

INKWELL

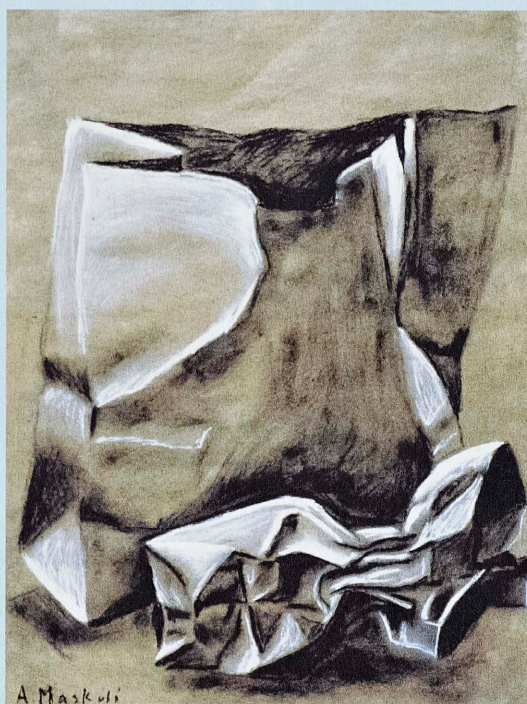


STUDENT ESSAYS FROM
THE COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

INKWELL

STUDENT ESSAYS FROM
THE COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

THE COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND
2006-07



MARY REDA AND HILDEGARD HOELLER: CONTEST COORDINATORS

SARA GAITHER: MANAGING EDITOR

CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM MARY REDA
& HILDEGARD HOELLER 1

FIRST YEAR CONTEST WINNERS

FIRST PLACE: BARNABAS SUDRE
"THE BLIGHT OF BLACK ROCK IN AMERICA" 3

SECOND PLACE: ELVIN OMEROGU
"DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AT ITS WORST" 9

THIRD PLACE: ANDREW SAVAGE
"AN IGNORED TRUTH: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT
HARASSMENT OF GAY TEENS AND ADOLESCENTS" 15

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM WINNERS

FIRST PLACE: MICHAEL KELLY
"HAPPILY EVER AFTER: AN OUTLINE OF ACCEPTABLE
MALE EXPRESSION IN THE FICTION OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON" 21

FIRST PLACE: RENEE DRENNAN
"THE MULE BONE CONTROVERSY: A DEPICTION OF
HURSTON'S COMPLEX PERSONALITY" 29

SECOND PLACE: JENNIFER FITZGERALD
"THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AUNT VICKIE" 37

THIRD PLACE: JONELLE FERA
"GAINING AUTHENTICITY THROUGH SELF CHANGE:
MY LOOKING GLASS" 43

HONORABLE MENTION: CHRISTOPHER FERRO
"AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTERS: A NEW AGE HOLOCAUST"
(NOT PUBLISHED)

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of *Inkwell*, a collection of prize-winning essays from our first year-long essay contest.

We are particularly excited about what this publication shows about CSI students and their writing within freshman composition courses and in our upper-division classes across the curriculum. In these pieces, we encounter the compelling stories of students asking real questions about subjects that engage their intellectual interests, conducting serious academic research, finding useful sources that help answer their questions, and thinking critically about those materials. Each essay shows that students find not only their own insights but also their own structures and voices as they pursue academic questions. The variety of issues, approaches, and stories that emerges lets us see how each student uses the form of the academic essay as a way of exploring something that matters to him or her and of drawing in and teaching readers about it.

We hope that you will be inspired by these pieces and able to use them to explore the form of academic writing within your own classes and lives. We see *Inkwell* as a chance to publish student writing that deserves to be read by others and to use it as a way of engendering a campus-wide conversation about academic writing at CSI.

Special thanks to Dean Soto and Vice President Podell for their support, to the faculty who encouraged their students to submit their work, and to the students who let us read their work. Thanks as well to Sara Gaither for her efforts in putting this publication together.

Mary Reda and Hildegard Hoeller

In my English class, some of the conversations that the students often participated in had to do with movies or music. Since I had some knowledge of the latter I would often say my fair share. From time to time we would also free-write and I wrote a piece about the injustice of the Grammy's and the hypocritical nature of the current punk rockers. My professor liked my work and complimented me on how it intertwined beautifully with social matters of today. So, with her encouragement and my insatiable obsession to unveil gaping flaws in the history of music, I began to think up a subject concerning my ethnicity and the music we have forgotten. When the final assignment came about and one of the subjects we could work on was music I was elated because I finally could express something that I could relate to.

The Blight of Rock in Black America By Barnabas Sudre

Rock is a ubiquitous staple in current American culture. Anyone can be exposed to it wherever they go. Aside from television, films, and radio, rock flows freely in supermarkets, elevators and even on the phone line when one is on hold. Billboard advertisements project rock paraphernalia as well as famous phrases once uttered by legendary rock artists. Car commercials periodically stamp their work with rock classics. (The song "Rock and Roll" by Led Zeppelin was the theme for Cadillac commercials for a few years.) Politically wise as well as socially, rock also made quite the impact. While the American government was sending troops overseas to fight in Vietnam rock enabled the young generation of the time to fight back by means of demonstration mixed with song. Before that it influenced a forcefully clean-cut society to rebel against the older generation and create a world all their own. Musically wise, rock shifted the social youth of America in the past and continues to mold the generation of the future. Nevertheless, despite the numerous contributions rock provided for the American society and its global fame, many individuals are still misdirected when it comes to the origins of rock and roll. Most people are oblivious to the fact that such hits that were immortalized by Elvis Presley like "Don't Be Cruel" and "All Shook Up" were not written by the rock star but by Otis Blackwell, a black man. Or that the single "Twist & Shout" which was sung famously by The Beatles was written and sung long before by the Isley Brothers, a black rock and R&B group. Rock and roll legends such as Buddy Holly and the Rolling Stones as well as The Doors all had prior influences that were all in the shape of black individuals. Rock and roll was created and pioneered by African-Americans, yet today white people monopolize the genre and blacks are essentially nonexistent in the subject. This, in effect, spawns ignorance in the black youth as they isolate themselves away from rock in fear that the subject will affect their ethnicity and that they will be persecuted for favoring white music rather than their own. Therefore, should rock be completely embraced among the black youth despite its profound belonging to white individuals? If a true understanding of the origin of rock is gathered then the answer will be a resounding yes.

The definition of rock & roll according to the Encyclopedia Britannica is "a volatile mix of black culture and white spending power" (Britannica). However, the latter came after white individuals approved of the music; since then it has been coined as "nigger music" (Gendron 2). It was a hot topic during the early 50's that seethed rebelliousness that white parents wanted to keep their children away from because even the name denoted immorality due to the fact that

“rocking” and “rolling” were black euphemisms for sex. Eventually, the rebellious music appealed to the white kids because of their thirst to break away from the high-strung conception of morality that their parents held. From there on out they began to adopt and formulate rock music of their own without any shame of mixing with black individuals. In his biography of Jerry Lee Lewis, Robert Palmer paraphrased the conception of an average southern youth:

...and, hey all you parents and cops and all you preachers that are burnin' rock n' roll records and tellin' kids not to listen to it 'cause its nigger music, listen to this: we are a bunch of white rednecks from deep down south...we are playin' this essence-of-primal nigger music and we are usin' this nigger music to arouse bestial desires in your teenage daughters... (qtd. in Bernard 2).

By that time black people as a whole were losing their grip with rock. Although some of the leading artists of the time were black, the enthusiasm that whites had overpowered the creators because their cause was greater.

The prospect of whites taking music that was originally devoted to black individuals was not a new one. Some thirty years before the first glimmers of rock there was blues and boogie-woogie, two genres that greatly influenced the creation of rock and roll. Blues did comprise as a back bone for African-American folk music and it did outlast its faster counterpart boogie-woogie. However boogie-woogie, which took front stage in the black community in the 1930's due to the work of Pinetop Smith was noticed by the white community and unfortunately the intuitiveness of artists such as Smith was silently and openly stolen by white artists and lauded by the public. An epic example was the renowned war related “Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy” by the Andrew Sisters. Jazz, also a creation of black Americans of the early 20th century was taken by whites and diluted into ‘Big Bands’ that catered to the upper-class”(Gendron 4).

The rock legends of yesteryear that most music critics as well as rock idols lionize today give their dues to black artists in the realm of influence. A good example can be the Rolling Stones, one of the most influential and longest running of rock bands. Their persuasion to play as well as their style is solely based on Blues and the artist Muddy Waters, a Blues guitarist. They were so influenced by him that they named their band after one of his songs “Rollin’ Stone” (Chappell146). Other rock artists share the same sentiments. The late Jim Morrison of The Doors said: “When we were playing clubs, I’d say over half of what we did was blues” (146). The late Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead stated: “When I took up guitar, I wanted to play like Chuck Berry more than anything in the world.” Flea of the Red Hot Chili Peppers recounted: “George Clinton influenced me so deeply that it is a part of me, like my kidney or my liver” (146). Finally, the Beatles were greatly influenced by Little Richard and their manifestation of their gratefulness convinced him to restart and extend his career (Britannica).

The irony, of course, is that while white artists like the Rolling Stones are exalted for their borrowing of black music, black artists who try to reclaim the now predominantly white classic-rock tradition are often met with industry indifference, if not hostility. For example, the group Living Colour, an ethnic rock band from the 80's, were rejected on various occasions by major records and labels because the music directors did not want to acknowledge their music and the band. It took the intervention of Mick Jagger, who paid for and produced the band's demo tape, to get them signed to Epic Records (DeCurtis 78). Douglas Martin, an upcoming folk-rock musician, professed his love for rock at a young age but his interest was met with scorn (Pressler). He explains: “For a long time I was laughed at by both black and white people about being the only black person in my school that liked Nirvana and bands like that.” Lenny Kravitz, a rock artist of mixed race, explains the difficulty of his advancements in the music industry:

My mom taught me when I was 5 years old that I was half-black and half-white, and that I am not more one than the other, that I am equally both. But she also taught me that society views me as black only. That was a really smart thing that she did. (Later) I was offered several deals so long as I would change my style to what they thought a black artist should be doing. It would have been R&B, early hip-hop, and I passed those deals up. For some reason they would say that my music was not black enough. What does that mean? Not black enough? Black people invented rock 'n' roll (Louis).

The evidence is obvious. Now that white individuals have taken rock to be their own they will have no leeway when it comes to who plays what. As disgusting as it may seem, the segregation laws that were abolished in the mid 50's are still alive and well where music is concerned. Essentially, for black rockers to make it they have to be unwaveringly independent and original. Jimi Hendrix not only made it to the top because he played good guitar but because he played really good guitar. It was his amazing feats on stage like his playing the guitar behind his back or with his teeth, tongue, and toes that put him on top of the map. Sylvester Stewart, or Sly from Sly and the Family Stone, proved himself to be original by creating one of the first bands to have multiracial individuals of both sexes singing and performing simultaneously. Prince, another influential African-American rock artist, made his presence known by his innovative style of fashion, his amazing falsetto as well as his abstract way of life (DeCurtis 78-79).

Nevertheless, in the end it all depends on who is listening to what music. Jimi Hendrix, despite his being one of the wildest guitar players of his era was still essentially shunned by blacks. Paul Friedlander, author of Rock and Roll: A Social History, noted that Hendrix became popular just as the black power movement emerged. Yet his band included two white musicians and his audience was largely white. "To the black community he was not playing wholly African-American music even when Hendrix formed a new all-black band." (Pressler). George Clinton, a pivotal musician in the genre of funk (a combination of jazz, rock, as well as other minute musical additions), used to appeal to many a black individual during the apex of his band Parliament-Funkadelic; however the situation shifted as time persisted. "We appeal mostly to white kids now, more than ever," he says. "A lot of Deadheads (fans of the Grateful Dead) follow us around. I'm telling the company that we got to make sure we do something to maintain that audience. I mean, we ain't got to worry about not being black" (DeCurtis 79).

Today the young black generation is rooted in hip-hop. The fact is manifested by the slew of black rappers on MTV and VH1 not to mention specialized channels devoted to young black America like BET. Black kids, for the most part, are talking the ever-changing talk by installing new found phrases into their vernacular made official by rappers and attempting to walk the walk by sporting hip-hop related clothing and shoes. Hence, wherever rap goes the African-American youth will likely follow obediently. Therefore, theoretically if rap were to mix with rock, wouldn't the outcome be fruitful and spark a new interest in the young black community of today? The answer could probably be found in the lyrics of the rapper Mos Def. Although he may not be as prominent as rappers who are currently having their music played repeatedly on the radio, his work does speak volumes. An example can be seen in his song "Rock N Roll," a ballad that ferociously explains who rock belongs to. His chorus goes:

I said, Elvis Presley ain't got no soul (huh)
Chuck Berry is rock and roll (damn right)
You may dig on the Rolling Stones
But they ain't come up with that style on they own (uh-uh)

Elvis Presley ain't got no Soulll (hell naw)
Little Richard is rock and roll (damn right)
You may dig on the Rolling Stones
But they ain't come up with that shit on they own (nah-ah)

He goes on to conclude his rap by ordering various cities with predominantly black populations to get up and act because rock and roll is their own. However, the response from the general black community is thin if not non-existent. Another less caustic example of hip-hop attempting to integrate rock fully and to label it as black for urban consumption can be seen in the constant efforts of Jay-Z (an extremely influential and famous rapper of today) with his collaborations with Lenny Kravitz as well as Linkin' Park. Also, his latest album features contributions from Chris Martin of Coldplay. Nevertheless, the majority of the populace remains distant and the reason lies in their social conception. Lamont Thomas, the drummer for This Moment in Black History, explains: "There's an unfortunate tendency for some black people to think if you listen to rock music or want to play rock music you're an Uncle Tom" (Pressler).

