Airport, reporting that TSA officers approached him and demanded that he delete the video he had recorded. When Tait refused to comply, he found himself surrounded at his gate by TSA officers: "a 3<sup>rd</sup> and then a 4<sup>th</sup> agent came... They would occasionally glance at [him] and talk on their walkie-talkies. [He didn't] know why they were there or if it was a huge coincidence but they... left just before [he] boarded the plan[e]" (Tait 2010). Tait admitted to feeling that his experiences were at least somewhat "intimidating," in spite of the fact that the TSA has no policy against allowing photography or recording videos at screening checkpoints. On March 31, 2009, "Blogger Bob" posted the TSA's official policy on recordings at checkpoints: "We don't prohibit public, passengers or press from photographing, videotaping, or filming at screening locations. You can take pictures at our checkpoints as long as you're not interfering with the screening process or slowing things down" (Blogger Bob 2009). As Bob is quick to point out, just because the TSA does not prevent anyone from "filming at screening locations," any number of "local laws, state statutes, or local ordinances" could be cited in order to prevent images from being produced by passengers. Additionally, as Andy Greenberg points out on his blog on Forbes.com, "Blogger Bob" makes "no mention of the TSA agents' discretion to throw out this photographic privilege at will" (Greenberg 2010b). In spite of the importance of photography as "a check on agents' power" (Greenberg 2010b), Greenberg was told<sup>9</sup> that "interfering with the screening process," as the TSA blog puts it, is defined by TSA employees at checkpoints – ergo, any photography at all could be considered "interference" if they so choose, and photographers are compelled by law to cooperate with the TSA screeners' determination<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> As Tyner points out to the plain-clothes agent, the TSA website is not consistently up-to-date. Additionally, the website is vague enough on many points of the screening procedures that Tyner's shock and refusal to submit to a pat-down could be understandable even if he were well-versed in the TSA's online publications. That the plain-clothes agent merely passed off concerns, as he was "not a webmaster," suggests an internal disconnect between public relations and everyday operations within the TSA.

<sup>8</sup> The video in question achieved more than two million views as of December 11, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> This occurred after Greenberg was prompted to investigate his experiences at a checkpoint, at which a TSA agent insisted that taking photos was "against the rules" when Greenberg attempted to record a pat-down his wife was undergoing.

<sup>10</sup> Greenberg, in his blog post, references a blog post by Robert Graham, who in turn references the blog and Twitter account of Steven Frischling. Both Graham and Frischling were also detained immediately after taking photos of

The parallels are striking between Michel Foucault's account of the Panopticon and the physical space generated by screening procedures like AIT and enhanced pat-downs utilized by the TSA. Airline passengers entering the screening area are isolated in cells – backscatter X-ray machines – in which they are bathed not in visible light, but rather in x-rays, a higher-frequency form of electromagnetic radiation that permits the gaze of screeners to penetrate beyond layers of clothing (Foucault 1975). A body is revealed, stripped bare, (supposedly) with nothing to hide. Such a gaze is entirely mono-directional; the employees appointed to review resulting images from AIT are located in another room and are concealed from view. Even for those individuals who “opt out” of screening by AIT, “enhanced pat-down procedures” are implemented. TSA screeners are authorized to physically contact all areas of a passenger's body, ensuring that one way or another, the gaze of security officials cannot be modestly obscured. Such a gaze makes any individual seeking to travel by air subject to passage beneath the eyes or hands of government authority. Thus, this procedure becomes requisite for bodies that become as sheep passing below the crook of a shepherd. Have American citizens become a flock?<sup>11</sup>

Foucault describes how individual bodies, once made subject, have power exercised upon them through “discipline.” Intervening so far as to segment the body, bringing focus to each individual part by indoctrinating it with particular gestures and scripts, discipline “implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result” (Foucault 1977). By this definition, the TSA screening checkpoint is a highly disciplined space. Each stage of the screening process is punctuated by rules and checklists: “IN-OUT-OFF” dictates the removal of metallic items from the person, the removal of laptops from bags, the removal of coats and jackets; passengers “ARE REQUIRED to remove [their] shoes<sup>12</sup>,” (TSA: For Travelers). If singled out for AIT or a pat-down, bodies are expected to “assume the position,” and the reporter from *Consumer Traveler* reported how “the scan felt somewhat invasive, with [him] holding [his] hands in the air as if [he] were an apprehended fugitive” (Elliott 2010). The sense of “invasion,” felt even in a scanner, becomes that much more intense during a manual pat-down, like the one suffered by an informant of *Consumer Traveler* who said she was made to feel like “a common criminal” (Elliott 2010). The TSA establishes a system of

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AIT at security checkpoints, and both cited the TSA's handbook in pointing out that their detention seemed to be illegal. Frischling was approached by a State Trooper who was under the incorrect impression that it was “a federal offense” to record images at a security checkpoint (Frischling 2010). Graham, on the other hand, was held by employees of the TSA who interviewed him for half an hour, continuously insisting that photography in the checkpoint was not allowed and that he needed to delete the images he had taken using his camera phone. Interestingly, a supervisor who spoke to Graham asserted, “Not all parts of the government are accountable to the public, especially the TSA” (Graham 2010).

<sup>11</sup> The analogy is more apt than not, especially when considering Foucault's work on the subject of biopower. If the modern state exerts power over its subjects “to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (Foucault 1976), then it would seem that the work done by the TSA in the name of “protecting” the American people is an instance of discipline over individual bodies for the sake of the human race-- *in toto*, an interesting intersection of two otherwise conflicting views.

<sup>12</sup> No emphasis added.

discipline and punishment that separates people not only from parts of their bodies but also from their clothing and their very sense of modesty<sup>13</sup>.

“Meticulous control of the operations of the body” (Foucault 1977), as Foucault describes, is combined with a meticulous control over the view of the body during the screening checkpoint. Similarities between the position of the TSA over airline passengers and the relationship between France and Algeria are eerie, as expressed by Malek Alloula’s analysis of colonial-era photography and postcards. Alloula tells a story of Algerian women, shrouded in veils and thusly protected from the invasive gaze of the camera, possessing sight “concentrated by the tiny orifice [in the veil] for the eye... a little like the eye of a camera, like the photographic lens that takes aim at everything” (Alloula 1986, 14). These women look back at French photographers from a space that is protected and preserved from view, as the veils they wear “recall... the closure of private space” (Alloula 1986, 12) and assert their right *not* to be seen, to *choose* who may see them and therefore who may know them distinctly from their “generalized mask” (Alloula 1986, 11). Alloula describes how this assertion of power may frustrate photographers to no end, driving them to desire nothing more than the stripping away of the veil and the revelation of all that may be seen beneath it<sup>14</sup>. In the case of modern security measures, a gaze wishes to penetrate beneath clothing, to reveal anything that might otherwise be hidden. The fear that drives that gaze ever deeper into its subjects is an easier fear to read than the fear motivating the photographers in Algeria. However, fear of the unknown runs through both, whether it is fear of the nebulous threat of “terrorism” or fear of “the feminine world... [that] threatens [the photographer] in his being” (Alloula 1986, 14).

While Algerian women resisted by wearing the veil and wielding their camera-like gazes, the public subject to the TSA resisted through narratives and images that exercised power. Just as the French photographers retaliated against the unintelligible Algerian woman by stripping her of her veil and photographing her as they wished to see her, employees of the TSA act at the edge of their authority to prevent the photographic gaze from being turned back on them. In spite of policies permissive of photography at screening checkpoints, individuals photographing or filming the screening process have repeatedly been subject to warnings, detention, and other forms of retaliation as employees attempt to control the story that is told about enhanced security procedures – a story told in cheery (sometimes cloying or downright imploring) tones by propagandists who seem desperate to ensure that Tyner, Tait, Greenberg, and Graham are not accepted by the public as stewards of the “truth” about the TSA.

Many stories – many “truths” – are being told through modern “security theater.” There are victims of sexual assault who find “enhanced pat-downs” – or even the idea of going through AIT and having “nude” images of themselves produced – to be intolerable, as they recall too

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<sup>13</sup> Several articles have been published and circulated that recommend a relatively immodest form of dress – including tightly-fitted tops and pants for women – in order to pass through security checkpoints with minimal interruption, and the TSA’s own website warns that wearing loose-fitting clothing or head coverings, even for religious reasons, would be reason enough to select someone for further levels of screening.

<sup>14</sup> When read in conversation with Susan Sontag’s *On Photography*, the sexual nature of the frustration Alloula describes becomes clearer. The camera lens has the impotence to reveal everything within its scope.

vividly their past trauma (Schulz 2010). Transgender and transsexual individuals feel that invasive new screening procedures, which include “same-gender” pat-downs, force them to conform to a gender norms that they feel uncomfortable inhabiting (Robinson 2010). Even worse, their physical self-representation is called into question any time a TSA screener examines a prosthesis worn to better form the shape of the body with which they identify<sup>15</sup>. Any individual with a physical disability or prosthesis is subject to extensive and often exhausting screening procedures; many individuals with chronic illnesses choose to avoid flying whenever possible to avoid needing to explain insulin pumps or devices meant to assist with breathing<sup>16</sup>. Short skits parodying widespread unease over recent changes in security were generated from venues in Taiwan to the stage of *Saturday Night Live*<sup>17</sup>.

In an analysis by the New York Times published on November 28, 2010, David Carr questions why, exactly, the media took up the stories about enhanced screening procedures and generated a positive feedback loop of websites, blogs, forum posts, tweets, and news stories all reporting as much, if not more, on one another than on the actual protests. His article brings attention to the fact that twice as many men as women were posting on Twitter about dissatisfaction or discomfort over the new screening procedures.

