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The College of Graduate Studies wishes to thank each of the faculty reviewers of manuscripts for Volume III of The Graduate Review for their time and effort in evaluating manuscript submissions. We also wish to extend our gratitude to the talented graduate students and faculty mentors whose excellent work is on display in this journal. Finally, we wish to thank Ellen Dubinsky, Library Digital Services, for the management of The Graduate Review website; Ken Green for the layout of the journal; and Heather Hanson, Print Synergy, for the publication of The Graduate Review, volume III.
On the Cover

Artist’s Statement for B-Phone
BRENDA ROVEDA

This body of work explores the conflicting feelings I have regarding digital communication. While I value and rely on the little powerhouse of a computer I keep within reach for its many abilities and conveniences, I also resent it for its interruptions, distractions, and my growing dependency on it. These contrasting feelings have led me to create historic-type vessels that are decorated in technological motifs to symbolize the contemporary storage vessel, the Cloud.

My investigation draws from the traditions of Ming Dynasty pottery in both form and design. The vessels have bulbous bodies with collared necks and feet. Most have fitted lids, and several are open. In an effort to juxtapose the antiquated forms against contemporary digital semiotics, I incorporate language in the form of binary code and other digital symbols, such as Wi-Fi and cellular bars, in repeat patterns and bands. I began using 0s and 1s symbolically by meticulously stamping the vessels to create a uniform pattern with a variety of blue underglazes, drawing from their cobalt blue predecessors of the Ming Dynasty that popularized blue and white porcelain in the 14th century. Through the course of my investigation, I transitioned into using binary code as an expressive language, translating descriptive words such as “bubble”, “virtual”, “always-on”, and “connected” to name a few, which express my feelings toward digital communication.

Similar to many of us, I deal with digital communication on many different levels. I observe and participate in online communications and social media, both professionally and personally as a useful tool. However, I am concerned with the social shift I perceive such as the effects of screen time with my own children and social-emotional issues with my students due to the effect of constant contact with social groups. I am connected but conflicted, and this work examines these feelings through artistic exploration. I hope the viewer will reflect on their own use of technology and contemplate their personal feelings regarding digital communication and the changing social climate surrounding it.

Editor’s Note
Photographs of Ms. Roveda’s ceramic vessels are found throughout this volume of The Graduate Review.

About the Artist

Brenda Roveda is pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching Creative Arts at Bridgewater State University. This body of work was completed in the fall of 2017 under the guidance of Professor Preston Saunders. Brenda resides in Marion, MA and teaches ceramics at Fairhaven High School. Outside of teaching, Brenda enjoys spending time with family; exploring the outdoors; and playing music with her husband, with whom she has two daughters. She completed her Master’s Degree in May of 2018.
The Effect of Project-Based Poetry Writing Intervention on Writing Attitudes among Students with Severe Learning Disabilities

JOHN M. BONANNE

Introduction

Prior to my career in teaching, I graduated from college with a degree in English that led me to work as an editorial assistant for college-level math and science textbooks for a company located in Plymouth, MA. During the recession of 2008, I was laid off and found myself looking for new employment throughout Cape Cod, where I continue to live. I discovered a job as a counselor in the residential component of Latham Centers, a private, substantially separate residential school, located in Brewster, MA. In this position, I worked with children with disabilities, planning activities, providing crisis intervention, and providing instruction for Activities of Daily Living (ADL) skills. After 4 years, I entered into my first teaching job at Latham’s school and taught students ages 17-22 English Language Arts (ELA), life skills, science, social studies, and social skills.

Due to my background in English literature, I have been interested in writing attitudes among struggling learners for some time. Throughout my career in human services, I have continued my own love for aesthetic reading and writing and have published my own creative writing in peer-reviewed literary journals such as Hayden’s Ferry Review, Washington Square Review, Seattle Review, and Prairie Schooner. In 2013, I completed a writing residency at AS220 in Providence, RI, a space for artists, in which, while completing my own manuscript, I taught a poetry workshop to incarcerated youth at the Rhode Island Training School. While teaching there, I found poetry to be a difficult sell to these students - reading it often appears as an esoteric, inaccessible mental space for students to access. In terms of writing, the blank page can be intimidating. After hosting these workshops, I found that students there had garnered an affinity for hip hop and lyrics related to hip hop but did not completely generalize this appreciation into the writing of poetry. I gained further experience in teaching writing to non-struggling learners at the Cape Cod Writers Center’s summer program for young writers, where I taught three times as summer writing faculty. The juxtaposition of the two groups was astounding: These learners wanted to write and share their work, while my struggling students groaned at the very idea of writing for fun.
Writing has long been associated with success. Successful writers, like successful readers, gain better employment, perform better in school, and are viewed by others as more academically capable. Writing, too, can be used as a therapeutic intervention, as has been the case with therapists who practice poetry therapy with their patients. In other words, writing is an essential part of everyday living. Writing attitude is very closely linked with writing ability. As evidence suggests, if writing attitude improves, then writing ability will also follow. Because struggling learners often lack motivation to write, I wanted to better analyze the attitudes toward writing of three of my current students and then to see if an intervention could be successful in improving attitudes toward writing.

My current title as a special educator in the Nauset Regional School System has placed me in a unique position to conduct action research for students with severe learning disabilities. Nauset Regional Middle School is located in Orleans, Massachusetts, within a coastal community on Cape Cod. The school services 535 students, 270 of whom identify as male, and 265 identify as female. In the school, only seven students qualify for MCAS Alternate Assessment (MA DESE). Here, I teach in a substantially separate classroom for eight students, seven of whom qualify for the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt), a portfolio-based state assessment reserved for the most struggling students. My classroom has two educational assistants, and I share my case load with one co-teacher. My co-teacher and I differentiate instruction in cooperative learning groups, dependent on each child’s academic abilities, and, at times, due to scheduling and the students’ grade levels. With the support of the classroom aides, all students attend inclusion electives and inclusion homerooms with their grade levels, while three students additionally attend inclusion social studies. One student also attends inclusion science. Two students in the classroom are in eighth grade, one student is in seventh grade, and five students are in sixth grade. Two students in the classroom identify as female, and six students identify as male. I have been teaching at Nauset for two years: my block of ELA has three students, while my block of science has seven students, and my block of math has three students. Prevocational skills, such as job readiness, are addressed by the school’s occupational therapist in a group that meets once weekly.

The project that I conducted for my action research posed the question of whether or not a project-based poetry unit could improve attitudes toward writing and writing skills for students with severe learning disabilities. This action research provides useful information for special educators involved in writing instruction. In relation to this study, the word “motivation” will be used interchangeably with the word “attitude” due to the fact that in order for one to be motivated, the interplay of positive attitude is required of the writer. In other words, attitude is inherent in motivation (Graham, Collins, & Rigby-Wills, 2017). I conducted the research in my substantially separate ELA class, which has two students in eighth grade and one in seventh grade. Writing interventions being used prior to the intervention were Project Read’s *Framing Your Thoughts* curriculum, an explicit instruction program in
grammar and writing. Another writing tool being used prior to the intervention was the “burger method” of using a graphic organizer that looks like a three-meat (details) hamburger, sandwiched by two buns (topic sentence and concluding sentence) in order to compose a five-sentence expository paragraph while promoting thought organization. Two of the three students had also just completed a compare-and-contrast paragraph using a modified burger graphic organizer. As their ELA teacher, I issued the Writing Attitude Survey developed by Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosia (2000); surveyed the students regarding poetry; and gained baseline writing samples prior to the creative writing intervention. At the culmination of the intervention, the survey was re-administered in order to assess changes in attitudes, if any, occur.

**Literature Review**

Writing attitudes among students with learning disabilities has been documented throughout educational literature. In multiple studies, students with documented learning disabilities show negative attitudes toward writing (Graham et al., 2017). While these attitudes among learners with disabilities have been measured, the measurement of writing proficiency and writing progress may often prove difficult for the teacher-researcher due to the need for objectivity, and the fact that writing improvement is often not quantifiable, but rather, subjective to the teacher’s unique experience and standards for writing. For this reason, I utilized a rubric (Appendix A) to gain a comprehensive picture of writing among three learners with severe disabilities.

Because I sought to measure writing attitude among learners with disabilities, I first looked toward adequate measurement tools that would prove useful in my action research. Kear et al. (2000) provide a background on attitude surveys traditionally used to measure student attitudes toward writing. Past scales include the Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) developed by Bottomley, Henk, and Melnik (1997/1998 as cited in Kear et al., 2000) for use in grades 4 through 6 as well as the Writing Attitude Survey for Children developed by Knudson (1991) for grades 4 through 8. While the authors of the article note the usefulness for teachers in understanding their students’ attitudes toward writing, they also note that these measures are not norm-referenced. Using information garnered from these traditional surveys, as well as the reading attitude survey created by McKenna and Kear (1990 as cited in Kear et al., 2000), these authors were able to develop their own norm-based writing attitude survey. They further suggest using this survey to measure the effects of an intervention.

Graham et al. (2017) provide a meta-analysis of a vast body of 53 studies conducted with students with disabilities and writing. To find common writing characteristics among learners with disabilities, studies, which were analyzed by the authors, were coded into distinct categories of writing quality, output, genre elements, ideation, substance, organization, vocabulary, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions. The authors analyzed further variables of writing motivation, self-regulation, and knowledge. The authors found that across studies, learners with disabilities evidenced less
“mastery or facility” on every writing outcome, including their demonstration of low motivation and self-efficacy, and that these differences were both statistically significant and clinically significant. In their analyses of seven studies specifically related to writing motivation among learners with disabilities, the authors further concluded that much of this low motivation stems from text production.

Since providing an intervention in creative writing of poetry did not improve writing attitude among my students, I questioned how a creative writing in fiction intervention may compare. Saddler (2006) conducted a replica study of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development to understand if this strategy could improve the writing of those identified with disabilities. Using an initial study conducted by Harris and Graham (1992 as cited in Saddler 2006), the author replicated the study to teach students with disabilities narrative writing. This intervention provided second graders with mnemonic devices to better their narrative writing. Given implementation fidelity, the use and practice of this strategy and its accompanying mnemonic devices (POW, WWW, What 2, How 2) were found to increase narrative writing skills for these learners with disabilities. Improvement in areas of story elements, number of words, quality, and time spent planning were all found in this replica study, though the improvements were not as dramatic as the original authors of this intervention. Though writing attitude was not measured within this study, the efficacy of the intervention may improve overall attitude due to the evidence-based writing improvements. While Saddler found that this specific intervention increased student planning time during writing, to better understand how this linked to writing attitude, I then looked to Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002) who found that concept mapping, both by hand and by digital device, improved overall writing performance but also found that the use of digital technology during concept mapping improved writing attitude among learners with disabilities, while hand-mapping did not.

Santangelo (2014) provides an overview of written language, writing instruction, and learning disabilities. The author reviews major differences between skilled writers and writers with learning disabilities and moves to define writing, while providing contrast between the skilled writer and the learner with disability. The author further analyzes these key differences in areas of planning, text production, revision, and motivation. Santangelo confirms that writing is “cognitive, linguistic, affective, behavioral and physical in nature” (pp. 6-7), and that writing growth is largely dependent on self-regulatory or strategic behaviors, writing knowledge, writing skills, and motivation. The author notes that unlike skilled writers, most students with learning disabilities typically devote less than one minute to the planning stage of writing, likely due to memory retrieval and limited writing knowledge regarding genre, schema, grammar, and conventions. Further deficits addressed in this article included lower motivation. As Santangelo notes, “students who struggle with writing, including those with LD [learning disabilities], hold a less positive view of the process than that of their peers who are skillful writers” (p. 15). She further reviews
evidence that student attitude molds writing development and is a solid predictor of future writing performance.

Methodology

Initial Data Collection

For the methodology of this research, I sought to: 1. Gain a measure of students’ general attitudes toward writing, 2. Gain a baseline of student ability in poetry writing expression, and 3. Gain insight toward more specific student attitudes toward poetry writing. I administered the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) to all students in February, developed my own survey using Google Forms, and administered this survey in April, along with a baseline writing prompt, prior to beginning the project-based poetry curriculum.

After searching through a number of resources, I piecemealed my own poetry curriculum using sources from ReadThinkWrite.org, from The Academy of American Poets, and from my own experience reading poetry and attending various poetry workshops. For the curriculum, I predicted that poetry’s spontaneous text generation could allure students, as many poets such as e.e. cummings and W.S. Merwin prefer a lack of conventions (such as punctuation) over grammatical structure. Additionally, past action researchers had found poetry to be a useful tool for building confidence and fluency with struggling readers (Wilfong, 2008). In other words, when students are not required to focus on spelling, punctuation, and grammar, they may be likelier to improve attitude toward writing because validation occurs in the form of concretizing one’s ideation. Despite this allure, I also wanted students to understand that some planning is also involved in poetry. For this purpose, I chose to scaffold students with less challenging forms such as collaborative poetry and later integrated more difficult poetry forms that required more planning such as the haibun that encompasses a haiku. The haiku graphic organizer from Read Think Write provides an excellent source for planning a poem. Furthermore, a graphic organizer that I provide for a sonnet (Appendix C) was utilized to help students recall numeration while engaging with their ideation.

In the beginning of February, as we were using Project Read’s Framing Your Thoughts curriculum for writing and sentence structure, I administered the Likert scale attitude survey developed by Kear et al. (2000) to three students in my ELA class. All students were on IEPs and were diagnosed with severe learning disabilities. Natalie was in 8th grade and was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury. Sara was in 7th grade and has an intellectual impairment. Anthony had been diagnosed with autism. Because this attitude survey is norm-referenced, I calculated how each student’s attitude toward writing compared to their grade-level peers. The following documents the daily lessons involved for the poetry writing intervention.

Day 1: Introduction to Poetry

I began by collecting a baseline writing sample for each student. Students were given the prompt: “If I could be any animal, I would be...”. After taking the baseline assessment, in order to activate prior knowledge, I then created a semantic map on the Smart Board.
to better gauge collective and individual student understanding of poetry. Students then created a “silly poem” using the Smart Board. For the “silly poem” activity, each student was told to say the first thing that popped into their heads. As the students dictated their thoughts, I scribed them on the screen. I joined into the rotation to model valuing of spontaneous thought and allowed the rotation to continue three times, creating a 12-line poem. This type of activity is often referred to as an “Exquisite Corpse” poem, first used by Dadaists to play with language but derived from ancient Japanese forms such as renga, which is also a collaborative poem. To culminate the lesson, I printed out the poem for the students and asked them to identify any types of figurative language they recognized. I then evaluated all student baseline writing samples, using a teacher-generated rubric (Appendix A), specific to the classroom.

**Day 2: Personification Poem**

Students again engaged in modified renga, whereby spontaneous thoughts were valued through dictation and scribed onto the Smart Board. Students were then shown a PowerPoint presentation on poetry tools, such as figurative language (personification, metaphor, simile) and sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, and assonance). I reminded students about the definition of personification and kept it on the board as a procedural prompt. I then modeled reading the Exquisite Corpse poem and asked students to give an example of personification in their collaborative poem. Natalie was successful in identifying “the trees listen” as personification. Students were then given a graphic organizer (Appendix B) that contained word banks of nature nouns (trees, river, sky, sun, etc.), along with a word bank of human verbs (whisper, talks, plays, etc.). After I modeled how to use the word bank to combine the noun and verbs into a line of personification, students were then instructed to create their own personification poem. Poems were collected or, if unfinished, assigned for homework. Students were further given an Emily Dickinson Poem, “The Moon”, for homework to highlight examples of personification.

**Day 3: Haibun**

Students started their ELA by reviewing homework on personification and identifying personification in Emily Dickinson’s poem, “The Moon”. Students then shared out loud one poem of their choosing. Students were then reminded of their past work with haiku and were told that they would be creating another Japanese form, the haibun. I introduced the haibun: It is a Japanese form consisting of one prose block followed by a haiku and is often used to talk about a journey. Students were already familiar with the haiku from previous ELA classes and were thus reminded that the haiku was typically about nature. Using explicit instruction, I reminded, “The haiku contains a first line with 5 syllables, the next with 7, and the last with 5.” They were also reminded about their personification poem, which contained nature imagery, often dominant in haiku. Students were shown two examples of haibun, including one by Basho, and one by a local poet, Richard Youmans. Because of the hybridity of this form, I told students that the poem is a block of prose followed by a poem. I discussed the “journey” themes of the prose block, then finished with a haiku. Students were giv-
en a graphic organizer for brainstorming trips they had been on, along with a haiku graphic organizer from the Read Think Write website. Students then combined words that they had brainstormed to create lines adhering to the haiku form. Students were given a half hour to write. Most students reached the paragraph form but not the final haiku. Students were thus asked to finish their haibuns for homework.

**Day 4: The Sonnet**

On the fourth day of poetry, I started with a review of the haibun form. Anthony and Sara required support to finish their haibuns: Anthony in understanding where to break lines in the haiku, and Sara simply required prompts to produce words that corresponded to her topic. I then started the class with a 14-line renga. I told the students that they would be learning about the sonnet, and that the sonnet once needed to rhyme at certain points, but that today, it does not have to rhyme. I informed them that most contemporary poets view any 14-line poem as a sonnet. Therefore, explicit instruction for this lesson was that “The sonnet is a poem of 14 lines, usually about love.” I showed the students “the old” sonnet by very dramatically reading them Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”, emphasizing the parts about love. I then asked one student to count the lines. I read them the “new” sonnet, one by Yusef Kommenyaka. I modeled writing a sonnet by writing a sonnet about coffee. I then instructed the students to write a 14-line poem about something or someone that they love. I then gave students a graphic organizer (Appendix C) that served to help them maintain track of the number of lines that they were writing.

**Days 5-6: Project-Based Learning**

On Day 5, I told students that we would be printing their poems in a book that they would be reading, and that in order to print their poems, they would first have to type them and share them with me. While students were typing their poems using Google Docs, on the Smart Board, I modeled using Microsoft Publisher to create the book publication. What students did not finish typing, I helped by typing the rest into the program, as my goal was to essentially expose them to the publication process. If students had finished typing their poems, I assigned them roles: typesetter (helping me design the layout), printmaker (making a cover for the book), and paper cutter (measuring and cutting poster board for the cover). Natalie had finished typing her poems early, so I gave her the job of printmaker, wherein she used a Styrofoam pad into which she carved a drawing for the book cover. When Anthony finished, he measured and cut the poster board for the book cover. Sara finished editing her haibun and then typed her sonnet. I then printed a copy and used the school copier to duplicate the pages. On Day 6, the students used Natalie’s design on carved Styrofoam to create prints for the cover. They then folded and collated the pages, saddle stitched it into a chapbook, and made extra chapbooks for staff and parents. For homework, I told students to bring in an odd hat or beret.

**Day 7: Poetry Reading “Coffee Shop”**

Before the poetry reading, I first reviewed the poetry toolbox using a PowerPoint slideshow, addressing figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification) and sound devices (onomatopoeia, alliteration, as-
sonance) and then took a final writing sample from my students, using a similar prompt about animals. I then set up the room into tables and gave students a choice of hot chocolate or tea. I used my Smart Board to create a backdrop of a Greenwich Village Coffee Shop, where they could have their poetry reading. After each reading, I encouraged students to snap rather than clap. I further invited school staff such as the reading specialist and administrators to listen to the students’ work. Here, students received positive praise from multiple adults as well as from each other. After the “coffee shop”, I re-administered the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) and my teacher-generated poetry survey in order to collect results regarding attitude toward writing. I then graded their final writing samples using the rubric (Appendix A).

Results

All students wrote the personification poem with minimal assistance, most likely due to the word bank provided. Students appeared goofy when writing each collaborative poem. I was happy for this sense of community, as the purpose of these poems served as an icebreaker for the possibility of intimidation of a poetry unit. Natalie was independent in writing both the haibun prose block and the sonnet. She required substantial assistance with the task of creating her haiku to culminate the haibun, most likely due to her deficits in numeration. Sara completed the task, though her processing speed remained slower than the other two students, and she required substantial prompts to stay on task. Anthony was nearly completely independent with the task, most likely due to his strengths in areas of mathematics, though he required prompting regarding the form of a haiku. All students appeared to enjoy sharing their work, and though the project of book-making required substantial direction to each individual student, once the students understood their required tasks, they appeared to enjoy it.

The following graphs illustrate pre-intervention and post-intervention results regarding general writing attitude, the poetry survey, and poetry writing ability based on the writing rubric (Appendix A).
In the Writing Attitude Survey developed by Kear et al. (2000), a student with a primary diagnosis of Intellectual Impairment displayed a worsening attitude toward writing with lower raw scores. Meanwhile attitudes of students with traumatic brain injury and autism showed an increase, with higher raw scores, after the project-based poetry writing intervention. All students showed an increase in raw score values for two questions on the survey: “How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?” and “How would you feel if you had a job as an editor of a newspaper?” Anthony’s raw score value increased from 78 to 84, moving him to the 91 percentile for his grade in terms of writing attitude. Meanwhile, Sara’s score dropped from 61 to 49, placing her in the 3rd percentile for her grade. Natalie’s raw scores improved marginally from 65 to 67, placing her in the 50th percentile for her grade.

Raw scores on the Poetry Attitude Survey were coded based on a Likert Scale. A number 4 was given to the most positive response, while a number 1 was given to the most negative response. After the project-based poetry writing intervention, raw scores dropped for students with intellectual impairment and traumatic brain injury. Meanwhile, the raw score for the student with autism increased. Despite the drop in raw scores, one trend noted in the post-survey was that all students reported liking writing poetry and reported liking listening to other people’s poems.

Based on the poetry writing rubric (Appendix A), all students’ poetry writing ability improved. While Sara’s attitude toward writing and toward poetry decreased, her skills in writing poetry increased from a score of 7 to 12 between baseline and final writing samples. Anthony’s writing skills also increased (9 points to 16 points), and Natalie’s improved marginally (12 to 13 points). All students exhibited better skills related to the use of figurative language within their final writing samples.

Summary of Results and Reflection

Of the students involved in this action research, the student most positively influenced had a primary diagnosis of autism. The student with a primary diagnosis of traumatic brain injury also held scores regarding attitudes toward writing that
improved, though marginally. The writing intervention had a paradoxical effect on the student whose primary disability was intellectual impairment. Sara’s scores in writing attitudes, both in the generalized writing survey and in the more specific poetry attitude survey, significantly dropped. Reasons for this drop could be the test-retest environment in which post-surveys were conducted. Sara sat individually with me for the pre-survey but was around classmates for her post-surveys. Additional reasoning may validate past studies in which explicit instruction has improved writing outcomes for students with intellectual impairment, while more exploratory, inferential methods have not.

Given baseline and final poetry samples for each student, graded using the Poetry Writing Rubric (Appendix A), all students’ poetry writing scores improved. By the end of the intervention, students were more likely to use precise vocabulary and show evidence of editing. Because Sara’s attitude scores were higher during Project Read’s Framing Your Thoughts curriculum, further exploration into an explicit instruction poetry program, rather than a project-based program, for students with intellectu-
al impairment as a primary disability could offer more insight into the role of creative writing for writing attitudes for students with intellectual impairment. As processing speed remained slow for Sara, technology such as speech-to-text could also be offered during the writing process in order to explore any improvement in attitude, which would prove consistent with aforementioned findings by Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002), where digital concept mapping improved motivation. Given Anthony’s marked improvement, both within his writing samples as well as within attitude toward writing and attitude toward poetry, further studies should be conducted on the role of poetry intervention for writing attitudes among students with autism. Suggestions from this study are summarized below:

- Explicit Instruction may be more beneficial for writing attitudes of students with intellectual impairment.
- Scores among students validate the conclusion of Graham et al. (2017) that much of writing attitude among students with disabilities relies on “text production”, as Sara’s text production speed was much slower than the others, while Anthony’s was much faster.
- Due to the Anthony’s dramatic improvement, more studies are needed regarding poetry as a tool for improving writing attitude among students with autism
- Given the marginal difference in scores for Natalie and the drop-in scores for Sara, interventions to improve writing attitude may need to occur at a younger age in order to increase efficacy.

References


### Appendix A

#### Poetry Writing Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BEGINNING 1</th>
<th>DEVELOPING 2</th>
<th>ACCOMPLISHED 3</th>
<th>EXEMPLARY 4</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Does not use an appropriate form and demonstrates little knowledge of poetry, and cannot express why form is being used.</td>
<td>May use an appropriate poetic form, but can't describe why it's being used.</td>
<td>Effectively uses an appropriate poetic form and can verbally describe why it's being used.</td>
<td>Creatively uses an appropriate poetic form and can describe why it's being used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Student's use of vocabulary is very basic. Vocabulary was limited or largely unrelated to prompt or all text was provided by the teacher.</td>
<td>Student's use of vocabulary was appropriate to the writing prompt, functional, but still more telling than showing.</td>
<td>Student's use of vocabulary is appropriate to the writing prompt, and effectively presents clarity of ideas. Some descriptive language is shown, rather than told, intended meaning.</td>
<td>Student's use of vocabulary is precise, vivid, and paints a strong, clear and complete picture in the reader's mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poetic Techniques (elements)</strong></td>
<td>Uses few poetic techniques such as figurative language.</td>
<td>Uses some poetic techniques such as figurative language.</td>
<td>Uses poetic techniques such as figurative language or sound devices to reinforce a theme.</td>
<td>Effectively uses poetic techniques such as figurative language and sound devices (assonance, alliteration), to reinforce the theme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation)</strong></td>
<td>Poem contains frequent and numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation that interferes with the reader's understanding.</td>
<td>Poem contains some errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation that at times interfere the reader's understanding.</td>
<td>Poem contains mostly appropriate spelling, grammar, and punctuation, contains some errors that do not interfere with the reader's understanding.</td>
<td>Poem contains appropriate spelling, grammar, and punctuation; contains few, if any, errors that do not interfere with the reader's understanding leaving the meaning clear; very minor errors in grammar and conventions of poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effort</strong></td>
<td>Student's work lacks understanding of the assignment; no editing or revision evident.</td>
<td>Student's work demonstrates some understanding of the assignment; minimal editing evident.</td>
<td>Student's work demonstrates understanding of the assignment; significant editing evident.</td>
<td>Student's work demonstrates complete effort of the assignment and goes beyond the requirements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix B

Personification Poem Graphic Organizer

Writing a personification poem

You are going to write a poem which personifies aspects of nature.

It’s really easy to do, just follow the steps below.

1. Choose a verb from the box below that you think goes well with an object from List A – write the verb next to it. Each object needs a different verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb from List B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tells</td>
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<td>awakes</td>
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<td>sleeps</td>
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2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List A</th>
<th>Verb from List B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sun</td>
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<td>dawn</td>
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<tr>
<td>morning</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.

You are now going to expand your words into the lines of your poem.

For example: stone and listens might become:

The stone listens carefully to the grass as it grows around it.

Start your first draft of your poem here:
Appendix C
Sonnet Graphic Organizer

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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| 4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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| 14|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

Title: _________________________________________________________
About the Author

John Bonanni lives on Cape Cod, where he serves as founding editor of the *Cape Cod Poetry Review*. His poems have appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. He works as a special education teacher for the Nauset Regional School District and is pursuing a Master of Education degree at Bridgewater State University.
From Bikini Atoll
JILLIAN BOGER

The bleached coral sits dead
on the dresser, full of
holes and curves,
too light to be anything
ever alive, though
not light enough to float
in water.
Misshapen and out of place
within the nautical themes of the nursery,
yet untouched like everything else.
It is so easy to walk in
and want to hold it,
to wish
it was permitted to move

Editor’s Note
Another poem and an article written by Ms. Boger are
found in this volume of The Graduate Review.

About the Author
Jillian is pursuing her MA in English. Her poems were
written in the spring of 2017 under the mentorship of
Professor John Mulrooney. She presented at the 2018 PCA/
ACA National Conference on horror and girlhood trauma,
and at GSU’s 2018 New Voices Conference on selected
works by J. G. Ballard during the spring semester 2018.
She hopes to pursue her Ph.D. following the completion of
her Master’s Degree program.
Menace II Society: A Social Learning Perspective

JOWAUN GAMBLE

Introduction

Aker’s social learning theory is composed of four central concepts: imitation, definitions, differential association, and differential reinforcements (Akers, Sellers, & Jennings, 2017; Vito & Maahs, 2015). Imitation refers to an individual engaging in behavior after they observe similar behaviors in others (Akers et al., 2017; Vito & Maahs, 2015). Definitions refer to an individual’s own attitudes and beliefs that they attach to specific behaviors (Akers et al., 2017; Vito & Maahs, 2015). Differential association refers to the notion that individuals are exposed to different people and different attitudes and values throughout their life (Akers et al., 2017; Vito & Maahs, 2015). Lastly, differential reinforcement is the balance of anticipated rewards and/or punishments that are consequences of certain behaviors (Akers et al., 2017; Vito & Maahs, 2015).

The film Menace II Society is a drama/thriller based in South Central Los Angeles, California in the 1990s that depicts youth violence in disadvantaged communities. This film follows the delinquent life of the protagonist, Kaydee “Caine” Lawson. Caine is a young African American male who sells drugs, commits robberies, and engages in other criminal behavior. Caine learned his behavior from his father and his best friend O-Dog. Caine receives positive reinforcements from selling drugs, and this enables him to earn a surplus amount of money to buy new apparel and jewelry. Furthermore, social learning theory applies to Caine in Menace II Society.

This paper will begin with a brief summary of the evolution of Aker’s social learning theory. Then, the paper will explain the theoretical underpinnings of Aker’s social learning theory. The purpose of this paper is to apply social learning theory to Caine from the film Menace II Society. Aker’s social learning theory is comprised of four key concepts, which are imitation, definition, differential association, and differential reinforcement. These key concepts will be applied to Caine and considered why he engaged in deviant behavior. Lastly, this paper will explain how this film depicts youth homicide in the United States, and which policy implication(s) should be considered.

Social Learning Theory

History

Social learning theory has been used to refer to any behavioristic approach in social science. Psychologists such as Albert Bandura and B. F. Skinner (1947) developed social learning theory to explain behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Kunkel 1975; Miller & Dollard, 1941; Patterson, 1975; Rotter, 1954). B. F. Skinner (1947) proposed the use of stimulus-response theories to describe language use and development, and he also proposed that all verbal beh-
behavior was reinforced by operant conditioning. Skinner formed the basis for the redevelopment of behaviorist theories into social learning theories (Skinner, 1947). However, in the field of criminology, social learning theory refers primarily to Ronald L. Akers and his theory of crime and deviance.

Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory

Edwin H. Sutherland (1937) is recognized for pioneering sociological studies of white-collar crime and professional theft. Sutherland is well known for formulating the first general sociological theory of crime and delinquency labeled the “differential association theory” (Sutherland, 1937). For over 30 years, Sutherland was the author of a criminology textbook labeled, *Principles of Criminology*, in which he first fully stated his theory. Sutherland published the theory in his 1947 edition of the textbook (Sutherland, 1937). In this theory, he suggested differential association theory as an explanation of individual criminal behavior. He coined the term “differential social disorganization” as the explanation of differences in group and/or societal crime rates (Sutherland, 1947).

Sutherland explained differential association theory briefly in nine points. First, criminal behavior is learned (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Second, criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Third, the principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Fourth, when criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime and (b) the specific motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Fifth, the specific direction of motives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Sixth, a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Seventh, differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Eighth, the process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Lastly, although criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values because noncriminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947).

Sutherland (1947) explains that criminal behavior is learned in a process of symbolic interaction with peers, but specifically with intimate groups, which are parents, friends, and family. Although Sutherland stated nine points that established the theory, the sixth point that he discussed identifies the principle of differential association, which is a person who becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law. Sutherland’s theory explains criminal behavior by an individual’s exposure to their peers’ defi-
nitions favorable to criminal behavior, balanced against confronting definitions favorable to criminal behavior (Akers et al., 2017; Sutherland, 1947). Cressey (1960) discussed that although an individual expects that law-abiding definitions are characteristically communicated amongst those who have violated the law, it is possible for individuals to learn law-abiding definitions from those who abide by the law. Additionally, if individuals are exposed to law-violating definitions first, more frequently, for a longer duration, and with greater concentration than law-abiding violations, then the individual is more likely to engage in deviant behavior and violate the law.

**Akers Social Learning Theory**

In Sutherland’s eighth statement of his theory, he explained that all the mechanisms of learning are involved in criminal behavior. Yet, he did not explain which mechanisms of learning are involved in criminal behavior. Burgess and Akers (1966) specified which mechanisms were involved in criminal behavior in their “differential association-reinforcement” theory of criminal behavior. They developed a reformulation that recalled the principles of differential association and restated them in terms of the learning principles of operant and respondent conditioning that were developed by behavioral psychologists. Akers followed up his work with Burgess and developed the social learning theory and applied it to criminal, delinquent, and deviant behavior (Akers et al., 2017).

Akers (1985) stated that social learning theory retains all of the information of differential association processes in Sutherland’s theory and integrates it with differential reinforcement and other principles of behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation. Still, social learning theory explains criminal and delinquent behavior more meticulously than the original differential association theory (Warr & Stafford, 1991). Burgess and Akers (1966) retained the concepts of differential association and definitions from Sutherland’s theory but conceptualized them in more behavioral terms and added concepts from behavioral learning theory. The concepts included conditioning of involuntary, reflex behavior (classical conditioning); environmental and internal stimuli that provide cues or signals for behavior (discriminative stimuli); the rate and ration in which rewards and punishments follow behavior principles (schedules of reinforcement); and other ideologies of behavior modification (Akers et al., 2017; Burgess & Akers, 1966).

Akers (1985) discussed that social learning theory maintains a strong component of the symbolic interactionism found in the concepts of differential association and definitions from Sutherland’s theory. Symbolic interactionism is the theory that states that social interaction is the exchange of meaning and symbols. Moreover, individuals have the cognitive capacity to imagine themselves in the roles of others and incorporate those ideas into their conceptions of themselves (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2003). Also, Akers (1985) stated that explicit inclusion of such concepts as imitation, anticipated reinforcement, and self-reinforcement makes social learning theory.
Theoretical Underpinning of Social Learning Theory

Imitation

Social learning theory is comprised of four key components, which are imitation, definitions, differential associations, and differential reinforcement. Imitation refers to the engagement in behavior after observing behaviors of role models (Akers et al., 2017; Sellers, Cochran, & Kathryn, 2005). These role models are significant others whom an individual admires, has a personal relationship, and with whom has directly observed behavior (Akers et al., 2017; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Sellers et al., 2005). Donnerstein and Linz (1995) stated that the observation of prominent models in primary groups and in the media affects both prosocial and deviant behavior.

Definitions

The second key component of social learning theory is definitions, which refers to an individual’s own attitudes or values that they attach to specific deviant/criminal behaviors. These attitudes of an individual may approve, disapprove, or be neutral toward specific behaviors (Akers et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 2005). Furthermore, there are both general and specific definitions in social learning theory. General definitions include religious, moral, and other conventional values, norms, and beliefs that are favorable to compliant behavior and unfavorable to committing deviant/criminal behavior. Specific definitions orient to particular acts or series of acts (Akers et al., 2017). In addition, an individual may view that laws against part-one offenses should be obeyed but then see nothing wrong with smoking marijuana and justifies that it is alright to violate laws against possession of marijuana.