However, today, even though the general black youth may stay isolated from what their grandparents created 40 years ago, there are some blacks who are again looking to reconnect with the rock music scene. These black individuals may not be a lot in number, but they find one another by way of the Internet and are adopting rock clothing style and turning to the handful of bands with black members that are slowly taking on "indie rock," a relatively new sub-genre of rock (Pressler). The manifestation was not quickly perceived, but it has subtly seeped into the black youth. Bahr Brown, a resident of East Harlem who happens to be a zealous supporter of anything dealing with the current rock scene, opened a skateboard and clothing boutique to cater to consumers like himself who like to "wear tight jeans and Vans and skateboard through the projects" (Pressler). According to what we know already about the abstinence of the black youth one would take people like Brown to be extreme. In *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Boho's*, Nelson George writes "Black kids do not want to go out with bummy clothes and dirty sneakers." But lately, rock music and its accoutrements, are being accepted more openly. Mainstream hip-hop artists like Kelis wear Mohawks, Lil Jon and Lupe Fiasco rap about skateboarding, skulls and chains are a current trend among any kid with fashion sense, and according to Anoma Whittaker, the fashion director of Complex magazine, "...all of the Southern rap stars are into the '80s punk look, wearing big studded belts and shredded jeans" (Pressler). These current acts can be considered the involuntary commencement of the readopting of rock by the black community.

In the realm of the rock of today various black artists around the country are emerging. Although, they may lack the fame of such greats as Kravitz or Prince they still wield enough authority to be seen by the public and manifest a message. Bands such as Bloc Party, Lightspeed Champion, and the Dears could signify change. Another group by the name of TV on the Radio (the band consists of five members of which four are black) were lauded by critics. Their second album, "Return to Cookie Mountain," was placed on the best-album list in 2006. Still, confusion and some opposition instilled by the deep chasms of race separation slow down much of the advancements that budding black rock bands want to initiate. Lamont Thomas from This Moment in Black History says: "The funny thing is a lot of people assume from the name that we're just white kids being ironic." The bassist of the group adds: "This is because our fans and the people who listen to us are white. You'll probably find one or two people of color." Nev Brown, a photographer and writer from Brooklyn, shares his experience at indie rocks shows on his music blog: FiddleWhileYouBurn.com. "Some fans are curious about why you're at the show and try to talk to you about it; and then you get the idiots who think you're a security guard.

Damon Locks, a Chicago-based publicist and singer in a hardcore band called the Eternals, said he is frequently mistaken for “one of the other three black guys” in the city’s rock-music scene. “We joke about it,” he said. “We’ve been thinking about getting together and starting a band called Black People” (Pressler).

Only time will tell what the future of rock for black people will bring about. However, the repetitive cycle of race and music might give us an idea. Rock and roll was created by black people and it was truly ethnic because of its coming out of blues and black people liked it because it was a reflection of who they were. Nevertheless, the ostracism that blacks endured which gave them the unwanted “bad boy” persona appealed to the young whites of the time who wanted to rebel from their parents. So, their interest for what was then black music was so powerful that they devoted themselves more towards black artists than blacks themselves. Little Richard recalls: “White people, [rock] always cracked ’em up, but black people didn’t like it that much. They liked the blues” (Miller 111). Gradually, the passion for rock that whites had surpassed that of the blacks and they called rock their own. The same holds true today now that hip-hop is the next big thing. “The music that was once the purview of black America has gone white and gone commercial all at once,” says James McBride of National Geographic (107). What used to be a genre devoted to blacks as a source of comfort in the slums of America is now warped into a money making machine spurred by the white youths. Will history repeat itself? Maybe, maybe not, but the one thing that is true is that rock will never be the same in Black America unless ignorance is annihilated. “Blacks always want to create something new, says Little Richard. “That’s fine. I can understand that. But I blame Blacks for forgetting the music of the past. You can move on, but you cant forget. We have to remember our history. We can never forget that Blacks started it all” (Chappell 147).

Works Cited

- Chappell, Kevin. “How Blacks Invented Rock and Roll.” *Ebony*. Jul 2001. Academic Search Premier. College of Staten Island Lib., Staten Island, NY. 3 May 2007
- DeCurtis, Anthony. “Is Rock ‘N’ Roll a White Man’s Game?” *Time*. 29 April. 1996. Academic Search Premier. College of Staten Island Lib., Staten Island, NY. 3 May 2007
- Gendron, Bernard. “Rock and Roll Mythology: Sex and Race in ‘Whole Lotta Shakin’”’. Wisconsin: Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1985
- “Little Richard” *Britannica Student Encyclopedia*, from *Encyclopædia Britannica Deluxe Edition 2004 CD-ROM*. Copyright © 1994-2003 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. May 30, 2003
- Louis, Rebecca. “Kravitz: Black Enough For Ya?” 24 May 2004. Lexis-Nexis. College of Staten Island Lib., Staten Island, NY. 9 May 2007
- Marcus, Greil. *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘N’ Roll Music*. New York: Plume, 1997
- McBride, James. “Hip-Hop Planet” *National Geographic*. April 2007. Academic Search Premier. College of Staten Island Lib., Staten Island, NY. 9 May 2007
- Miller, James. *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977*. New York: Fireside, 1999
- Pressler, Jessica. “Truly Indie Fans” *New York Times*. 28 Jan 2007. Academic Search Premier. College of Staten Island Lib., Staten Island, NY. 9 May 2007
- “Rock and Roll.” *Britannica Student Encyclopedia*, from *Encyclopædia Britannica Deluxe Edition 2004 CD-ROM*. Copyright © 1994-2003 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. May 30, 2003

Immigration is such an enormous part of what our country stands for. From my experience, American citizens have always praised the cultural differences in this country; however, the federal government has always treated these people with anything but praise. With all of the laws attempting to limit immigration, how can we continue to pretend we care about these people unless we protest what the government is doing? While looking through the many scholarly articles involving immigration, I stumbled upon one that particularly caught my interest. This article, "A License to Abuse: The Impact of Conditional Status on Female Immigrants," was written by Michelle Anderson. This article drew me in because it discussed cases of abuse involving immigrant women in the very first paragraph. After reading this article, I learned for the first time what a serious problem immigrant women with a "conditional" status may face because of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The INS cares more about preventing immigrant women from fraudulently becoming citizens than preventing them from being abused. I chose this topic for my research paper so that I could educate the public in the same way that Anderson's article educated me.

Domestic Violence at its Worst **By Elvin Omeroglu**

Imagine yourself as a young woman who has fallen in love. The man of your dreams, an American, has asked for your hand in marriage. You travel to the United States from your home country with more hope than anyone could imagine. You are about to enter a life of endless possibilities; however, once you arrive to the States, everything is not how you imagined it. The man you thought you could love has taken advantage of your vulnerable situation and abuses you. He beats you, verbally assaults you, and threatens to have you deported if you leave him. You find yourself in a foreign country, with language barriers, a society you don't understand, and no one to turn to for help. This is the reality that hundreds of immigrant women face every year.

"One time I had eight stitches in my head and a gash on the other side of my head, and he broke my ribs . . . He would bash my head against the wall while we had sex. He kept threatening to kill me if I told the doctor what happened" (Anderson 1401). This was what one immigrant woman, Maria, said about her husband's abusive behavior. Like thousands of immigrants, Maria migrated to this country to marry a United States citizen. She then obtained a "conditional" resident immigration status. This meant that she could legally live in the United States as long as she remained married to her husband. Maria, tired of the abuse, decided to flee from her husband and the violence he brought upon her; however, her husband realized that without him, Maria would be deported from the country. He used her immigration documents against her and demanded that she return to their apartment. Maria, like many other immigrants, had no choice but to return to her husband and tolerate his abusive behavior, or else she would be deported from the country (Anderson 1401).

Maria, along with thousands of other immigrants, was very vulnerable to abusive behavior due to her "conditional" status. This immigration policy came about in the year 1986. In this year, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) constituted the "Immigration Fraud Amendments" (IMFA) in an attempt to decrease marriage frauds. "Under the IMFA, when a citizen or LPR [legal permanent resident] files a petition with the INS requesting residence for

his immigrant spouse, and the qualifying marriage is less than two years old, the INS rewards the immigrant conditional residence” (Anderson 1404). In other words, once an immigrant woman marries an American citizen, her spouse must request a petition for her residency. For the first two years of the marriage, the woman will obtain a “conditional” resident immigration status. “Under conditional residence, the marriage must remain intact for at least two years; otherwise the immigrant spouse loses her legal status, and becomes deportable” (Anderson 1404). This means that the woman’s status as a legal United States resident depends wholly upon her marriage to the husband.

Overall, the INS feared that too many immigrants were becoming legal residents through fraudulent marriages; however, in their attempt to decrease these frauds, they neglected to consider the hundreds of immigrant wives who were battered each year. Although there haven’t been nearly enough studies about this important topic, it is said that immigrant women are more vulnerable to domestic violence than women who are already American citizens. As one scholar stated, “A recent report by the American Medical Association reported that one in three women will be assaulted by a domestic partner in her lifetime” (Narayan 106). Although this may seem like a large number, the rates of battered immigrant women are significantly higher. “One study reports that 77 percent of women with dependent immigrant status are battered. Of the victims of domestic violence at the Victim’s Services Agency in Jackson Heights, Queens, 90 percent were immigrants” (Narayan 106). After learning about the outrageous percentages of battered immigrant women, I had many questions to answer. For instance, I wanted to know why immigrant women’s experiences with domestic violence are so exacerbated, and also what the INS has been doing to help these women.

As I discovered, there are many reasons as to why immigrant women are so vulnerable to domestic violence. Overall, the woman’s dependency upon her spouse gives him the ability to control her. One of the main factors that prevent immigrant women from being more independent is the language barrier. Many of the women that migrate to this country for marriage-related purposes are not familiar with the English language. Communication skills are so important to have nowadays. Without the proper communication skills, women will have a very limited amount of job opportunities. As one scholar stated in his article, “. . . language skills and job opportunities go hand in hand” (Menjivar 903). If a woman is not fluent in the English language, she will most likely obtain a job in lower fields, such as in the restaurant business, or a factory, if anything at all (Menjivar 903). Jobs such as these will provide the woman with very little income and, therefore, leave her financially unstable. This increases the woman’s dependency upon her spouse because without him, she may not have enough income to survive. Language barriers also have other negative effects on an immigrant woman. For instance, a woman would be unable to familiarize herself with the laws of the United States without the help of another person. If this individual happened to be the victim of an abusive relationship, she may not be aware of her opportunities for escape. As Menjivar explained, “. . . language is a barrier in accessing and communicating their needs to community-service providers and in seeking protection from their abusers through the criminal justice system” (Menjivar 903). Immigrant women are often unaware of their rights and don’t know who to turn to for help. Without the proper language skills, they constantly have to remain dependent on another individual who is fluent in the English language; this individual is often the woman’s spouse. Another major factor that prevents immigrant women from leaving their abusive husbands is the isolation that these women may face. Many of the women that migrate to America leave all of their family and friends behind. This is particularly true in the case of mail-order brides. Mail-

order brides are women, mainly from third world countries, who sell themselves in magazines to men from America in hopes of a better life. There are an estimated 200 agencies in the United States and an approximate 2,000 to 3,500 bride-purchases per year (Anderson 1408). These agencies travel to countries persuading these women to enter the catalogue by promising them a happy marriage with an American citizen; however, the men who order from these catalogues are often middle-aged or divorced men who are looking for a “traditional wife.” One man, who ordered himself a bride, stated:

Unlike American women, most Filipinas are virgins up until the day they are married . . . Filipinas are more caring, loving, devoted to their husband & children, understanding, and responsible than American women . . . They have much more concern for the family unit and are against the idea of divorce.
(Anderson 1409)

Ultimately, men who order from these catalogues are searching for women who are less independent. They are looking for “traditional” women who do not believe in divorce, and view their husbands as authority figures. These types of men are also typically the men who resort to violence when conflict arises with their spouse. These men find satisfaction in knowing that the women are helpless and need the husband. As one scholar mentioned about the case regarding mail-order brides, “The bride is often on her own for the first time, in a foreign land where her support base is non-existent, which increases her vulnerability and isolation” (Menjivar 906). This is why hundreds of mail-order brides end up victims of domestic abuse. Once they become involved in these violent relationships, they have nobody to turn to for help.

As I stated earlier, isolation often prevents an immigrant woman from leaving her abusive spouse. In the case of arranged marriages, women are often pressured into remaining in an abusive relationship for cultural reasons. Although these women may be surrounded by extended family members, they may feel isolated because of their family members’ lack of support. One woman said, “Whatever my husband tells my mother-in-law, all the blame falls on me. They think I make him do it. Once my husband told his mother that he wanted to move out; all my in-laws accused me of inciting my husband” (Menjivar 904). Like in this particular case, some women are blamed for their husbands’ abusive behavior. Many are also still influenced by their old culture and feel that it is their obligation to “save the family.” As Menjivar stated, “. . . if she leaves the abusive partner, she runs the risk of being ostracized by her family because she left and thus could not possibly be a ‘good wife’” (Menjivar 905). Being a victim of an abusive relationship is a very traumatic experience; all of these factors only make it that much more difficult for a battered immigrant woman.

One final factor, although not the last, that I would like to discuss is an immigrant woman’s psychological dependence upon her spouse. As I have previously stated, many immigrants are unaware of American laws due to language and cultural barriers. This often makes a woman feel as though she has no control over her own life. Since the battered women that I am referring to in my paper are under a “conditional status,” they constantly face threats of deportation. For many of these women, the idea of deportation is worse than the abuse they face here in America. This could be for a number of reasons. “In their native lands, women may face unemployment, extreme poverty, or political repression” (Anderson 1421). The woman may also not want to leave her loved ones in America. For instance, a woman can be deported without her children. They may also be socially rejected if they returned home for the cultural reasons that I have discussed earlier. Nonetheless, because of the constant threats they face

about their worst fear, these women feel as though their spouses have complete control over them. As a result, women often remain in these abusive relationships. As one scholar stated: “Battered conditional spouses often think that if they flee an abusive husband, the husband can just snap his fingers and the INS will come knocking at the door to put them on a plane the next day for their old country. . . . The exploitation is so apparent” (Anderson 1403).

