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Hijabi Muslim Women:
Resisting in Sexy and Fierce Formation
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Abstract

Muslim women who bear on the hijab are often viewed through a patriarchal binary lens: one of oppression and constrained-piety. This has led to the reduction of the Hijab, and within that, of the agent who chooses to wear it. In this paper, I argue how popular culture can be a powerful tool for Muslim women to reclaim the meaning of the Hijab. I analyze and contextualize Mona Haydar's Music Video "Wrap My Hijab" to show how she redefines the hijab to be one that is diverse and unique to the agent who bears it on. Overall, this paper will reaffirm the notion that Muslim Hijabi women are resisting the patriarchal narrative of the hijab in powerful and sexy formations.

Introduction

The *hijab*, a religious head-covering, is one way Muslim women choose to perform *ibadaah*: the complete devotion and love for the Almighty. In this paper, I will argue that popular culture can act as a powerful tool for Muslim women to reclaim the meaning of the hijab, and within that, their religious identity. Mona Haydar's music video, "Wrap My Hijab", works to disrupt patriarchal notions of the hijab as a symbol of oppression and constrained-piety. First, I will describe how the rise of Islamophobia in the West and the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia have contributed to a binary narrative of the hijab as a symbol of oppression and constrained-piety, respectively. The common element among such binary narratives is patriarchy. Second, I will describe how the representation of a veiled Muslim woman on screen and the visual and auditory aesthetics of the music video work together to challenge a reductive and patriarchal narrative of the hijab. In doing so, I will show how Haydar re-claims the narrative of the hijab to be a powerful symbol of female empowerment and resistance against patriarchy.

Summary of the Music Video Hijabi

Mona Haydar is a Syrian-American rapper, poet, activist, educator, and "God-enthusiast" originally from Flint, Michigan. Her first single, "Wrap my Hijab", received over 1.5 million views on YouTube, which excludes the millions of others view generated through other various social media platforms. Haydar's music video embodies a multitude of messages that supports a universal notion of female empowerment. The message in the music video is communicated through the vantage point of Muslim women, with rap lyrics like, "covered up or not, don't ever take us for granted," referring to Islamophobes and (conservative) Muslims alike. The video's aesthetics incorporate elements of Afrofuturism, a form of art that blends science fiction and black culture. In an interview with the Huffington Post, Haydar says that she hopes the video "would inspire people and offer some levity, joy, and hope" (Herreria, 2017). The music video received mixed responses, especially from within the Muslim community that condemn Haydar for displaying her body so publicly. Islamophobes, moreover, continued to sexualize, racialize, and orientalise the actors in the comment section of the music video.

Islamophobia and the Hijab

The rise of Islamophobia in the contemporary west offers a critical discussion on Orientalism. Edward Said defines Orientalism as a discourse concerning the people of the East, particularly of Arab-Muslim subjects. Said contends that the narrative concerning Muslims is one of inferiority, established by the elevated power of the West, and in contradistinction to the superior West (Said, 1978, p. 52). Neo-Orientalism is an extension of this notion, but focuses on how a new way of describing the Orient emerged post 9/11 (Al-Zo'by, 2015, p. 224). Whereas traditional Orientalism views Muslims as lacking desirable qualities, neo-Orientalism views Muslims as inherently parasitic. Muslim individual's hostility and resentment of democratic values – such as freedom, human dignity, and security – stems from their religious, cultural,

"social, and psychological structures" (Al-Zo'By, 2015, p. 223). As such, Muslims residing in the west are viewed as a threat to liberal democracy. Islamophobes consider Muslims as either dangerous, violent, incompetent, uncontrollable, vicious, pathological, or all of the above.

Zine (2006) defines Islamophobia as the "fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents," which work to create "individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination" against Muslims (p. 239). The intersection of race, gender, and religion emphasizes the distinct impact Islamophobia has on different Muslim bodies. Muslim women who wear the Hijab, for example, are "disproportionately victims of hate encounters," which is further intensified towards Black Muslim bodies (as cited in Alimahomed-Wilson, 2017, p. 77). The depiction of Muslim women as "passive victims of male violence" or as subjects "for the fulfillment of male sexual fantasies" work to "ascribe sexual exoticism and powerlessness to Muslim women" (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2017, p. 77). It is evident, therefore, that the hijab has come to represent a threat to the West. As result, this has led to the framing of Muslim women as inherently parasitic and needing to be saved and liberated.

Hijab as the Epitome of Religious Piety within Islam

An Islamic anecdote concerning the hijab, as cited in Malik (2017):

A man asked a Muslim man: Why do your women cover their bodies and their hair? The Muslim man smiled and took two sweets, he opened one and kept the other closed. He threw them both on the dirty floor and then asked: If I asked you to take one of the sweets, which one would you choose? The man replied: The covered one. Then the Muslim man said: That's how we see and treat our women. (Author unknown).

The above anecdote represents the current discourse concerning the hijab, and its rendition of piety. The story aims to encourage Muslim women to bear on the hijab through an analogy that

positions a non-Hijabi woman as an unwrapped candy bar and a Hijabi woman as a wrapped candy bar. Both candy bars are thrown on the floor, where only the one that is wrapped is picked up from the floor. The story positions women who do not wear the hijab as lacking faith in their religion, and it positions women who wear the hijab as possessing religious superiority.

According to the analogy, a non-Hijabi Muslimah is dirty while a Hijabi Muslimah is pure.

Marking the hijab as a dominant indicator of a Muslim woman's spiritual faith undermines the personal connection that a non-Hijabi Muslim woman has with her Lord, while maintaining a patriarchal expectation of piety of Hijabi Muslim women.

The anecdote also reveals how the discourse of Muslim female bodies is dominated by Muslim men. The story itself depicts an exchange between two men talking about a particular aspect of a female's religious identity. One of the men in the story asks the other man about "your women," as if Muslim women are ornaments for Muslim men to possess. The response of the Muslim man also works to objectify and sexualize the female body by ascribing it to a sweet that is only worth having if it is wrapped. The story, finally, diminishes the essence of the hijab, which is to obey and worship God.

The author of this paper makes the argument that such stories are propagated by and through the doctrines of Wahhabism. Wahhabiyya is a religious movement inspired by one of Sunni Islam's four major schools of thought, Hanbali, that emerged in 18th century Saudi Arabia. The teachings of Wahhabism is "centred on the cleansing of faith from impurities and a return to authentic Islam" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p.44, p.114). A central role in the preservation of a true Islamic nation included "the status and rights of women, their piety, and ritual practices" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 44). The Saudi state enforces laws concerning female bodies with the support

of the Ulemah, religious scholars who issue fatwas or religious rulings based on scholarly consensus.

Al- Rasheed (2013) argues that an important element in the formation of fatwas is based on "drawing the boundaries between pious Saudi women and corrupt Western women," where piousness is defined in contradistinction to the latter (p. 117). For example, "wearing high heels, perfuming the body, eliminating excessive facial hair, and tattooing the skin for decoration or marking a tribal identity are all prohibited (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 118). The influence of Saudi Arabia on the Muslim nation is significant. The country is considered the birthplace of Islam, with over 15 million people visiting the country annually to touch The Holy Kabaa. As such, the author of this paper argues that Saudi Arabia's enormous wealth, influence, and the rise of the internet are all important factors to the spread of Wahhabi ideology in the West and throughout the Muslim world.

Auditory and Lyrical Analysis

The genre of rap in the music video works to amplify Haydar's overall message of female empowerment in regards to Muslim Hijabi women. Pinn (2017) argues that "rap music" signals "a cultural resistance" and a "continued dialogue with religious ideals and institutions" (p. 396). Using Pinn's analysis of rap music and its implications on African American identities and black religion, Haydar's music can be classified as "progressive rap:" a lyrical form that addresses the socio-political construction of visible Muslim women in the West, and a critical discussion on Muslim religiosity (2017, p. 402). Haydar's choice of rap music therefore works to strengthen Haydar's resistance against oriental and patriarchal portrayals of Muslim women's bodies.

The lyrical content of Haydar's song is directed to those who view Muslim women within a narrow and prejudiced framework, and that position Hijabi Muslim women as homogenized,

oppressed, and powerless subjects. Duits and Zoonen (2006) argue that "the headscarf is often framed as a marker of women's oppression in Islam," which inspire debates around "gender inequality" and "multiculturalism" that concerns Muslim women in the West (p. 109). Such reductive and essentialist conceptions of Muslim women result in organizations such as FEMEN establishing a need to 'liberate' Muslim women from their oppressive values and systems. This type of feminism is often practiced "without ethical boundaries," where an organization assumes "that all feminists agree with one agenda, tactics, and ideology" (Natalle, 2015, p. 382). With this conception in mind, one aspect of how Haydar's music video offers a space for resistance is that the video is produced by a Hijabi Muslim women with the purpose to empower other Hijabi Muslim women in the power that they possess through the embodiment of the Hijab.

The lyrics in Haydar's music video begins with stereotypical renderings that are constantly hurled at Muslim Hijabi women, such as:

What that hair look like

Bet that hair look nice

Don't that make you sweat?

Don't that feel too tight?