The greater an individual holds attitudes toward specific acts, then the less likely the individual will engage in the behavior and vice versa. Akers, Sellers, and Jennings (2017) discuss explicitly positive, negative, and neutral definitions of criminal behavior. Conventional beliefs about criminal behavior are called negative behaviors. Positive definitions are beliefs or attitudes that make specific behaviors morally desirable. Lastly, neutralizing definitions favor the order of crime by excusing it. Neutralizing definitions are viewed as unwanted, but it’s justified (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran, Maskaly, Jones, & Sellers, 2017).

Differential Association

Differential association is the process in which individuals are exposed to definitions favorable and unfavorable to deviant behavior (Akers et al., 1979; Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 2005). Differential association includes both interactional and normative dimensions. Interactional dimensions are the direct association and interaction with peers who engage in certain kinds of behavior as well as the indirect association and identification with more distant reference groups. Normative dimensions refer to patterns of norms and values that an individual is exposed to through these associations (Akers et al., 2017; Clark, 1972; Cochran et al., 2017).

The impact of certain exposures may vary according to the frequency, duration, intensity, and prior-
ity of the differential associations in which individuals have with others (Sellers et al., 2005). Specific groups that an individual is in differential association with typically provide essential social contexts in which all concepts of social learning operate. These groups expose definitions and present models to imitate criminal or conforming behavior to individuals in differential association (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017). Similarly, primary groups of friends and family are the most important influences for differential association. Warr (2002) states that neighbors, churches, school teachers, physicians, the law and authority figures, and other groups in the community have fluctuating effects on an individual’s tendency to engage in delinquent behavior.

Differential Reinforcement

Differential reinforcement refers to the balance between anticipated and/or actual rewards and punishments that are the consequences of certain behaviors (Akers et al., 2017). As well, an individual’s commitment to engage in deviant behavior will depend on past, present, and future rewards and punishments of their behavior. The likelihood that an offender will engage in deviant behavior depends on whether or not they receive positive or negative reinforcements. Positive reinforcement occurs when one’s deviant behavior will be committed or repeated is based on the rewarding outcomes of the behavior. For instance, earning money, eating food, or gaining a pleasant feeling from engaging in deviant behavior is considered positive reinforcement (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 2005). In contrast, negative reinforcement is the likelihood a certain action will be conducted when the individual can avoid unpleasant events (Akers et al., 2017).

Punishment may also be positive, in which unpleasant consequences are related to a behavior or negative, in which a pleasant consequence or reward is removed (Akers et al., 2017). The greater the amount of reinforcement an individual receives for their behavior, the more frequently the behavior is reinforced, and the higher the probability that the behavior will be reinforced determines the likelihood the offense will be committed or repeated (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017).

Reinforcers and punishers can be social and non-social. Social reinforcement refers to the peer, family, or other social context in which the actions take place. One’s learned moral attitudes and other social variables affect how much one experiences the intrinsic effects of substance use or committing certain acts as pleasurable and enjoyable or as frightening and unpleasant (Akers et al., 2017). Nonsocial reinforcement refers to unconditioned physiological and physical stimuli (Akers et al., 2017). In addition, self-reinforcement refers to the individual exercising self-control, reinforcing, or punishing one’s own behavior by taking the role of others (Akers et al., 2017).

The Social Learning Process

All of the social learning concepts explained are part of a fundamental process that is operative in each individual’s learning history and in the immediate situation in which an opportunity for crime may occur (Aker-
ers et al., 2017). Akers (1985) stated that social learning is a process with reciprocal and feedback effects. Individuals go through a process in which the balance of learned definitions, imitation of deviant models, and the anticipated or actual balance of reinforcement produces the preliminary deviant behavior. After the first commission of deviant behavior occurs, actual social and non-social reinforcers and punishers affect whether or not the deviant behavior will be repeated, and how frequently it will be repeated (Akers, 1985; Akers et al., 2017). Akers claimed that behaviors and definitions of behaviors are affected by the consequences of the initial deviant behavior. In addition, whether deviant behavior will be committed in a situation that grants opportunity will depend on the individual’s learning history and set of reinforcement possibilities in that situation (Akers et al., 2017).

Social Learning Perspective of Menace II Society

Caine

Caine is the protagonist of the film Menace II Society. In this film, Caine is a drug dealer and a gang leader. Throughout his life, he has been influenced by gang members, drug dealers, pimps, and other deviants. According to social learning theory, behavior is learned from activities that one becomes accustomed to at an early age. Since Caine was an adolescent, he wanted to be like his father. His father was a drug dealer, drug and alcohol user, pimp, and a criminal. In the beginning scenes of the film, Caine was an adolescent and was observing the behavior of his father and his mother. The father always had friends over the house where they played card games, gambled, consumed alcohol and illicit drugs, and possessed firearms. The mother was addicted to heroin and constantly consumed heroin in front of Caine on multiple occasions. Moreover, Caine is an example of a young male growing up in a high-risk community where youth violence and gang involvement are nearly inevitable. The film demonstrates how young men become involved in violent and deviant behavior, even when there are positive peers in their life.

Imitation

As mentioned earlier, imitation refers to the engagement in behavior after observing behaviors of role models (Akers et al., 2017; Sellers, Cochran, & Kathryn, 2005). These role models are significant others who an individual admires, has a personal relationship, and who has directly observed behavior (Akers et al., 2017; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, Radosevich, 1979; 2018 The Graduate Review 29
Sellers et al., 2005). Caine observed behaviors of his father, who was his role model. Caine began to imitate his father’s behavior, and as an adolescent was holding guns and tasting alcohol. Likewise, Caine witnessed his father shoot and kill a friend for talking “shit” to him during a game of cards. He began to imitate the deviant behaviors of his father at an early age. However, once his father was incarcerated and his mother overdosed, the only people to whom he could turn were his grandparents and O-Dog. His grandparents attempted to keep Caine away from the streets, but he lived in the streets his whole life, and it was difficult to guide him out of that lifestyle.

Once Caine turned to the streets he became best friends with O-Dog. O-Dog taught Caine how to cook crack cocaine, rob, and engage in deviant behavior. O-Dog became his role model. There is a scene in the movie where O-Dog goes into a convenience store to purchase liquor. O-Dog and the clerk get into a verbal altercation, and then he becomes violent and kills both store owners. Caine witnessed his role model shoot and kill two store owners over a verbal altercation. Still, Caine was desensitized to this behavior because he had witnessed his father kill somebody over a card game when he was an adolescent. Furthermore, Caine imitated O-Dog and became violent and deviant. Later in the film Caine shoots and kills somebody as well.

Definitions
Definitions refer to the attitudes and values individuals hold concerning the principles of the law and the wrongfulness of certain deviant behaviors (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 2005). Caine endorsed norms and values that were sufficient in generating deviant behavior. Since Caine was an adolescent, his attitudes and values of deviant behavior have been skewed. Selling drugs, cooking crack cocaine, robbery, and other acts of deviant behavior are positive definitions for Caine. These are beliefs and attitudes that make deviant behavior morally acceptable. Caine holds the belief that cooking and selling crack cocaine and robbery are ways to make money and to survive.

In the film, Caine’s cousin is shot and killed during a drive by. Caine does not think to go to law enforcement in attempt for them to find and arrest the offender. Yet, he and his friend O-Dog go out one night searching for the two gang members who killed Caine’s cousin. This is Caine’s first encounter with shooting somebody, but it wasn’t his first time witnessing somebody get shot. Caine believed that killing the person who shot his cousin was justifiable. Caine believed that this action was justifiable because he learned to solve his problems through O-Dog and the streets. Excusing or justifying the commission of a crime is known as a neutralizing definition (Akers et al., 2017). Caine’s definitions favorable to crime developed through imitation and differential reinforcement. Caine’s belief that killing his cousin’s murderer was justified because he has seen his father and O-Dog engage in that behavior before.

Differential Association
Differential association is the process through which
individuals are exposed to definitions favorable and unfavorable to deviant behavior (Akers et al., 2017; Cochran et al., 2017). Also, differential association has both interactional and normative dimensions. Since Caine was an adolescent, he had direct associations and interactions with others who engaged in deviant behavior. Caine was exposed to violence, drug dealing, gambling, and other deviant acts from his primary caregivers. He developed attitudes that were favorable to deviant behavior because that was the only behavior to which he was exposed. Even friends of his parents offered Caine to hold their firearms, taste their malt liquor, and encouraged him to use profanity. Still, when Caine’s mother died from an overdose and his father was incarcerated, then his grandparents took custody of him.

Caine’s grandparents tried to influence him away from the deviant lifestyle in which he was involved. Caine’s grandfather was a very religious man and held attitudes and values that were unfavorable of deviant behavior. There is a scene in the film where the grandfather sits Caine and O-Dog down on the living room couch and discusses how they need to change their lifestyle. He mentions that he hears the deviant behavior in which the two are engaging, and that it can only lead to two results: incarceration or death. Caine narrates that all of these talks his grandfather gives him “go in one ear and out the other”. At the end of the scene, the grandfather asks Caine “if he wants to live or die?” Caine replies “I don’t know”. Caine starts to reconsider the lifestyle in which he was involved and seeks to opt out of it throughout the movie.

Caine’s friend, Sharif Butler, and his father attempt to convince Caine to join them on a trip to Kansas City to get away from their neighborhood and start a new lifestyle. Mr. Butler explains to Caine that staying in that neighborhood would only cause harm, and he would end up dead or in jail. The trip to Kansas City would be a fresh start and would allow him to live a rewarding and successful life without the involvement of violence, drugs, and other deviant actions. Caine’s discussion with Mr. Butler began to influence him to want to leave the neighborhood. This was the first time someone had told Caine about surviving for good and not just surviving on the streets.

In addition, Ronnie, the woman for whom Caine looked out since the father of the son went to jail, had also influenced Caine to pack up all of his stuff and leave with her. Ronnie visited Caine at the hospital and told him that she cared about him and wanted him to move to Atlanta. Caine believes that no matter where he moves, he will be involved in the same behavior. He has been exposed to so much deviant behavior in his life that there is no alternative for him because the deviant lifestyle is his comfort zone. Furthermore, Caine’s life wasn’t lacking positive influences. There were several positive influences in his life, including his grandfather, Mr. Butler, Sharif, and Ronnie. Still, his direct associations and interactions with O-Dog, his father, and other street gang members influenced his behavior.

**Differential Reinforcement**

Differential reinforcement refers to the balance between anticipated and/or actual rewards and
punishments that are the consequences of certain behaviors (Akers et al., 2017). Caine received positive reinforcement from robbing and selling crack cocaine. He made surplus amounts of money, bought a new car, new apparel, and jewelry. Caine and O-Dog were the big-name drug dealers in the neighborhood, and they didn’t have much competition with other sellers. According to Caine’s attitudes and values about deviant behavior, the rewards of selling drugs outweighed the anticipated punishments because Caine did not fear prison or death. Caine continued to sell crack cocaine, rob, and engage in other deviant behavior because he was receiving constant positive reinforcement (money, clothes, jewelry, women, etc.), with no punishments (arrests, convictions, incarceration, etc.), until the end of the film.

Caine does encounter a few punishments towards the end of the movie. Caine’s grandparents had kicked him out of the house because they were disgusted with his behavior and couldn’t cope with him any longer. Also, he had been beaten by police officers and had to be taken to a hospital. At the hospital, Caine realized that he needed to leave with Ronnie and move to Atlanta to start a new life. The ending scene of the film is the death of Caine. Caine is packing up his van for travel, and he is ready to leave for Atlanta. Unfortunately, Caine is killed in a drive-by shooting while loading the van.

Keep in mind that all the concepts of the social learning theory that were applied to Caine can be applied to any juvenile or young adult in society who has been involved in any deviant or criminal behavior. Moreover, this film brings light to the concerning rate of youth homicides in the United States. Although the film was made in the early 1990s, it demonstrates the lifestyle of juvenile delinquency in socially disorganized and disadvantaged communities. The themes associated with this film that represent society are youth violence and gang violence. Many cities in the United States have high youth homicide rates such as Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and more. For this manuscript, Boston’s youth homicide rates will be explored, and policy implications that decreased youth homicide rates will be discussed.

**Youth Homicide in the United States**

Homicide rates in the United States have significantly declined since the early 1990s (Braga, 2003). Youth homicide rates, and incidents involving firearms increased considerably (Braga, 2003). Between the years 1984 and 1994, juvenile homicide victimizations that were committed with handguns increased by 418 percent. In addition, juvenile homicide victimizations committed with firearms other than handguns increased by 125 percent (Fox, 1996). All increases in youth homicide included the use of a firearm (Cook & Laub, 1998).

Cook and Laub (1998) stated that for many cities, the bulk of this significant increase in youth homicide occurred in the late 1980s to early 1990s. For instance, in Boston, youth homicide increased from 22 victims in 1987 to 73 victims in 1990. Youth homicide remained high after the peak of the homicide epidemic.
In addition, Boston averaged nearly 44 homicides per year between 1991 and 1995. Still, like other cities experienced sudden downfalls in youth homicides during the late 1990s (Braga, 2003). In Boston, the amount of youth homicides decreased to 26 in 1996 and dropped to 15 youth homicides in 1997.

**Focused Deterrence Strategies and Policy**

The low level of youth homicides in Boston continued through 1998, 1999, and 2000. In 2001, a problem-oriented policing intervention, which tightly focused criminal attention to chronically offending gang-involved youth, was significantly associated with reduction in youth gun involved violence (Braga, 2003). A concern to society is why cities with high youth homicide rates haven’t implemented focused deterrence strategies to decrease youth homicide rates.

Focused deterrence strategies strive to change an offender’s behavior by understanding certain underlying violence-producing dynamics and conditions that sustain habitual violent gun injury problems. These strategies are implemented through law enforcement, community mobilization, and social service actions (Kennedy, 1997, 2008). Moreover, focused deterrence strategies seek to influence the criminal behavior of offenders through the application of both law enforcement and social service resources to assist offenders to engage in desirable behavior. Focused deterrence strategies are framed as problem-oriented exercises, with which specific recurring offenses or crime problems are analyzed, and responses to the analysis of the crime problems are modified to local environments and operational capacities (Braga & Weisburd, 2015).

**“Operation Ceasefire”**

The Boston Police Department (BPD) implemented a focused deterrence strategy named “Operation Ceasefire” in the mid-1990s. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Boston experienced a significant increase in youth, gun-involved violence. “Operation Ceasefire” consisted of criminal justice, social service, and community-based agencies, which diagnosed the youth, gun-violence problem and implemented strategies to reduce youth homicide in Boston (Kennedy, Piehl, & Braga, 1996).

This focused deterrent strategy was designed to reduce and prevent gun violence by reaching out directly to gangs, telling gangs explicitly that violence would not be tolerated, and supporting that message by pulling every legal lever when violence occurred (Kennedy, 1997). Braga and Weisburd (2015) claimed that law enforcement agencies could disrupt street drug activity, focus police attention on low-level street crimes such as trespassing and public drinking, serve outstanding warrants, cultivate confidential informants for medium- and long-term investigations of gang activities, deliver strict probation and parole enforcement, seize drug proceeds and other assets, ensure stiffer plea bargains and sterner prosecutorial attention, request stronger bail terms, and bring potentially severe federal investigative and prosecutorial attention to gang-related drug and gun activity. Concurrently, outreach workers, probation and parole officers, churches, and other community groups offered services and other forms of help.
to gang members (Kennedy, 1997; Kennedy, Piehl, & Braga, 1996). These groups also delivered the message that violence would not be tolerated and was unacceptable.

For “Operation Ceasefire” to be effective and successful, it had to deliver a credible deterrent message to Boston gangs. Law enforcement strictly targeted gangs that were in violent behavior, rather than expanding their resources on those gangs who were not engaging in violent behavior. A key component of this strategy was conveying a direct and explicit “retail deterrence” message to a small, targeted audience and communicating which behaviors provoke a response, and what that response would be (Kennedy, 1997, 2008). Overall, “Operation Ceasefire” was an effective deterrent strategy for reducing violence, firearm offenses, and youth homicide (Braga, Kennedy, Waring, & Piehl, 2001; Corsaro, Brunson, & McGarrell, 2013). Since the first focused deterrence strategy was implemented in Boston, there have been several replicated strategies in United States cities such as Baltimore, Maryland; Cincinnati, Ohio; High Point, North Carolina; Lowell, Massachusetts; and many more (Corsaro, Brunson, & McGarrell, 2013). These focused deterrent strategies should be implemented nationwide. However, funding becomes a major concern. Chicago’s homicide rates have skyrocketed again after their “Operation Ceasefire” was no longer implemented due to funding (Corsaro et al., 2013). Focused deterrent strategies are effective, but there needs to be sufficient funding for these programs to be effective.

Conclusion

Social learning theory interprets that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur through observations or direct instruction (Cochran et al. 2017). Social learning theory encompasses four key elements, which are imitation, definitions, differential association, and differential reinforcement. Imitation refers to an individual engaging in behavior after observing similar behaviors in which others engage. Definitions refer to certain attitudes and beliefs that an individual attaches to specific behaviors. Differential association refers to the concept that individuals are exposed to different attitudes, values, and people throughout their life. In addition, differential reinforcement is the balance between predicted rewards and/or punishments that are consequences of particular behaviors.

The history of social learning theory was explored. Edwin H. Sutherland is the common-known pioneer for the first general sociological theory of crime and delinquency. His theory was first published in 1947 and was labeled the “differential association theory”. This theory suggested an explanation of individual criminal behavior. Sutherland stated nine key points of his differential association theory but did not describe all of the mechanisms of learning that were involved with engaging in criminal behavior. Burgess and Akers (1966) specified those mechanics of learning in their theory of criminal behavior termed “differential association reinforcement”. Akers (1985) stated that social learning theory retains all of the information of differential association processes from Sutherland’s theory.
and integrates it with differential reinforcement and other principles of behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation.

The film *Menace II Society* was debuted in 1993 and portrays urban youth violence in the United States. The film is a drama/thriller that takes place in south central Los Angeles, California in the 1990s. The protagonist of the film is Kaydee “Caine” Lawson. Caine is a young African American man who sells drugs, commits robberies, and engages in other deviant behavior. Caine learned most of his behavior from his father who was a drug dealer. Once his mother died from a drug overdose, and his father was murdered over a drug deal, Caine’s grandparents took custody of him. Still, Caine lived a deviant lifestyle, and his role model was his best friend O-Dog who was gritty, violent, and killed people for fun.

This paper applied Aker’s social learning theory to Caine. Ever since Caine was a child, he had attitudes and values that encouraged deviant behavior. His father was his biggest role model, and he was a drug dealer. Caine received positive reinforcement from his lifestyle and was constantly earning money and respect. The rewards of selling drugs and committing robberies always outweighed the anticipated punishments that Caine would receive because he did not fear being incarcerated or death. However, Caine did have positive influences in his life. Caine’s grandfather, Ronnie, Mr. Butler, and Sharif Butler had deep conversations with Caine about changing his lifestyle and leaving California. By the time Caine was ready to leave, he was killed in a drive-by shooting. Aker’s social learning theory applies well to Caine in the movie *Menace II Society*.

**References**


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**About the Author**

Jowaun is pursuing his Master of Science in Criminal Justice. His research assignment was completed in the spring of 2017 under the mentorship of Dr. Jennifer Hartsfield. He plans to pursue his Ph.D. in the fall of 2019.
Ceramic Vase: *All Blue Binary*

BRENDA ROVEDA

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About the Artist

Brenda Roveda is pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching Creative Arts at Bridgewater State University. This body of work was completed in the fall of 2017 under the guidance of Professor Preston Saunders. Brenda resides in Marion, MA and teaches ceramics at Fairhaven High School. Outside of teaching, Brenda enjoys spending time with family; exploring the outdoors; and playing music with her husband, with whom she has two daughters. She completed her Master’s Degree in May of 2018.
Preterm Birth and Infant Mortality among African American and Caucasian Women: A Critique of the Systematic Devaluing of African American Women and Infants

CATHERINE COOPER

Introduction

The prevalence of health disparities in the United States between racial groups is a well-documented fact that has largely gone unattended in a culture that continues to lay individual blame at the feet of the disenfranchised. There appears to be a reluctance to address these concerns at a policy or institutional level, while interventions at the practice level do very little to bring about meaningful, widespread results in the outcomes. One possible reason for this is the notion that well-intentioned professionals are intervening at a level that continues to put responsibility for societal problems on the individual by attempting to force behavior change, rather than examining the conditions that existed before a patient sought healthcare (Culhane & Goldenberg, 2011).

This work examines the multiple layers of institutional and structural racism that contribute to the perpetuation of negative outcomes for African American women and their newborns, while also delineating cultural and socioeconomic factors affecting this health disparity. The intersection of socioeconomic status and race is explored, and possible explanations for the limited research of this intersection as it pertains to the incidence of pre-term birth and infant mortality among African Americans are suggested. The ethical requirements of social workers in taking on this injustice is a final point of discussion.

Statistical Significance

A review of the literature demonstrates that there is a persistent disparity in preterm births between African American and Caucasian women in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one-third of infants are born preterm in the United States each year, and though there was a reduction across all races in preterm births between 2006 and 2010, significant disparities persist between African American and Caucasian populations (2017). The 8% decrease in the preterm birth rate for children born to African American women between 2006 and 2010 is undercut by the fact that in 2010, this group’s preterm birth rate remained 60% higher than that for White women; 17.1% versus 10.8% (CDC, 2017). While the CDC has prioritized reduction of the preterm birth rate across all races and ethnicities, the continued variance cannot be definitively accounted
for; therefore, the health disparity continues to be inadequately addressed. This is evidenced by the fact that African American women give birth to preterm infants twice as often as Caucasian women (Hauck, Tanabe, & Moon, 2011). Normal, healthy gestation during pregnancy is 40 weeks, and birth prior to 37 weeks’ gestation is categorized as a preterm birth. Within the latter categorization, there is further specificity based on the number of weeks before complete gestation that a baby is born. Very early preterm births are babies born at less than 32 weeks’ gestation, and late preterm births are those born 34 to 36 weeks’ gestation (MacDorman, 2011). Preterm birth is one of the largest indicators for infant mortality as well as a host of physical, neurological, emotional, and social problems if the infant survives (Lu & Halfon, 2003).

There is a demonstrated association between preterm birth and infant mortality, the latter of which has also been linked to health disparities characterized by race. Non-Hispanic Black babies are 2.5 times more likely to die than non-Hispanic White babies (Hauck et al., 2011). Currently, statistics indicate that 54% of the racial differences in infant mortality can be ascribed to the increased incidence of preterm births among African American women (Hauck et al., 2011).

**Competing Explanations on Outcome Variances**

As with other well-established health disparities, there are a multitude of explanations in the literature for why the incidence of preterm birth and infant mortality is higher among the African American population. In the following section, an exploration of the role personal behavior and the environment plays in determining outcomes is discussed. Additionally, the convergence of class and race are examined, and the influence of socioeconomic status is highlighted as it pertains to the health disparity under discussion.

**Behavior Versus Environment**

There have been numerous suggestions for why these disparities exist, but there is a debate in the literature whether these differences should be attributed to individual health behaviors, socioeconomic status, prenatal care, or infections as the primary reason for the different experiences of African American and Caucasian expectant mothers in the United States. These four categories have been identified by multiple researchers as the leading possible explanations for the preterm birth rate disparity between African American and Caucasian women (Braverman et al., 2010; Culhane & Goldenberg, 2011; MacDorman, 2011). To focus on individual behaviors such as smoking, drug and alcohol use, educational attainment, diet, or delayed prenatal care as cause for this phenomenon may seem an obvious answer. However, it is notable that controlling for these factors in multiple studies has revealed that behavior alone does not explain increased preterm births among African American women (Culhane & Goldenberg, 2011; Osypuk & Acevedo-Garcia, 2008). For example, women with higher levels of education generally have lower rates of preterm births, but African American women with 13 or more years of education still have considerably higher rates of premature births than Caucasian women with less than 12 years of education (Culhane & Goldenberg, 2011). Similar findings
are noted with tobacco use, which is strongly associated with preterm births. Culhane and Goldenberg found that non-Hispanic Black women have much lower rates of tobacco use than non-Hispanic White women (2011). The conclusion, taken alone, behavior does not fully explain the higher incidence of preterm births in Black women, and a wider lens is necessary. Focusing exclusively on behaviors reinforces the cultural tendency for victim blaming. Historically, this tactic has resulted in a continuation of disparate outcomes for African American and Caucasian women in rates of preterm births and infant mortality and provides an excuse to divert resources into research deemed to have a more deserving cohort.

Putting aside individual behavior, researchers have identified infection and congenital defects as causes of preterm births. These physical conditions would most likely be categorized as beyond the control of both the patient and medical professionals as well as exempt from racial significance. However, the Vaginal Infections in Pregnancy study identified six urogenital infections that are strongly associated with preterm births. All of these infections occur at higher rates in African American women than Caucasian women (Culhane & Goldenberg, 2011). Additionally, Culhane and Goldenberg (2011) documented that urogenital infections have been found to account for as much as 50% of the preterm birth rate disparity between African American and Caucasian populations. What is most interesting about this is the absence of interventions designed to counter this physical occurrence. One of the six infections identified by the Vaginal Infections in Pregnancy Study, bacterial vaginosis, occurs two to four times more often in African American women than Caucasian women, and its diagnosis has been associated with higher levels of stress in the patient and incidence of preterm births (Nansel et al., 2006). This link supports the need to examine the influences of social and racial inequity on differential rates of preterm births between African American and Caucasian women.

The Intersection of Socioeconomic Factors and Race

To fully understand and appreciate the implications of increased likelihood of preterm births and infant mortality among African Americans, the intersection of race and socioeconomic status must be examined. Research into the incidence of preterm births and infant mortality frequently focuses on race as the singular point of disparity; however, Braverman, Cubbin, Egerter, Williams, and Pamuk (2010) surveyed the data from five nationally representative studies, encompassing 11 health indicators and determined that the addition of social disadvantage had a significant impact on patterns of poor health. The research showed that incorporating class into the examination of both child and adult health indicators resulted in distinct advantages for Caucasians over African Americans, who had consistently better health outcomes in all areas (Braverman et al., 2010). What makes this critical to understanding differences among these two groups when it comes to infant mortality and preterm births is the association of negative outcomes with education and income combined with race. Again, research underscores why this health disparity must be scrutinized from multiple angles if change is to occur.
In an effort to delve into this point of intersection, Osypuk and Acevedo-Garcia (2008) examined the influence that living in racially segregated areas within larger cities had on rates of preterm births among African American women. Negligible attempts to desegregate in the past three decades have resulted in continued elevated concentrations of African Americans living in urban centers, and 40% of childbearing African American women live in hyper-segregated areas (Osypuk & Acevedo-Garcia, 2008). In 2008, researchers found that hyper-segregation (segregation across multiple dimensions) was associated with preterm births in African American women, especially older African American women (Osypuk & Acevedo-Garcia). The suggestion from this study is that characteristics of residentially segregated areas including poverty, elevated crime rates, and the high levels of stress may contribute to the high incidence of preterm births among African American women.

The Importance of Early Intervention

As with many health conditions, early access to care is critical to both the mother’s and unborn child’s health during pregnancy. By entering care as soon as pregnancy becomes known, women can benefit from early detection and treatment of risk factors or health conditions as well as receive information about making healthy lifestyle choices throughout pregnancy. Apart from a potentially unwanted pregnancy, it’s reasonable to assume that accessing quality care as soon as possible would be a priority for women. However, the statistics do not bear this out. In 2011, researchers determined that 78.8% of non-Hispanic White women entered prenatal care in their first trimester as compared to 63.4% of non-Hispanic Black women (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). A further analysis of prenatal care among pregnant women using Medicaid to access healthcare illustrates some possible explanations for the lower rate of medical care early in pregnancy. Gavin et al. (2004) discovered that there was a higher rate of screening for diseases often associated with high-risk behaviors, such as drug testing and HIV testing, among African American women as compared to Caucasian women. If racial profiling is a perceived reason for the administration of these tests in communities where minority populations reside, word of mouth may influence women’s willingness to seek prenatal care early in pregnancy. This same study revealed racial discrepancies in the services offered, and tests typically administered to pregnant women. Non-Hispanic White women were more likely to be given an ultrasound or amniocentesis and be prescribed prenatal vitamins during prenatal care than non-Hispanic Black women (Gavin, et al., 2004). While direct causation cannot yet be linked between these findings and increased rates of preterm births and infant mortality, they are outstanding factors that require serious consideration in how these health disparities are addressed.

Minority Women Interact with the Health Care System

One of the foundational qualities necessary for women to access and continue with quality prenatal care is trust between them and the care providers (Sheppard, Zambrana, & O’Malley, 2004). Using qualitative methods, researchers evaluated low income, minority wom-
en’s perception of trust in their physicians, nurses, and lay healthcare workers, such as those utilized through home visiting programs. There were remarkable differences between trust in trained medical providers versus lay healthcare workers. Minority women reported distrust in health care settings, where the medical practitioner changed throughout the course of care, while expressing complete confidence in lay health workers, especially when that worker had been a mother herself (Sheppard et al., 2004). Some of this difference may be attributed to the importance of how minority women perceived their doctors’ care about their individual circumstances and challenges. Impact of this perception is critical and can have serious consequences as evidenced by one study participant’s statement, “They just acted like you are too young to be having all these kids anyway. So after that, I never went back to (name of institution) or their clinic or nothing” (Sheppard et al., 2004, p. 487). Patient perception should not be minimized, particularly given the role implicit bias plays in provider-patient interaction. Tucker et al. (2014) documented significant findings in the continuity of care based on African American patients’ perceptions of being treated as fairly as other patients. What these studies reveal is the complexity of racial bias in how African American women access care, participate in the healthcare process, and experience divergent health outcomes in a multitude of areas including preterm birth and infant mortality.

The Role of Personal Health Values

Health beliefs play a vital role in how all people access and utilize medical care, but the established bias toward non-Hispanic White women while accessing prenatal care enhances the probability of providers failing to identify and consider how Black women perceive and experience their pregnancies. There are several beliefs about pregnancy that may impact how early African American women enter prenatal care. One perception, particularly by low-income women, is that being pregnant is considered an indication of wellness, and, therefore, medical oversight is unnecessary. A second belief is that acceptance of a pregnancy is tied to one’s economic station in life (Lowdermilk, Perry, Cashion, & Alden, 2012). The latter belief can be applied to both self-perception and fear of how the pregnancy may be perceived by a provider, both of whom could potentially sway the decision of when to seek prenatal care. On the contrary, Caucasian women generally perceive pregnancy as a condition that necessitates medical oversight to ensure the best health for mother and baby and value the earliest possible prenatal care (Lowdermilk et al., 2012). If a provider does not understand these differences between African American and Caucasian women, the chances of an African American woman being judged for entering prenatal care later are increased; a judgement that could result in termination of care. Caucasian women value and emphasize technology in an institutional setting as the dominate means to manage labor and delivery, while African American women are more likely to arrive at a hospital further along in the labor process (Lowdermilk et al., 2012). The crucial aspect, again, in these difference lies in how the medical setting and care providers respond to the manifestations of the differences. As previously established by Sheppard et al. (2004) and Tucker et al. (2014), patient per-
ception plays a vital role in the establishment of trust with providers and the level of adherence to medical advice by non-Hispanic Black women. Providers have the unique opportunity to change the experience of minority women in prenatal care by providing meaningful education and training to office staff. Research has illustrated that commonly used diversity or cultural competence trainings have little effect on the individual’s capacity to arrest implicit bias responses during initial patient interactions (Stone & Moscowitz, 2011). However, Stone and Moscowitz (2011) propose a workshop model anchored in social psychology that employs strategies designed to interrupt the activation of implicit bias and teaches medical providers to disrupt the process of acting upon non-conscious stereotyping and prejudices. This conscious disruption has the potential to positively influence health outcomes for minorities.

Even though African American women experience infant loss twice as often as Caucasian women, there is a scarcity of literature exploring how they manage in the aftermath of such a tragedy. There is even less available research on how the family/caregiver system is impacted by such a loss. In 2001, Van conducted the first study comprised entirely of African American women who had experienced pregnancy or infant loss. Although a small sample size, the qualitative interviews revealed four primary ways members of this community managed their grief, all of which had a characteristic in common – they fell into the self-help category, which was prompted by the lack of external resources (Van, 2001). Van points out that spirituality and/or religion was identified as the primary coping mechanism, capturing 40% of the sample, and extended to the belief that the lost infant was being cared for by predeceased ancestors. In the context of limited research, these findings are thought-provoking because they appear to be commensurate with perceptions of African American women as more religious than Caucasian women. This study begs the question, if African American women look inward to cope with their loss, how are spouses, partners, and other family members processing the loss? This remains an area warranting research.

Complexities of Structural Racism

Lack of effectual methods to counter the higher rates of preterm births and infant mortality among African American women is perhaps the most significant indicator of how the healthcare system in the United States views this problem. This long-since acknowledged health disparity continues to exist despite national agendas by large health organizations to reduce it, and non-Hispanic Black women are not a cohort that receives equal funding when it comes to research and intervention design. This general lack of attention indicates low priority in our society given that our culture generally assigns social capital based on how much financial capital has been allocated to a group. Sadly, that belief is being reinforced by current events and the proposed slashing of Medicaid that will primarily affect the poor, disabled, elderly, and minorities.

Perhaps one of the reasons there has been no meaningful interventions to address this health disparity is because of the pervasive unwillingness by those
in positions of power and privilege to examine multiple socioeconomic factors and incorporate all areas into an intervention that truly addresses structural disadvantage. Researchers, practitioners, and medical providers have an interconnected relationship in driving the development of effective interventions given that they operate with a degree of educational, racial, authoritative, or socioeconomic privilege beyond that of the minority women under consideration. Members of these groups take cues from each another about what is considered a valuable enough cohort into which they should invest human and financial capital. Therefore, establishing shared goals and an action-specific roadmap for achieving justice for African American women in the areas of preterm births and infant mortality is a critical place to start.

It is a daunting task that many may feel ill-equipped to take on, but continued resistance to acknowledging the role class and economic disadvantage plays in health disparities in the United States only ensures the continuation of them. If there is any hope of bringing equity to African American women in the areas of preterm births and infant mortality, the medical and research professions must care equally about women of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, front-line medical professionals must commit to actively combating their implicit bias when treating women of color during pregnancy. Establishing a personal connection with a patient through discussion of a shared interest has been shown to stimulate social group identification in an area disconnected from race and inhibit the activation of thoughts stemming from stereotypes associated with a racial group (Stone & Moscowitz, 2011). Additionally, utilizing lay health care workers has demonstrated success among low-income, racial minority women and is especially effective in their retention while utilizing prenatal care (Sheppard et al., 2004).

