

COLLECTIF:
COMMISSIONED
ESSAYS ON
THE 2019
REPORT THEME

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Letter from the Director**
- 2 Why Are There So Few Women Pilots?:
A Comparative Case Study of Women Pilots
in United States and Indian Aviation**
by Caitlyn Keeve, '20
- 13 What Good is an Apology?:
Restorative Ethics in the Age of #MeToo**
by Aimée Koeplin, PhD
- 23 Identity and History: Decentering the Narrative**
by Wendy J. McCredie, PhD
- 30 U.S. Maternity Care in Crisis**
by Sarah Shealy, CNM, IBCLCD
- 44 The Challenges of Cultural Proficiency
for the African-American-Mexican Woman
in los Estados Unidos**
by Ana V. Thorne, PhD
- 53 Partner Spotlight:
Mount Saint Mary's University's
First Legislator in Residence**
by Emerald Archer, PhD
- 55 Acknowledgments**



Letter from the Director

The Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary's extends the mission of the university by offering women's professional development opportunities, commissioning gender equity research, and advocating on behalf of California women and girls. As part of this work, the Center releases *The Report on the Status of Women and Girls in California*[™] annually to shed light on persistent gender inequities so that community members — from students to elected officials — feel empowered to push for positive change.

Last year the Center debuted *Collectif*, an online anthology of original faculty and student writing, that adds depth of understanding to the Report themes covered that year. I am delighted to release the second volume of *Collectif*, showcasing five commissioned papers from our scholarly community on the 2019 Report theme of intersectionality.

Two humanities scholars discuss the power of cultural narratives, but from different perspectives. Ana Thorne, PhD, offers a personal ethnographic narrative that connects her lived experiences as a Blaxicana to larger social, political and cultural accounts that shape aspects of a mixed-race identity. Alternately, Wendy McCredie, PhD, shows that the stories and histories we tell ourselves, that our families and our society tell us, can limit our understanding of who we are and what's possible through Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Our 2019 Report covers some astounding data related to maternal health for women of different races and ethnicities. Nursing professor Sarah Shealy digs deeper into the underlying structural and systemic issues related to maternal care in the United States. The theme of intersectionality at this particular time in our cultural history also allows us to take up the topic of the power of apology. The #MeToo movement and era of political scandal requires Americans to think about apologies, restorative justice, and moving forward. Aimée Koeplin, PhD, explores these intersections and crafts a framework for suitable apologies that acknowledge past social harms. A student essay, authored by Caitlyn Keeve, '20, rounds out this year's *Collectif* by investigating an industry that suffers from the underrepresentation of women – specifically, aviation.

While these papers are written from diverse perspectives and highlight different experiences, they are stitched together in one anthology. The legacy left by the Sisters of St. Joseph is a powerful one — they sought to equip women to reach their fullest potential. This is as true for us today as it was for the first Sisters serving in seventeenth century Le Puy, France. As a collective — or *collectif* — we carry forward their mission of empowering women with data and information that will transform the way they approach problems.

Warmly,

Emerald Archer, PhD
Director, Center for the Advancement of Women

COLLECTIF

WHY ARE THERE SO FEW WOMEN PILOTS?: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF WOMEN PILOTS IN UNITED STATES AND INDIAN AVIATION

Caitlyn Keeve '20

In 2017, *The New York Times* published a letter Amelia Earhart had written them shortly after becoming the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean alone. Earhart's 1932 letter requested that the *Times* refer to her as Amelia Earhart instead of by her married name of Mrs. Putnam.¹ Now seen as a reasonable and easily granted request, her persistence introduced questions of identity in the changing public perception of women with impressive accolades. For decades, women pilots have made significant contributions to the aviation industry in the United States and globally — but with limited recognition. Traditionally, the relationship between women and transportation has been inherently political, seen through Saudi Arabia's policy change on women obtaining drivers licenses or NYU's discovery of the "pink tax" where women pay increasingly more than men on private ride-sharing apps to avoid harassment on public transportation.²³ Considering these events, issues of mobility and access are now shifting away from the gender-specific and exclusionary policies of the past.⁴ The private sector of aviation has seen the most growth when it comes to the involvement of women pilots, compared to corporate transport and military aviation.⁵ Overall, the increasing demand for air travel is forecasted to lead to the granting of 790,000 new pilot licenses over the next 30 years.⁶

Today, women make up only 7% of all pilots in the United States; up from 3% in 1960.⁷ Slowly, though, the number of women participating in aviation as students and as private and commercial flyers continues to climb, as do the strong international predictors of growth, specifically in the South Asian country of India. In 2018, India had the highest percentage of commercial women pilots in the world (13.9%) at the airline IndiGo; in comparison Jet Blue and Southwest airlines have both hovered around 4% for the number of women pilots on their staff.⁸ These positive developments can be attributed to more than just a shift in culture. The average age of a pilot in the United States and Asia is approaching 50. As many reach the mandated retirement age of 65, the window for younger and more diverse recruits is expanding. Today, there are also more alternative and professional career options including corporate and business piloting that have flexible hours and have pilots operate jets for transport.⁹ In addition, policies that prevented women from participating in combat missions in the Indian and United States Air Forces have been amended or eliminated in recent years.¹⁰

Despite increasing opportunities for female aviators, policy cannot be the only solution to solving the global pilot shortage. The aviation industry has been affected by the psychological concept of *stalled collective action*, where pilot schools and airlines are not filling the need for labor fast enough to meet the current demand.¹¹ Inviting more women into aviation spaces and relating piloting to its broader connections with STEM careers would not only diversify the field, but help to ease the labor shortage for pilot schools and airlines. For women, there are a variety of factors that influence the discovery, initial pursuit and maintenance of a piloting career. The purpose of this report is to contextualize why there are so few women pilots and propose solutions to increase the current number. This investigation interrogates four variables that may explain why women are outnumbered by men in the pursuit of pilot licenses and careers. Those factors include: (1) workforce safety; (2) the impact of gender role stereotypes; (3) access to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) training; and (4) professional support. This paper will demonstrate that the existing arena for women in aviation is slowly improving, though the underrepresentation of women of color remains an issue. Greater accessibility to training, scholarships and role models can all serve as a potential remedy to the low number of women pilots in general and within the aviation industry.