So many factors contribute to the exacerbated situations that battered immigrant women face. These women are often helpless, hopeless, and uninformed.

Despite the already agonizing situations that battered immigrant women face, the United States government is not giving them any leverage. As I have stated earlier, under the original “Immigration Fraud Amendments” (IMFA) created in 1986, the U.S. citizen had to petition residency for his wife. She would then obtain a “conditional status” for two years. If, for any reason, the marriage split, the immigrant wife would be deported back to her old country. If the marriage was successful, the two would have to jointly petition to adjust her status to a permanent residence. The couple would then have to be individually interviewed by the INS. The only possible way for a woman to obtain permanent residence with an unsuccessful marriage was to either prove that she initiated a divorce for “good cause” or to provide evidence that deportation would subject her to “extreme hardship” resulting from an occurrence within her years in the U.S. (Anderson 1413). However, both of these possibilities are nearly impossible for an immigrant woman to achieve.

The INS became aware of its unfair conditions towards battered immigrant women and revised its laws in the year 1991. These revised amendments stated that a battered conditional wife could waiver for an adjustment to their conditional status in two ways. For one, the woman can provide evidence for physical abuse. Credible evidence includes “expert testimony in the form of reports and affidavits from police, judges, medical personnel, school officials, and social service agency personnel” (Anderson 1415). If the INS, for any reason, suspects the source to be unreliable, they can deny it. Another way for a women to gain permanent residence without remaining in the abusive marriage is to provide evidence of “extreme mental cruelty” ; however, the INS only accepts proper documentation from professionals such as licensed clinical social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists (Anderson 1415). This is a nearly impossible option for immigrant women. With the low wages that these women earn, they would never be able to afford a session with a licensed professional without the husband’s assistance. As one attorney stated, “From my ten years of experience . . . I know of not one battered woman who could have afforded to pay for even one interview with a clinical social worker, let alone a psychiatrist or psychologist” (Anderson Note 108 1418). These revised laws seem incomplete because they, once again, leave these immigrant women with very few options.

It seems to me that the INS, in making these laws, was more concerned about controlling frauds rather than helping these women. Within one month of the publication of these laws, the INS received one hundred and eighty written letters from agencies for battered women opposing the requirements. Every one of them believed that the extreme mental cruelty evidentiary requirements were too stringent and nearly half of them opposed the physical evidentiary requirements as well (Anderson 1416). “Not one of the 180 responses supported the rules as they were written” (Anderson 1416). The INS makes it nearly impossible for an immigrant woman who has obtained a conditional status to divorce her husband without facing deportation. Even though these women are the victims, they are treated as fugitives.

Now, imagine you were one of these immigrant women. Imagine facing the abuse, the isolation, and the agony that these women face every day. Do you see a possible way out?

There are many factors that exacerbate battered immigrant women's conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, language barriers, dependency upon the husband, isolation, and psychological abuse. The laws that the INS constituted, as well as all of these factors, make it nearly impossible for conditional status women to escape from an abusive relationship. I believe that now is the time to change the INS laws and help these women that suffer by the hundreds each year.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Michelle J. "A License to Abuse: The Impact of Conditional Status on Female Immigrants." *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 102, No. 6. (Apr., 1993), pp.1401-1430.
- Menjivar, Cecilia and Olivia Salcido. "Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence; Common Experiences in Different Countries." *Gender and Society* Vol. 16, No. 6. (Dec., 2002), pp. 898-920.
- Narayan, Uma. "Male-order brides: Immigrant Women, Domestic Violence and Immigration Law." *Hypatia* Vol. 10 Issue 1 (Winter95), pp104-119.

Bullying in school has been around for as long as schools have been around. Children and youths always find something wrong with each other and when they do they exploit it. It was always the fat kid or the kid with glasses. However, in recent years the victims of bullying and harassment have increased. Lesbian, gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth are among the top 5 groups of bullied children and adolescents. Bullying has been the cause of a lot of violence and tragedy among youth. Suicide and homicide have been presented as options to young adolescents. Now with Cyber-bullying on social networking websites and instant messages its important to address the emotional scars bullying leaves. I wrote this paper for my English 151 class because it was a good opportunity to tell my story while educating people about the turmoil that LGBTQ and questioning youth go through. I want people to know that harassment of LGBTQ youth is a serious issue that should be addressed. It is also important to note that my professor in my English 151 class is an amazing open minded woman who gave me the inspiration and the opportunity to write down my experiences in a way that could help someone. During the semester I viewed it as "just another paper," but it's so much more than that to me looking back on it. I realize that this paper could make a difference in someone's life. I hope by writing this paper that I will reach someone. I want someone to read this, my story. If this paper makes a gay, 12-year-old boy second guess his choice to commit suicide, than I have done my job. To me that is more rewarding than the grade on the paper or the monetary reward that I will receive for winning third place. My goal in writing this paper was to show gay youths today that they are not alone; I wanted to show them that there are people out there who understand them. I hope this paper shows young LGBTQ adolescents that they are not alone and that they shouldn't give up.

An Ignored Truth: An In-Depth Look at Harassment of Gay Teens and Adolescence By Andrew Savage

I am a gay man. I know what it is like to be looked down on and discriminated against for my sexual orientation. I was coming to terms with my sexuality when I was in my early teens. Not only was I battling myself, but I was also battling everyone around me. School was torture. I was made fun of every day, sometimes by people that I thought were my friends and sometimes just by complete strangers. School became the place I hated most. I was verbally harassed and ostracized by the people around me; I didn't feel safe in my own school. I experienced verbal abuse from my peers. In addition to insults to my face I also heard rumors that had been spread about me. It even got back to my social circle. One of the rumors was even that I was performing oral sex on classmates in the locker room at gym. It got so bad that I even contemplated suicide. Because of my depression and anxiety from these experiences, I underwent treatment through therapy and anti-depressants.

This was perhaps the loneliest time of my life. I felt like there was no one in the world who could possibly understand what I was going through. However, I was wrong. When I went to my mother's support group, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, I found out that many teens and adolescents go through the same hell I went through every day. When I went to high school I joined my school's gay straight alliance which is sponsored by the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). GLSEN helps gay teens by creating Gay Straight Alliances and safe spaces in middle and high schools all across the country. In addition to helping these teens, they also shed light on the harassment and abuse gay teens face every day.

There are many reasons why harassment happens. One reason is the perpetrators can get away with it. Kids who harass LGBTQ youths in school know they can get away with it because it has become the norm in society to make a joke out of LGBTQ people. That is why the words “fag” and “dyke” are thrown around school hallways as casually as a simple “hello.” This is essential to the reason why harassment goes on. Kids in school harass their fellow students because they can get away with it, especially when an LGBTQ student is the one being harassed.

Schools have to be staunch in enforcing their policies of anti-discrimination and anti-bullying and harassment. A lot of the school administrators simply just want these kids to just suck it up and deal with it. However it is not that simple anymore now that we have school shootings and suicides over bullying; it is just not as simple as it used to be. The tragic events of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre showed us that bullying should not be taken lightly. The perpetrators of this massacre were often the victims of bullying and they took their anger and frustration out by killing people.

As a history major I am inclined to look to the past to solve the problems of the future. Thomas Jefferson had a stutter in his speech, but he always wrote about the power of words. He always knew the impact that words have on the way people live their lives. To one person an anti-gay slur might not mean anything. However, to someone like me an anti-gay slur really affected my self-esteem, particularly when I was younger. Now that I have grown into myself, an anti-gay slur doesn't mean as much as it used to. However, a lot of kids do not have the luxury of feeling their oats and growing into themselves. That's where a more inclusive school system and a more inclusive world would come in handy. It is our job to make this world a better and safer place for every person on earth.

Many people want to ignore the fact that gay people get harassed in society every day. However, gay youths get the brunt of the abuse and harassment. Many gay teens and adolescents admit to skipping school because they don't feel safe in their school anymore. This is a disturbing trend. Kids should always feel safe in school especially if their home environment is not good. I was one of these kids at a point in my life, and I understand everything they are going through. It is sad because many of these kids have nowhere to turn. Even adults sometimes shut these teens and adolescents out in the cold because of their sexual orientation. Many of these people justify their actions by saying that homosexuality is contrary to their religion and/or “moral values.”

It is my mission in this paper and in my outside activities to help these kids grow into themselves. The only way that is going to happen is if people everywhere would wake up and see what this bigotry and abuse is doing to youths and adolescents. The data that GLSEN has acquired prove this. Every year GLSEN takes a survey on the school climate for LGBTQ students in middle and high schools. They not only survey and document harassment toward LGBTQ teens, but they also take note of the effectiveness or lack thereof, of groups such as Gay Straight Alliances and programs such as the Safe Space Program which encourages faculty and staff of schools to leave their doors open to LGBTQ youth who are being harassed in the hallways at school.

GLSEN's most recent survey goes back to 2005. These are national statistics about the safety of LGBTQ students. GLSEN explored the derogatory remarks that students use every day. Their survey reported that 75.4% of students heard derogatory remarks such as faggot or dyke frequently or often at school. GLSEN's survey also showed that 37.8% of students experienced physical harassment at school because of their sexual orientation. The survey also said that one fifth of all students were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation or perceived

sexual orientation. These statistics are alarming especially since in the country as a whole homophobia among youths is spreading like wildfire (GLSEN's 2005 National School).

The consequences of this teasing and bullying are really bad for students in the long run. Many of these students who get bullied or teased because of their sexual orientation or perceived orientation are less motivated in their studies. Adolescents and students who experience both verbal and physical harassment are five times more likely to skip school because of safety concerns (GLSEN's 2005 National School). According to GLSEN's survey the teasing and harassment of gay teens also interferes with their long term plans for their future. GLSEN reports that LGBTQ students who get harassed on a regular basis reported that they did not plan on going to college or receiving any post high school education. The survey also points out that the grade point averages of LGBTQ students who get harassed are more likely to be lower than students who don't experience harassment on a regular basis.

According to the New York State Chapter of GLSEN, New York schools aren't much better. In New York State 57% of students reported bullying on the basis of sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. According to GLSEN's survey in New York State an LGBTQ student is three times more likely to get harassed than a non-LGBTQ student. The data on the survey states that the most common reason for bullying in New York State is the physical appearance of the student. However, sexual orientation and perceived orientation ranks second as a reason for bullying in schools throughout the state (New York Survey).

One effort that has been promoted by GLSEN and high and middle schools around the country is groups like Gay Straight Alliances. These groups work to promote tolerance in high schools and middle schools. I was in my high school's Gay Straight Alliance and it was a very rewarding experience to be part of something that promoted peace and tolerance. We had special events like walking in the Annual Central Park AIDS Walk and Harmony Day. Harmony Day was a day where we collaborated with the student organization and the Council for Unity and made presentations for various subject classes in our school. These demonstrations proved useful since violence at Susan Wagner High School was significantly reduced.

Gay Straight Alliances have also proven to have helped LGBTQ students nationally. According to GLSEN's national survey, LGBTQ students feel safer in a school that has an active Gay Straight Alliance. These students are also more likely to feel accepted as opposed to schools where there is no Gay Straight Alliance present. Gay Straight Alliances aren't the only way schools attempt to make the environment safer for LGBTQ students. Schools are beginning to have more comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. These policies have reduced the occurrence of bullying and harassment in schools and are widely enforced by school faculties; all reported incidents of harassment under these school policies state that a faculty member intervened. A supportive faculty and school staff proved to be useful in enforcing anti-bullying policies and reducing the number of harassed LGBTQ teens. A supportive faculty provides a sense of security for LGBTQ students in their schools. All of these advancements in protecting bully victims have reduced the number of students who skip school because of safety issues and because of these policies more LGBTQ students reported that they wanted to go to college (GLSEN's 2005 National School).

One person whose goal in life is to make our community and our world safer for the LGBTQ community is Wayne Steinmen Iacullo. Wayne and his husband Sal have invested a lot of their time and money into gay causes. They work with gay youths and their parents and families frequently. They are also in charge of fundraising at the Staten Island Chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Wayne and his partner Sal are friends of my family and they

were a real comfort when I was coming out. They have an adopted daughter named Hope, and, in fact, were the first gay couple in New York State to adopt a child.

Wayne and Sal have a lot of experience working with a lot of gay youths. This experience also applies to their personal lives as well. Wayne and Sal took care of a foster son who was picked on at school and thrown out of his house because he was gay. This boy was very promiscuous and later on in his life he found out that he contracted the HIV virus. Recently I emailed Wayne about this paper. I sent him my questions via e-mail and he responded back with the answers to my questions. He spoke about a wide range of topics having to do with gay youths. He speaks about how an affirming and supportive family helps shape the self esteem of a gay youth and he also speaks about the effectiveness of Gay Straight Alliances.

My first question to Wayne was about differences he noticed in gay youths from when he was young to now. He said, "I attended high school between 1964 and 1967. While I knew I was gay especially toward graduation, it was impossible for me to be out in those days. I was totally closeted and had few friends. There was no internet. If you would look up homosexuality in the library, all the books were psychologically focused describing homosexuality as a disease or as something wrong" (Steinmen). Wayne states that things are better for gay youths now then they were back then, but he still affirms that there are a lot of gay teens who are bullied and that are social outcasts and need to be taken care of.

I asked Wayne about some of the groups that he's worked with that involve gay youth. He said he has been involved with two groups in New York City that have helped gay youths deal with the pressing issues they face: Gay and Lesbian Youth of New York (GLYNY) and the Hetrick-Martin Institute for Lesbian and Gay Youth. It was in these groups that Wayne helped solve some of the problems gay youths face today, such as homelessness, violence, health and education. After a few years Wayne was named chairperson of the GLYNY Adult Advisory Group. It was in that position that he was able to "attract lawyers, doctors, social workers, politicians and the like to call upon to assist the young people of GLYNY when they are in need." Wayne says that he was also harassed as a youth in school. However, he says it wasn't because he was an out gay youth. Since he wasn't out in school the harassment he received was based on the preconceived notion that he was gay. He said it was "because of my short stature at the time and not being the most athletic person in school, I would hear catcalls of 'faggot' from time to time" (Steinmen).