The Social Work Mandate

Social workers adhere to an imperative that demands social justice for all. Addressing the health disparities between African American and Caucasian women regarding preterm births and infant mortality falls into this category, and several methods that fall within the social-determinants approach show promise for making meaningful change. As demonstrated in the literature, a one-pronged approach has not worked. The social-determinants framework integrates “social and economic factors, social support networks, physical and social environments, access to health services, and social and health policies” (Koh et al., 2010, p. 73). This approach demands that the social worker view the patient and their situation through varied lenses, increasing the likelihood that all aspects of patient care are met. Advocating for this methodology within organizations or health care settings gives social workers the chance to make change on an institutional level. Under this umbrella, social workers can encourage community-based, participatory research that encourages an egalitarian relationship between researchers/academics and community members, while providing the opportunity to test interventions in a real-world setting (Koh et al., 2010). One of the greatest potential benefits to this is more quickly establishing the difference between
clinical trials and real-world effectiveness, potentially speeding the resolution of a life-threatening problem. On a larger policy scale, social workers can engage in and advocate for establishing time-limited goals in lieu of pilot programs with the intention to push for wider access to treatment and support for adherence programs (Koh et al., 2010).

Finally, on a continuing basis, social workers must actively challenge their own biases and increase awareness of cultural sensitivity when working with people from marginalized populations. Acting in this manner promotes equality and dignity for African American women and other minorities and puts social workers in the position of being change agents within their organizations.

Conclusion
Health disparities, while pervasive, have been shown to have lethal consequences for African American women and their newborns. Rates of preterm births and infant mortality among this group remain significantly higher than Caucasian counterparts, and the absence of attention to the problem reveals a disturbing hierarchy of care in the medical system. Attention to the intersection of race, culture, socioeconomic class, personal health beliefs, and behaviors influencing how African American women access and receive healthcare must be attended to by individual providers and overarching government entities alike for there to be meaningful and lasting change.

References


About the Author

Catherine is pursuing her Master of Social Work after working in social services for many years. Initial research for this project was completed under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Bond in the summer of 2017, and revisions were completed under the mentorship of Dr. Jeffrey Steen in the fall of 2017. Catherine will be graduating in May 2019 and plans to pursue her clinical license while working in the field.
On July 27th, 1981, Adam Walsh was abducted from a Sears in the small city of Hollywood, Florida while his mother was shopping a few aisles away. Two weeks later, the boy’s decapitated head was found in a canal. Along with a few other cases of child kidnapping and murder—especially that of Etan Patz (Troppo)—Walsh’s murder began a collision between the “child safety narratives” that “are central to the suburban experience” (George 138) and the grisly reality of a child being spirited away and murdered by a faceless and malicious actor. The cultural force of this collision can be measured by the reach of its “reverberations” (Waxman 1) across the political, economic, and temporal landscape of America. I will refer to the sum of these reverberations as the stranger-danger movement.

While the entire nation was gripped by the Walsh case, I contend that it most impacted the experience of suburban parents. Obviously, the importance of children in family and society has long been present, predating the suburbs erected after World War II, but concern for the safety of children is especially characteristic of post-war suburban psychology. In his history of the American suburbs, Crabgrass Frontier, Kenneth Jackson writes that one of the biggest motivations for the mass migration to the suburbs after WW II was “fear” (289); while this particular fear was a reaction to the increasing racial integration in cities, it shares an important similarity with the suburban fear characterizing the stranger-danger movement that started in the 1980s—both fears motivated a generation of parents to mobilize “‘for the kids’” (289). While post-war fear for children led to a mass migration of white families to the suburbs, stranger-danger fear led to “child safety [becoming] an enterprise” (Renfro 152) and focused on the creation of “new safeguards...against the kidnapping and corruption of young Americans by strangers” (Renfro 153), as Paul Renfro puts it in “Keeping Children Safe is Good Business.” In spite of this difference, it seems clear these two fears are distinctly suburban in that they reinforce the sanctity of the nuclear family by focusing on safeguarding children against a dangerous and disruptive other.

It is no surprise that early-eighties America became the site of the collision between the suburban narrative of child safety and the specter of kidnappers and child endangerment: it was only a few years before that America became a country in which more people lived...
in the suburbs—a social structure, as I have mentioned, with fear in its DNA (Jackson 289)—than in either rural or urban areas (Beuka 159). At the same time, the pressures of the Cold War were pushing Americans to strive for greater security (George 121). The confluence of these developments led Americans to search for greater security and control. By introducing another faceless and ubiquitous threat into America’s psychic landscape, the Walsh murder shook the foundations of suburban America’s narrative of control and security of its “most precious resource,” its children (qtd. in Renfro 177).

At first glance, the suburban nature of the reaction to Adam Walsh’s abduction and murder seems to be complicated by the fact that he lived in and was abducted from the small city of Hollywood, Florida. However, I contend that the reverberations of this case were most acutely felt in the suburbs. A case in point: only a few years before the Adam Walsh abduction, Atlanta weathered a horrific two-year stretch during which “twenty-nine young African Americans were kidnapped and slain” (Renfro 157). While this tragedy led to a robust (if both tardy and short-lived) response from Atlanta’s city government and private business community, it did not push the country into a decades-long panic, while the abduction and murder of a single white child did just that. Given that a fear for the safety of white children factors so significantly in the development of post-war suburbia (Jackson 289), it becomes clear that the powerful resonance of Adam Walsh’s murder was grounded in suburbia.

The implications of this suburban resonance were wide-ranging. The Walsh case created the impetus for the signing of a number of federal laws, including the Missing Children and Missing Children’s Assistance Acts (Renfro 153). The case also led to the formation of powerful nonprofit groups whose goal was to protect children from abduction (153), and a new market for companies selling products to inform families of the threat of strangers and to protect and insure families against abduction tragedies (178). On a more granular level, the Walsh case changed America’s psyche. Richard Moran, a criminologist at Mount Holyoke College, says, “[the Walsh Case] created a nation of petrified kids and paranoid parents” (qtd. in Waxman 5). Moran also notes that this reaction was not limited to the ‘80s; the durability of the stranger-danger movement is such that “the fear still lingers today” (qtd. in Waxman, 5). For example, only a decade ago, twenty-five years after Adam Walsh’s murder, President George W. Bush “signed The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, which expanded the national sex-offenders registry and created a national child-abuse registry” (181). Even today, one can see the specter of child abduction still present in the suburban psyche. We receive Amber Alerts on our Smartphones, see the faces of missing children on the billboards of our highways and the bulletin boards in our stores, and we can find a website to tell us how many registered sex offenders live in our neighborhood (Renfro 180-181).

While the economic and temporal reach of the Walsh case is staggering in its breadth and depth, the most important aspect of the Walsh case for the pur-
pose of this argument is its symbolic power. The significance and reach of the stranger-danger movement is on its own proof that the case touched the suburban American psyche in a very powerful way. There is, however, another aspect of the stranger-danger story that shows these reactions were primarily based on the symbolic power of the abducted child narrative. In the early-to-mid ‘80s, activists and politicians often quoted the statistic that “fifty thousand youths were taken by ‘strangers’ annually” (Renfro 152). By the late eighties, however, this number had been debunked; “In reality, only a few hundred young Americans at most were abducted by strangers in any given year” (152). No one questions that many of the advocates who worked in the stranger-danger movement did so to help children and had no intention of misleading the public. Instead, I contend that the powerful symbolic force of the abducted child narrative warped people’s sense of reality. Suburban America all at once realized it was less able to “mediate the hazards [its] children face” (George 139) than the suburban narrative had promised. Gone were the days of a suburban space insulated from the dangers of the outside world; now the suburbs were a place where “death lurks behind every cupboard and waits in every garage” (George 139).

In July 2016, three decades after the stranger-danger movement began, Stranger Things debuted on Netflix and met instant success, garnering “a whopping 14.07 million views in the United States in the key adults 18-49 demographic in its first 35 days,” making it “one of Netflix’s highest ratings [sic] shows” (Bowden). It is significant that many in this demographic were children themselves during the ‘80s. While at least some of Stranger Things’ success with this group can be attributed to the show’s ‘80s aesthetic, “allow[ing] the series [and its audience] to luxuriate in a comfortable bath of Deja vu” (Wren 1), I contend that the show’s success is at least partly due to a deeper cultural resonance connected to the stranger-danger movement. The show’s title itself seems to enter into discourse with the stranger-danger movement, and the series develops a number of plot lines centered around kidnapped children. It is no surprise, then, that a large part of Stranger Things’ demographic is the adults who were children themselves during the advent of stranger-danger. With this in mind, I contend that the power of the show comes not simply from its engagement with the symbolism and narrative of the stranger-danger movement but from its reconfiguring of some of most paranoid and insidious aspects of stranger-danger. Specifically, Stranger Things inverts the power structure underpinning of the stranger-danger movement, characterizing the government and the nuclear family as dangerous and, especially in the government’s case, exploitative of children, while the children themselves are positioned as active, empowered agents in their own safety. In doing this, Stranger Things offers its audience a way of understanding children in the suburbs that promises to free both parents and children from the paranoia that characterized 1980s childhood and now threatens to bleed into the world of the next generation.

Like many contemporary critics of suburban film and literature, my goal is to use a suburban text to enter into the symbolic landscape of suburbia. Rob-
Ert Beuka, in the introduction to his book, *Suburbia Nation*, writes that the term “suburbia” itself is full of “loaded signifiers” like pools, barbeque pits, and neatly constructed neighborhoods that “taken together, connote both the middle-class ‘American dream’...and that dream’s inverse: the vision of a homogenized, soulless landscape of tepid conformity” (4). However, Beuka also notes that the suburban critic must look past this durable but simple conception of the suburbs in order to form a deeper, more culturally exact view of suburban film and literature that expands “the dominant perception of suburbia over the course of the second half of the twentieth century” (14).

Of the most recent studies on suburban film and literature, Murphy’s introduction to *The Suburban Gothic* is the only text that sets its argument squarely within the “dominant perception” noted by Beuka. In this chapter, Murphy suggests that *The Suburban Gothic* explores “the malevolent and frequently subversive flipside to the pro-suburban rhetoric espoused by” the leaders of popular culture (4), highlighting “the perception that there is a dark and terrifying underside to the suburban experience” (11). Murphy’s argument certainly connects to *Stranger Things* on a very literal level; the upside-down of *Stranger Things* and its terrifying inhabitant can both be read as a reification of that “dark and terrifying underside” of suburbia. However, outside of a cursory mention of the suburbs as “an obvious hunting ground for pedophiles and child murderers” (3), Murphy’s analysis does not provide an extensive analysis of the position of children in the suburbs.

Each of the other major contemporary suburban critics attempts to complicate the “dominant perception” of the suburbs in his or her own way. Catherine Jurca’s criticism in *White Diaspora*, for example, stands alone in its attempt to fully confront the fraught racial dynamics of the suburbs. Instead of engaging in the critique of suburban literature as resting on bland “tropes of typicality and ‘mediocrity’” (4), she seeks to “analyze the assumptions that sustain” suburban novels, especially “the tendency in twentieth-century literary treatments of the American suburb to convert the rights and privileges of living there into spiritual, cultural, and political problems of displacement” (4).

Jurca attacks this tendency with considerable force, as is evident in the introduction to her book *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*, where she states, “that perhaps nothing comes more naturally to the affluent white middle class than feeling bad—maltreated, rather than angry or guilty—about being the white middle class” (19), a feeling she clearly sees as anything but “a reasonable point of view” (8). On one hand, the force of this attack is only proportionate to the injustice of a whole genre of literature based on a “fantasy of victimization” (8-9), which the author convincingly argues is true. On the other hand, Joseph George argues that the polemic force of Jurca’s argument “overlook[s] the contingent and multifaceted communities so prevalent” (George 31) in suburban literature. Jurca’s contribution to the discourse on suburban film and literature certainly highlights the fact that *Stranger Things* largely ignores the issue of race in the suburbs. However, I do not believe...
Stranger Things, which privileges suburban outsiders over the affluent suburban core, is guilty of being a narrative of affluent people worrying about “problems of displacement.”

Joseph George’s analysis of the suburbs, Postmodern Suburban Spaces, reads suburban literature “as acts of imagination, creative responses to real facts of suburbanization that describe and explore more ethical ways of being together in a model that has dominated American popular culture as much as it has real landscapes” (37). George conceives of the suburbs as an “imaginary space” (3) that promises much more than simply reinforcing old clichés of suburban life; specifically, he contends that many modern portrayals of suburbia complicate the “dominant perception” and act as a “means to envision a different type of suburban interaction, one based on care for the other people with whom one lives” (4). George applies this idea specifically to suburban families in the third chapter of book, titled Domesticated Strangers: Fissures Within the Nuclear Family. Most germane to my argument is the section of this chapter focusing on John Irving’s The World According to Garp. In it, George argues how the protagonist of the novel, T. S. Garp, is “[transformed from] the fretful parent into the inescapable threat” (141), a model which perfectly describes the transformation of Karen Wheeler, the mother of Mike and Nancy, when Eleven arrives at their house (as will be discussed later in this analysis).

In his argument in chapter three, George also makes the point that part of Garp “reflects the outlook...[that] it is [both the author and the protagonist’s] imagination that has made the world into his enemies, focusing on grisly deaths instead of potential lives” (147). This powerful observation fits perfectly into my conception of the stranger-danger movement; the Walsh case and others like it ignited the American imagination, creating a world of unseen enemies and “grisly deaths” that clouded the public’s view of reality. Further developing this idea of unseen danger, George notes that in suburban literature, “death lurks behind every cupboard and waits in every garage” (George 139), a description that fits Stranger Things perfectly. The creature from the upside-down (that is itself a kidnapper, it should be noted) travels through the suburban electrical grid and emerges from the walls of suburban houses; he is quite literally behind the walls of the Byers’ house and the Hawkins Middle School (Duffer ch. 8, 30:51). The nature of the upside-down itself further develops the idea of death as a ubiquitous and hidden force in the suburbs. It is “a place of decay and death” (Duffer ch. 5, 06:29) that exists just under the surface of the suburbs at all times—it is literally “right next to you and you don’t even see it” (Duffer ch. 5, 6:38).

In fact, Stranger Things positions itself as a narrative developing the concept of unseen suburban danger from its very first moments. The first scene of the series shows a horrified scientist running down a dimly lit subterranean hallway, only to be pulled into the ceiling of an elevator by an unseen malevolent force. In a juxtaposition representing a perfect example of what George terms the “juxtaposition of the horrific and the mundane” (139), the next scene is a ground-level shot
of a sprinkler head watering the lawn of the Wheeler house in Hawkins, Indiana (Duffer ch. 1, 01:33-01:57). The nature of the Wheeler family reinforces the mundane, suburban mood of this scene. They are the film’s premier nuclear family, complete with parents who married for money and status rather than love (Duffer ch. 5, 22:12), and who live in a classic suburban house, the “modified colonial” (Jackson 240).

In a voice-over behind the sprinkler head shot, Mike Wheeler, one of the show’s young protagonists, introduces his friends to the next encounter in their game of Dungeons and Dragons, saying “something is coming. Something hungry for blood” (Duffer, ch. 1, 01:44). The dramatic irony in these words highlights the innocence of the children, who believe monsters exist only in the safety of their games when the audience already knows otherwise. More importantly, this voice-over sets the narrative clearly within the framework of the stranger-danger movement, when suburban citizens became convinced monsters who were “hungry for blood” lurked under the surface of the suburban patina of child safety.

While the opening shots of this series unmistakably place it within the stranger-danger discourse, the narrative quickly inverts the sources of danger in its narrative. Where the stranger-danger movement created a dichotomy between the danger of strangers and the safety of established social structures such as the nuclear family and the government, Stranger Things characterizes these two institutions as the narrative’s major sources of danger.

From the show’s very first chapter, the government is characterized as a dark and murderous force. In this episode, the audience sees the government illegally tapping the town’s phone lines (Duffer ch 1, 18:10), suggesting it is a secretive and manipulative force. Also introduced in the first chapter is Connie Frazier, the government agent who murders Benny, the restaurant owner who first took in Eleven (Duffer ch. 1, 39:53). Seeing a government agent pose as a social worker, only to murder a well-meaning citizen, clearly establishes the government as a threatening entity. The fact that Connie looks very much like a put-together suburban mom also begins to develop the motif of the nuclear family as a source of danger.

More specifically, the narrative places the government in the role filled by the malicious stranger in the stranger-danger narrative; there are two kidnappings and a child murder in Stranger Things, and each can be attributed to the government on some level. The first and most central kidnapping in the narrative is that of Eleven, who was kidnapped at birth by the government (Duffer ch. 6, 27:10). Interestingly, although the kidnapping of Will Beyers and the murder of Barb Holland both come at the hands of the creature (who the kids dub the Demogorgon) from the upside-down, this creature can itself be read as the reification of the government’s kidnapping and exploitation of Eleven, since it is the government’s eventual attempt to exploit Eleven’s powers in an effort to gain an advantage in the Cold War (Duffer ch. 6, 19:15 and ch. 7, 30:34) that sets the Demogorgon loose (Duffer ch 6, 42:16-42:41). In this way, the government is indirectly responsible for
the kidnapping of Will Beyers and the murder of Barb Holland. Supporting this point, the government seems at times to be in loose collusion with the Demogorgon; in both Barb’s and Will’s case, the government acts to hide the creature’s crimes. In Will’s case, they create a fake body to trick Joyce into thinking her son is dead (Duffer ch. 5, 12:20). In Barb’s case, the government moves Barb’s car to a bus stop to mislead the public into believing that Barb ran away (Duffer ch. 5, 30:26).

The characterization of the government as a dangerous kidnapper is also developed in the headlines connected to Dr. Brenner that Hopper reads as he researches the government lab, headlines such as “Alleged Experiments, Abuse,” and, most incriminatingly, “Terry Ives Suing: ‘They Took My Daughter’” (Duffer ch. 3, 26:24-26:43).

Whereas the government’s function in the stranger-danger movement was in part to “shore up... the nuclear family” (George 153), the government in Stranger Things turns the suburban nuclear family into a source of danger in the Wheeler house. When Mike finds himself harboring Eleven in his basement, his first instinct, like that of any good suburban child, is to go to his parents for help. He suggests Eleven sneak out the house and immediately return to the front door, pretending she is lost. Mike is confident his mom will “know who to call” (Duffer ch. 2, 10:00). Knowing the fate of Benny, the restaurant owner when he called for the government’s help in dealing with Eleven, Mike’s words again ring with dramatic irony; the call Mike’s mom would make would almost certainly lead to the demise of Eleven and the entire family, a point made fairly explicit by Benny’s earlier murder and Eleven’s denial of Mike’s plan. She explains her answer by miming both her and Mike getting shot by the “bad people” (Duffer ch. 2 10:48).

George describes a similar inversion in The World According to Garp, saying that “parents’ efforts to safeguard their offspring in fact makes them vulnerable” (140), a point made with great clarity in Stranger Things when, after Eleven has made it clear asking for help from Mike’s parents would lead to death, we see Karen Wheeler, Mike’s mom, say to him, “I never want you to feel like you have to hide anything from me” (Duffer ch. 2 24:39). Taken in a vacuum, this is a classic familial interaction between a concerned, well-meaning parent and her child; however, set within the inverted framework of Stranger Things, these words carry an implied threat. Karen Wheeler is unable to help her son, even when his problem is not an outside adult stranger, but another child living within the walls of her very house.

The characterization of both the government and the nuclear family as dangerous is cemented in the narrative’s central antagonist, Dr. Martin Brenner, the lead scientist of a series of top-secret government experiments at the Department of Energy research lab in Hawkins. It was Brenner who kidnapped Eleven at birth, a kidnapping that stemmed from a series of ethically questionable, government-funded human experiments he conducted on Eleven’s birth mother (Duffer ch. 6, 21:06). Interestingly, because of the extended length of Eleven’s captivity, she comes to identify Brenner as a
parent, as we see in the chilling punishment scene in which she repeatedly cries out “Papa!” to an unmoved Brenner as she is dragged away to solitary confinement (Duffer ch. 2, 23:25). The complex intersection of roles in Brenner’s character—he is at once kidnapper, government official, and parental figure—positions him as one of the narrative’s central characters and the personification of the inversion of sources of danger in Stranger Things.

It is also worth noting a powerful critique of the stranger-danger movement present in the complex construction of Brenner’s character. As Paul Renfro argues, the ‘80s struggle against child abduction can be read as self-serving for both the government and the private sector. In the case of the Reagan government, “[the] administration harnessed the power of the child safety campaign” (168) to support their neoliberal agenda, using the movement to support its “core thematic objectives vis-a-vis social and economic policy” (173). The private sector also used stranger-danger to forward its own goals. Larger, more established companies: Mobile, Trailways (a bus company), and Quality Inn, to name just a few—engaged with the stranger-danger movement through public awareness campaigns and the offering of safe spots for missing children; however, in the end, these efforts succeeded only in “captur[ing] market share for ‘responsible’, family oriented, child friendly businesses, as many of these campaigns amounted to “little more than public relations moves” (Renfro 171). The stranger-danger movement also drew the attention of “more dubious startups” that capitalized on the movement in more brazen and direct ways. New insurance programs offered such services to parents as access to “a private investigator, counseling services, up to $50,000 in reward money, and up to $10,000 in travel funds should their child fall prey to a kidnapper”—all for a monthly premium, of course (Renfro 178). Along with these insurance programs, “companies marketed new products devised to restrain and monitor children, in the hopes of keeping them out of harm’s way” (178). Viewed through the lens of these facts, the stranger-danger movement seems less about protecting children from the exploitation of strangers and more about the exploitation of suburbia’s fear for its own children by the government and for-profit businesses.

Throughout Stranger Things, Brenner’s relationship with Eleven can be seen as a reification of the exploitative relationship that blossomed during the stranger-danger movement between government and for-profit businesses on one hand and children on the other. There is never a question that Eleven’s place in the government is purely motivated by exploitation; in fact, she is characterized as a captive or prisoner. The haunting, Holocaust-like image of her numerical name tattooed on her wrist (Duffer ch. 1, 27:56) strongly suggests the government has stripped her of a human identity. This characterization is further developed through Eleven’s limited vocabulary and the spare, prison-like image of her bedroom (Duffer, ch. 5 04:18-04:35). In place of developing a human, we see the government pursuing a darker goal in its interactions with Eleven. In the numerous flashbacks to Eleven’s time at the Energy Department labs, we see her repeatedly being trained to
use her telepathic and telekinetic powers as a weapon. At one point, the audience is to understand that Eleven has been asked to injure a cat with her mind (Duffer ch. 3, 33:04); soon after, we see her practice surveilling a Soviet operative with her mind before she kills two laboratory workers with telekinesis. Brenner’s reaction to this last event shows he is more concerned with her status as a weapon than as a human being. After being unmoved by her crying only moments before and seeming unconcerned that Eleven is pale and bleeding from her nose and ears after using her powers, he caresses her head and says “incredible” (Duffer ch. 3, 34:46). This reaction clearly shows Brenner’s value structure—he gives Eleven positive parental attention only to reward her for her making herself a weapon.

That Eleven’s exploitation directly introduces the Demogorgon into the narrative further comments on the exploitation of real suburban children during the stranger-danger movement. Just as the shadowy kidnapper of the stranger-danger movement gained power as various government and for-profit institutions propagated the stranger-danger threat for their own benefit, the very existence of the Demogorgon in Stranger Things, a child kidnapper and murderer itself, is a consequence of the exploitation of a child by the government.

When Stranger Things repositions the source of danger in the stranger-danger movement, it also liberates the image of the suburban child, which has been trapped in the paranoia of the stranger-danger movement for the last thirty years. The stranger-danger movement’s focus on the child as a victim, which can be seen in everything from the exaggerated statistics about child abduction to the profusion of lost children’s faces on milk cartons and specially-made leashes to keep children near their parents, led to “a nation of petrified kids and paranoid parents” (Waxman 5). Gone were the days of children being allowed to independently explore public spaces in their neighborhoods unattended. (Corcoran et al. 11) The stranger-danger era ushered in the age of the play date, of the highly structured, highly managed childhood, a childhood that robs kids of a sense of agency, independence, and empowerment.

Stranger Things certainly acknowledges the reality that some children will fall victim to tragedy, just as Adam Walsh did; Eleven, Will Beyers, and Barb Holland all suffer at the hands of a kidnapper in this narrative, and, in an incredibly painful flashback, we see Chief Hopper lose his young daughter to cancer (Duffer, ch. 8, 38:04). With the exception of Barb, however, children are given more agency than simply being passive objects of adult aggression and perversity. Will Beyers was kidnapped, but the narrative allows him to use his ingenuity and bravery to stay alive, where Barb could not. Both of these traits are on display in the very fact that he manages to navigate the upside-down. He successfully communicates with his mother in the Beyers’ home (Duffer, ch. 3, 40:10) and escapes the Demogorgon by finding refuge in Castle Beyers (Duffer ch. 7, 34:38). Both of these points suggest a heroic and empowered act—trapped inside the incredibly forbidding and dangerous world of the upside-down, Will takes active steps to communicate and survive.
The narrative of *Stranger Things* empowers most of its child characters in one way or another, creating too many examples of child empowerment and agency to profitably list in this paper. An example that stands out above many of the others is the role Will Beyers’ three best friends--Mike, Dustin, and Lucas--play in the narrative. From the beginning, against the insistence of the adult figures in the narrative, these boys take a brave and active role in the search for Will. As soon as they hear of his disappearance, they venture out into the dark woods in spite of knowing it is “the exact same spot where [Will] went missing,” a place where “he ran into something bad” (Duffer ch. 1, 45:42). These children are not the passively endangered children of the stranger-danger movement who are unable to act outside the purview of the nuclear family, the business world, and the government. In fact, *Stranger Things* positions these boys’ independent actions as some of the most efficacious in the narrative. For example, next to Joyce Beyers and Eleven, who both have a preternatural connection to Will, the three boys are the first characters to solve the mystery of Will’s disappearance. The fact that they use *Dungeons & Dragons*, a game popular with children in the ‘80s (Duffer ch. 5, 06:26), as a lens through which to understand Will’s situation offers a vision of children using imagination and flexibility to solve their own problems.

In another key scene in *Stranger Things*, the teenagers Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve make the most successful stand against the Demogorgon by any character without telekinesis (we will soon explore Eleven’s climactic encounter with the creature). At two different points in the series, the Demogorgon easily dispatches trained, armed soldiers--once when the lone soldier ventures into the upside-down (Duffer ch. 4, 27:57-28:49) and again during the dramatic climax of the series, when the monster single-handedly dispatches the entire unit of heavily-armed paramilitary soldiers led by Dr. Brenner (Duffer ch. 8, 30:52). Yet Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve manage to lure the monster into the Beyers’ home, ensnare it in a bear trap, and set fire to it, all of which leads to Hopper realizing that the creature is hurt when he sees blood stains on the floor of the upside-down Beyers’ home (Duffer ch. 8, 22:40). While this scene may strike the audience as improbable on a literal level, (especially when Steve bests the creature in close combat) (Duffer ch. 8, 20:51), it can be read figuratively as a metaphor of empowered children confronting the issues in their lives.

While these scenes are strong examples of *Stranger Things* empowering its child characters, Eleven is the character who most embodies the empowered and active child; her character can be read, in fact, as a reification of child power. Like Dr. Brenner, Eleven’s important role in this narrative is reinforced by the way her identity represents an intersection of a number of important images relating to the stranger-danger movement. Eleven is a daughter--literally, she is the daughter of Terry Ives; figuratively she is the daughter of Dr. Brenner. At the same time, Eleven is also a kidnapped child. Above all else, though, she is an empowered child.

As I have noted a number of times, the strang-
er-danger movement’s immense cultural force was fueled by the power of children in suburbia, and this should be no surprise, given that the creation of the suburbs itself was fueled, at least in part, by this same power (Jackson 289). In both the post-war migration to the suburbs and the stranger-danger movement, the power of children manifested itself as adult fear, which paradoxically led to the practical disempowerment of children in the suburbs. In yet another inversion of stranger-danger symbolism, Eleven herself becomes the seat of the power of children. Endowed with immense telepathic and telekinetic abilities, Eleven is the personification of power. With nothing more than her mind, Eleven launches a van high into the air (Duffer ch. 7, 4:11), saves Mike from falling to his death (Duffer ch. 7, 06:29), breaks a boy’s arm (Duffer ch. 7, 40:43), surveils a Soviet operative halfway across the world (Duffer ch. 5, 42:51-43:18), and even “open[s] up a tear in time and space...[an act that would require] a massive amount of energy, more than humans are currently capable of creating” (Duffer ch. 5, 20:34). Eleven’s presence has the potential to warp the world around her, just as the presence of children in suburbia warped adults’ views of reality (Renfro 152). Also, like children in the real world, Eleven was exploited and penned in because of this power by adults hungry to forward their own interests. It is significant, then, that Stranger Things begins its narrative with Eleven escaping from captivity and becoming a force that disrupts the structures of adult exploitation in a number of ways.

If the Demogorgon can be read as the reification of the dark consequences of child exploitation, and Eleven can be read as the reification of the power of children, the final confrontation between Eleven and the creature is the ultimate metaphor of child empowerment disrupting the dark forces released by the stranger-danger movement. The greatest fear of adults during the stranger-danger movement was that their innocent and powerless children would fall prey to the lurking kidnapper, but Stranger Things allows its audience to see the ultimate reversal of this image. Eleven, the kidnapped child, confronts and destroys the kidnapper, saving her friends, and maybe even her entire community--for who else could have stopped the Demogorgon?

It is of course easy to discount this powerful image--the singular tragedy of losing one child in as barbaric a way as Adam Walsh’s parents lost him seems to at once negate any hope Stranger Things holds for changing the way our society views its children. Moreover, it seems an unchallengeable truth that children are not capable of protecting themselves. There are, however, expert voices who seem to support the idea empowering children in the face of danger, a stance that runs totally counter to the passive conception of children forged during the stranger-danger crisis. First of all, Mary Corcoran reminds us in her article, “Making Space for Sociability: How Children Animate the Public Realm in Suburbia”, that our view of children as “vulnerable and in need of protection” is not an immutable truth but a “contemporary construction”. Taking this idea a step further, Nancy McBride, national safety director at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, stresses that our culture must
“take stranger-danger and put it in a museum” (qtd. in Abrams). She goes on to explain that children need to be empowered to think situationally, making them more active and empowered agents in their own safety.

It may seem that I have given undue weight to the narrative symbolism of Stranger Things. It is, after all, a fictional account, so it may be difficult to imagine that it could contribute to changing our culture’s view of children, which is based in part on real—if extremely rare—cases of tragic child abduction and murder. However, it is clear stranger-danger derives most of its power from the narrative of child endangerment created by the Adam Walsh case; parents reacted to the story of an abducted child more so than they reacted to any real-world data suggesting their children were actually at risk. Because of the narrative underpinnings of the stranger-danger movement, there is the possibility that offering an alternative narrative could influence the discourse around the safety of suburban children in our culture. As George explains in the conclusion to Postmodern Suburban Spaces, fiction has the power to offer “new myths” in place of “conceptions of childhood that dominate American suburbs” (189). By offering the image of empowered children overcoming dark and exploitative forces, Stranger Things offers our culture a “new myth,” and, while this narrative will never bring back Adam Walsh, it can help our society find the bravery to banish the specter of stranger-danger and free today’s children—and their parents—from the prison of fear.

**Works Cited**


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**About the Author**

Gregory Shea is pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching English at Bridgewater State University, and his paper was completed in the spring of 2017 under the mentorship of Dr. Heidi Bean. He completed his Master’s Degree in the spring 2018.
Ceramic Vase: *Blue Binary 1*

BRENDA ROVEDA
Uncovering the Evolution of Hijabs in Women’s Sports

KRISTEN COOK

Introduction

The use of veils or hijabs among women in Islamic cultures can vary depending on the specific location in the world or the beliefs of different Muslim families. The reference to hijabs can be found throughout the Qu’ran, the religious text of Islam, especially in Verse 33:53 “a’yah” (verse) of the hijab “when ye ask [the Prophet’s wives] for anything ye want, ask them from before a hijab: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs” (Ruby, 2016, p. 56). This verse is one of many suggestions in the Qu’ran for Muslim women to wear hijabs to “veil” or “cover” themselves from other men aside from their family members or husbands. In terms of the definition of hijabs in society, 19th-century scholar William Lane described his exposure to hijabs during his many years in the Middle East as “a thing that prevents, hinders, debars, or precludes; a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or protects, because it prevents seeing, or beholding” (Ruby, 2016, p. 55). Although wearing a hijab during certain activities, such as sporting events, could appear as an obstacle, the Qu’ran does not suggest that Muslim women refrain from participation in sports but instead promotes a balanced life. With this understanding of the religious connection between Muslim women and hijabs, as well as the general message of the Islamic religion for a balanced life, one must next look at society’s perspective for Muslim women’s inclusion in sports while wearing a hijab.

In today’s society, Islam has become a dominant religion in many countries, as have the cultural traditions that many Muslim men and women follow. According to an article in The Muslim World, “Muslims have become visible actors not only in sports but also at school and at work, in big cities and smaller towns” (Ali, 2005, p. 515), encouraging the prevalence of women wearing hijabs in a variety of different settings. A study featured in the Journal of Asia Pacific Studies researched the perceptions and opinions of 15 Arabic-Muslim women in Malaysia toward their involvement in physical activity and sports. The study included surveys with a list of questions related to sports involvement and possible reasons why the women may not participate in sports. The results from the study showed that 14 out of the 15 participants responded with a positive aspect to liking sports, “However, this study found that the culture (ethnic) that includes parents, dress code, and family is the main reason [that] prohibited them from sports participations” (Sofian, Omar-Fauzee, & Abd-Latif, 2010, p. 370).

Problem

The research in this study will feature the evolution of hijabs in women’s sports across the world in
terms of players’ safety and sport associations’ regulations for recreational, collegiate, and professional athletes.

**Player’s Safety And Sport Association Regulations**

For some athletic associations, the regulation against wearing a hijab falls under the rule against wearing any headpiece to encourage players’ safety. The idea of a hijab or another head scarf becoming unwrapped could pose the risk of strangling the individual wearing it, or even the possibility of other athletes slipping on the hijab if it were to fall off during a sporting event. Officials in Canada imposed strict regulations for young girls in recreational sports to reduce the risk of injury while wearing hijabs. In Montreal, a girl wearing a tae kwon do was asked to leave a tournament because five out of the six girls on the team were wearing headscarves and refused to remove them (Montgomery, 2007). In Calgary, a fourteen-year-old girl was ejected from a soccer game for the same reason of refusing to remove her hijab, along with an eleven-year-old girl in Winnipeg who was removed from a Judo competition. According to the head of the legal committee for Judo Canada, Telly Mercury, a change from an international level within different sports will have to be made regarding the hijab. According to Mercury, items like the hijab cannot be taken “for safety gear and try them out on young people. You have to have some research done on it and all the rest of it, like they do for hockey helmets” (Montgomery, 2007, para. 13).