Perhaps the most chilling story of all is the story of National Opt-Out Day. Reddit.com generated an entire “Subreddit” (a specialized forum focused on a single topic), separate from its preexisting TSA Subreddit, in honor of Operation Grab Ass, used to organize protest efforts against invasive security screenings (Reddit 2010). The forum was flush with enthusiastic champions of civil liberties on November 24, 2010, who tweeted that AIT was not active at many checkpoints in order to facilitate the passage of people with minimal holdup from civil disobedience (“Backscatteroff”). The TSA responded publicly by claiming that contrary to many bloggers’ opinions, National Opt-Out Day had no support among the majority of Americans, who were out of touch with the web-based organization of the protest and apathetic in the face of long lines at checkpoints<sup>18</sup>. “Redditors” felt that they needed to make clear that TSA was merely manipulating the news in their own favor rather than admit that a government administration had been cowed by the possibility of protestors. While it is, as of yet, unclear which side of the

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler would surely have a few things to say on the subject of conformity to gender norms in such a violent, unequal space as the screening checkpoint. One case, that of a breast cancer survivor who was forced to remove a prosthetic breast and show it to a screener at a checkpoint, was picked up not only by the Human Rights Campaign but also by a Taiwanese news network that generates animated short films to illustrate news stories in a humorous fashion.

<sup>16</sup> In spite of an official apology issued by John Pistole, the head of the TSA, many news outlets ran stories that told of the experiences of a cancer survivor whose urostomy bag was detached and spilled on him during a pat-down, soaking him with his own urine at a checkpoint and forcing him to get on his flight before being able to change clothes. *Wired* reported that an audit revealed that many TSA employees are insufficiently trained to cope with differently-abled passengers, while a post on *Popular Mechanic* pointed out that prosthetic technology develops too quickly for the TSA to keep track of it.

<sup>17</sup> In the SNL skit, the TSA screening procedures are depicted as being similar to the services of sex workers, and “erotic fiction” has begun to show up on some forums detailing a charged encounter between a TSA employee and a man undergoing an “enhanced pat-down.”

<sup>18</sup> See Andy Greenberg’s article, “Travelers Fear TSA’s Radiation And Groping—Almost As Much As Losing Five Minutes,” and “Blogger Bob’s” “Response to Claims That TSA Opted out of Using AIT During Opt-Out Day.”

argument will be better remembered, it is clear that protestors had an effect on government policy for National Opt-Out Day: a memo circulated from the heads of Homeland Security and the TSA, indicating that anyone choosing to opt out on National Opt-Out Day could be considered a “domestic extremist” under the Patriot Act (Slavo 2010). That such steps could be taken against American citizens who are merely asserting their rights indicates the importance of continuing to turn a critical eye towards the screening checkpoint as a space in which an important struggle over individual rights and liberties is occurring.

### *Afterword*

This analysis was generated in the winter of 2010, in the immediate aftermath of National Opt-Out Day. In the months following National Opt-Out Day, the TSA tested and introduced a new screening procedure to airport security checkpoints. Now, as of early 2012, it is commonplace for TSA screeners to use new software in combination with AIT that displays only the outline of passengers, with AIT-detected “anomalies” highlighted (Halsey 2011). Such software, which generates images resembling gingerbread men, would appear to be an implicit response to public concerns about the nature of the images produced by AIT, since it uses neuter, generalized outlines of the human form. Although such a change does not eliminate many of the concerns regarding the actions of the TSA in 2010, it might speak to the responsiveness of the administration to public outcry.

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***Senegal, West Africa***

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## Archaeological Implications of Gender in the Prehispanic Southwest

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### *Introduction*

The discipline of Southwestern archaeology has been historically dominated by men. Pioneering archaeologists such as Wetherill, Kidder, and Haury, sought adventure in the rugged landscape, becoming heroes with their priceless finds. Although there have been some notable female archaeologists working in the Southwest, their contributions have often been glossed over. While the qualifications and integrity of Southwest archaeology are not in question, one may conclude that a gender bias among the early archaeologists has left its mark.

A similar trend can be traced in the subject matter of Southwest archaeologists. The search for important men in prehistory has overshadowed that of women. Archaeologists has assumed that important tasks were simply the work of men, virtually ignoring the presence of women. Sensationalist headlines regarding Southwestern archaeology focus on more “masculine” phenomena, such as alleged cannibalistic tribes, rather than anthropomorphic images depicting “feminine” aspects of daily life. This trend can also be seen through analysis of artifacts. For example, lithics have commonly been associated with men and pottery with women. While pottery is one of the most common artifacts found in Southwestern sites, and perhaps one of the most culturally and socially revealing, it has often been dismissed as less exciting women’s work. These gender-based reputations of artifacts represent mere extrapolations of our own cultural values and understandings being projected into the past.

However, archaeological theory has changed tremendously since its beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century. Rather than identifying artifacts and constructing culture histories, archaeologists have become more concerned with the people who left their mark on the landscape hundreds and thousands of years ago. Who were they? What influenced them? What can these artifacts tell us about their place in the world and how they viewed it? Asking such questions allows archaeologists not only to understand life from the perspective of all Southwestern people, but to critique contemporary biases in our society and discipline. Accordingly, archaeologists have begun to look at previously marginalized areas, such as gender and gender roles. This paper will examine implications for gender and gender roles in the prehispanic Southwest through the archaeological evidence of art, including pottery, effigies, and rock art.

### *Gender in Archaeology*

It must be noted that in the search for gender in the archaeological record, gender and sex are not interchangeable terms. Sex is determined by the biological make up and characteristics of the body. It is defined by genes and physically reflected through genitalia and secondary sex characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, is an interpretation of the physical characteristics as an indicator of the person’s inner self (Munson 2000: 128). Therefore, gender is not a static entity, but a fluid reflection of distinct cultural ideologies.

How gender is used also varies by culture and area. Gendered identities dictate physical appearance, participation in activities, means of interaction, and reactions to the social world, making it an easily recognizable element of an individual's social identity (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 54). Gender may not be limited to just the individual. Often, gender is assigned to "non-sexed phenomena such as kinds of work, art styles, ... deities, and landscape features" (Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998:4). For example, in our contemporary western culture, there is a sense of feminizing aspects of nature, such as "Mother Earth" or "Hurricane Katrina". If an archaeologist is able to distinguish the genders of a given society, they are given precious insight into the intricate abstract qualities of a culture and its sense of identity.

However, looking for gender in archaeology is not necessarily equated to searching for women or simply adding women to the already present data on a given site or period. Instead, gendered studies of the past seek to understand "the significance of gender groups, gender relations, and gender meanings" (Conkey and Gero 1991:5). Gender calls for an entire new way for archaeologists to approach and understand what they uncover in the archaeological record. Because gender is so intimately tied to the individual, critically thinking about and assessing it transforms how we perceive the people we study.

The very nature of gender adds to the complexities of its study. Gender is a social phenomenon in a constant state of production and change. Epistemologically, it cannot be considered a bounded, static entity, lying beneath the dirt waiting to be excavated like the artifacts we so willingly study (Conkey and Gero 1991). The variability of gender, its understanding, portrayal, and implications, thus pose several obvious problems in a field based on the tangible remnants of the past. However, instead of intimidating archaeologists from pursuing a more complete view on gender, it should peak interest in understanding how these gender roles and relationships affect the material culture throughout time. After all, isn't this the very essence of archaeological and anthropological inquiry, to understand the people behind the material?

Searching for gender and gender roles in the past can be one of the most challenging aspects of archaeological investigations. The prehispanic Southwest is devoid of written records detailing explicit information on the roles and implications of gender in society. Instead, archaeologists must rely on the evidence at hand to infer information about gender. As gender is a form of identity, its implications are embedded in every aspect of ancient society (Arden 2008:21). There are various forms of gender evidence in the archaeological record, including architecture and spatial organization, anthropomorphic images on vessels and surfaces, human remains and associated grave goods, and ethnographic analogy. Of the various forms of evidence, visual media, in association with ethnographic analysis, is perhaps both the most alluring and enigmatic.

### ***Gender through Southwest Visual Media***

Visual images in the archaeological record provide a plethora of information about how the group in question viewed the world. This holds especially true for representations of human figures. Anthropomorphic images provide clues for understanding gender because although they

may not necessarily always represent daily life, they reflect a complex combination of behaviors, beliefs, and ideologies related to sex and gender (Munson 2000: 128). Examples from the Southwestern archaeological record come mainly from decorated pottery and rock art.

The Classic period Mimbres black-on-white pottery, ca. AD 1000 – 1150, features very distinct figurative designs, which include representations of local and exotic fauna and flora. The Mimbres figurative pottery has been interpreted to hold a level of significance to the Mimbres people due to the limit of scale and context in which they are found (Hegmon and Trevathan 1996: 748). This may represent controlled access and high symbolic value. The images depicted are highly stylized, making traits such as sex and gender difficult to interpret. However, through analysis of 6,500 bowls, with 326 depictions of individuals, archaeologists have been able to determine several consistent traits associated with sex (Munson 2000: 132). Traits identified as male include hair knots, plaits, feathers on the head, and eye masks, while traits identified as female consist of string aprons, headbands, and leggings (Munson 2000: 133). These traits provide clues as to how Mimbres men and women may have dressed and acted. The appearance of individuals with indications of both male and female traits may represent the acknowledgment of multiple genders among the Mimbres.

Once sex can be determined in visual images, inferences can then be made about possible gender roles through the activities in which the sexes are depicted. For example, the same study noted that among images of ceremonies, individuals with multiple or mixed sex traits were most commonly found (Munson 2000: 136). If these individuals represent a possible third or fourth gender outside of what is associated with sexually male and sexually female, this implies that they may hold a significant role in religious ceremony and ritual. This is found to be consistent with the religious significance of gender reversal in ethnographic observations (Munson 2000: 136). Another way in which gender roles can be assumed by the associated activities on Mimbres pottery is by providing evidence for a sexual division of labor. The activities associated with men and women, respectively, could possibly represent idealized depictions of the lifestyles and genders/gender roles associated with them. For example, carrying burdens and burden baskets have been associated almost exclusively with women (Munson 2000: 136). This association implies that women may have been involved in long distance trade. If women had control or a significant role in trade, it could give them a position of power and authority over others in the community.