Wayne also gave his input on the effectiveness of Gay Straight Alliances in schools in deterring harassment and violence. He commented, "GSAs provide a space for LGBT youth to come together in a safe, supportive environment." He also emphasized how the help of a supportive faculty member advising the group would heighten the sense of security in school among gay youths. These groups help gay youths along in their difficult adolescence. Wayne says that in GSAs, gay youths "find a place where you know you are not alone. GSA's also provide the ability for LGBT youth to socialize and find community" (Steinmen).

Wayne also commented on how the teasing and harassment of gay youths affects their future plans. His response was conclusive of GLSEN's findings; he agreed with them by saying the teasing, bullying, and harassment of gay youths "often leads to poor self esteem and dropping out of school." Wayne also links bullying and harassment with hate crimes. He says that the two are directly connected. Wayne also speaks about the effectiveness of hate crime laws and anti-harassment laws. Wayne says these laws "make a statement that these acts will not be tolerated by imposing stiffer penalties" (Steinmen).

Wayne also told me what people can do to make sure our schools are safe for all our students. He said that “school officials must enforce a zero tolerance policy toward harassment (including any use of the word ‘fag’), provide sensitization to the school communities, and support local and state regulations and laws forbidding discrimination and harassment” (Steinmen).

These facts speak for themselves. It is particularly alarming that sexual orientation is the second reason for bullying throughout New York State. Six years ago I was one of those kids mentioned in the survey and the article. I think it is important for people to shed light on the abuse these kids take at school. More laws should be put into place to prevent bullying in school. So far only nine states and the District of Columbia have laws which ban bullying and harassment (GLSEN’s National School). It really gets in the way of these kids’ lives and futures. It is crucial that we open people’s eyes to what is happening to these kids.

We can’t do this through bureaucracy or debate; we need to enact laws and rules to protect these kids from harm. I know from experience that these harassed teenagers will be scarred with those memories of teasing for the rest of their lives. Even to this day I am still very cautious around people. I am on guard all the time; no one should have to live that way. People should live their lives in a happy and healthy way. No teen or adolescent should ever have to go through that kind of pain especially when that is supposed to be the best time of their lives.

Works cited

GLSEN’s 2005 National School Climate Survey Sheds New Light on Experiences of LGBT Students. 11 March 2007.
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1927.html>

New York Survey Illustrates Severity of Problem and Identifies Frequent Targets of Verbal and Physical Harassment. 11 March 2007.
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1859.html>

Steinmen, Wayne. Personal Interview. 19 March 2007.

In the fall of 2006 I was introduced to the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, a black female author during the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Her fiction was poignant, touching, and often times outlined the tensions existent between the sexes. One thread between her stories that quickly became apparent was the vicious abuse women suffered at the hands of the men closest to them and the way people in Hurston's small, tight knit, "fictional" community turned a passive, if not blind, eye to these horrible indiscretions. I also noticed Hurston dispatched these men using some very unconventional methods. Needless to say I was very surprised to find one man in all her work who, while living in the same demographic and having the same physical prowess of some of Hurston's more violent offenders, was a kind and loving husband, even in the face of marital infidelity. I felt this exception to the rule was a message from Hurston, a sort of manual on how a man could be sensitive, devoted and affectionate towards a woman while still keeping his masculinity intact. With that in mind I set about the task of clarifying Hurston's pointed message.

**Happily Ever After: An Outline of Acceptable Masculine Expression
in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston
By Michael Kelly**

It is through the treatment of the men in Hurston's fiction that we can gauge her opinion of the men of her time. Black men are portrayed negatively in her work. They are displayed as oppressive, abusive, insidious, and insolent. Even Tea Cake, "that great male hero of contemporary Hurston criticism" (Powers 241) is oppressive of Janie, at times resorting to violence and crime to secure his place in their relationship. Characters such as Sykes Jones (Sweat) and Spunk Banks (Spunk) exemplify Hurston's portrayal of the black men of her time as "oppressive forces that women must resist and refuse" (Powers 231). After reading through her works it becomes clear that all of her overbearing, brutish men have very short life expectancies.

In the following essay I will outline how, through the life and death of her male characters, Hurston gives us a model for acceptable masculine expression. In his essay "Gods of Physical Violence, Stopping at Nothing: Masculinity, Religion, and Art in the Work of Zora Neal Hurston," Peter Powers states, "...men possess and display power – whether sexual, geographic, literary, or religious power – that Hurston desires for herself. Males, then, are regularly oppressive, but there is, nevertheless, something about their 'masculinity' that is also often desirable" (231). These "regularly oppressive" men are so desired by women that it is difficult to find an abusive male in Hurston's work who is not involved in a romantic relationship with some woman. In fact, many of these men are actually revered by both their women and the men of the town. *Spunk* (1925) features Spunk Banks, a local man who is having an open affair with Lena Kanty, wife of Joe Kanty. In the very first sentence we find "A giant of a brown man saunter[ing] up the one street of the Village and out into the palmetto thickets with a small pretty woman clinging lovingly to his arm" (Novels. 949). He's a large, physically overbearing man who idly strolls around without care or fear for who might see him with Lena. So does she, embracing him with the love she promised to her husband on their wedding day. Banks is so self-assured that he earns some praise from one of the porch-sitters. Elijah Mosley announces, "But that's one thing Ah likes about Spunk Banks – he ain't skeered of nothin' on God's green footstool – nothin'! He rides that log down at saw-mill jus' like he struts 'round wid another man's wife – jus' don't give a kitty" (Novels. 949). Even Spunk's size is archetypically

masculine; he's a "giant" of a man, who, because of his physical prowess, is unaffected by fear. The fact that he has a married woman "clinging" to him as though he were a life preserver only adds to his over-all sense of "manly." He's such a man that Elijah praises his brazen fearlessness, both at the mill and "wid another man's wife."

If Spunk's fearlessness and manhood are cause for adulation, then it is only fitting that Joe Kanty's fear and timidity are cause for disdain. His entry into the store projects him as weak and downtrodden, the total antithesis of Spunk. "A round-shouldered figure in overalls much too large, came nervously in the door and the talking ceased. The men looked at each other and winked" (Novels. 949). Elijah taunts Joe by asking after his wife. It quickly becomes clear that Joe is well aware of Lena's infidelity. "Now Joe knew his wife had passed that way. He knew that the men lounging in the general store had seen her, moreover, he knew that the men knew he knew" (Novels. 949). Yet in the face of this knowledge, Joe has never made any attempt to win his wife back from this other man. Through the dialogue of the men in the store, we learn that Joe had come across Lena and Spunk on the street once. According to their story, Spunk "tole Joe right to her face that she was his. 'Call her', he says to Joe. 'Call her and see if she'll come. A woman knows her boss an' she answers when he calls'" (Novels. 951). Spunk lays it all on the line for Joe, taking the stance that Joe himself neglected to take. Spunk even goes so far as to treat Joe's woman like an animal, bidding Joe to "call her and see if she'll come," as though she were a dog. Joe's reaction to this affront to his marriage and masculinity is the exact opposite of what one might expect. "'Lena, ain't I yo' husband?' Joe sorter whines out" (Novels. 953). And Lena, in response to Joe's weak reaction to this situation, "look[s] at him real disgusted but she don't answer and she don't move outa her tracks" (953). This woman favors the stronger, attractive, protective alpha-male to her weak and wasted husband, an event that also occurs with some frequency in Hurston's stories.

Eventually Joe reaches his breaking point. After Elijah's relentless taunting, Joe makes a declaration: "Ah'm goin' after her to-day. Ah'm goin' an' fetch her back. Spunk's done gone too fur.' He reached deep down into his trouser pocket and drew out a hollow ground razor..." (950). Powers tells us, "Boys display an incipient sense of self-reliance by being able to 'dish it out themselves'.... Being a boy means refusing to recognize pain in order to remain part of the pack" (Novels. 232). Joe is about to make an attempt to "dish it out" to Spunk, albeit late in the game. And he's certainly overlooked the pain of having an adulterous wife in the past. He's making one last ditch effort to "remain part of the pack." Joe's told he's "talkin' like a man" (950) after his declaration, but this is said with a tone of warning, as though a person of his stature should never attempt to do anything "like a man." The very statement alludes to Joe's decided lack of masculinity. Nevertheless Joe hunts down Lena and Spunk and, in a cowardly sneak attack, jumps on Spunk's back making a half-hearted attempt at murder. This act gets him killed. Spunk tells the men in the store, "Joe came out there wid a meatax an' made me kill him" (952). Joe's wife shows no remorse for her dead husband, instead choosing to move in with Spunk immediately. But in the end Hurston sees that justice finds Spunk. He's convinced that Joe has returned from the grave to haunt him. The night he and Lena moved in together, a black bob-cat was circling the house "howl[ing] like forty... But Spunk says twant no bob-cat nohow. He says it was Joe done sneaked back from Hell!" (953). Spunk's fear of Joe's specter (or perhaps Joe's specter itself) causes him to fall on the saw at the mill and perish, leaving Lena to lament and the townspeople to go on with their lives with another story for the porch. Hurston, in essence, has thoroughly executed this character for his "crimes."

A man similar to Spunk Banks is Sykes Jones in *Sweat*, published in 1926. Sykes is abusive, hateful, and vile in his treatment of his hard working wife, Delia. He asserts his masculinity and dominance through his aggressive mistreatment of her. Within the first few paragraphs we are given an idea of the nature of their relationship. Delia is squatting on the kitchen floor “beside [a] great pile of clothes, sorting them into small heaps according to color, and humming a song in a mournful key, but wondering through it all where Sykes, her husband, had gone with her horse and buckboard” (955). When he finally returns home, he sneaks up behind her and throws his bull whip over her neck in imitation of a snake, well aware of the horror it would cause her. “Sykes,” says Delia, “what you throw dat whip on me like dat? You know it would skeer me....” Sykes responds, “‘Course Ah knowed it! That’s how come Ah done it.’ He slapped his leg with his hand and almost rolled on the ground in his mirth” (955). But Delia, after fifteen years of systemic abuse which started “Two months after the wedding, [when] he had given her the first brutal beating” (957), begins to take a stand for herself. After Sykes steps on and kicks the laundry she had so painstakingly washed and separated, “Delia’s habitual meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf” (956). She jumps up on her feet to confront her husband, brandishing an iron skillet at him. Sykes leaves after this confrontation; his dominance hinges on Delia’s ability to quietly endure his abuse. At the first sign of resistance he runs to his mistress, where he can be reassured of his manhood unchallenged.

Later, Hurston shows us what the townspeople think of Sykes and his treatment of his wife. “Syke Jones aint wuth de shot an’ powder hit would tek tuh kill ‘em” (958), says Moss. “Too much knockin’ will ruin any ‘oman. He done beat huh ‘nough tuh kill three women, let ‘lone change they looks” (958-9). They even go so far as to contemplate his murder. “‘We oughter take Syke an’ dat stray ‘oman uh his’n down in Lake Howell swamp an’ lay on de rawhide till they cain’t say ‘Lawd a’ mussy.’ He allus wuz uh ovahbearin’ niggah, but since dat white ‘oman from up north done teached ‘im how to run a automobile, he done got too biggety to live – an’ we oughter kill ‘im” (959). This is quite a sway in opinion from the admiration of Spunk. Perhaps this is because, rather than merely stealing a weaker man’s wife (which is somehow admirable), he is abusing his hard working wife whom some of the men seem to have desired themselves at one point or another (“‘Ah’d uh mah’ied huh mahseff if he hadnter beat me to it” [958].) Whatever the case, the men leave the store abruptly upon Sykes’ arrival with his mistress. It’s at this point that Delia rides by on her cart and horse and sees the two together. “...Sykes was ordering magnificently for Bertha. It pleased him for Delia to see” (960). He gets a great deal of joy out of tormenting his wife, a fact that becomes even more apparent later in the story when he brings home a soap box containing a six foot rattlesnake. “Look in de box dere Delia, Ah done brung yuh somethin’!” (961). Delia nearly faints in fear and begs her husband to take the snake away. He does nothing of the sort and instead belittles his wife in order to assert his dominance over her once again. “‘Doan ast me tuh do nuthin’ fuh yuh. Goin’ ‘roun’ tryin’ tuh be so damn asterperious. Naw, Ah aint gonna kill it. Ah think uh damn sight mo’ uh him dan you! Dat’s a nice snake an’ anybody doan lak ‘im kin jes’ hit de grit” (962). He holds this reptile in higher regard than his wife. When asked how he caught it, he explains that the snake was “full of frogs so he caint hardly move,” but goes on to say, “‘Ah’m a snake charmer an’ knows how tuh handle ‘em” (962). He mistakes the snakes silent contentedness for passiveness, the way he has with Delia over the years. He is such a self-serving narcissist that he lacks any ability to interpret any creature accurately.