For high school athletes in many schools, the ability to wear a hijab during sporting events is up to the National Federation of State High Schools Association (NFSHSA), which prohibits headwear, with the exception of medical, cosmetic, or religion-related garb that has been approved by the state, following documented evidence of a need for the headwear. In March 2017, high school student Je’Nan Hayes was removed from a regional final basketball game in Gaithersburg, Maryland, due to an official’s strict adherence to the NFSHSA’s guidelines (Lynch, 2017). Hayes, a junior at Gaithersburg High School, had played 24 games that season leading up to the finals with no issue regarding her hijab, until the referees for the regional title requested authorization for the headwear, as stated by the rulebook. According to Bill Reinhard, spokesman for the NFSHSA, “the officials made a strict interpretation of the National Federation of State High Schools’ playing rules for basketball instead of the spirit of the rule designed to ensure safety and competitive fairness” (Lynch, 2017, para.11). However, a set of consistent standards and guidelines for all officials to follow could defer the issue of wearing hijabs during sporting events altogether.

For professional athletes, the exclusion of hijabs in sports has reduced participation for many individual players and teams in advanced playing fields. In 2010, the Iranian women’s soccer team was faced with a dilemma of not participating in games due to their inability to wear hijabs, as enforced by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (Singh, 2012.). In an attempt to avoid wearing a hijab, while still following the Iranian law of covering their hair, ears, and necks, the women’s football team
opted to wear caps on their head and turtlenecks under their uniforms. Although this option for coverage did follow Iranian law, it did not follow the regulations enforced by FIFA, and the team was forced to forfeit an Olympic qualifying game against Jordan. The Iranian team’s then central midfielder, Katayoun Khosrowyar, described the regulation as an ultimatum, “Either we take it off or we don’t play, and obviously no one will take it off” (Singh, 2012, para. 8).

By 2012, FIFA had lifted its ban for women wearing hijabs during soccer games, creating new opportunities for female soccer players to compete in the London Olympic games. Along with FIFA, other international sporting associations have adjusted their regulations to allow hijabs in the 2012 Olympics. In 2011, the International Weightlifting Federation allowed females athletes to cover their arms and legs, as well as the option of wearing a hijab during competitions. Other athletes embraced the new regulations such as judo player, Wodjan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim, and Saudi Arabian runner, Sarah Attar, as well as countless other athletes who were able to compete in the games for the first time while wearing a hijab (Guardian, 2012).

According to The International Basketball Federation (FIBA), athletes are prohibited from wearing any “equipment (objects) that may cause injury to other players”, including a hijab (Blumberg, 2016, para. 2). This regulation prevents any headwear from being on a professional basketball court, as well. The Huffington Post recently reported the global efforts being made to adjust the regulations to include such headwear as an exemption from the previously stated rules by FIBA. According to The Huffington Post’s article, the Council on American-Islam Relations (CAIR) has been working with female Muslim basketball players, as well as members of congress, to find a solution for FIBA to lift the ban permanently (Blumberg, 2016). In 2014, as an attempt to find a compromise, FIBA agreed to a two-year trial period in which players were able to wear hijabs and silk turbans during selected competitions. Unfortunately, the trial period ended in August 2016, and a final decision was not made in time for female basketball players to wear hijabs at the Olympic games. CAIR’s National Communications Director Ibrahim Hooper expressed that “The only determining factors for athletic participation should be skill and hard work, not what is worn on one’s head”, while FIBA refused to comment to The Huffington Post regarding the article (Blumberg, 2016, para. 6).

**Attempted Solutions**

Although many athletic associations around the world are making adjustments to their rules pertaining to the inclusion of headwear on the playing field, some athletes are having to modify their athletic choices to include hijabs regardless of sport regulations. For example, United States’ Olympic fencer, Ibtihaj Muhammad, chose fencing as her sport for the fact that she could cover her head and wear her hijab during fencing matches, since all athletes must cover their faces with fencing uniforms to participate in the matches (Guard-
ian, 2012). Although this option may have benefitted Muhammad as far as choosing a sport that she excelled in, some female athletes may not be as successful and should have the opportunity to try other sports without their hijab being a concern. For some athletes, the inability to wear a hijab could restrict them from participating in any sport, which is why a consistency among sporting standards and some type of compromise could adjust the inclusion of hijabs in different sports across a variety of playing fields.

In June, 2017, a high school in Portland, Maine became the first known secondary school in America to not only allow the use of hijabs among student athletes, but to embrace the headwear by offering a school specific hijab to match their team uniform. The movement to include hijabs within the school’s athletic teams was introduced by the two captains of the school’s tennis team, Anaise Manikunda and Liva Pierce, who began an online campaign to fundraise money to have the hijabs custom made for the school’s athletes (Payne, 2017). Although neither Mainkunda or Pierce are Muslim, both students found the inclusion of hijabs among student athletes to be so necessary that they chose private fundraising for the additional cost to avoid any possible controversy among taxpayers due to the religious representation connected with hijabs. The attempt by the high school students to include hijabs for their classmates to wear during sporting events not only increased a concept of inclusion but also increased players’ confidence during games due to the performance-based design of the headwear.

Such attempts to include the hijab and other headwear in sporting events has become more attainable with the efforts made in March, 2017 by athletic wear giant, Nike. Nike initially partnered with the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) as the main company for products and marketing as well as apparel, footwear, and equipment for FIBA’s largest competitions, including the FIBA Women’s Basketball World Cup (Davidson, 2017). This release of the Pro Hijab opens doors for many Muslim women who may have not previously competed in any sports simply because of the concern that may have lied within not being able to wear a hijab during athletic events.

Since developing the Pro Hijab, Nike has wasted no time in sharing the new standard in athletic wear for Muslim women with the Winter Olympics as a showcase. Twenty two-year-old figure skater Zahri Lari qualified for the Olympic games in 2017 as the first Emirati competitive figure skater, as well as the face for the Nike Pro Hijab (Murdoch Smith, 2017). Lari was featured in Vogue magazine, Nike photo shoots, and even a Nike commercial to demonstrate the beauty and athletic abilities that can be associated with hijabs in sports. When describing the Pro Hijab, Lari explains her reaction, as well as other Muslim women’s reactions, as “so surprised and happy to see such a large company, like Nike, do something like this to cater specifically to Muslim athletes.” (Murdoch Smith, 2017, para. 4).

Conclusion
Nike’s designs and attempts such as those made by the

Bridgewater State University
high school tennis team captains to provide hijabs for all female athletes could broaden the playing fields of all female sports while simultaneously broadening the inclusion of all female athletes. The revision of sporting associations rules and regulations could be the next step to create a consistent set of guidelines for sporting officials to follow in order to increase opportunities for athletic success for young girls playing on recreational teams for fun, as well as grown athletes who have worked their way to the Olympics. The religious connection between the hijab and the women who wear them can make a hijab seem like a part of daily life and even a part of women’s personalities, in general. Including equipment, such as the Nike Pro Hijab or other performance based hijabs could adhere to Muslim women’s beliefs while still reducing the risk of injury for athletes, so that Muslim women can participate in sports as any other female athlete would. The goalkeeper for Jordan’s national soccer team, Reema Ramounich, provided a determined comment for athletic equality pertaining to women wearing hijabs with her statement, “I’m not thinking about what I’m wearing, and what kind of message I’m trying to reach the people. I’m only there because I love this game, and I want to play” (Singh, 2012, para. 16).

References


**About the Author**

Kristen is pursuing her Master of Science in Adapted Physical Education program in the spring of 2018. Her research proposal was completed in the fall of 2016 under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Sheehy, who introduced her to the many different approaches to research. She completed her undergraduate degree in December 2017 and began a Master of Education in the Special Education program in the spring of 2018.
Andromeda

JILLIAN BOGER

The Astronomer says that trying to get a photo of the Milky Way is like being inside a house and trying to photograph the front door from one of the side windows:
Impossible. Just look over at the neighbor’s place, instead.
(Apparently, space is the suburbs and all the galaxies look alike.)
Andromeda moves like the Milky Way does.
One day, arms will grab arms and the two galaxies will crash into each other, painful and bright and beautiful.
The arms tangle, bodies collapsing,
waiting for the heat death of the universe, together.

However many light years from here,
some residents of a planet in the habitable zone of 6 Persei (maybe Persei V?) wonder,
Why haven’t aliens come yet?
Perseans point up at Andromeda’s bright white belt,
a thing in a sky that the nearest city’s light pollution hasn’t touched.
The dirt is dark dust now under an old quilt made by a grandmother’s arthritic hands.
Somewhere, there is a Pale Blue Dot,
and one Persean, overwhelmed by the thought of Persean Insignificance in the face of what will happen to the galaxy in 7.5 million years
Smiles and Cries.
The next-door neighbor undresses,
and is beautiful.
Introduction
In 2011, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts adopted new guidelines for the evaluation of all teachers. These regulations, which are state law, incorporate traditional elements such as administrator evaluation of educators through observations and student learning data. The system also takes into account modern trends of educator evaluation such as teacher-led analysis, reflection, planning, action steps, collaboration, and the use of a standards-based rubric.

This system places on teachers ownership of providing evidence of proficiency as they are required to display aptitude related to several major standards and indicators such as curriculum, planning, assessment, and professional practice. Another element of this system is showcased when teachers create student learning and professional practice goals and offer evidence of their proficiency in meeting them.

While this new system considers traditional aspects as well as modern trends in educator evaluation, it is not without criticism. Some educators and teacher unions are skeptical of use of student data related to state-wide assessment acts, in part, as an evaluative tool. However, not all educators teach subjects that have state assessments. Regardless, assessment data as an evaluative tool will not take into account the group of students one teaches (i.e., students with disabilities, English language learners, and other learning challenges) or the socioeconomic status of the district, and thereby the caliber and the expectations asked of the students.

Another potential issue is the amount of time, effort, energy, and money needed to implement the procedures and processes. From a teacher’s perspective, creating evaluation evidence, which prove they are meeting the state’s standards, is extremely time-consuming.

A final potential problem with the new evaluation system mandated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts involves the ability to accomplish its goals. Teachers and administrators feel the burden of all that is asked of them from the federal government, the state, and their individual districts. They question whether adding another item to their list will turn teachers away from the profession all together, potentially causing talented individuals to go into other fields.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of State-mandated teacher evaluation on teacher perceptions of professional growth.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do teachers feel the teacher evaluation rubric is reflective of quality teaching?
2. What is the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of their professional growth regarding curriculum?
3. What is the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of their professional growth regarding planning?
4. What is the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of their professional growth regarding assessment?
5. What is the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of their professional growth regarding goals?

Literature Review

The literature review reveals that increased federal involvement in education policy over the past sixty years have mandated a fusion of high-stakes tests and educator evaluation. Groen (2012) argues this was done for both educational and political reasons. For example, as an incentive to comply with desegregation orders, the federal government provided local school districts money to fulfill their legal obligations, while also promoting educational programs to assist underprivileged students. With the No Child Left Behind Act being effective in 2001, high-stakes testing and teacher accountability were incentivized across the nation.

Teacher evaluation continues to be a major tenet of the educational-reform movement. The federal Race to the Top Initiative has spurred development and implementation of new teacher evaluation systems as a key lever for improving school effectiveness and raising student achievement (Master, 2013). Described by Sabol (2013) as a “seismic shift in the educational landscape” (p.13), student assessment results have become a central indicator of learning, and their inclusion in many teacher evaluation tools is common.

Doherty and Jacob (2013) noted that 48 states have implemented varying levels of evaluation systems, with 45 of those states requiring formal observations as an evaluative tool. They reveal two main approaches to teacher evaluation reform: value-added measures and standards-based evaluations. Value-added models attempt to estimate a teacher’s contribution to student test-score growth. In contrast, standards-based evaluations take into account rigorous and data-driven classroom observations in which evaluators assess a teacher’s practice relative to explicit and well-defined district standards.

Papay (2014) argues that the value-added model has many limitations, causing a negative effect on teacher evaluation. With standardized testing in place in most states, fewer than one in three teachers work in a grade or subject area that supports value-added analysis as state assessments typically only include English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. While the val-
ue-added model offers hard data, standards-based evaluations can be more objective, as the evaluator bases conclusions in a qualitative fashion. Standards range from student achievement to professional responsibilities.

One study found that standards-based evaluations helped teachers become more reflective and focused on their teaching (Montecinos et al., 2010). They found that the use of standards-based performance indicators and rubrics made “the process transparent and allow faculty to develop a common understanding of what quality teaching means” (p. 287). If a teacher did not meet a standard, the rubric clearly showed steps towards improvement in a self-directed fashion to meet the standard in the next evaluation cycle. To further support standards-based evaluations, Master (2014) found in a study that teachers valued an administrator’s holistic judgment because these statements can capture aspects of job performance, such as teaching to diverse learners, that may be missed by more evaluation instruments.

Teachers need to feel motivated if they are going to “buy-in” to teacher evaluation. Firestone (2014) argues that if teacher evaluation is going to be effective, teachers need to feel motivation based on intrinsic factors rather than external motivation (such as based on pay and prestige). Conducting research on motivation theory related specifically to teachers, Firestone determined several key school-based elements necessary to intrinsically motivate teachers to see evaluation as a tool in their professional growth, such as providing teachers with useful feedback.

The new mandated teacher evaluation tool in Massachusetts is teacher-centered as it relies on educators to create a portfolio of work showing proficiency in a set of standards as well as individual goals. However, Thompson (2014) studied teachers’ perceived professional growth as a result of Massachusetts’ new teacher evaluation system in three early adopter districts. He found that the new evaluation process had veteran teachers perceiving less professional growth than novice teachers. He concluded that the results of the study in early adopter schools showed that the impact of educator evaluation as perceived by teachers was rather mixed.

**Methodology**

This was a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive study, using a descriptive survey as an instrument to attain data. This study was intended to examine the effect of state-mandated educator evaluation on teacher perceptions of professional growth.

**Setting**

The setting for this study included six high schools in suburbs south of Boston, Massachusetts. The schools shared similar homogeneous demographics and community socio-economic status. Each school was located in a community that was predominately middle to upper-middle class and largely Caucasian. The median income of the six school districts was $97,000, and the average ethnic make-up was 93% Caucasian. The six schools totaled a possible respondent pool of
723 teachers. School A had a total teacher population of 109. School B had a teacher population of 132. School C had a total teacher population of 132. School D had a total teacher population of 60. School E had a total teacher population of 153. School F had a total teacher population of 136. The researcher anticipated a response rate of 35%.

Participants

Respondents included teachers holding a valid teaching license in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and who worked currently under each district’s teacher collective bargaining agreement. This included educators who taught core subjects such as mathematics, ELA, history, science, and foreign languages. This also included special education teachers, physical education teachers, and those who taught specialties such as business, art, and industrial technology courses. The participants had a varied amount of teaching experience.

Instrumentation

This survey was created by the researcher (see Appendix) and distributed using Google Forms, incorporating elements of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system and the research questions. The variables, which addressed the research questions, included elements of quality teaching, curriculum, planning, and assessment. Further variables were created, incorporating elements of goal setting and usefulness of the state’s teacher rubric. The survey instrument was reviewed by each school administrator prior to agreement to participate in this study.

Page one of the Google Forms document sent to possible respondents contained an explanation of the study and an introduction thanking participants for taking the time to respond to the survey. Page two of the survey contained questions regarding demographic information such as school, years of teaching service, and current evaluation rating. Page three contained questions that aligned with the research questions. Respondents were instructed to use a Likert Scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4) to respond to these questions. An optional comment box was also available for respondents to leave feedback and general comments.

Procedure

The first step taken to implement the study was to recruit principals from schools in the Boston suburbs who shared similar homogenous demographics. The researcher sent e-mails, called schools, mailed information packets, and utilized contacts from a list of 27 prospective schools, of which 6 principals agreed to allow their staff to participate in the study.

Google Forms, a web-based survey software, was used as a method to distribute the survey in mid-September 2016 as the principals of each participating high school were sent an e-mail that contained information about the study, the researcher, and a link to the Google Forms online survey. This e-mail also contained information ensuring that teachers were aware that the survey was anonymous and completely optional. The survey was then forwarded to each respective school’s staff. Respondents had two weeks to complete
the online survey before submissions were no longer accepted.

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis of data. The data from the completed surveys were coded and entered into SPSS in October 2016. The researcher analyzed Mean data, standard deviation, and independent samples t-Tests for several months to determine statistically significant findings.

Findings

There were 173 total respondents in this study, with a response rate of 24%. Demographically the following profile emerged from six participating high schools. Thirty-one percent of the respondents taught at School A, fifteen percent at School B, eleven percent at School C, eight percent at School D, twenty-seven at School E, and thirty-three at School F. Eleven percent of the teachers taught mathematics, fifteen percent science, eighteen percent social studies, sixteen percent ELA, eight percent a foreign language, thirteen percent in special education, and the remaining twenty percent responded to the option “other”. This category included business, media production, art, physical education, and industrial arts. Sixty-six percent of the respondents were female, and thirty-four percent were male.

Educators are evaluated by school administration. Twenty-three percent were evaluated by their principal, forty-two percent by an assistant principal, thirty percent by their department head, and the remaining five percent responded with the “other” option. Those answering “other” noted “district superintendent”, “it changes annually”, and “any of the above”.

The respondents were well educated and had a great deal of experience in the field of education. Thirteen percent earned only a Bachelor’s Degree, sixty-four percent earned one Master’s Degree, eleven percent earned more than one Master’s Degree, nine percent earned a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS), and three percent earned a Ph.D. Twelve percent of respondents had been teaching between one-five years, twenty-one percent had been teaching between six-ten years, twenty-two percent had been teaching between eleven-fifteen years, and the remaining forty-five percent had more than sixteen years teaching experience. Sixty-eight percent stated they took on professional responsibilities outside of teaching such as coaching a sport and/or advising a club, while thirty-four percent did not.

Further demographics data included 86% of teachers having earned professional status in their district, while 14% did not. Underscoring their high level of experience, 82% of the teachers were on a two-year, self-directed growth plan that is reserved for those with both professional status and three or more years teaching experience in a particular school. Eighteen percent were on a one-year, self-directed growth plan that is reserved for newer teachers. Using the state and/or their district evaluation ratings, 84% earned a rating of proficient, and 16% were rated as exemplary. None of the teachers currently held a rating of unsatisfactory or needs improvement. Regarding evaluation ratings, 68%
of the teachers felt that evaluators should have the option to rate them between these rating levels, while 32% felt the current rating system was fair as it is.

Teachers were asked if they had experience with other evaluation systems in the past, and if the new evaluation system offered a marked improvement from previous systems of educator evaluation. Only 13% of respondents had experience only with this system, indicating they are new to the field of education. As 87% of respondents had 6 or more years of experience, they had undoubtedly had experience with other evaluation systems in the past. However, only 17% of respondents stated this new system was an improvement from previous systems, while 47% stated it was not better, and 23% were not sure.

By and large, teachers did not perceive that they were gaining professional growth as a result of the new evaluation system. One of the more straightforward items in the survey inquired about teacher perceptions of receiving professional growth as a result of the new educator evaluation system. The scale of responses was: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4). Teachers did not feel that the educator evaluation system helped them in their professional growth (n=173, M=2.11, SD=.75).

Furthermore, Mean data illustrate that respondents were neutral to the statement that the evaluation system caused change to their professional practice (n=173, M=2.54, SD=.75). For many variables, teacher responses about the growth they experienced as a result of the evaluation rubric produced a Mean of less than 2.50, except where otherwise distinguished.

There were no noteworthy statistically significant differences in any of the dependent variables when assessed by the independent variables of gender, school size, professional status, and whether a teacher advised an after-school club or coached a sport. Analyses conducted for the six individual schools and by department-subject produced mixed results.

The first research question examined “the extent that the teacher evaluation rubric was reflective of quality teaching”. In responding to the statement that “the teacher rubric is a comprehensive guide of the traits of effective teaching”, there was more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with the teacher rubric (n=173, M=2.38, SD=.82). However, respondents in schools that used the state’s model rubric perceived it more poorly (n=70, M=2.31, SD=.88) than those in schools that had created their own adapted rubric (n=50, M=2.50, SD=.76).

The second research question focused on “the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of professional growth regarding curriculum”. Respondents tended toward disagreement that educator evaluation caused changes to the delivery of their curriculum (n=173, M=2.31, SD=.76).

The third research question investigated “the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of professional growth
regarding planning”. The full sample of respondents (n=173), in treating these dependent variables individually, were toward disagreement: “I find myself collaborating with colleagues more since the implementation of the new evaluation system” (M=2.19, SD=.73); “Since implementing the new evaluation system, I have created more rigorous standards-based units” (M=2.30, SD=.68); “I find myself making more creative lessons since the new evaluation system was implemented” (M=2.01, SD=.69); and “The new evaluation system has caused me to think deeper about my lesson planning” (M=2.05, SD=.80).

The fourth research question evaluated “the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of professional growth regarding assessment”. Respondents were asked if the new evaluation system had caused them to evaluate student data more than they had in the past, to which they tended toward disagreement (n=173, M=2.30, SD=.79). Furthermore, respondents disagreed that they were creating more non-traditional assessments to earn a proficient evaluation rating (n=173, M=2.15, SD=.73). Finally, teachers did not feel the evaluation system caused them to rethink the way they assess students (n=173, M=2.13, SD=.76).

The fifth research question concerned “the relationship between the state-mandated evaluation process and teacher perceptions of professional growth regarding setting goals”. The Mean for these two dependent variables was contradictory: while teachers did give thought to their goals (n=173, M=2.77, SD=.78), they did not feel that this step helped them to focus on improving their practice (n=172, M=2.32, SD=.75).

Embedded in the survey instrument were additional questions about respondents’ general experience with the evaluation system not connected to the primary research questions of the study but still worthy of consideration. These variables contributed to understanding the general effect of the Educator Evaluation System on teacher perceptions of professional growth.

Self-reflection is a critically assumed goal of the Educator Evaluation System in Massachusetts. As such, a successful evaluation system is expected to cause educators to be more reflective about their teaching practice. However, when asked if they have become more reflective as a result of the evaluation system and process, teachers responded toward disagreement (n=173, M=2.28, SD=.76). Furthermore, respondents were barely neutral that reflection led them to consider their teaching practice (n=173, M=2.40, SD=.75).

While there appears to be a general dissatisfaction with this evaluation system, total years of experience in education generated many significant differences among teachers in their response to the evaluation system. Those with 1-5 years of teaching experience (n=21) appeared to gain professional growth from the system. For example, regarding the effectiveness of the teacher rubric, a statistical difference resulted in the comparison of new teachers, those who have between 1-5 years experience (n=21, M=2.76, SD=.77) and those with slightly more experience, 6-10 years (n=36,
M=2.25, SD=.87). A t-Test comparing these groups on this variable produced a statistically significant difference (t=.09, p<.03).

The only demographic group that felt the goal-setting process tended to help improvement in teaching were those with 1-5 years experience (n=27, M=2.71, SD=.78). A comparison with those who have 6-10 years of experience (n=40, M=2.30, SD=.79) on this variable resulted in a moderate difference (t=1.89, p<.05). Those with 1-5 years were then compared to those who had 11-15 years experience (n=32, M=2.32, SD=.66). Between these two groups there was also a moderate difference (t=2.07, p<.04). Finally, when the least experienced teachers were compared on this variable of whether the evaluation system produced improvement in teaching with those who had 16 or more years experience (n=79, M=2.23, SD=.75), the results indicated a strong statistical difference (t=2.58, p<.01).

The researcher transformed the variables of years teaching into two new variables: 1-5 years teaching experience and 6 and more years for the variable “I feel I have received professional growth as a result of the new Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system”. Respondents who had been teaching 1-5 years were neutral about their professional growth due to the educator evaluation system (n=21, M=2.57, SD=.68). This was compared to the disagreement of those with more than 6 years experience (n=152, M=2.22, SD=.76) about whether the evaluation system produced professional growth. A t-Test comparing the Mean of the newer teachers with this combined group of more experienced teachers about perceptions of professional growth produced a strong statistically significant difference (t=.82, p<.00).

Respondents with 1-5 years of experience found reflection to occur as a result of the evaluation process (n=21, M=2.76, SD=.70), while those with 6 or more years of experience did not (n=152, M=2.21, SD=.75). Comparing years of teaching experience produced strong statistically significant results on this variable (t=3.12, p<.00).

Teachers with only a Bachelor’s Degree (n=22, M=2.59, SD=.80) were slightly greater than neutral when asked if the evaluation system assisted in changes to their delivery of curriculum. Those with a Master’s Degree were close to disagreement responding to this variable (n=112, M=2.22, SD=.76). A t-Test comparing teachers with these two levels of education and their perceptions that the evaluation system effected changes in their delivery of the curriculum resulted in a statistically significant difference (t=2.36, p<.01).

Further analysis of teachers with less experience utilized a comparison by educational level in the perception of growth as a result of educator evaluation. Those with only a Bachelor’s Degree (n=22, M=2.63, SD=.79) were compared to the transformed demographic those with a Master’s Degree or higher (n=151, M=2.32, SD=.74) on this variable of whether they have become more reflective as a result of the evaluation system. A t-Test comparing these Means resulted in a statistically significant difference (t=2.36, p<.01).
Comparisons of teachers with experience with other evaluation systems against teachers with experience only with the new system produced some significant findings. Respondents with only experience with the new system were generally neutral that it impacted their professional growth (n=23, M=2.43, SD=.73). However, those who had experience with other systems reported strong disagreement that the new system is better than previous evaluation methods (n=150, M=2.00, SD=.75), producing statistically significant results (t=2.20, p<.00).

Regarding the degree to which the self-reflection process as connected to evaluations was causing teachers to consider their teaching practice, it appears that those who had only experience with the new system were generally neutral to the statement (n=23, M=2.60, SD=.84). However, individuals with experience with other systems, and did not feel the new one was better, reported that the evaluation system was not causing them to make changes in their teaching practice (n=150, M=2.09, SD=.73), displaying statistically significant results (t=5.50, p<.00).

The role of the teacher’s primary evaluator was also addressed. When considering the new style of mini-observations conducted by evaluators, respondents tended to agree that they preferred them more than traditional, full-period observations (n=173, M=2.68, SD=.84). Concerning the usefulness of formative meetings, respondents were neutral that these sessions were important to their professional growth (n=173, M=2.46, SD=.83). An identical result was found in the teacher evaluation of whether summative meetings were important to their professional growth (n=173, M=2.46, SD=.84).

Those teachers whose primary evaluator was a department head found the value in terms of professional growth very low, that is greater disagreement to the variable “I feel I have received professional growth as a result of the new Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system” (n=51, M=1.94, SD=.76). However, teachers appeared to perceive the educator evaluation process less poorly in terms of the professional growth experienced when their primary evaluator was the school’s principal (n=40, M=2.37, SD=.74) than when the primary evaluator was an assistant principal (n=72, M=2.04, SD=.72). It is important to note that each demographic group had a mean less than 2.50, indicating a tendency toward, and, in two cases, outright disagreement that the evaluation system had caused them to perceive professional growth.

When teachers whose primary evaluator was a principal were compared to those who primary evaluator was an assistant principal, there was a statistically significant difference (t=2.32, p<.02). Furthermore, when teachers whose primary evaluator was a principal were compared to those whose primary evaluator was a department head an even greater statistically significant difference was found (t=2.73, p<.00).

All the respondents in this study were rated as either exemplary (n=28) or proficient (n=145) teachers. Principally, respondents rated as “exemplary” per-
ceived the evaluation system somewhat favorably compared to those who earned a “proficient” rating. Those who were rated “exemplary” viewed at a level of stronger agreement (n=28, M=2.57, SD=.69) than those who were rated “proficient” (n=145, M=2.25, SD=.80) regarding the variable of teachers using assessment data to drive instruction. A t-Test comparing groups on this variable resulted in a moderate statistically significant difference (t=2.38, p<.01).

A teacher’s most recent evaluation rating also had a perceived impact on changes to teaching methods. Those who were rated “exemplary” (n=28, M=2.60, SD=.57) perceived more changes to their instructional methods than individuals who were rated “proficient” (n=145, M=2.20, SD=.72). A t-Test found very strong significant results (t=2.81, p<.00).

Additionally, those teachers rated as “exemplary” did not see educator evaluation as a necessary evil (n=28, M=2.35, SD=.83), while those whose evaluation rating was “proficient” did (n=145, M=2.73, SD=.75). A comparison of the two groups on this dependent variable showed a statistically significant difference (t=2.38, p<.01).

**Conclusion**

Most respondents in this study had many years of teaching experience, took on after-school activities, worked toward advanced degrees, and had professional status in their schools all to earn high teacher ratings. In other words, it is reasonable to state that this group of teachers were veteran, professional, and valued by their school community. Inferences and conclusions about the degree of the connection between the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system and process, and how the teachers conducted their professional lives are provisional but also shed some light about how worthwhile this initiative is five years into its existence.

The data in this study strongly suggest that the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system has not affected positive change in most educators’ professional growth in any significant way. Teachers responded negatively when asked directly if they felt the new evaluation system caused them to experience professional growth. Respondents felt similarly when asked if their evaluation caused any changes to their professional practice. Consequently, the teacher response of this sample became a matter of how displeased teachers expressed themselves as being with the new system, than the degree of how much growth they were experiencing because of it.

There were areas in this study where significant differences were expected at the outset of the study, but do not appear to be confirmed by the evidence. First, there were no differences by gender; both male and female teachers held negative views of educator evaluations’ impact on their professional growth. Also, though it was thought possibly otherwise, there was no difference comparing respondents who were involved in after-school activities, and those who were not. It might logically be presumed that educators who dedicated time to advise clubs or coach sports might be more invested in their professional practice. Howev-
er, both groups reported little or no impact because of state-mandated evaluation.

In analyzing the data pertaining to the first research question about the efficacy of the teacher rubric, there appears to be no significant connection between aspects of the teacher rubric such as curriculum, planning, assessment, and goals with increased professional growth in most educators. Generally, respondents felt more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with the rubric.

While the teacher rubric was created by the state, districts had the option to use the state’s rubric as a model to fashion their own. Data in this study suggest that teachers who used the state’s rubric had slightly more dissatisfaction than districts that created their own. This conceivably can be attributed to the state rubric not being particularly user-friendly and being cumbersome to read. Districts that utilized the option to create their own rubric considered teachers as stakeholders in the development process. Districts tended to know their teachers better than the state does and could tailor the rubric to address their needs.

Regarding the researcher’s questions concerning educator evaluations’ effect on planning, curriculum, and assessment, educators throughout this study appeared not to feel any more reflective in their practice as a result of the evaluation process, but this does not mean reflection is not occurring. Reflection is a hallmark of the educator evaluation system in Massachusetts and is a term that is used frequently throughout the teacher rubric. Thus, the evaluation system does not appear to be assisting in this aspect of professional growth in this sample of teachers.

Respondents in this study appeared more receptive to their evaluator being higher-level administrators, mainly principals, but even assistant principals, than department heads. It can be reasoned that this is due to the weight of a school leader having direct discussions, particularly with newer educators. Respondents were asked if they perceived professional growth due to educator evaluation, and those whose primary evaluator was the principal provided the most favorable results compared to those whose evaluators were assistant principals and department heads. The data clearly show that educators care about their evaluation, so perhaps being evaluated by a principal is a way for teachers to show their principal they are doing a “good job”.

However, many variables related to the primary evaluator still showed a negative view of teacher evaluation and were neutral to the impact of formative and summative meetings on their professional growth. Juxtaposed to teachers caring about their evaluation, they appeared to resent having to prove that they are good teachers to their evaluators, particularly the group of those who have been teaching more than 16 years. It is reasonable to conclude that many experienced teachers felt they had the least to learn through evaluation because they were self-motivated and skilled enough to change their teaching practices if they feel it was needed.

As noted previously, the teachers in this study
were all rated “proficient” and “highly effective”, yet there were significant differences when comparing teachers with these two evaluation ratings. The data show that respondents who earned an “exemplary rating” used assessment data to develop instruction and perceived changes to their teaching methods and did not see educator evaluation as a necessary evil. This perhaps indicates that those who earned an “exemplary” rating do in fact work the hardest to embrace the evaluation process.

The findings appear to indicate years of experience and highest degree earned were a major influence on perceptions of professional growth due to educator evaluation. The data reliably indicate that teachers with 1-5 years of experience and holding only a Bachelor’s Degree (though the smallest group demographically, n=21) were the only group to report that they gained professional growth from the evaluation process. This group had generally favorable views of the teacher rubric and of the impact on their evaluation of curriculum, planning and assessment.

This perception likely resulted from the possibility that those with less experience in education benefitted from feedback and perhaps were more prone to learn from their mistakes. Several newer teachers commented that they benefitted from having conversations with their evaluators. As teachers created their own evidence to show they had met evaluation standards, this may have benefitted new teachers as it caused them to reflect on their own practice.

While newer teachers appeared to benefit to the largest degree compared to their peers from the evaluation system, most respondents, especially those with six or more years’ experience, had strong disagreement that they gained growth from this process. This corroborates results found in a similar study by Thompson (2014) in Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system early-adopter districts. This group had experience with other systems in the past, and while the Massachusetts system reflected modern trends in educator evaluation, they did not feel it was an improvement over what they had previously experienced. Comments by respondents suggest beliefs that they already did their jobs the best they could, and that they resented a message sent from the state that they were “guilty until proven innocent”, meaning they inferred that the evaluation process made the assumption that they were not doing their job, and they needed to prove that they were. Furthermore, those with experience with other evaluation systems had seen past methods of evaluation come and go. Therefore, it is reasonable to state that they felt this new system will not have any longevity.

It may benefit educational leaders to consider how teacher evaluation is packaged prior to it being implemented. While school leaders cannot change what is handed to them by the state, they can shape the way it is implemented in their school. The data indicate, and respondent comments confirm that this group of educators felt this system is cumbersome and time-consuming. Respondents noted that the time they spend being observed by and having discussions with their evaluator was not worth the time it took to put together evaluation materials. Educational leaders can benefit by offering
additional professional development on aspects of the Educator Evaluation system to show further investment in their staff’s professional growth.

Furthermore, this study provided insights about who may gain the most from educator evaluation. Newer teachers perceived the most growth as they may be most receptive to the structured encouragement and engagement in reflection and discussion about teaching. For this group, it is thus important that their primary evaluators should be school principals.

Finally, this study indicated that veteran teachers, i.e., individuals with six or more years’ experience, did not perceive that they experienced professional growth as a result of participation in the Educator Evaluation system. These individuals had advanced degrees, experience with other evaluation systems, and possessed years of experience to guide their teaching. The state should strongly consider decreasing the frequency, or possibly for the most experienced, waiving the evaluation process altogether for these veteran teachers. There may be other creative ways in which the experience and expertise of these more veteran teachers can serve as models for novice teachers to grow, rather than forcing veteran teachers to prove and reprove their value in a school building.

References


Thompson, D. (2014). Teachers’ perceptions of the new Massachusetts teacher evaluation instrument and process on instructional practice (Doctoral Disser-
About the Author

Craig Goldberg began his teaching career for the New York City Department of Education after receiving a Bachelor’s Degree from St. Joseph’s College in Patchogue, NY and a Master’s Degree at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He graduated from Bridgewater State University in May 2017, having earned a C.A.G.S. in Educational Leadership. This research was completed under the mentorship of Dr. Stephen J. Nelson during the 2016-2017 academic year. He is currently a history teacher at Oliver Ames High School in Easton, Massachusetts. He lives in Easton, Massachusetts with his wife, Meredith; daughter, Madison; and son, Declan.
Appendix

Massachusetts Educator Evaluation System Survey

Instructions: Thank you for volunteering to respond to this 10-minute survey about the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system. Although you may not personally benefit, this study is important because teacher feedback is essential to the success of any educator evaluation system. There are no foreseeable risks, your responses are anonymous (this form will NOT automatically collect your email address), and you may refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from this survey at any time.