Methodology

A comparative methodology was used to examine if the United States is a strong supporter of women pilots, while considering areas of growth through an international lens. India was chosen as the secondary case study to illustrate how both countries operate in the same industry, though from differing sociocultural perspectives. The four variables of the study were chosen to holistically address categories highly applicable to workplace success, specifically for women pilots.

While there was ample research on the importance of women's integration and retention in other professional settings, the small body of academic work on female pilots, specifically, proved outdated and warranted further investigation. The present research was approached through a gender lens to assess what realistic goals can be set to increase the number of women pilots in aviation internationally. This study aims to generate scholarly research and awareness to motivate young girls and women to consider piloting as a career path or as an activity that joins them to the wider general aviation community. In this paper, extra focus was given to the extensive efforts in both countries to work specifically on addressing gender-role stereotypes and professional support for women, particularly for ones pursuing pilot careers.

Discussion

The factors that describe the interaction between women and global aviation include workforce safety, the impact of gender role stereotypes, access to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) training, and professional support. Collectively, these variables represent the varying degrees to which each helps or hinders the discovery, pursuit or development of women as pilots.

WORKFORCE SAFETY

The environment in which women pilots feel safe and describe the workplace are supported by data trends, policy change and guaranteed benefits provided by military, commercial and private entities. A comparison between India and the United States reveals the parameters for a realistic assessment of goals to increase the number of women pilots nationally.

Like Earhart, many other female aviators have found freedom in the skies and claimed recognition for women pilots. This includes the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), a civilian unit of the United States Army Air Forces that formed in 1942 to fly military aircrafts while men fought as combat soldiers overseas.¹² World War II was an era of increased opportunity for women in the workplace, but within two years after the war, there was a cultural transition to an age of preservation for female safety. Post-war, many non-traditional jobs (e.g., factory work, WASPs flight training) once praised as patriotic, were discontinued for women in the name of patriarchy. Almost forty years later, the WASPs were recognized with military status in 1977, and later granted the Congressional Gold Medal for their service.¹³ For women in the military, gender-based caution was penned into law in 1948 as the official Combat-Exclusion Policy of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The act, voided in 2013 by former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, supported women as members of the Armed Forces but limited their capacity to administrative roles — ruling out active duty and combat responsibilities afforded to men.¹⁴ Similarly, in the Indian Air Force, India's government cited the threat of sexual violence in enemy territory as its rationale for excluding women as fighter pilots and other combat participants.¹⁵ Today, despite the repeal of India's Combat Exclusion Policy, there are still concerns with the prevention of violence against women overseas.

Within the context of safety, the idea that conditions inside the plane have become in many ways gendered spaces, where the planes are inherently designed to accommodate male bodies, is presented in recent research. In Penny Hamilton's "Teaching Women to Fly" research project, data suggest that even the physical interior of a standard plane accommodates men rather than women. Of the 157 female participants, 37.6% reported barriers in the physical environment, including outdated training or simulation equipment and the small interior of the cockpit that affected their pilot training.¹⁶

Air Force pilot Heather “Lucky” Penny suggested that in the short term, the aviation industry would benefit if the goal was to expand the percentage of women pilots to 30%. As the Director of the US Air Force Air Superiority at Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company and Senior Resident Fellow at the Air Force Association, her approach to expanding representation specializes in business strategy and defense policy. When 30% of any organization is comprised of women, “the collective IQ of an organization increases substantially...and they get better.”¹⁷ In this case, rather than aiming for gender parity at 50% right away, the Air Force and commercial employers should aspire to securing at least 3 out of every 10 pilots to be women, in order to improve productivity and success. Increasing the goal incrementally allows for the existing community of women pilots to pursue mentorship, attract more students to the field and continue advancing into senior leadership positions.

With more than 50 female fighter pilots in the U.S. Air Force today, conversations around their professional and physical welfare aim for increased equity and inclusion. In a case brought against the Department of Defense, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argued that a concern for female safety should not equate to professional marginalization. In 2013 testimony, the ACLU argued: “Men do not have a monopoly on patriotism, physical ability, desire for adventure or willingness to risk their lives. Until both the responsibilities and the rights of citizenship are shared on a gender-neutral basis, women will continue to be considered less than full-fledged citizens.”¹⁸ In India, where a history of deeply recognized patriarchy has existed, the country has witnessed the addition of its first three women into the Indian Air Force, in 2017. By now, most Indian policies that excluded women from fully participating in the aviation industry have been withdrawn. However, to truly excel, India’s current and future female pilots must also be guaranteed the same protection, benefits and support as their male counterparts.

One reason why India maintains the highest percentage, globally, of commercial women pilots is because of recently instituted policies by large airline employers — policies that stand in contrast to those in the United States.¹⁹ Within the last decade, commercial Indian airlines like IndiGo and SpiceJet have instituted strategies to improve productivity and the well-being of pilots by reducing workplace stress with union mandated equal pay, on-site daycare services and commuting accommodations of “pick-up and drop-off services, accompanied by an armed guard,” in areas that have been determined unsafe.²⁰

This is a leading example of the effectiveness of recruitment techniques that attract women from all walks of life. The negotiation between respect and the genuine pursuit of an exciting career is no longer a primary battle for the growing number of female cadets and students in India’s flight schools.

GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPES

Gender role stereotypes influence the careers and experiences of women pilots in a variety of ways. First, stereotypes that reveal *implicit biases*, or unconscious perceptions of character, impact policy and cultural traditions that work against efforts to recruit more women to the field.²¹

Historically, non-discrimination policies based on sex have been helpful, certainly, but have not extinguished other deeply-ingrained issues like gender role stereotyping in the United States and India. Gender roles are a series of characteristics performed or impressed upon an individual based on society, culture and time.²² The goal of these assumed roles is often to maintain some patriarchal structure of power that does nothing to mend its relationship with women who resist. Chahat Dalal, a seasoned pilot in India, provides an example of a gender role stereotype: “People assume that women are bad drivers, so they must be bad flyers as well. For instance, if a female pilot has a harsh landing, she will often face snide comments about it. But if a man has a harsh landing, it’s assumed that the weather is bad.”²³ Given the underlying judgment of women, the stereotype perpetuates a legacy of mistrust and lack of confidence in women’s abilities. *Microaggressions* like sarcastic comments, often mask larger, more systemic issues like the reality of India’s labor force being only 29% female.²⁴ The lack of land ownership and the routine exclusion of women from financial institutions there contextualize

the power that aviation has to reverse these barriers.²⁵ While 47% of the United States workforce is female, women who do not fit into normalized categories are either stigmatized, sexualized or scrutinized.²⁶ The different degrees of patriarchy in Indian and American society represent varying obstacles that contribute to lingering societal resistance to women pilots. Regardless of geography, gender stereotypes that rely on a fixed ideal have become personal barriers that affect the woman, the family and the society at large.²⁷ Today, elements of culture and tradition remain paramount in the discussion of what women can do.

While some believe that life as a pilot introduces a prospect of danger or risk — elements assumed to be inherently masculine — data suggest that female pilots score higher on personality characteristics proven to strengthen their performance as pilots, when compared to men.²⁸ Though there is limited research on the risk taking behaviors of the female pilot community, it is possible that their behaviors might diverge from the more common risk taking behaviors of the larger female population, based on their interest and pursuit of aviation. While male and female pilots share an initial fascination with planes and a determination to succeed, women pilots in the U.S. Air Force were reported to score higher than men in the areas of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness.²⁹ Being able to outwardly express confidence and adapt with flexibility are habits that women pilots tend to demonstrate better than their male counterparts. Out of the three characteristics measured, “agreeableness” has traditionally been connected to femininity and inherent care for others; however, there is a larger case to be made that what is truly being measured is women’s persuasive management potential and skill.³⁰ “Conscientiousness,” or self-awareness, was named as the most important trait that Air Force pilots should have due to the excessive demands for accountability, responsibility and consistency.³¹

Risk and masculinity are becoming increasingly uncoupled as the gender gap closes on self-reported and observed risk-taking behaviors.³² In the example of post-war dismissal of WASP veterans, so-termed *benevolent sex discrimination* was used against them because of the assumed physical and emotional strength disparity between the two genders. This form of sexism is most often carried out by men who are trying to appear helpful but are still entrenched in the ideas of misogyny. The fact that there are so few women pilots in the world today may be related to the disproportionate amount of men to women in positions of power globally. Still, trailblazing women constantly disprove of what women are *supposed* to do. As a result, women have created an occupational identity for themselves that runs parallel to the confines of traditional gender roles.

Pilots make up only 0.002% of the entire world population; any and all sex discrimination, stereotyping and sexism negatively harms women and does nothing to benefit the aviation industry.³³ Identified as *societal implicit bias*, the three aspects of professional critique that women endure fall under the categories of ability, experience and authority.³⁴ An example of sex-based implicit bias was a 2011 incident in which a man refused to fly on an Indian airline where a woman was the senior pilot. According to the news report, he said: “I don’t want to die! She can’t take care of the house, how will she take care of a plane?” His comments are an example of inherent and personal bias against a woman in a position outside of his perception of accepted gender norms.³⁵

Hostile sexism like that, where intentional and chaotic conflict occurs, can be severely damaging to women because of blatant disrespect and the maintenance of a superiority dynamic between men and women. It’s important to correct inaccurate and harmful comments that prop up gender role stereotypes or implicit bias. In the United States, for instance, data confirm that there is no significant difference between the accident rates of male and female airline pilots.³⁶ Neither men nor women are the safer pilot group, and the average age of a female airline pilots is 38, seven years younger than the national average for men. Other indicators of skill include exposure to different types of planes and hours logged. In Penny Hamilton’s “Teaching Women to Fly” study, 61 percent of female private pilots with military, instrument or advanced rating and glider training had completed 100 to more than 500 hours of flight experience.³⁷ All of these factors work to validate the capability of female pilots everywhere.

Even though the incident above sparked a discussion about value and gender roles in India, it is difficult to change stereotypes because of ever-changing views on authority. Today, social media and news media possess the power to dismantle negative stereotypes. Compare that to 40 years ago, when most people looked only to their parents to model what a man and woman should act like. The attack on women's authority in the aviation space is a direct function of traditional gender role expectations. Because female pilots have been identified as an untapped market for global airlines, international military services and private employers, commercial leadership scholars point to a fundamental political dilemma as the result: a resistance to women in authoritative positions to maintain a masculine pilot identity.³⁸ As long as gender remains a key feature of individual identity, naming an activity inherently masculine or feminine does little to explain what being a woman in the industry really means.