In the Casas Grandes culture area of the Southwest, polychrome effigy vessels have also been used to reveal information on gendered views of society. The vessels studied were found to depict various aspects of human life and behavior. Archaeologists have theorized that the vessels represent actual activity, as several images seem to complement other excavated materials. For example, many effigies portray men smoking cylinder pipes morphologically similar to pipes excavated in the region (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 56). Associating the images with actual artifacts implies that other images and activities represented may have also actually taken place in daily or ceremonial Casas Grandes life. Many of the vessels have been identified to distinctly

represent males and females through the presence and accentuation of primary and secondary sex characteristics (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 58).

As with the Mimbres pottery, several characteristics of Casas Grandes vessels are strongly associated with the respective sexes, allowing inferences to be made about values and possible gender ideologies. For example, males are associated with flexed legs, masturbation, horned serpents, smoking/pipes, small diamonds and ticking, while women are associated with straight legs, birds, a single large diamond, children/nursing, and holding bowls (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 60). The exclusivity of these activities with the respective sex implies that these behaviors are bounded by ideologies of gendered behavior and gender roles. However, there are few instances of vessels with subtle combinations of characteristics. For example, one vessel combines recognized feminine symbols with male posture (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 66). This may indicate the presence of another gender outside the realm of male or female. It may also represent the possible fluidity of gender roles with permeable boundaries.

There is a similar trend in Mimbres and Casas Grandes depictions of women. In both areas, women are commonly associated with birds, specifically macaws (Munson 2000: 138; VanPool and VanPool 2006: 69) (figures 1 and 2). Macaws are tropical birds that are not native to the Southwest region. The combination of the rarity of macaws with their presence on pottery and effigy vessels implies a level of cultural importance. Macaw remains from Mimbres sites have been interpreted to reflect ceremonial usage of the birds due to the consistent age at death and articulation of the skeletal remains (Creel and McKusick 1994: 517). If macaws were significant in Southwestern ceremonies, their association with women implies that women held important roles in such rituals. Casas Grandes effigies of smoking men have been interpreted to represent shamans and shamanistic rituals (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 68). Male effigy vessels are associated with smoking and shamanism; the same relationship could then be extrapolated to the association of women with macaws. VanPool and VanPool note that the macaw is a significant symbol in the journey of the shaman (2006: 68). The availability of shamanistic roles to both men and women implies a social organization and hierarchy based not on gender or sex, but on some other factor. Power could then be either ascribed through family or social relationships, or acquired through other means such as involvement in or contribution to the community. Mimbres parrots have been associated not just with women but with specific families as well (Munson 2000: 140). This supports implications of power and prestige based not simply on gender distinctions, but perhaps on more complex combinations of heredities and knowledge of particular rituals or ceremonies.

Figurative illustrations have been used to provide information not only about what is depicted, but also on who was responsible for the production of such images. Pottery production has primarily been associated with women throughout multiple geographic and temporal ranges, especially in the Southwest. A notable and controversial example from the Mimbres often cited in such examinations is an image of a birth scene from Swarts Ruin (figure 3). The image shows an infant emerging from its presumed mother, facing forward with arms raised. The relative position of the infant has been argued to be medically impossible, thus proving that the person

who painted the bowl had no knowledge of birth or the birthing process (Hegmon and Trevathan 1996: 751). This interpretation is based on the assumption that as men do not experience the birthing process and are not as ethnographically involved, they would not be able to portray it in a realistic sense. Therefore, the surreal nature and interpretation of the birth scene implies that it, as well as other figurative designs, was created by men. Hegmon and Trevathan (1996: 752) support their argument by presenting ethnographic evidence of historic and contemporary Southwest and northern Mexican groups in which men are not primarily involved in the birthing process.

However, there have been several counterarguments to this interpretation (e.g. Epenshade 1997; LeBlanc 1997; Shaffer et al 1997). The nature of the depicted scene may not necessarily correlate to the sex or gender of the person who created it, or all of Mimbres pottery for that matter. The nature of the birth scene has been argued to not be impossible, but difficult (Shaffer et al 1997: 729). If the birth were in fact possible, the image would be painted by one who was knowledgeable of such instances, rather than ignorant. Cross-cultural references reveal that in the case of difficult births, both men and women are present (Shaffer et al 1997: 730). If both sexes are aware of difficult births, then it is not safe to assume that either one was more likely to produce images of it. The evidence shows that females and males were equally likely to produce and paint such pottery. It is also noted that due to Mimbres stylistic conventions of positioning figures in a front or side view (LeBlanc 1997: 724), the scene may not have necessarily been intended to represent a difficult birth, but a normal birth. Following this logic, the gender of the painter is not determinable based on the image alone. Heavily stylized art often reveals very little if any information about the individual artist.

Gendered images in the Southwest are not restricted to portable material culture, as many sites also feature rock art. These images may be even more significant than the portable art, as rock art marks and transforms the landscape with a particular meaning (Hays-Gilpin 2004: 3). Whereas a bowl or effigy vessel may only be accessible for particular groups and at particular times, rock art may be accessible to a wider range of audiences.

In the Southwest, rock art has been found to span different time periods and geographic ranges. Just as with the Mimbres pottery and Casas Grandes effigies, anthropomorphic rock images are not always clear in expressing sex and gender. For example, bodies are rarely drawn in any style other than stick figures or rectangular bodies, eliminating indications of curvatures such as hips, waists, breasts, and muscle shapes that may be used to indicate sex (Hays-Gilpin 2004: 31). Because of this, Southwest archaeologists use various other indications within the images to infer about gender. For example, indicators of women include hairstyles such as the butterfly whorls of Pueblo women, string aprons, skirts; and bows, flutes, and other instruments for men (Hays-Gilpin 2004:37). These signals can then be used to infer the gender of portrayed figures.

An interesting aspect of rock art that differs from the portable art of pottery and effigies is that the creators are working with a finite resource. A Prehispanic Pueblo rock artist cannot conjure up another sandstone bluff, the way a potter can create another bowl to paint. The

exclusivity of creating rock art then implies a more formal and perhaps ritual use. For example, the butterfly hairstyle used to identify a feminine gender implies the use of rock art as a rite of passage (Hays-Gilpin 2004: 128). Pueblo art has portrayed this hairstyle from the Prehispanic period to the historic era in various mediums. Ethnographic studies of historic Pueblo groups, such as the Hopi, have revealed that the hairstyle is worn ceremonially by girls after reaching puberty and until they are married (Hays-Gilpin 2004: 128). Assuming that the butterfly hair whorls have remained a constant trend in puberty and ceremonial rites for unmarried Pueblo women, their presence in rock art can then be inferred to represent the importance of the feminine gender. Puberty represents a transformation of identity, from childhood to adulthood. Associating this transformation exclusively with the female sex implies some sort of culturally valued identity based on the female form. This identity then reflects a possible Pueblo-specific view on the female gender. The temporal and geographic range of this image in rock art, throughout Arizona and New Mexico in areas such as the Four Corners, Mogollon Rim, and the Rio Grande (Hays-Gilpin 2004: 134), may represent a widespread reinforcement of a particular gendered ideology.

### ***Context***

When extrapolating theories of gender and gender identity from Southwestern artifacts, understanding the context is crucial. The bowls and figurines as material culture transcend meaning from that of the individual to “become part of the social corporate spheres of meaning making” (Sørensen 2006: 114). That is, these items serve a purpose specific to their respective culture. This may surpass the realm of physical and obvious use and establish a culturally specific symbolic or abstract purpose. For example, a Mimbres bowl was created and designed according to assumptions on how and by who it would be used. The actual use or possession of the bowl, or any other item, would then reinforce, or perhaps alter, these expectations (Sørensen 2006: 114).

The examined images come from highly specific contexts. Whether from specific graves, buildings, or areas, the items discussed are not utilitarian. For example, figurative Mimbres bowls have been recovered from limited burial contexts, suggesting a controlled scope of access (Hegmon and Trevathan 1996: 748). Such awareness of a particular context encourages archaeologists to push their understanding of gender further. Gender roles may be expressed in different manners within a given society or culture. For example, the portrayal of a feminine gender may vary with regards to status, occupation, or even age. If the ceramic depictions of women in the Mimbres and Casas Grandes regions were found indiscriminately throughout an entire site or sites, they would paint a vastly different image of gender than if they were only recovered in such highly specific contexts.

### ***Conclusion***

The ability to identify gender in the archaeological record, especially in anthropomorphic images, allows for a greater understanding of life and identity in that particular context. In our contemporary western culture, gender has become one of, if not the, most elementary marker of identity and personhood. It has become so embedded into our subconscious that we only really

acknowledge its presence when it is ambiguous or not immediately clear. Archaeologists, in not just the Southwest, must be aware of the power and complexities of gender. It must be recognized as a point on a sliding scale, varying with each culture, instead of treated as a given reflection of binary male/female oppositions.

The Southwest archaeological record provides an interesting case study of gender and gender identities. As seen through the examples of pottery, effigies, and rock art, biological sex, let alone gender, is not always easy to identify. Archaeologists determine gender by identifying a human image to be either male or female, usually based on the presence of identifiable genitalia, and then inferring relationships between these individuals and other characteristics associated with the image. For example, the Casas Grandes effigy vessels associated biologically sexed men with particular postures and smoking.