Please respond to one answer for each of the following questions regarding your experience with the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Craig Goldberg (C.A.G.S. in Education Leadership Student and Graduate Research Assistant) at cgoldberg@student.bridgew.edu. Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Please click “continue” to begin.

Part 1: Please answer the following questions. When you are done, click “continue” at the bottom of the page to go on to the next set of questions.

1. Which of the following schools do you currently teach at?
   - School A
   - School B
   - School C
   - School D
   - School E
   - School F

2. Of which department are you a member?
   - Math
   - Science
   - Social Studies
   - English
   - Special Education
   - Foreign Language
   - Other (please specify):

3. What is the student population of your building?
   - Under 1000-1250
   - 1251-1500
   - 1501-1700
   - 1701 or more

4. How many years have you been a teacher (please include experience at other schools, if applicable)?
   - 1-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16 or more
5. What is your highest degree earned?
   - Bachelor’s
   - Master’s
   - More than 1 Master’s
   - CAGS
   - Ph.D.

6. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

7. Did school and/or district administration invest professional development time to explain to staff the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Other:

8. Are you an adviser to an after-school club or coach a sport at your school?
   - Yes
   - No

9. For teachers who have been evaluated using different models in the past, do you feel the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system is an improvement from previous methods of evaluation?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Unsure
   - I only have experience with the current Educator Evaluation system

10. Who is your primary evaluator?
    - A Principal
    - An Assistant Principal
    - A Department Head
    - Other:

11. The educator plan I am currently on is
    - 1 Year, Self-Directed Growth
    - 2 Year, Self-Directed Growth
    - Directed Growth Plan (up to one year)
    - Improvement Plan (30 days to one year)
12. Based on your most recent evaluation, what rating were you assigned by your evaluator?
   Exemplary
   Proficient
   Needs Improvement
   Unsatisfactory

13. Do you feel evaluators should have the ability to rate educators between rating levels (ex: between “proficient” and “exemplary”)?
   Yes
   No

14. Have you earned Professional Status as an educator in your district?
   Yes
   No

15. Are you required to set a professional practice and student learning goal at the beginning of each evaluation cycle?
   Yes, I am required to set both goals
   I am required to set a Professional Practice goal only
   I am required to set a Student Learning goal only
   No, I am not required to set either

16. Does your district use a rubric to evaluate educators in your school?
   Yes
   No

17. Does your school use the rubric provided by the state or create its own rubric adapted from the state’s?
   We use the state’s model rubric
   We have our own rubric adapted from the state’s model rubric
   Unsure

18. My district uses District Determined Measures (DDMs) or Common Assessments, and they have an impact on my evaluation.
   Yes
   No
   Unsure
   Other:
Part 2: In this next section, please rate whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with each of the following statements. When you are finished, please click “continue” to go on to the final page.

19. Since the new educator evaluation system was implemented, I find myself evaluating student data to adjust my practice more than I did in the past.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

20. The teacher rubric is a comprehensive guide of the traits of effective teaching.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

21. The new evaluation process has resulted in changes to my teaching methods.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

22. I feel I have received professional growth as a result of the new Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

23. My evaluator was able to gather sufficient evidence to accurately rate my effectiveness as a teacher.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

24. I gave my goals (professional practice and student learning) a lot of thought when considering them.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree
25. The teacher evaluation process has caused me to make changes to the delivery of my curriculum.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

26. I find myself creating more nontraditional assessments to ensure I am proficient in my evaluation.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

27. I have become a more reflective teacher due to the new evaluation system.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

28. I find myself collaborating with colleagues more since the implementation of the new evaluation system.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

29. My curriculum already aligns with “proficient” evaluation; it was not necessary to adapt my delivery of it.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

30. The self-reflection process, as prescribed in the Educator Evaluation model, has caused me to consider my teaching practice.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
31. I find formative meetings with my evaluator important to my professional growth.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

32. Since implementing the new evaluation system, I have created more rigorous standards-based units.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

33. The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system has not caused any change to my professional practice.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

34. I prefer mini-observations as opposed to “traditional” full-period observations.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

35. The new Educator Evaluation system is just another thing I have to do.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

36. Teacher evaluation has caused me to rethink the way I assess students.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

37. The evaluation process has resulted in positive changes in my professional practice.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Agree
   Strongly Agree
38. I find myself making more creative lessons since the new Educator Evaluation system.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

39. I care about my teacher evaluation rating.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

40. The new Educator Evaluation system has caused me to think deeper about my lesson planning.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

41. Teacher evaluation is a necessary evil.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

42. I find summative meetings with my evaluator important to my professional growth.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

43. Setting goals (professional practice and student learning) has helped me focus on improving my teaching practice.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree

44. I take seriously feedback from my evaluator about what they observe in my classroom.  
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Agree  
   Strongly Agree
45. Teacher evaluation has made me create lessons with more measurable outcomes.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

46. I feel that my evaluator has a stake in my professional growth as an educator using the evaluation system.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

47. The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system has been implemented in a way that is fair.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

48. The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system has made me collaborate more with other educators.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

Section 3: After completing this section, please click “submit” to enter your submissions. Thank you.

49. Your answers are completely anonymous, however, if you would like to enter your name in a drawing to win an Amazon gift card, please fill in your name and email below, and you will be contacted if you win. Your name will not be used for any reason other than for the purpose of picking a winner for this raffle.

50. If you have any additional comments about the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system, please leave them in the comment box below. Any and all feedback is appreciated. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to complete this survey!
Determinants of Health Disparities among African and Caucasian Americans with Chronic Kidney Disease, Renal Cell Carcinoma, and End-Stage Renal Disease

KATHLEEN COSGROVE

Introduction

Maladies of the kidneys, such as Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), Renal Cell Carcinoma (RCC), and End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) have been increasingly recognized in the United States as a public health concern and as key determinants of poor health outcomes (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015; Hofmann & Purdue, 2014; Lipworth et al., 2011; Lipworth et al., 2012; McClellan et al., 2006) worldwide (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015; Satko et al., 2007). Incidents of nephrology differ by race and ethnicity. Various nephrology studies, such as the Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) Cohort Study (2006) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Surveillance and Epidemiology End Results (SEER) Cancer Statistics Review, provide evidence of the disparity that African American patients have an increased prevalence of severely impaired kidney function compared to Caucasian American patients.

According to the Mayo Clinic (2017), CKD describes the gradual loss of kidney function. The kidneys filter wastes and excess fluids from the blood, which are then excreted in the urine. When CKD reaches an advanced stage, dangerous levels of fluid, electrolytes, and wastes can build up in the body and cause further damage. CKD may not become symptomatic until kidney function is significantly impaired. Treatment focuses on slowing the progression of the kidney damage, usually by controlling the underlying cause. Gradual progression of CKD to end-stage kidney failure is fatal without dialysis or a kidney transplant (Mayo Clinic, 2017).

Renal disease is a slow-moving, progressive, and irreversible condition that is measured in five stages based on the patient’s level of glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), the filtering capacity of the kidneys to clean the blood, take out waste, and manufacture urine. eGFR measures kidney function using a formula that includes a person’s age, gender, race, and serum creatinine levels. Creatinine is a chemical waste molecule generated from muscle metabolism (Hofmann et
eGFR under 60 milliliters (mL) may indicate kidney disease, while an eGFR of 15-29 requires dialysis or a kidney transplant to sustain life. Inevitably, CKD will result in a fatal prognosis of end-stage kidney failure. Diabetes and hypertension are two of the most determinant factors of end-stage renal disease (ESRD) in the United States, which most often develops during the fifth stage, following a CKD diagnosis (Hofmann et al., 2015; Mayo Clinic, 2017).

WebMD (2017) outlines how the five stages of CKD are determined by eGFR calculation. Stage 1, kidney damage with a normal or high eGFR of 90 or above requires monitoring by an urologist. Diagnosis and treatment of comorbid conditions slow disease progression and reduce cardiovascular risk. Stage 2, kidney damage with mildly low eGFR of 60-89, an estimate of disease progression is determined by an urologist. Comorbidities such as diabetes and high blood pressure are managed. Stage 3, kidney damage with moderately low eGFR of 30-59, evaluation and treatment of complications such as anemia and bone disease begin. Stage 4, kidney damage with severely low eGFR of 15-29, signals preparation for treating kidney failure, including, kidney replacement therapy. A nephrologist is consulted. Stage 5, kidney failure with a critically low eGFR of 15 or less requires dialysis, or, if the patient chooses, palliative care. Kidney replacement is the recommended procedure to sustain life, if uremia or renal waste is present in the blood (WebMD, 2017).

RCC is the most common type of kidney cancer in adults and occurs most often in men, ages 50 to 70 years old. The U. S. National Library of Medicine (2017) defines RCC as a type of kidney cancer that starts in the lining of very small tubes (tubules) in the kidney. The U.S. National Cancer Institute SEER review diagnosed more than 65,000 cancers of the kidney and renal pelvis in 2013, with 13,680 estimated deaths. New cases in 2017 total 63,990, while projected deaths estimate 14,400 (NCI SEER, 2017).

Incidents of small renal masses (SRMs) increase approximately 2% per year. Twenty-five percent of SRMs are benign. Treatment protocols to preserve kidney function have produced excellent oncologic results for tumor patients. Generally, elective partial nephrectomy (PN) for SRMs is the first-line medical approach. Surgically treated renal tumors less than 4 centimeters (cm) carry an excellent prognosis, <90% of a ten-year, recurrence-free survival rate. RCC tumors treated surgically exceed the 5-year survival rate by 95% in most studies (Blecher & Challancombe, 2016; Chang, Finelli, Berns, & Rosner, 2014; Shuch, Bratslavsky, Linehan, & Srinivasan, 2012; Yap, Finelli, Urbach, Tomlinson, & Alibha, 2014).

A less invasive, outpatient procedure, percutaneous probe ablation or cryotherapy is used to treat RCC patients with tumors >3cm. A surgical syringe filled with extremely cold liquid is inserted through the skin to freeze and obliterate targeted tumors and abnormal cells, while preserving the surrounding tissue. Success rates are inferior to PN; nonetheless, consid-
ered acceptable at <90% recurrence-free rate for some populations. Diagnostic rates of kidney tumor biopsies are <80% with a very low complication rate of <5% and a benign histology of 25%. Subsequently, the practice to biopsy lesions before treatment and repeat the process after a non-diagnostic biopsy is 80% successful. Concordance rates comparing biopsy results and surgical pathology approach 100% results for SRMs (Blecher & Challancombe, 2016; Chang et al., 2014; Yap et al., 2014).

ESRD is defined by the U. S. National Library of Medicine (2017) as the last stage of chronic kidney disease, when the kidneys can no longer support the body’s needs. ESRD occurs when the kidneys malfunction and lose the ability to remove waste and excess water from the body. As a result, the kidneys are no longer able to maintain functionality at a level needed to sustain life day-to-day. Diabetes and hypertension are conditions that distress the kidneys and are two of the most common determinant factors of ESRD in the United States. ESRD predominantly develops after CKD. Cessation of kidney function happens over a course of 10 to 20 years before end-stage disease results (NLM NIH, 2017).

Epidemiology of CKD Disparity

The research of Garcia-Garcia and Jha (2015) explores how poverty negatively influences healthy behaviors, limits healthcare access, and minimizes environmental exposure to health information. The poor are more susceptible to disease due to high-risk community environments and social disadvantages, such as the lack of access to goods and services, minimal exposure to clean water and sanitation, insufficient nutrition, and limited information about prevention and safety. Roadblocks to accessing adequate healthcare impede urban and rural impoverished communities and embody a shortage of regional medical facilities, fewer doctors and specialists, and lack of accessible transportation. Although the United States is a prominently developed country, the poor and ethnic minorities, predominantly African Americans, suffer from higher incidents of ESRD (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015).

Data from the REGARDS Cohort Study reveal that in the United States, ethnic minorities most prevalently, African Americans, have the highest incident rates of ESRD. The racial disparity gap was 3.8, in contrast to Caucasian American patients, who, in 2000, accounted for 64% of the ESRD incident population and 77% of the overall U.S. population of ESRD cases. Age-adjusted ESRD rates in 2000 indicate 982 people per million among African Americans and 256 people per million among Caucasian American individuals with the disease (McClellen et al., 2006).

Correlation between low birth weight (LBW) and CKD, due to nutritional factors and kidney disease, has been described as notable in poor African Americans and Caucasian Americans living in southeastern regions of the USA, such as Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, and the like. Similarly, findings revealed a southeast Native cohort with LBW and early malnutrition was associated with later development of metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and di-
abetic nephropathy. A high prevalence of proteinuria, elevated blood pressure, and CKD of unknown etiology was discovered (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015).

Lipworth and colleagues (2012) report that the disparity gap between Caucasian and African Americans affected by CKD continues to grow. Still, the causal circumstance responsible for the increasing prevalence of severely impaired kidney function among African American patients remains undetermined. Consistent factors associated with increased renal cell cancer risk in epidemiologic studies are obesity, hypertension, and cigarette smoking and account for less than half of cancers among Caucasian Americans. Due to enigmatic differences in incidence and mortality trends, African Americans are represented as the population at the highest risk (Lipworth et al., 2012).

Risk factors for ESRD are categorized by low income males with an annual salary below $15,000.00 per year; minimal education; smoking; a history of diabetes and hypertension; and a history of myocardial infarction (MI/CABG), obesity, and high cholesterol. The risk of developing ESRD among African Americans vs. Caucasian Americans decreases after adjustments are made to the factors (Lipworth et al., 2012).

Cancer in itself is a complex topic; wherefore, a striking pattern of racial differences exists for CKD. An observed disparity in ESRD incidence between African Americans and Caucasian Americans may have occurred, in part, due to racial differences in the rate of progression of CDK to ESRD. In a San Francisco Community Health Network population study, African Americans with stages 3 to 5 had a four-fold higher risk of progression to ESRD than Caucasian Americans after adjustment for socioeconomic status. Early stage CKD is deemed higher among Caucasian Americans compared with African Americans. This analysis is based on eGFR, the glomerular filtration rate, or how fast the kidneys are filtering blood and removing excess wastes and fluids. Results show the Caucasian American excess for mild CKD gives way to an excess for moderate to severe CKD in African Americans (Lipworth et al., 2012).

Perhaps, pattern changes in the progression of CKD may be due to lower mortality at higher eGFR levels among African Americans. Nonetheless, empirical evidence demonstrates death rates of African Americans are higher at all levels of CKD prior to ESRD. Rates of ESRD incidence are five times higher than rates of cardiovascular deaths among African Americans with hypertension. African Americans remain at risk for faster transitions to moderate and advanced CKD and eventually ESRD (Lipworth et al., 2012).

Access to Medical Treatment

The populations discussed in this paper accessed healthcare primarily from local community healthcare clinics and facilities and hospital emergency rooms. There were some populations in the Hoffman and Purdue (2014) study whose records were surveyed through the Kaiser Permanente Northern California system. The author of one of the articles contributed a note indicating that data collection did not assume that
some of the minority participants may have had a job with appropriate medical benefits. The benefits were determined by the access to testing and other care provisions and access to care data (Hofmann & Purdue, 2014).

Other global populations presented by members of the World Kidney Day Steering Committee, as indicated by Garcia-Garcia & Jha (2015), discussed the key links between poverty and CKD as consequent implications for the prevention of kidney disease and the care of kidney patients in various populations. Compelling evidence shows disadvantaged societies, those from low-resource, racial and minority, ethnic communities, and indigenous and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, suffer from marked increases in the burden of unrecognized and untreated CKD. The same inequity holds true in the United States (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015).

ESRD is the only disease protected by a Medicare mandate and a series of Amendments: (P.L. 92-603) under the Social Security Act passed by the United States Congress in 1972, 1978; (P.L. 95-292) 1981; (P.L. 97-35) 2003; (P.L. 108-275) 2012; ATRA, P.L. 112-240). ESRD requires lifelong dialysis treatment. More commonly, nephrologists prefer to offer patients self-administered home treatment options such as hemodyalisis, a catheter system that is injected primarily in the arm in a localized vein source or inserted in a stint installed in the arm. Peritoneal is a catheter implanted in the abdomen wall. Service is performed daily via machine and provides a 40% decrease in mortality risk (CSM, 2012: Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

A kidney transplant has proven to be the most expensive yet more viably permanent solution to combat CKD; however, according to Gehlert & Brown (2012), Caucasian American males are more likely recipients of a kidney transplant than any other demographic group in the United States. African American ESRD patients are much less likely to be referred, placed on a waiting list, or receive a kidney transplant. The extent of the disparity points to the limited number of African American patients who willingly participate in preventative care, harbor distrust for the medical community, and lack informed knowledge about kidney transplantation and general, medical eligibility (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Recipients are required to partake in an extensive evaluation and be placed on a waiting list if they are unable to identify a living donor. A “paired” donor, or altruistic donor sourced from a support network such as United Network of Organ Sharing, Georgetown University Hospital, may be appropriate. Transplant recipients take immune-suppressants for the life of the kidney to avoid body rejection. If the plan fails, the patient returns to dialysis (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Healthy People 2020

Healthy People 2020 is a federally mandated objective funded in support by an annual block grant program, administered by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. One of the objectives of Healthy People 2020 is to increase the number of persons who
receive kidney transplants (Gehlert & Brown, 2012). Not all patients are medically suitable for transplant surgery due to comorbid health complications such as cardiovascular disease or psychosocial stress resulting from obesity. Patients self-determine treatment preferences (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

**National ESRD Program (NESRD) – Public Law (92-603)**

The national ESRD law passed on October 30, 1972, after significant lobbying by patients, their families, and communities, in response to the rationing of dialysis care. Public Law (92-603) provides coverage of dialysis or kidney transplantation for all ESRD patients through Medicare, regardless of age, and pays expenses for kidney donors and paired donors. ESRD is the only disease category to guarantee eligibility through Medicare, provided the patient or spouse/parent/guardian can prove sufficient work history (CSM, 2012; Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

**Demographics**

Sixty-five plus is the fastest growing population age of ESRD patients. Patients present with more co-morbidities as they age, such as diabetes, hypertension, RCC, renal cancer, CKD, more psychosocial issues, and physical problems. Kidney disease disproportionately affects African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives. Minorities and homeland native recipients are more likely to develop renal failure compared to Caucasian Americans with ESRD incidence. Caucasian Americans usually die of cardiovascular disease before reaching a level of mature ESRD incidence (Gehlert & Brown, 2012; Tarver-Carr et al., 2012; Yap et al., 2014).

Two hundred, seventy-three per million Caucasian Americans vs. nine hundred, ninety-eight African Americans per million; five hundred, eight per million Hispanics; four hundred, ninety-five per million Native Americans; and two hundred, ninety-six per million Asians develop renal disease (Data collected from U.S. Renal Data, 2009). There is a greater prevalence of diabetes and hypertension in minority populations. Sixty percent of dialysis patients experience chronic pain. Sixty-six percent use prescription pain medication (Gehlert & Brown, 2012; Mafolasire et al., 2016).

Comparatively, Caucasian American males with kidney disparity are more likely to receive transplants than any other demographic in the U.S., while African Americans are much less likely to be referred for transplants and are more often placed on a waiting list. Potential reasons are an identified lack of preventative care, patient preference, socioeconomic status, distrust of the medical community, and lack of knowledge about transplantation and related medical conditions. (Gehlert & Brown, 2012; Mafolasire et al., 2016).

The National Cancer Institute SEER program reports approximately 1.6% of men and women will be diagnosed with kidney and renal pelvis cancer in their lifetime. In 2014, there were an estimated 483,225 people in the United States living with kidney and renal pelvis cancer. The number of new cases was estimated at 15.6 per 100,000 men and women per year, with
deaths estimated at 3.9 per 100,000 men and women per year. The percentage of patients surviving 5-years in 2014 was 74.1% (2017).

Cancer survival is estimated by stage at diagnosis. Stage refers to the extent of cancer in the body and determines treatment options. Abnormal cancer cells found in the part of the body where it started is referred to as localized or Stage 1. As cancer metastasizes, the stage is referred to as regional or distant. Kidney and renal pelvis cancers are diagnosed at the local stage 65.2% of the time. The 5-year survival rate for localized kidney and renal pelvis cancer is 92.6% (NCI SEER, 2017).

**Emphasis on Poverty**

Many studies demonstrate the bidirectional relationship between poverty and chronic kidney disease. Patients lacking financial means or adequate insurance coverage become vulnerable and are often burdened with meeting huge, out-of-pocket costs to cover ESRD treatment. The financial strain associated with kidney disease progression impacts patients and their families in ways that can thrust them into circumstances of extreme poverty (Garcia-Garcia & Jha, 2015).

Overall, the poor carry a higher disease burden and limited access to resources for meeting treatment costs. Neighborhood poverty is strongly associated with higher ESRD incidents for both African Americans and Caucasians. Despite the persistent disparity of ESRD across all poverty levels, greater risk exists for African Americans. Subsequently, the possibility exists that African Americans suffer more from lower socioeconomic status than Caucasians (Volkaova et al., 2008).

**Palliative Care/End of Life Issues**

End of life issues and palliative care options are prevalent with ESRD. The life expectancy is 75% lower than similar patients with chronic, life-threatening conditions other than ESRD. Ceasing treatment leads to death. Ninety-six percent of the patients who stop dialysis treatment are deceased within a month (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Sixty percent of patients change their careers or apply for supplemental security income or Social Security Disability insurance (SSI or SSDI) due to ESRD treatment. The disease health maintenance process takes an emotional and financial toll on individuals and families to a level that can potentially leave them destitute (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Patients are recommended to follow a strict diet. Processed foods are not condoned. Foods with high potassium levels lead to heart failure. High phosphorous foods lead to bone disease and calcification of the heart. Kidney patient diets are tough to follow and difficult to uphold (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

**Challenges for Social Workers**

As chronic renal disease slowly progresses to ESRD, clients face significant socio-emotional and lifestyle changes. The intrusiveness of the treatment causes multiple disease-related and treatment-related...
psychological stressors. Clients are faced with a bleak prognosis of planning how long they can expect to live on dialysis, and how treatment will impact their quality of life and that of their families (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Many ESRD patients struggle with psychosocial issues and harbor legitimate, personal concerns. Clients are often coping with debilitating physical pain prior to their death. There are significant psychosocial ramifications for families adjusting and coping with the impact and life-changing finality of the disease. The significance of the psychosocial issues faced by clients and their families requires culturally competent, compassionate, and specialized intervention (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Typically, ESRD patients are referred to a hospital social worker, specializing in nephrology or renal social work. ESRD is the only disease category with a public policy mandate under Medicare, stipulating a Master’s Degree-level social work clinician on health teams. Every dialysis facility and kidney transplant program is required to have a Master’s Degree-level social worker on staff (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

The integral purpose of a hospital social worker is to develop a flexible treatment plan, in collaboration with the client and the treatment team. Options should include coping mechanisms, talk therapy (Dialectic Behavior Therapy [DBT]), cognitive support (Cognitive Behavior Therapy [CBT]), writing therapy, and a safe and comfortable environment for the client to be able to release and shed some of the pain and grief from the losses incurred as the disease transitions. Social workers are advised to be prepared by having a crisis intervention plan at the ready and a Plan B (Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Each ESRD patient is unique and can present with various symptoms, such as impaired sense of taste, diminished appetite, and bone disease. Toxins build up in the blood, causing pain, anemic and uremic episodes, and can lead to symptoms of confusion, lethargy, sleep problems, and residual psychosocial effects. Energy becomes diminished as nutritional status is compromised (Cuppari & Ikizler, 2010; Gehlert & Brown, 2012). Overall quality of life is hindered. Complex medications may be prescribed to counteract symptoms. Reactions to medications are common until the patient’s body adjusts to the dramatic life changes. Palliative care is also inevitable. Kidney disease takes a toll on the entire family and requires that all natural supports are available to help the patient navigate living with disease (Cuppari & Ikizler, 2010; Gehlert & Brown, 2012).

Interventions

Psychosocial issues faced by ESRD patients and their families are significant. Training as a nephrology social worker would be required to understand the intricate and complex needs and the specialized circumstances that challenge clients. Knowledge of public policy would be effective if planning to advocate for legislation to support kidney care issues and to help lower adjunct medical and prescription costs. We live
in transitional times. The only thing we can depend on is change; therefore, staying current on issues and trends in the field reflect a commitment to professional responsibility.

One of the most effective ways social workers can support their clients is by connecting them with accessible and available resources, including Medicare, Medicaid, housing, support groups, medical equipment, day-treatment facilities, and specialized programming. Helping our clients to master themselves and build confidence toward partnership with others is a monumental and honorable task.

In conclusion, in order to best serve our clients, we as social workers, must first be willing to challenge ourselves in a manner that honors the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics. We have a fundamental duty to place the client’s needs first. Being authentic with our clients requires a durability that depends on our commitment to mastering and accepting our own values as social workers.

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About the Author

Kathleen Cosgrove is pursuing her Master of Social Work at Bridgewater State University. Her research article was completed in the summer 2017 for a Medical Social Work class taught by Dr. Barbara Bond. Kathleen plans to work in the medical field as a hospital social worker. She will continue her writing endeavors.
Ceramic Vessel: *Color Binary*

BRENDA ROVEDA
The Effectiveness of Retrospective Miscue Analysis as a Reading Intervention for a Secondary Functional Academics Student

DREW CUMMING

The Student

“Jack” is a ninth-grade functional academics student diagnosed with brachycephalic syndrome, a birth defect that resulted in abnormal development of his skull, as well as deficiencies in his ability to see, hear, and articulate speech sounds. Jack’s oral intelligibility can be challenging for unfamiliar listeners, but his expressive vocabulary is actually very strong for a student his age. In fact, Jack would be the first to tell you—in eloquent language, no less—that the outward effects of his syndrome often cause people to underestimate his abilities.

In addition to special education services for English language arts and mathematics, Jack receives direct support from a speech and language therapist; an occupational therapist; and me, a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI). As his TVI, I am responsible, through direct intervention and through collaboration with Jack’s teachers, for maximizing Jack’s access to the high school curriculum. Since I began working with Jack at the start of his sixth-grade year, Jack’s individualized education plan has mandated that he be given the opportunity to have a text read aloud to him in lieu of reading it himself due to an intellectual disability. (In addition to my work as a TVI, I’ve been completing graduate work over the past three years to become a licensed reading specialist. My interactions with students like Jack—whose reading difficulties can’t be entirely attributed to their visual impairments—strongly influenced my decision to enter into the reading program and broaden my expertise.)

A brief analysis of Jack’s most recent psychoeducational report delineates the vast discrepancy between his reading strengths and challenges. While his overall intellectual functioning score is low, the report warns against generalizing intelligence measures, considering the variability of his subtest scores. For example, Jack scored below the 10th percentile among same-aged peers on fluency and pseudoword-decoding tests but scored above the top 90th percentile on tests of receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension.

Jack’s functional academics teacher Ms. K and other teachers have reported that Jack can often be found staring off into space when given a text to read silently. Jack also freely admits that some topics are of no interest to him. Considering his difficulties with de-
coding and other reading subskills, it can be hard to determine when his reading performance has been disrupted by intellectual challenges or by a lack of motivation, or perhaps a combination of both.

Jack’s stark contrasts in ability provided the impetus for this reading case study and indicated the possible effectiveness of retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) as an intervention for him. (The section that follows, entitled “The Process”, describes the RMA intervention in detail.) Using the Reading Miscue Inventory: From Evaluation to Instruction (RMI) by Goodman, Watson, and Burke (2005) as a guide, I set out in this study to improve Jack’s overall self-concept as a reader, if only to encourage him to read for pleasure as an adult, particularly about the one topic that has always captivated him: zoology. I hypothesized that, when motivated to read high-interest texts about animals and animal behavior aloud, his strengths in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension would afford him the opportunity to analyze audio recordings of his readings and talk about his deficiencies more fluently than someone without those strengths.

Prior to the intervention, I interviewed Jack using The Burke Reading Interview Modified for Older Readers. (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 275) First, I asked him what he does when he’s reading and comes across something that gives him trouble. He said he typically rereads the text and determines whether he missed a word or if he “just used it wrong”. Jack identified his classroom teacher, Ms. K, a special education teacher, as a good reader who he knows. I asked him what makes her a good reader. “She doesn’t mess up on too many sentences”, he said, making reference to her oral readings in class. “And she has a lot of books around, not for class, but for herself.” I asked him if he thinks she ever comes across something that might give her trouble when she’s reading. He figured she probably does, but he wasn’t able to list a specific strategy that she might use to solve the problem. When I asked him what a teacher would do to help a student who was having difficulty reading, he said, “They’d pull out their metaphorical bag of tricks, how to look at the sentence”, but again he was unable to provide examples. For the remainder of the interview, Jack expressed confidence in his reading ability, admitting that he is, however, definitely a better listener than he is a reader. The final interview question from the inventory asks the interviewee to name the most difficult things he has ever had to read. For this question, Jack was a little more forthcoming about his challenges: “When I see a giant paragraph, I just become overwhelmed. It’s like a giant wall that I have to climb. Sometimes I say to myself, ‘Do I really want to do this?’”

In the passage below, the authors of the RMI give a more methodical explanation of the trepidation Jack might feel when he’s asked to “climb” that “giant wall” of text:

Many readers, even proficient readers, tend not to correct if there are too many low-quality miscues clustered in the same phrase or clause. Such a situation results in the reader ‘short-circuiting’; that is the reader produces a structure that he or she does not know how to unravel or does not choose to...
take time to sort out. (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 87)

The Intervention

RMA is a reading strategy lesson that encourages readers to reflect on their own reading process by listening to audio recordings of their readings. Research has indicated that students who participate in RMA become more proficient and confident readers (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005). According to the authors of the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI),

The gap between what students think they should do as readers and what they actually do often causes them to lack confidence in their ability, especially when they come to difficult or unpredictable texts. Discussions about how they read allows them, often for the first time, to realize that what they thought was wrong...is exactly what they should do to construct meaning. (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 205)

When reading aloud, a reader’s observed response doesn’t always correspond to the expected response. This phenomenon is referred to as a “miscue” in the RMI to “avoid the negative connotation of errors...and to avoid the implication that good reading does not include miscues” (Goodman, 1969, p. 13). Through RMA, readers begin to differentiate between high quality miscues (syntactically and semantically acceptable miscues that show that the reader is predicting and making sense of what he or she is reading) and low-quality miscues (miscues that disrupt syntax and meaning).

The Process

All instruction and assessment for this case study took place in a resource room at Jack’s high school. Jack was comfortable with this setting, as he was already being seen there on a weekly basis for direct special education services. I met with Jack for the purpose of this study once a week for 30 to 60 minutes at a time over a four-week period.

All of the texts used for the RMA strategy lessons were taken from issues of Science World by Scholastic, Inc. (2016), a periodical classroom magazine containing science-based news stories that would be challenging for Jack but also of very high interest to him. Below is the RMA procedure I used with Jack:

1. I recorded Jack as he read aloud from a large print version of an unfamiliar text at his instructional level. (Based on an informal assessment of Jack’s reading ability using word lists from the Qualitative Reading Inventory: 5 [Leslie & Caldwell, 2011], Jack’s instructional reading level is grade six.)

2. I asked Jack to complete a reading strategy lesson from the RMI.

3. Without Jack present, I listened to the audio recording of his reading and notated his miscues using a standard coding system. I then transferred the information to a summary sheet for analysis (Figure 1). (Below is an abbreviated version of the summary sheet I used for each session. A comprehensive summary sheet would
4. When Jack returned for another session, we listened to the audio recording from the previous session together, and I asked him to follow along using a line guide and a copy of the text. I stopped the recording periodically to point out miscues, gradually releasing the responsibility of identifying the miscues to Jack as we proceeded from session to session. (At first, I was sure to emphasize miscues that indicated good use of reading strategies to bolster Jack’s self-confidence.)

5. After each playback, I initiated a discussion with Jack about the reading process using some of the guiding questions below:
   - Was the miscue corrected?
   - Does the miscue sound like language?
   - Did the miscue make sense based on what you’ve already read?
   - Why do you think you made this miscue?
   - Did the miscue interfere with your understanding of the text?

Below is a summary of the four RMA strategy lessons.

### Session One

Borrowing from the RMI strategy lesson entitled “Estimate, Read, Respond, Question” (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 217), I asked Jack to look over a question-and-answer dictation of an interview between a *Science World* reporter and an Australian biologist with specialized knowledge of a tiny, colorful spider native to Australia (Romain, 2016). I instructed Jack to scan the entire article, to estimate how far he could read with good comprehension, and to make a check mark at the spot where he would like to stop reading and review his comprehension. The article began with a three-paragraph section introducing the spider and the featured biologist. Jack marked the end of this introductory section as the place where he would like to stop. I then recorded him reading the section. Af-
terward, he was able to adequately summarize what he had read. I then chose to focus on text structure, since it appeared that Jack hadn’t recognized that the remainder of the article used a question-and-answer format. I pointed out that the rest of the article looked different from the introduction. “The print appears to be in a different font”, I said, “and it seems to alternate between highlighted and non-highlighted text”. He still didn’t recognize, or at least wasn’t able to articulate to me, that the remainder of the article represented the transcript of a back-and-forth interview. I told Jack that it’s important to look over the length and format of an article before diving into it. “That way”, I said, “you’ll have a better idea of how to go about reading it. It might even help you decide whether or not you want to read it at all.”

**Session Two**

Without Jack present, I listened to the audio recording of him reading the introduction to the spider article and notated and analyzed his miscues. I determined that Jack made nine uncorrected miscues in all, three of which changed the meaning of the text (low-quality miscues). When Jack returned the next week, I played the audio recording from the previous session and asked him to follow along. I stopped the recording periodically to point out miscues, and we discussed the difference between high-quality and low-quality miscues. Below is an example of a miscue Jack made that didn’t change the meaning of the text (high-quality miscue):

**Expected response:** “This job has made Otto an expert at studying very small creatures.”

**Observed response:** “This job has made Otto an expert at the study of very small creatures.” (Romain. 2016, p. 12)

Together, Jack and I concluded that only one of the three low-quality miscues extensively changed the meaning of the text:

**Expected Response:** “Peacock jumping spiders are only about 3 millimeters (or about an eighth of an inch) long”

**Observed Response:** “Peacock jumping spiders are only about 3 millimeters (or about eight-and-a-half inches) long” (Romain. 2016, p. 12)

Jack admitted that he didn’t know the difference between an eighth of an inch and eight-and-a-half inches. (On his most recent psychoeducational evaluation, Jack scored in the first percentile among same-aged peers in mathematics and math fluency.) I demonstrated for Jack with my two index fingers the difference between the two values and pointed out, as light-heartedly as I could, that the only miscue he made that changed the meaning of the text wasn’t even a reading mistake at all; it was a math mistake!