Within these comments and questions are implicit messages that exclude Muslim women from broader society and that position them as inherently foreign, especially within a western context. Haydar responds to this line of questioning, implying that perpetrators of Islamophobia are in need of education. This subverts the image of Muslim women as being deprived of formal education by re-framing it with respect to those who perpetuate Islamophobic understandings of Muslim women. Important in this analysis is the way the female actors are positioned in the music video. Haydar is shown rapping while staring directly at the camera lens, and by

extension, the cynical inquirer. The camera zooms out of a medium shot that exposes Haydar rubbing her 8-month pregnant belly, her eyes still fixated on the camera lens. Haydar's disinterested and apathetic facial expression and bodily movements show how she is bored of the Islamophobic rhetoric due to its repetitive use in the mainstream socio-political sphere. As such, Haydar rejects romanticized notions of her body, one that is inspired by her racial and religious identity as a Muslim-Syrian American. In doing so, Haydar also challenges the racial and religious identity of America as a White-Christian society.

Importantly, however, Haydar is not concerned with gaining the acceptance and approval of the hijab and of her body from others. Rather, Haydar is concerned with making her presence visible and permanently known, whether others like it or not:

All around the world

Love women every shading

Power run deep

So even if you hate it

I still wrap my hijab

Haydar's message is one of defiant resistance, where she does not plan to back down from her identity because others dislike it or because it makes others feel uncomfortable. This is further reinforced through the defiant stares and dominant body positions of the female actors in the music video, where they are seen looking down on and directly at viewers. It can be argued, furthermore, that Haydar recognizes and understands the dominant power structures that operate around her body and of the other Muslim women's bodies. Haydar recognizes that oppressive power structures "run deep" in society, which implies that they may never be torn down. The recognition and acceptance of these hegemonic power structures as forever embedded in society

show how Haydar seeks to resist while working in this space. This is further reinforced in how she says that even if others don't agree with her choice, she still plans to wear the hijab. In doing so, Haydar assigns power to the hijab, which is manifested when worn by Muslim women. Haydar highlights how Muslim women can resist by calling on her Muslim Hijabi sisters to "keep swaggin" (Haydar, 2016).

More implicitly, the auditory aspect of Haydar's music video challenges notions of female piety within Islam. According to al-Kanadi (n.d), the dominant consensus is that musical instruments of all kinds are forbidden in Islam (p. 45). The argument for the prohibition of music and instrumentals is that it can lead Muslims astray, and encourage sinful activity. Listening to the female voice, moreover, is forbidden for Muslim men even in circumstances where a woman is reciting the Quran. The argument is that "the nature of a woman's (singing) voice is to excite sexual feeling in the male listener" (al-Kanadi, n.d., p. 47). In an interview, Mona Haydar recognizes the Islamic view of music, but says that she sees music differently, calling it "resistance music" (Wazwaz, 2017). Haydar goes on to say:

"You know, I'm not a young person. I'm not this thoughtless person who's just jumping into something. Music being forbidden, I'm not interested in this conversation. Because something that promotes love and light is positive and is permissible. And not only permissible but necessary, especially in the world we live in right now" (Wazwaz, 2017).

As such, Haydar's engagement with music as well as the sound of her voice in the music video work to disrupt traditional notions of what it means to be a pious and modest Muslim woman. Haydar's framing of music as an act of resistance, furthermore, raises questions in the way religious rulings are formulated in their purpose and intention. They reveal, specifically, the

patriarchal ways in that certain fatwahas are constructed to restrict Muslim women's ability to resist and exist in public spaces.

Finally, the instrumentals used in the video represent an aesthetics of belonging. Though the exact instrumentals used in the video are unknown by the author of this paper, it is clear that Haydar incorporates a mix of instrumentals that are distinct to Eastern, African, and European cultures. The blending of distinct music instruments in Haydar's music video can be argued to show how Haydar tries to "adopt discursively pre-arranged subject positions" in order to "make sense of the world" and "to be made sense of" (Lithgow, 2017, p. 149). The catchy, unique, and familiar sound in the music video work to engage viewers from all backgrounds. This is further reinforced in regards to a Western audience, where "the music video has these Beyonce-esque elements," such as the "all-female cast, vibrant choreography and camera work," all of which "creates intimacy for the viewer (Wazwas, 2017).

Visual Analysis

The visual aesthetics of Haydar's music video are simplistic. The women are shown performing on roughly four different backgrounds that alternate throughout the video, each of which changes in the different number of vocalists that perform in front of the backdrop. Scenes are shot in monotone and plain backgrounds. Some of the backdrops in the music video, specifically, show a dull white-beige stairwell and a somber-looking room. Other backdrops show what appears to be a painting and a mural, but it is difficult to make sense of the content because they are either disrupted by the female vocalist's bodies or zoomed in too much for the author of this paper to analyze. The lack of props and exciting landscapes in the video, therefore, make Haydar and the vocalists the focal point of the video. The plain and uninteresting backdrops, specifically, position the bodies of Haydar and the vocalists as the spectacle to be

seen and observed in the music video. As a result, this forces viewers to draw their attention on Haydar and on the other Muslim vocalists and dancers in the music video.

The defiant stares of the actors on screen creates a relationship with viewers that results in a "radical de-centeredness," in which the very presence of Muslim Hijabi women initiates an interactive and reflective space between them and the viewer (Bloul, 2012, p. 149). An interaction between the Muslim women and the observer is established, either at a conscious or unconscious level. The observer, in understanding the video's message of female empowerment, begins to mentally question their own pre-conceived notions of Muslim women and their agency. This interaction establishes opportunities in which oriental and patriarchal conceptions of Muslim women are de-constructed.

The representation of plus size vocalists in the music video shows how it challenges patriarchal conceptions of beauty. Bartky argues how "the current body of [women's] fashion is taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering emancipation" (1995, p. 28). The more thin, curvy, and light-skinned women are, the more acceptable they become by females and males alike. In a personal essay, Medina (2013) talks about the concept of body shaming within the socio-religious sphere of Islam. She recalls how she would be approached by members of her religious community telling her that her "obesity was a reflection of weak Iman (faith)" (para. 4). The judgement is based on the fact that Islam "instructs followers to not overfeed the body or to 'eat in moderation'" (Odoms-Young, 2008, p. 10). Medina argues that the portrayal of her obesity is a reflection of how her body is not just hers, rather, "it is exposed for the visual consumption, evaluation, fat-shaming and chubby-chasing by others" (2013, para.

4). This is in line with the disciplinary power of patriarchy that Bartky (1995) describes in her paper, where women are positioned to "stand perpetually before" the "gaze" and "judgment" of men (1995, p. 34).

Not only does Haydar's pregnant body on screen reject dominant notions of female beauty, especially normative conceptions of female representations on screen, but it also offers an interesting discussion about notions of motherhood that further amplifies Haydar's message of female empowerment. Badissy (2016) describes procreation from an Islamic perspective as a form of jihad, the struggle of oneself. Badissy contends that "women's biological jihād helps depict the woman an agent who is responsible about using all her human potential, the procreative function included, with full autonomy and awareness of her role as [the] vicegerent" (2016, p. 144). The element of procreation in the video, and the video's overall message of universal love symbolizes Haydar's way of trying to re-birth a nation that radiates in love and positivity. Specifically, Haydar's pregnant body works to dismantle the hatred and violence in the current nation.

The diverse racial cast in Haydar's music video works to disrupt a homogenized view of Muslim women. This is further reinforced with how each woman in the video portrays her own style of the hijab and clothing that is distinct to their own cultural backgrounds. This shows how not all Muslim women are the same. More importantly, the various racial representation of Muslim women on screen show how Islam is practiced differently by different social subjects. This shows how Islam, and in extension, Muslim bodies cannot be understood in a black or white framework. Rather, it shows how Muslim women are diverse and complex social beings that cannot be understood through minimalist generalizations and understandings.

It has been mentioned elsewhere in this paper that Black Muslim female bodies experience greater forms of violence due to their intersectionality, which is perpetrated by Islamophobic rhetoric. Haydar's music video, however, also offers a critical discussion of how black bodies experience racism within the Muslim community. The diverse female cast in the video and the lyrics, "love women every shading," provides a space to discuss the hidden racism within Muslim communities. Mohammed (2017) celebrates the representation of the "two black women" in the music video, who are the main backup dancers, citing that representations of Black Muslim women are a necessary form of representation within Islamic cyber-space. This is because Black Muslim bodies, in general, are not fairly represented in the narrative of the Ummah (Muslim Nation), where Muslims are no longer considered a cohesive and united front when talking about Black Muslim bodies. Collins argues that "by not belonging," Black female bodies "emphasize the significance of belonging" (Collins, 1990, p. 70). This is further reinforced by Mohammed (2017), where they contend that mediums like *Wrap my Hijab* create spaces that recognize "contributions from Black Muslims in their area of expertise, and having conversations about the racism which exists, despite some people's reluctance to admit it."

Conclusion

Overall, Haydar's music video seeks to reclaim the narrative of the hijab as a symbol of female empowerment. I have shown this by first describing the dominant, and paradoxical narrative of the hijab. I then provided a thoughtful analysis of the music video's auditory and visual aspect that shows how Haydar resists these patriarchal narratives. In doing so, Haydar reassigns the hijab as a symbol of power in the hopes of inspiring other Muslim women to continue occupying their space in sexy and fierce formation.

An Awareness of Asperger's Syndrome Subcultures as an
Answer to Surplus Suffering

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Abstract

Asperger Syndrome (AS) as a diagnosis and as a community has been heavily debated in its form across both medical and AS collectives. The cornerstone of many of these discourses has been around how stakeholders and special interest groups can work together to the benefit of the AS community at large. This paper sought to uncover the proper union of perspectives to promulgate the best outcome for those identified, or self-identified, under the AS label. By exploring both the medical and AS community perspective separately, a four-part argument was conceived showcasing the creation of AS as a recognized label; the subcultural groups born from this label; how discourses insensitive to these varying groups can catalyze ‘surplus suffering’; and how subculture led discourses can bypass this surplus suffering. ‘The AS Mood Disorder Synthesis Loop’ was proposed as model of harm through which surplus suffering takes form.

