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Amy Kruzan

Editorial Staff

Faculty Advisor & Honors Program Director: Dr. Alicia Swords

Editor-in-Chief: Emma Sheinbaum

Associate Editors: Arianna Ashby, Kelly Auricchio, Erin Broussard, Miranda Ella, Olivia Forker, Sophia Hebert, Zoe Merod, Farwa Shakeel

Contributing Authors

Liz Alexander, Samantha Castonguay, Sophia Hebert, Katie Hutton, Zoe Merod, Alexa Salvato, Lena Sargenti
Dear Readers,

It has been an intense year in our college community. In September, our school year began with mourning as we grieved the loss of Anthony Nazaire, a 19-year-old student who was stabbed to death after attending a party at Cornell.

In November, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States.

In January, a day after the presidential inauguration, a half million people took part in the Women’s March on Washington, along with 5 million protesters in 673 marches on all seven continents.

A week later, Trump signed an executive order banning immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries, but the order was deemed unconstitutional by federal judges.

Throughout the year, contingent faculty at Ithaca College were raising awareness on our campus about inequalities right here at home. They organized, threatened to strike, and negotiated to achieve longer-term contracts and higher compensation.

In February, our ninth president was announced and we began to learn about Dr. Shirley Collado’s vision of an inclusive and accessible college community.

Meanwhile, IC students were taking classes, meeting with study groups, working, studying, rehearsing, performing, hooking up, going to meetings, partying, and hanging out with friends.

This edition of Symposium asks critical questions about this moment in history. The authors investigate their own experiences as students and participants in a global, diverse, and unequal world. Their questions about climate change, gender, sexuality, violence, power, and spirituality are critical and match the seriousness of the events of this year.

Liz Alexander reflects on her potential to appreciate global music. Drawing on Buber, Adorno and Bourdieu, she contrasts individual appreciation, in which music brings images and memories, to a more collective communicative experience.

For Zoe Merod, a key question is how Islamic architecture expresses spiritual meaning. She describes four monuments that show how the sacred is built into the monument’s function.
Katie Hutton investigates the impact of climate change on bird migration. Building from existing research on birds’ first arrival date, the findings suggest that differences in adaptation between short-distance and long-distance migrants are likely to reduce diversity and abundance.

Samantha Castonguay analyzes experiences of Ithaca College students with condom use in the context of hooking up. Her focus groups highlight assumptions about who should provide condoms, fear of purchasing condoms, and little attention to whether condoms will fit, ultimately calling for quality sex education.

Sophia Hebert writes a poetic exploration of witches referencing medieval and historical texts, including manuals for identifying and persecuting witches. The poem ends with a “recipe” for witches, revealing how women’s knowledge and power has been seen as dangerous.

Lena Sargenti reviews The End of Patriarchy by Robert Jensen, a radical feminist perspective on rape culture, pornography, and transgenderism. Sargenti writes, “radical feminism seeks to break out of and destroy the boxes so that there are no more groups that can be dominant or subordinate.”

Alexa Salvato examines rape as a weapon of war by inquiring about the experiences of the Birangmas or rape survivors of the 1971 Bangladeshi war. Salvato describes the contemporary reproductive rights movement in Bangladesh, acknowledging the global origins of rape culture as a tool of genocide, and the need for a worldwide feminist movement for justice.

Behind the scenes, Emma Sheinbaum and the editorial team have gathered submissions and worked the magic we call editing. I commend these scholars to you. May you be as grateful as I am to read what follows.

Yours,

Alicia Swords

Director, Ithaca College Honors Program
Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to present the sixth issue of the Honors Program’s Symposium Academic Undergraduate Journal! None of this would have been possible without the support and enthusiasm from our Honors Program director and faculty advisor, Dr. Alicia Swords. Her encouragement for innovation and growth is inspiring.

The Symposium’s associate editors—Arianna Ashby, Kelly Auricchio, Erin Broussard, Miranda Ella, Olivia Forker, Sophia Hebert, Zoe Merod, Farwa Shakeel, and Jennifer Walsh—also deserve the heartiest of thank yous. Your hard work, attention to detail, and critical yet potential-seeking eye has curated an eclectic and exciting array of works published in the 2016-2017 issue. Our editorial meetings were fueled by all of your creative ideas and unrelenting dedication to the publication. Thank you endlessly.

As synopsized by Dr. Swords in her letter, this year’s published works cover a large range of global, individual, and community issues. We had the most submissions to Symposium that I have witnessed in my years on staff, along with an ever-growing number of creative (personal essay, poetry, etc.) pieces. Every year, it is difficult to select which submissions are accepted, but it was especially hard this year since we had so many. Thank you to everyone who submitted—you are the reason we continue to grow! Keep writing, researching, and submitting in the years to come.

What I love most about Symposium, especially this year’s issue, is the curiosity exhibited by each writer. Whether it’s studying the beautiful architecture in Islamic tradition or exploring the relationship between art and individuality through philosophy and personal experience, research of the Ithaca College community’s condom behaviors, or feminist and historical analysis of witchcraft through poetry, all of this year’s works motivate me to continue to think critically, feel intensely, and write honestly.

I hope you will have feel just as inspired by and proud of these students, and all students, after reading.

Thank you.

Best,

Emma Sheinbaum

Editor-in-Chief
Art and Individuality

By: Liz Alexander

“When the inquirer, having pushed to the circumference, realizes how logic in that place curls about itself and bites its own tail, he is struck with a new kind of perception: a tragic perception, which requires, to make it tolerable, the remedy of art.”

-Nietzsche, A Critical Backward Glance (1886)

It is with growing trepidation that I allow myself to critique my taste in music, my relationship to art, and the nature of my own perceived suffering. The slow development of this artistic consciousness began in a global music course last fall. There, the rich political potential of African aesthetics asserted a blow to the sounds that filled my own headphones, lyric-centric ballads professing homogeneity and predictability. I initially sought solidarity within classical Indian music, imagining its sensibilities to be much closer to my own, as both genres embrace a shared principle of tragedy and loss. Yet in evaluating the limitations and possibilities of such a principle, I am forced to acknowledge a profoundly worrisome difference between my own music-evoked tragedies and my limited understanding of a traditional Indian aesthetic.

My response to global music forms—specifically from West Africa, South Asia, and Brazil—has generally been one of appreciation without pleasure; this is because the music says nothing about me. I feel no sense of inclusion within the collective whole; I demand music and art that encourages me to access my individual experience. This relationship to loss is not the same as that contained within Farida Khanum’s “Dil Hi to Hai,” despite lyrics that cry of a heart filled with pain. This realization pushes me to ask: What makes my taste in music different from
those who can understand and love classical Indian music? What makes it the same? Can we say that one aesthetic is better or worse than the other?

I hesitate to say that accessing my individual suffering through music could be useless or violent. I am under somewhat of an understanding that the acknowledgment of our own wounds is what allows us to feel compassionate toward others, and that this co-suffering is the very foundation of an authentic battle against universal forces of oppression. However, I feel there is a significant distinction between reveling in the despair of lyricist jouissance and being crushed by the overwhelming weight of life’s deep structural limitations. In *On Popular Music* (1941) Theodor W. Adorno divides the world’s music listeners into weepers and marchers. Until this point I have been able to cling to the value of my weeping, believing it superior to the mindlessness of the latter. Yet what is the value in weeping, if it is only for oneself?

Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (1970) critiques the role that feelings assume in a world where actors experience others as objects and things, rather than participating in encounters with actualizing subjects: “Feelings are what is ‘in here’ where one lives and recovers from the institutions. Here the spectrum of emotion swings before the interested eye; here one enjoys one’s inclination and one’s hatred, pleasure and, if it is not too bad, pain” (Buber 93). He describes how the encouraged division between life and work obfuscates the function of our emotions, increasing our obsession with the individual:

That institutions yield no public life is felt by more and more human beings, to their sorrow: this is the source of the distress and search of our age. That feelings yield no personal life has been recognized by few so far, for they seem to be the home of what is most personal. And once one has learnt, like modern man, to become greatly preoccupied with one’s own feelings, even despair over their unreality will not easily open one’s eyes; after all, such despair is also a feeling and quite interesting. (94)
Buber then asserts what he believes is necessary to transform the fetishized feeling into something that promotes intimacy instead of isolation, encouraging community rather than clusters of estranged individuals. For him this would involve a third, mediatory space between self and other, between personal and public life, and between our emotions and institutions. For Buber this mediator is God, or the spirit; a secular or non-secular essence of universal accountability.

This is perhaps where Buber fails us, forcing a subject-object dichotomy onto a world that exists through shifting combinations of such extremes. Even the most public institutions—say, the military—contain aspects of individuality. Inversely, even the most obvious displays of our personal life—perhaps, a love for The Beatles—bear the influence of institution. Yet despite Buber’s dichotomies, his work reveals the alienating role that our individuality often assumes, the misunderstood nature of one’s pain and one’s pleasure. He shows how a feeling—such as love or pain—is an insufficient means of creating nonviolent relationships with others, or a sense of fulfillment within oneself. In fact he goes further than this, suggesting that the dominant function of such feelings actually degrades our relational capacities. Without an awareness of this complexity, the presence of institution becomes invisible, disguising the externality of our tastes as authentic and self-willed creations.

This would imply that my love for simple melodies is not my own, but rather the result of my location within society. I can stretch my imagination to see how this process might be true, but it feels nearly impossible to trace. I consequently fear that the most powerful or creative thing I will ever feel is the sensation of being consumed by my own pain, because I do not have the tools to see how it is not my own. I am heavily drawn to music, writing, dance, and even relationships that inspire this state of being. I fear this reality not only because I enjoy it, but more so because it seems to involve only me. There is no visible process of encounter, critique, or conversation; my favorite artists exist only as amplifiers of my own experience.

As I say this, I am reckoning with my recent experiences at two different concerts, both at Cornell University. The first was a performance by distinguished sarod players, brothers Amaan and Ayaan Ali Bangash. I appreciated their apparent technicality, but felt so distant from the audience members around me who rocked and swayed in obvious amazement. Only two weeks later, I watched Zakir Hussain perform tabla with sitarist Niladri Kumar, anticipating an experience similar to the previous concert. What happened instead took me by complete surprise—I was transfixed for the duration of the show. Hussain’s hands moved at impossible speeds, playing two tabla parts simultaneously, while Kumar produced sounds on his sitar that I could never have imagined. I left the performance in a daze, acknowledging that it was the best concert I had ever been to.