Because Jack struggled to identify text structure in our previous session, I borrowed from the RMI strategy lesson entitled “Schema Story” for our next reading (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 207). Using scissors, I cut up a five-paragraph introductory passage into five sections, one for each paragraph, then scrambled the paragraphs and asked Jack to read them and arrange them in a sequence that made sense. The article was about animals that haven’t evolved much over millions of years. I again recorded him reading. After he
finished, he was able to sequence the second, third, and fourth paragraphs correctly but needed help identifying the opening and closing paragraphs. Ironically, sorting the middle three paragraphs required a more nuanced understanding of language and meaning, whereas both the opening and closing paragraphs contained glaring indicators of where they should be found (an extremely large “H” in the word “how” at the start of the opening paragraph and, below the closing paragraph, the author’s name in large type). I reminded Jack of the importance of analyzing the overall structure of a text, and I again showed him the remainder of the article to put the passage into context, pointing out that what he had read was only the introductory section of a larger article.

Session Three

Without Jack present, I again listened to the audio recording of him reading. This time, I determined that he had made 13 uncorrected miscues in all, and that 6 of them had changed the meaning of the text. Before playing the audio recording, I reviewed with him the difference between high-quality and low-quality miscues. We discussed reading strategies that indicate the use of high-quality miscues, such as skipping words that don’t affect meaning or substituting hard-to-decode words with synonyms. When I played the recording for him this time, I again stopped the recording periodically to point out miscues but occasionally asked him to point out his own miscues, which he was able to do independently.

For our next reading, I borrowed from the RMI strategy lesson entitled “Language Experience” (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 217). I asked Jack to read another five-paragraph introductory passage that I had cut out from Science World. This time the article was about the molting process of Antarctic penguins (Free, 2016). After he finished reading the passage, I instructed him to paste the passage onto a larger piece of paper. Above the pasted passage, bold lines indicated the need for a headline and subheading. I showed Jack examples of headlines and subheadings from other articles in the publication. I told him I would scribe while he dictated to me what he thought should be the heading and subheading for the passage he had just read. Jack chose “Penguins Getting New Coats? You’ve never seen anything like this before. When penguins molt.” I again showed him the remainder of the article and pointed out that the article was really just an assortment of images and captions about penguins that was lacking a cohesive, linear format. I pointed out that an article like this might be less challenging and more likely to be read for fun than the previous two articles.

Session Four

When reading the penguin article, Jack produced nine uncorrected miscues, and only one changed the meaning of the text. During the audio recording, I stopped the recording at the end of each sentence, regardless of whether or not the sentence contained a miscue and asked Jack if he noticed one or not. He laughed at himself when we identified the one miscue that changed the meaning of the text:

Expected Response: “Their feathers interlock like shingles on a roof, keeping them warm and
dry, whether they’re waddling on ice in Antarctica or diving off the coast of New Zealand.”

**Observed Response:** “Their feathers interlock like shingles on a roof, keeping them warm and dry, and the weather that they’re waddling on ice in Antarctica or diving off the coast of New Zealand.” (Free, 2016, p. 12)

Not only did the miscue change the meaning of the text, it didn’t conform to an acceptable grammatical structure, meaning that it was syntactically unacceptable. (The RMI states that a sentence can have “acceptable syntactic structure without having acceptable meaning”, but a sentence without syntactic acceptability will always be semantically unacceptable [Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 79]). I asked Jack why he found this particular miscue so funny. He said, “Because it doesn’t even make sense.” I agreed. Jack explained in his own words that the word “whether” led him astray; he assumed the word was its homophone, “weather”. This led to a discussion about the interrelationship between syntactic and semantic structures, but in more conversational terms: I said that if an observed response doesn’t sound like the language we use when we’re talking, it doesn’t stand a chance of making sense. (I was careful not to mention the author’s intentions. The RMI explicitly states on p. 79 that “no one knows exactly the author’s meaning, unless the author is present to provide such information” [Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005].) I reminded Jack that the context we use to confirm the meaning of words can be found after the word as well in front of it, and that you don’t always have to make a decision on the spot. There are no rules against skipping or re-reading.

**Reflection**

I set out in this study to improve Jack’s overall self-concept as a reader by giving him the opportunity to reflect on audio recordings of his own readings. A week after the four sessions were completed, I interviewed Jack using the same set of questions I used prior to the intervention. Unfortunately, I discovered that he hadn’t committed any of the RMA terminology to memory, terms like “miscue”, “high-quality”, “low-quality”, “text structure”, “context”, “language”, and “meaning”. While I can’t say that the four sessions had any long-term effects, I do feel that the process itself was extremely informative in its own right. By the fourth session, Jack could identify his own miscues and decide whether or not a miscue had disrupted the meaning of the text, whereas he depended entirely on me for both skills at the start of the intervention. This indicated to me that the prospect of applying an intervention like RMA, one that equips students to confront their weakness by activating their strengths, could be an effective process with repeated use for someone like Jack, who carries with him a wide array of strengths and weaknesses.

Perhaps a more informative function of trialing the RMA process with Jack was an entirely unexpected one. By borrowing from RMI strategy lessons designed to encourage readers to “attend to the context of circumstance and situation” (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 203), it became clear to me that it’s very challenging for Jack to look at the entirety of a
text and appreciate its purpose and structure. While the read-aloud accommodation in his education plan is designed to maximize his access to information, the resulting lack of visual engagement with text may have had the unintended effect over the years of limiting his ability to analyze text structure. This effect was most apparent in Session Two, when Jack was able to accurately sort three paragraphs based on semantic information but then jumbled the first and last paragraphs, both of which should have been placed correctly just by looking at their visual features.

Obviously, to say that Jack should now be required to read texts for himself just so he can better analyze text structure would be over-reactive and counter-productive. The read-aloud accommodation has served him well over the years, ensuring that he, someone with compromised decoding skills and strong listening skills, has the utmost access to written subject matter in class. Perhaps a happy medium would be to ensure that a text’s structure is visually previewed with him prior to the read-aloud, thus encouraging him to fathom the entirety and purpose of the text prior to digesting its individual parts. This is an idea I’ll be sure to propose to his special education team the next time his education plan comes under review.

References


About the Author
Drew Cumming is a district-wide teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI). He provides individualized instruction to students across the K-12 curriculum and collaborates with teachers and parents to ensure that appropriate classroom supports are in place for students who are visually impaired. Drew received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College in 2003; his Master of Education in Vision Studies from the University of Massachusetts in 2013; and his Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Reading from Bridgewater State University in 2017.
Mindfulness Practitioners Clarify the Concept of “Re-Perceiving”: A Qualitative Interview Study

JOSEPHINE MADONNA

Introduction

Mindfulness is a type of awareness that dates back to ancient Buddhist practices. In our era, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) designed a secular program to teach mindfulness practices called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). He and his colleagues have studied the effects of this training on physical and psychological healing and quality of life. Mindfulness is defined by Kabat-Zinn, as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). This entails moment-to-moment awareness; one’s focus is on non-perceptual experience as it is happening, as opposed to cognition or affect. Mindfulness practice intentionally focuses awareness in a kind and curious way (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Engaging in meditation practices develops mindful awareness, which is considered a “freedom of mind… a freedom from reflexive conditioning and delusion” (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009, p. 4). This distinction is crucial in understanding the difference between the actual practice of mindfulness, and the shifts that typically occur as practice develops. Such shifts will be discussed as this paper examines the topics of re-perceiving and self. Through meditation, the mindfulness practitioner learns to isolate their sense perceptions from habitual discursive thinking about whatever is being perceived. Formal practice allows the meditator to become increasingly aware of habitual or conditioned ways of filtering direct experience through concepts. This type of awareness gives the meditator repeated practice with flexibly shifting attention, which can then be incorporated into what is known as informal practice, bringing mindfulness to all aspects of everyday life. To integrate these differing aspects of mindfulness practice and the cultivation of awareness, this paper reviews two theoretical concepts relevant to MBSR: self and re-perceiving. The concept of self is easily taken for granted but needs some review in order to more deeply understand the main topic of this paper, re-perceiving. This concept will then be broken down into three meta-mechanisms posited by Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006), in order to understand specific aspects of re-perceiving. Finally, the literature review will cover mindful awareness as it relates to re-perceiving.

Literature Review

Reified Language of Self

The self is often considered in Western psychology to be an unquestioned, immutable entity. There is
an assumption that we are born with a self, and the best we can do is try to accept, if not improve, it. Most psychological theories view the self as a set of fixed characteristics, often judged as favorable or unfavorable. Psychotherapeutic approaches work at changing specific behavior patterns, while integrating the differing aspects of the client’s self into a unified whole (Whelton & Greenberg, 2004). While there are some post-modern theories that recognize this self as constructed through language and social interaction, they are in the minority. In contrast, the MBSR program implicitly encourages a more fluid view of self.

The construction of the self assumed by Western psychology can be traced historically. Gulerce (2014) provides some insight into the development of the Western, Christian version of self. With this non-secular underpinning that is present in most Western societies, certain aspects of the self are reified using dichotomous language. An individual living in Western society may strive to be wholly good and dismiss the aspects of self that they consider to be negative in order to appeal to a higher power. The discourse used indicates a particularly rigid self-concept focusing on objective qualities. This contrasts the mindfulness philosophy that self is impermanent, inherently subject to change (Olendzki, 2010); a fluid process, constantly changing moment by moment. Observing the sensations that arise and change during formal meditative practices helps cultivate the recognition that all experiences are fleeting. Practitioners, then, practice accepting any difficulties that arise during meditation that then help them to accept aspects of themselves that they had deemed undesirable. From this view, meditation reduces suffering by helping practitioners to accept rather than deny or avoid their emotions, thoughts, and conflicts.

In keeping with this post-modern approach, research from McCown and Ahn (2015) describes how participants in an American MBSR class will be asked to describe why they joined the class. The inquiry between the instructor and participants often describes reified aspects of self that they deem negative and hope the class will eliminate, revealing how they construct a suffering self using shared language. When an individual begins to shift from maintaining a reified view of the self into recognition of non-self, or a detachment from all of the traits that may typically define the self, one can begin to change the “series of assumptions made about the self that are not sustainable by empirical observation” (Olendzki, 2010, p.10). By recognizing their habitual construction of the self in mindfulness practice, meditators shift towards moment-to-moment awareness.

The construction and perception of the self is made evident through the discourse that an individual uses to reflect and create meaning. Constructivist theory states that the self is created through a multi-level construction built on linguistic interactions that occur moment by moment. Meaning that the process of the reified self is not an arbitrary compilation of traits but is constructed developmentally, influenced by historical and cultural norms and expectations, then described and reified using discourse. One derives meaning from emotions and cognitions that are elicited during linguis-
tic interactions (Whelton & Greenberg, 2004). These meanings then become a basis for the construction of self. In keeping with a constructivist view, MBSR theory suggests that through the formal practice of meditation, there is a process in which the self can be de-reified, experienced, and accepted in the moment as a series of perceptual transitions. These shifts are exemplified by the specific language used to describe self.

Re-Perceiving: A Shift in Perception

The term re-perceiving does involve a cognitive shift, but the concept is far more complex, implying that mindfulness practice impacts emotional and pre-conditioned conceptions as well. Shapiro et al. (2006) define the term as involving de-identifying with conditioned judgments, shifting focus instead to direct perception of sensations in the current moment. In MBSR theory, reactivity refers to automatic, conditioned responses to certain objects or inner states. Re-perceiving refers to the meditator simply observing emotions and the stimuli that elicit them, as they arise, with bare attention. In this sense, bare attention is defined as the non-discriminative awareness that is free from the addition of thoughts or language as means of evaluating and conceptually controlling present moment reality (Brown & Cordon, 2009). The relationship that an individual had with a label or judgment toward themselves becomes less fixed, “identity begins to shift from the contents of awareness to awareness itself” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 379), experiencing the self non-judgmentally in the moment. Carmody, Baer, Lykins, and Olendzki (2009) make reference to Shapiro’s study, clarifying that re-perceiving refers to “an ability to observe one’s thoughts and feelings as temporary events in the mind not necessitating particular responses, rather than as reflections of the self that are necessarily true or important” (p. 614). These authors frame re-perceiving as a meta-process that is a psychological process that undergirds affect and thought, perception, and interpretation of perception. The practitioner’s relationship to automatic thoughts is brought into awareness; conditioned thought patterns can be recognized and questioned.

The psychological literature discusses decentering, a term closely related to re-perceiving but differing in important ways. Decentering is a cognitive distancing from reactivity, allowing for a focus on the present moment without engaging in narratives about past or future (Bernstein et al., 2015). Stanley (2012) provides some understanding of how re-perceiving should be distinguished from decentering, which he calls a purely cognitive process and thus “sub-personal”, understanding that thought is occurring but lacking the qualities of introspection (p. 66). Whereas, re-perceiving focuses on direct perception, attending to the arising and dissolving of the contents of consciousness.

Bernstein et al.’s (2015) theory of decentering references Shapiro et al.’s concept of re-perceiving as a similar process but states that decentering is the best term to use due to its emphasis on cognition. Both processes are comprised of three interworking axioms. These include meta-awareness, dis-identification from internal experience, and reduced reactivity to thought content. These three axioms focus on objective shifts in cognition. Shapiro et al. (2006) also propose a three-ax-
iom process that will be discussed in further detail below. Clearly the process of re-perceiving is very similar to the process of decentering, but the two are considered separate terms with some overlapping meaning that primarily focuses on a shift in perspective (Bernstein et al., 2015; Brown, Bravo, Roos, & Pearson, 2014). While earlier researchers used the terms decentering and re-perceiving interchangeably, the processes are markedly different. Re-perceiving is the more comprehensive term, a process that cultivates a shift in perspective in all domains and directly affects an individual’s sense of self. To further contrast re-perceiving from decentering, I will more fully describe the three axioms of re-perceiving.

Three Aspects of Re-Perceiving

Having distinguished the Western construction of self from that implied in mindfulness practice, it is necessary to unpack the concept of re-perceiving. Shapiro et al. (2006) describe several ways that mindfulness benefits practitioners. By breaking down Kabat-Zinn’s (1990) definition of mindfulness – “paying attention, in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (p. 4). Shapiro et al. identified three axioms: intention, attention, and attitude. The first of these, intention, is defined as the reason that one decides to engage in mindfulness practice. Derived from the first part of Kabat-Zinn’s definition, “on purpose”, intention refers to the purpose for which one initiates and maintains a mindfulness practice. Though MBSR explicitly discourages creating goals, since that reduces mindfulness to a mere means to an end, intention identifies what may motivate a meditator initially and throughout their practice. Typically, the intention that one sets can act as a reminder to the mediator of their initial reasons for beginning the practice in the first place. Kabat-Zinn describes intention as “a personal vision” necessary for the practice to develop (p. 46). Initial intention can often shift as one’s practice develops (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). For example, many participants decide to enroll in MBSR with the intention to decrease stress, but such an outcome orientation is countered by the present-moment focus of mindfulness practice. With practice, participants notice subtler intentions to become more aware and accepting, which helps reduce stress (Field, 2015). As the meditator develops more awareness, they may realize their stress level is high because of a habitual rage reaction towards this boss. This realization shifts the initial, broad intention to a more definitive intent to accept his boss’ difficult style of interacting. Once the mediator perceives the boss’ interactions in new ways, interpersonal communication with the boss will likely improve, and stress reactivity will decrease. For this reason, we need to better understand how practitioners describe moments of re-perceiving retrospectively. Typically, Westerners would not have the specific language to address a reified self (McCown & Ahn, 2015). It stands to reason that re-perceiving would not be accessible as an initial intention for a new meditator, but one that would evolve as the meditator cultivates mindfulness as a way of being.

The second axiom that Shapiro et al. (2006) describe is attention, derived from Kabat-Zinn’s (1990) phrase, “paying attention”. During meditation, the indi-
idual applies bare attention to experience what is happening in the moment and becomes aware that these experiences are often accompanied by a conditioned narrative about such experiences. This experience is often described in Western psychology as experiencing automatic thoughts. Shapiro (2009) states that “one’s patterns have become so ingrained that often one does not realize one is engaging in them” (p.7). This recognition of conditioned patterns as a layer added to the direct experience is crucial to re-perceiving. For example, when fully attending, a meditator will notice that their mind has wandered from an anchor to an extraneous noise and recognize a conditioned response to the noise. In that moment of recognition, habitual conditioning can be noted and replaced with acceptance. It is this capacity to shift focus from merely reacting to observing direct experience on multiple levels that develops through the process of attending.

The third axiom that Shapiro et al. (2006) describe is attitude, which builds on Kabat-Zinn’s phrase “in a particular way”. Attitude describes the mental qualities that the mediator brings to their mindfulness practice. The most relevant qualities for developing “affectionate attention” (Shapiro, 2009, p. 11) include “patience, compassion and non-striving” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 377). Mind-wandering is a common experience that meditators face, the attitude that one brings to mind-wandering can be critical and judgmental, or it can be warm and compassionate. Kabat-Zinn (1990) describes specific attitudinal foundations that cultivate such an open attitude. When one is able to become aware and shift towards affectionate attention during meditative practice, this provides insight into how one might attend to daily experience.

These three aspects of re-perceiving mutually influence each other, developing together as mindfulness is cultivated over time. Each aspect provides a lens through which individuals observe subtle aspects of self-construction. Re-perceiving enables shifts that de-reify self. Having clarified the concept of re-perceiving, I will now turn to an exploration of how best to examine this concept empirically. Due to the multi-faceted nature of self-construction, as well as the fact that participants of an MBSR course would not necessarily identify the concepts of self or re-perceiving explicitly, a study of participant narratives was designed to shed new light on how they experience these complex processes. The next section will detail the theory and methodology selected to explore these complex concepts.

A Grounded Theory Approach to Interview Data

The complex process of re-perceiving is best captured using an approach that analyzes self-construals in narrative data (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Freeman, 2014; Mamberg, 2012). Re-perceiving, an inward process, cannot be outwardly observed. Thus, traditional methods of measurements would not capture the shift; the best method to capture these inwardly occurring shifts in self is through participants’ discourse (Stanley, 2012). Qualitative data present a direct look at the subtleties of language in participants’ reports, and then researchers “attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).
The meaning that participants make out of their meditative experiences is best obtained in dialogue about their experience. This contrasts with traditional quantitative research that reifies the self to study objectively-measured behavior. To study meaning-making in lived experience, it is best to use a method that captures the nuances of their talk.

From amongst the range of qualitative methods available, Grounded Theory (GT) provides tools and a framework best suited to the study of re-perceiving. Rather than making statistical inferences drawn from a subgroup then generalized to populations as a whole, GT uses systematic coding to analyze discursive data that allows the researcher to make meaningful descriptive interpretations about a subjective phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Broadly, “coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). This type of coding is driven by the language used by participants in the data set without interpretation from the researcher.

Two types of coding guide the reduction of the data. The first step is initial coding; the researcher “remains open to whatever theoretical possibilities we can discern in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). The goal is to describe the data content, using some kind of expressive word to summarize participants’ discourse and avoid drawing any premature interpretations. The second phase of coding is focused coding. This is where the researcher identifies themes within the data. Using the content codes that were developed during initial coding, the researcher can begin to work through the data to draw analytic conclusions. The researcher begins to become more active with the data, interpreting participants’ speech and the researcher’s theoretical concepts; in this case, the language of mindfulness and MBSR. Connections are made within and across interviews, developing analytic patterns and generating new linkages. This second round of coding entails “memoing”, which highlights that the researcher, while staying close to the data, is making notes that are slightly removed from the participants’ statements and is beginning to make analytic sense of the complex phenomenon being studied. GT provides a process for analyzing interview data that is in sync with seeing self as constructed through reifying language. Given that re-perceiving is a process that may serve to de-reify the self, I developed a research question to guide analyses of an existing data set: “What shifts in language indicate that participants experience re-perceiving?”

Method

To address the research question, I used data collected as part of a larger research project. Data collection entailed semi-structured interviews conducted with past participants of an MBSR course. This qualitative data was then interpreted using Grounded Theory analysis. The purpose of the larger study was to focus on two objectives: 1. To learn from participants’ own narrative descriptions what they found to be most helpful during and after the course, and 2. To understand how each participant incorporates MBSR into their life and self-portrayal (Mamberg, 2012, p.1). A brief explanation of the larger study and data collection is provid-
ed; the initial coding had already been completed, and a master code list had been generated prior to the present project. The specific procedures of my study follow.

**Participant Interviews**

Participants (N = 20) were graduates of one instructor’s 8-week MBSR course, conducted over the prior four years. All had provided releases, agreeing to be contacted later for research purposes and were alumni, undergraduates, graduate students, staff, or faculty at a small liberal arts college in New England. There were 7 males and 13 females whose ages ranged from 21-62. The identity of participants has been kept confidential through assignment of pseudonyms. Participants were interviewed (average duration: 48 minutes) by their former instructor, using a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 10 open-ended questions that inquired about the participants’ experience during and after the MBSR course. The selection of an interviewer familiar with the participants’ training was intentional; his knowledge of the specific MBSR course and his role as instructor enabled participants to trust he would follow even subtle descriptions of their subjective states, while allowing him to elicit rich and detailed narratives. The researcher hoped to attain information relative to the research question, specifically, experiential descriptions of current engagement in formal and informal practice, the impacts of the program, and how participants defined mindfulness (Mamberg, 2012).

**Data Reduction Process**

Research Assistants on the larger project were trained on a detailed transcription method using symbols to convert the nuances of spoken discourse into text. As a transcriptionist for the larger project, I had previously listened to two of the audio recordings, using iTunes and a USB-connected foot pedal to type the data into Microsoft Word. Each transcript was uploaded into Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software program. All transcripts were subjected to the Grounded Theory initial coding described above, where a “discursive turn” (DT) was the unit of analysis. A turn-by-turn coding was conducted by the principal investigator and two research assistants independently; inter-rater agreement was established through consensus of each research assistant and the principal investigator on 30% of the data. Across all transcripts, 993 initial codes captured all meaningful content. In this present study, I employed focused coding to isolate a relevant subset of data, where memo-writing enabled the identification of themes across transcripts. To address the research question, I selected content codes that were conceptually relevant, yielding a subset of DTs related to re-perceiving. The data subset consisted of 91 DTs, all of which had been coded with one or more of the following codes: reperceive, decenter, detach, self, self-reflect, self-compassion, self-acceptance, judging, judge self, perspective taking, and insight. Focused coding of these turns highlighted patterns of discourse; memoing allowed connections across various interviewee statements that were later categorized into thematic categories to fully describe all participant discourse related to re-perceiv- ing, as presented below.

**Analyses**

Typically, research studies of MBSR courses...
focus on outcomes: how the structure of the course and the practice of meditation decrease practitioner stress levels. The analyses of this study focus instead on reports given by the mindfulness practitioner about the meditation process. To articulate participants’ experience with various aspects of re-perceiving, the discourse of lay participants, who would not use the technical term “re-perceiving”, was examined so as to detect shifts of language that relate to this concept posited by mindfulness researchers.

The data subset included all talk that related to experiences of re-perceiving. The process of focused coding yielded three main categories which did, indeed, align with Shapiro et al.’s (2006) three axioms: intention, attention and attitude. When the research question was first developed, it was unknown whether Shapiro’s concepts would be noted in this data, yet given that Shapiro et al.’s (2006) work was so heavily relied upon to develop the definition of re-perceiving used in this paper, it is not surprising that instances of each axiom were seen. As a direct result of the analytic process, I was able to expand upon and further develop the three axioms based on participant reports. Within each thematic category, subcategories were then identified; in this way, my analyses provide more explicit detail about each aspect of re-perceiving. 1

Category 1: Intention

The first category, intention, was comprised of 37 DTs in which participants discussed becoming more aware of their own initial intentions then using that awareness to respond in new ways. Two subcategories of intention were identified: Decrease Reactivity and Presencing, the first indicates an intention to moderate or minimize unexamined impulsive reactions, while the second entailed a fuller awareness of emotional experiences.

The first subcategory of intention, decreased reactivity, was comprised of 29 DTs. Such turns described a self-inquiry that questioned habitual, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral reactions through direct experience with the five senses. Contrasting new perceptions of self with outdated self-concepts and conditioned reactivity was common. Typically, judgments are made based off of past interactions, creating perception and meaning making, often leading to automatic reactions. Participants reported practicing cognitive pauses to disconnect from automatic reaction in order to evaluate whether previously conditioned responses were appropriate in the current moment. Some common themes that participants reported were: striving for perfection and defensiveness. Participants stated that striving for perfection often consumed their daily way of being. Participants’ statements conveyed an intentional shift away from striving for perfection toward awareness for the needs of the body or the mind in the moment and responding to those immediate needs instead. The practice of meditation, specifically on the anchor of the breath, cultivated decreased reactivity to seemingly common reactions. Participants were able to broaden current moment awareness during meditation

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1 Throughout the data analyses, transcription conventions will be seen in which (.) indicates a brief pause, (＃) indicates number of seconds of pause, and <vc> indicates voice change.
into everyday experiences.

Participants reported re-perceiving when they described separating specific happenings or parts from the whole identity. Participants, for example, recalled making a global statement, “I am tired”, then reported parsing out where specifically in the body or mind they felt tired. This allowed them to dis-identify with the overwhelming sensation of global tiredness. This process of re-perceiving shifted how participants related to their own overwhelming or uncomfortable emotions, reporting experiences of variance; realizing that nothing is all good or all bad. As opposed to feeling aversively toward discomfort, this feeling was used as a means to relay information and then allow for feelings of tenderness toward these uncomfortable sensations. Participants also referenced adopting a new type of self talk that had the quality of kindness and compassion as opposed to judgement; this, too, decreased reactivity. This quality of talk will be discussed more in the 3rd category, attitude. Participants reported a new relationship to self judgement; “letting it go” more often, and moments of negative self-talk were less impactful than they had been in the past. Participants also reported intentionally choosing to speak to others in a kinder manner. Finally, participants reported intentionally quieting the distracting noise of daily life in order to observe inward happenings. The following turn is the clearest example of decreased reactivity. Kent, a 55-year-old college staff member, depicted his process of identifying conditioned patterns and shifting.

Kent: so this allows me that I don’t have to that this next response does not have to be tied to … every other response I’ve ever had in my life. That I can thoughtfully look at this and go okay what am I gonna do next? what am I gonna do with this?

Kent reported his awareness of his past responses have been conditioned. He noted that he can be more thoughtful in the moment in order to more appropriately respond to his direct experience. In sum, DTs comprising the subcategory, decreased reactivity, were all characterized by descriptions of catching one’s automatic reactions, pausing, or otherwise interrupting the conditioned habit, then taking a curious, present-moment interest in that reaction so as to respond more intentionally.

The second subcategory of intention, presentencing, was comprised of 13 DTs. Such turns described an intentional shift in perspective leading to an increased awareness of the present moment. Participants reported fewer instances of fantasizing about the future or remembering the past. They reported this shift in terms of detaching from the need to cling to pleasantness. Instead, they experienced the birth, life, and death of each moment without striving for it to be something else. Participants’ DTs described how presentencing affects the meaning-making process, stating that they are now “seeing the larger picture”. A shift was often described during the formal practices from their initial attempts to be silent and blank, to setting an intention and using compassionate self-talk to cultivate awareness of whatever arose in the present moment. This led to a
development of a more intentional type of presence in
the moment. Participants reported feeling connected to
the mindfulness practice; finding everyday shifts that
stemmed from the practice. The clearest example of a
turn that depicts the subcategory of presencing is this
example that Maria, a 22-year-old student-teacher, pro-
vided. Maria is responding to the interviewer’s ques-
tion that asked if her original definitions of mindfulness
and meditation have shifted now that she has completed
the course. Maria responded to that question:

Maria: um (.) I think they complement each oth-
er (.) um and I feel that mindfulness -- mindfulness
now (.) is ME it’s anything that goes around in my
life and it’s (.) just (.) a way that I can present my-
self and be around (.) um just noticing everything
about the world I live in and HOW I respond to it.
Meditation IS a way to practice that formally.

Maria described a new sense of being in the world. She
described being more present and realized how she
responds to the world as a result of subtle awareness
stemming from mindfulness practice. In sum, data
comprising the subcategory, presencing, were charac-
terized by descriptions of intentional shifting into pres-
ent-moment perceptions and sensations within familiar
experiences.

Category 2: Attention

The second category, attention, was comprised
of 31 DTs in which participants described meta-cog-
nitive awareness for the quality and validity of their
thoughts. Three subcategories of attention were iden-
tified: recognizing thoughts, attentional flexibility, and
accepting mind-wandering. All of these subcategories
included the expansion of present-moment attentive-
ness that cultivates mindfulness awareness, as Shapiro
and Carlson (2009) predicted. However, these data pro-
vided subtle differentiation.

The first subcategory, recognizing thoughts, was comprised of 16 DTs. Such turns described par-
ticipants’ increased awareness of the various processes of thinking that are typically overlooked. One such
process being the meta-cognitive process of identifying
that one is having a thought followed by a purposeful
pausing or distancing from the thought. The particip-
ants’ specific use of the terms “distancing” and “paus-
ing” are interpreted by MBSR instructors as disiden-
tifying with one’s thoughts, questioning their validity,
and thus de-reifying their relationship to the thought.
Thoughts shifted from being considered as a way to
define the self into an observable mental event, thus
decreasing emotional reactivity to thought. The pur-
poseful language that participants used to introduce
thoughts indicated disembodiment of the thought from
their whole being; identifying that they are the thinker
of the thought, as opposed to believing that the thought
defines their whole self. Use of “the thought” or “a
thought” as opposed to saying “my thought” was fre-
quently noted. Participants stated that they “had stress”
as opposed to saying “my stress”. This subtle language
choice provided insight into re-perceiving on a cogni-
tive level.

Participants discussed that they were able to
notice self-critical thoughts directed towards the whole
self. Having already strengthened the muscle of awareness of thinking, participants were able to delineate the shift to acceptance, curiosity, and kindness. This shift provided insight into the active process of re-perceiving that might not be directly observable; thoughts about the self were perceived with an added layer of judgment or meaning making. These perceptions often create a pattern and could serve to reify the self. When a pattern of thought had been established, it could typically be considered the only way to think. Participants reported a time component when they watched their thoughts, monitored from the first moment of awareness until the thought fades away and eventually dies. Once they had become aware of a thought, participants could decide that they could think about this at another time rather than interrupt their current intent. Bonnie, a 21-year-old, 4th-year college student, described becoming aware of her thoughts, shifting from being previously unaware of thinking into awareness, and then questioning the thoughts’ validity. This turn depicts such questioning of conditioned thought processes and the additional layer of perceptual judgments. For example, Bonnie, described the process of increasing recognition of her own thought process:

Bonnie: uh::m (3) before it was probably like (.).
I would think something and NOT think anything of it (.). or (.). I wouldn’t (2) like uh if I was like judging a situation I would just say ohh yeah (h) that’s how IT IS ,h, but now like (.). I have more of a (.). ya know (.). like a sense of (.). like (.). it’s oKAY (...). before the course I guess (.). and then NOW I’m aWARE of it and I can kind of (.). deal with it differently I guess.

Bonnie described recognizing that she was having a thought, in contrast to previously when she lacked awareness of conditioned assumptions. Bonnie described that she is now more aware of her thoughts, and that it has helped her cultivate acceptance. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, recognizing thoughts, were all characterized by descriptions of the meta-cognitive process, recognizing that one has thoughts and questioning the validity and the reality of the thoughts in the current moment as well as dis-identifying from reifying thoughts.

The second subcategory, attentional flexibility, was comprised of nine DTs. Such turns described a type of control cultivated through shifting one’s focus to any specific anchor (e.g., breath, body, or sound) during the formal sitting practice. Participant turns in this subcategory appeared to have a distinct emotional undertone in regard to the intrusive thoughts during meditation from which they then flexibly shifted away. In these turns, participants report a new relationship with unpleasant events and stimuli in various ways. Participants’ discourse revealed that they no longer actively avoided unpleasant events but instead were able to become aware of these moments inquisitively. Conversely, participants realized that they could flexibly shift attention to something else in any given moment; typically a meditative anchor. This means cultivating a focus more intently on whatever is coming up in the moment and exploring the various characteristics of the arising emotion. Not only did participants report cultivating flexible attention between different anchors and emotions but between different domains as well.
as shifting between thoughts, affect, or bodily sensations. Also, shifts in cognition were reported, choosing to stop a thought, and knowing they could revisit it at a future time. Taking this shift even further, participants also reported shifting between mental frameworks; typically operating in an analytic framework but strengthening the ability to shift to operate within an emotional framework.

Attentional flexibility differs from distractibility, which is more like a ship blown off its course. Attentional flexibility is the purposeful shifting of attention to and from various events and stimuli. Attentional flexibility is not a synonym for avoidance. Participants did not report ignoring thoughts or emotions, but instead realizing what was happening in the moment and then choosing to return to the moment as opposed to immediately addressing anything that arises. Attentional flexibility often co-occurs with the subcategory, recognizing thoughts. Once the muscle of attentional control had been developed, participants became aware that they were thinking, which is a precursor to choosing to engage a thought or to instead flexibly shift attention to something else. The recognizing thoughts category primarily consisted of turns in which participants became aware of cognitive events, while participant reports in the flexibility of attention category seemed to primarily describe emotional events but did include shifts into all domains. Carol, a 22-year-old student, reported flexibly shifting from working on a homework assignment to noticing what was happening in her body. Carol described noticing that her body was feeling pain; she stopped working and attended to the pain. Once that had subsided, she returned to her homework. Carol discussed this process of flexibly shifting her attention from homework, to her body, and then back to her homework:

Carol: I think I tried (.) um (. I think beFORE My (2) my first reaction when I was stressed was to just (. um (. ya’)know if it was because I had a paper or I had a test I would just keep going forward keep- keep writing that paper keep- keep studying rather than (. taking a break and saying like ok lets just breath? and um (. so after meditation if I had a stomach ache I would kinda just sit there? like put my hands on my stomach or just kind of just breathe? relax. (. um (. and take a step back from whatever I was doing and usually if I (. focused on it -- it it lessened the intensity of it. and then I’d given it time so then I could go back and do what I was doing.

By taking a moment to observe what was happening in her body, Carol was able to skillfully take care of her pain as opposed to ignoring it. Carol indicated the flexibility she had cultivated through meditation. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, attentional flexibility, were all characterized by statements about flexibly shifting between stimuli, domains, and mental frameworks.

The third subcategory, accepting mind-wandering, was comprised of 10 DTs. Such turns described initial judgmental awareness of mind wandering during
meditation. As their mindfulness practice developed, participants described cultivating acceptance for mind wandering, shifting back and forth from noticing that the mind has wandered to focused attention on the selected anchor. Within this subcategory, there were two differing types of DTs. Some participants described specific direction of attention, a type of increased direct focus, while others described emotional reactions or judgments about mind wandering. The participants who described their experiences with direct focus reported this as an effect from the formal practice. This differs from the subcategory, attentional flexibility, in the way that participants directed their attention purposefully as opposed to just noticing some distraction during formal practice and then choosing to return to the anchor. Those who described their emotional reactions toward the phenomena of mind wandering reported a shift from initial judgments to acceptance and compassion. As opposed to rejecting mind wandering and struggling against it, participants treated mind wandering as a universal experience, a hindrance common to all who practice mindfulness. Once this acceptance was cultivated, participants were able to “watch” the mind wandering just as they are able to watch the birth and death of thoughts described in the category of recognizing thoughts. Jordan, a 27-year-old graduate student, cited a renowned Vietnamese teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, to explain his experience of coming to accept mind wandering:

Jordan:   So this mind wandering off. <vc> But I just noticed that wandered off. And now you’re back in the present! <vc> And just being completely happy about that and (...) That kind of avoids the judging altogether and stuff. And (...) I really think that THAT was a HUGE piece...