While the difficulties of identifying gender through Southwestern images may dissuade some from even approaching the topic, the very hardships may in fact be the most telling. For example, if one were to look at any modern culturally important image, gender is easily identifiable, even if one does not hold that set of cultural values. This shows how important the division of gendered identities is in relation to other cultural values and norms. The same cannot be simply applied to a classic Mimbres black-on-white figurative bowl or a rock art image from Chaco Canyon. The lack of immediate gender identity may imply that if gender roles are not the main basis of identity and place in society, then something else may be. In fact, the very ambiguity and absence of gender may implicate that other criteria shaped their existence. Here then is the very crux of archaeological inquiry. It is not to project our own values and culture into the past, but to understand how peoples of the past, in the Southwest and elsewhere, made sense of their world and their place within it.

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Figure 3. Photograph of birth scene from Mimbres bowl (Shaffer et al 1997: 729).



Figure 1. Female effigy from Casas Grandes with macaw design (VanPool and VanPool 2006: 62).

## The Living Dead: Euthanasia, Sacrifice and the Emerging Metaphysics of Secular Society

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Rund Abdel fatah

### *Abstract*

This paper explores the modern-day phenomenon of euthanasia within an increasingly secularized world. In an effort to uncover how sacrifice as concept and practice has been modified to fit this context, a study of the social re-articulation of the processes of life and death is presented. Durkheim's model of the *Intishuma* provides a framework to conceptualize the climate of biotechnology and economic incentivization, which imbues the act of euthanasia with heightened significance and suggests the emergence of a new secular type of sacrifice.

Within the landscape of the secular, modern 'West' (which, for the purposes of this paper, denotes North America and Europe), the advent of new technologies is almost always perceived as a positive force – contributing to the development and improvement of society. Despite the rejection of religion in these societies, at least in the public, official arena, seemingly outdated notions of sacrifice nevertheless prevail, although the ways in which they manifest are contingent upon the particularities of secular society. In a sense, because sacrifice is so deeply intertwined with the social, practices of sacrifice must be contextualized within a broader societal framework, as the social manufactures the sacrifice while the sacrifice simultaneously modifies the social. Effectively, even the foundation of sacrifice – death – is subject to revision. In a secular context versus a classically religious one, death assumes an altered significance. In the absence of an afterlife, the weight of death becomes especially burdensome, as it corresponds to the absolute end of existence, both physically and symbolically. Thus, secular societies have necessarily restructured their approaches to the processes of living and dying in order to maximize the length and quality of life while minimizing the pain of death and dying. These efforts have produced controversial practices in the treatment of individuals that challenge the boundaries of society and prompt the question: How much can or should be sacrificed for the sake of this pursuit? With this inquiry in mind, one must ask: In light of secular renovations of what it means to be alive, to be dying and to be dead, especially when steeped in the discoveries of the scientific realm, how can the modern phenomenon of euthanasia be reinterpreted within a conceptual scaffold of sacrifice whose design is essentially a product of this secular society?

Euthanasia is generally defined as the termination of a disease-plagued life, whether actively (pulling the plug) or passively (withdrawing life-prolonging measures). It can be enacted with consent from the patient (voluntarily) or without consent (involuntarily) if the patient is unconscious and therefore unable to make the decision for oneself.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, it describes “a

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<sup>19</sup> Firth, Rosemary, “Euthanasia,” *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* no. 45 (1981), accessed January 13, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3031789>.

quiet and easy death” that affords “an abridgment of the pangs of disease.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, although euthanasia is a relatively modern practice in its technical form, the concept of voluntary or assisted suicide is nothing new within human societies. However, the characterization of assisted suicide as sacrifice may be an unorthodox portrayal of the experience. But this novelty is precisely the point; just as secularization as worldview is a novelty, casting aside thousands of years of religious dominance, the sacrificial elements of these societies in a sense *should* conflate the standard methodology of sacrifice. Accordingly, the morality of euthanasia is not the issue, so much as how euthanasia fits into, and potentially disrupts, the broader discourse on sacrifice.

Before exploring euthanasia and its connection to sacrifice, we first need to more acutely examine the fraternal twin of sacrifice – society – that inspired and manufactured the practice. Despite the individualized theoretical essence of the procedure’s application, it is, in actuality, entangled in a web of social factors such as economic efficacy and personal convenience. Going one step further, as Kressel does in his study of honor killings in Arab Muslim culture, even personal motives, when considered on a national scale, are “indicative of social climate, social pressures.”<sup>21</sup> Howarth and Jefferys further elaborate on these social impetuses in their article “Euthanasia: Sociological Perspectives,” citing as most prominent “demographic, technological, economic and cultural” stimuli.<sup>22</sup> It would be helpful, then, to delve more deeply into the strata of society and uncover the metaphysical roots of euthanasia that, even in a secularized space, nonetheless exist and regulate the social and psychological schema.

Starting from a physically oriented perspective, the human body assumes a distinct role within secular society that reflects the wider culture of industrialization and mechanization. Each individual is, when healthy at least, autonomous, and this all-important principle of independence provides the blood supply to the heart of the secular body. This system of supposed autonomy has contributed to conscious “biologized and a-social discourses of personhood that reign in the west.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, on the surface it appears that secularism does not accommodate a collective. In reality, it is this necessity – obsession even – with individuality that compels the collective, in other words, when persons grow too co-dependent, especially as a result of illness (whether physical or mental), individuals converge as a group to enact measures to remedy the situation in the interest of returning to an independent state. Take, for example, the secular reaction to pain as it compares to the religious one; in contrast to the religious approach of transforming the suffering of pain into something sufferable and therefore redemptive (with Christ as the ultimate example), secular thought aims to reduce, and if possible, to eliminate, the experience of pain among the collective body. In this context, pain is simply seen as pain. With comfort in this life as the basic objective, each individual plays a part in the social machine so

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>21</sup> Kressel, Gideon M., et al, “Sorricide/ Filiacide: Homicide for Family Honour,” *Current Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (1981): 141, accessed January 13, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2742699>.

<sup>22</sup> Howarth, Glennys and Margot Jefferys. “Euthanasia: Sociological Perspectives.” *British Medical Bulletin* 52, no. 2 (1996): 383, accessed January 13, 2012. <http://bmb.oxfordjournals.org/content/52/2/376.full.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Kaufman, Sharon R. and Lynn M. Morgan. “The Anthropology of the Beginnings and Ends of Life.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 321. Accessed January 13, 2012. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01204.x/pdf>.

that if one part becomes defective, the entire machine draws to a halt, thereby forcing the collaboration of persons to collectively develop a solution. Admittedly, this scenario oversimplifies the interactions between people and neglects the nuances of the individuality it so strongly seeks to preserve. Nevertheless, it does offer a theoretical launch pad for understanding the role of the social, and more specifically, the State, in the lives of individuals.

According to this secular capitalist diagram of society, the individual operates under the jurisdiction and authority of the governing body (the State) and codes one's life around the limitations delineated by that power. This State-sanctioned commodification of ideology establishes personhood as a "process conferred, attenuated, contested, and withheld by the collective."<sup>24</sup> The implications of this power hierarchy manifest particularly strongly in a context of death: how society defines death, what qualifies as a 'good' vs. 'bad' death, and at what stage *dying* warrants *death*. Kaufman and Morgan posit, in their article "The Anthropology of the Beginnings and Ends of Life," that "the lives, bodies, and life itself of whole, living persons are governed – that is, made healthy and sick, valuable and vulnerable, visible and invisible, expendable, profitable and mortal through regulatory, biomedical, ethical, and political structures" of the State.<sup>25</sup> Thus, paradoxically, even as secularism emphasizes the status of the individual as an independent body, it also constructs a system in which power is consolidated and appropriated to a single source, the State. Foucault creates the term "biopower" to describe this systematization of health, and death, whereby the State "wields influence through the production of knowledge and regulation of information about vital processes such as life, death, and health."<sup>26</sup> As such, scientific research, in the pursuit of knowledge, and economic incentivization, in the pursuit of wealth, underline the secular system of governance. Therefore, although their principles and commandments differ, secularization mimics religion by establishing "its own set of metaphysics" and, in traversing this "normative track (whereby the law of God becomes automatically reconfigured to Law as such – Law *as* God)." The State essentially adopts a certain dogma that erects an "institutional framework of social existence."<sup>27</sup> What all this suggests is that, while secularism deviates from religious notions of a supreme being that exists outside society, indeed outside this world altogether, it still upholds the fundamental notion of a supreme being in the form of the State. However, it moves to dispense of the existential element and firmly roots its doctrine in tangible reality, effectively sacralizing the nation.<sup>28</sup>

The two-pronged doctrine of the State, which stresses scientific advancement and economic optimization, expects individuals to contribute more resources than they consume. As a result, when people fall ill they become noncontributing members of society who, within a capitalist economy, only induce harm to the collective order. Eventual euthanasia patients

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 320-1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>27</sup> Gourgouris, Stathis, "Detranscendentalizing the Secular," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 439, 440, 445, accessed January 13, 2012, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=4a1d82c9-d41e-4946-8fd4-17178e78089c%40sessionmgr12&vid=2&hid=18>.

<sup>28</sup> Evans-Pritchard, E.E., *Nuer Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, 199.

represent the most extreme case of this condition, as their illness is virtually irreparable and therefore a perpetual drain on resources – money, time and energy. In exploring the complex economics of the body, science emerges as the ultimate authority, thus generating what Kaufman designates a “culture of medicine.”<sup>29</sup> Reflecting an atmosphere of rationalism, the State has adopted the role of “organizing and naming life and death” with the help of biotechnologies that “govern forms of living and dying and new forms of life such as the stem cell, embryo, comatose, and brain dead, and emphasize the production of value.”<sup>30</sup> A ‘new form’ of particular interest in this paper is the system of organ transplantation that is intimately linked to euthanasia. In the crudest sense, the system depends on death to restore life with the ultimate aim of ensuring the continued prosperity of the collective, in essence enforcing a ‘for the greater good’ mentality. This idea will be revisited later in connection to the circuitry of secular sacrifice.