Introduction

I was four when I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS). This label haunted me in my elementary school experience where I experienced much personal trauma from well-intending adults and not so well-intending kids. I was different. I liked to keep to myself and often engaged in solitary activities like video games and playing Lego. I had a few friends, but never felt deeply connected to them... perhaps the reason for this is that we all kept to our solitary activities, just within each others' presences. I was unable to speak properly until I was 4 and struggled to conceive the meanings behind metaphors and other figurative language. Despite all of these quirks, I was happy. This was until I started grade one when the school was informed about my apparent disorder and so the "accommodating" began.

I was forced to ride a special bus that was separate from the normal kids. I was frequently handed detentions for social infractions that other children were able to get away with,

like being too loud. I was challenged when I did well on tests, even being accused of cheating on a few occasions since it was too unbelievable to my instructors to believe I could do well. I was even banned from competing in races on behalf of the school despite being the fastest runner in my grade. The support I was offered consisted of me having to go to special classes and meetings with children who had a whole menagerie of psychological problems, each differing in severity and symptoms from the other. My recollection was of always feeling out of place at such meetings and embarrassed that I had to be pulled from class to attend to them. This persisted until I switched schools in grade 6 whereupon I started anew with a fresh slate. Now, I enjoy a healthy menagerie of friends and success within my social abilities. The apparent weirdness of my earlier years all but a shadow in my young adult life.

The experience I just explored defined much of my early life and development into posterity. The whole experience left me feeling indignant for the longest time. Hence, I was inspired to research more into AS. I had the intention of revealing it as an unnecessary institutional weapon against diverse youth and how the institutions at play were abusive and narrow-minded. However, what I came across were perspectives that conflicted with mine, a medical community that had largely agreeable approaches, and an ignited debate over the very meaning of AS itself.

The patterns I saw in the literature led me to some fascinating conclusions around our institutional and personal relationships with AS. I have conceived a four-part argument around these patterns that I shall reveal as I move forward. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to point out how institutional harm is generated around AS and how best we can mitigate such harm through a sociological awareness of AS as a community.

To begin, I shall explore AS and its meanings and consequences through the lens of two communities: the medical community and the AS community. Upon finishing this exploration, I shall make a four-part argument around AS as a cultural identity and what discourses around AS have been blind to. Upon revealing this blindness, I shall explore the ramifications of this lack of awareness on the AS community and how we can best address such issues to minimize harm to the community itself.

The Medical Community's Perspective

The current DSM-V observes AS under the Autism Spectrum Disorder (Spillers et al., 2014). This spectrum is characterized by two main features: 1) deficits in social interaction, communication, and comprehension across multiple contexts and 2) repetitive, restricted patterns of behaviours, interests, and activities. These conditions must be present from early on in an individual's life, placing autism spectrum disorders under pervasive developmental disorders (Spillers et al., 2014). AS is considered as high functioning autism which is the least severe disorder of the autism spectrum. There are what are known as a triad of social impairments that characterize the disorder: 1) issues in comprehension and communication, both verbal and non-verbal; 2) issues in two-way communication; 3) issues in engaging in spontaneous, non-regimented behaviours, activities, and ways of thinking (Tantam & Girgis, 2009).

Biologically speaking, AS is strongly hereditary though its causes are still debated (Tantam & Girgis, 2009). Its origins are believed to be multimodal and involve multiple genes with features present across them different from individuals without AS (Warrier et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2016; Runswick-Cole, 2014). No definitive link has yet been strongly supported between biology and the expression of AS in others. What is not in question is the difference in brain scans between neurotypical individuals and individuals with AS.

First, I'll define what neurotypicality is. Neurotypicality refers to the concept of there being individuals who share roughly the same biochemical, electrical, and structural elements within their brains (Rudy, 2013). Further, neurotypicality requires the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral expressions of individuals to also be generally the same. Such expressions must also adapt in similar fashions across social contexts (Rudy, 2013). Neurotypicality is commonly used synonymously with the notion of the healthy brain. Neurotypical people are seen as healthy but AS people are observed as unhealthy. AS individuals are thus compared to people deemed as neurotypical who act as controls in brain scan research. Brain scans have shown that AS individuals have significantly different electrochemical activations in their brains than neurotypical individuals (Castelli et al., 2002; Ashwin et al., 2007; Happe et al., 1996).

These studies are positioned upon AS being interpreted as harmful to people. The medical community believes that individuals along the autism disorder spectrum have difficulties forging and sustaining close friendships; find the social world threatening; and find unpredictable changes alarming (Tantam & Girgis, 2009). Anxiety and stress thus promulgate as individuals with AS struggle to forge desirable friendships. People with AS also have an increased chance of being diagnosed with a comorbid disorder than neurotypicals would (Tantam & Girgis, 2009).

The medical community takes a management approach to mitigating the negative impacts of AS on people afflicted with the disorder. The pathway in place is as follows: 1) accurately diagnose AS; 2) screen for comorbidity; 3) provide resources and support around social training and general education concerning AS; 4) compliment social supports with medications (Tantam & Girgis, 2009). Concerning four, there is a history of medical professionals prescribing medications to treat AS itself, not just the comorbid diseases and disorders that may accompany it (Tantam & Girgis, 2009). Clinical trials exist that suggest medications are useful in treating

AS, but such results show up only for the experiments that failed to account for the placebo effect in their trials (Tantam & Girgis, 2009). Prescribing medications for AS patients can elicit spikes in arousal that mimic the extreme reactions observed in cerebro-vascular episodes and dementia (Carota et al., 2001). The medical community generally advises against medicating individuals with AS as a means of managing their symptoms.

The Asperger's Syndrome Community's Perspective

The perspectives of the AS community are explored through the lens of sociological research and the qualitative data it has uncovered across time. Jones & Meldal (2001) isolated five distinct themes that individuals with AS identify as characterizing their lives: 1) awareness of communication/comprehension difficulties; 2) a desire for relationships; 3) attempts to fit in using role-play; 4) a supportive community; 5) the benefits of the internet. Themes one through three propagate a great deal of anxiety for individuals with AS, particularly over prolonged periods of time (Jones & Meldal, 2001). Jennes-Coussens and her partners (2006) discovered that individuals with AS had significantly lower qualities of life both physically and socially with fewer positive experiences across relationships and work.

Regarding the 'supportive community' theme, sites like Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN), Autism Network International (ANI), and Wrong Planet explore AS related concepts ranging from exploring life in a neurotypical world to rebranding the very image of AS itself (Spillers et al., 2014). These various topics fulfill the needs of a vast and diverse group of people all under the AS umbrella. These online communities are not without their conflicts and controversies. Two separate debates remain at large in the community: 1) concern over AS being pooled under autism spectrum disorders in the DSM-V and 2) the neurotypicality versus neurodiversity debate.

Concerning the first controversy, some individuals have embraced the change and call themselves "spectrumites" whereas others remain suspicious who identify as "aspies" (Giles, 2013). Aspies are concerned about: how to identify themselves; reduced support and resources; being silenced; and promoting strategies of advocacy over curative measures (Spillers et al., 2014). Some aspies are concerned about pharmaceutical manipulations behind the new DSM-V change, but the majority are critical of psychiatry in general, referring to "hard science" as the eventual means of disentangling the true definition of AS (Giles, 2013).

The neurotypicality versus neurodiversity controversy is centered upon defining what a healthy brain is. Neurodiversity is a movement towards uncoupling the stereotypes from AS and autistic individuals by embracing a diversity in behaviours, interests, and thoughts as acceptable expressions of normal people (Spillers et al., 2014). It involves resisting and challenging what the medical community defines as "illness" around individuals with AS or autism. This extends to rejecting the curative approach of well-intending entities rooted in the neurotypical model by enforcing a culture that accepts different ways of socializing and thinking as also healthy. However, there are those within both the AS and autism communities who support the "cure movement" due to the severity of their symptoms and the consequent aid such individuals seek in coping with the world (Spillers et al., 2014).

The 'benefits of the Internet' theme consolidates information, communal belonging, and activism for the AS community. Jones & Meldal (2001) found that AS members used the internet to collect information about their conditions and ways of managing it. Davidson (2008) suggests that AS members create their own "language games" and consequently their own culture through such communication to foster a sense of belonging. Such belonging is further fostered in how members find that online communication is more considerate, responses can be edited, and the

difficulties of implicit communication are largely removed (Benford & Standen, 2009).

However, institutional sites, which often function as advocacy nodes, can either position AS as a disorder that needs to be cured, e.g. The Asperger's Network, Families of Adults Afflicted with Asperger Syndrome (FAAS), or as a healthy expression of human diversity, e.g. The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership (GRASP) (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007). AS oriented blogs exist that seek to normalize the experiences of aspzie individuals and align with the advocacy work of sites like GRASP. Not all AS oriented sites fit the needs of all individuals with AS - belonging is contingent on finding the right community (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007).

Now that I have characterized both the medical community's and Asperger's community's perspectives, I will proceed to unpack a four-part argument that will unveil a pattern not overtly discussed in the literature.