I am not yet sure what to make of this encounter, or what it means for my relationship to art. The performance smacked me with an unfamiliar jolt of immediacy, leaving me disoriented on my descent back to earth. Most of this sensation seems conditional to the live performance, as I had listened to Hussain’s music before the show without feeling particularly moved. Yet even if it was conditional, it still seems powerful as I compare it to other live concerts I have been to,
where I was brought to tears for different reasons. At indie music concerts I feel pleasure in being brought back to a delightful summer, or to a forgotten heartbreak. Hussain and Kumar introduced me to a different type of beauty, one that may be impossible to replicate. My enjoyment was not induced by the invocation of images or memories, but rather by the creation of something beyond rational communication.

I confess that despite this encounter, I still fall weak to acoustic lyricism and I still struggle to enjoy or understand global music forms. I could stop here, recognizing the egocentrism of my tastes, and accepting my failure to move beyond an encouraged nostalgia. Yet Kiese Laymon reminds us that this acknowledgement is not enough, that being honest as our inhumanities reveal themselves should never be an end in itself, but rather a measure preceding the difficult work that lies ahead. With this I must ask: why does my body crave music and art that whispers softly to individual experience? What is preventing me from desiring the collective aesthetic of Fela Kuti? How do I begin critiquing something that I receive so much pleasure from?

In *Nothing Ever Dies* (2016), Viet Thanh Nguyen offers that “capitalism can turn anything into a commodity,” and that “emotion and ethnocentrism are key to the memory industry as it turns wars and experiences into sacred objects” (13). It is this industrialization of emotion that inspires me to weep to egocentric music. It is also what normalizes wartime, normalizes violence against ‘inferior’ others whose experiences will never seem as powerful as our own jouissance, our own encouraged nostalgia. It is perhaps also what facilitates the “structured indifference” (Gordon 204), of a nation complicit in perpetual genocide. Yet if my exposure to global music has informed the way that I listen to the music I love, then perhaps the music I love, even with its politics of deep indifference, offers something to my understanding of
global music. My experience at Hussain and Kumar’s concert showed the universality present within my particular aesthetic sensibility, suggesting that the skills to critique, enjoy, and understand classical Indian music are already present within me. Perhaps through continued engagement with global music, the bodily knowledge that I already possess will begin to reveal itself.

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**Bye Bye Birdie: The Effects of Climate Change on Bird Migration**

By: Katie Hutton

**What is phenology?**

Climate change trends in the last century have shown a steady increase in global temperature, resulting in many species decreasing in abundance. Plants and animals all respond differently to rapid climate change, specifically in their phenology (Swanson & Palmer, 2009). Phenology is the study of how organisms’ life cycles are impacted by climate variation. According to Swanson and Palmer (2009), the larger issue lies in how life cycles overlap — specifically with birds, plants, and insects — and how this interconnected web between species can jeopardize their reproduction and survival if it is impacted by climate change.

A major part of most avian life cycles is migration, during which birds have to constantly adjust to local temperatures, food, and predation along their migration paths (Swanson & Palmer, 2009). How does climate change affect the timing of bird migration? This review will investigate the possible correlation between phenological response and abundance, the effects of climate change on closely related species (Davis et al. 2010), and overall how changes in surroundings affect avian migration.

**What factors influence migration?**

According to Tøttrup et al. (2010), rapid changes in an organism’s environment can have a detrimental impact on species where only a small portion are able to adapt to local conditions.
Species less responsive to change decline more in abundance (Møller & Merilä, 2004), thus decreasing the overall biodiversity of the ecosystem. Within bird migration, it is evident that some species are more responsive to local environmental cues, while others rely on predictable, large-scale changes in the environment (Swanson & Palmer, 2009). Local factors are those that pertain to a single location along a migration path, such as spring vegetation (the availability of food), temperature and weather patterns, and predation (Tøttrup et al. 2010). Better local conditions decrease the necessary stoppage time for the bird, resulting in an earlier date of spring arrival at breeding grounds. Long-term environmental cues are those that remain constant from year to year, such as seasonal variation and length of day. Oftentimes, birds that rely on long-term cues also rely on internal mechanisms to control their migration, such as circadian and circannual rhythms. The degree by which birds’ first spring arrival date changes depends on what factors influence the birds, and the consistency of these factors over time.

**First Spring Arrival Date**

There are many ways to characterize spring migration, such as duration, distance, and arrival date. The studies mentioned in this review look at first spring arrival date (FAD), and how this varies with increased local temperatures. Swanson and Palmer (2009) explain that FAD can vary greatly within a species, and even within a migration route. It was found that FAD differs even within a population: adult males arrive first, followed by adult females, and then juveniles (Tøttrup et al. 2010). This is because adult males need to claim their territory before the females arrive. Although FAD data is easier to collect, it is more affected by outliers (Swanson & Palmer, 2009), because that data is usually aggregated as a mean rather than a median.
Swanson and Palmer (2009) examined the FAD of 44 easily identifiable migratory birds in South Dakota and Minnesota in order to see the influence of changes in winter and spring temperatures from 1971 to 2006. They divided the birds into early (28 February to 7 April) and late arrivals (7 April to 15 May). They discovered that the number of days until arrival decreased as temperature increased. In South Dakota, 90% of species observed had an earlier FAD with an average 0.27 °C increase overall in local temperature. In Minnesota, 100% of species showed an earlier arrival with a 0.37 °C increase in local temperature (Swanson & Palmer, 2009). The following birds arrived later with increased local temperature: purple martin, dickcissels, least flycatcher, and rose-breasted grosbeak. Therefore, an increase in local temperature over time resulted in earlier migration in birds of South Dakota and Minnesota.

**Early Migrants vs. Late Migrants**

In another study in western New York, short-distance and long-distance migratory bird species were observed from 1967 to 2008 looking at a possible correlation between distance traveled and FAD with change in temperature (DeLeon et al. 2011). Short-distance migrants in this study are those that winter in North America, and long-distance migrants are those that winter in Central America, South America, or the West Indies. Out of 93 total species, 37 were short-distance migrants and 56 were long-distance migrants. It was found that 71 of the 93 species had earlier FAD, and moreover, short-distance migrants showed greater change in arrival date. Figure 1 depicts three characteristic linear regressions as examples for the species in this study.
Figure 1. Linear regressions for FAD vs. year for three migratory bird species. On a 5% significance level, only turkey vulture (of the graphs above) had a significant change, arriving 0.658 days earlier per year (DeLeon et al. 2011).

The graphs depict the three types of correlations of arrival date (in days) with year. When compared with local temperature trends, 76% of species showed earlier arrival in response to increased local temperature, supporting the DeLeon et al. hypothesis (2011).

When comparing short-distance and long-distance migrants, it was concluded that short-distance migrant FAD is more strongly correlated to climate change (Swanson & Palmer, 2009). Early arrivals — short-distance migrants — have been found to use local environmental cues to adjust their phenological response to the changing climate (Tøttrup et al. 2010). In comparison, late arrivals — long-distance migrants — use “endogenous control,” control within the organism, to adapt to long-term and predictable variations in climate. Late arrivals therefore have more trouble adapting to immediate climate changes, making these birds more threatened by increasing local temperatures.

**Phylogeny and Abundance**

Phylogeny is the study of evolutionary relationships connecting related species to a common ancestor. Over time, species go extinct because they cannot adapt to a rapidly changing
environment. Below is a hypothetical scenario of how temperature change can affect extinction rates (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Hypothetical scenario depicting the extinction of species with increased global temperature.](image)

In the pre-warming scenario (left) all nine species are within the yellow temperature range, whereas in the post-warming scenario (right) a clade of three species has gone extinct because they are not within the higher temperature range.

It was hypothesized by Davis et al. that closely related bird species would respond similarly to changes in local temperature (2010). They compared phylogenetically related bird and plant species in Concord, USA with those of Chinnor, UK. Both areas of study were well protected, underdeveloped land. The study wanted to determine whether species that diverged from a common ancestor would respond differently to similar temperature changes in similar habitats. It was found that closely related plant species showed similar responses, in that both clades were not able to adjust to climate change well and have declined drastically in abundance. Møller et al. found that species less responsive to climate change decreased in abundance (2004). In a study of 100 species of European birds, they looked at responses of FAD to climate change.
from 1970 to 1990 and from 1990 to 2000. Responses to climate change were only found in birds from 1990 to 2000. The following traits were observed to determine the phylogeny of the species studied: “body mass, sexual dichromatism, population size, migration distance, number of broods, over-wintering in Africa, natal dispersal, northernmost latitude, thermal maximum, change in migration date, habitat specificity and farmland habitat.” Interestingly, species that declined in abundance from 1990 to 2000 were found to be more closely related to one another (Møller et al. 2004). These groups include buntings, dabbling and diving ducks, grebes, kinglets, and wading birds, most of which are water fowl.

Swanson and Palmer found that temperature increased more in winters, and that there was no significant increase in spring temperatures from 1971 to 2006 (2009). The maximum winter temperature increase per decade recorded was 1.31 °C. Warmer winters have a greater effect on arrival date, being that they result in less ice and earlier availability to fruits and vegetation. These improved conditions allow for shorter stoppage times and result in earlier FAD for birds that are able to adjust their phenology to local conditions. For waterfowl, such as those studied above by Møller et al., they are not as able to adapt and are jeopardized by climate change (2004).

**Conclusion**

There is a correlation between phenological response, phylogeny, abundance, and climate change. As global temperatures increase, birds arrive at their breeding locations earlier. While short-distance migrants, and some long-distance migrants, are able to adjust their physiology, immunology, and morphology with changes in local conditions, many species are unable to rapidly adapt and decrease in abundance in communities as a result. One long-term effect of this
is that communities will become less diverse, with a high concentration of short-distance
migrants. Additionally, top-down and bottom-up effects will occur in ecosystems. Without birds,
plant and insect species will thrive without their natural predators, exhibiting a top-down effect.
The elimination of bird species will also result in the decline of birds’ natural predators, such as
larger birds, mammals, and reptiles, exhibiting a bottom-up hypothesis.

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Condom Use Behaviors and Preferences among Undergraduate Ithaca College Students

By: Samantha Castonguay

Introduction

Since the 1920s, a cultural revolution of the sexual variety has been creeping its way into the pants of American young adults. People now marry and have kids much later in life, the age of puberty has dropped, and “young adults are physiologically able to reproduce but not psychologically or socially ready to settle down and begin a family (Bogle, 2007; Garcia & Reiber, 2008)” (Garcia et al., 2013). Even the euphemisms for “sex” have shifted from when a mommy and daddy love each other very much to when two horny college students are prowling through Tinder®.