To conclude this survey of the social ordering of secular society, consider again the metaphysical underpinnings of secularism. We have taken the State to be both doctrine *and* God but, holding the first part of the statement as true, the assumption of Law *as* God should be further inspected. After all, in a secularized setting the question is not only ‘who is God’ but ‘what is God’. Even though the State represents the enforcing body, capable of implementing and lifting regulations, these measures in large part derive from, and are thus determined by, the realm of research. Therefore, is science actually God? Or, returning to the initial claim of secularism as highly individualistic, is each person his own God? Drawing from Talal Asad’s piece “Thinking About the Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics,” the structure of secular societies suggests “political life is profane whereas...the sacred is located in a private self.”<sup>31</sup> The resolution of this question lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, the mere acknowledgement of this ambiguity exposes the as yet unresolved tensions within the metaphysical framework of secular society.

With the social scaffold now in place, we can move on to the specific study of euthanasia as secular sacrifice. As mentioned earlier, the practice comes in two varieties: voluntary and involuntary. I am more concerned with the latter type but I will first briefly explore the former. The central property of voluntary euthanasia is that the decision to induce death belongs to the patient alone. This action technically qualifies as suicide but, as Rane Willerslev argues in her study of voluntary death among the Siberian Chukchi, beyond this superficial reading voluntary death can instead be viewed as a “ritual inversion of suicide.”<sup>32</sup> The practice among the Chukchi, which has been described as an “archaic type of active [or voluntary] euthanasia,” involves the cultural “killing of a family member – often ill and aged – who expresses a wish to die.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kaufman, 317.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Asad, Talal, “Thinking About the Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics,” *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 661, accessed January 13, 2012, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01118.x/pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Willerslev, Rane, “The Optimal Sacrifice: A Study of Voluntary Death Among the Siberian Chukchi,” *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 4 (2009): 693, accessed January 13, 2012, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01204.x/pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Hubert and Mauss offer an explanation for this claim, characterizing voluntary death as a form of “sacrifice of request” which brings about the “fulfillment of a promise.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, although Willerslev acknowledges that, in the strictest sense, suicide is not sacrifice, she asserts that “it nevertheless functions as a kind of unattainable ‘ideal’ through which the value of any actual sacrifice is measured...[because] sacrifice is always a shadow of itself, in that it substitutes for the impossible real act, the sacrifice of oneself.”<sup>35</sup> Here, she departs from Hubert and Mauss, reasoning that “behind the triangular relationship of sacrifice, deity, and victim lies a structure of ideal sacrifice”<sup>36</sup> that manifests through voluntary suicide. In addition, just as the Chukchi feel obligated to fulfill this request, it is likewise binding in the secular context. If a patient elects euthanasia, his family, the doctors, and the Law cannot refuse these wishes even if, in theory, there is a slim possibility of recovery. If we return to the question ‘Who is God’, this scenario paints the individual as the ultimate arbiter of his fate and, thus, potentially as God. Those still alive in both societies must reconcile the individual’s sacrifice, integrating and even profiting from it (for the Chukchi, in the form of spiritual positivism and, for the secularist, in the form of material gain, i.e., the will and organs), thereby establishing a “contractual conception of the relationship between the dead and the living.”<sup>37</sup> This connection between the living and the dead will resurface later.

Moving now to the second, more controversial, and thus more intriguing type, involuntary euthanasia, we can invoke classical theories on the mechanism and staging of sacrifice to help situate this practice within the wider discourse. Drawing from John Borneman’s article “Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany,” I will adopt the more abstract definition of sacrifice as “the constitution of a loss necessary for the creation of the sacred.”<sup>38</sup> The central controversy surrounding involuntary euthanasia can be summarized as a struggle over agency. Put simply, who determines if and when it is in the patient’s best interest to die? If we adopt Howarth’s definition of agency as “the social institution which has by legal authority or common consent the recognized right to set and control the normative practice in any given field of human activity,”<sup>39</sup> the notion of control appears vital to this discussion. Although officially the patient’s family members have the final word, if we return to the idea of personhood as a product of society (thinking specifically of medical professionals and public discourses on the issue), then the decision appears to belong increasingly to the social rather than the private realm. In particular, doctors and nurses, generally considered more knowledgeable and thus more equipped to handle these questions, wield a great amount of influence over the

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<sup>34</sup> Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, Translated by W.D. Halls, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Willerslev, 700.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 693.

<sup>37</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Translated by John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Penguin Books, 1973, 234.

<sup>38</sup> Borneman, John, Introduction to *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany*, by Marcus Funck, et al., Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Howarth, 381.

choice to euthanize, such that in a sense they are ‘playing God’.<sup>40</sup> Beyond the immediate social influences directly in contact with the patient’s hospital space, indirect forces like the media along with established social norms transform a seemingly independent choice into one that is entangled in “societal beliefs and practices concerning death and dying.”<sup>41</sup> As the social machine takes over, the autonomy of the patient nearly vanishes. Already immersed in an unconscious ephemeral space between life and death, the patient grows more and more dependent upon a system that is highly individualistic and that, as a result, engenders a “cultural abhorrence of relying on others to provide care.” This mindset, in turn, may construct a sort of “moral blackmail” to rationalize euthanasia.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, just as with other more traditional forms of sacrifice, the implementation of involuntary euthanasia necessitates the transgression of cultural taboos, namely the sanctioning of the otherwise prohibited action of killing. Kressel describes this deviant element as it relates to human sacrifice in the following way: “circumstances in which [causing the death of another] is justified are rare and confined to cases occurring during the maintenance of law [whether secular or religious] and in its name or cases of mercy killing, euthanasia, and the like.”<sup>43</sup> Viewed in this light, the killing involved in involuntary euthanasia appears to happen due to a manufactured loophole in the secular social mind, thereby converting this killing from an act of violence to one of mercy. With this rationalization in place, the phenomenon enters the realm of sacrifice.

Using Durkheim’s concept of the sacred journey in Intishuma society as a basic guideline, it becomes clear that the trajectory of death for involuntary euthanasia parallels, and at times diverges from, this map of sacrifice. At heart, Durkheim portrays the totem as the ultimate source of power, which in the context of secular societies is the State. Accordingly, the sacrifice is done to preserve the totem so that the totem will, in turn, guarantee the wellbeing of the group. This principle needs to be reconfigured slightly in its application to involuntary euthanasia. After all, on the surface it seems that euthanasia prescribes death for the wellbeing of the individual, not the society. But, in light of the highly ambiguous element of agency involved in administering this decision, especially in situations where the patient has no family to bridge the gap between the individual and social realms, the society actually stands to gain much from the individual’s death. Returning to the ‘for the greater good’ mentality explored earlier, and keeping in mind the doctrine of secularism already discussed, the elimination, or sacrifice, of the patient removes a drain on resources (indeed, contributes resources) and revives the independent condition for those still living. As a result, although euthanizing the patient may in fact be what the patient would have preferred (which, for practical reasons, cannot be discerned) and may offer the most ‘humane’ exit, the question of when this death is induced – essentially, what degree of *dying* necessitates *death* – is left up to the social machine. As Kaufman notes, “when the Intensive Care Unit and mechanical respirator became standard features in North American and Western European hospitals [in the 1970s], life extending, ‘heroic’ technologies collided

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kressel, 141.

with medicine's unclear sense of its role in prolonging dying and keeping the 'dead' alive."<sup>44</sup> In effect, because society "shapes understandings of the parameters of life, death and the person,"<sup>45</sup> the 'when' factor becomes crucial in understanding euthanasia as sacrifice, as it directly corresponds to social constructions of what qualifies as death altogether.

Durkheim continues to describe that the sacrifice requires a temporary dismissal of social prohibitions and taboos in this special circumstance (already paralleled above). Thus, the sacrifice occurs outside the boundaries of normal society in a space of liminality, defined as "a period and state of being between social statuses."<sup>46</sup> In the case of euthanasia, the liminal space necessarily accompanies the sacrifice, though it is relocated from outside the society to within the individual. If we reexamine Asad's claim that the secularized sacred inhabits the self, then this internalization of the liminal space, while diverging from classical form, seems appropriate to a secular setting. Euthanasia can only emerge at this juncture between life and death. Thus, within this context, liminality refers specifically to the state of being that is "not-dead-but-not-fully-alive"<sup>47</sup> which characterizes involuntarily euthanized patients. The very existence of this state of being is a product of secular society and its modern categories, and subcategories, of physical processes, which have restructured the landscape of death and what it means to be alive. Whereas the absolute disappearance of consciousness, termed 'brain dead', seems to signify a social death, as it effectively removes the individual from the network of social interactions, the individual is not classified as biologically dead until his heartbeat stops.<sup>48</sup> As Victor Turner describes in his work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, liminal persons are "threshold people...neither here nor there"<sup>49</sup> but what differs in this secular context are the connotations of 'here' and 'there'. From a religious perspective, *here* refers to this world and *there* to a spiritual domain beyond death, while from a secular perspective, *here* indicates life and *there* death. Thus, the transcendent leap must occur between life and death, exclusively within material reality. Immersed in this liminality, the patient becomes virtually dehumanized and transforms into a blank slate on which is "inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group."<sup>50</sup> In this way, the person, both as liminal object and eventually as victim, improves the society by acting as an experiment (recall the possible role of science as God) that can advance the society's understanding of itself and, in the process, enhance life for the living. Thus, euthanasia takes the concept of transcending the self (usually, through a substitute) to an entirely new level: the individual gives up his entire body to the collective.