It is the misinterpretation he has of his relationship with the snake and his wife that is his downfall. Delia comes home from church one evening and delightedly discovers her house void of Sykes. She also finds the box with the rattlesnake as still and silent as her house. In a brief hiccup of hope, Delia supposes that her husband had performed an uncharacteristic act of compassion and rid her of her reptilian tormentor. "Perhaps he was sorry! Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to a place where she would hope anything that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions" (964). Sykes, however, has not broken character. Delia soon discovers that the rattler has merely been transferred from its box to the wash basket in hopes that it will do his dirty work and murder his wife for him. She escapes to the barn, where, in the silence, she is able to meditate and have an epiphany. "Well, Ah done the bes' Ah could. If things aint right, Gawd knows taint mah fault" (965). Sykes returns home in the hour before sunrise and destroys the empty box. When he goes to the house, he doesn't rush through the door. Instead he "hung outside there some minutes before he entered, and stood some minutes inside before he closed it after him" (965). But instead of finding a dead Delia and a docile snake, he finds a quiet, dark, and unmoving house. He knocks over a pot lid in his quest to retrieve a match from behind the stove (from the matchbox which he had been responsible for emptying), causing the rattler to whirl from underneath. Delia positions herself under the window outside to listen in. She hears the viscious rattling, hears Sykes scream like "a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla" (966). In the final, desperate act of a man who sees his own death, he calls to Delia; she answers with silence. As the sun rises, she stands by the door and watches Sykes die. Once again Hurston has exacted a harsh punishment on one of her "literary men who [has] been ... little more than [a] villainous brute" (Powers 237). Sykes, like Spunk, was an overbearing brute. It is the expression of masculinity and manhood through violence and oppression that causes Hurston to end the lives of these men in scenes of kharmic retribution.

Oppression and aggressive masculinity are not always blatant themes in Hurston's work. Teacake from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published in 1937, is what contemporary critics have called "a precursor to contemporary forms of enlightened masculinity" according to Powers. However, he goes on to say, "Teacake falls into any number of stereotypical behaviors" (241). Teacake, like Spunk and Sykes, uses violence to assert dominance over those around him. In chapter XVI we meet Mrs. Turner, a light skinned black woman who reveres Janie because of her mulatto heritage and consequent lack of black features. We meet Mrs. Turner in Janie's home where she is prattling on, berating and criticizing blacks; not the entire black race, just those who are darker and more featured than some others. "'Who want any lil ole black baby layin' up in de baby buggy lookin' lak uh fly in buttermilk? Who wants to be mixed up wid uh rusty black man, and uh black woman goin' down de street in all dem loud colors, and whoopin' and hollerin' and laughin' over nothin'?" (290). Because Teacake is a "common nigger" (289), Mrs. Turner detests him as well, and is therefore driven to suggest that Janie meet her brother. When she leaves, Janie finds Teacake sitting in the kitchen, dejected after hearing their conversation. Mrs. Turner's brother does eventually come to town, and she takes him to meet Janie. This gives Teacake an idea: "Teacake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss" (294). On the surface this seems out of character for Teacake. However, throughout the story Teacake is dominating Janie, turning her into the type of woman he wants her to be. He teaches her to play checkers, hunt, fish, even has her move to the Everglades with him to pick bean sprouts. Janie falls in love with him for all of

these things, but the fact remains that he is still in control, allowing her to do the things he tells her to do. This is another form of control and expression of ownership that the men of Hurston's fiction display. A rabid dog bites Teacake during the course of saving Janie's life while they are fleeing the ravages of a massive hurricane. Teacake goes mad with the rabies and attempts to shoot Janie. The only thing she can do to preserve her life is to gun down the only man she ever loved. Once again Hurston cuts the life of a controlling, oppressive, abusive male short, only this time she seems to have a little more compassion for him than some others, choosing not the painful death of rabies, but the warm, caring bullet of his wife's rifle.

There is one man who stands out above the rest, one who is worthy enough to escape Hurston's gallows. Joe, of *The Gilded Six-Bits* (1933) stands out in stark contrast from many of the other men in her fiction. He does not use violence or aggression to assert his place in the marriage relationship or to affirm his masculinity. Instead, he uses kind words and an acknowledgement of his wife's performance in her domestic duties to secure his place in the relationship and his role as a husband. He's consistently kind to his wife, turning something as trivial as his return home from work on Saturday mornings into a game. Much the way she does with Spunk, Hurston sets up Joe's personality for us when he enters the story. "[Missie Mae] had not seen the big tall man come stealing in the gate and creep up the walk grinning happily at the joyful mischief he was about to commit" (Novels. 985). He is a "big tall man," yet his presence is not oppressive. He's sneaking up to his house, not because he's been inexplicably absent, but because he's about to commit some act of "joyful mischief." He's even grinning in anticipation of seeing his wife after a long week of working nights. Before he even enters the house he's playing a game of "throwing silver dollars in the door for her to pick up and pile beside her plate at dinner" (985), an event that occurs every Saturday morning. When Missie Mae sees Joe hiding behind the bushes she gives chase, feigning anger. He runs into the house where he is quickly overtaken by his wife and tackled. "For several minutes the two were a furious mass of male and female energy. Shouting, laughing, twisting, turning, tussling, tickling each other in the ribs; Missie Mae clutching onto Joe and Joe trying, but not too hard, to get away" (986). Joe is so secure in his manhood that he allows his wife to physically dominate him. Joe does put up a fight, but it is merely to allow Missie full access to the dominant experience. The game proceeds as she attempts to go through his pockets to find whatever it is he has "hidden" on him. She tells him "gimme whateve' it is good you got in yo' pocket. Turn it go, Joe, do Ah'll tear yo' clothes" (986). Joe has nothing to hide from her and he allows her to search him, freely offering all that he has, hidden or otherwise. He simultaneously continues the game and acknowledges her role in the home by telling her, "Go on tear 'em. You de one dat pushes de needles round heah" (986). For all the work that the women in Hurston's other stories put in, the men they serve scarcely give any credit to what they do domestically. And when Joe isn't engaged in "friendly battle" with his wife, or "pretend[ing] to deny affection" (987), he speaks to her reverentially. During dinner she requests some more "tater pone" from him, which he denies because, "You too sweet already.... Ah don't want you to git no sweeter than whut you is already" (987). As they're getting ready to leave the house to go to the new ice cream parlor in town, which is owned by newcomer Otis Slemmons (who tells Joe that "All de womens is crazy 'bout 'im everywhere he go" [988]), Joe tells his wife, "He talkin' 'bout his pretty womens - Ah want 'im to see mine" (989). After their visit with Slemmons, Joe and Missie Mae are still in awe over all the gold he was wearing, from his shirt to his teeth. Missie tells Joe that the gold would look better on him, and maybe they would be so lucky as to find some gold on the road one day. But Joe is disinterested in material wealth. "Ah'm satisfied de way Ah is. So long as

Ah be yo' husband, Ah don't keer 'bout nothin' else. Ah'd ruther all de other womens in de world to be dead than for you to have de toothache" (990). His sentiment towards his wife is regularly ripe with devotion. On his way home one evening, we're told: "That was the best part of life – going home to Missie Mae" (990). Joe's entire being is the polar opposite of the other men in Hurston's fiction. Spunk speaks to Lena as if she were some sort of dog, asserting his dominance over her with phrases like "youse mine," and bidding her husband to "Call her and see if she'll come" (951). Sykes Jones verbally assaults and emotionally scars Delia every time he opens his mouth. The only character that comes close to Joe is Teacake, and even he uses violence at one point in order to assert his dominance and masculinity. Joe has had no trouble asserting his dominance in the relationship and expressing his masculinity while treating Missie with the love and respect a devoted wife deserves.

The crux of any great piece of Hurston fiction is conflict, blatant or not, so it is inevitable that Missie Mae has an affair with Otis Slemmons, the same man that Joe was so readily praising in the first half of the story. Joe comes home from the fertilizer plant early one night. In his attempt at stealth he knocks some dishes onto the floor. He hears his wife gasp in fear, but quickly reassures her that it's only him. At the sound of his voice there is "a quick, large movement in the bedroom. A rustle, a thud, and a stealthy silence" (991). His first thought is for his wife's safety. "What? Robbers? Murderers? Some varmint attacking his helpless wife, perhaps" (991). He never considers another man being in his marital bed. When he does enter the bedroom he finds Slemmons standing there in the most compromising position – "half in and half out of his pants" (991) – and laughs. He's in such a state of shock at the entire situation that it's about the only natural reaction a man like him could have at that moment. But he quickly comes to his senses, and this huge "rough-backed mountain" (991) drives his fist into the intruders face "to crush him like a battering ram" (992). Having taken his due, Joe intends to be a gentleman and simply let Slemmons leave. However, "Joe's fury overrode his intentions and he grabbed at Slemmons with his left hand and struck at him with his right. The right landed" (992). Joe is not one to act out viloently, not even to prove dominance over his wife. Joe does not go out to bars and get into knife fights during dice games. He merely has a passionate reaction to a detestable situation. He doesn't attack Slemmons excessively, but he does assert himself as the dominant male in the situation by absolutely pummeling him with only two shots. When he turns to his wife he does not lash out aggressively. Instead he goes to bed and asks her why she's crying. "'Cause Ah love you so hard and Ah know you don't love me no mo'." Joe sank his face into the pillow for a spell then he said huskily, 'You don't know the feelings of dat yet....'" (992). Joe remains totally level headed, opting not to fly off the handle, leave, or kick her out. He does not exhibit the lack of impulse control we have seen in Hurston's other men. It is not in his nature to use violence despite his massive Spunk-like size or his clear ability to dish it out like Teacake. But there is an immediate change in the dynamic of the relationship between Joe and Missie Mae: "No ringing silver dollars to stack beside her plate. No pockets to rifle" (993). But Joe stays with her, and never uses her infidelity as a tool of oppression. "He was polite, even kind at times, but aloof" (993). In the end Missie Mae delivers a baby boy that we are to assume is her husband's. Delighted at the arrival, and reassured in his marriage and masculinity, we find Joe throwing even more money into the kitchen door after work. Joe has managed to survive Hurston's slaughter, and in the end he gets exactly what he deserves.

Violence is a large part of what defines Hurston's men as masculine. They use violence as a tool, a value that abusive men pass on to their own sons in order to perpetuate the vicious cycle. This is a value that Joe clearly lacks. His single act of violence is committed in defense

of his marriage, and even that is not committed against his wife. Sykes Jones, on the other hand, is extremely prone to violence against his wife. We know that shortly after they are married, he gives Delia “her first brutal beating” (957), and he consistently lashes out against her in a very creative display of brutality. He, too, would certainly have passed his diseased ethics on to his future generations if given the opportunity. Spunk Banks uses his size, words, and gun as tools of intimidation; these things suggest violence, which allows him to obtain the things he wants, including another man’s wife. Joe Kanty, on the other hand, is non-violent and not abusive in any way. In fact, he lacks so much of what makes a man “masculine” that he’s more feminine than androgynous. He never does anything to defend his marriage, even when his wife’s infidelity is thrust mockingly into his face. The one time Kanty does decide to take action he does so in a cowardly fashion, attacking his wife’s lover from behind with a razor as opposed to taking him head on, the way Joe takes on Slemmons. He does not display any of the “masculine” cultural styles” that Powers says “Hurston idealizes” (231). It would seem that, as much as Hurston would like to eradicate violent male oppression, she cannot allow such blatant neglect for masculinity to continue either.

Clearly Hurston has given us a model for masculinity through her fiction. Joe in . . . Six-Bits is a prime example of acceptable masculine expression. He is genuinely kind, expresses appreciation for his wife, is hard working, and very playful. He play fights with his wife, in effect both asserting his masculinity and allowing her a dominant place in the relationship. He does not shy away from defending his marriage and home when the time comes. No other man of Hurston is quite like Joe; he is the model of acceptable masculine expression. A man should not commit violence unprovoked, nor should he shy away from it when the situation calls. A man should not use his words or fists as tools of oppression, or even to reassure himself of his place in the relationship. These other men are the ones that Hurston encountered throughout her life, which is why they are so prevalent in her fiction. It’s as though she is punishing those men for their behavior, much the same way Dante punishes those who have wronged him in The Inferno. Joe is her ideal man, and it is for this reason that Joe, above all others, is able to live happily ever after.

Works Cited

- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Novels & Stories. Comp. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1995. 173-333.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. “Spunk.” 1925. Novels & Stories. Comp. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1995. 949-955.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. “Sweat.” 1926. Novels & Stories. Comp. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1995. 955-968.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. “The Gilded Six-Bits.” 1933. Novels & Stories. Comp. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1995. 985-997.
- Powers, Peter Kerry. “Gods of Physical Violence, Stopping At Nothing: Masculinity, Religion and Art in the Work of Zora Neal Hurston” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 229-247. 2002 The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. 10/31/2006. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.csi.cuny.edu/view/10521151>

The following essay was produced in a course dedicated to the life and work of a single female author, Zora Neale Hurston. Throughout the course, the complexity of Hurston's work intrigued me. Personal letters written by Zora Neale Hurston inspired me in my research. Ultimately, they illustrate the ways in which Hurston wore different masks to suit her needs as a struggling writer. The following research paper is the final piece of a multifaceted project. The writing process encompassed a proposal, bibliography, draft, abstract, final version, and presentation.

The Mule Bone Controversy: A Depiction of Hurston's Complex Personality By Renee Drennan

Abstract

The main purpose of my research paper is to explore the literary quarrel between Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes over the authorship of Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. In this process, an important aspect of Hurston's personality is brought forth. Ultimately, it illustrates the ways in which Hurston wore different masks to suit her needs as a struggling writer. Therefore, the analysis emphasizes the significance the quarrel has in the understanding of Hurston's complex personality. To maximize understanding, I organized my paper into the following subheadings: Introduction, Background Information: Hughes-Hurston Relationship, The Mule Bone Controversy, and Conclusion. In my opinion, this order seems most appropriate because each subheading builds upon the previous. Hence, it eases the difficulty involved in understanding an incredibly complex affair and the equally as complicated personality of Zora Neale Hurston.

Introduction

When analyzing the events of the Mule Bone controversy between Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, one is bombarded with names, dates, and events that combine to make an incredibly bizarre and extremely complicated affair. Despite its complexity, the Hughes-Hurston quarrel highlights a very significant aspect of Hurston's personality. Through a careful analysis of the Mule Bone controversy, striking personality traits emerge. Essentially, the intricacy of the Mule Bone controversy mirrors the true personality of an important historical figure, Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston is remarkable in her ability to assume different voices to suit her personal needs. Ultimately, Hurston is masked by different identities created to meet her needs as a struggling writer, making her contradictory in nature.