According to a 2013 review by Binghamton University and Kinsey Institute researchers, this liberated sex culture – now referred to as “hookup culture” – was born out of a series of historical events (Garcia et al.). They claim the movement started in the twenties with the increased availability of automobiles and “novel entertainment, such as movie theaters.” Young adults were able to move beyond their childhood bedrooms and explore their sexualities without the fear of parental scrutiny (Garcia et al., 2013). By the sixties, Garcia notes, the rise of feminism, widespread availability of birth control, and increased frequency of gender-integrated college party events allowed young adults even more sexual liberation. In modern times, the rise of popular culture and social media is said to have normalized “sexual behavior outside of
traditional committed romantic pair-bonds (Bogle, 2007, 2008)” and promoted the “physical and emotional enjoyment” of commitment-less sexual encounters.

Garcia et al. also comments on the college student hookup culture in particular. The team’s most recent quantitative data suggest that between 60 percent and 80 percent of North American college students have had some sort of hook-up experience. The increase in released films portraying the consequences of this new sexual culture, such as *It Happened Here* or *The Hunting Ground*, supports Garcia et al.’s claims. With this omnipresent hook-up culture that exists on most American college campuses, researchers and health professionals alike are doing all they can to promote safe-sex and condom use among college-aged individuals. *Why aren’t kids using condoms?* and *How do we get them to use condoms more often?* seem to be the million-dollar questions.

Professionals in these fields have proposed and tested various explanations for why condom-usage rates are as they exist now and how they can be improved upon. The goal of this review is to explore these previously-researched explanations for current condom use behaviors. In addition, this review will assist in the completion of the overall objective of my study: investing other potential impacts on undergraduate condom use behaviors and preferences. By conducting focus groups comprised of diverse college students, I will examine the development of condom use behaviors, brand or style preferences, and if/how existing preferences manipulate safer sex practices.

**Adopting a Feminist Approach to Interviews**

For my study, it is essential that I consider my approach toward conducting focus group interviews. Sexuality and personal sexual behaviors are quite taboo topics in American culture;
therefore, it is my responsibility as the researcher to ensure my participants’ well-being. The overall goal is to create an environment in which participants are equal and feel comfortable sharing personal information.

Davidson and Layder – authors of the 1994 book, *Methods, Sex, and Madness* – offer a description and literature review of a particular interview style that lends itself well to the goals I have for my study. They refer to this style as “The Feminist Approach.” In this passage, they review a pro-feminist-approach argument:

Oakley also points to more practical reasons for ditching the advice of orthodox methods texts, noting that *the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship* (1982: 41). Feminist methodologists…[stress] the need for rapport and genuine interaction…The interviewer can…enter into a genuine emotional relationship, possibly even a friendship with her research subjects.

Being that I – the researcher and interviewer – am a college undergraduate interviewing my peers, my relationship to my participants is already “non-hierarchical.” In order to utilize this relationship and the feminist approach to my advantage, I will practice “reflexivity” by considering how my presence and the presence of other focus group members influence the responses I receive and, eventually, my findings (Davidson and Layder, 1994).

*The College Right of Passage: Hook-Up Culture on College Campuses*

In order to understand why there is concern over condom use in college, it is necessary to first understand the source: campus sexual climates. At American colleges in particular, hooking
up – or having many sexual encounters – is deeply embedded in the assumptions for what occurs in the college experience. In a review of recent data from the “Online College Social Life Survey,” NYU researcher Jonathan Marc Bearak revealed some interesting hook up trends among American college students at ~21 colleges and universities. First, the likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse during a hookup nearly doubles between freshman year and senior year of college. Bearak also notes that the probability of sex during a hook up for women increases from 27% freshman year to 43% senior year. With men, this probability jumps from 33% to 52% in the same time period. Second, Bearak found that condom use during hook ups drops by about 40% between freshman year and sophomore year before reaching some form of equilibrium. The likelihood of unprotected sex increases from 7% to 16% among women between freshman and sophomore year, and from 6% to 15% among men. Finally, the study found that condom rates are lowest among first-year students with the most highly educated mothers.

Bearak’s archival methodology – reviewing more than 10,000 detailed narratives of hook up experiences – may not prove directly useful to my interview-style research, but does lead to applications I expect to propose based on my data. Bearak’s conclusions suggest that the college environment greatly influences student sexual behavior. If this is the case, I am particularly interested to see how my focus group results might compare to those of a much larger or smaller institution. My current hypothesis is that Ithaca College students will respond differently than students attending other institutions, given that it is a small, private institution. If I am to continue this study, I would aim for a much larger sample and expand upon the number or types of institutions I sample from. I could also apply an archival approach like Bearak, attempting to uncover why condom use behaviors exist as they are now.
In a review of literature pertaining to condom use barriers, two articles written over twenty years apart both noted the same barrier to condom use in their research. Fehr et al (2014) and Grady et al (1993) explained that study participants’ condom use correlated with their perception of risk. Focused primarily on STD/STI contraction, the participants claimed that condom use is associated with unhealthiness. In other words, if sexual partners were perceived as healthy, condom use declined. This commonality between the two articles, despite the twenty-year time gap between publishing dates, offers a potential expectation for my results. If this excuse for inconsistent condom use can withstand twenty years of time, there is a good chance that I may come across a similar logic in my focus group interviews.

Name Brand or Store Brand: Condom Marketing, Purchasing, and Effectiveness

Condom Brands and Their Consumers

How condoms are marketed, why consumers select certain condom products, and how a condom brand compares to its competition are the questions most beneficial to my assessment of brand preference and condom use. In an article authored by Student Wellness and Campus Health professionals at the University of North Carolina, the main sexual health counselor observed that students had developed condom preferences almost entirely based on their perception of the brand’s effectiveness. The article continues on to disprove this myth, citing FDA regulations for condom manufacturing and quality assurance. Most condoms sold in America (or lying around American college health centers in fun little jars) are approved by the FDA, regardless of brand. This means that any particular batch of American-marketed condoms are subject to a unique blend of tests, from water-leak to air-inflation. Once the tests are over, condoms are packaged with the FDA-approved label stating that said condoms are “intended to
prevent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections” (Durex, 2013; FDA, 2015; HealthyHeels, 2012). If a condom fails any test or has no label on the packaging, it was not approved by the FDA and is for novelty use only (HealthyHeels, 2012).

Despite these clearly published FDA regulations, one group of California-based health professionals and researchers (Walsh et al.) delved even deeper into the effectiveness of male latex condoms. Walsh and her research team analyzed and combined the results of two previous commercial latex condom studies. Each of the studies conducted “in bedroom” trials of three well known condom brands: Trojan-Enz, LifeStyles, and Ramses Sensitol. The trials included 3,526 menstrual cycles of 800 documented sexual partners, detailed condom breakage and slippage reports, and post-intercourse vaginal samples of spermatozoa and prostate-specific antigen concentrations (Walsh et al., 2004). Walsh and her colleagues concluded that commercial latex condoms were reliable, with only “1 out of 200” condoms breaking and “1 out of 100” condoms slipping completely off. Walsh’s study also stated that there was no significant difference in effectiveness per brand.

The Walsh and UNC articles raise some important questions in terms of condom use and student brand preference. While they both identify and disprove condom-use barriers and myths, the articles neglect to take the next step and answer how and why these barriers and misconceptions developed in the first place. Why do college students believe that certain condom brands are better than others? Why do students believe that unheard-of or uncommon brands are untrustworthy? How did the students come to that conclusion? What happens if this unknown brand is the only one available? These questions barely excavate the root causes of low condom use: a potentially better approach to increase safe sex practices. Based on where this research left off, we can begin to examine condom use through a much broader lens: questioning how and
why current conditions came to be. Health and research professionals cannot expect to see rapid condom use improvement (or at least develop an understanding of why) by ceaselessly applying trial-and-error-based improvement strategies. We need to understand the problems and limitations before attempting to solve them. From the sociological standpoint, my study would continue on with this research and attempt to uncover why such conditions exist.

The two studies addressed by the Walsh article utilized an interesting methodological choice for assessing the effectiveness of each brand of commercial condoms. These methods were particularly thought-provoking due to the direct use of human subjects. As opposed to testing condom effectiveness with the FDA’s numerous quality control procedures, the researchers chose to study the condom’s performance in its natural setting: during and after sexual intercourse. The two studies, one published by Walsh et al and the other by Trussel et al. (Princeton/Emory University research team), include the consumer in their research. Because the consumer is the one responsible for the overall effectiveness of the product, targeting the condom-users can reveal much more about overall effectiveness than a lab test. For example, a condom may pass all of the FDA’s regulations for manufacturing, but fail to meet the requirements of the consumer (i.e. difficult to use). Using human subjects also directly (and quickly) relates the studies’ findings to real-world applications. In terms of my study on the development of brand preference and condom use habits, emphasis on humanity and consumer experience is preferred over emphasis on the product itself. In order to gain a better understanding of college student condom use habits, direct interaction and experience are necessary.
Product Placement in Condom Marketing

With a different focus in mind, a team of University of Connecticut researchers explored variations in condom shelf placement its effects on the participants’ condom attitudes and acquisition. The shelf placement of condoms was observed in 59 retail outlets in Connecticut. Scott-Sheldon and her team noted that condoms were “typically located in areas of high visibility (e.g., next to the pharmacy counter) and on shelves adjacent to feminine hygiene and disease treatment products”. In the second study, 120 University of Connecticut undergraduate students (all heterosexual) were randomly assigned to evaluate condoms in a particular environment. Each environment was coded as sensual, positive, neutral, or negative. Scott-Sheldon and her colleagues found that men overall reported “more positive attitudes and acquired more condoms when exposed to condoms in a sensual context compared to women in the same condition.” Condom attitudes for women were more positive in a neutral product environment and condom acquisition was strongest when exposed to them in the positive environment. Thus, curiosity regarding condom product placement is a unique and previously unexplored potential influence on the condom use habits of college students that may yield more detailed results as to how and why students choose to use certain condoms as opposed to others.

Methods

Overview of Methodology

In this study, I am exploring the development and current status of condom use regimens among undergraduate college students at Ithaca College. Within this, I will question the influence of certain factors such as consumer perspective on marketing techniques, the
development of condom type preference, the development of brand preference, and any
collections between safe sex education and current condom use regimens.