The 1997 study, *Female United States Air Force Pilot Personality: The New Right Stuff*, that distinguishes the personalities of male and female pilots, reinforces gender stereotypes by determining an ideal standard for women to reach as it relates to their sex. In this research, female Air Force pilots proved statistically different from both the male pilots and the female non-pilots. However, both groups of pilots were more alike than both sets of women.³⁹ Some argue that the women pilots, over time, adapted their personalities to align with that of the masculine ideal. However, a more convincing argument considers the parameters of the job.⁴⁰ When considering the need for attention to detail and an increased desire to succeed in the face of gender stereotypes, it makes sense that women are redefining what being a pilot looks like. The study concluded that the female pilots were more "similar" to male pilots than to women in general.⁴¹ This result could be attributed to the obvious fact that pilots, regardless of gender, probably have more in common with each other than with those who don't understand the appeal and challenge of flight.

Analysts suggest that a woman's confidence and performance in highly selective and demanding tasks improved in response to specific, positive feedback on things they can control — such as effort, strategies and behaviors, all of which are influenced by the environment in which she is taught.⁴² Irrespective of factors that make men and women similar or different, the power of discipline and their passion for flying is what connects them, regardless of the results of any personality test.

STEM TRAINING

Women's access to STEM opportunities through education, internships and workshops can contribute to the success of pilot training and completion of licensure. In particular, where there is no access or pursuit of physics, "the building block" to all other STEM disciplines starting in high school, students are less likely to get degrees in those fields. And, thus, less likely to be pilots.⁴³

Science, technology, engineering and math are all relevant fields to the discipline of aviation. While neither the United States nor India has a formal requirement for pilots to obtain an advanced academic degree in any specific major, a variety of technical skills are beneficial to the success of a piloting career early on. Knowledge gained in most science-based curricula can relate to aviation proficiency, including aptitude in weather patterns, cockpit technology, physics and fuel calculations.⁴⁴ Sally Ride, NASA's first woman astronaut pointed to "lingering stereotypes" that socialize girls to disengage from STEM more than boys do starting in middle school.⁴⁵ One cause of the disparity in the number of female and male pilots today can be attributed to the lack of exposure, or the early academic withdrawal of girls in specialized subjects like engineering, mathematics and physics.

Even for women who do enter STEM occupations, without external investment or a positive long-term experience in their jobs, women are more likely to leave the industry entirely due to experiences of isolation from hostile work environments or minimal to no feedback from supervisors.⁴⁶ Almost one-third of women in the United States and 20% of women in India tended to leave their science, engineering or technology jobs within the first year.⁴⁷ Despite this trend, data suggests that women pilots are the anomaly, where over 52% continue their careers past six years.⁴⁸ In 2017, senators Susan Collins

(R-ME) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced S.2244, the Promoting Women in Aviation Workforce Act. This bipartisan resolution would create a Women in Aviation Advisory Board for the Federal Aviation Administration and guarantee science-based workshops that focus on education, training and recruitment of women as licensed pilots across the United States.⁴⁹ Education and exposure are the bridge that will join a new generation of pilots with an industry that is projected to grow by 14% by 2020.⁵⁰ The bill also encourages industry stakeholders, including employers and leaders in the field, to expand opportunities, such as pilot training for youth, flight simulation and STEM education. These strategies, combined with accessibility for students, will help women from a young age learn about, and prepare for, a career in aviation. With evidence that girls are motivated by projects they find personally relevant and deeply meaningful, the continuation of this will help increase the number of young girls and women interested in aviation.⁵¹

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Mentorship and professional development organizations are the cornerstone of women's involvement and inclusion into non-traditional career choices. Affinity groups, women-led workshops and outreach programs have provided extensive research on the ways to improve retention rates and value the experience of women pilots.

There are many reasons why some women choose to pursue life as a pilot, some of which include the fulfillment of a personal dream, the sense of freedom or the desire to conquer fear.⁵² The universal aspiration to succeed at any craft, including one as dynamic as aviation, starts with an interest and is achieved with an environment of support. With increasing focus on the empowerment of young girls in male-dominated fields around the world, positive relationships with role models and mentors in their field of choice greatly influence the trajectory of the girl's future.⁵³ In celebration of International Women's Day, in 2017, India became the first country to have an all-women flight crew on its four longest routes from India to the United States, using 20 pilots and 75 cabin crew members in total.⁵⁴ Not far behind, in May of 2018 Alaskan Airlines in the United States confirmed the world's first flight operated solely by African-American women pilots and crew. Similar celebrations of diversity took place in countries like France, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁵ This series of "unmanned" flight crews are an international example of representation that serves to engage the public and bring awareness to the growing presence of female pilots.⁵⁶

While the United States reports to have a greater percentage of women in its Air Force (20%) than India's, Air Force (8.5%), this could be due to the difference in size between both forces. In 2017, there were 12,297 pilots in the US Air Force, in comparison to India's 585 active duty fighter pilots.⁵⁷ Beyond the numbers, both countries still have work to do on the topic of gender role stereotypes.⁵⁸ Brené Brown, a leadership scholar with extensive research in the arena of courage and vulnerability, introduced these elements to encourage women leaders to go against the status quo. In conversation with Colonel DeDe Halfhill, the director of innovation, analyses and leadership development for the U.S. Airforce Global Strike Command, they found that nowhere in the most recent Air Force training manual was there reference to a sense of belonging, team-building or common humanity, in comparison to the first version published in 1948.⁵⁹