Background Information: Hughes-Hurston Relationship

To understand the complexity of the Hughes-Hurston dispute, one must understand the relationship existing between the two prior to their devastating feud. In 1925, Hurston and Hughes met for the first time at Opportunity's annual literary contest awards dinner. From the very onset, Hughes found Hurston to be a remarkably intriguing individual. He remarked, "She is a clever girl, isn't she?" (Rampersad 107). As if foreshadowing, Hughes points out the cleverness of Hurston. The observation made by Hughes is particularly interesting in the overall

scheme of events. As shall be explored later in the analysis, it is Hurston's clever nature that allows her to deceive Hughes.

After his first encounter with Hurston, Hughes wrote to a friend, "I would like to know her" (Rampersad 107). Shortly after, his wish was granted and the two became very close friends. From 1925 through the Mule Bone collaboration, Hurston and Hughes developed a strong, healthy friendship (Hemenway 137-138). Conversing frequently, they shared their dreams for a "Real Negro Theatre" (Hemenway 137). In July 1927, they took a road trip to Manhattan that lasted about a month with "The two sharing notes on hoodoo, folktales, and the blues along the way" (Bass 8). In addition, it was Hughes that introduced Hurston to his white patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason. Shortly after, Mason became Hurston's patron as well. Living in close proximity in New Jersey, the two saw each other practically on a daily basis (Hemenway 137). In fact, it was under Mrs. Mason's orders that they both resided there. Both Hurston and Hughes shared the same secretary, Louise Thompson, who was hired the previous September by Mrs. Mason to assist Hughes (Hemenway 130). As this research shall explore, Louise Thompson will play a pivotal role in the Hughes-Hurston dispute.

During their friendship, Hurston praised Hughes tremendously, placing him on a pedestal far above herself. Referring to their proposed collaboration on a folk opera, Hurston writes to Hughes in July 1928 saying, "Without flattery...you are the brains of this argosy, all the ideas have come out of your head" (Kaplan 122). This is the exact opposite of what Hurston later says in a letter to Hughes concerning the Mule Bone collaboration: "It was my story from beginning to end. It is my dialogue; my situations" (Kaplan 202). Although the letters were written at different times in Hurston's life, they set the tone of contradiction that shall be explored in the Mule Bone controversy. While still companions, Hughes looked out for Hurston, often protecting her interests when trouble arose with Mrs. Mason. Like all good friends, Hughes gave her useful advice and provided unconditional support (Rosenberg 81). This support is present throughout the controversy, in spite of the deceitfulness displayed by Hurston. In late February or early March of 1930, Hughes suggested to Hurston that they write the first real Negro comedy together (Hemenway 137). At this point, the drama really begins!

The Mule Bone Controversy

In spite of their apparent close knit friendship, Hurston and Hughes closeness did not result in a lifelong companionship. As Hughes recorded on the draft of Mule Bone, "This play was never done because the authors fell out" (Hughes). As Hughes later explains, they became involved in a "Literary quarrel – although, basically, it was not really a literary quarrel" (Hughes 331). If it was "not really a literary quarrel," as Hughes claims, what was at the root of their dispute? How and why did this falling out occur? According to Bass and Gates, "Exactly why they 'fell out' is not completely clear, despite the valiant attempts to reconstruct the curious series of events that led to such disastrous consequences" (10). To understand the complex affair, it is crucial that one understands the sequence of events leading to their broken friendship. As the events unfold, Hurston's complex personality emerges. As a result, the ability of Hurston to wear different masks becomes omnipresent.

In an effort to create the first Negro comedy, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes collaborated in writing Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. As intimate friends and co-authors, Hurston and Hughes worked vigorously on the piece in the year 1930 (Hemenway 137). During the literary process, however, their friendship took a turn for the worse, transforming

their friendly relationship into one filled with animosity and disdain. As this analysis shall reveal, the original title of the play, A Bone of Contention, would have been exceedingly appropriate given the adverse circumstances. In essence, Mule Bone remains an unfinished literary piece. Consequently, neither production nor publication of Mule Bone was accomplished in either of the authors' lifetimes. As Hurston's biographer Robert E. Hemenway explains, "It is a notorious work, the center of a quarrel that transformed Hughes and Hurston from intimate friends to lifelong enemies" (136).

After collaborating with Hughes from April through May of 1930 on Mule Bone, Hurston returned South in the month of June. Hurston was supposedly going to complete the trial scene of Act II while she was down South (Hemenway 138). Hurston, however, returned in September without the completed scene. It was in October of 1930 when Hurston disregarded collaboration with Hughes and filed for the copyright of Mule Bone as sole author (140), consequently leading to the dispute that ended their friendship. The reason for Hurston denying Hughes's collaboration remains rather uncertain, mainly because Hurston never publicly revealed her side of the story (137). It is only through the careful examination of primary sources that the motivation behind her actions can be discovered and her personality is revealed.

As Hughes describes in his autobiography, The Big Sea, he only discovered Hurston's claim of sole authorship in an unplanned, casual conversation with a director named Rowena Jelliffe (331). Hughes was justifiably shocked and hurt by this revelation. Jelliffe explained that she had just received an exceptional piece by a talented young woman named Zora Neale Hurston (331). She briefly described the genre, plot, and title and Hughes instantaneously knew that it was the play they had collaborated on. When Hughes tried to contact Hurston, she was entirely unresponsive (332). By concealing the reasoning behind her actions, Hurston masks her intent so as to deceive Hughes. She acted casually, in a manner that did not alarm Hughes. In his eyes, their relationship remained in a normal, healthy state. However, Hurston was only masking herself so as to appear completely content with the current state of things. Essentially, Hurston masked her true feelings and intentions by filing for authorship without the knowledge of Hughes. She made a conscious effort to keep this information hidden from Hughes. Like Hughes foreshadowed, "She is a clever girl, isn't she?" (Rampersad 107).

Based on evidence found in personal letters, Hurston seems to have become increasingly angry with the blossoming friendship between Hughes and Louise Thompson, their secretary for Mule Bone. In Hurston's eyes, Thompson was coming between her friendship with Hughes. She believed that Hughes was attempting to include Thompson in their collaborative effort (Hemenway 138). Hurston's anger derived from Hughes' suggestion that Thompson obtain a greater role than just stenographer, and perhaps even manage any future Broadway productions (138). After Hughes had written three letters, Hurston finally responded to him, admitting that she had indeed sent the play to her agent under sole authorship. On January 18th, 1931, Hurston writes to Hughes in justification of her actions by saying, "In the beginning, Langston, I was eager to do the play with you. ANYthing you said would go over big with me. But scarcely had we gotten under way before you made three propositions that shook me to the foundations of myself. First: That three way split with Louise.... Then your argument that if we paid her money, that it ought to be something fancy.... Then when these failed you come forward with the Louise-for-manager plan" (Kaplan 202). Hurston originally masked her anger, thereby avoiding suspicion that may have arisen in Hughes had she been straight forward with her emotions. Based on Hurston's actions, it is quite obvious that she sought to receive full credit for the writing of Mule Bone. Hurston failed to acknowledge the contributions made by Hughes

in the creation of the play, presenting it to Jelliffe as if she wrote it entirely on her own. To get what she wanted, Hurston went behind Hughes' back and filed for authorship without his knowledge or his consent. This action is one example that highlights Hurston's ability to wear a mask in order to get what she wants.

In addition to her anger over Thompson, Hurston also claims that the play was more hers than Hughes' and, therefore, belonged to her. Hence, she wears the mask of the innocent victim, acting as if she is the one being betrayed. In a letter written on January 18th, 1931 addressed to Hughes, Hurston writes "It was my story from beginning to end. It is my dialogue; my situations" (Kaplan 202). On January 20th, 1931, Hughes responds to Hurston by writing, "The play is ours, neither yours nor mine, and I feel it is too good to be lost" (Bass 221). During a short reconciliation, Hurston responds to Hughes on January 20th, 1931, by saying, "Now, I suppose that both of us got worked up unnecessarily....I am in fault in the end and you were in fault in the beginning. I shall freely acknowledge my share at any time and place" (Kaplan 204). A statement of this nature implies that Hurston agrees with Hughes in that the play belongs to both parties involved. In her letter to Hughes, Hurston suggests that the controversy was a result of miscommunication, nothing more, and is now resolved. Hurston accepts her role in the sequence of events and all appears well. However, this reconciliation is short-lived and the quarrel returns to its previous state. Hurston writes to Mason over a year later, on May 17th, 1932, in reference to Langston. In the letter Hurston claims, "He knows full well he hasn't one word in all that script. He knows that the plot is mine, the dialogue mine. He has nothing, nothing there except the suggestion, 'Zora, lets write a play' (Kaplan 256). This is quite ironic, considering she admitted to Hughes that she was the one "at fault in the end" (Kaplan 204). In this example, Hurston makes a valiant attempt to get Mason on her side and against Hughes. No longer reconciled, Hurston again seeks full credit for the play and attempts to ensure that Hughes goes unaccredited. Hurston admitted to Hughes that she was at fault in the end but now does not want Mason to be aware of it. Hurston speaks to Mason in a way that makes her out to be the innocent. She wears the mask of the betrayed victim by making Hughes look like the guilty party.

Hurston expresses offense when Hughes uses the word "nigger" in his letter dated January 20th, 1931, yet uses it the same day in a letter she writes to Mason. She says to Hughes on January 20th, 1931, "How dare you use the word 'nigger' to me. You know I don't use such a nasty word. I'm a refined lady, and such a word simply upsets my conglomeration" (Kaplan 205). Then on the very same day she writes to Mason about the dispute with Langston concluding her thoughts on the issue with, "But my nigger mess aside..." (Kaplan 206). So Hurston expresses disapproval of Hughes use of the word "nigger" but uses it herself within the same twenty-four hours. Although it is uncertain which way Hurston really felt, it is quite obvious that she was aiming to mask her true self in one of the letters in that these statements are complete contradictions. In my opinion, she wanted Hughes to feel that the use of such a word is unacceptable due to its negative connotation. Since Mason is her white superior it is acceptable for Hurston to refer to herself as inferior especially since she is financially dependent on Mason. Regardless, the two references to "nigger" illustrate Hurston's contradictory nature.

Another notable factor in the falling out of Hughes and Hurston was Hughes' digression from Ms. Mason (Hemenway 138). During the fall and winter of 1930, Hughes began to feel guilty about his expensive living style in comparison to those less fortunate, left scrounging for survival. As a result, he went off of payroll from Mason in late December or early January (Hemenway 139). They parted on a bitter note, with Mrs. Mason accusing him of "ingratitude

and disloyalty (139).” It is quite possible that Hurston abandoned Hughes so as to not hinder her own relationship with Mason, protecting her patronage arrangement. Hurston uses her present relationship with Mason to threaten Hughes saying, “I told Godmother that I had done my play all by myself, and so I did, and for the reasons stated before” (Kaplan 203). This made Hughes aware that Mason knew Hurston’s story and, given their circumstances, it was most likely that she would support Hurston’s theory. She made it out to Mason that she was the one being betrayed.

When writing to Mason, Hurston makes Hughes out to be the bad guy, claiming that “He knows full well he hasn’t one word in all that script” (Kaplan 256). Hence, Hurston assumes the mask of backstabbed friend, rather than the backstabber.

On January 20th, 1931, a mutual friend named Carl Van Vechten writes to Hughes, “Zora came to see me yesterday and cried and cried and carried on no end about how fond she was of you, and how she wouldn’t have had this misunderstanding for the world” (Bass 223). In stark contrast to this event, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a letter the same day addressed to her patron Mrs. Mason. Unlike the absolute “tantrum” (Rampersad 195) that Van Vechten describes, Hurston speaks of Hughes in a negative tone in her letter to Mason. When writing to Mason, Hurston refers to a letter written by Hughes by saying, “It is just as we know, Langston is weak. Weak as water. When he has a vile wretch to push him he gets vile. When he is under noble influences like yours, you know how fine he can be” (Kaplan 208). In this letter, Hurston praises Mason’s “noble influences” and criticizes Hughes for being “weak.” Essentially, Hurston is fearful that Mason may banish her if she associates with Hughes. In order to protect her own interests with Mason and remain in good standing, Hurston speaks negatively of Hughes while paying tribute to Mason. These words are almost unbelievable when we recall that the very same day Hurston was throwing herself to Van Vechten’s library floor in an absolute tantrum, crying and carrying on to no end about the quarrel with Hughes (Rampersad 195). In that situation, she wore the mask of the upset friend. Aware that Mason disapproves of Hughes, Hurston ridicules him so as to not hinder the benefactor relationship. When speaking to Mason, she expresses disapproval of Hughes.

On February 1st, 1931, Hurston arrived in Cleveland in order to resolve their conflict (Hemenway 144). It was agreed that Mule Bone would be performed in Cleveland, and hopefully one day would make it to Broadway and eventually be produced as a movie. With their differences resolved, all seemed well, at least for that fleeting moment. That same evening, however, Hurston became enraged at the news that Louise Thompson was in Cleveland to visit Hughes (144). Although Thompson’s visit was business related, Hurston automatically assumed it was linked to her interest in Mule Bone. Hurston, feeling betrayed, was in an absolute outrage. She arrived the next day at Hughes’ for a conference and spoke harshly, berating Hughes, his mother, the Gilpin Players, and the Jelliffes (144). At this time Hurston wore the mask of the betrayed friend, when in reality she had betrayed Hughes in the beginning.