To explore these questions, I will conduct casual focus group interviews with
undergraduate students. The students will be asked a series of questions and invited to respond to
one another’s commentary. I selected this approach because I hope to obtain higher quality
results from qualitative data. A qualitative approach will provide more in-depth answers to the
questions I am posing. In addition, my questions are exploratory in nature and are not formulated
to have a specific set of answers as a survey might do. Considering the focus group approach
versus an individual interview approach, I believe that posing questions to a group will allow
more flexibility, positive participant interaction, and non-verbal behavior observation.
Participants can interact with one another in order to probe certain questions with greater breadth
and depth, especially with questions that some may not know how to answer. I also have the
option to observe and record how participants interact non-verbally, such as body language or
reactions to fellow student feedback. This group dynamic, as opposed to a formal back and forth
setting, may also allow participants to feel more comfortable during the interview while
discussing their personal sexual behavior. Overall, a focus group methodology will enable me to
obtain the broad qualitative data I need and ensure that my participants feel comfortable and
active in my research.

Methods and Participant Recruitment

For this study, I will be conducting 3 focus group with each lasting approximately 1-2
hours. Each focus group will contain anywhere from 2-4 Ithaca College undergraduate students
of various gender identities and sexual orientations. These focus group interviews will take place
in an Ithaca College classroom with chairs prearranged in a circle. Participants will be asked a series of interview questions pertaining to condom use, preferences, and regimen development. The environment will be casual and relaxed, with emphasis on open dialogue and group conversation. Group members will be encouraged to participate and respond to others while remaining respectful.

Participant recruitment will occur primarily through word of mouth: I invite someone I know and ask them to invite as many of their acquaintances as possible. In addition, recruitment ads will be placed on Ithaca College social media student platforms and weekly newsletters (Facebook, Twitter, and IC Honors Program E-Mail Listserv). Snacks will be used as an incentive for participation. Once enough interest is generated, the students will be given my professional contact information to confirm their place in the focus group via school email.

**Focus Group Questioning Procedures**

To begin the focus group session, participants will be asked to create a pseudonym to obscure their identity during the focus group and for publication. Next, participants were asked basic demographic questions, such as their name, age, course of study at Ithaca College, sexual orientation, current relationship status, and current sexual activity level. Questions will then shift toward the main research questions prefaced by a brief explanation of the topic and questions to follow.

Questions in the main research section will first focus on the development of safe sex knowledge and condom use regimens. Participants will first be asked how they learned about condoms and other contraceptive methods – including who they learned from, where they learned, how effective the education was, and how old they were at the time. Depending on all of
the participants’ previous answers, further questions may or may not include: *Do you have a better understanding of contraception and safe sex now? Do you use condoms or other contraceptive methods? Where do you get contraception? Is it purchased or taken from somewhere? Why do you wear/use or not wear/use condoms? What do you look for when choosing a condom? How do you choose a condom? Does the brand name have anything to do with it? Are you more likely to choose a name brand condom over an unrecognizable brand condom and why? Are there any other factors that you believe play a role in condom/contraceptive use?*

**Ethical Concerns**

The most prominent ethical issue with this study is brought about by the use of the focus group methodology: breach of confidentiality. Although I can ensure that participant confidentiality will be maintained on my part (pseudonyms, password-protected data, etc.), I cannot guarantee the same among the participants themselves. My data will be collected in a group setting; this means that any shared information has the potential to travel outside the security of the focus group. To reduce the likelihood of such, participants will be cautioned not to share information outside the focus group setting and made aware that I cannot guarantee full confidentiality.

Some questions pose a risk of psychological harm, as they may trigger emotional stress in certain participants. Statements made by other participants might also allow traumatic experiences to resurface create discomfort for the participant. To reduce the risk of psychological damage, I will preface each section of questions with a trigger warning and offer any participant the option to leave if uncomfortable. In addition, my questions will be reviewed several times by
other student researchers and a professional sex researcher to ensure they do not pose a threat to a participant’s well-being. Participants will also be given a thorough introduction upon arrival at the focus group interview. It will be made clear that they should be respectful of their peers, utilizing techniques such as inclusive language, equal and open conversation, encouragement of participation, and confidentiality.

Analysis and Implications

No Penis, No Problem: The Influence of Gender Roles on Condom Responsibility

Despite the lack of a specific question to address the issue, every focus group somehow managed to discuss the topic of what partner is responsible for providing the condoms for sexual activity. Out of these discussions, nearly all participants came to same conclusion (varied from 5/6 to 6/6): it is the assumed responsibility of the male to supply condoms. For example, in one focus group, the topic was introduced by Liana – a bisexual, cisgender female. When asked how she obtains condoms, she replied: “well, when [sex is] with a guy, he usually has one anyway”. Johnson, a bisexual cisgender male, noted the same and provided even more detail:

Usually [I provide the condom]. Seeing as, if I’m with a woman, I’m the one with the penis and if I’m with a man, he’s probably got his own condoms for his own penis. I mean, I think that I’m the one with the penis, so I should provide the wrapping paper.

The lines became slightly blurred when Leonardo, a homosexual cisgender male, answered the question:

It’s really a mixed bag for me, ‘cuz like, you don’t really know what the other person is going to want to do. Are they feeling top-y? Are they feeling bottom-y? I guess it’s kinda assumed that every guy will come with a condom…but it also depends on your relationship with the other person.
Out of all male participants, Johnson seemed to be the only one with an explanation for why this assumed masculine responsibility existed. Further research on this bedroom responsibility and gender or power dynamic may be useful for increasing condom usage among teens and college students and for improving the state of safe sex education in America.

Despite the societal expectation and assumed sexual code for men to provide the condoms, nearly all of the women noted that they often have condoms ready and available if the male does not provide them. After further questioning, Liana continued to explain why: “I mean, yeah, [it’s expected for him to have the condom], but I always have one anyway…cuz feminism or whatever.” Female undergraduates may also feel the need to carry back-up protection in case the male forgets a condom. In his case, it’s not a huge problem. He can assume that his female partner is using another form of contraception. He still runs the risk of catching an STD, but that might not be where his concern (or her concern) lies. The main concern, as noted by my participants and the literature mentioned earlier, is pregnancy. If they have sex without a condom, he does not have to bear the potential physical consequences of it; she does. She gets visibly pregnant, noticed at an abortion clinic, or embarrassed in public places all against her will (or at least her life plans). She has to directly change her life, but he probably doesn’t. And if this is the case, even subconsciously, having a condom or some form of pregnancy prevention is more important to her than to him. If this is the case, having a back-up condom is important regardless of the masculine responsibility.

**Condom Selection and Penis Measurement**

During the interviews, participants were asked if they had ever measured their own penis or a partner’s penis and why they had done so. All male participants (3/6) acknowledged that they did measure their own penises. These participants also stated the same reasoning behind the
measurements: simply to know. One participant – a cisgender, homosexual male named Leonardo – also measured his partner’s penis with the intention of settling a bet and boosting his partner’s self-esteem. Furthermore, none of the male participants indicated that their measurements were taken for the purpose of selecting a correctly sized condom. Most noted that they never consciously factored their penis size into the condom-selecting equation. However, it appeared as though penis size played a subconscious role in condom selection. For example, when asked if his size influences what condoms he purchases, Leonardo confidently responded: “I would say no to this question…I would just get regular [sized condoms]. Is there a regular? I guess I’d go normal. I’m not feeling, like, very Magnum.” Despite the claim that he does not consider his size when buying condoms, Leonardo exhibited the opposite on a subconscious level. He did not perceive himself as well-endowed, and therefore, translates that perception into thinking larger condoms are unnecessary and/or will not fit properly.

In addition, the participants who did measure their own penis were further questioned on what measurements they took: length and/or girth. They all responded that only length was measured. However, the same participant mentioned above (Leonardo) commented that girth was “much more visually obvious” and therefore did not necessarily require exact measurement. This raises an exhaustive list of important questions. Does girth actually matter for condom selection? If it matters for sex, why does it not matter for safe sex preparations? Why is length considered socially important, but not girth? In terms of getting college undergrads to practice condom use more religiously, these questions become even more important. For example, due to the fact that length is considered more important in our society, one would expect men to complain that condoms do not fit because manufacturers do not make them long enough. However, we know this is not the case because the most common complaint about ill-fitting
condoms is due to band width, which is directly related to penis girth. If a condom does not fit properly, tearing or sliding can occur. This ultimately reduces the effectiveness of the condom and creates discomfort for the user. This, in turn, makes men less likely to use condoms at all.

However, we can use this as a tactic for increasing the amount of students who use condoms regularly. By promoting the importance or social reward of penis girth, we might expect to see more penis-bearers measuring their girth and considering this measurement when purchasing condoms. As a result, they may have more success finding comfortable condoms and, thus, choose to wear them more routinely.

**Point of Purchase Panic: The Effects of Fear and Embarrassment on Condom Selection**

The most common, condom-related knowledge shared amongst the participants were their experiences purchasing condoms. All participants consistently noted experiencing fear, shame, or panic when purchasing condoms either for the first time or in general.

Over half of all participants (4/6) stated that they have brought a friend or companion along to help purchase condoms. This “help” included offering suggestions, boosting confidence, eliminating shame, or reducing fear. One participant, a heterosexual cisgender female named Kiki, even stated that she still would not go to buy condoms alone. In addition, if she needed to ask a store employee for the condoms, maybe if they were behind the counter, Kiki admitted that “[she] would make someone go with [her] and ask for [her].” I would imagine this fear comes from the sexual modesty of American culture. Similar to the experience of purchasing feminine care products, those who purchase condoms are under the impression that they must be secretive or apologetic for necessitating these items in public. Furthermore, Juliet – a bisexual cisgender female – stated that her fear originated from societal pressures:
Some girls, myself included, feel like they can’t carry condoms cuz then it looks like they want sex. And girls aren’t necessarily supposed to want sex. It’s what the guy wants.

This fear also plays a strong role in determining style and brand of condoms that the participants’ purchased or have purchased. Half of their condom brand selections or brand preferences appear to have developed out of their fearful, rushed purchasing experiences or recommendations from peers and/or partners. For example, Kiki shared that she religiously buys “Trojan Ultrathin condoms based on [her] friend’s mentioning of them when [they] shopped together.” Jack, a heterosexual cisgender male participant, shared that he used Durex brand condoms for a long time (~3 years) because it was the first box he quickly and nervously grabbed during his initial condom purchasing experience. Jack also considered how his peers may have influenced this decision by introducing him to the Durex brand name: “I had heard things about Durex from friends before and…just immediately grabbed them in the store and ran to the cashier”. He only changed brand allegiances per request of his female partner, who suggested they try an equally (if not, more) familiar brand, Trojan.