This almost parasitic relationship between the living collective and the sacrificed victim recalls the final step of Durkheim's sacred journey: the return. In the same way that the community of the Intishuma collects the totem following the period of sacrifice, the secular community likewise collects the profit procured from the death of the euthanized patient. More

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<sup>44</sup> Kaufman, 326.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>49</sup> Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969, 95.

<sup>50</sup> Turner, 103.

important even than the material belongings transmitted (through a will) from the dead person to his closest living connections is the partition and distribution of the physical body (effectively, the sacred of secularism). As Taussig asserts in his piece “Transgression”, the human body functions as “a privileged theater of sacred activity...[especially in cases of] automutilation, of the killing of the god, of the god killing himself.”<sup>51</sup> This transcendent potentiality of the individual thus allows the killing of the patient to become “a space of transformation”<sup>52</sup> where the experience of death generates life – “a rebirth by sacrifice.”<sup>53</sup> Just as in Evans-Pritchard’s account of Nuer sacrifice, in which some of the meat and blood of the sacrificed animal is offered to God at the end of the sacrifice for the spiritual benefit of the collective, secular society likewise extracts the parts of the victim’s body most useful to society (i.e., those parts that can benefit the still living through a system of organ donorship).<sup>54</sup> As Nobel Prize winner of medicine Carleton Gajdusek reflected, “With great advances in life-support technology and organ transplantation, the dead today do indeed have much ‘protein’ to offer us – in the form of their organs and body parts. We are the neo-cannibals.”<sup>55</sup> The secular economic landscape has therefore erected a “debt-peonage institution”<sup>56</sup> within social life that endorses a business-like approach to the dealing of human lives and deaths that reflects a systematized valuation of costs and benefits. In the end, the euthanized patient reinvigorates the collective and rejuvenates belief in the power of technology and the State among the living, thus prompting a secular spiritual revival of sorts.

The intent of this study was to draw forth the complex interaction between secularism and sacrifice as it applies to the specific practice of euthanasia. Essentially, just as secularism emphasizes a marked divergence from religious principles, the nature of sacrifice, inherently a social phenomenon, can likewise be expected to deviate from classical systems rooted in religion. This is not to say that the two realms, the traditional and the modern, do not overlap; indeed, they share much in common. At heart, the secular has adopted a similar framework to governing society as the religious, but with an altogether different doctrine. Additionally, since secular societies are so young, the boundaries and the powers that determine those limits are still being explored. Therefore, in a sense secular society is itself in a stage of liminality, attempting to define itself through experimentation (as can only be expected). Ultimately, the practice of euthanasia offers insight into the dynamics of various elements of secular culture: the collective, the individual, life, death, and of course, sacrifice.

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<sup>51</sup> Taussig, Michael, “Transgression,” In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 360.

<sup>52</sup> Taussig, Michael, “Culture of Terror—Space of Death. Roger Casement’s Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984): 468.

<sup>53</sup> Hubert, 62.

<sup>54</sup> Evans-Pritchard, 212.

<sup>55</sup> Gajdusek, Carleton quoted in “New Age and Euthanasia,” last modified in 1989, accessed January 13, 2012. [http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0338\\_New\\_Age\\_and\\_Euthanas.html](http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0338_New_Age_and_Euthanas.html).

<sup>56</sup> Taussig, “Culture”, 495.

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***Tam Bao Son Monastery: Harrington, Quebec***

Olivia Tonin, Binghamton University

## Media(ted) Identities: Constructing and Caring for Female Adolescent Sexuality In the United States and the United Kingdom

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### *Abstract*

Adolescence is defined by the context in which it occurs, and the navigation of that context. In the same way that female adolescent sexuality does not exist in a vacuum, elements of the framework in which adolescence occurs are interconnected, informing one another. One such element is the reproductive health clinic. Thus, the information available to girls, as well as the sources from which this information comes and the means by which it is accessed, is mediated by the larger structure. Reproductive health clinics, so important to female adolescent identity, construct their own identities within the same framework as the girls they serve, presenting themselves in the media they generate. This paper is the product of an independent study completed during a semester in London. Drawing on a combination of literature-based research, observation, and original media analysis, this paper will examine the social, governmental, and cultural norms that inform these (re)presentations.

There is no direct route, no way to move from childhood to adulthood unencumbered or uninfluenced by outside forces. Rather, adolescence is defined by the context in which it occurs and the navigation of that context. Individuals are confronted with a complex web of interpersonal influences, social forces, educational, governmental, and institutional structures. This web provides the raw material—information, social norms and sexual scripts—with which individuals navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood, from sexual immaturity to sexual agency.

Female adolescent sexuality, and the process by which an adolescent girl comes to know and identify herself, is contingent upon the preexistent social framework. In the same way that female adolescent sexuality does not exist in a vacuum, elements of the framework in which adolescence occurs are interconnected, informing one another. Thus, the information available to girls, as well as the sources from which this information comes, and the means by which it is accessed, is mediated by the larger structure.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, a most vital source of information, support, and care is the reproductive health clinic. Such an organization, like the adolescent female, exists only in context. It is shaped by a set of social, governmental, and cultural norms, influenced by history and traditional social mores. Most prominent of these organizations are Planned Parenthood in the United States and the Brook Advisory in the United Kingdom. These two organizations, so important to female adolescent identity, construct their own identities within the same framework as the girls they serve, presenting themselves in the media they produce.

In her article, “More! New sexualities in girls’ and women’s magazines,” media scholar Angela McRobbie takes a critical look at girls’ and women’s magazines and how feminist critique of these media productions has shifted over time. McRobbie draws on Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology to situate the original feminist critique (Althusser 1970). “Ideology was the key means by which dominant social groups retained their power and influence” (McRobbie 1999, 48). It worked, and continues to work, by “naturalizing and universalizing meanings and values which were [and are] in fact socially constructed” (McRobbie 1999, 48). McRobbie asserts that we are all “implicated in the spider’s web of ideology,” that the “inner selves” of individuals and of larger collectivities are “constructed” within and in relation to ideology (McRobbie 1999, 48). Ideology’s strength is in its invisibility. It traverses the social framework, crystallizing social construction into palpable cultural fact, and affixing these ‘truths’ to the individuals and institutions that operate within the framework.

The media that Planned Parenthood and the Brook Advisory use to display themselves as organizations and to make themselves available to adolescent girls provides insight not only into the services they offer, but also to the cultural construction of ‘adolescent’ and the norms and beliefs concerning the understanding and treatment of female adolescent sexuality. They are evidence not only of the needs of adolescent girls, but of the social understanding of adolescent girls and the needs that the larger social body is prepared to meet.

To understand how Planned Parenthood and the Brook Advisory identify and present themselves, their situation within American and British culture, respectively, must be considered. The function and efficacy of these organizations is bound up with the ways in which they are able to depict and make themselves available to adolescent girls. A publication offers guidance and information about its producer. The publication is (less visibly) a product of the social forces that shape the involved organization and adolescent and what it means to be either of these things. By examining the websites, pamphlets, and brochures produced by Planned Parenthood and the Brook Advisory, this paper will investigate the structural forces and prevailing social norms that shape the ways in which these organizations are situated in cultural context and are able to identify and present themselves. It will analyze the ways in which the production and consumption of these media extend beyond the organizations and the target audience, becoming implicated in a dialogue between producers, consumers, and the social forces that allow for and shape production and consumption of these documents.

Planned Parenthood and the Brook Advisory are discrete organizations. They share little in common besides their dedication to serving their respective female adolescent clients. Planned Parenthood is twice as old as the Brook Advisory (“History and Successes” 2011, “About Brook” 2011). Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) is a nation-wide coalition that serves a variety of purposes, initiatives and goals. For the scope of this paper and to best parallel the Brook Advisory, this paper will focus on Planned Parenthood of New York City, a branch of the Federation. New York City is of historical importance to Planned Parenthood because it is the city in which Margaret Sanger opened the 1916 clinic that would eventually become part of the Planned Parenthood network (“History and Successes” 2011). It is also of personal

significance to me, as I spent last summer interning in their Department of Education & Training.

Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) provides “reproductive health care, innovative educational programs, and effective advocacy,” and strives to “promote awareness about contraception as part of [their] commitment to prevention and proactive education” (“Who We Are” 2011). Through “community and educational initiatives,” PPNYC aims to “empower teens...to make informed and healthy decisions” and protect their rights to such decisions (“Who We Are” 2011). The organization recognizes the importance of the “understanding of individual and societal implications of human sexuality” (“Mission” 2011). Teenagers “have the right to access the information they need to make well-informed sexual and reproductive health decisions in a safe, supportive, and confidential environment” (“Mission & Values of Planned Parenthood of New York City” 2011).

The Brook Advisory (BAC) is the United Kingdom’s “largest young people’s sexual health charity...providing sexual health services, support, and advice to young people” (“About Brook” 2011). The Advisory’s mission is “to ensure that all children and young people” are able to “make informed, active choices about their personal and sexual relationships,” and works to provide information, education and outreach, counseling, [and] confidential clinic and medical services” (“About Brook” 2011). The Brook Advisory believes that young people have the right to “high quality education about sex [...] and sexuality” (“About Brook”). BAC seeks to “promote the health, particularly sexual health, of young people...through providing information, education and outreach, counseling, confidential clinical and medical services, professional advice and training” (“About Brook” 2011).

The Brook Advisory was founded in 1964 as a “charity dedicated to providing contraception of practical advice to young, unmarried women” (“About Brook” 2011). Although a private donor originally funded the organization, Brook now receives funding from both public and private sources (“About Brook” 2011). There are 18 Brook Advisory Centres in and around London. Brook seeks to influence and provide information to policy makers, but is mired by a political and cultural system that, as Brook’s own mission statement attests, considers Brook Advisory Centre clientele “children” (“About Brook” 2011). Both Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory are defined and constrained by the social frameworks in which they exist.