More broadly, as the pilot community grows, ensuring that mentors and instructors have the tools to offer authentic guidance is paramount to keeping learners interested. Halfhill noted that terms like tactical, operational and strategic leadership as they relate to pilots are important but "provide little guidance to young leaders on how to deal with the complexities of people."⁶⁰ Globally, the primary champions of community-based outreach are national and local affinity groups that work to increase the number of women pilots, and provide resources to curious students. In 1967, the Indian Women's Pilot Association, India's first organized group of female pilots, was established with the sole purpose of increasing the number of women pilots in the country.⁶¹ India has also seen a rise of female pilots go hand-in-hand with the rise of the country's middle class, which further demonstrates aviation to be of economic and social value. In contrast to the United States, India's government-run airlines have a mandated equal pay requirement for

male and female employees.⁶² In a direct effort to amend the costs for students, India's Government organized an initiative that subsidizes the cost of flight school for underserved populations. In 2016, the Special Component Sub-Plan (SCSP) waived the tuition of ten students pursuing their private pilot licenses in the state of Karnataka.⁶³ Today, Indian flight schools maintain a steady 25-30% of female students in classes every year, supporting the upward trend in comparison to the 12.9% of female students in American flight schools.⁶⁴

While the United States and India differ in their strategies to recruit new female private and commercial pilots, they have a shared history when it comes to aviation advocacy in the early 20th century. In 1929, 99 female pilots established The Ninety-Nines International Organization of Women Pilots® in the United States to share their passion for flying with the world. By 1967, the women helped to create the Indian Women Pilots Association and a 99s India chapter to create a network of high-achieving women in aviation. Today, through a variety of scholarships, grants and leadership programs, they aim to "accelerate the advancement of women in all pilot professions."⁶⁵ On a local level, Mount Saint Mary's University, a women's university in Los Angeles, hosts an annual "Expanding Your Horizons" workshop that introduces girls in grades five-eight to careers in STEM — including an aviation component.⁶⁶ The presence of these types of women-led advocacy and education efforts help to reverse the effects of the historical absence of women in senior leadership and mentorship positions.⁶⁷ In the days of passengers challenging the competence of pilots based on gender, now more than ever, women-led organizations that provide tools to address public disapproval and counter discrimination are in global demand.

Conclusion

As a result of many years of advocacy, policy change and civic engagement, most women enjoy greater freedom and agency than those of their mothers and grandmothers. Despite this seemingly more equitable world, the concept of true equity is still challenged concerning what occupations women should pursue. Workforce safety, access to STEM education, gender role stereotypes and professional support are all variables that may help or hinder their journey as pilots. Addressing questions of ability, endurance and skill, as they relate to women pilots, produces consequences that can affect personal well-being and workplace stress. Still, the most transformative of actions have come through mentorship and collaborative projects aimed to uplift the aviation community.

Globally, the abolition of laws that prohibited women pilots from combat service and licensure restored the privilege of choice to 50% of the population. India's success as the world leader in hiring women pilots to the workforce can be attributed to the accessibility of information and programs for women. Instituting recruitment techniques — including a pledge to employee safety, government subsidies for flight schools and union-mandated equal pay — are all strategies that could improve the experience of women pilots around the world.

Despite bias and structural barriers to obtaining licensure for women pilots, social support and access to mentors are the two principal predictors of opportunity and growth. More, and earlier, exposure to piloting — as a stimulating career or as an activity — opens the doors for more women leaders in aviation. Because leadership is all about building a strong and far-reaching community, the invitation for more women to become pilots can only be made more attractive by improving the environment for those women who already serve as pilots and role models.⁶⁸

In Earhart's words, "*Flying may not be all plain sailing, but the fun of it is worth the price.*"⁶⁹ The enthusiasm passed down to younger generations from pioneering female flyers proves that for as long as there is passion, women will continue to surpass boundaries and fly with confidence.

CATEGORIES	ALL PILOTS	WOMEN PILOTS	% OF WOMEN
Pilots	609,306	42,694	7.01%
Students	149,121	19,219	12.89%
Recreational	153	14	9.15%
Sport	6,097	229	3.76%
Private	162,455	9,971	6.14%
Commercial	98,161	6,267	6.38%
Airline Transport	159,825	6,994	4.38%
Rotorcraft	15,355	N/A	N/A
Glider	18,139	N/A	N/A
Flight Instructors	106,692	7,105	6.66%
Remote Pilots	69,1666	3,462	5.01%

Source: [Women in Aviation International](#) via [FAA Aeronautical Center](#) December 2017

Endnotes

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WHAT GOOD IS AN APOLOGY?: RESTORATIVE ETHICS IN THE AGE OF #METOO

Aimée Koeplin, PhD

In October of 2017, two articles broke detailing Harvey Weinstein’s decades of sexual assault and harassment of Hollywood celebrities and others.¹ By October 15, the hashtag “#MeToo” was trending on Twitter.² Women from Hollywood and all strata of society were sharing their own stories of sexual harassment and assault.³ And this time, something was different. Women’s claims of sexual harassment and assault were commanding the attention and gravitas that they have always deserved. Along with serious allegations of wrongdoing have come some very public apologies, acceptances of apologies, and criticisms of apologies. Many of the public apologies of the #MeToo era have been less than satisfying from the point of view of morality. This is an occasion to raise the philosophical question: what *would be* a morally satisfying apology? That is, what makes an apology a *good* one? The project of this paper is to develop a moral philosophical theory of a good apology.⁴ I begin by discussing some of the better and worse features of some of the #MeToo era apologies we have seen. I then argue that the function, or purpose, of an apology in general is restorative, to express a desire to “make up for” the moral harms done to the extent that this is possible. I propose that a good apology is an expression of remorse for a moral wrong done, acknowledging that the target of the wrongdoing did not deserve such treatment and acknowledging moral responsibility for the action. In the second half of this paper, I argue that an apology that fits the criteria I have laid out can make progress towards “making up for” typical moral harms done in cases of sexual harassment. I use the Franken-Tweed photo as a point of analysis of the moral harms typical of sexual harassment — and lay out a case that these typical moral harms are addressed and ameliorated by the features of a good apology that I have set out in the final section.