When Jack shared his brand switch, Liana – a bisexual cisgender female – immediately followed up:

Trojan advertises a lot more than other condom brands. Definitely on TV, radio, I’ve heard more Trojan ads than Durex. And, like, I never see advertisements for them.

Leonardo also chimed in: “I’ve never even heard of [the Lifestyles brand] until I bought that cheap [thirty-pack] at Rite-Aid.”
Clearly, college students are paying attention to the media. In fact, half of all participants stated that they currently use Trojan brand condoms. This could be due to the fact that Trojan has developed a reputation or a “household name” that people recognize. This recognition then translates into trust. Consumers know this brand as they rush in and out of a drug store to avoid being seen or feeling embarrassment. In their purchase-time hustle, the consumer might not care about the limitless pleasure-enhancing features of a particular condom. The only thing that matters is the name they recognize in that short amount of time.

If most college students develop their preferences out of these panicky and embarrassing condom shopping trips, it pays for condom manufacturers to advertise well in advance. This way, teens who are preparing to buy condoms have already pieced together an impression of what reputable, normal condoms look like and what should immediately draw their attention in the store. TV, radio, and print ad exposure for condom brands also creates one of the most profitable forms of endorsement: word of mouth. If a particular brand is seen more often, it becomes recognized as a norm. Once it does this, people treat that brand as the condom that everyone else is using. So, they suggest it to their friends. Those friends then go buy that particular brand, support it because they do not know any another brands or don’t want to seem out of touch, and subsequently recommend it to their curious friends.

**Condom Use Behaviors and Quality of Sex Education**

Included on the demographic sheet, participants were asked for a description of any formal sex education they’d received – the duration, their age at the time, the setting and US state, the effectiveness and overall quality of material, etc. As expected, the answers ranged significantly. Participants received a sex education from many different locations in America. The U.S. has no national standards for sex education curricula, meaning that every state (or even
school district) gets to decide what is taught. Every student has the possibility of learning a completely different curriculum than their peers.

This lack of educational consistency was visible in the condom use behaviors mentioned by my participants. Those with a more in-depth sex education (including college courses), comprising a third of the participants (2/6), tended to use condoms more frequently, use condoms for sexual activity other than penile-vaginal intercourse, and have condoms available for use more often. This quality of education included 2+ years of in-school education, 1+ year(s) of outside sexuality coursework, and explored topics such as consent, pleasure, STDs, and condom selection. For example, the participant with the longest and most in-depth sex education – Jack, a heterosexual cisgender male – used condoms for both vaginal and oral sex. The second most educated participants – Johnson and Liana, bisexual cisgender male and female – used condoms for penile-vaginal and anal sex. These participants were also aware that condoms should be worn for oral sex but did not use them for those purposes: “You’re supposed to, but I don’t” (Liana).

The participants who received the shortest or most shallow sex education tended not to use condoms for any sexual behavior or were simply not familiar enough with the topic to answer. Their education consisted of elementary school health classes for ~1 year. For example, the participant with the most superficial sex education – Juliet, a bisexual cisgender female – has never physically seen an unwrapped condom and is completely unaware of how to use one. Leonardo noted that he “never knew [he] should use a condom for a blow job until [he] thought logically about it”.

In my opinion, these results show the implications of the current state of sex education in America. The failures of this sex education system have visible consequences on future
generations. Students are approaching the legal age of consent, entering college, and beginning to engage in serious relationships without knowledge that can keep them safe, healthy, and happy. However, little is changing and the majority of students remain without knowledge or accessible supplies. If we ever expect college students to practice safe sex behaviors or develop condom use regimens, we need a consistent, compelling education to teach them how and why first.

Works Cited


Power and Control

By: Sophia Hebert

—— “Traditional” ——

It all begins
with women who are not in their place,
women who defy social roles, men, and God,
women, the weaker in mind, body, and spirit,
who befriend demons,
sign a pact with the Devil,
kiss him,
love him,
worship him,
and allow him inside.¹

His influence drives them to maleficium,
killing crops,
bewitching objects,
eating children,
brewing potions,
 flying on brooms with magical ointment.²

Women who are adulterers,
young, beautiful maidens,
bewitch men to fall under their charms.

Women who are widows,
old, ugly hags,
granted land, money, and power
that only a man can handle.

Women who are midwives and healers,
learned, wise women
defy God by deciding
who lives
and who dies.

¹ As outlined in The Malleus Maleficarum by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger.

² Some of the portrayals of witches in the film, “Haxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages.”
She must be punished!
She must be stopped!
She must be put in her place!
Witchcraft! Witchcraft!
Burn her! Send her to the gallows!
How dare she think for herself?
How dare she claim her own sexual power?
How dare she speak out against authority?
How dare she live independently?
She is a woman, and women must stay in their place!³

—— Non-Christians ——

We are baffled.

We do not understand
this horror,
this panic,
this injustice.

Witchcraft depends on the user:
men, women,
young, old,
single, married, widowed,
any and all.

Some use it for malice,
but they are ostracized and avoided,
not killed for their craft.

Good magic is real.
Shamans and healers
are ever-present
in our villages, homes, families.

Witches are sometimes feared
but always respected,
even the bad ones.

³ First section of the poem mostly references *Witches of the Atlantic World* edited by Elaine G. Breslaw, but also borrows from *The Malleus Maleficarum.*
Why must they be punished
for something they are born with,
or for something they have devoted
their lives to learn?

Why do you, in black robes,
barge into our communities,
insisting the Devil
is among us,
inside us?

Why do you impose your
hateful,
spiteful,
prejudiced views,
on our people?

We are not sinners!
We are not savages!
Out! Away with you!
If anyone is the Devil,
it is you!  

—— Italians ——

There are men who fight evil in their dreams,
men who are pious, militant, upstanding,
men who do their part for society
by ensuring the fertility of the crop.

They are special men,
born with the caul,
chosen for their mighty task,
initiated at twenty years old,
fighting for twenty years more.

Women, too, take up the task.
Some speak to the dead,
yet they do not fight as the men do,
for their womanly wiles
are best applied elsewhere.

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4 Second section of the poem references Witches of the Atlantic World but also borrows from the reading, “The Devil in New France: Jesuit Demonology, 1611-50” by Peter Goddard and from the film “Black Robe.”
These are Benandanti,  
the nightly fighters of the folk,  
who serve for the power of good.

When the Inquisitors took hold,  
they did not understand such base beliefs.  
They twisted reality to match  
their elite prejudice, fear, and hate.

The fighters of evil were questioned,  
women more than the men,  
as the Inquisitors were hell-bent  
to name Benandanti as witches.

“This is not in the name of goodness!  
This is in the name of the Devil!  
You meet him at night,  
sign pacts with the Evil One,  
and cause maleficium  
with the help of the witches in your midst!”

Yet this transformation came too late.  
These “witches” missed the craze  
and were spared the fate of too many.  

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5 Third section of the poem is in reference to The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries by Carlo Ginzburg.
—— Germans ——

Now the men have the spotlight.

Their macho mania,
their desire — need — to prove
their masculinity
is a detriment to society.

The public sphere is the male domain.
Wealthy merchants,
early capitalists,
overpower the meek ladies,
who should be pleased
to have the household.

All are ruled by the patriarchy.

The men must be rowdy,
drink before the point of excess,
insult each other,
settle disputes with fists.

They give women the sole purpose
of bearing children and running the home.
Their violent masculinity is a rulebook
for woman-on-woman hate.
The lying-in maid,
an old, widowed woman,
is merely jealous
of the younger,
more beautiful mother
and her fertility,
which fulfills her role.

The young mother, bedridden,
must watch as her husband,
the insatiable man he is,
falls victim to the lying-in maid,
with her witchy allure
and sexual prowess.

When the new mother
is ready to raise her child,
the lying-in maid leaves
and casts a spell on her baby,
allowing it to suffer and die.
“See? The old crone is jealous! 
She got a taste of my power 
as domestic queen, 
but now that she must leave, 
she harms my baby to spite me!”

Only an exorcism 
can tamper down this discord 
and bring the warring genders together.⁶

—— French ——

The witch is a man or a woman. 
Flip the coin, 
an equal chance of either.

Witchcraft is hereditary, 
passed down from 
mother or father 
to child.

A witch’s daughter may feel wronged, 
so she will cast a spell 
to harm the offender, 
revenge magic her weapon.

Angry neighbors are prone 
to the male witch, 
who harms crops and livestock, 
who may even turn on their babies 
to settle the family feud.

Witchcraft is a part of life, 
woven into the societal fabric. 
No outbreaks occur, 
as witchcraft in these rural parts 
is essential to maintain order.⁷

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⁶ Fourth section of the poem references the various readings by Lyndal Roper.

⁷ Fifth section of the poem references Robin Briggs’s work.
Witches are different depending on who you ask and when, yet the common thread that ties these pieces together is Power and Control.

For those women who wanted more, who were not content with a substandard status, who wanted real authority in their lives, who threatened the order of society. Who, for their transgressions, were tortured, hanged, drowned, burned, in a “Woman’s Holocaust.”

For those Shamans and healers who were respected and sought out, who used magic to help, who overpowered those who harmed, but still could not hold a flame against the beliefs of elite forces.

For those men and few women who wanted to do good for their town, who warded off evil to help the crop. For it was the outsiders, who imposed their idea of a witch on them, who victimized these good folk and tarnished their noble image.

For those warring men, bred warring women, and as young was pitted against old, women accused each other, trying to regain their throne in their one domestic sphere.

--- The Image ---

--- The quoted term was an individual’s view as presented in the film, “The Burning Times.” ---
For those men and women who stood up for themselves, who used magic for revenge, as one thought one had bested another, the other fought back, all to maintain order.

Start with Power and Control, add in a pinch of Prejudice, a helping of Hate, and a flavor of Fear.

This is the recipe for a witch.
Architectural Importance Within the Islamic Tradition
By: Zoe Merod

Since the birth of Islam, architecture has played an important role of monumentalizing important places, spaces and ideas within the Muslim faith. Behind the initial observable form, the building’s function is woven into its meaning. Beginning with the House of the Prophet, architectural styles developed around key elements from Muhammad’s home. Moving to the Kaaba, the most central holy point, aspects of Islam are manifested through design elements. The Dome of the Rock, perhaps the most notable and well-known monument, is not only dazzling to the eye, but comforting to the spirit. Finally, the Great Mosque of Cordoba is the perfect example of architecture that draws from the built environment that came before it. Each important in their own right, the structure, purpose and significance of the buildings are inextricably linked, and through their combination become more powerful, helping to connect the divine and earthly.