The two organizations do not—cannot—exist outside American and British society, respectively. The objectives set forth in their mission statements are objectives relevant to cultural context and the existing social scripts. Naturalized cultural beliefs play a formative role in the identities and the agency of Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory. In the same way that individual adolescent girls “learn to interpret and act” based on the “social attitudes” they “extract” from the surrounding “cultural context,” Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory are influenced by their cultural context and the same ‘social attitudes’ as are female adolescents (Moore & Rosenthal 2006a, 91). The “underlying messages of a culture with respect to sex, and even political and economic forces,” have bearing

on the way these organizations are understood in cultural context and the possible social role they can assume (Moore & Rosenthal 2006c, 57). Individual girls, as well as the organizations dedicated to serving them, are shaped by a multitude of cultural factors and are inextricably tied to the tiered social framework. Formation of the self and the pursuit of one's goals are confined "within a number of material and cultural constraints" (Lawson 1993, 111). The 'self' that each organization forms and presents is "subject to political and other ideological influences" (Bonell 2004, 270). Ideology is very powerful, its influence "so extensive that it is 'interwoven' with everyday life" (Pilcher 2002, 110).

It is within these social parameters that Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory situate themselves and make themselves available—present themselves—to the adolescent girls bound in the same culture. An organization must portray itself in a way that addresses not only the needs of its clientele, but also in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the cultural context and what is acceptable to offer to adolescents. The relationship between clinic and clientele is inextricable from the framework in which an encounter between the two may occur. The reproductive health organization and its clinics are particularly important because teenage girls believe them to be "authoritative sources of prevention information" (Fortenberry 2002, 63). PPNYC and BAC are credited with increasing responsible sexual behavior and establishing a "sustained dialogue that promotes risk reduction within the context of healthy sexuality" (Fortenberry 2002, 65).

Media, in its production and consumption, is an apt vehicle for the promulgation of the 'ideology' McRobbie provides. By reproducing norms, media naturalizes them (Steele 1999, 337). Like all other elements of the social landscape, media is subject to the larger social forces that shape its production and consumption. Sociologist Jane Pilcher's article, "Scripting femininities: popular media culture," offers insight into how media is imbued with ideology, and how as a result, its social meaning and use is impacted. Neither media nor its producer exists outside ideology's sphere of influence. Relevant media is that which is designed to "adhere to particular conventions or codes of representation" (Pilcher 2002, 128). Thus, "certain dominant meanings are promoted," limiting the "extent to which and the ways in which the audience can formulate their own meanings" (Pilcher 2002, 128). "Interpretation of [media] texts" is confined to the matrix of "dominant" ideology and "wider macro-economic, political and ideological contexts acting on the construction of texts, and the micro contexts [...] within which texts are consumed" (Pilcher 2002, 128). Media's ability to convey meaning to an audience, as well as the very meaning it hopes to convey, is determined by the larger social forces and the extent to which it is compatible with the norms and social mores that have become accepted as fact.

Media plays an important role in the way Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory can become active in their respective contexts. Media becomes a key point of contact between the organizations and their adolescent clientele. By publishing pamphlets and other literature, PPNYC and BAC employ these forms of media to publicly convey their identities. These objects are useful on an individual level, becoming a tool for female adolescents while simultaneously reflecting the ways in which the organization is defined by larger social

forces. Media is integral to the formation of identity on multiple levels of the social framework (Hadley 1998, 7). A media item is a type of model for the way in which an organization, such as PPNYC or BAC, is influenced by the cultural context and how, as a part of the cultural context, an organization is able to participate in an individual experience of female adolescence.

At the individual level, constructing an adolescent identity is a dialogue, the process by which new expectations, social norms, and sexual scripts are internalized and blended into a cohesive identity. Emerging female adolescent identity reflects a negotiation of numerous sources of information, influences, and shaping forces. An encounter with a media object is “dialectic” (Steele 1999, 331). The teenage girl’s sense of self influences the types of media she chooses to encounter, and these encounters help the girl further develop her sense of self (Steele 1999, 334). There is a “complexity” to the “relationship between cultural products and audiences” (Pilcher 2002, 111). Cultural products are influential because girls do not simply accept them, but negotiate what they are saying and reconcile that meaning with what they already know (McRobbie 1999, 50).

The pamphlets and web pages that Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory use to present themselves as organizations and as a resource for teenage girls must be carefully engineered. Media is designed to be accessible to its intended audience, but this must be carried out in a way that is appropriate for its cultural context and its prevailing social norms and values. The organizations become knowable, their services available, in a way determined by the social framework. PPNYC and BAC are shaped by their locations in American and British society, which becomes reflected in the media they use to present themselves. The influence of dominant ideology is evident within the media PPNYC and BAC produce, and in the kinds of identities these media convey.

Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory are involved in the creation of reality for the populations of female adolescents they serve. Their clientele is “actively engaged” in not only a dialogue with available materials on an individual level, but also in the production of such materials (Pilcher 2002, 113). Adolescent girls are an active audience before they even come into contact with the literature. “Who the reader is and what she wants” is formative of PPNYC and BAC and how they make themselves available to this imagined reader (McRobbie 1999, 59). The prospective reader is considered in the context of the “wider social settings” within which she will encounter media items (Pilcher 2002, 119). Media is tailor-made for the girls its producers hope to reach.

Dominant ideology and social concerns about female adolescent sexuality and identity provide PPNYC and BAC with an ideological silhouette of adolescent femininity. This set of guidelines—and rigid boundaries—is a naturalized authority in the lives of teenage girls. The information and support presented in the media objects made available to them aligns with the ubiquitous cues and social scripts to which they have already been exposed. Media produced by PPNYC and BAC is most useful when it can be interwoven with other shaping forces and influences.

Contact between an adolescent girl and PPNYC or BAC commonly occurs through engagement with media publications. This convergence of producer and consumer is implicated in a larger cultural dialogue involving the adolescent girl, the tangible article itself, and the organization that published it, as well as the omnipresent larger social framework in which these actors operate. Publications, then, are “highly influential socializing agents” (Pilcher 2002, 117). While explicitly they provide guidance and a portrayal of an organization, they implicitly are manifestations of established norms and social values, a means of perpetuating dominant ideology. Though dominant ideology itself is invisible, its influence is evident in the publications of both Planned Parenthood of New York City and the Brook Advisory.

If media is to serve its purpose and transmit information, it must first attract its reader. It must be approachable. PPNYC and BAC are both successful in this initial endeavor, but their aesthetics vary greatly. The front pages of PPNYC’s brochures feature a photograph, making the information inside more relatable. Each page’s background is white, the lettering inside neatly arranged and easy to read. BAC’s brochures are devoid of pictures, instead using bright colors and a casual font. The information inside is neatly categorized and presented, but a smattering of thought bubbles asking ‘Did you know?’ adds youthfulness. The organizations are both successful in creating a point of access between themselves and the adolescent reader, the last page offering additional resources and contact information, including their web addresses.

An American study conducted earlier this year ranked online sites as one of the top five sources adolescents use to learn about sexual and reproductive health (Boyar et al 2011, 16). To borrow from the same study, the current ‘Digital Age’ renders information available electronically as the most accessible to adolescents. The Internet makes it possible to access a large body of information quickly and conveniently. PPNYC and BAC both capitalize on the opportunity to reach teenagers by way of the Internet. Each site’s pages are visually attractive and well organized. Information is parsed first into categories, and neatly arranged in an approachable way. BAC’s website is manageable and comprehensive. A combination of bullet points and colorful font make it easy to read. Each page engages the reader, guiding her through the information by suggesting other related topics. PPNYC’s ‘Info for Teens’ is accessed through Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s umbrella website, as are PPNYC’s own pages. ‘Info for Teens’ boasts bright colors and photographs. Information is organized by category and then presented in the form of questions and answers (“Info for Teens” 2011).

Media objects are carefully designed to be visually attractive to adolescent girls. The success of these publications evidences their appeal to adolescent females and the accessibility of the offered information. It also involves underlying normative ideas about what adolescent girls should be attracted to and what kinds of information are appropriate for this universalized exemplar of adolescent femininity. These norms shape the interaction between a girl and a media publication, regulating both her exposure to the information and the conclusions she can draw. Thus, these websites and pamphlets are produced for adolescent girls, but are in part produced by social norms and cultural attitudes. These ‘socializing agents’ become a “reflection of tensions around contemporary femininity, and ambivalence about what women are meant to be” (Pilcher

2002, 117). To engage with a media object is to engage with the larger social forces that informed its production, the prevailing cultural beliefs about adolescence, and the broader structures of society that serve to naturalize and sustain such cultural beliefs as truth.

A British girl's engagement with a Brook Advisory publication—or that of an American girl with a PPNYC publication—is bound up with the dominant ideology and naturalized social truths in the United Kingdom or the United States, respectively. The media produced by PPNYC and BAC volunteers a wealth of examples of this intricate dialectic engagement and the variety of ways in which it is manifest in these publications. These documents are created with the intention of presenting the organizations that produce them and supporting female adolescent identity construction. This exchange cannot occur outside the cultural framework within which the adolescent and the organization exist. Within this framework, the media passed between the two bodies is subject to the set of existing social norms, sexual scripts, legal and governmental structures, traditions, and cultural beliefs and anxieties. The effects of these forces on media objects is played out in various arenas of both British and American culture—in the domain of adolescent identity and sexuality and in ways less obviously correlated with PPNYC, BAC, and adolescent females.