Part 1 – The Medical Community and the Creation of the AS Social Group

The medical community is rooted in neurotypicality (Rudy, 2013). Therefore, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural expressions that exist outside of the realm of neurotypicality must be defined and minimized to reduce harm. This cultural standpoint allowed for Lorna Wing, with backing from Hans Asperger's work, to define AS based on abnormal expressions of speech patterns, knowledge banks, and social comprehension (Giles, 2013). Thus, the DSM-IV included AS in its pages for the first time in the DSM's history. This galvanized a social rippling across the Internet where websites sprung up claiming to provide advice and support for those dealing with AS (Giles, 2013). Sites designed by individuals with AS, like Wrong Planet, started to proliferate with great intensity. Individuals with AS were beginning to realize that they were not alone and now finally had a medium to unite under.

Individuals across history have borne this condition (Giles, 2013), but only when it became identified by the medical community was the cultural experience of AS able to be reified into the disorder's name. This name was the platform upon which an entire social group came together and constructed the massive online presence observed today. The medical community, perceived people experiencing AS symptoms as atypical and developed a diagnostic name for them. In granting the AS community a name, AS members who were once isolated from one another now had a common language to connect through. This connection was mediated through the Internet and visibilized an entire group of people as distinct and unique from neurotypical society. Thus, the medical community created the AS social group.

Part 2 – The Four AS Subgroups

The AS community swiftly became saturated with a diverse population of members, each with their own experiences and interpretations of AS (Giles, 2013). Specifically, communities formed online hold competing perspectives across the two controversies explored earlier: neurotypicality versus neurodiversity and aspies versus spectrumites (Giles, 2013; Spillers et al., 2014). The neurodiversity movement has existed since the conception of AS (Giles, 2013), but the aspie versus spectrumite debate only became relevant in 2010 when details about the DSM-V were first released (Spillers et al., 2014). Various sites around AS and autism were thus established for different subgroups within the AS group (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007).

I argue that there are four subgroups that exist under the AS social group: 1) aspie/neurotypicality (AT), 2) aspie/neurodiversity (AD), 3) spectrumite/neurotypicality (ST), and 4) spectrumite/neurodiversity (SD). Each group has its own associated beliefs, perceptions, and practices around AS. Thus, each group has their own respective and distinct needs. Their needs embody as the preferred frameworks these groups desire to hold discourses from, i.e. AT

and AD people would prefer not to be assumed under the autism spectrum disorder in a discourse, but ST and SD people would. Mismatching discourse frameworks with AS subgroups can lead to something known as "surplus suffering" (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007).

Part 3 – Surplus Suffering and AS Subgroup Mismatching

Surplus suffering is when harmful stereotypes and biases are promulgated through one's interactions with a specified group and directly cause the group further harm (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007). This is quintessentially evinced in the medical context where patients and their lived experiences are medicalized to the point where their own understanding of normalcy and well-being are questioned (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007). This pathologization can cause patients to feel degraded and their treatments to be ridden with undue mistakes, carelessness, and unkindness (Clarke & Fletcher, 2004). In the AS context, this is present in how the interpretations of AS people and their lived experiences are often ignored. Instead, medicalized lenses are used by both medical communities and other agents to 'help' individuals with AS. By dismissing the voice of AS individuals and insisting that their unique experiences are symptoms of a medical problem, medical communities and well-intending parties alike destroy an AS individual's sense of normalcy and humanness (Giles, 2013). Disturbingly, much of the surplus suffering dealt to AS communities is through the institutions and charities positioned around helping them in the first place (Clarke & Fletcher, 2004).

Charities often subordinate and oppress AS community groups (Clarke & Fletcher, 2004). They do this through three primary mechanisms: the philanthropic, the heroic and the compensatory (Clarke & Fletcher, 2004). The philanthropic approach is focused on "helping, identifying, and treating" individuals with AS. The heroic theme refers to framing AS individuals as significant in talent and moral character despite their 'condition'. Finally, the compensatory

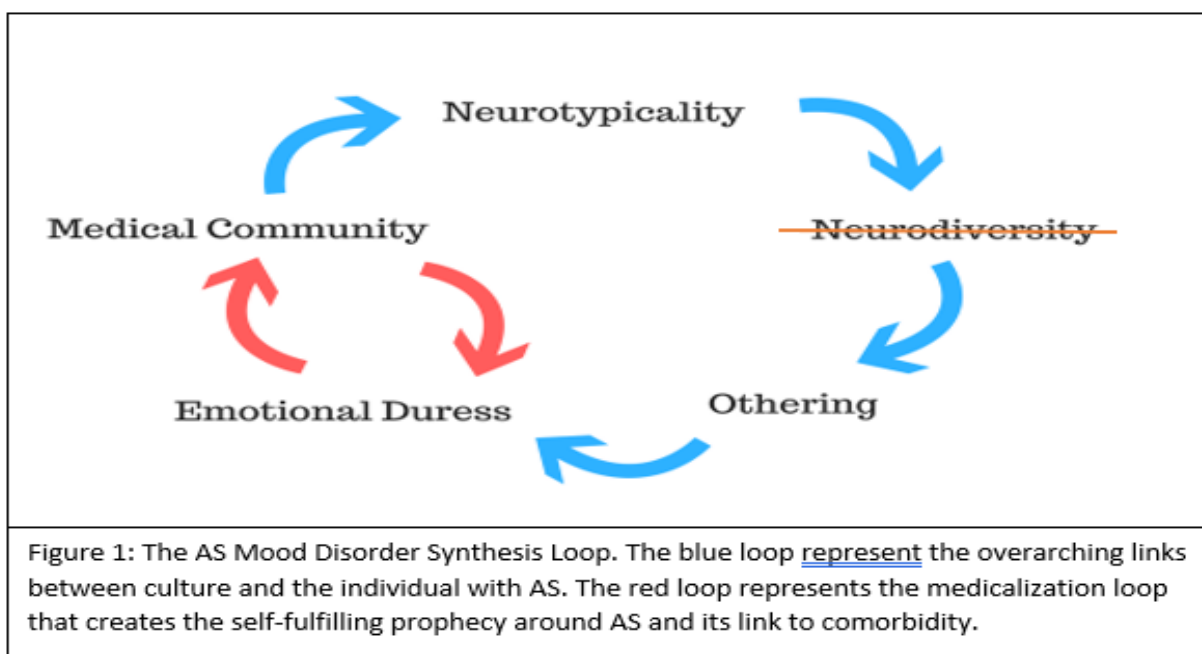
theme ties into the heroic theme in how it suggests that AS individuals make up for purported 'weaknesses' through 'strengths' specific to them. These mechanisms subordinate AS individuals in how they problematize their characteristics, homogenize their diverse communal needs, relegate them as pitiful dependents and reduce their features to a trade-off of strengths and weaknesses.

I argue this surplus suffering shares a relationship with the heightened comorbidity we observe among individuals with AS. For instance, Tantam (2000) showcases how individuals with AS have a heightened risk of developing anxiety and depression for a variety of reasons. The following reasons he lists are the potential aftermaths of diagnosis: 1) family tension or breakdown; 2) higher than usual rate of adverse life events; 3) victimization; and 4) awareness of difference (Tantam, 2009). Events 1, 2, and 4 are all a combination of both the AS individual's own symptoms and reactions they and their families/peers have to their diagnosis. Event 3 arrives almost purely from an assigned diagnosis. Through being victimized, the individual with AS is treated as if they have a problem that requires correcting. Consequent accommodation leading from victimization can influence an individual in ways that render them feeling alienated (Lengel, 2015). Arising emotional issues contribute to an increased risk of triggering comorbid emotional disorders like anxiety or depression (Tantam, 2000). Well-intending charities and peers that effectively oppress and subordinate individuals with AS compound onto their emotional duress.

I propose a feedback loop is created which sustains a self-fulfilling prophecy around the medicalization of AS and its heightened comorbidity. It is called the "AS Mood Disorder Synthesis Loop" (Figure 1). The culture of medicalization has enshrined neurotypicality as the reigning cultural lens we see AS through. Neurotypicality innately rejects neurodiversity as the

correct model - invalidating AN and SN groups. Individuals with AS recognize this cultural lens and thus grapple with their identities relative to it. This defines which of the subgroups individuals within the AS community fall under. Those individuals with AS that reject neurotypicality for neurodiversity endure increased emotional problems as medical society, charities, institutions, and individuals, in general, continue to oppress and subordinate their lived experiences. Individuals who embrace the neurotypical model are arguably more prone to the negative influences of neurotypical culture as they are more willing to accept the stereotypes and biases that exist around a medicalized AS individual.

The emotional duress experienced in a neurotypical society eventually drive individuals with AS to meet medical professionals who issue diagnoses and treatments. Through their strain, individuals with AS are likely to present with comorbid disorders by the time a doctor is seen. The patient is not only diagnosed with AS, but also with any present comorbid mood disorders, further cementing the perspective that AS correlates highly with comorbidity. Such diagnoses may aid certain individuals, but they also reinforce the medicalization of individuals with AS.



With their othering from neurotypical society enforced, feelings of isolation, frustration, and sadness promulgate, thus increasing the individual's risk of developing and enhancing mood disorders. Doctors may prescribe medications meant to treat the AS itself that can be dangerous to their patients. As explored earlier, such medications can lead to spikes in the arousal of individuals with AS and could potentially trigger the expression of comorbid disorders. This sustains the medicalization feedback loop (red) in Figure 1. Upon doctors observing the effects of this positive feedback loop, they further cement themselves in neurotypicality which strengthens it as a cultural position, thus completing the blue loop (Figure 1).