Jordan described becoming aware that the mind wanders and not chastise himself or express judgment toward the mind wandering. He displayed acceptance and deliberately refocused the mind back to the present. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, accepting mind wandering, were all characterized by descriptions of awareness that the mind wanders and cultivation of compassion for that experience during informal and formal practices.

Category 3: Attitude

The third category, attitude, was comprised of 23 DTs. Each turn fitting in this category described the quality of the speaker’s attitude toward their own experience. Four subcategories of attitude were identified: developing acceptance, developing compassion, developing curiosity, and developing non-judgement. The first subcategory, developing acceptance, was comprised of 22 DTs. Such turns described a specific quality of attitude; a cognitive and emotional shift from judgement to openness. Participants reported experiencing this shift initially during formal meditation practice, then bringing this quality into everyday interactions, particularly in regard to the self as well as unpleasant experiences. Cultivation of acceptance during formal meditative practices occurred during the practice itself as well as during instructor-led inquiry following classroom meditations. Participant statements conveyed increasing acceptance for each meditation sitting for what it was
in the current moment as opposed to striving to meet a specific goal (i.e., trying to relax or seeking solely to eliminate stress). This extended into acceptance for the meditator. Participants reported decreased striving in their daily lives. Group inquiry fostered new ways of relating to self and others particularly when hearing about how others also struggle with similar hindrances. Conversely, some participants reported that judgment directed at the self resulted from comparing themselves to others, striving for perfection, and feeling worried they were not doing it right. Interestingly, one participant reported using his self-talk as a reminder that meditation is a self-directed process. Participants reported moments of re-perceiving when they described experiences of acceptance for self-processes.

Participants described various aspects of the self as building blocks and used less reified language when describing the self. They observed what was occurring in the moment, as opposed to utilizing a fixed and rigid description of who they were. The wish to reject certain parts of the self in order to mimic someone else gave way to reports of acceptance and decreased need to force certain attributes. Participants realized that judgments directed at the self had been conditioned from past experiences. Participants’ reports generally discussed accepting the whole self but, interestingly, many participants also discussed the specific acceptance of unpleasantness and pain as a means to tolerate aversion. Pain or stress are not eliminated during meditation but perception shifts from unmanageable and overwhelming to accepting. These sensations do not have to be eliminated but can be tolerated in the moment, without need to over identify in any other way than noticing how the pain feels in the body. Again, participants reported moments of re-perceiving through subtle shifts in language, using terms that describe aversive events as present moment experience as opposed to global assumptions about the self. Participants were recognizing habitual responses to the unpleasant and meeting those experiences with an attitude of acceptance. The clearest example of a turn that depicts the subcategory of acceptance is this example that Jordan, a 27-year-old graduate student, provided in response to the question about defining mindfulness:

Jordan: It’s not about being happy all the time? It’s not about being stress free all the time? It’s just about noticing and accepting and being aware of what is and therefore living life knowing that by paying attention to the negative moments it will also it will eventually with practice accentuate the future moments.

Jordan described that meditative practices cultivate acceptance that he then brings into his everyday life. Jordan described acceptance of present moments, noticing what is actually occurring as opposed to focusing on eliminating aversive stimuli and stress. In sum, data comprising the subcategory developing acceptance were all characterized by descriptions of the qualities of acceptance for the practice, the self, and unpleasant events. Participants shifted from undifferentiated wholes to recognizing specific aspects of themselves and their experience.

The second subcategory, developing compas-
sion, was comprised of 11 DTs. Compassion is another quality of attitude. Participants described developing kindness in the formal practice and then cultivating that for the self and for others. Participants reported initial awareness of compassion during formal practice, particularly the awareness of breath, awareness of body, and Metta (Loving Kindness) meditations. Feeling compassion for the wandering mind versus scorn can have markedly different effects on the perception of formal practice. In this particular category, many participants described being conditioned to feel that the notion of cultivating compassion for the self was selfish. Due to the reified self-concepts that participants created as “caring people”, they felt that meant they could not develop self-compassion and still be considered caring. Participants experienced moments of re-perceiving when they realized that self-compassion was necessary and should not be considered as negative. The participants experienced differentiating their past idea of compassion and creating boundaries with others and no longer giving of themselves entirely without taking time for self-care. Participants reported realizing that at any given moment one differentiated part of the self (for instance, anxiety or another unpleasant feeling) might need to be met with compassion. The development of compassion provided insight into the added layer of perception that acts as a lens that determines that experiences will be accompanied by valence judgements. Participant language shifted from reifying emotions into realizing that emotions were temporary. Participants also reported feeling compassion for the body, no longer pain or discomfort in order to meet some goal. Instead, they developed compassion for their bodies’ messages. Participants reported feeling compassion for their own thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, but they also reported a type of compassion that is cultivated for others. Participants’ discourse described extending compassion to others, especially those who are particularly frustrating. Participants reported maintaining an independent emotional state; not following through with the conditioned reaction of matching another person’s attitude. The clearest example of a turn that depicts the subcategory of developing compassion is provided once again from Maggie, a 44-year-old administrative staff member. Maggie was responding to the interviewer’s question that asked her to discuss any changes in compassion she had noticed toward herself or others:

Maggie: when I’m in practice I’m much more aware of what I need to do for ME yes uhhm (2) I think my and this I don’t mean for this to sound egocentric at ALL (3) but I think that I spend so much time worrying about others that I lose myself in that sometimes (…) so it DOES help me in that way, but I usually don’t struggle being compassionate to others (…) But mindfulness helps me do is hold myself there too and realize that in the absence of awareness I will lose myself trying to make sure that everyone else is cared for and I will become angry that I’m not getting my own needs met at some point because I’m so busy trying to do or appreciate what other people might (…) 

Maggie revealed her conditioned worry in regard to sounding “egocentric” in the beginning of the
turn. She then went on to describe how she typically was putting others’ needs before her own, and that this habit served to reaffirm that she was a compassionate person. Maggie went on to describe that she had begun to show compassion to herself as well as others. The practice of mindfulness helped her gain distance from what she called her “natural instincts” in order to assess if she was truly being compassionate to herself in the moment. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, developing compassion, were all characterized by participant discourse that depicted how the development of compassion was first noticed in the formal meditation and then permeated everyday life, shifting the way that an individual related to self and others.

The third subcategory, developing curiosity, was comprised of 14 DTs that described inquiry into sensations, behaviors, cognitions, and affect. The participants described a shift in the way that they related to previously conditioned habits. Participants reported recognizing that curiosity has developed during the formal practice, and that development informs everyday functioning. Although participants specifically reported developing curiosity for emotions and for bodily sensations in the informal practice, their discourse revealed that they experienced a cognitive shift during meditation, thus, becoming curious about sense perceptions. Participants reported bringing this curious attitude into their everyday lives, aiding in the ongoing development of present moment awareness by using curiosity to assess what might be occurring, and the perceptions that were being elicited. Participants’ discourse provided insight into the process of developing curiosity, utilizing self-inquiry to question past conditioning, and asking themselves how they wanted to respond in this moment. This shift into present moment awareness with the quality of curiosity helped participants to be truly present and attentive to their own needs. Participants reported re-perceiving when they used curiosity to distance themselves from overwhelming emotions as opposed to experiencing undifferentiated, overwhelming sensation. When curiosity developed, participants reported inquiring why, how, and what was happening as a means to better understand the moment. Participants reported shifting from the typical dichotomous way of perceiving events and realizing that many emotions can exist at once. Not only did participants report that curiosity affected emotion, but participants also become curious in regard to what was happening in the body. Participants reported differentiating global pain sensations and becoming curious about which specific parts of the body might be feeling pain. As opposed to ignoring the pain or becoming consumed by it, participants reported becoming curious about which sensations were actually occurring and then addressed them appropriately. Curiosity into physical sensations allowed for the participants to create some distance and to observe the body. Participants described that curiosity developed a new relationship to outdated pain reactivity. In this way, statements coded as developing curiosity often co-occurred with those coded as developing acceptance toward pain, described above. The clearest example of a turn that depicts the subcategory of developing curiosity comes from Bella, a 53-year-old project manager. Bella was responding to the interviewer’s request to discuss her informal practice since completing the
MBSR course. Prior to this turn, Bella had described the overwhelming need to “just get away.” Bella listed many changes including this excerpt regarding curiosity:

Bella: it’s more like <vc> okay what’s going on? okay I’m tired <vc> or I’m… or, its usually with my daughter <vc> why am I? why do I want to blow up at her? <vc> it’s that catastrophic thinking, y’know if she doesn’t do her homework she’s not gonna have a good life umm or:: <vc> you didn’t get enough sleep last night you’re tired-- pull it back this has nothing to do with her. If you were rested you would be fine with this.

In this turn, we see Bella’s curiosity developing when she asked herself “what is going on?” She then differentiated the overwhelming feeling of wanting to “get away” into the specific sensation of tiredness. This helped her to distance herself from her conditioned habit to ruminate about her daughter, and she was aware of what was happening for her in the moment. Bella described her emotional state when she catastrophized about her daughter’s future by focusing on specific bodily sensations. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, development of curiosity, were characterized by descriptions of increased self-inquiry, specifically during formal meditation practices. When discussed in everyday life, curiosity tended to be about emotions and bodily sensations.

The fourth subcategory of attitude, developing non-judgement, was comprised of 23 DTs. Such turns described a perceptual experience with various qualities of judgements during formal and informal practices. Participants realized that recognizing judgements allowed for a deeper understanding of habitual ways of interacting. Participants could question these judgements and then respond more skillfully in the moment.

Statements in this subcategory described judgements toward the formal practice. This finding has been interpreted to mean that judgements, while typical for human behavior, are cognitive processes that may go unnoticed until some kind of intervention or meditation brings these processes into awareness. This increased awareness shifted judgements from a disembodied habitual process to something that could be directly observed. Specific judgements for the practice were reported; mind wandering and striving to “do it right”, which had also been reported in the subcategories above. This is interpreted to mean that the various subcategories, while mutually exclusive, did occur together as a cyclical process, not linear. Participants realized that they directed scorn toward their wandering mind and judged themselves as inadequate meditators. These judgements shifted as the MBSR practice developed, and participants realized that perfection was not expected in meditation. Instead, participants recognized that judgement was happening and used that as a reminder to return focus to the anchor. Participants reported that instruction by the MBSR teacher prepared them for mind wandering, and this helped to ease judgements in this area. Interestingly, participants reported a distinction that judgements could have a valence quality as they applied to the formal practice. Participants noticed varying levels of pleasant or unpleasant moments and not feeling as though they had to strive for grandeur in
order to experience a pleasant moment. Participants’ discourse revealed a shift from being over-identified with the judged self (reified through years of conditioning) to more neutral observation and even acceptance of their perceived imperfections. Participants separated themselves from past experiences in order to construct a self that is de-reified and changing moment by moment. They did this by removing judgements and focusing on direct perceptions. Judgements were observed in the forms of negative self-talk that often encouraged perfectionism. Participants reported a decreased reactivity when they were not able to meet intended goals or appear perfect. The clearest example of a turn that depicted the subcategory, developing non-judgement, came from Corinne, a 21-year-old, 4th-year student. Corinne was responding to the interviewer’s question that was asking her to discuss any last significant elements that she learned from taking the MBSR course. Corinne described a shift from feeling hatred for the process of washing dishes to now enjoying the task:

Corinne: it- just looking at it in a new LIGHT I think and (1) like (1) taking it as it IS instead of adding judgment to a situation like (.) <vc> I -- I DON’T like dishes that’s a HASSLE <vc> and then being like (2) wh --what am I actually doing (.) in that moment (.) that (.) like there’s no HASSLE in it it’s just (.) what IS and what’s happening (1) and just (.) like removing (.) all of the outside noise that’s going on in y -- your mind!

Corrine reported that she had shifted her way of dealing with unpleasantness. Corrine described the addition of judgement to the direct perception of washing dishes. She described her shift in perception in regard to the chore now that she has eliminated judgement. In sum, data comprising the subcategory, developing non-judgement, were all characterized by recognition of the added layer of the judgmental quality of perceptions.

As expected, the 91 DTs examined did, indeed, instantiate Shapiro et al.’s (2006) three axioms of intention, attention, and attitude. This discursive analysis of the data subset yielded those three categories that were then divided into subcategories enabling a more detailed articulation of the concept of re-perceiving.

Discussion

The analyses presented provide insights into a crucial phenomenon of mindfulness practice and MBSR through the understanding of participants’ reports of re-perceiving. Until now, most research has focused on the various health benefits of MBSR. Little research has been done to uncover the subjective experiences of the self. This project sought to address the research question, “Which shifts in language indicate that participants experience re-perceiving?” Findings are important for those living in a culture that constructs the self as a reified entity.

The literature review highlighted that Western practitioners typically reify the self. But through meditation, this view may cultivate re-perceiving and develop particular discourse that describes the shift in self-perception. This study was designed to identify participants’ reports of this process in detail. Special emphasis
was given to Shapiro et al.’s (2006) work due to its detailed theoretical description of re-perceiving. Shapiro et al. describe three axioms involved in the transitional cultivation of re-perceiving: intention, attention, and attitude. The participants in this study, who were presumably not aware of Shapiro’s work, described moments that map onto the three axioms quite well. This study went on to display how these three axioms were reported by participants. My analysis distinguishes detailed subcategories that comprised each category. This allowed for a more in-depth articulation of the concept of re-perceiving, indicating that the process may be more complex than originally implied. Each subcategory delineated specific implications on how the self is experienced as a non-reified, fluctuating sense of identity. The subjective experience of re-perceiving exists at various levels. This finding contrasted the original belief that an individual had experienced re-perceiving or did not. The development of the subcategories made this abundantly clear in a way that was not obvious from their original description of axioms. Although Shapiro et al. state that these mechanisms would appear in various forms, at different rates, my subcategories gave insight that some participants would report experiences in all of the categories, while some would experience just one or two.

Re-perceiving is a process that occurs on more than just a cognitive level. Participant statements clearly describe behavioral and affective impacts. While these domains are not mutually exclusive to each category, there are some general parallels. Participants reported becoming aware and making moment-by-moment shifts in cognition in the subcategories of attention. In contrast, affect was often mentioned in the four subcategories of attitude. Meanwhile, behavioral shifts were noted in the subcategories of intention, when participants noticed conditioned reactivity and then chose to respond as opposed to react. The analyses presented here dovetail with the literature reviewed and fit with discursive approaches to self (Brown & Cordon, 2009; Stanley, 2012). By examining the participants’ descriptions of re-perceiving, I found evidence supporting others’ views that mindfulness entails a shift from the story that a person tells about their experience (Brown & Cordon, 2009) to direct, observable behavior and emotional/cognitive processes as they relate to varying experiences of self-construction (Stanley, 2012). Participants’ first-person accounts specified relational shifts, from “disconnected practitioner” into that of a “practitioner observer”. Through meditative practice, the practitioner begins to directly observe what is occurring as they become aware of sensations; this expanded view reconstructs their perspective. Perspective is determined by the judgments that the practitioner makes about stimuli. Our Western cultural structure provides a shared language and a shared construct that focuses on “I am” and personality traits. The idea of self is developed through the social construction of observable behavior, and roles used to define affect and cognitions (Stanley, 2012). The MBSR course consists of mindfulness practice and instructor-led inquiry. Through such discussions, the practitioner is able to shift the use of language and experience a different sub-cultural construction within the classroom that evolves into a less-reified self.
Participant language, rather than investigator assumptions, drove the Grounded Theory categorizations. Shared cultural meanings between the participants and researcher enabled analytic interpretation of participants’ discourse. Noticing parts of the outdated self-concept that were no longer relevant to the present moment of self were “let go”; hence the fluidity that is associated with re-perceiving. This implication is a crucial addition to the larger body of MBSR literature. Understanding the shared cultural meaning behind participants’ language brings new significance to instructor-led inquiry. Based on this work, MBSR instructors might learn how to decipher the meanings behind the specific language choices in participants’ speech when they describe their meditative processes.

Continuing with the role that language and cultural construction has on the self, McCown and Ahn (2015) describe how Judeo-Christian mainstream views may encourage reified development of the self. These non-secular teachings inform most Westerners that in death certain aspects of the self will be evaluated (Brown & Cordon, 2009). Thus, characteristics of self are judged using valence or a positive/negative dichotomy. In our consumer-oriented culture, we are able to pick and choose anything that we like. We can even pick and choose aspects of personality that we deem to be favorable to increase our status or define us as individuals (McCown & Ahn, 2015). For example, over-commitment and perfectionism in our culture are behaviors and qualities for which modern day Americans seem to be striving. Through the shift in re-perceiving, participants gained insight into their striving to “be” a certain way.

Shapiro et al (2006) describe that one process of re-perceiving is choice-full awareness of directly observing life events through the five senses as opposed to being overly involved in judgments or stories. Participants described transitions from filtering the moment through the conditioned, fixed self to being fully aware in the present moment. They realized their self-concept had been conditioned by experiences from the past. This kind of conditioning is necessary to “know” who you are. For a Western practitioner, this implication is an essential shift in the experience of re-perceiving, to be able to observe the self as it moves from role to role and in and out of life stages. The practitioner’s relationship to the world is not centrally focused on their subjective experience. Participants respond skillfully to experiences while meditating and then applying that experience to the informal practice of everyday being; thus, decreasing reactivity (Olendzki, 2010). This process helped create distance from the stimulus in order to become more fully immersed in the present moment without the conditioned need to narrate with memories from the past (Brown & Cordon, 2009). Re-perceiving assists one in becoming aware of this reifying process, moment-to-moment. The process of re-perceiving enables a unique response to each new experience.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any research project, this study had some limitations. One of which can be found within the selection of participants. All participants were highly educated members of a small liberal arts college cam-
The group was ethnically, racially, and culturally homogeneous. By definition, participants who willingly signed up for the MBSR course, showing motivation to engage in mindfulness, are a self-selected group. Those who then gave permission to be contacted for research, indicate a further self-selection process, influencing the sample. These limitations may be addressed by future research that includes a more diverse sample size. Additionally, the interviews were conducted at various subsequent time frames after the course had completed, which meant that some participants may have taken the MBSR course up to three or four years prior to being interviewed. In this way, participants’ length of experience and commitment to the practice varied greatly. There is no way to know if or how any of these participant factors impacted the findings. As is the nature of qualitative research, findings cannot be generalized; rather, they serve to clarify a concept. Analytic interpretations of the data set mapped onto and refined a theoretical construct. Future implications of this research may be adapted to further expand upon the concept of re-perceiving; developing a more refined idea of when or how one realizes that they have shifted from the pre-conceived notion of the fixed self to that of a fluid self.

Conclusion

Given the earlier discussion about the Western, reified self, it is important to relate this refined concept of re-perceiving to the field of psychology as a whole. By understanding the processes detailed in the analyses, psychological researchers may better understand the role that culture and language play in therapeutic interactions. The MBSR course cultivates re-perceiving and thus a new way of experiencing self, which may explain why it is such a useful adjunct to other forms of treatment. Mindfulness meditation helps practitioners realize that their view of self is reified, a view that poses particular difficulties when navigating a world that is constantly changing. Clinging to the fixed, culturally constructed view of self adds an unnecessary layer of suffering to psychological distress. When what is “known” about the self can be let go, the individual can focus more deliberately on healing. Re-perceiving is the process by which the self becomes de-reified; questioning conditioned self construction. Awareness of what is needed in the present moment takes precedent, having significant implications on health and well-being reported by MBSR practitioners. I interpret re-perceiving to be one reason why MBSR elicits such restorative effects.

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**About the Author**

As a graduate student, I was able to continue my interest in MBSR during my two-year Graduate Research Assistantship, working with Dr. Mamberg in the Clinical Psychology department. As an undergraduate student, I assisted with Dr. Mamberg’s larger study in my role as a transcriptionist. Being able to experience the MBSR class as well as continuing my meditation practice gave me particular insight into the experiences of our participants. I have since graduated from the Master of Clinical Psychology program, and for my work on this project, I was awarded the Distinguished Graduate Research Award. I have recently started my work as a clinician at a local community mental health clinic.
Ceramic Vessel: *Connected II*

BRENDA ROVEDA
Utilizing Animal Metaphors in Child Psychotherapy: An Integrative Approach for Therapists

TRICIA A. GORDON

Introduction

Despite a plethora of therapeutic approaches utilized when working with children, there is still a need for empirically-based, child-centered, developmentally appropriate methodologies (Ray & McCullogh, 2016). The purpose of this research is to provide the framework of an integrated psychotherapeutic model that provides a greater understanding of the use of action-based metaphors when working with clients in early to middle childhood. The use of metaphors in a therapeutic environment that focuses strictly on traditional talk psychotherapy is not effective in reaching young children. However, by expanding this definition to include non-verbal expressions of metaphors in children’s play, mental health professionals can use this technique more easily and effectively interact with children. This position was espoused by Anna Freud (1965), one of the pioneers for using different modalities in therapy with young people. While there are a countless number of metaphorical possibilities, there is a lack of research with a focus on the specific use of animal metaphors in child therapy. Moreover, this research will contribute to the field of play therapy, both theoretically and practically, as it will synthesize current explanations, demonstrate techniques through the use of a clinical-case conceptualization, and provide a framework for applying action-based animal metaphors. Counselors can then utilize this as a guide when working with children.

In the therapeutic environment, communication is paramount to success and can take on many forms. Historically, there are several approaches to psychotherapy, each having its own unique perspective and techniques. The psychodynamic approach, for instance, was developed by Sigmund Freud and focuses on the influence of the unconscious mind (Freud, 1900/1953). Behavior therapy, as developed through the work of many professionals including Albert Bandura, B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Ivan Pavlov, emphasizes the child’s observable behaviors (Hayes, 1987). Aaron Beck (2011) created cognitive therapy, which places an emphasis on the individual’s internal cognitive processes. Cognitive therapy works to change cognitive distortions through processes such as cognitive restructuring and is often combined with behavior therapy, forming cognitive-behavioral therapy. Person-centered therapy was created by Carl Rogers (1961) and focuses on the here and now. Rogers described three characteristics of an effective therapist: empathy, unconditional positive
regard, and genuineness, which are necessary and sufficient to create a strong therapeutic alliance and produce positive change within the client (Rogers, 1992). In a similar fashion, emotion-focused therapy is a therapeutic approach that has roots within person-centered theory. Emotion-focused therapy emphasizes the individual’s internal thoughts and feelings (Greenberg, 2017). Although each approach has established effectiveness with clients, these, like most theories, focus specifically on one aspect of the individual (Santostefano, 1998). Later in this article, I will turn to an integrative approach, where each of these methodologies will be incorporated into one cohesive approach when working within different therapeutic metaphors with children.

**Developmental Theory**

For now, let us turn to a brief discussion on the development of children because as Brems (1993) points out, “no discussion of children can be complete without giving some thought to development” (p. 45). In order to successfully interact with a child, one must understand the child’s inner world. Many adults attempt to interact with children using language and get discouraged when the child does not respond. As Landreth (2002) explained, “children must be approached and understood from a developmental perspective. They must not be viewed as miniature adults” (p. 9). According to developmental theory, one must not only understand which developmental state the child is at, but also which modality of expression the child is successfully able to use (Calicchia, 2005; Santostefano, 1998). Although children in early to middle childhood have developed language, their primary modalities of expression are action and fantasy, and therefore, regularly utilize nonverbal forms of communication to express themselves (Chesley, Gillett, & Wagner, 2008; Linden, 2003). Even more importantly, when serving children within clinical populations, it is important to understand that referrals for maladaptive behavioral problems are the norm. Hence, children, who are seen as behaviorally disruptive or acting out, typically construct behavioral patterns based on maladaptive, nonverbal metaphors, as they do not have easy access to language or fantasy to express these difficulties. Therefore, it is critical that the child’s therapist is able to work within the dysfunctional modality of expression to reach the child and to facilitate growth. As Landreth demonstrated, children’s communication is “facilitated by the use of toys as their words and play as their language” (p. 41). Especially in the therapeutic environment, in order to communicate effectively and connect with children, therapists must meet the child where he or she is at, utilizing these modalities as the primary modes of interaction.

Santostefano (1998) describes therapy as “a journey the child takes you on, traveling through the child’s personal world, a terrain that you have never seen before” (p. 28). When the therapist and the child engage in metaphorical play therapy, they “leave the outer conscious world dominated by reason and cognition [and] enter a different realm of inner focus and creative imagination- the place where the language of action, of make-believe, of surprise and magic potentiates the child’s archetypes towards healthy, healing new behaviors” (Linden, 2003, p. 250). Fantasy and play are natural, innate processes children use to make
sense of their world; in order to effectively communicate with children, therapists must join the child’s subjective world.

**Traditional Use of Metaphors in Therapy**

In traditional, verbal-based adult psychotherapy, the use of metaphors is a common occurrence. Metaphors in psychology predate Sigmund Freud (1953) and his psychodynamic approach, focused on symbolism and the interpretation of the unconscious mind, including the analysis of symbols within dreams. By definition, a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another” (Agnes, 2012, p. 400). The concept of speech appears to limit the definition and application of metaphors. However, within the field of psychology, it is largely accepted that metaphors involve the transfer of meaning from one object or instance to another. In doing so, the current use of such metaphors can go beyond the modality of language and can translate into thoughts, emotions, actions, and fantasies, and therefore, can be integrated into the primary modalities used by children (Brooks, 1985).

**Utilizing Metaphors with Children**

Just as verbal metaphors are helpful for adults, the metaphorical use of play has been used to facilitate positive therapeutic change in children (Chesley et al., 2008). Play therapy is an approach to psychotherapy in which the therapist selects a variety of therapeutic play materials and helps “facilitate the development of a safe relationship for the child to fully express and explore [his or her] self through play, the child’s natural medium of communication, for optimal growth and development” (Landreth, 2002, p. 16). In most instances when children participate in therapy, they will bring their experiences and feelings from their everyday life into therapy, which will be depicted in their play (Rose, 1995). Play itself is a behavioral metaphor of the child’s internal world, as children cannot adequately describe their internal experiences in words. Throughout play, children often act out specific themes or metaphors, typically related to their lives and difficulties, called play reconstruction. The problem can be transposed into a storytelling format, where the situation is paralleled to a metaphor that takes the focus off of the conflict in the child’s life and focuses on solutions and growth (Mills & Crowley, 2014). Children consciously understand some metaphors, while others are understood at a subconscious level; nonetheless, children who work with therapists and explore action-based metaphors learn new metaphors that prescribe adaptive behavior and foster development. Metaphors in child therapy provide a non-threatening way for children to communicate information, their thoughts, fears, and styles of coping, while also providing an opportunity for the child to attempt to solve his or her problems in a protective and supportive environment.

In everyday play, children can get stuck in limited play themes, such as killing or playing the role of a helpless victim (Reichert, 1994). Children may need assistance to rewrite this story. During play therapy, the counselor may intervene to help create change by introducing healthy adaptations and helping the child resolve conflicts in a comfortable environment (Linden,
2003). By doing so, the child and therapist will begin to alter the maladaptive metaphor, turning it into an adaptive metaphor.

Much like fairy tales and nursery rhymes that portray the moral of the story through symbolic representation, metaphors in child psychotherapy assume a similar purpose, addressing parallel social and emotional lessons. Metaphors provide a simple way for children to understand more complex concepts, while “enlivening the traditional treatment modules” (Friedberg & Wilt, 2010, p. 110). In utilizing metaphors, “there is movement away from simplistic explanations of behavior and simplistic solutions to problems…promoting the child’s ability to focus upon and understand his or her own feelings and thoughts in more sophisticated, more integrated and less fragmented ways” (Brooks, 1981, p. 137). It becomes easier for children to see a problem through the lens of a metaphor in comparison to exploring one’s own conflict directly.

In an effort to determine if children prefer the use of metaphors to literal instructions, Heffner, Greco, and Eifert (2003) investigated children’s preferences through the use of relaxation techniques using literal and figurative explanation approaches. As discovered in their research, children respond better and irrefutably preferred metaphors to literal instructions, and additionally, depicted that figurative language will increase rapport, increase the child’s understanding of concepts, and decrease resistance to therapy (Heffner et al., 2003). This provides further evidence to support the use of metaphors with children.

**Animal Metaphors**

Due to the complex nature of metaphors, there is an unlimited number of ways to classify metaphors: the source, function, content, etc. (Burns, 2007). For the purpose of this research, the focus will specifically be content-based metaphors, exclusively the use of animals. In order to operationally define terms, animals will be considered as any living creature, besides humans, that belongs to the animal kingdom. The use of animal metaphors has been used historically in the field of psychology; for instance, the Child Apperception Test (C.A.T.), a projective measure, uses animal cue cards to test children’s personality and various streams of consciousness. The C.A.T. was published in 1949 after being developed by Leopold Bellak and Sonya Sorel Bellak in response to the Thematic Apperception Test (Bellak, 1949/1971). Although this use of animals is not a new concept in the field of psychotherapy, it has been neglected in the literature.

Children connect to animals for a variety of reasons. Children and animals have the ability to form a special connection, as animals are the perfect companions for kids, serving a lovable, yet protective role. Children enjoy caring for animals in addition to having the ability to control them at times, depicting clear themes of power. Using animal metaphors also makes it possible to discuss human situations in a symbolic way, as they can easily serve as abstract replacements for people. Fantasies, such as these, connect to children through being embedded in the context of reality while maintaining a safe psychological distance (Rose, 1995).
Through the use of fantasy, children sometimes see animals as real life superheroes. Superheroes have captured the imagination of Americans almost a century ago and continue to play a major role in fantasy (Rubin & Livesay, 2006). Superheroes are disguised beings that have pure motivations and extraordinary powers, coming to the aid of individuals or communities that are threatened (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Superheroes often toy with the themes of good versus evil, strong versus weak, and right versus wrong, depicting strength, courage, determination, and hope. The metaphor of the hero is apparent in innumerable books and films and can be traced back to the earliest stories/writings, such as Beowulf. The hero metaphor was noticed by Freud and Jung (Campbell, 1949) and formed the base of much of their early work. The ubiquitous nature and appeal of the hero metaphor is nicely summarized by “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (Campbell, 1949, p. 23). These same superhero traits may be recognized in animals, as seen in birds that can fly, cheetahs that can run at abnormally fast rates, and chameleons that change color in order to camouflage themselves, paralleling the power of invisibility. Animals can be seen as evil, such as ravens, crows, and snakes, or nurturing, such as cats, dogs, kangaroos, lambs, and koalas. Animals such as bears, gorillas, and bulls depict strength, whereas turtles portray vulnerability. Animals and their traits, nonetheless, may change over the course of therapy.

Children have a natural attachment to animals, as they fulfill many deep psychological needs, such as companionship, loyalty, trust, obedience, and submission (Levinson, 1962). The relationship between animals and children create a nonjudgmental relationship full of mutual acceptance and unconditional positive regard, fulfilling the child’s need for affection, while reducing stress (Levinson, 1984). Furthermore, due to the inherently therapeutic value of animals, the use of live animals has been incorporated into therapy through animal-assisted psychotherapy. However, this incorporation can be accomplished through the live or metaphorical use of animals. By capitalizing on children’s enjoyment and connection to animals, the use of animals in psychotherapy serves as a stimulus, which helps facilitate the healing process (Bachi & Parish-Plass, 2017).

Animal Metaphors Using an Integrative Approach

As previously discussed, theories in psychotherapy generally focus on one approach or only one aspect of a child, which have led to a rivalry between theoretical orientations. Currently, most clinicians describe themselves as being eclectic, using the one theory that best suits the client’s needs. However, many mental health professionals have a difficult time choosing just one single model because a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all interact with one another to influence the individual’s experience, causing dissatisfaction within the field. This lead to the idea of integration or trans-theoretical approaches (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Ideally, therapeutic approaches should combine or integrate these areas to target the whole in-
individual, rather than utilizing separate aspects of each theory. The recognition of the common factors in psychotherapy has contributed to the rise in interest in integration (Norcross & Goldfried, 2005).

As numerous individual approaches have proven effective, leading to positive outcomes on behalf of the client, an ideal child-focused approach will incorporate a variety of techniques from multiple theoretical orientations, in turn, dissolving the boundaries between the approaches. Again, the idea of theoretical integration is not new to the field, yet its use with child-friendly approaches has been overlooked. Rather than reinventing the wheel, this model aims to adjust therapists’ approaches by reworking their current model. In order to effectively integrate and treat clients, it is critical to see the client as a whole, rather than just seeing his or her symptoms. Following this approach, throughout a psychotherapy session, mental health professionals should combine and integrate numerous techniques from several therapeutic orientations. Using an integrative model, Santostefano and Calicchia (1992) have shown that various domains, as disparate as body image and relational psychoanalysis, can be integrated to form effective approaches that deal with difficult problems such as aggression in children.

First, each individual therapeutic model has a specific outlook regarding the therapist’s role in therapy. For instance, in psychodynamic therapy, the therapist is to remain distant and act as a blank slate, whereas in cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy, the therapist engages in play with the child (Beck, 2011; Freud, 1900/1953). Both of these approaches pick one extreme of directedness rather than shifting back and forth between the two extremes. This integrative approach suggests that directedness, like most therapeutic factors, occurs on a continuum. Applying metaphors should be a collaborative process, where both the therapist and client play a role in the construction and manipulation of the metaphor (Friedberg & Wilt, 2010). In doing so, the therapist must find a balance between being directive and non-directive within sessions, leading to a semi-directive approach, where the therapist carefully considers when to interject, being directive at appropriate times and completely non-directive at other times.

Once more, when working through a metaphor, the therapist will integrate approaches from various theoretical orientations. For instance, whenever engaging in a metaphor, the therapist will utilize interpretation, a classic psychodynamic skill, in an effort to understand the meaning behind the symbols presented (Freud, 1900/1953). The therapist should also aim to incorporate some person-centered skills within therapy through the use of empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and active and reflective listening (Rogers, 1961, 1992). Through this one instance, a therapist may also engage in cognitive approaches such as cognitive restructuring or roleplaying (Beck, 2011). The therapist may utilize behavioral techniques such as modeling, modifying, systematic desensitization, and conditioning (Hayes, 1987). In doing so, the therapist must not neglect the client’s thoughts and feelings, and therefore apply aspects of emotion-focused therapy as well. Although an explanation of various tech-
niques and approaches can be incorporated through this trans-theoretical approach, this is not a comprehensive list, as there are countless approaches and techniques, which can be effectively integrated when treating children through the use of a metaphorical integrative approach.