To truly understand Islamic architecture, knowledge of the Prophet’s house in Medina, Saudi Arabia is necessary. As Muhammad’s following grew, his house, where he lived from 622-632 CE, became a place to gather and worship. This simple planed dwelling consisted of four main walls surrounding an open courtyard (Ettinghausen et al. 5). Since Medina is a desert town, the courtyard was hot without protection from the sun, so columns were erected and covered with a ceiling, which further divided up the space. This came to be known as hypostyle, an important form within Islamic architecture. Muhammad dedicated the southern wall, facing Mecca, the qibla, where a niche indicating the direction of prayer, the mihrab, was inlaid. Muhammad also used his living space for the rituals of daily life as well as leading prayer and gathering with the growing community (Ettinghausen et al. 5). The House of the Prophet was a
place for the people of Islam to gather and connect, sharing their dedication to the faith as well as for all that was holy. Later constructions within the Islamic world alluded to this foundational model that served as a reminder of the life of the Prophet and the basis of the religion.

Muhammad’s establishment of the qibla wall and the direction of prayer towards Mecca raised the question, “where in Mecca?”. The answer: The Kaaba, dedicated by the Prophet in 631. As a simple, four-faced, cubic building, the Kaaba is the metaphorical core and literal focal point of Islam (Burckhardt 1). A lack of decoration on the neutral, earth toned surface adds to the unassuming air of this building, though its implication is far from that. In essence, it embodies all that is Islamic – simple, pure, and non-changing. It acts as a central focus point for the entire Islamic community. Unity is clearly significant within the faith since every follower must bow to the same single zenith, bringing everyone together regardless of distance between them.

The theme of unity can be observed surrounding another major monument in the Islamic world. According to the faith, one of the most holy sites on Earth is The Dome of the Rock which sits high above the city of Jerusalem. Constructed around the years 691-692, the Umayyad empire set out to memorialize the rock from which Muhammad ascended to Heaven (Ettinghausen et al. 15). With that very rock as the foundation, the octagonal base building is covered, in part, with brightly colored tiles. Atop this octagon is a drum and a dome. The dome is gold plated and shines alongside the light of the sun. Today, the magnificent landmark functions like a shrine where modern pilgrims come to bask in the spiritual glow of the Prophet and God. Some of the most important artistic details found decorating the walls are passages from the Qur’an. These passages have double meaning considering they are meant to be read by the followers of Muhammad and taken as the most divine word of God within the Islamic tradition, but they also function as a tool to connect with other monotheistic religion followers, such as
Christians and Jews (Ruggles 100). The Kufic script found inside the Dome of the Rock is evidence that this was meant to be a place of worship and unity. A harmony was established between three religions as all can find their similar devotion to God amidst their differences.

After a time of political unrest, the Umayyad empire was overthrown and all but one member of the dynasty was assassinated. Abd al-Rahman fled to Cordoba in the southern Iberian peninsula and soon began building a mosque to stake his claim as rightful ruler and remind him of his home that he wasn’t able to return to. From 784-987 The Great Mosque of Cordoba functioned as a working, hypostyle mosque that contained an important design features (Ettinghausen et al. 83-91). The mosque used recycled Roman columns to build the covered area as well as impressive double-tiered arches painted in red and white stripes. As Abd al-Rahman’s following began to grow within the newly formed al-Andalus region, the small, original mosque needed to grow as well to accommodate more people. Luckily, the hypostyle is effective in doing just that; expanding with flexibility due to its distinct pattern of columns. The double arches had three main purposes when the mosque operated as a place of Muslim worship. One being the strength of its structure, the addition of another arch removes more of the weakness created by lateral thrust. The second being the symbolic reference to Abd al-Rahman’s home and The Great Mosque of Damascus which featured these same arches. The third purpose was for decoration, creating an echo throughout the space and giving the inside a “forest effect”, adding to the Islamic interest in paradise, or other worldly experiences while inside the mosque (Ettinghausen et al. 83-91). This grand mosque was first meant only to be a home away from home for the Umayyad prince who lost his family, though it grew to be one of the most splendid examples of mosque architecture in the world as a new chapter in Islamic history began in southern Spain.

Architecture, at the very core, is simply an enclosure of space and a form of spatial
organization to create structure within societies. It is clear after studying important Islamic monuments that buildings are more than just brick and stone, mortar and concrete. They take on meaning given to them, as well as meaning not meant for them in the first place, by the manner in which they are used. Architecture can express the spiritual in a way that words and human gestures cannot. All four of these major monuments have sacred connotations within the Islamic tradition, though they are also fully functional as places of refuge, quiet and happiness. It is within the built environment that we can see the materialization of social values which is true for The House of the Prophet, The Kaaba, The Dome of the Rock and The Great Mosque of Cordoba.

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Introduction

Before reading Robert Jensen’s *The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men*, I could define patriarchy as a system where the man was in charge, whether it be in the household or in the government. After reading Jensen’s book, I now understand patriarchy as a system in which men dominate and have power over women and presumably weaker men. It is the root of gender inequality in our society and has led to the creation of gender norms and expectations. Patriarchy has arbitrarily created this power dynamic of domination and subordination, causing people to live scripted, predetermined lives based on the reproductive anatomy they are born with. In this paper I will focus on how patriarchy created gender and how that leads to rigid, repressive, reactionary, and individual responses to the inequality (Jensen, 2017).

Jensen examines patriarchy through a radical feminism perspective. He believes that this type of feminism provides the best framework for analyzing the social construct of gender. Jensen firmly believes that radical feminism will lead women to liberation from patriarchal control (Jensen, 2017). I had very little exposure to feminism growing up and thought that feminism equated to women wanting equal opportunities to men (mostly in the work force). The closest thing I had to feminism was Beyoncé’s song “Flawless” in which she includes an excerpt from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s speech, “We Should All Be Feminists.” I now understand that feminism is a lens to critique patriarchy as a sex-gender hierarchy. Radical feminism says patriarchy needs to be eliminated if we want to end sex-gender discrimination and inequality.
Jensen’s book gave me the vocabulary and tools to critically analyze a patriarchal society. I am now able to question what I read and hear, such as my friend’s article in The Ithacan. A fellow Health and Physical Education major wrote a piece about the necessity of comprehensive sex education in this country. As much as I loved what she had to say, I was able to comb through it with my new radical feminism lens and point out things she overlooked. She hopes to live in a world where one day stereotypes for men and women no longer exist and a spectrum of femininity and masculinity can be made more visible. I immediately wonder if these stereotypes can ever come to a halt or if it is even possible to normalize a spectrum of femininity and masculinity. The binary has been engrained in our minds for so long that most people can no longer recognize what is put in their head because of a patriarchal system.

**Gender**

How is sex different from gender? Sex is a reference to reproductive features and is therefore purely biological. It is underneath someone’s clothes; it is personal and private. There are three sex categories: male, female, and intersex. Instead of referring to someone as male, female, or intersex for the rest of their lives, we also assign someone one of two genders when they are born. Families even throw gender-reveal parties before the birth, something I do not plan to partake in. Gender refers to categories that we are all familiar with such as woman, girl, man, and boy. Yet there are also many more identities! What many people fail to realize is that gender is not biological like sex; it is a socially constructed idea put in place by patriarchy. When one thinks of gender there are certain images that come to mind. Those images are called stereotypes; a typical way to organize someone or something based on popular repetitive patterns and experiences. A stereotype based on gender is also called a gender norm. A gender norm, also referred to as cultural story, defines how a woman, man, girl, and boy should look, speak, carry
themselves, and what they can participate in. All of these gender norms and stories are socially constructed because they are not biological or natural; they were created by people and perpetuated by the culture and society in order to reinforce the sex-gender hierarchy.

I think of gender norms in two metaphors; first, a gender norm is a box in which we are confined, unable to gain mobility or move into other spaces. Second, a gender norm is a script of how one’s life will probably play out. If you are a girl you will be expected to be cute, polite, shy, and un-athletic, while boys are expected to be rough, aggressive, athletic, and protective. A woman can only achieve certain professional accomplishments, while men are expected to surpass women in every aspect.

Have we ever stopped and asked why these boxes and scripts exist? The boxes were created by patriarchy, a system which seeks to “support male power and makes the system’s domination/subordination dynamic seem natural and normal” (Jensen, 2017, pg. 122). Most of us do not realize this because we have been socialized in patriarchy and know nothing different. Of course there have been many people to step back and say, “This isn’t right!” and unfortunately they are a minority and marginalized group of people. This might be changing as we have seen now more than ever many people come together to fight inequalities. Yet, these disparities will not disappear so long as gender and patriarchy exist. “Gender in patriarchy is a category that established and reinforces inequality” (Jensen, 2017, pg. 122). Jensen addresses two specific ways in which gender inequality is reinforced in our society: the sexual exploitation of women and rape culture.
Sexual Exploitation of Women and Rape Culture

Continuing the conversation of inequality, the sexual exploitation of women is another vehicle reinforcing that inequality. Jensen’s chapter on Prostitution and Pornography was very powerful. The preceding chapter titled Rape and Rape Culture is just as important, but for my own purposes I think the subjects should be combined. I will briefly summarize what I took away from the Rape and Rape Culture chapter and then talk about pornography and the purpose of intercourse.

We live in a culture where rape occurs. There are some men who feel that they have the entitlement to sexually dominant women. Jensen devotes portions of the chapter to explain consent without desire—there are people who consent to sex, but do not actually want to have sex. I think that is because most women and girls are not taught that it is okay to say no. We also do not teach all men how to properly please women. The previous sentences are extremely heterosexual/heteronormative. Not all sex is heterosexual. However, in Jensen’s chapter of Rape and Rape Culture, he refers mostly to men who rape women because men sexually assert themselves over women in patriarchy. Heterosexual sex is very male-centered and focused on the male’s orgasm. Intercourse is commonly known as penetration. Images of thrusting, forcing, and invasion instantly enter our mind. It does not and should not have to be this way.