Part 4 – AS Community Led and Subgroup Specific Discourses

The AS Mood Disorder Synthesis Loop is meant to showcase two things: 1) cultural frameworks developed by those outside the AS community are harmful to all members under the AS social group and 2) AS subgroups are impacted uniquely from each other in discourses around AS. The first point addresses the first part of my final argument: discourses around individuals with AS must be lead and defined by them, not other parties. The mass promulgation of blogs written by individuals with AS speaks to a power struggle against other parties over controlling the discourse around AS people (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007). As explored, when other institutions attempt to assume authority over defining and approaching individuals with AS, they often miss the subcultural differences found within the AS community while also subordinating them (Giles, 2013; Spillers et al., 2014; Clarke & Fletcher, 2004). The institutions that assume authority often wield much power over how our culture manifests and so can heavily influence the collective discourse around AS (Clarke & van Amerom, 2007).

My second point is as follows: there are multiple subgroups under the AS social group which must be recognized and accounted for when holding discourses around AS, especially in

research. From my appraisal, the social sciences have been skilled at dissecting the cultural nuances behind AS community members and attending to multiple perspectives simultaneously. This point is mainly directed at both the medical community and the institutions or charities that are involved in discussing the AS community. The medical community almost never acknowledges the culture of neurodiversity propagating in the social science literature and continues to use language that problematizes AS. For instance, individuals with AS are referred to as "sufferers" in Tantum's (2000) paper as he assumes a clinical dissection of the issue. Ashwin and his colleagues' (2007) refer to autism as a "dysfunction of the social brain" as opposed to just saying 'differences' in the social brain. A final example that seems to express the medical community's overt biases reads as follows, "The social impairments of people with AS include deficits in empathy, self-awareness, and executive function. Many of these are quintessentially human characteristics, and the study of people with AS provides opportunities for using neuroimaging to compare people with AS and controls and identify which areas of the brain are concerned with these 'higher functions.'" (Tantum & Girgis, 2009). Imagine someone with AS being told that they have "deficits" in "quintessentially human characteristics" that are regarded as "higher functions". They would likely feel degraded and dehumanized. Such individuals are being told they are deficient in essential human traits that are considered "higher" in functioning, implying they are left only with the 'lower' functioning brain regions to rely on. Overall, my four-part argument can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The process of medicalization designed and refined the concept of neurotypicality.

Through the lens of neurotypicality, the medical community created the diagnostic name – Asperger's Syndrome. This name gave individuals who shared the cultural experiences of people with AS a name to rally under. Thus, a social group was born.

- 2) The AS social group divided into four subcultures: AT, AD, ST, and SD. Each group has their own positions, beliefs, and approaches that differentiate each other, but lines can still blur.
- 3) Addressing any of the subcultures in a framing that does not align with their stances or homogenizing all members of the AS social group as one culture can cause surplus suffering. The "AS Mood Disorder Synthesis Loop" is a manifestation of the predominant form of surplus suffering we observe in society.
- 4) Surplus suffering can be avoided by keeping in mind AS community subcultures and allowing AS communities to be the 'experts' of applicable discourses. This is especially important in both research and among institutions as they are powerful platforms of advocacy and awareness around AS people.

Conclusion

Future studies should focus more on refining and uncovering the varying subgroups that exist within the AS community. The neurotypicality versus neurodiversity debate is a more potent distinction than the asprie versus spectrumite debate and so studies should prioritize accordingly. This bears the most relevance in the medical literature which should specify their groups of interest. Generally, they are speaking to AS community members who identify as spectrumites positioned upon neurotypicality. Should they wish to take a more de-medicalized approach, then directly addressing other AS community subgroups would be effective.

The medicalization loop in the "AS Mood Disorder Synthesis Loop" should also be investigated further to untangle the issue of cultural disease synthesis. The model itself can be remodified depending on changes in cultural contexts and medical conditions under

investigation. Its core element is the concept of surplus suffering and how it sustains a disease synthesis loop.

Both the medical and social literature can profit from a more acute observance of AS community subgroups. Research holds great power and can influence entire institutions in terms of the terminologies and philosophies they use in investigating AS people at large. With this power comes a responsibility to mitigate any suffering imposed upon the AS community through precise, kind, and attentive care around the language and perspectives we utilize.

‘Strangled the Chicken’:

The Spectacle of Gay Male Sex and the Incitement of its
Discourse in *Rope*

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INvoke Sociology Undergraduate Journal

Abstract

In this paper, I explore discourses of gay male sex and homosexuality in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) as it situates within the highly-restrictive moral landscape of the Motion Picture Production code era. Although the restrictive economy surrounding these regulations had supposedly expurgated all discourses of sex and sexuality from the public sphere, I will draw on Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1984) to argue that this was not the case. Instead, I shed light on the paradox of censorship, by which the shrewd restriction of sexuality has transformed gay male sex into a topic of discussion. I then offer a critique of Hitchcock's spectacularization of gay male sex, urging us to question *how* discourses of gay male sex are being constructed and *who* is constructing these discourses.

Introduction

Ever since motion pictures have been produced, society has sought to control them. When tracing back through an entire century of censorship in the U.S. film industry, motion films have become public sites of social, political, and moral control and influence. Stemming from early days of public outrage over 'indecent' films, society continues to analyze the power this medium yields. Historians of Hollywood widely recognize the time period between 1934 and 1968 as the Motion Picture Production Code era. Many sought to understand the societal effects surrounding these regulations that governed what could and could not be shown in film and advertisement during this period. In the name of 'protecting' the public from harm, motion picture films were restricted, censored, or outright banned if they did not comply with the Hays Code regulations and standards. The Hays Code recognized a moral obligation for filmmakers to remain "responsible and sensitive to the standards of the larger society" (Tropiano, 2009, 291) by abstaining from including 'distasteful' content in their films.

Among the list of content the PCA had considered 'distasteful', depictions of sexuality (and especially homosexuality) on screen was one of them. Although Alfred Hitchcock's psychological crime

thriller film noir *Rope* (1948) was released during an era of enforced censorship and strict regulations that governed the form and content of classical Hollywood films, Hitchcock was able to seemingly transgress these tightly enforced policies. Hitchcock used cleverly overt depictions of covert homoeroticism through his auteurship and originality in film technique. Some critics of film censorship would argue that the Hays Code has brought more destruction than good. These critics argue that the repression of homosexual discourse has ultimately resulted in less realistic depictions of homosexuality on the silver screen and has done little to curb the marginalization faced by LGBT groups during this time period. However, I will be drawing on Foucault's work on *The History of Sexuality* (1978) to disprove this claim. I thus seek to establish two main arguments in this paper: first, that censorship has paradoxically allowed the discourse of sexuality to flourish in numerous and diverse ways; and second, that the spectacularization of gay male sex has allowed for the deconstruction and resistance of certain 'negative' depictions of homosexuality on film.

I: Depictions of Sexuality on Film

It is important to recognize that while film censorship has seemingly expurgated discourses of sex and sexuality, in reality, the opposite has occurred. Traditional allegations against the Hays Code and other forms of film censorship have argued that this prohibitive practice results in fewer and duller representations of human sexuality presented on film (Gilbert, 2013, 1). This argument parallels what Foucault describes as the repressive hypothesis, or the dominant narrative of the history of sexuality. According to Foucault, the repressive hypothesis focuses on the shrewd controls that were tightly harnessed on the mouths of the public when discussing sex and sexuality. The repressive hypothesis served as "an integral part of the bourgeois order" (Foucault, 1978, 5), by which energy that was not expended on being a productive worker within a capitalist society and, instead, expended on pleasurable activities, like sex, were highly discouraged. Discretion, modesty, and prudishness had seemingly

characterized the Victorian epoch. This confined all discourses of sex and sexuality into the private sphere of the monogamous, heterosexual, married couple's bedroom. As a result, this history of sexual discourse ultimately led to contemporary enterprises that served to further repress public discourses of sex - such as the Hays Code. Foucault, however, does not agree with this narrative. In critiquing the repressive hypothesis, he also does not completely reject it either. He certainly does not deny the fact that Western culture has imposed an "edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence" (Foucault, 1978, 4-5) towards discourses of sex. Foucault recognizes that any talk of sex - especially deviant or abnormal forms of engagement, like gay male sex - was publicly discouraged. However, he does not think sexual discourse was completely removed from the public realm either. Rather, he argues that the way sex is "put into discourse" (Foucault, 1978, 9) has shifted. Crude discourses that were frowned upon as constituting 'bad taste' were replaced with the explosion of complex, nuanced, subtler, and less intuitive discourses of sex that allowed for the increasing public exposure of different forms and numerous discursive frameworks surrounding sex and sexuality.