Within the current Digital Age and the broad—and broadening—influence of technology in the lives of adolescents exists an opportunity to harness such technology to disseminate information. Both the Brook Advisory and Planned Parenthood of New York City are becoming part of emergent “digital landscapes,” expanding their spheres of influence by employing new modes of communication (Boyar et al 2011, 6). Both organizations have implemented a text messaging service. Teenage girls are rarely far away from their cell phones, creating the potential for text messaging to become an open line of communication at all times. In their concluding remarks, Boyar et al stress the importance of “tone” in new forms of communication, recommending one that “resonates with youth” (Boyar et al 2011, 36). Both text-messaging services adopt a form of abbreviated texting lingo. BAC calls this service ‘txt us!’ (“txt us! 07717 989 023” 2011). PPNYC’s text messaging service, ‘NowUKnow,’ is automated; subscribers receive a weekly sex tip comprised of excessively abbreviated words. Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011’s message reads, ‘Take Plan B w/in 72hrs 2avoid prgncy after unprotectd/unwantd sex. Txt CLINIC + ur zipcode 4 clinics near u.’ The message is an important one, but it gets lost in the format of the words. Both the online ‘Info for Teens’ and ‘NowUKnow’ are attempts by PPNYC to make information accessible and relatable. PPNYC’s texting service seems to be unsuccessful in its effort to be casual and misguided in its understanding of the manner in which teenage girls communicate.

In the British social framework, the traditionalist view of the child as thoroughly innocent is a powerful one. There is a cultural “insistence that children are asexual beings whose innocence must be protected” (Lewis & Knijn 2003, 117). Many adults consider it a moral obligation to “protect young people against sexual involvement” (Moore & Rosenthal 2006b, 128). This proclamation of innocence has become part of the dominant ideology, evident even in materials produced by the country’s largest “sexual health charity” that caters to Brits under age

25 (“About Brook” 2011). The Brook Advisory’s mission statement declares that the organization, like the “society” in which this declaration is made, “values all children” (“About Brook” 2011). Its mission is to provide free sexual healthcare and resources to the innocent ‘children’ of Greater London. BAC’s adolescent clientele would not be regarded as children by an outside observer, but it is clear that within British cultural context and ideology, ‘children’ is an appropriate and (socially) truthful label. A glance at the wall of pamphlets in a Brook Advisory Centre and the rows of the playful font and bright colors might give credence to the notion that childhood innocence is highly valued in British society. Obviously, this traditional belief does not impede BAC’s ability to provide the services it does. Rather, it proves the Brook Advisory’s British identity and its integrated place in the social structure.

The emphasis on the innocence of childhood and a need to protect them from sexual activity flows naturally into reluctance, even refusal, to acknowledge emerging adolescent sexuality. The lack of openness and honesty about sexuality in British social context renders teenagers unprepared to manage their sexual health (Hadley 1998, 1). Adolescent ignorance is not by choice. Discussion is “rare” and serves as a tool to relate “warnings to their daughters.” This situation does more to stunt female sexuality than it does to promote its healthy development or to answer questions (Moore & Rosenthal 2006a, 101). Teens want to discuss and seek advice about sexuality, but adults do not provide the forum for such conversations. The reticence of adults to talk about sex and sexuality “reinforces the prevailing view in British society that sex is a taboo area” (Hadley 1998, 10).

Aware of the needs and interests of both parents and adolescents, the Brook Advisory’s web page, ‘Talking it through,’ suggests methods by which teens can broach these topics with their parents in a way that is minimally threatening to the rationale of parents’ silence. First, the web page assures the reader that her desire to establish frank communication with a trusted parent is a valid one. It goes on to acknowledge that “it’s not always easy to start a conversation with someone, especially if [she is] worried they might be shocked, upset, or even angry by what [she is] telling them” (“Talking it through” 2011). The text does not shy away from the potential of a dismissive, even hostile response. Instead, it recommends that the reader “be sensitive to” the fact that “lots of adults find it difficult to talk about sex or relationships” (“Talking it through” 2011). Parents’ unwillingness to talk about sexuality is rooted in a naturalized total avoidance of the topic, a normalized ideology that does not seem to have embedded itself or become totalizing in the adolescent population. ‘Talking it through’ recognizes the discrepancy here, and reminds the teenage reader to remain rational, keeping in mind that a rebuff does not reflect a lack of care. On the contrary, it is closely tied to a cultural safeguarding of childhood innocence. “The adults around you [teenage girls] usually just want to keep you safe and happy” (“Talking it through” 2011). Whatever its impetus, silence does not answer questions or offer guidance. The last piece of advice included on the webpage is significant in that it gives the reader options. A parent’s unwillingness to counsel an adolescent female does not reflect a universal unwillingness. The reader is encouraged to seek Brook’s further advice over the phone (“Talking it through” 2011).

‘Talking it through’ is significant. Not only does it offer accessible, feasible advice to the reader, but also it anticipates potential outcomes and prepares her for a range of likely reactions. Moreover, the web page corroborates the Brook Advisory’s understanding of dominant British ideology and how it might influence the encounter between the organization and the adolescent female reader. The webpage acknowledges the strength and presence of the cultural norm, and rather than accepting it as limit, BAC presents the ideology—within its presentation of its own identity—as an established social force that the reader, unlike her parents, can isolate and reincorporate into future dialogues.

The pursuit of advice and information is not only taboo within the parent-child relationship. It takes courage to seek support and information about sexual health. A key component of the Brook Advisory’s commitment to—and success in—providing adolescent clientele with information and advice is the organization’s ability to offer accessible and confidential counsel. On every page of the Brook Advisory’s website is a reminder from BAC: ‘we won’t tell anyone.’ While the Internet allows all of the Brook Advisory’s materials to be accessed from one place, browser history threatens the confidentiality and anonymity the website promises. In the case of a shared computer, it is not a betrayal by the organization, but the indiscretion of the browser and the computer monitor on which media was viewed. The Brook Advisory’s website includes a page of detailed instructions to “prevent people finding out you’ve [teenage girl] visited this website” (“Your confidentiality” 2011). Like the Althusserian ideology that forbids the pursuit of BAC guidance, the organization assumes invisibility in order to best spread its influence.

The views expressed by Brook Advisory’s media objects resonate with the British cultural injunction to lionize and protect the innocence of childhood. The organization aligns itself with the dominant ideology, and is very careful to avoid transgressions. Like BAC, Planned Parenthood of New York City and its umbrella Federation are staunchly committed to their ideals and the availability of services to adolescent girls. However, the ways in which these ideals are promoted and services delivered are entangled in the political vacillations of the American framework, which may be hostile at times. The success of PPFA, and thus PPNYC, is attributed to the organization’s ability to remain committed to its ideals and to navigate a changing political climate. The prevailing attitude toward the provision of reproductive healthcare and advice to adolescents has remained controversial in American society. The government policy that regulates American culture and its institutions has seen a great deal of change since the days of Margaret Sanger.

Adolescent sexuality is “politically dangerous” territory in American politics (Cromer & McCarthy 1999, 292). Concerns about female adolescent sexuality continue to be determining factors in the support for a politician, bill, or court ruling. In turn, extreme political and legislative decisions prove dangerous to the provision of services to teenagers. Most of the funding for teenage family planning services is federal (Cromer & McCarthy 1999, 287). Thus, the availability of public funding is crucial to the work PPNYC fulfills (Frost et al 2004, 211). Numerous chains of events can be used to trace the influence of politics on Planned Parenthood’s

sovereignty. Tracing the history of Title X serves as a means for understanding the cultural framing and constraints on Planned Parenthood, as the organization depends on it.

In 1970, Nixon enacted Title X of the Public Health Service Act, which made contraceptives available to women regardless of income, and set aside funding for educational programs. It was later broadened to include funding for “community-based sex education programs and preventative services to unmarried teenagers” (“History and Successes” 2011). During the Reagan administration, Title X clinics were severely restricted in their ability to provide confidential care to teenagers. Clinton repealed Reagan’s severe restrictions on Title X agencies and advocated women’s choice, only to be succeeded by Bush, whose administration posited that sexual health knowledge led to promiscuity among teenagers, appointed “anti-choice extremists” to oversee Title X (“History and Successes” 2011). PPFA remained committed to supporting female adolescents, but the scope of their influence fluctuated with the available revenues to fund programs.

Currently, Title X is an important revenue source. It “is not tied to particular services rendered or clients served, it remains one of few sources clinics can draw on to [...] provide educational and outreach activities [and services]” (Frost et al 2004, 215). However, dependence on Title X means susceptibility to a “variety of financial and political pressures [...] depending on the political will of the moment” (Frost et al 2004, 206). Thus, PPNYC’s stability must be rooted in its dedication to its ideals, and the support of the government in its pursuits. Materials must lend themselves to providing the best support possible to adolescents in a mercurial political climate. PPNYC’s brochures, then, do not only provide the reader with a sense of the organization’s identity, but also bear witness to the organization’s ability to adapt to the current situation. The detailed, straightforward information, presented in an approachable and orderly manner, focuses on the rights and needs of the individual. The organization’s pamphlet covers, unlike the bold hues of the Brook Advisory’s publications, bear muted, neutral colors and photographs of ‘real’ adolescents, appealing to individual teens on a personal level. Their contents are comprehensive and factual, but presented in a sophisticated, methodical way that speaks to their commitment to adolescents, whatever the dominant ideology or political climate. The strength of PPNYC’s brochures—and of the organization itself—lies in its streamlined presentation of facts and their very existence irrespective of political opposition or financial constraints.

An interesting consistency arises; dominant ideology passes over and runs through these objects, but the websites and pamphlets are not passive. These media objects prove themselves greater than just a point of contact between active agents. A pamphlet encouraging open discussion between parents and children encourages such conversation where there may be none. A commitment to providing support and services to adolescents in spite of a hostile political climate creates the opportunity for a more favorable political setting in the future. By shedding light on an issue or by remaining visible in spite of it, media has the potential to become a shaping force in society. Media objects are more powerful than they first appear. They are implicated in the larger social matrix, both as representations of their producers and as

freestanding participants in the matrix of production, consumption, and adolescent sexuality and identity.

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