In a letter written to Arthur Spingarn, Rowena Jelliffe describes Hurston as an unbelievably complicated individual. While Hughes and Hurston were on good terms, Hurston freely admitted that they had collaborated together. After discovering that Thompson was visiting Hughes she denied any such collaboration, masking the truth. As Jelliffe explains to Spingarn in a letter dated January 30th, 1931, “In one connection, Miss Hurston acknowledged his collaboration. Now, apparently, she repudiates it” (Bass 258). Hurston is willing to admit collaboration when she is on good terms with Hughes. When she realizes that Thompson is visiting Hughes she then changes her mind and denies it. Her contradictory nature is again

highlighted when Jelliffe writes in the same letter about Hurston's bizarre behavior, "One telegram says 'O.K – Zora Hurston.' – this is in reply to a request to do the play, her name being used as co-author with that of Langston Hughes. Two hours later, I got another one calling it all off. The next morning, I have another one saying 'Proceed. Good luck. Zora Hurston' (258). Hurston is a complicated individual, consistently changing her mind about things and wearing the appropriate mask to suit her needs. Jelliffe justifiably questions the professionalism of Hurston when she says, "I am wondering whether she is not really too unreliable a person to deal with" (258).

Surprisingly, Langston is completely forgiving in spite of Zora's secret plan of claiming sole authorship. There is no evidence of animosity in the words or tone expressed by Hughes in personal letters nor his autobiography. In a letter written to Van Vechten Hughes writes, "I am not at all angry about her actions, because she has always been strange in lots of ways" (Bass 220). Hughes is certainly right, the behavior and personality of Hurston is at many times strange and often contradictory. As a former close friend, it seems that he would be a reliable source in describing Hurston's true personality.

Conclusion

In an attempt to write the first negro play, Hughes and Hurston began work on Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. It was a bold effort, perhaps as its production implies, too bold for its time. Despite positive efforts, the joint authorship resulted in tremendous problems for both Hughes and Hurston. Hurston accused Hughes of stealing her ideas and claiming them for his own. After their final falling out, they never contacted one another again. Unfortunately, the Mule Bone controversy can only be partially understood by the diminutive evidence left behind. Despite this, the evidence does provide significant insight into the complicated personality of Zora Neale Hurston. The production of Mule Bone was also significant to the advancement of Negro art: "Had it been performed, the power of its poetic language could very well have altered forever the evolution of African-American drama enabling the theatre to fulfill its great – and still unfulfilled – potential among the African American arts" (Bass 23).

Based on my understanding of Zora Neale Hurston, I strongly believe that her tendency to wear masks derives from the lack of control she experienced in her own life. Hurston's behavior provides great insight into her life as a distressed writer. Under immense pressure, she responded by wearing masks in order to meet her needs. Feeling unable to succeed on her own, she wore the appropriate mask to get what she needed. The "cleverness" of Hurston is reflected beautifully in From the Life of Langston Hughes, by Arnold Rampersad, in which it describes a time when "Hurston moved into a Manhattan apartment with no furniture at all and no money and in a few days friends had given her everything, from decorative silver birds, perched atop the linen cabinet, down to a footstool" (Rampersad 184). In this example, Hurston was able to obtain what she needed in spite of her own lack of funds.

The controversial, puzzling, and inconsistent behavior of Hurston during the Mule Bone dispute reflects elements of her own personality. As Hemenway explains in Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, the controversy "illuminates complex tensions in Hurston's life that arose from patronage and personality" (137). Throughout her life, Hurston was dependent on others and financially unstable, consistently pleading for money and favors from Mason and others. In response, Hurston created different masks in order to meet her needs as a struggling writer, making her contradictory in nature.

Works Cited

- Bass, George Houston and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds. Introduction. Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. By Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. N.Y: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.
- Hemenway, Robert E. Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Hughes, Langston. The Big Sea: An Autobiography. 1940. London, Pluto Press, 1986.
- Hughes, Langston and Zora Neale Hurston. Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. Ed. George Houston Bass and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings. New York: Library of America, 1995.
- Kaplan, Carla. Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters. New York: Doubleday, 2002.
- Manuel, Carme. "Mule Bone: Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston's Dream Deferred of an African-American Theatre of the Black Word." African American Review, Vol. 35, No. 1. (Spring 2001): 77-92.
- Rampersad, Arnold. The Life of Langston Hughes. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1986.
- Rosenberg, Rachel A. "Looking for Zora's Mule Bone: The Battle for Artistic Authority in the Hurston-Hughes Collaboration." Modernism/Modernity, The John Hopkins University Press, 6.2 (1999): 79-105.

The following essay was an assignment for my Women's Written Expression class taught by Prof. Marvin. The class was asked to write a narrative about a personal experience when gender affected our lives. I was afforded the rare opportunity to witness a woman choosing to give up her independence and social equality for her religious faith. My attachment to her allowed me to feel this change on many levels. For a moment I was completely conscious of being a woman; all of its consequences and realities.

The Disappearance of Aunt Vickie **By Jennifer Fitzgerald**

I missed the damn exit for the Garden State Parkway North. New Jersey's road signs make absolutely no sense. An inconsequential ex-boyfriend told me that it would cost over \$100 million to fix, proving that this is not my inability, but a state's negligence. I now have to go back over the Outerbridge, pay the toll, and then come back to try again. I despise this state so much that I would rather pay to have Staten Island as my starting point than drive on Jersey's terms.

After my loop, I get off at the correct exit, wondering why the off ramp is so close to the bridge; it is a set up for failure. I have already smoked half a pack of cigarettes and it is only 10 AM. My long skirt and button down shirt constrict my breathing, aided only further by the seat belt. It took me forever to put this warped librarian's outfit together. Trying to keep the dress code sharp in my mind, I tore apart my closet.

"You have to wear a skirt and it has to be below the knee. Not Catholic school 'below the knee,' but ankle length below the knee. When you pick out a shirt make sure it covers your elbows and collar bone. Absolutely NO CLEAVAGE! Keep the print mild. No loud colors or overpowering patterns." These rules threw out 93% of my wardrobe and sense of self simultaneously.

I reach for another cigarette as I double-check the directions. They seem easy enough. Stay on the Parkway until N.Y. and then only a few turns to the hall. They are doing both the ceremony and reception in the same building. I haven't seen my Aunt Vickie in a while. She kind of disappeared after she converted. Her face is missing from pictures of recent family gatherings. No one talks about her much either; at least not in front of me. I do not believe that anyone besides Grandma (her mother) has met the husband to be. Maybe this is the final step in the disappearance of Aunt Vickie.

After an hour or so of chain smoking and station flipping, I pull into the parking lot of the hall. It is sparsely decorated and could easily be mistaken for an office building. The sunny skies were left on Staten Island and a cloak of gray mist hovered over this area. Luckily some of my family was standing outside smoking. I wave as I approach. We hug and I light up another cigarette. My uncle offers me some last minute reminders.

"Remember, don't try to shake any man's hand like you did at Aunt Diane's wedding." I smirk to myself as I remember her wedding. It was a Catholic ceremony and I was a 13-year-old junior bridesmaid. Many of her Orthodox Jewish co-workers were at the reception. As I was introduced, I made a point of extending my hand to all yarmulka clad men. To not be disrespectful they shook my hand and smiled. My Aunt Diane explained the rule to me after 3 or 4 men were forced into touching my hand. I apologized with naivete. I had known that I was

not supposed to, but needed these men to understand that I would not be subjugated. I took their cultural guidelines as a personal affront and cared not for what I saw as patriarchal bullshit. I smiled at my uncle reminding me of the rules and promised to be on my best behavior. We went inside to wait for the ceremony to begin. I found the rest of my family at our assigned table. I patted my brothers' heads and rustled their hair when under the watchful eye of congregants and those I did not know. I walked arm in arm with them when it came time to find seats in front of the stage (where the pabbi would perform the marriage ceremony). This was a fairly pathetic act of defiance. I did not even know if the Orthodox male/female separation rule even applied to siblings. I did it anyway to show these people that I was not and would never be one of them. They stole my Aunt Vickie from me, and for this I could never forgive them. I was mentally taken back to the irrational preteen years. It seemed that we were stared at because we were obviously different. I am sure that they were curious about us just as we were of them. We both posed the same question : "How could they be happy in that life?"

As we sat and waited for everyone to find a seat, I imagined what she would look like. Her dress would have to be conservative, but I knew she would still be beautiful. She always has been. Her deep red hair and hazel eyes shone like her smile. Although she was not my blood relative, I had known her since I was two years old. This was my stepmother's side of the family. I still called everyone Aunt, Uncle, Cousin, and Grandparents. They had accepted me into their family with open arms and never even hinted that it had not always been that way. Aunt Vickie was always one of the "cool aunts." She bought me my first Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, and Offspring C.D.'s. She spoke 5 languages and tutored me in French. I did not need help; I just liked having her around. Maybe these were the last memories we would make together. I looked at my family around me. The men were separated from us, but I could see them in the last row of the men's side. The women, ever pushy, were in the front of the female side. I had never seen my Uncle Al and cousin David wearing yarmulkas. They were Jewish, all of them, but only in theory. Jewish holidays were a reason for all of us to pack into the small Brighton Beach apartment and laugh with each other until the wee hours of the morning. The food was never kosher and Christmas was always the biggest celebration. Now here we were, basically covered from head to toe, trying to understand everything said to us in Hebrew. I had always felt a little Jewish. I loved being exposed to the culture (as watered down as it may have been) and liked the food (except gefilte fish, yikes!). I had managed to pick up a little Yiddish and learned gibberish from my grandma and great aunt. Gibberish is similar to the idea behind pig Latin, but sounds a more complicated. It seemed like Aunt Vickie was taking it too far. She was raised Catholic like me because of her mother's remarriage and claimed it turned her into an atheist. No one, on either side of my family, had let religion dominate their lives to such an extent.

My eyes skimmed the crowd as I wondered what their day-to-day lives were like. How could I know so much about this faith and yet know so little? How could I love that Judaism was a part of my life, and still be so angered by my aunt's devotion to it?

The people began to quiet down as I saw the rabbi come out on stage. Behind him was the groom, Adam, or at least I assumed it was. We had been told his name, but knew nothing else about him. He stood about 5'10". He was slender and had a short rough beard beneath his light blue eyes. He looked nothing like the guys Aunt Vickie had dated. I met a few of the men from her long-term relationships. When you are young, it is easy to be intrigued by older family member's boyfriends. I would watch them intently and imagine what my first boyfriend would be like. I hoped not to have to live vicariously through them forever. First there was the artist.

He looked the part as he did a sketch of my little brother as a testament to his talent. Then there was the pretentious and arrogant businessman. His only endearing quality was his ability to always know what time it was without looking at a clock. The last man I remember was the red haired recovering alcoholic. We all thought that this last one would stick. Aunt Vickie swore to only marry a red-headed man so that her children would share her hair color. She also wanted someone that would be accepting of her recovery from alcohol abuse.

This last fact is what bought Aunt Vickie and I close and ensured her a special place in my heart. Just before I turned 14, she took me to my first AA meeting. Mind you, I had only ever tasted alcohol under the watchful eye of my mother. It was my Aunt's belief that I would inevitably have a substance abuse problem because of my highly dysfunctional family and chaotic childhood. I just saw this as another outing, and enjoyed anytime she stole me from my crazy house. She took me to Goodfella's for my first Vodka Pie to soften the blow. Whether it was foreshadowing or a curse, Aunt Vickie would later be coming with me to meetings where I belonged.

Soft music played behind me. My grandmother and Aunt Vickie stood side by side and slowly made their way down the aisle. Grandpa had passed away a few years prior, also acting as a catalyst for her extreme life decisions. There were tears in Grandma's eyes as they parted just before the steps of the stage. Aunt Vickie continued on. She proceeded to circle Adam several times. I had never seen anything like this. I looked to my stepmother and she could only return my confused gaze. We were separated from my uncle who would have been able to help. We found a woman nice enough to try to explain everything that was happening. The entire ceremony was in Hebrew. We could not even decipher when they were pronounced husband and wife. It was like watching the ceremony from within a soundproof glass box. There, but yet not.

As I sat creating an imagined English version of what was being said, I realized that I was the only woman there conscious of what all this actually meant. My grandmother, stepmother and aunt were too busy being ecstatic about the big day. Did they think of the life she was leaving behind? Had anyone tried to process the before and after of this monumental choice? Aunt Vickie made almost twice as much money as Adam and would be quitting her job. When she converted, her choices of men had been limited to other converts and found through a match-maker. This was because she was not a virgin, and worse, had slept with "goyem." It really hurt me to find out that this word meant "cattle." Aunt Vickie had been a role model. After completing her bachelor's degree, she had a pool of great jobs to choose from. She lived comfortably by herself and never settled for anything. She was proof that real women could create a life for themselves and then start a family if they chose to. None of this made sense. Now she was looked down upon because she was not a virgin, throwing the women's movement back centuries in lieu of decades. I wanted to run up on stage and shake her. I wanted to tell her that it wasn't too late. She didn't really have to leave us. We could help her find whatever she was looking for. Was it her age? I did not think that being 34 would make one freak out from the deafening ticks of a biological clock. All feminist babble aside, this couldn't be a happy life. Maybe it wasn't happiness she was looking for. Maybe it was finality; the knowledge that this was the last stop and the chaos was over. There must be some solace in knowing that the crazy ride is ending and she can finally sit and catch her breath.

Adam had to stomp on the glass three times before it broke in its cloth covering. There were playful giggles from the crowd. At least this part was familiar to me. I knew it signified the destruction of the temple, although I had no idea what that meant.

We filed out and headed to where the reception was being held. Adam and Vickie were hoisted up on chairs and carried around the dance floor. I asked Uncle Al why this was done. "It's to distract the newlyweds from each other. The wedding night should be the first time they touch."

Did they honestly believe that the newly married couple would start going at it in front of their families? I thought that this was bringing humans to an animal-like level. In truth, I just needed to find something to justify my attempted contempt for this culture. I grasped like a drowning rat for anything that would support my need to blame and make sense of my feelings.

After their procession on the shoulders of their peers, they took their place on an elevated platform in front of the dance floor. One by one people would approach them to offer congratulations. I waited impatiently in line. I decided that whatever I said would have to reestablish our connection in under a minute. My time came. I looked into her eyes and tried desperately to show the sincerity I wanted to have.