Similarly, Nora Gilbert (2013) sheds light on the paradoxical nature surrounding the prohibitive act of censorship. Through the Hays Code, Gilbert identifies a consequence of forcing certain narratives, like 'sex', underground - it "creates an open space, between text and subtext" (Gilbert, 2013, 14) for the filmmaker to explore and for the audience to interpret. Foucault would argue that this paradox supports his critiques of the repressive hypothesis. Although a "restrictive economy" (Foucault, 1978, 18) has policed and restricted the intensification of crude and indecent speech on sex, Hitchcock was still able to depict or, more appropriately, to *imply* the covert display of homosexuality in his film *Rope*. Throughout the film, a homosexual relationship between the two murderers, Brandon and Philip, is alluded to with subtlety. Hitchcock's usage of connotations was illustrated through a recurring double entendre throughout the film. Miller (1990) addresses the homoerotic undertones depicted right at the opening of

the film as Brandon and Philip exchanged dialogue about the murder, describing "it" as synonymous with sex ("How did you feel - during it?" "I don't remember feeling much of anything- until his body went limp, and I knew it was over, then I felt tremendously exhilarated") (Miller, 1990, 118). Since murder and homosexual sex were both taboo acts that were to be kept unspoken about and unseen from the public, this post-coital parallel is also reflected through the measure of precaution Brandon takes, especially when he ensures 'the deed' was done with the window shutters closed. Throughout numerous parts of the film, Brandon and Philip stood in close proximity and spoke to one another in a hushed tone. These scenes evoke a sense of intimacy and sensuality. Miller (1990) goes on to further explain that Hitchcock's clever use of depth perception, parallel spatial planes, and camera framing conveyed suggestions of Brandon and Philip committing a seemingly undisputable infraction "of the codes governing male homosocial space" (Miller, 1990, 124) by, in fact, touching one another. A play on words that is cleverly shrouded in suggestiveness is also exchanged throughout the film. An example includes Brandon describing to his house guests a time when Philip strangled the necks of two or three chickens - toying with the phrase *choking the chicken* as slang for male masturbation. Although some may argue that the Hays Code censorship regulations ultimately repressed discourse on sex, Foucault would agree that filmmakers like Hitchcock used numerous techniques and added various nuances into the production of the film in order to shroud depictions gay male sex and sexuality with secrecy during the Motion Picture Production Code era.

II: Gay Male Sex as Spectacle

The film techniques Hitchcock uses to depict the homoerotically charged nature of *Rope* has sparked a new, specialized form of discourse around sex and film where gay male sex has become a spectacle. Miller argues that *Rope* depicts an "essentially insubstantial homosexuality" by which the silent, yet implied nature of its existence in the film was built upon "suspense on less a question than that

of its own existence” (Miller, 1990, 119). Namely, the depiction of gay male sex is premised around an unstable, foggy image of what homosexuality *really is*. These connotations still provide a sense of ‘visibility’ for gay men in popular culture. However, a problem with this technique stems from the ambiguous interpretations the viewer must make, which involves navigating around that “which *may only be, does not necessarily mean*, and all the rest” (Miller, 1990, 119). For example, without explicit corroboration, the viewer may conclude that Brandon and Philip often standing in intimately close proximity throughout the film is evidence pointing towards their homosexuality. At the same time, that *does not necessarily prove* they are gay. Although charges of ‘homosexuality’ and ‘obscenity’ on screen have repeatedly thrown religious leaders, Hollywood industry regulators, and state/local officials into heated disputes, critical theorists analyzing the intersection between LGBT themes and popular culture have also asked a very similar question - how should homosexuality be depicted in film?

Although Hitchcock’s film was charged with homoeroticism, these film techniques become problematic when considering the societal effects it holds on gay people outside of the film. Foucault recognizes that the process of ‘truth telling’ produces the self. Foucault would then also argue that “transforming sex into discourse” (Foucault, 1987, 20) operates in a similar fashion. Discursive control of sexuality and the way people subjectively speak about sex not only offers further knowledge and control over the subject, but also, in turn, produces its objective reality. In an era of film with little visibility for sexual minorities like the LGBT population, Hitchcock’s depiction of homosexuality in *Rope* becomes a catalyst for potential misrepresentations of who gay men *are* and misunderstandings of what gay male sex *is*. Problematizing the spectacle of gay male sex in *Rope* extends beyond issues of distortion and silencing - it fails to draw the line between obscurity and the potential for inaccurate misrepresentations. Criminality and psychopathy, for example, may be interpreted by some viewers as characteristics associated with homosexuality. However, how could Hitchcock *prove* that *this is not*

necessarily the case? With society's need to control and dominate objects through formulating discursive knowledge on it (Foucault, 1978, 20), these misunderstandings could ultimately work to sustain a heteronormative system that subordinates gay men.

By flattening the richness and complexity of the lives of gay men, the spectacle of homosexuality vividly illustrates a seemingly unintentional implication of 'increased visibility' for marginalized sexual minorities. Although the idea for social change spurts a new form of discourse that also serves to reshape current discursive frameworks of sex and sexuality, merely "speaking about it" (Foucault, 1978, 6) does not necessarily curb this process of marginalization and oppression. Foucault understands power as a force that can constrain us but can also serve as a tool for social change. On Foucault's account, power does not operate in a hierarchical fashion that bears down on the individual. Instead, power unfolds in multiple directions through a "net-like organization" (Foucault, 1987, 95); therefore allowing us to both serve as both the subordinates and bearers of power. "To speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures" (Foucault, 1978, 7) has incited a new form of discourse of sex that utilizes the power of individuals - especially those belonging to the LGBT population - to overcome barriers together, establish solidarity, and build a stronger community. While the spectacle of gay male sex in *Rope*, as well as other films that depict homosexuals in a 'negative light' reflects a dominant narrative of heterosexual hegemony and taints gay men as 'deviant', LGBT pressure groups have formulated their own form of power through resistance. Although *Rope* had not received backlash specifically, this film definitely contributes to a "continuation of the treatment of homosexuality as seen through the eyes of the heterosexual" (Lyons, 2006, 293) on the silver screen. Foucault's understanding of power and the answer to the question of 'who is doing the speaking?' permeates our underlying assumptions and current understandings of gay male sex. While organizing for social change is a viable option for political advancement that supports and upholds the

rights of LGBT members, as well as eliminating the stigma and demonized stereotypes associated with gay men, mere ‘visibility’ on film does not play a sufficient role in reshaping the discourse of gay male sex.

Conclusion

Rope's depiction of homosexuality has ultimately contributed to the expansion of discursive frameworks surrounding gay sex and sexuality. By engaging with Foucault's understandings of power, discourse, and knowledge, the spectacle of homosexuality and the censorship of its depiction in film has proven to be a rather complex topic that highlights a symbiotic relationship between discourse and activism. In contrast to the repressive hypothesis, censorship measures have caused discourses of sex and sexuality to flourish through new, creative, and specialized ways. According to Foucault, discourse on sex is expected to shift through time due to society's unwavering desire to establish a sense of control and knowledge over these topics. Within a heteronormative society that continues to deprive gay men of certain rights and equal treatment, the path of determining further steps in consolidating progressive social change for gay men is not so straight. Since power operates in society through a pervasive network, the solution to this problem does not lie in eradicating all forms of authoritative social structures that limit the agency of individuals. While the Hays Code allowed the Production Code Administration (PCA) to maintain a sense of control over dominant discourses of sex and sexuality, the resistance against this dominative mode has also yielded its own form of power. Pushing for open, progressive, and diverse representations of sexual minorities in media, indeed, plays an important role in shifting the views of its audience. Resistance, however, stems from questioning and critiquing current representations and deconstructing the taken-for-granted assumptions that are inherent within the dominative mode.

Arbitrary or Administrative:
The Consequences of Unregulated Segregation
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Abstract

This paper explores the consequences of the Canadian practice of administrative segregation (solitary confinement) as it currently exists with few mechanisms of oversight and few regulations guiding its use. The consequences are examined from three perspectives: that of ethics, that of reintegration and, finally, that of its uneven application. These consequences are evaluated and compared to the benefits of this practice in order to provide a more objective analysis. This paper concludes by arguing that, instead of abolishing the practice of solitary confinement in its entirety, the Correctional Service of Canada should instead create more comprehensive restrictions regarding its use so as to reduce the inevitable harms produced by this practice and in turn contribute to public safety.

Introduction

Imagine spending weeks alone without any substantial human contact. Now imagine those weeks are spent within four windowless walls bordering a room just big enough for a twin sized bed. While this sounds like a practice that certainly has no place in the modern Canadian context, this is the reality faced by Canadian prisoners subjected to administrative segregation. Though this practice remains in place to protect the prison population, it continues to adversely impact the thousands of prisoners subjected to this kind of punishment and in turn, creates problems for the criminal justice system as a whole. In this paper, I will argue that the Canadian criminal justice system should limit the specific confinement practice of administrative segregation to those circumstances in which it is absolutely necessary and provide specific judicial guidelines regarding its administration. I will assess the practice of administrative segregation from an ethical perspective, in terms of its general incompetence in achieving the

justice system's explicit purpose of reintegration and, finally, in terms of its unequal administration as a consequence of the broad discretionary powers granted to prison officials.

The Ethics: Cruel and Unusual

It is first necessary to evaluate this practice in terms of the basic ethical considerations that should underlie the Canadian criminal justice system. According to those who defend this practice, Canadian administrative segregation is by definition not a practice of solitary confinement and is thus arguably exempt from the ethical criticisms that it attracts. As such, Correctional Service Canada [CSC], which operates the federal prison system, is not required to abide by the specific guidelines governing the use of solitary confinement as established by the United Nation's Mandela Rules (2015). This document defines solitary confinement as "the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 17). Recently, however, the federal government of Canada has made amendments to the rules governing administrative segregation such that inmates admitted are provided with "the opportunity to be out of their cell for a minimum of two hours daily" (CSC, 2017). Technically, then, the Canadian practice of administrative segregation does not qualify as solitary confinement (Parkes, 2017, p. 167). Further, CSC defends administrative segregation on the grounds that it is administered for security purposes rather than as a disciplinary response. As such, it is not a practice of solitary confinement in the punitive sense and is therefore arguably exempt from the criticism regarding its inhumanity.