I think we should make sex more woman-centric and sex positive. I say woman and not female because I mean all women (transwomen, women of color, different class, body types, abilities, ages etc.). A start would be to create a standard comprehensive sex education where we properly socialize girls and boys to the idea of sex and pleasure. When one thinks of male and female genitalia, one probably thinks of the penis and the vagina. The vagina should not be
compared to the penis because for some women, they do not experience pleasure through vaginal intercourse. Some women experience pleasure through clitoral stimulation. Therefore, if compared at all, it should be the clitoris and the penis. We could also change the terminology from penetrating to enveloping, which would also shift the focus from the man to the woman. To me it feels pointless to make suggestions to an irremediable society; nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that change is glacial but also constant.

Jensen’s chapter on pornography was a little tough to chew on. Full disclosure: I was socialized through pornography. I felt uncomfortable sitting in class when we unpacked this chapter. I felt that Professor Carla Golden was clearly disgusted by porn and I really wanted to say, “Well wait a minute, it’s not my fault I was socialized in porn and that I am addicted to it! It’s really patriarchy’s fault!” Should I feel ashamed for watching porn? Before reading Jensen I would say no, but now I would say that it is an extremely unhealthy habit that once again reinforces gender inequalities. Jensen argues that porn by no means demonstrates female empowerment; it is the exact opposite. Similar to how one may consent to sex but may not want it, many women consent to porn but may not want to. I know that is overgeneralizing and that there are in fact women who do want to make pornos, and to that I say do what you want (a rather liberal view). However, Jensen wants us to critically analyze the impact of sexual exploitation. We must consider the decisions these women made leading up to that point and how sex work will impact their lives in the future. Finally, one thing that Jensen and our class really glossed over is the fact that women watch porn too; it is not just men who are socialized in it!

My biggest take-away from the Prostitution and Pornography chapters were answers to the question, “What is sex for?” Jensen declares, “The typical conservative/religious answer to
that (sex is appropriate only in heterosexual marriage) and the typical liberal/secular answer (sex is for whatever the person decides) are both patriarchal answers, flip sides of the same patriarchal coin. The conservative answer gives specific men (husbands and fathers) control of women’s sexuality, while the liberal answer makes women’s sexuality as widely available to as many men as possible” (Jensen, 2017, pg. 98). This was eye opening for me because it meant that the hook up culture I had been living in had deceived me this whole time! I was not in control or making an empowering decision by agreeing to have sex with different boys. I also used to sit and wonder why no one wanted to date me… Jensen adds clarity and sheds light on a lot of issues I had once overlooked. In a rigid, repressive, reactionary patriarchal society, women’s bodies will always be viewed as sexual objects for men’s pleasure. If that is the case, a woman will never be seen as a man’s equal, always the lesser of the two. Therefore, we cannot fix a broken system.

Transgenderism

The first time I had a comprehensive education on what it means to be transgender was when I took Human Sexuality freshman year with Rachel Gunderson. In high school I had always known about the T in LGBT, but never knew too much about it. Gunderson’s class taught me that there are children as young as four who do not identify with the gender given to them at birth. We watched many videos about this, including MTV’s The T Word. It was fascinating to learn about and heartbreaking to realize that there is a group of people who face discrimination based on gender identity, not just sexual orientation. I vowed to myself that I would be more aware of our gendered society and embrace my future child no matter what.

Never once did I stop and question why and how people felt “trapped in the wrong body.” My immediate reaction was to be loving, supportive, and accepting and to not question
too much. I had also only been exposed to a handful of celebrity transgender people such as Jazz Jennings, Laverne Cox, and Caitlin Jenner. I did not personally know anyone who was transgender until coming to college. Reading Jensen’s section on Transgenderism was another eye-opening experience for me.

Jensen is not attacking any transgender person, rather, he is critiquing the underlying idea. He writes, “On the surface, transgenderism may seem to be a more revolutionary approach, but radical feminism offers a deeper critique of the domination/subordination dynamic at the heart of patriarchy and a more promising path to liberation” (Jensen, 2017, pg. 120). He feels that the transgender movement does not offer a thorough critique to patriarchy like radical feminism does. Transgenderism allows people to move from one rigid, repressive box to another; it is not revolutionary. One does not break out of either box but stays within the confines of the socially constructed box. Radical feminism seeks to break out of and destroy the boxes so that there are no more groups that can be dominant or subordinate; so that there are no more scripts, pre-determined pathways, stereotypes, and no limits. Before reading Jensen’s book, no one had ever offered me that critique of the transgender movement. I have to say, I agree with Jensen in that moving from one gender identity to another is not solving the overall issue. Yes, it is scary to critique a movement and have it interpreted as questioning a person and their experiences. I am not discrediting someone’s feelings and lived experiences. Rather, I am trying to probe a question that Professor Golden asks in class, “I understand when someone says I feel like a girl or I like girl things, but what do they mean when they say I am a girl?”

There is no such thing as a female or male brain (Jensen, 2017). Using gender in biological terms to evaluate why someone is transgender does not work because gender is a social construct. How then do we understand the transgender movement? Several public health
organizations classify it as a disorder, disease, dysphoria, or condition (Jensen, 2017). I think most progressive people including myself would be quick to disagree with those terms. Still, how do we explain it? The American Psychological Association declares that, “There is no single explanation for why people are transgender” (Jensen, 2017, pg. 126). It seems as though we do not have the answer right now; perhaps one day we will. Jensen’s stance is unfavorable because he argues that the transgender movement is not helpful in the grand scheme of remedying the pathology of patriarchy. Like pornography, transgenderism does the exact opposite of what it sets out to do (Jensen, 2017). Jensen goes as far as to say that transgenderism actually reinforces the gender boxes that much more, allowing patriarchy to continue to rule over our lives (Jensen, 2017).

Jensen does not go into great detail about the idea of non-binary, non-conforming, or fluid identities. He mentions the terms briefly but does not say much about his opinion on them. I think he would say that radical feminism still offers a better critique of patriarchy and that if patriarchy did not exist we would not need terms such as non-conforming and non-binary. However, I think a way to step out of the binary box is to pronounce oneself as non-binary; to not conform. It does not solve the issue, but at the end of the day, patriarchy is not going anywhere. Patriarchy will die when our planet dies, when we have exhausted every ounce of resource on this earth until it is dry and dust. Only then patriarchy will cease to exist.

Conclusion/Take-away

I can certainly say that before reading The End of Patriarchy I did not understand just how detrimental a patriarchal society is. This system is the main reason why we have gender inequalities. Before reading Jensen’s book I also did not know what feminism or radical
feminism meant. Now I do; radical feminism is the political belief that patriarchy needs to be
gotten rid of in order to a) eliminate gender and all that comes with it (norms, stereotypes, and
cultural stories), and b) remove the sex-gender hierarchy in order to eliminate inequalities. It
does not mean adjusting the system to include everyone. It does not mean giving everyone an
equal opportunity to succeed. It means to get rid of the system, tear it down, and destroy it.
Jensen argues that this is not coming anytime soon (despite what his title leads onlookers to
believe). I agree, and similar to my fellow Health and Physical Education colleague I hope that
one day an adult will say to a child, “I remember when there were these terms for people called
man and woman and with these words there came societal expectations, traits, and pressures. It
was totally ridiculous because it separated and divided people and did not allow people to live
truly happy lives. It was difficult, but that time is over. Now we are all just people, free of
socially manipulative ascribed characteristics.”

Patriarchy is not going anywhere. That is why Jensen often quotes James Baldwin, “Ain’t
no place to run. So, you walk toward it. At least that way you’ll know what hit you” (Jensen,
2017, pg. 153). For the first time I am trying on my new radical feminist glasses. I have noticed
that I am hyper-aware of sex and gender and how it shapes the world around me. Jensen says we
will most likely always live in a world where there are stories about gender (Jensen, 2017).
Similarly, I believe that patriarchy is not going anywhere and radical feminism can shed light to
the inequalities and strengthen one’s argument when critiquing society. However, any solution
proposed or put forth will not fix the broken system. The system is irrevocably damaged.
Afterword

There are many topics that I could not address in this paper due to time and space constraints. A few of them being intersectionality, what it means to be a woman or a man (what does it mean if you cannot reproduce?), my own experiences, and I only briefly touched on the middle space between man and woman (gender fluidity). I apologize deeply for this!

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Independence, Genocide, Rape, and Feminism: The Birangonas of the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Independence

By: Alexa Salvato

Bangladesh’s secession from West Pakistan allowed freedom for people that had been subjugated for generations — but like many freedoms, it came at a cost. During the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Independence, there were many violent actions conducted against the Bengali people, the ethnic and linguistic group that would become the majority in the new Bangladesh state. Today, many scholars consider the 1971 war to be a genocide. Central to that genocide was the use of rape as a weapon of war primarily against Bengali women. Although millions of East Pakistani soldiers and civilians were killed during the conflict, the rape of these women — a number estimated between 200,000 and 400,000 — could be considered genocide in and of itself.

Discussing genocide requires a concrete definition of the term. For the purposes of this paper, the definition will be that stated in article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” (208). As Lisa Sharlach explains in her 2000 paper on rape as a type of genocide, although sexual violence is not explicitly stated in the convention’s definition, it directly falls into categories (b) and (c) in the situations where it does not result in the death of the victim (a) (91).
Sharlach compares the use of rape as genocide in East Pakistan’s secession from West Pakistan to other conflicts that occurred in the late twentieth century, including the Rwandan Civil War (1900 – 1993) and the Kosovo War (1998 – 1999): “In all three regions, soldiers or militia used rape as a tactic to cause either death or psychological and physical harm to women and girls” (90). Despite the fact that these girls and women are the ones who experienced this harm that can lead to a lifetime of trauma, the public perception that they have been irreparably “damaged” by this incident can cause victim-blaming by the men in their lives (husbands, fathers, brothers) who are afraid of the destruction of their family’s reputation. Additionally, “before women’s emancipation in Western societies, judges perceived rape not as a crime against the woman or girl herself, but rather against the man, whether father or husband, to whom she belonged” (Sharlach 90). In the 1970s, this emancipation was reaching the mainstream in some Western countries with the Second Wave feminist (also known as women’s liberation) movement in the United States and United Kingdom. The marginalization of rape victims in a predominantly Muslim country with a feminist movement that would not blossom for decades provided these women with few resources to process their traumas, and little understanding that the personal trauma they experienced was part of a systematic violation of human rights in a sexist and exploitative society.