"Congratulations! I am so happy for you. I think it is great that you found the life you always wanted. I hope he understands how special you are. I know the both of you will have a wonderful future and thank you so much for inviting me here to share in this day."

As I stood, waiting for a deep and profound response to quell my fears, she smiled and said "Mazel Tov." Then she turned to her husband.

"Adam, this is my niece Jenny."

I forced a big smile and said, "It is SO great to finally meet you!"

He said nothing. He glanced in my direction and offered a half smile then turned his attentions back to the dance floor. It was over. I irrationally resigned myself to never even looking in their direction again. Where was my aunt, and who was this stoic man sitting next to her shell? I turned and went back to the table.

The Vickie that I had known for almost 20 years might never be back. The few times I saw her after this, I would search her face for the familiar laughter and sarcastic humor that made people gravitate towards her. I wanted her back in my life. We chose to love each other, biology had not dictated our bond. I did not want to believe that it was gone.

There would be children in her future. There would be a move as well; carrying her body almost as far away from us as her mind. She would never be able to hug my brothers again. She could never come to another Brighton Beach holiday, and will not be at my wedding.

I do not mean for this to sound like a eulogy. I am definitely jealous of her ability to be so devoted. I know I lack both the conviction and drive to put my entire soul into something; anything. She has always been a strong woman. I have full faith in the fact that she would not stay in something that was not exactly what she wanted. With that said, she is blessed to have found her calling and path to happiness amidst the turmoil of her life. I do not believe that she sacrificed her family for her faith. She merely asks us to keep loving her even if we cannot understand her choices. I hope that maybe she got a glimpse of the big picture and knew exactly what she had to do. Maybe it all became clear to her and the decision was then simple. I may have taken her choices personally, but I must believe in my heart that everything is as it should be. In spite of myself, I will try to understand.

As I sat with my stepmother going over the guest list for my wedding, I asked her, "Will Aunt Vickie at least come to the reception?"

She looked solemn as she responded, "I don't know. She asks us to keep inviting her to stuff and she will let us know what she can come to."

Her image is fading from family photo albums and will most likely be missing from my wedding pictures. Unable to make new memories with her, I hold on to the old ones. I fear that she took with her the piece of my heart that she held.

Jonelle Fera is an aspiring mental health counselor and graduated in 2007 from the College of Staten Island with a bachelor's degree in Psychology. This essay was a final exam project for Dr. KupperSmith's counseling class. Successful completion of the assignment would show whether or not she was able to self-reflect, an essential skill for any counselor. Self-reflection is necessary because it allows counselors to confront conflicts, assess situations and realize their strengths and weaknesses. As such, this introspection will enable them to better help those in need. A very applicable adage is, "In order to help others, one must first help himself."

Gaining Authenticity Through Self Change: My Looking Glass **By Jonelle Fera**

What is the role of a counselor? Every source has its own definition of what a counselor's main priorities ought to be and how they go about addressing these priorities. From my perspective, a counselor plays the role of a "facilitator" who can help organize and guide an individual through their fears, eventually resulting in a decrease in their anxiety. Some people may have the misconception that a counselor is responsible for "fixing" problems or "saving" people but I realize now that this is not the case. A counselor is responsible for identifying problems and their possible solutions to help the client consider and decide what might be best for them. Each case is unique and has a particular method that is best suited for the particular situation. "Counselors are experts in what can go wrong, and the more they listen to problems, the more problems surface. In recent years, however, counselors have increasingly focused on listening to what works in people's lives - and on their strengths, resources, and talents" (Littrell, 1988, 3, as cited in Littrell & Peterson, 2005). I believe this new focus on the positive aspects of people's personalities may build a stronger and more productive relationship with the client; one which fosters their own strengths and improves their self concept. This new focus comes NOT from the old psychology of pathology but from the new psychology of wellness.

In order for counselors to find out what works for other people, they need to know what works for themselves. For example, Littrell & Peterson (2005) created three major themes that focus on a counselor's ability to organize the self as a unified whole: "grounding the self," "realizing a vision," and "staying the course." It is essential for those who wish to study and practice counseling to be willing to confront their self-concept. To support a professional outcome for those who visit a counselor, the pre-requisite is to first treat your "self." No individual is capable of helping others if they cannot fully "see" themselves.

The first step in "grounding the self" is being able to form a vision: How does one form a vision? "...[V]ision emerges from personal experiences, a succinct expression of who a person understands himself or herself to be in relationship to larger systems" (Littrell & Peterson, 2005, 11). My passion to help others derives from who I am and who I want to become. My life experiences also influence me in wanting to help others. My vision involves the belief that every individual (consciously or unconsciously) wishes to become a better person but sometimes unfortunate events prevent them from reaching their desired goals. I can see that with hard work and a directed effort every individual is capable of solving their own problems, especially with the proper guidance and professional resources made available to them.

The second step in "grounding the self" is being able to identify: "Who am I and what is my goal?" I am a young individual wishing to accomplish certain desired goals: earning a

degree beyond my BA and having a career helping others. I am someone who genuinely cares for others and wishes to make a difference in the world. I am aware that these goals require many years of hard work but I am willing to accomplish anything that will enable me to help others in need. Taking on challenging objectives fuels my passion even more because after completing something difficult I feel a great sense of pride and achievement. I am someone who wishes everyone could get along, however, I understand that the world may never work this way. I am able to accept the good in this world and the bad. I believe two wrongs do not make a right and that every individual deserves a second chance. I try now, not to look at a bad experience as something totally unfortunate but rather as an opportunity to learn and to grow. I think that what you put into something is what you will most likely get out of it.

The third step in “grounding the self” is being able to form core beliefs and values: What are my core beliefs and values? “A belief is confidence in the existence of something not susceptible to rigorous proof” (Littrell & Peterson, 2005, 13). My core beliefs are shaped from my life experiences and observations of other people’s experiences. One of my core beliefs is that every individual has problems. How to treat these problems depends on the situation and the methodology available. Every individual has the power to change themselves but not the power to change others. Using the new counseling philosophy of looking at the strengths of the person and not the strength of their pathology makes me more optimistic in thinking that everyone has the ability to solve their own problems. “Values are deeply held views of what we find worthwhile.’ Values describe how we intend to operate, on a day-by-day basis, as we pursue our vision” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994, as cited in Littrell & Peterson, 2004, 13). My values involve helping others, being active and involved, working hard, trusting people, building community, taking responsibility, cooperating, looking at the good in people first, being honest, and staying true to myself.

The fourth step in “grounding the self” is being capable: What are my personal strengths that will aid me in being a counselor, and how do I achieve my vision? I am not a counselor yet, but I can label potential counseling strengths that are a part of my personality: I am willing to express my strengths and weaknesses. Since I was a child, I was always well-disciplined and I paid attention to the rules and regulations of a system. I will not allow my personal life to get in the way of helping others. I am aware that if I am emotionally unstable for a particular reason I must take care of myself first. I am currently attending therapy and learning that I have the strength and courage to talk about my personal problems. I enjoy listening to people and will only offer advice if asked. Socializing with people energizes me, especially when they confide something personal to me. I always measure the costs and consequences of a situation. When someone tells me something personal, I try to understand it from all points of view and feel empathetic towards every individual involved. I no longer believe that only one person is THE cause or reason for a problem.

The fifth step in “grounding the self” is behaviors: Do I have the behaviors required for an accomplished counselor? I feel I do have the necessary behaviors for becoming an accomplished counselor, but it is not my place now to say if I meet the requirements of a counselor or not. I do know in order to be a successful counselor, my methodology ought to be consistent with my vision, identity, core beliefs, basic values, capabilities, and behaviors.

The final step in “grounding the self” is context: To what extent will other variables (co-workers) support or prevent me from achieving my vision? I cannot say for sure how other people involved with my work will react but I know I must incorporate all variables of the system into my methodology and try to work the whole system rather than trying to solve

problems on my own. In doing so, I will have much support for my work. For example, Littrell & Peterson (2004) interviewed a guidance counselor named Claudia Vangstad because they were inspired by her problem solving methodology. Ms. Vangstad worked with all of the variables within the context of her high school and in the process developed an excellent working relationship with the teachers and the principal. She discovered, overtime, that it was not so difficult to implement change when she had the cooperation of all the staff, the teachers, and the principal.

Being aware of one's strengths is beneficial, however, it is also important to become aware of one's weaknesses. It is a difficult task to identify weakness but through experience and self-reflection it can be accomplished. One of my weaknesses (could also be a strength) is relying on support from my family network. Littrell & Peterson (2004) coined the term "self-renewal." This term refers to the ability to engage in an activity that is purposeful in supporting the individual independently. An important responsibility a counselor must keep is taking care of the "self." The "self" has a tendency to be neglected if caught up in other peoples' lives. If I can find my personal space and a personal "activity" that focuses solely on me, I will be able to relieve and relax my thoughts. Finding my unique personal support system will allow me to focus on my "self" without having to always rely on other individuals.

I have another weakness which involves feelings of guilt when I'm not able to help someone. I understand that not every client is successfully helped and it is unrealistic to think every client can be helped, but it will most likely upset me if I am unable to help a client. Another aspect of weakness that relates to my emotions is my ability to control my emotions so that they do not overtake those of the client. I must do all I can to prevent my tragic experiences, which may be very similar to the clients, to influence my professional counseling.

Another weakness (and strength) is my ambition. I do not like to give up, and I realize this may get in the way of treating someone. For example, if I do not meet the standards of treating a client, I may do whatever it takes in my power to find a "solution," rather than referring the client to someone else who may be better trained to treat them.

I must not completely dedicate my life to other people and to work. I need to keep my life connected to the outside world and try to keep my work world and social world as equal as possible. I must also be able to keep my work world out of my social world and vice versa.

My strengths may become my weaknesses and my weaknesses may become my strengths. I recognize that new weaknesses may surface in the future, as well as new strengths. I have come to accept who I am now, and where I have been. From today on, I want to live my life more in the present while looking forward to my future.

Works Cited

Littrell, J.M. & Peterson J.S. (2005). *Portrait and model of a school counselor*. Boston, MA., Lahaska Press.

ESSAY CONTEST SUBMISSION FORM

We ask that when you submit a paper, please:

- ❖ Include **3 copies**.
- ❖ Indicate for which contest you qualify.
- ❖ Attach a completed permission form that is signed by you and your instructor and staple it to one copy of the essay.

The essay should not contain any identifying marks (student, teacher, class name, etc.), including comments or grades from the instructor. The essay should be **carefully proofread**.

_____ English 111/151 writing contest submission

_____ *Upper-division writing contest submission*

Name: _____

Title of paper: _____

Class paper was written for: _____

Instructor: _____

Home address, phone number and email, should we need to contact you:

I would like my paper to be considered for the essay contest and publication. By signing this, I attest that this paper is completely my own work.

Student's signature

Instructor's signature

Fall semester : Bring to 2S-218 by 12/19, at 2pm ; Spring semester : Bring to 2S-218 by 5/20, at 2pm.

CREDITS

STUDENT ART

WANDA CALAMIA

SPRING 2007

(BACK COVER PHOTO)

ARIANA MASKULI

SPRING 2007

(INSIDE COVER DRAWING)

CHARLES TAGLE

SPRING 2007

(COVER PHOTO)

PROOF READERS

BOB BRANDT

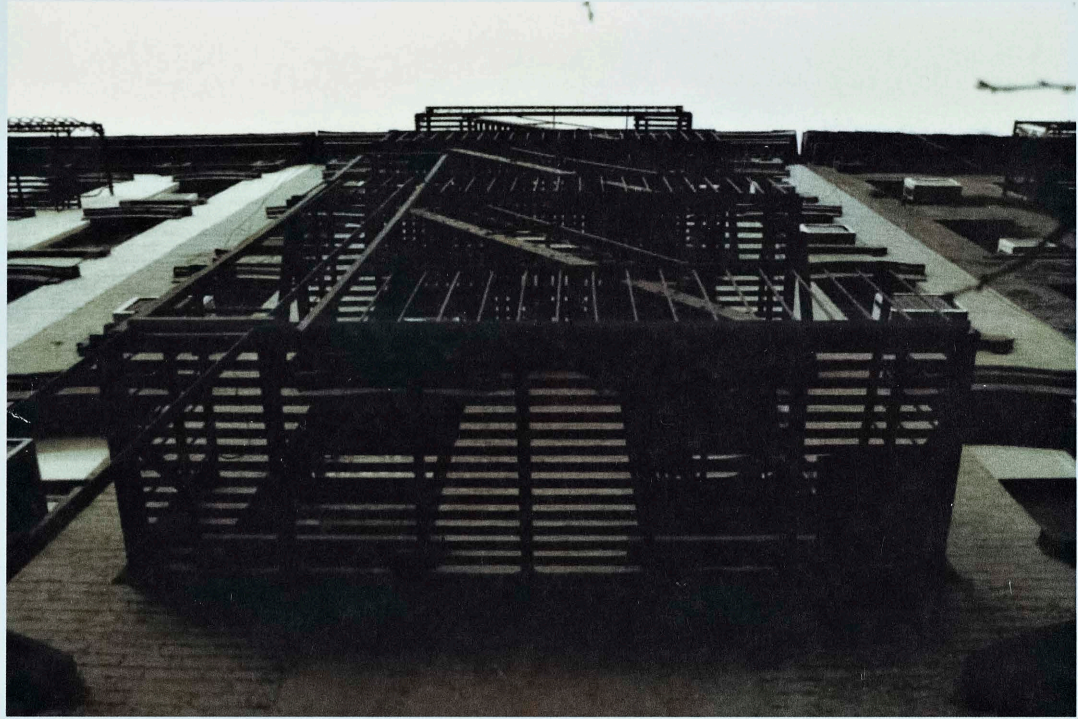
DIRECTOR

CSI WRITING CENTER

PETER CONTI

LECTURER

CSI ENGLISH DEPARTMENT



INKWELL