A Review of Some #MeToo Apologies

In order to get a sense of what goes wrong or right with apologies, let’s take a closer look at a handful of #MeToo apologies that have been issued since October of 2017. We find much to criticize in the public apologies issued by Harvey Weinstein,⁵ Louis C.K.,⁶ and Al Franken⁷. In his early public apology, Weinstein admits, “I realized some time ago that I needed to be a better person... I appreciate the way I’ve behaved with colleagues in the past has caused a lot of pain, and I sincerely apologize for it.” While it is encouraging that Weinstein acknowledges that he could improve as a person, this apology falls well short of what we might expect from someone who is accused of the magnitude of crimes that Weinstein has been accused of.⁸ The allegations against Weinstein include exposing himself to employees and aspiring actresses, physical threats, professional retaliation, and rape.⁹ A short statement of “I know I need to do better,” is not adequate to the task of acknowledging the harm done by Weinstein’s actions of the past decades. Louis C.K.’s apology shows some awareness that propositioning women who are counting on him to promote their work is an abuse of power. He begins his apology by stating, “These stories are true,” which acknowledges and affirms his accusers’ reports. But much of his apology reads as self-promotional. He lists the many projects that he is involved in and suggests that very many people owe their careers to him. Many commenters note that C.K. nowhere uses the words “I’m sorry” or “apology” in his statement.¹⁰ Furthermore, C.K.’s actions since he issued his apology have done a lot to undermine the perceived sincerity of his apology. C.K. has undertaken what many consider a premature attempt at a comeback to the world of standup comedy. C.K.’s standup sets since December 2018 have included jokes that make light of the sexual harassment allegations against him; demonstrating an insensitivity to the seriousness of the allegations against him.¹¹ Similarly, former Senator Al Franken issued both a public apology and a speech on the occasion of resigning from the U.S. Senate. In both of these statements Franken claims that he is

a “champion of women” and urges that women deserve to tell their stories and to be heard. But, Franken also claims that he remembers events differently than Tweeden and his other accusers do. He acknowledges “a number of women have come forward to talk about how they felt my actions affected them.” The passive language that Franken uses here gives the impression that the problem is the women’s feelings. Franken does not here acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Finally, Franken claims that it is “ironic” that he is resigning from his elected office when President Trump has been caught on tape bragging about a history of sexual assault. But this complaint that others have done worse undermines the seriousness of Franken’s own apology. So, even though each of these apologies may contain some insights, each falls well short of what we would hope for in an apology.

So, what would be a morally satisfying, good apology? We can use the tools of moral philosophy to develop a theory of what would count as a worthwhile apology.

Moral Philosophy and Restorative Ethics

But why focus on apologies? First, everyone needs to consider her views on moral philosophy to some extent. As humans living among other human beings, we have little choice but to make daily decisions about what is the best thing to do given the circumstances we are in. It behooves us to carefully consider questions of meaning and value. Further, restorative ethics is important. Too often, moral philosophers reason abstractly about what is morally right and what is morally good, assuming ideal conditions. But we are not in ideal conditions. We are in *medias res* – we’re in the middle of it. Moral philosophy ought to focus more attention on imperfect people in imperfect circumstances. Focusing on apologies can help us in two ways. First, we all need to think about what is the best thing to do when we inevitably find ourselves in moral error. Each of us ought to consider what would make for a good apology because, presumably, each of us will one day find ourselves in circumstances in which the best thing for us to do is to issue a good apology. Even someone truly guilty of all of the things Harvey Weinstein has been accused of remains a part of the moral community. Even this person has to decide what is the morally best thing to do given the circumstances he is in. The answer to this question begins with a thorough, contrite apology. And second, if our goal is to improve the circumstances of women and girls in our society, we ought to recognize that we are not starting from a morally neutral, abstract, starting point. We have a legacy of injustice and inequity around gender to repair and overcome.

Defining A Good Apology

People have various motivations for issuing apologies (and especially *public* apologies). Apologies are made when someone finds that their actions have caused public criticism. People apologize because they have been made to in some way. A child might be required to apologize by a parent. Or someone may be ordered to apologize as part of a legal proceeding. People will often issue public apologies in order to avoid or allay criticism of some actions taken. In sexual harassment cases, it is extremely unusual to see an apology (particularly a public apology) without a precipitating public accusation.¹² Finally, people will sometimes give a “quasi-apology” acknowledging that some action that the agent is responsible for has been subject to some amount of scrutiny or criticism. We might refer to this as the “I’m-sorry-if-this-upset-you” non-apology apology. For the time being, I set aside apologies that are “externally” motivated in these kinds of ways as less than sincere. I am concerned here only with what will make for a good apology in a moral sense.

What I am proposing here is also a restorative project. I am urging a conception of a good apology that takes *remorse* as the central moral attitude expressed. I understand remorse as the desire to *take back or make up* for a morally wrong action to the extent that such is possible. Of course, what has been done cannot really be un-done. But I do take it as a hallmark of remorse that the wrong-doer *wishes* that the moral harm had never occurred in the first place, and is, furthermore, willing to take steps to ameliorate the moral harm that has occurred. I take the emphasis of a good apology to be on the wrongdoer’s desire to “make up for” the moral harm that has occurred.