However, given that both the conditions and consequences of administrative segregation are virtually indistinguishable from those of solitary confinement, this argument is fundamentally flawed (Parkes, 2017, p. 167). From an ethical perspective, administrative segregation should be assessed not in terms of its purpose, but rather in terms of its specific outcomes. Further, though

it is legally not to be administered as a punishment for inappropriate behavior, “it is often imposed in a punitive fashion on those considered to be a general security risk” (Kerr, 2015a, p. 503). Therefore, while in theory, this justification does arguably appeal to the concern that punitive measures are inconsistent with basic ethical standards, in practice, the distinction between the punitive and protective functions is necessarily obscure.

Further, these arguments fail to justify the adverse psychological impact on those subjected to this practice when understood from an ethical perspective. According to Dr. Kelsall (2014), prisoners in administrative segregation experience both mental and physical health effects resulting from “the profound lack of stimulation...combined with the lack of control over daily life inherent in incarceration” (p. 1). The literature indicates that, while some of these effects may subside after reintegration, others may, in fact, be long-term, including impaired memory, clinical depression, and personality changes (Kelsall, 2014, p. 1). This is particularly troubling in the Canadian context given that prisoners with pre-existing mental and abuse disorders are more likely to be subjected to this practice (Kelsall, 2014). Those who have the authority to determine the appropriateness of administrative segregation likely do not have adequate mental health training and thus are unable to assess the consequences of subjecting any given offender to this practice.

Finally, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act [CCRA]* of 1992 establishes that inmates are to retain all those rights and freedoms enjoyed by any other Canadian citizen except those necessarily limited in the process of incarceration (Arbel, 2015, p. 134). Given the conditions under which confinement practices are administered, this principle is more ideal than real. Kerr (2015a) maintains that the legislation governing administrative segregation is not Charter compliant and is thus likely to provoke challenges regarding its Constitutionality (p.

501). Section 12, for example, prohibits cruel punishment. However, according to the courts, prolonged confinement without mitigating efforts on behalf of correctional authorities qualifies as cruel and unusual (Arbel, 2015, p. 135). Likewise, inmates placed in solitary confinement have little to no access to structures of due process that underlie the Canadian criminal justice system (Parkes, 2017, p. 173). For example, have little access to any meaningful grievance procedures when they feel they have been wronged in the segregation process (Kerr, 2015b, p. 103). All in all, basic Constitutional rights are largely unavailable to the segregated population. Clearly, then, these practices do not abide by the basic principles that are to govern the Canadian criminal justice system, nor are they consistent with the explicit purpose of incarceration

Reintegration: A Failure to Satisfy

The practice of administrative segregation does not continue to exist simply because it has not yet been revoked; rather, there are calculated and arguably reasonable objectives that it aims to fulfill. According to the *CCRA*, the federal legislation governing the operation of Canadian correctional facilities, the purpose of such measures is to “maintain the security of the penitentiary or the safety of any person” (1992). Given that it serves an explicitly protective function when used appropriately, administrative segregation arguably has the capacity to uphold the basic human rights of those subject to this practice. In this sense, administrative segregation actually fulfills the *CCRA*’s mandate of protecting both the dignity and the safety of federal inmates. Further, this legislation requires that solitary confinement not be used except in exceptional circumstances, defined as “an immediate situation which endangers the life, safety or health of inmates, staff, visitors, or the security of the institution” (CSC, 2017). According to this definition, then, the use of solitary confinement is clearly within the interest of all parties involved. It can thus be reasoned that placing an inmate in solitary confinement is actually

conducive towards their own safety and is thus in alignment with the broader purpose of the practice itself.

In order to further evaluate this practice, however, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what it is that the Canadian criminal justice system in general aims to accomplish. According to CSC, prisoners are incarcerated for the purpose of both maintaining the safety and security of the public with the “gradual and structured return of offenders to the community” (2015). Given that most offenders are eventually released from custody, it is certainly in the public interest to provide inmates with the necessary resources and treatment to rehabilitate and reintegrate them back into the community as productive and law-abiding citizens. The literature consistently indicates that the most effective means of doing so is to treat them in a way that both respects and upholds their dignity (CSC, 2008). Clearly, then, subjecting inmates to a practice that further degrades and isolates them is an inappropriate response in the context of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Hannah-Moffat and Klassen (2015) argue that, though segregation is administered with the laudable objective of maintaining order, this perspective overlooks that fact that this practice itself may, in fact, be criminogenic and in turn produce disorder (p. 147). Placing people within such an environment and depriving them of their social and emotional needs is in no way conducive to the explicit purpose of rehabilitation that governs Canadian corrections. Instead, this practice only serves to exacerbate the pre-existing issues responsible for their criminal behavior. Further, when placed in administrative segregation, offenders lose access to the treatment or programs necessary for their rehabilitation (Parkes, 2017, p. 170). As such, if preserving public safety is truly the priority of the Canadian correctional system, the practice of administrative segregation should be abandoned except when absolutely necessary. Given how

the existing structure operates with considerable discretion and little external oversight, however, these rehabilitative efforts directed towards segregated inmates are unlikely to succeed.

Discretion: Arbitrary Confinement

The rules governing administrative segregation are specifically designed to be exceptionally vague and thus subject to considerable interpretation. According to those who defend this practice, “the staff’s understanding of the dynamics of an institution... [are] integral to making the right decision” (Jackson, 2015, p. 72). Thus, they provide the prison staff with the autonomy to adapt to the specific needs of their own institutions and make decisions accordingly. In this sense, establishing more comprehensive and rigid guidelines for placing prisoners in solitary confinement would only serve to restrict the ability to adapt to the particular demands of any given institution (Kerr, 2015b, p. 91). Likewise, the significant powers of discretion provided to those who administer solitary confinement allows them to respond to dangerous situations without the delay of having to consult external mandates. From this perspective, a degree of independence from external agents of oversight is required to allow prison officials to act in the best interest of their institution (Kerr, 2015b, p. 116). Given that these agents of oversight are far removed from the day to day operations of the institution and arguably do not understand the interests of any specific institution, such interference is arguably inappropriate and represents a threat to the safety of all parties involved.

While this type of organization provides prison staff with the necessary autonomy to adapt to the specific needs of its own institutions, it removes these decision-making processes from political oversight and accountability (Kerr, 2015a, p. 497). Thus, despite some effort on the part of Canadian criminal justice agencies to regulate its administration, the practice of segregation continues to be used largely on the basis of the discretion of prison officials who can

“effectively modulate the severity of the prison sentence by isolating prisoners for indefinite and prolonged periods of time” (Kerr, 2015a, p. 485). As a result, this practice is applied unevenly in profoundly racialized ways. The degree of discrimination is particularly severe in the case of federally incarcerated Indigenous women. The statistics reveal that Indigenous are both more likely to be placed in solitary confinement and more likely to be segregated for a longer period of time (McGill, 2008, p. 98). Violence against Indigenous women has become normalized in the broader context of ongoing colonial structures of power, including that of the prison system. As women within Western patriarchal structures, they experience multiple systems of oppression that combine to create an experience that is both racialized and gendered (McGill, 2008, p. 92). As such, the practice of solitary confinement when applied to this specific population seems an implicit but natural extension of the social space they occupy outside of the prison system.

Because this practice remains largely unregulated and involves a considerable degree of discretion, it is certainly informed by pre-existing stereotypes among those with the decision-making authority. It is important to note that, upon admission, security classifications are assigned to inmates based on a risk-assessment conducted by CSC. This evaluation process is organized such that, “put crudely, a low level of education or employment training combined with past experiences of violence...are likely to classify a woman as having ‘high needs’” (McGill, 2008, p. 98). As such, Indigenous women are more likely to be classified as a security risk and are therefore subject to greater scrutiny in the decision to administer segregation. Indigenous women continue to be grossly overrepresented in the general prison population, attesting to social exclusion they experience within the colonial structure. The fact that so many of them are further socially isolated within the prison itself certainly makes matters worse.

In Conclusion: A Regulated Practice

Though it is not formally named as such, the Canadian practice of administrative segregation is one of solitary confinement. While rooted in very legitimate purposes, administrative segregation and its accompanied discretion are certainly not justified when evaluated from an ethical perspective and when considering the broader objective of the Canadian practice of incarceration. As such, administrative segregation should be reserved for the most severe cases and be governed by strict guidelines that reduce the opportunity for discretion. Efforts to regulate solitary confinement do not simply emerge out of a commitment to the ethical treatment of inmates, but also as a response to the failure to rehabilitate those subject to this practice. In this sense, establishing a more regulated practice that is truly only administered when absolutely necessary both protects the rights of the inmates placed in confinement and enhances public safety – and the importance of public safety is certainly something that we can all agree upon.

White Picket Fences:

Fulton Sheen's Influence on the Social Role of Catholicism in
the 1950s

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Abstract

“Life is Worth Living” was a well-received Catholic show that aired in 1950s America and was hosted by the venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen. The popularity of the show can be easily tied back to Sheen’s on-screen charisma and dramatic delivery of American Christian concepts. The show aired Tuesday nights at eight opposite the popular Milton Berle show and Fulton Sheen even won an Emmy for the Most Outstanding Television Personality for his performance in 1952. However, the show is representative of a brief era of normalcy before the change of the 1960s. The unification of Catholic morals and cultural values presented by Sheen in the show helped renew public interest in Catholicism through appealing to a common national identity during an era of an expanding religious marketplace. So through examining “Life is Worth Living,” the social values of faith and the changing religious views can be illuminated upon.