Men who fight in a conflict, and especially those who die for the cause, are forever venerated as heroes. Meanwhile, civilian deaths and violence affecting women and children often goes unmarked and unrepresented. The newly established Bangladeshi government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman decided to ensure that this would not be the case. Since a reported 200,000 – 400,000 women were raped in the Bangladeshi War of Independence, the country was filled with survivors. To demonstrate that these women would not be forgotten, the government took a
conscious stand after independence, essentially attempting to re-brand them in the eyes of the media. “The Bangladeshi government referred to the raped women as *birangonas* ('war heroines') to prevent them from being socially ostracized, and attempted to rebrand them by marrying them off or introducing them to the labour market” (“Remembering to Forget…” 436). This title had empowering intentions, but was relatively ineffective in changing the public perception. Until the 1990s, rape was not recognized as a war crime, and it was then activists began to collect the stories of the survivors. The traditional values present in the new Bangladeshi villages made identification of these women as survivors taboo when it came to their own individual lives.

In her 2006 article, Nayanika Mookherjee follows one group of three *birangonas* from a village called Enayetpur who became unofficial spokeswomen for rape survivors when their pictures were used in various newspapers after they were profiled. Once they were “outed,” they were regarded much differently by fellow villagers, people whom they had known for their whole lives. “All the women would refer to a loss of sociability and how they would refrain from visiting others and mixing with people for fear of being scorned” (“Remembering to Forget…” 438). Even if their neighbors were supposedly a part of the national movement to support *birangonas*, when they actually encountered these women personally, their personal biases kicked in. When Mookherjee spoke to the people in these villages, they said: “…allusions to rape were about events in neighbouring villages, but never about Enayetpur.” This act of “othering” survivors, deeming them as people far away rather than those to whom one may be intimately connected, leads to the phenomenon commonly referred to as “the second rape” by Sharlach: “Post-rape trauma is compounded by ‘the second rape’ of becoming a pariah in one’s own society and even one’s own family” (Sharlach 90). “The second rape” is also one of the many
reasons why survivors refrain from pressing charges, speaking to the press, or even telling their closest friends and family members about incidences of sexual assault.

Although the media and government reported the phenomenon of rape during wartime, individual victims primarily did not choose to identify themselves. This is how sexual assault in wartime becomes what Mookherjee calls a “public secret”:

Consequently the process also sets up sanctions against the overt narration of the experience of rape, ensuring that it remains concealed as a secret, a public secret, only to be invoked at specific moments in the context of intersubjective dynamics. … In fact, the very shunning of the raped woman because of the public secrecy of rape ensures her representation through scorn. (“Remembering to Forget…” 434)

When a person’s personal trauma becomes a public secret, the survivor herself loses the power to tell her story. In a conservative country (and global society) burdened with rape culture, these now-older women, many of whom reside in rural villages, are not the ones who create the dominant narratives of Bangladesh’s recent history. People who can create narratives are those in the government, the media, and the military. Those groups differ from the birangonas in both class and gender, as they see the wartime rapes through distinctly religious and patriarchal lenses. When Irene Khan, former secretary general of Amnesty International who was born and raised in Bangladesh, was interviewed on the subject for The New York Times, she explained how the massive number of victims is used as a tool to provide historical context of the war’s atrocities; however, people’s denial is sometimes louder than the true narrative: “A conservative Muslim society has preferred to throw a veil of negligence and denial on the issue, allowed those who committed or colluded with gender violence to thrive, and left the women victims to struggle in anonymity and shame and without much state or community support” (qtd. Roy). The same 2010 piece cites how other historical examples of genocidal and systematic rapes are
officially regarded today as human rights abuses, yet Bangladesh’s struggle is not over. This is partially due to the fact that rape was not deemed a war crime until the 1990s. In fact, trials for justice did not begin until 2011 surrounding the fortieth anniversary of the War of Independence. Khan argues: “‘It was only after Bosnia that the Rome Statute,’ the treaty that set up the International Criminal Court, ‘made rape a war crime. Forty years ago, gender violence as a weapon of war was poorly understood, not just in Bangladesh but worldwide’” (Roy). Scholarly comparisons have been made to the Rape of Nanking in 1937 – 38 examples of rape as a war crime as well as the more contemporary examples enumerated above.

Rape as a tool of genocide is not a problem endemic to South Asia as a region, Asia as a continent, or even the Eastern Hemisphere altogether. Rape as a weapon of war stretches across cultures and nations because of its roots in masculinity, a mentality informing military attitudes worldwide. “Certain attributes of hegemonic masculinity seem to be quite enduring – such as physical strength, practical competence, sexual performance, and protecting and supporting women – whilst others are more contingent” (Alison 76). Masculinity serves to dominate and exploit daily, but the explicit violence, sexual and otherwise, of wartime makes its danger tangible; “Rape and sexual assault provide a way of acting out historically established notions of power relationships and identities that are normally discussed and represented in less physical, material ways” (“The Absent Piece of Skin…” 3). This “acting out” aids in the process of making victims anonymous, a tragic number to be touted by Western aid workers, militaries, and non-governmental organizations with white Christian savior complexes. When a culture of patriarchy and masculinity dictates no accountability for rapists — especially when those rapists are men in uniform — survivors are grouped together in a way that eliminates individual identities and stories. It is portrayed as if there is a group of perpetrators and a group of victims,
but that no one perpetrator did anything worth prosecuting; therefore, one victim’s suffering is legitimate.

Feminist theory proposes that when rape is used as a weapon of war and/or genocide, the masculinity of perpetrators is inextricably intertwined with sexual assault and sexuality itself. This connection is amplified in nations with conservative taboos about women as sexual agents. This is equally true in male to male rape during wartime, something that also undoubtedly occurred in the 1971 War of Independence but is mentioned even less because of the increased stigmatization and how it threatens to damage heterosexual men’s conception of sexuality. “Male to male rape is a highly masculinized act for the perpetrator and his audience, whilst the victim is feminized. This reflects the construction of female sexuality as passive and male sexuality as active.” (Alison 81). In fact, examination of genital anatomy was used in a deliberately violent way specifically against Bengali Muslim men by West Pakistani troops. In her 2012 journal article, Mookherjee cites a famous publicized photograph of a Pakistani soldier looking under a Bengali man’s lungi cloth to examine his penis. These soldiers attempted to discern religion via seeing if the penis was circumcised, a custom practiced by Muslims, but not Hindus. “This widely-known photograph was circulated in other newspapers as evidence of the Pakistani army’s discourse of checking the Bengali Muslims through their circumcised penis” (“The Absent Piece of Skin…” 17). The intimacy of sexuality makes its violations painful, purposeful, and traumatizing.

This violence is a reality that was not addressed at the time, but is now being challenged by Bangladesh’s vibrant feminist movement. Bangladeshi journalist and blogger Anushay Hossain, who is now based in the United States, wrote a 2012 blog post that was shared by
*Forbes Magazine*’s website, about the need to speak to the “public secret” of the War of Independence’s rape survivors. She states:

In recent years, the shame is slowly lifting from this part of Bangladesh’s Liberation War as more scholars ask questions, and more feminists demand the truth. Each time I go home to Bangladesh, a relative, usually male, takes me aside and whispers stories to me about the “piles, and piles of bodies of rape victims” you would find under bridges in mass graves. “How many women were raped and killed in the hands of Pakistani soldiers,” my uncle tells me as his voice whimpers. “You cannot imagine, Ma.” (Hossain)

Houssain found that digging further into these histories was challenging. Although she found it excruciatingly painful, she followed the mantra that investigating the history of her country’s women was vital for their present existence. It illustrated the fight that Bangladeshi women still must face. Houssain writes about Bina D’Costa’s work to find Geoffrey Davis, a doctor from Australia who performed abortions during the war, including late-term abortions, for women who became pregnant after being raped. Davis was sent by the International Planned Parenthood Federation to perform this work in the 1970s, just a few years before Roe v. Wade federally recognized the right for a woman to have an abortion (within limitations) in the United States (Hossain). In a recent interview with D’Costa, Davis claims that the often claimed 200,000 to 400,000 number of rape victims is almost definitely an understatement, especially considering, he said, how many women died in the rape camps after multiple violent assaults (Hossain). But like Roe v. Wade has been in danger throughout 2016 in the United States due to challenges in many states’ Houses of Representatives, there is an incredible amount of work to do for Bangladeshi women to secure their reproductive freedom. According to international reproductive rights organization, Ipas: “Abortion is only legal in Bangladesh to save a woman’s life. Yet a procedure the government terms ‘menstrual regulation’—which involves vacuum aspiration to bring on menstruation and thereby establish non-pregnancy—is legal in the first
Although menstrual regulation provides a relatively safe and legal way to end, specifically, first trimester pregnancies, it is not surprising to learn that abortion is illegal in Bangladesh once one realizes that abortion falls under a colonial penal code established in 1860.

“Nationally, just 57% of facilities that would be expected to provide [menstrual regulation] services actually did so in 2010” (Guttmacher Institute); the facilities remain a resource that is often inaccessible to Bangladesh women. It is also found that to “an estimated 646,600 induced abortions were performed in Bangladesh in 2010, the majority of which were unsafe” (Guttmacher Institute). This means that in a country where abortion is illegal except to save the life of the mother (a situation determined by a doctor), more than half a million women have abortions performed annually.

Just as reproductive justice is still a battle being fought, so is justice for rape survivors. Victim blaming is still a common reaction to survivors globally, particularly in countries dealing with a revival of conservative religious extremism. These oppressive forces are now working to quiet Bangladeshi women who are known throughout south Asia for their powerful voices filling public spaces. Prominent men are being tried for the human rights violations, including rapes, that they committed decades ago, and many are jumping to their defense instead of that of the victims. And in Bangladesh, as well as worldwide, girls and women (along with men and boys) are raped every day and are unable to seek justice, even if a survivor makes the choice to report their rapist and go to court. In that vein, Hossain addresses the central issue for today’s Bangladeshi feminists: “[Where] can the vibrant women’s movement in Bangladesh go if we have a such a massive historical wound to heal from? We must look to the past and bring justice to these women, to all the survivors of the sexual violence of the 1971 war, if we really want to move forward.”
For that to happen, these rapists from decades ago need to be held accountable. That many are powerful Pakistani generals today makes the struggle all the more important; the indictment of public officials can empower survivors worldwide to come forward, and will demonstrate that rapists should not be immune to justice. It must be understood that rape is not an isolated incident; it can be a weapon of war, a form of genocide, and/or an act that demonstrates unequal and sexist power structures. The work that Bangladeshi feminists and women’s and human rights activists worldwide do to seek justice for rape survivors of the past is imperative to securing justice for survivors of the present and future.

Works Cited