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It is worth mentioning that I do not consider forgiveness on the part of the target of the wrongdoing to hold any significance for the success of the apology whatsoever. The value of the apology does not depend on whether the target forgives the wrongdoer. I hold it especially important that no one is obligated to offer forgiveness simply because an apology is a good one, or truly heartfelt, or expressive of true remorse or whatever. The target of wrongdoing has no moral obligations to the wrongdoer in virtue of her having had wrong done to her.¹³ I will focus here on the questions of what makes for a good apology and what a good apology can do to ameliorate the particular harm of sexual harassment.

A good apology, I submit, serves the purpose, or function, of trying to restore the moral balance. It is an attempt to “make-up for” an affront to dignity that the target/victim has suffered. The target has suffered some moral harm. An apology affirms the dignity and moral worth of the target. When one apologizes for a wrong done, one affirms the moral worth of the target of the wrong-doing. An apology is a declaration that some “target” has suffered a moral wrong, and her suffering is important and worthy of our moral attention. An apology serves the purpose of assuring the target of wrongdoing that the perpetrator is aware that wrong has occurred and that is regrettable.

An apology, in my view, is an **expression of remorse at a wrong done**. It can be spoken or written. It can be issued publicly or privately. But an apology must be expressed in order to count as an apology. In other words, an apology is necessarily an “illocutionary speech act”— an act accomplished through its expression. And a good apology must have the following features:

1. A good apology must **express remorse**. In order for an apology to be genuine, the apologizer must feel some remorse about the wrong done and must give some expression to that feeling.¹⁴
2. A good apology must **explicitly acknowledge that a morally wrong action occurred**. A good apology states that something happened that was regrettable, caused pain, caused harm, made the target worse off, or was an affront to the dignity of the target. That wrong is worthy of our moral attention.
3. An apology must implicitly or explicitly include **an acknowledgement of the dignity of the target** of the action; the target of the action does not deserve such treatment. If an apology is genuine, then the target, or victim, is acknowledged as someone to whom such treatment was not owed.
4. An apology must implicitly or explicitly include an acceptance and **acknowledgement of responsibility** on the part of the wrong-doer. The wrong action really did happen and the agent was properly responsible for the act.

Notice that on my account the expression of remorse (criterion 1) and acknowledgement of the morally wrong action (criterion 2) must be explicitly stated in order for an apology to count as a good one. The acknowledgement of the dignity of the target (criterion 3) and acceptance of responsibility (criterion 4) need not be explicitly stated. It is important, however, that nothing is said to undermine the dignity of the target or to imply that the apologizer is not really at fault. To summarize, then, if I am making a good apology to you, then I am (1) expressing remorse or regret (2) that a certain action occurred, (3) that it happened to you, and (4) that I caused it.

Examining the Typical Moral Harms of Sexual Harassment: The Franken-Tweedden Photo

In order to see how a good apology could make progress toward restoring the moral balance, let us take a closer look at the nature of the moral offense inherent in sexual harassment. The Al Franken-Leann Tweedden case includes elements that took place in private, but also elements that are quite public and literal illustrations of the problem.¹⁵ In November of 2017, Leann Tweedden, a Los Angeles radio news anchor went public with her account of Senator Al Franken groping and forcibly kissing her while they were on a USO tour together in 2006. Franken was a U.S. Senator at the time of the accusation

in 2017, but not at the time of the incident in 2006. Franken resigned from the Senate on January 2, 2018 as a result of this and similar accusations coming to light. Now, if Tweeden's account had stayed focused on an incident of forcible kissing while rehearsing a comic sketch for the USO, the allegation may have passed with little notice. But, Tweeden's account was accompanied by a now-infamous photograph. In the photograph, Tweeden is asleep in a chair. She is wearing the protective gear of a U.S. Service member: a battle helmet and a camouflage bulletproof vest. Al Franken is hovering over Tweeden's sleeping figure, apparently groping her breasts over the Kevlar jacket. Franken's face is turned toward the camera to reveal the delighted smile of someone who is getting away with something.

So, what is the joke of this photograph? At least part of the joke is that Franken is "getting away with something." Franken seizes his chance to fulfill his desires while the object of his desire is unable to stop him. Tweeden's breasts are an object of desire because Tweeden is a woman. Tweeden is a desirable target of the grasping because she fits into this category of a conventionally attractive woman.¹⁶ Furthermore, Tweeden's dress in the photo is significant. The dress of a service member ordinarily commands a sense of respect, admiration, strength and toughness. At least part of the joke is this impression of a soldier's self-reliance and strength juxtaposed against a feminine, sleeping Tweeden who is vulnerable to non-consensual groping. Franken has found a way to obtain the object of his desire without Tweeden's lack of consent spoiling the fun. Tweeden's apparently exhausted slumber removes her sexual autonomy as a hindrance to Franken's desires. In Kantian ethical terms, in the photo Franken treats Tweeden in a way that she could not possibly agree to be treated.¹⁷

The moral summary of this case, then, is that Tweeden's vulnerability as an object of sexual gratification for Al Franken — despite Tweeden's lack of consent — is made an object of fun. Her body is specifically used as a means of sexual gratification without regard for Tweeden's status as a rational agent capable of consenting or not consenting to sexual activity. One message lurking in the photo is clear. If a woman is sufficiently sexually attractive to a man, her agency does not matter. If she is desirable enough to a man, her choices about what to do with her body are treated as unimportant.