Manuscript

The Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen was a very influential Catholic media figure in the 1950s. He is most famously recognized for the considerably popular TV show “Life is Worth Living” that aired through 1952-1957. During his twenty-six-minute segment, Fulton Sheen would mix fundamental Christian morals with contemporary issues of the day to create an informative viewing experience suited for a broader American audience. The success of the show can be easily tied to Sheen for his on-screen Charisma and dramatic delivery of Christian morals as a solution to the life’s current issues. However, the widespread popularity also suggests a shift in the social position of Catholicism and religion broadly during the white picket fenced days of the 1950s. By examining the unification of Catholic morals and cultural values presented by Fulton Sheen in “Life is Worth Living,” it is clear that the show helped renew public interest in

Catholicism through appealing to a common national identity during an era of an expanding religious marketplace.

The popularity of “Life is Worth Living” can be tied to the unification of Catholic morals and cultural values that Fulton Sheen provided in response to contemporary social and moral issues of the 1950s. The era of the white picket fence is often romanticized as the fulfillment of the American dream; however, the 1950s represented a brief return to normalcy in a climate of modernizing religious and political views. With the attempted return to normalcy came an emphasis on traditional family values and the accompanying issues. So Fulton Sheen emphasized themes associated with family values such as marriage, motherhood, handling teens and character building rather than focusing on the institutional dogma that Catholicism was previously being associated with at the time. “Life is Worth Living” was more than a Catholic show; it dealt with contemporary issues facing everyday Americans, therefore creating a viewing experience that appealed to the traditional American family. For instance, in his episode *The Value of Incompatibility*, Sheen explained that the egoism in the husband and wife must be crushed when facing a tension in order for marital love to grow. Marriage is inherently a Catholic concept as well as an American one (The Catholic World, 2017). By providing an explanation for the moral issue of tension in a marriage, Fulton Sheen used Catholic virtue to solve a cultural hardship, therefore creating a valuable viewing experience for all Americans, Catholic or not.

Family values were not the only topic discussed in “Life is Worth Living.” The United States was plagued by Cold war anxieties and anti-communist views during the 1950s; therefore this topic was frequently addressed during Sheen’s segments as well. In his episode, *The Russian People*, he makes a clear distinction between Communism the ideology and Russia the

people. He stated that “ideologies come and go, the people remain” (The Catholic World, 2017). Continuing along this line of thought, he said that he hates communism but loves the Russian people. Through these statements, Fulton Sheen combined the Catholic ideal of love for all people with the American values that opposed communism. It was the unification of Catholic virtue with the family and political values of the era that gave “Life is Worth Living” the widespread American popularity.

Through the creation of a united Catholic American identity in “Life is Worth Living,” Fulton Sheen helped renew public interest and faith in Catholicism, therefore, helping create the Golden Age of Catholicism. As was mentioned previously, the white picket fenced era of American history is characterized as a post-war society seeking normalcy scattered with anxieties regarding the Cold War with Russia. While Fulton Sheen helped create the Golden Age of Catholicism that was the white picket fences, there were negative stereotypes surrounding the Catholic Church in the 1950s; Catholicism was viewed as intolerant and dogmatic and there were Catholic-Protestant tensions around parochial schools, public funding, and birth control (Smith, 1997; Tucker 1997). Sheen was an essential component to the shift in public perception because he created an image of Catholicism that was modern and separate from past understandings. “Life is Worth Living” exemplified the renewal of religious meaning and identity that was occurring in the post-war society through its use of a shared Catholic American identity. A quote from the last episode of season one, Character Building, exemplifies this unified identity. Sheen ended this segment with the phrase “May all the American character begin to emerge under the grace of God as we continue to be a great nation” (The Catholic World, 2017). This is just one of the many instances in which Sheen refers to Catholic concepts and American character as a single identity. The Catholic identity was also fractured along ethnic lines of the Irish, Polish,

and Italians among others. “Life is Worth Living” presented a new image of the Catholic identity as reasonable, humane, and democratic that “transcended denominational lines” (Smith, 1997, 59). The new media of the 1950s, television, allowed Fulton Sheen to present Catholicism to audiences in their home as connected to American identity, therefore renewing interest in the religion and helping contribute to the Golden Age of Catholicism. While there was a marked increase in Catholicism during the white picket fence era, the soaring birth rates and economic boom also helped spark interest in many other religions of the day.

The mode of discourse used by Fulton Sheen in “Life is Worth Living” mirrored the expanding religious marketplace’s movement towards the post-modern pluralistic society of the 1960s onward. In general, there tended to be a more overall use of religious philosophy than Catholic dogma in “Life is Worth Living”. While this allowed for a broader audience, it also reflected the religious trend towards postmodernism and the new religious movements of the 1960s. For instance, Lesson One in Economics mentions the soul at the beginning of the episode and relates the conclusion drawn to living virtuously for the salvation of the soul (The Catholic World, 2017). Other than these instances, Sheen does not mention any Catholic concepts in this episode. While salvation of the soul is a concept used in Catholicism, it is also a central theme in most world religions. So when Fulton Sheen talked about religious morals such as the salvation of the soul, it fostered more than just a Catholic identity in the American population because the concepts were broadly religious and therefore not solely Catholic. As mentioned previously, Fulton Sheen expressed a love for all people including the Russians even though it was a period of conflict between the two. The love for all people is definitely a Catholic moral, but it is also a concept in many religious philosophies. Many other religions and ideologies such as humanism, monasticism and the new religious movements of the 1960s expressed a similar level of

spirituality.

While the discourse used by Fulton Sheen in “Life is Worth Living” reflected a shift towards a postmodern society, there are a few social trends that also contributed to the expanding religious marketplace in postwar America. The combination of economic good times and the Baby Boom paired with a return to normalcy created an increasing demand for large-scale Churches and religion in general (Tucker, 1997). There were more and more traditional American families popping up that required an increasing number of Churches. Through “Life is Worth Living” Fulton Sheen helped foster a new identity for the Catholic Church responsible for the Golden Age for Catholicism that was the 1950s. However, by using religious concepts rather than Catholic dogma Sheen created both a renewed Catholic American identity and a general interest in religious morals altogether. Fulton Sheen talked about religious morals and philosophy that applied to more than just Catholicism. So even though “Life is Worth Living” renewed faith in Catholicism, it also renewed faith in the general religious morals that helped lead the religious marketplace to new and foreign areas characterized by the 1960s onward.

Through the examination of Fulton Sheen’s “Life is Worth Living”, it is clear that his use of American identity and Catholic morals as synonymous concepts helped renew faith in Catholicism and create a new religious identity that also expanded religious interest altogether. Sheen’s use of Catholic virtue to solve traditional American issues like Marital conflict helped create the shows widespread popularity in America. This also portrayed the Catholic Church more favorably in a new media format that contributed to the Golden Age of Catholicism. Yet the unintended outcome of “Life is Worth Living” was that it cultivated interest in broad religious spirituality that, along with other social trends, created an expanding religious marketplace that led to the new religious movements of the 1960s. Therefore, white picket fences

represent more than the era of the American dream. They represented an era in which Fulton Sheen and the new American Catholic identity flourished while religious morals altogether started to change.

A note about the authors:

Mohamed Rahall is a current undergrad majoring in Sociology and minoring in Political Science. He is interested in the discursive ways that sexual health and education operate within the context of gender, religion, culture, and citizenship. Mohamed's research interests are primarily focused on Western Muslim identities and their sense of belonging. Currently, he is working on a graphic novel that seeks to highlight the various social forces that operate around Queer Muslim identities in the West.

Benjamin Sperling is a former biological sciences student who recently finished his coursework with the U of A. Despite his love of ecology, he is a self-described "in-the-closet-sociologist" who grew deeply invested in the social sciences during his final years at the U of A. His sociological projects have primarily revolved around mental health topics ranging from access to post-secondary mental health services to the philosophy of how we come to problematize neurodiversity. Currently he works as a Research and Evaluation Coordinator for Alberta Health Services where he is supplementing programs around youth, addictions, and gender.

Mark Guerrero is a third-year sociology student from the University of Alberta. Foucault has certainly helped him discover his newfound interest in the sociology of knowledge. Broadly, his includes understanding the ways in which knowledge is produced, disseminated, and received within society. Through applying this framework in further research, he would love to study the ways this intersects with some of his other interests: health/illness, sexualities, and social theory. He intends to pursue graduate school and hopes to become a professor in sociology.

Regan Brodziak is a third year Sociology student with a minor in Political Science. Upon graduating in 2019, she hopes to pursue her Juris Doctorate degree. Throughout her time at the University of Alberta, she has developed a keen interest in the criminal justice system and restorative justice practices. She has volunteered with organizations such as the Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton and will be working with Native Counselling Services of Alberta on a restorative justice-based project in the upcoming summer. Aside from this, Regan also enjoys spending time her with her cat Ferb and exploring the Alberta Legislature Grounds.

Marina Bartlett is in her last year of a Bachelor of Arts undergraduate degree. Her major is psychology and her minor is sociology. She has wanted to study psychology ever since she was fourteen when her uncle Dan, who is a psychologist himself, was talking about his work. While psychology is the main topic of her interest, by itself it is not enough to get the full picture of human functioning in society. She has found that both sociology and religious studies have drawn her interest because they are essential to understanding people as groups and therefore individually.