**How to Apply this Integrative Approach**

To illustrate this unique integrative approach, let us explore how to apply these concepts, followed by a case example. As with any approach, the first step to a successful therapeutic experience is to build a strong therapeutic alliance (Rogers, 1992). Once the rapport has been established, the work of psychotherapy can begin. Regardless of which methodology is being utilized, the therapist should be an active observer, looking to identify the client’s strengths, weaknesses, and coping strategies, as this information will become helpful later in therapy. Viewing the child through a developmental lens, the therapist should also assess the child’s preferred modality of expression, as this will be the primary method of interaction throughout treatment (Landreth, 2002). In addition to these recommendations, the following steps, as inspired by Santostefano’s (1998) directed-fantasy approach, provide a framework for counselors to utilize when implementing this integrative metaphorical approach with children.

**Step 1- Establish a Metaphorical Conflict and Consider How It Relates to the Child’s Presenting Problem**

As indicated previously, children typically externalize their problems, presenting them through their play and using a metaphor or a recurring theme. Once the underlying conflict is established and understood completely by the therapist, the work of therapy can begin.

**Step 2- Construct the Story**

The therapist and child should work to co-create a story that fits the child’s individualized preferences and needs. If possible, the therapist should allow the child to bring the metaphor into therapy. Metaphors children bring into a session have a special meaning to them, as they show a glimpse into the child’s inner world (Brooks, 1985). If the child does not bring the metaphor into therapy, the therapist can facilitate the process by beginning to create a story. With this in mind, the therapist should be especially careful not to impose his or her biases on the child. Instead, the therapist is imposing structure to facilitate the expression of the metaphor so that subsequent iterations can transform maladaptive metaphors into adaptive behavioral patterns with embedded meanings that best serve to help the child to develop age-appropriate behaviors that fit the environment and facilitate development. As the story is being developed, a large range of characters will be created, often including, but not limited to, a villain, a character in distress, and a helping character. Through the story, both the therapist and the client will find themselves identifying with a character, which will be important down the road in treatment (Mills & Crowley, 2014).

**Step 3- Understand Metaphor Before Intervening**

Before intervening, the therapist must be sure to...
completely understand the child’s metaphor (Bowman, 1995). The therapist must not jump to conclusions and must be sure not to impose any biases on the child.

**Step 4- Work Through the Metaphor Together**

As previously mentioned, creating a metaphor should be a collaborative process. The therapist and client should work through the problems together, while exploring new possibilities for solutions and coping mechanisms. When children engage in more active solutions to their problems, these provide them an opportunity to play various roles, such as the helper, the individual being helped, or an observer. Through this process, it is essential for therapists to stay in the metaphor when working though these issues, as what the therapist does is often more important than what is said when working with children.

**Step 5- Integrate the Bad Guy**

As previously discussed, in most metaphors, there are clear themes, often comprised of an agonist and an antagonist. Although the children’s instinct may be to kill off the bad character, this is considered a limited play theme and is not therapeutic (Reichert, 1994). Instead, the therapist should work with the child to find a way to rewrite the ending to incorporate the villain.

**Step 6- Evaluate and Reevaluate**

As with all therapy approaches and techniques, the therapist must continuously evaluate and reevaluate the progress of treatment. Advancements and setbacks may occur throughout treatment, requiring the treatment approach to be altered. Over the course of therapy, new issues may arise, entailing a new or altered purpose of treatment and treatment goals.

**Step 7- Make It Fun**

When conducting this work, the therapist must remember with whom he or she is working. Although the content may be serious, the audience is still a child. As Landreth (2002) explained, children are not miniature adults, and therefore, the therapy must reflect this. If therapy is fun for the child, he or she may feel safer, more willing to be engaged, and will increase the therapeutic alliance, ultimately increasing the likelihood for success.

**Case Example**

Let us turn now to a case example to more completely illustrate this integrative approach. The case of John was chosen as it demonstrates common problems faced by children in early to middle childhood and illustrates how the client and therapist constructed a metaphorical animal storyline. John and his therapist worked through the presented metaphor, using the integrative metaphorical approach with animals.

John, an eight-year-old boy with gifted intelligence, was doing well academically in school. His mother reported that she divorced her husband due to domestic violence when John was five years old. John was never a recipient of violence, but he witnessed struggles at home. His mother reported that during these struggles, she often found him under the covers of his bed anxiously crying with his *Winnie the Pooh* books and his favorite cheetah, stuffed animal. His
mother also reported that he longed for the attention of his father, who was rarely available to him. He has had no relationship with his father since the divorce, and his mother has sole custody. The school and John’s mother reported that John suffers from extreme anxiety in social situations; he tends to stay on the periphery during recess and other social opportunities and prances about in an anxious manner rubbing his hands and licking his lips until they are sore and cracked. When he was approached by a group of boys one day, he became visibly upset and pushed one of them to the ground as he ran back in the school crying “No one likes me, I hate it here!”

Upon the first therapy session, John entered the room and was anxious and somewhat reluctant to engage. The therapist pulled out a *Winnie the Pooh* book, that she knew John liked, and read it to John hoping that the animals in the story would provide John a handrail for expression. Suddenly John bounced up after reading the book and stated, “Do you want to go on a safari? I know a lot about all of the animals in Africa. Let’s go!” Immediately John became engaged with the therapist and presented an animal-based metaphorical storyline about an African safari. He explained and enacted how many animals were living in the plains of Africa, which he would play with for the next few sessions. Through John’s depiction of the story, the plains of Africa appeared to be ruled by Leo the lion. Almost every time Chase the cheetah went to the watering hole for a drink of water, the strong and powerful Leo the lion was there, which scared Chase the cheetah, causing him to run away. Chase is afraid of Leo even though Chase has the ability to run almost 100 miles per hour, faster than any other animal in the plains of Africa. John portrayed this metaphor with glee and action as he raced across the grass in the backyard of the office. Suddenly, John became visibly upset and asked to return to the therapy room. When John reentered the building, his demeanor became sad, as he slumped over, eventually falling to the floor. John crawled slowly across the floor, saying, “it does not matter how fast Chase can run, the lion will get him anyway, and he’ll never get a drink. I might as well just lay here and die.” At this point, the therapist reflected the sadness by mimicking John’s body posture on the floor. Suddenly the therapist jumped up and exclaimed, “I know what to do…. We can go to the wise old owl for help! He knows everything. I’m sure he can help us.”

Over the next few weeks, the therapist assumed the role of Oz the owl and worked with Chase to help him solve his problem. Oz the owl was especially careful to listen closely to what Chase was telling him, as he tried to understand his internal feelings and thought processes. Oz taught Chase a magical breathing technique that would make him feel relaxed and confident. Oz told Chase he should use this technique when he goes to the watering hole. Chase then reported that no one on the plains of Africa liked him, which was why he went to the watering hole at night. Oz helped Chase understand his thought distortions and restructured his distorted cognitions through the use of the metaphor. Oz noted that many animals in the forest were indeed friends with Chase, but he just could not see it. Just because he was not currently a friend of Leo the lion, does
not mean that no one likes him. In fact, maybe Leo the lion likes him too. Oz helped Chase overcome his fear of Leo by gradually getting him closer and closer to the watering hole. Eventually, Chase was able to drink out of the watering hole at the same time as Leo. At this point in the therapy, reports from school and his mother showed that John was beginning to integrate into the social networks and showed much less anxiety when interacting with the other children. Teachers began to notice that the children considered him intelligent and funny!

In the next phase of therapy, after making it this far, Chase could not thank Oz enough for all of his help but had one last request; Chase wanted to talk to Leo with the hopes of possibly being friends one day. Oz agreed to help Chase accomplish this final goal. Oz first modeled the behavior that Chase should engage in and then provided an opportunity for Chase to practice what he was going to say in the non-threatening environment. Chase had made so much progress and felt that he was ready for this challenge. The next day, Chase went down to the watering hole and talked to Leo. At this point, the therapist assumed the role of Leo the lion. As it turns out, Leo wanted to be friends with Chase, but he was too shy because he thought everyone was scared of lions. Chase was surprised to find out that he was wrong. Leo the lion never disliked him; he simply did not know who he was. Needless to say, both were excited about this misinterpretation, as Leo and Chase spent the day running and playing together, where they became best friends. They always shared the water in the watering hole, and they defended together all of the smaller animals in the jungle against any possible threats. Later that summer, on a hot dry night, Chase and Leo were lying in the grass together relaxing and enjoying their time together. During this metaphorical discussion and enactment, John and the therapist enjoyed a cupcake together. “Hey,” John said, “I just remembered that in the Winnie the Pooh book we read when we first met… A day without a friend is like a pot without a single drop of honey left inside.” The therapist nodded with great care as she smiled. John laughed and stood up to say goodbye to the therapist with a quick embrace. The therapist then stated “Hey, I remember when we read the Winnie the Pooh book, you were just a young cheetah then. Now, I think you’re faster, stronger, and smarter, but most importantly, you know how to make friends. I think I’m the first of many friends you are going to make; all the animals in the jungle think you’re really funny and smart!”

**Discussion**

This metaphor strongly reflected difficulties John displayed with his peers, while providing additional insight into the rationale behind these difficulties. Although he played many roles, John seemed to most clearly identify with Chase the cheetah. At the beginning of the therapy session, the therapist was extremely non-directive, allowing John to present information through the metaphor. The therapist took on a person-centered and psychodynamic approach, as the therapist used reflective listening and interpretation, respectively. The therapist also took on an emotion-focused approach, as the focus was on the cheetah’s internal thought processes and emotions. As the therapy
went on, treatment became more directive, since John looked to the therapist for assistance. In doing so, the therapist still allowed for periods of non-directive work. The therapist took on the role(s) of the animals in John’s fantasy, as they attempted to begin to work through the problems together. Also, at this point, the therapist embedded relaxation and anxiety management techniques that were explained to John while the therapist assumed the character of Oz the owl.

The cheetah presented irrational thoughts, as he shared his belief that no one liked him. Oz the owl, representing the therapist, utilized the cognitive technique of restructuring to turn the cheetah’s irrational thoughts into rational thoughts (Beck, 2011). The therapist then integrated behavioral aspects into therapy, as she and John engaged in systematic desensitization. When Chase the cheetah drank out of the watering hole while Leo the lion was around, this drink acted as a reinforcer, increasing the likelihood of this behavior in the future (Hayes, 1987). Lastly, when Chase the cheetah wanted to engage in conversation with Leo the lion, Oz the owl modeled appropriate behavior before engaging in a roleplay, depicting integration of cognitive and behavioral approaches (Beck, 2011).

In addition, the use of Oz the owl, a wise, all-knowing character, provided insight into John’s view of the therapist. As Yalom documented, humans have a “need for an omnipotent, omniscient, all-caring parent or rescuer - a need that concludes with the infinite human capacity for self-deception to create a yearning for and a belief in a superbeing” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 313). Clients in play therapy will often create this rescuer or a character with superpowers in order to fulfill this basic human need. The case illustrated this concept, with the superbeing depicted through the owl, representing the therapist’s presence, knowledge, and unconditional positive regard, components of Roger’s (1992) person-centered approach. As one can see from this case, although the storyline may appear simple, metaphors can be complex. There are many factors and interactions occurring at once, each of which must be interpreted and understood by the therapist and the client. Keeping that in mind, metaphors depicted through play prove a simpler way for children to share their subjective inner world with others.

**Conclusion**

Throughout their play, children often present a persistent, habitual pattern or theme, which mimics conflicts within their lives. If therapists enter into the child’s inner world, the child’s imagination can become a powerful tool towards healing and growth. Metaphors are vivid expressions that enhance the therapeutic environment by condensing facts and depicting events that are difficult to put into words. Metaphors are a common language, providing the therapist with insight into the child’s private inner world, which can be used to enrich therapy.

The use of animal metaphors is suggested as a resource for play therapy. This child-friendly, integrative approach proposes that therapists simply adjust their current working model to see the client as a whole, while integrating techniques from several therapeutic

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orientations, therefore, dissolving the boundaries between approaches and increasing the effectiveness of treatment. Incorporating an animal-based trans-theoretical approach in therapy, while tapping into the symbolic language used by children, will ideally increase the ability for therapists to provide meaningful experiences for children within the therapeutic environment. By developing and synthesizing the literature on animal-based metaphorical approaches for young children, ideally, this will lead to qualitative and quantitative methods of further analyzing this technique, with the goal of continuing to empirically support interventions such as this with children.

References


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**About the Author**

Tricia Gordon is currently a graduate student at Bridgewater State University perusing a M.A. in Psychology. Her research was completed under the mentorship of Dr. John Calicchia. Tricia received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Criminal Justice from Bridgewater State University in May 2016. She plans to continue her education in pursuit of a doctoral degree in a few years.
Manipulations of Stereotypes and Horror Clichés to Criticize Post-Racial White Liberalism in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*

JILLIAN BOGER

In a similar vein to its zombie movie predecessor *Night of the Living Dead*, Jordan Peele’s 2017 thriller horror *Get Out* takes the opportunity to make a social statement in the context of its body-snatching horror. *Get Out* is a work of satire and parody, which can seem like a conundrum to audiences who associate satire and parody strictly with comedy but works in the context of horror easily. Part of that comes from the dual nature of horror and comedy—they function as two sides of the same coin. Many of the same techniques that work in comedy such as exaggeration and bodily revulsion function similarly and just as well in horror. With that in mind, if comedy can be satirical, there’s no reason for horror not to be. That said, satirical horror presents in its nature a problem for audiences not so different from the problems faced by other serious “art horror” or comedy: at what point are you supposed to take what you’re watching seriously? This problem is not only an issue because of horror’s history as a medium meant for cheap thrills aimed at children as evidenced in Andrew Monument’s documentary on the genre, *Nightmares in Red, White and Blue* (2009), but arises when anyone—filmmaker, critic, or otherwise—wants to critique the genre. And, for some, it can be difficult to make the decision to take horror seriously, considering the frequently campy nature of the genre. However, satirical horror has its place in popular culture studies and tends to survive much longer in the public eye outside of horror aficionados than throwaway B movies.

*Get Out*’s satire is multi-fold. On the one hand, it functions as a critique of the genre that produced it, that is where we see its parody echoing older horror movies. On the other hand, *Get Out*’s second major target is the white liberalism of “post-racial” America in the years following President Obama’s election and re-election, which is something reviews of the film following its release immediately identified—though referring to white liberalism as a second target may be misleading. Neither target of satire takes priority over the other, and they function in tandem. Part of that is because of horror’s own sordid history regarding race and the portrayals of black bodies, which frequently stretch black men into literal monsters. Horror itself has a long-running association with toxic white masculinity, and even though some filmmakers have allegedly attempted to challenge that masculinity in their works, movies such as *Last House on the Left* (1972) and the most recent...
The King Kong film, *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), reaffirm the toxicity if not by their content itself, at least because of fan reception of them. For instance, *Last House on the Left* (1972) revels in gender-based violence, including graphic rape scenes, while Kong relives, again, a colonialist fantasy re-visions again and again in the King Kong series. *Get Out* as a satire of the horror genre relies on its satire of white liberalism. The crux of both satires follows in how the protagonist, Chris Washington, is treated by the narrative. While audience members who are less familiar with the horror genre might not be able to pick up on all the various subversions and inversions of typical horror tropes and clichés, the major ones that Peele explores within *Get Out* is Carol Clover’s Final Girl (which has been noted, though not as thoroughly as the criticism of white liberalism, by some film reviewers such as Julius Kassendorf) and the theme of body-snatching. Chris functions as *Get Out*’s Final Girl, and this itself is a challenge of not only how black men are expected to act or perform in horror but also wider societal stereotypes and assumptions about black masculinity. Further, *Get Out*’s body horror of brain removal and implantation is not only a callback to the old horror fear of body snatching in the ‘50s through ‘80s via communist or alien agents, but makes an indictment of ownership and use of black bodies in service of white liberals in post-racial America.

What are those stereotypes about blackness in post-racial America? Many of them, particularly in media representations of blackness, are the same as they’ve been in the twenty years since Marlon B. Ross described them in “In Search of Black Men’s Masculinity”. At the same time that black men are seen as “overly masculine”, they are still “not masculine enough” because they do not fit in the context of whiteness (601). Black men become threats to the hierarchy of white masculinity in their assumed athleticism, their appeal to white women, militant opposition to the status quo, and their overall possession of qualities which make them “supermen” compared to their white peers (603)—while simultaneously being depicted as lazy criminals. Ross uses the metaphor of Janus to describe black celebrities in the 1980s; black men are at once something to be ridiculed, something to be used for sports or military aims, to be jailed, and to be hated. The question of duality reemerges in terms of performance when Alford A. Young discusses what it means to be black in the age of Obama. Young marks a difference between “street” and “decent”, what black men are allowed to be with their peers, and what they must be in order to be taken seriously by their white peers. One of the differences between street and decent presents itself in language and vocabulary. Young argues throughout that just as black men may not dress a certain way when around white people, the same goes for how black men talk with their peers. Peele has noted that difference before in his sketch comedy show with Keegan-Michael Key during their “Luther” shorts where Luther functions as a way to tell the audience what Obama is really thinking. (And it is interesting that Peele, like Young, uses Obama as the example to show the difference between “talking white” and “talking black”.)

In *Get Out*, the same difference and codeswitching in language is evident early on with Chris’s encoun-
ter with first the police officer responding to the car accident with the deer, but then again when he meets Rose’s parents, Dean and Missy Armitage. Dean affects what Rose criticizes after dinner as an attempt to sound hip—his “my mans” especially are target of her criticism—and they function as a white man not attempting to sound hip but rather attempting to sound black. Likewise, Chris codeswitches in his language with Dean and Missy compared to his language with Rod and Walter. His language during his interactions with Dean and Missy are what Young would characterize as “decent”; he is concerned from the start about whether the Armitages know he’s black or not and wants to make a good impression as Rose’s first black boyfriend, though she tells him “they are not racist”. That said, even between Rose and Rod, his language is different, which indicates that the problem is not with talking to authority figures like policemen. For instance, when he calls Rod in the car on the way to Rose’s parents’ home and says “Yo”, and even Rod’s dialogue compared to Rose’s marks a difference between white speech patterns in Get Out and black dialogue patterns. Though Rose is not in a position of authority over Chris, she is in a relative position of power as a white woman—and Chris’s language adapts to this. Within the intersections of race and gender, white women are still privileged over black men, which has revealed itself in real life cases such as that of Emmett Till, and here, where Rose is one of the biggest threats to Chris’s safety.

Language itself becomes an important point for Chris to understand that something is wrong with Georgina, Logan, and Walter. In the exchange between Logan and Chris when he says it’s, “Great to see another brother”, Logan’s response—and Chris’s assessment that he sounds like how an old white man—shows a different failure in language adaption from Dean’s affection. While Dean plays the role of a dad attempting to fit in with his daughter’s black boyfriend remarkably well, nailing it and creating the expected discomfort response from an audience watching (whether that audience is Rose and Chris or the film’s audience), Logan is still a white man who does not make the effort to act black even after stealing a black body. Logan’s language is stuck in Young’s decent mode, even when Chris attempts to coax him into street lingo.

The language itself might be problematic, too, though, when we consider that it is playing into expected and codified roles of what blackness is. Is it a problem to expect black people to speak differently from whites, and then be surprised at similar language? What does this movie teach us about language—or cultural codeswitching in general—in these moments? In Get Out, it’s not a problem for Chris to have a language he uses with his friends and other black characters versus white characters, but that doesn’t necessarily mean the movie is telling its audience that all black people in real life speak the same. To that end, even expecting Obama to speak differently among his black peers versus to white audiences, whether he does or not is something that can transcend race and function more as a matter of knowing to whom one is speaking. How a southerner talks to other southerners is going to be different in many cases than a southerner talking to a northerner; at least, in theory. Even if language and the problem of
codeswitching is one that Peele targets, it is not to criticize Chris’s vocabulary (or Rod’s for that matter), but to point out that it happens. In these strange language moments, the film targets the ways black men have to and are expected to maneuver in extremely white spaces. Even with Georgina, who is, like Walter, a white person inhabiting a black body, we hear respectability politics in her language and voice. Even when part of the original “Georgina” is crying, her face is schooled and her language attempts to reassure Chris that nothing is wrong.

Black stereotypes in the wider world are not always amplified in horror. There are plenty of monster movies where the monster exemplifies black stereotypes (most notably, any King Kong movie). Even when they don’t, there are also plenty of movies featuring a “magical negro”, where black people are given supernatural attributes. That said, the most familiar black stereotype in horror is not necessarily the aggro-masculine force presented in other mainstream media—that is, a character like those of blaxploitation movies or, to one extreme, Mr. T—but rather (and criticized in the Wayans Brothers’ parody Scary Movie series) that the black character dies first, such as in Scream 2, Aliens, Queen of the Damned, Gremlins, and the 2009 remake of Day of the Dead. In Get Out, this trope is inverted; not only is our protagonist a black man—who gets rescued, in fact, by another black man—but he manages to survive. If audiences don’t consider the alternate ending of the movie as part of the film’s canon, he’s able to get away from the scene of trauma. This isn’t to say that the black person always dies first (the black character in Hal-ween V isn’t the first dead character), but it happens enough that audiences notice when it’s not the case. There’s also the history of black horror that Get Out has to contend with; while blaxploitation movies are in a very different genre from Get Out, it’s still one of the only major significant horror (and wider film) movements during which black men were allowed to take on the role of protagonist. The question then becomes how the protagonists of the blaxploitation compare against Chris.

John Semley, in “Who’s Bleeding Whom,” takes stock of the protagonists in blaxploitation films and compares them against contemporary white re-interpretations of blaxploitation-type heroes, especially in the works by directors such Quentin Tarantino. Semley acknowledges the hypermasculinity of the blaxploitation protagonists throughout the movement, but his assessment comes to the conclusion that even if they are hypermasculine in original movies, the purpose behind it was generative. The men are hypermasculine in original blaxploitation movies for the purpose of reaffirming black masculinity and are allowed the same qualities as masculine persons as mainstream media allows for white masculinity. By contrast, in works that follow blaxploitation-kitsch as Semley uses Tarantino to exemplify, hypermasculinity in black men works in a way that only serves the stereotype rather than being as affirmative as it was in original blaxploitation movies. But Chris doesn’t fit into this horror movie black protagonist cliché, either. He is neither the stoner black man who dies at the start of the horror movie at the moment of separation from the group, as the Wayans want
to critique, nor is he the hypermasculine protagonist of blaxploitation films.

Rather, Chris fits the function in *Get Out* of Carol Clover’s Final Girl. The Final Girl is one of the horror tropes that is parodied in *Get Out*; even if a viewer doesn’t know what the Final Girl is by name, she is, according to Clover, one of the horror archetypes that reappears enough that she is recognizable. Various critics reemphasize certain traits of the Final Girl: She is generally understood to be the “survivor” at the end of a slasher flick, the one who is able to kill the monster. While *TV Tropes* is not necessarily a totally academic source of information, I find that it does pare down the Final Girl trope into easily identified traits (namely, by citing other tropes). Fans on *TV Tropes* describe the Final Girl as “the last character left alive to confront the killer,” and, “especially in older works, she’ll also almost certainly be a virgin, remain fully clothed, avoid ‘Death by Sex’, and probably won’t drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, or take drugs either….The Final Girl is usually but not always brunette, often in contrast to a promiscuous blonde who traditionally gets killed off”.

In the wide span of feminist horror criticism, the Final Girl can sometimes be read as a conservative figure—but at the same time, she evokes a sense of sympathy from an audience which needs someone to identify with (Clover 8). Jamie Curtis’ character in the original *Halloween* movie, Laurie Strode, functions as the codifier for the Final Girl (better perhaps than another frequently cited Final Girl, *A Nightmare on Elm Street’s* Nancy Thompson, whose survival at the end of the movie is placed in a precarious position when she gets into the car in the dreamlike sequence after “killing” Freddy). While a female character, Laurie is not as sexy or sex-driven as her peers, which serves as a de-gendering tool, keeping her comparatively innocent compared to her friends. Because Peele plays around with several different horror themes and clichés that revolve specifically around gender and race, it makes sense that the Final Girl—arguably one of the best-known tropes of the genre—is one of the targets of parody in *Get Out*.

There are a few of Clover’s requirements for the Final Girl that Chris Washington shares with another male horror character—Ash Williams, from Sam Raimi’s original *Evil Dead*. They both match Clover’s loose requirement of a gender ambiguous name for the protagonist, and both turn a weapon used against them into one to use against their tormentors. In Ash’s case, the chainsaw which severs his hand becomes an obvious weapon. For Chris, it’s a little more complicated: He is made temporarily immobile early on when he hits a deer because of an association between it and his mother’s death, and the loss of his mother via an automobile accident is one of the traumas that the Armitages use as a tool for hypnotism to control him. Not only does he use deer antlers as a weapon in his escape, but by using them, he is able to leave. There are also the other requirements of a Final Girl that Chris fits: he is forced to give up his one vice (smoking) but otherwise is vice-less. He is able to keep his own against other characters, not by physical virility but rather by catching them off-guard (using deer antlers as a weapon, ironic against Dean who professes to hating the deer population and fighting Missy who wouldn’t expect...
him to rally against her because of her hypnotic control over him).

Additionally, Chris is virtuous in the same way as most other Final Girls because he’s not shown to be especially sexually promiscuous. While he has a girlfriend, Chris is monogamous in that relationship, and the same moments of sexual voyeurism that occur in many other horror movies are absent in Get Out. This is especially interesting to note, considering the way in which white masculinity posits black masculinity as a threat frequently because of the alleged hyper-promiscuity of black people in general, but black men especially. In these terms, perhaps because Chris is not hyper-sexual, perhaps he is somewhat de-sexed by these latent biases against black masculinity—though he is placed on the same level as white female Final Girls in that removed access to (or interest in) sex.

It’s not just that Chris survives despite being black that makes him the Final Girl. Though the Final Girl is somewhat de-gendered throughout her process of reclaiming the weapon (phallus) of the villain pursuing her, she still is a fundamentally feminine character—which is what allows audiences to sympathize more readily with her. Chris functions as a subversion of traditional black masculinity, in both terms of wider racial stereotypes of masculine blackness and black masculinity in the function of horror movies. There are specific character traits and habits that separate him from those stereotypes (even if they require an audience knowledge of stereotypes to work). He is shown to care more about intellectual and artistic pursuits rather than physical—which is associated with blackness in media, when referring to Ross’s description of blackness—from the start of the movie, which focuses a shot on his photography, and again when he makes the choice to take some photos during the gathering/pre-auction party. He has permission from the narrative to be emotional over the loss of his mother, and for that trauma to return at several points during the narrative.

Chris should be considered in the context of what horror movies and media in general expect of black men. He works both as the frightening black man: based on the microaggressions committed against him at the Armitages’ body-auction by female bidders, it is made clear that he is physically fit, and he is successful enough to have a nice apartment in (presumably) the city, shown at the start of the film, and these traits place him as a threat to the white masculine framework against which he is unwillingly pitted. At the same time, he’s a photographer: voyeur, maybe, but a witness to power at the same time he holds it. As much of a threat as he may pose to the white characters in Get Out, the relative gentleness in his character and his position as Get Out’s Final Girl makes him an obvious sympathetic focus point. If Clover argues that the Final Girl’s femininity, and therefore, her vulnerability is what makes her someone audiences want to see survive, Chris’s vulnerability, too, in a sea of white violence against the body makes him someone audiences should be able to project themselves onto regardless of their own race. He is at once removed from the white liberalism that surrounds him, but at the same time, he is one of its many victims.
There are other ways in which *Get Out* criticizes white liberalism. It’s not just about reestablishing what it means to be black, whether it’s abiding by stereotypical blackness or not. It’s about the way black bodies are literally being used by white characters.

Keeping in line with the parody of the Final Girl via subverting it with Chris, Peele targets another trope in horror cinema. In horror, there is a tradition of bodies being re-inhabited by new brains. Even if *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) was not the first instance of body repurposing, it has reoccurred often enough that it’s become familiar: we see it in *Soylent Green*, and most recently in Stephenie Meyer’s book *The Host*. The concept of body-snatching is familiar and always alarming; it makes us feel unsafe and uncomfortable where we should be comfortable. While Peele cites in various interviews *Stepford Wives* as one of the major influences on *Get Out*, the fear of assimilation goes back at least a little further in American culture. Patrick Gonder expresses this specific fear in “Like a Monstrous Jigsaw Puzzle”. During the 1950’s, westerners had finally discovered the DNA molecule, had realized what it was that made an individual different from everyone else in the world, but, at the same time, they were so afraid of their enemies that they were loath to see that difference come home into their own backyards. Horror provided—and still provides—the opportunity to address these cultural fears by turning them into monsters that can be physically fought, even if the protagonists are unable to conquer them. Frequently, the horror of the Cold War had to do with the Other invading domestic spaces and using that covert invasion to overtake and become one with the host, as if the Other were a parasitic organism. Gonder uses the film *The Fly* (1958) to represent the horror at becoming one with the Other, but also goes into the wider ideas represented by the eugenics movements in post-World War II. According to Gonder, most of the undesirable genes uncovered became associated with people of color; he brings up Henrietta Lacks as an example of nonconsensual medicine practiced on and against black bodies, and discusses the problem of genetics and race. Blackness in the 1950s through ‘80s was (and, to some extent, still is) seen as deviation from the norm, with that norm being defined by upper-to-middle class suburban whiteness.

Gonder uses *The Fly*, which is a sci-fi horror film focusing on the transformation of a scientist into a fly-monster-man, as a way to talk about the relationship between white suburbanism and blackness, communist sympathies, and anything else that threatened the Cold War. We may need to adequately identify the fear of black people (and men specifically) that white America still has in order to dig deep at what Peele is addressing, which is only difficult because of post-racial America’s adamant denial of its inherent racism. *Get Out* sees a desire to get away from the need to identify the problems within our culture: Rose makes mention of how her father would have voted for Obama for a third term, and Dean echoes the point while giving Chris the tour of the family property, and this is supposed to function as an excuse to Chris about the family’s “employment” of black servants. Rose’s brother, Jeremy, isn’t physically assaulting Chris at the dinner table; he’s practicing karate.
The problem is not with whiteness; it’s with anyone who brings up a problem with whiteness. Rod stands as comic relief throughout most of Get Out, which is something necessary in a film dealing with content that has the capability of being overwhelmingly despairing. As much as he’s the required tension breaker, allowing an audience the opportunity to laugh despite how much trouble Chris faces—particularly during his phone call with Rose, whose expressive voice contrasts with a face devoid of emotion—he’s also a conspiracy theorist. The narrative of the film establishes Rod as a character capable of detective work, though he’s also inherently suspicious. It’s supposed to be funny that he frisks an old woman and notes that the next 9-11 is going to be a geriatric job, but, at the same time, that it sets Rod up to suspect the unexpected, it also poises him the position of, if not The TSA Agent Who Cried Wolf, but at least Chicken Little. Rod’s credibility in his own world is questioned because he suspects people who the universe of the film suggests would not be suspected by others. This is first clear with his suspicion of old people, but made more obvious when he visits the police department with his well-founded worry about Rose’s family. The audience, because of the dramatic irony employed during this scene against the police officers, knows that the Armitages are doing exactly what Rod accuses them. But he doesn’t have the evidence and can only provide a hunch. He questions the white narrative, and even the black officer does not believe him. Perhaps if Rod was white, he would have provided a more credible narrative to other law enforcement officers despite being a TSA agent. His blackness does not help him.

The Armitages, however, use blackness, as do all of their friends. During their family/friendly get-together, where Chris is paraded around to showcase his body and attributes to the white visitors to Rose’s family, he is subjected to microaggressions. He is compared to Tiger Woods (who now is notorious for cheating on his white wife under the diagnosis of sex addiction—which serves to reinforce Ross’s black stereotypes); white characters ask about Chris’s virility compared to white men; Chris is described as being more attractive physically than any white man. It’s not immediately about blackness, but it comes down to black masculinity. White women, mostly, comment on his physicality. Paradoxically, black masculinity is seen as a threat to white masculinity, while, at the same time, it is made an objective to be obtained—which Peele hammers out in Get Out.

It goes beyond the physicality of blackness in Get Out, though. We should—and must—consider the implications of Dean Armitage, who “Would have voted for Obama for a third term” by both his and his daughter’s admission, and what he does to black people. It goes somewhat beyond Gonder’s merging of Other and White-Suburbia in movies like The Fly and The Thing. Dean literally scoops out the brains of black people except the most integral parts of their personalities: the parts of the personality which allow characters like Logan and Walter to act in Chris’s better interests, the parts that allow Logan to tell Chris to “GET OUT” repeatedly while he can, the parts that allow Walter to shoot Rose and then himself with the hope of getting Chris out of the clutches of these white characters. He
scoops out the brains of black people to place the brains of white people in the bodies, effecting the parodied *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

And while many horror films are satirical in nature, the question becomes at which point the satire of horror is more salient than the “horror” aspects. The salience of that satire comes in the whiteness of the villain. Dean’s affection for black language versus Walter’s and Logan’s inabilities to follow the black vocabulary that their original brains would have been able to supply naturally shows an overpowering of blackness by whiteness. Dean’s willingness to appear savvy with his daughter’s black boyfriend compared to his wife’s immediate inclination to brainwash Chris of his desire to smoke cigarettes is an insidious attempt to get on Chris’s side. Dean is the perfect white villain because he is unassuming: he went to Bali. He travels. He’s intelligent, and unlike Jeremy or Missy, he almost pretends that he wants to fit in with Chris. He’s not like any of those conservatives who openly believe that the last time America was great was when there was chattel slavery. He criticizes his father, who was so bent out of shape over losing to a black man at the Olympics that he could never, ever get over it (to the extent, in fact, that he co-opted a black body when his own failed him). Dean represents post-racial America. He is the system that criticizes traditional racism and moves towards a progressivist future—one that still makes use of black bodies as objects, which uses them in conjunction with black minds because black bodies are worthless without good (white) minds to pilot them. The post-racial America uses black bodies the same way Dean does: there is no point in discussing racism because we acknowledge that black bodies are better than white bodies, at the same time, white minds are better than black minds. The post-racial America is not racist, wants to bend to the culture of the people it uses, but still participates in microaggressions against black Americans. Rose is willing to defend Chris against a white police officer—but it should be noted that she does so to prevent leaving a paper trail. She does not defend him against the racial aggressions of her family—and in fact, like the biblical Salome, delivers him on a platter for the consumption of other white characters.

As tempting as it might be to dismiss the generic horror elements of *Get Out* as only being a vehicle for the satire, it is important to remember that in *Get Out* the satirical arguments Peele makes are unable to be made via comedic satire. The use of black bodies in service of white liberalism is a reality, unlike the imagined fear of communist covert invasion in movies like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. If *Get Out* is a comedy, it is only a comedy in that Chris survives. The horror of the content—coopting actual black bodies and leaving only the a small part of their original brains—cannot be divorced from the real-life target Peele attacks, and for that reason, *Get Out*’s satire relies on its genre specification as a horror movie. And because horror is just as guilty—if not guiltier—than other genres of perpetuating racism against black bodies, and the abuse of black bodies in service of elevating white ones, it must be made as much of a target of *Get Out*’s satire as white liberalism.
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