How A Good Apology Can Help to Repair the Moral Harms of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment and violence against women cause many harms for their targets. Targets may suffer professional, economic, and health-related negative effects. Underlying these more tangible ill-effects are the moral harms of sexual harassment. A good apology, in my sense, can make progress toward repairing these moral harms. We can identify three intersecting, identifiable moral harms that are typical of cases of sexual harassment: (A) the respect problem, (B) the "gaslighting" problem,¹⁸ and (C) the acceptance problem. Recall that my definition of a good apology was (1) an expression of remorse, (2) explicitly acknowledging a wrong done, (3) to someone who did not deserve such treatment, (4) caused by the person doing the apologizing. I believe we can see that these criteria of a good apology address the particular problems of high-profile sexual harassment in a way that helps to fulfill the function, or goal, of an apology—to "take back" or "make up for" the moral harms caused by the wrong action (to the extent that this is possible).

First, sexual harassment treats someone in a way that she ought not to be treated. I call this the respect problem. And I take it to be the fundamental problem of sexual harassment. The Franken-Tweeden photo, for example, shows a profound lack of respect for the target's rational autonomy, or rational agency.¹⁹ A person's rational agency is respected when she is permitted to pursue her own projects, plans, and goals without the interference of force, coercion, or deception. She is respected as a self-determining person and not treated merely as a tool that someone else may use to achieve his projects, plans, or goals. One aspect of rational agency is sexual agency. If a person's sexual agency is respected, then she is permitted to follow her own sexual choices. This is typically understood in terms of consent. Respect for agency requires that no one be required or expected to participate in a sexual project that is not freely chosen. Cases

of sexual harassment often involve some overt or implied *quid pro quo* transactionalism. This is particularly true in cases where powerful men have a great deal of influence over a woman's potential for career advancement. Consider the numerous up-and-coming actresses harassed by Harvey Weinstein. Consider the ingenue comedienne to whom Louis C.K. exposed himself. In addition to these high-profile cases, consider all of the waitstaff and restaurant workers who rely on tips for the bulk of their income. The "respect problem" reveals why a good apology admits that the harassing treatment was a moral wrong done to someone who did not deserve such treatment. A good apology admits that the wrongdoer previously believed a woman's desirability to him mattered more than the woman's own sexual choices — and that he now understands his mistake.

Secondly, we have what I call the "gaslighting" problem. To "gaslight" someone is to convince her that she is mistaking the facts, that what she perceives to have happened did not really happen. Gaslighting, it seems, is extremely common in cases of sexual harassment. Accused men have often exhibited a great tendency to categorically deny accusations of harassment. A harasser might characterize his actions as playful, or as harmless office fun. For example, Bishop Charles H. Ellis III apologized after visibly groping Ariana Grande's breast on live television at Aretha Franklin's funeral for "being too friendly."²⁰ Denying or minimizing reports of women's lived experiences of harassment is common. As a society, we tend to dismiss women's lived experiences of harassment and look for explanations of "what he must have meant".²¹ In the Franken-Tweedden case we also saw commentators on social media and elsewhere questioning whether Franken was actually groping Tweedden in the infamous photo or whether his hands were hovering over her as though to grab.²² While, I suppose, it is possible that Franken merely mimics or gives the impression of actual groping, this is hardly the point. In this case the skeptics are asking observers to discount the plain evidence of their senses and believe in Franken's innocence.²³ Combatting the gaslighting problem is also one reason why the reports of women from all walks of life under the hashtag #MeToo is so powerful. Posting under this hashtag affirms for other women and for all of society that harassment and other forms of sexual misconduct do happen and are quite common. And it is also why a good apology with explicit acknowledging that the moral wrong occurred is so powerful. Consider Louis C.K.'s public apology. Despite other shortcomings, he starts out by saying, "These stories are true." Simply acknowledging that the claims made by his accusers are true does a lot of work in bringing the problems of sexual harassment into the light of day.

Indeed, some prominent accusers have reported that receiving a good apology has had a healing, validating effect for them. Caitlyn Flanagan writes compellingly of the importance of an apology she received from someone who attempted to rape her when they were both in high school.²⁴ Megan Ganz, a writer who was harassed on the set of the TV show *Community*, received an apology from her boss Dan Harmon. Ganz remarked that she was relieved to have her perception of events confirmed by Harmon's apology.²⁵ The confirmation of events provided by an apology can help to combat the gaslighting effect.²⁶

Finally, the "acceptance problem" might be the most damaging effect of cases of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment has been a pervasive part of American culture. Both women and men are acclimatized to believe that this culture of sexual harassment is "just the way things are." According to a recent report by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC),²⁷ 25% of women are sexually harassed in the workplace — one out of every four women. According to a Harvard Review of Business study, 85% of the study's participants — women restaurant workers — were sexually harassed by managers, colleagues or customers within the study's 30-day period. Women are routinely expected to accept street harassment as a normal part of their lives. It is no exaggeration to point out that women organize their lives around avoiding the threat of sexual violence. Women avoid sexual violence by deciding where they park their cars, where they go and at what time, what floor of an apartment building they can live on and in myriad other small ways. (And they are, indeed, expected to do all these

things. Our society places the burden for avoiding sexual violence on women and teen girls.) By issuing an apology, a wrongdoer is turning his back on a culture of acceptance for sexual harassment and sexual violence. Any good apology for sexual harassment is an indication that the wrongdoer accepts that a moral wrong has occurred and that he played a causal role in bringing about that moral wrong. Genuine apologies like these help to chip away at the culture of acceptance. But public apologies in high-profile cases may play a special role here. When a high-profile harasser issues a good apology, not only does he acknowledge that a wrong was done and that he was responsible for that wrong, but he can also influence others to abandon the confraternity of harassers as well.²⁸

Conclusions

It is true that most of the public apologies that we have seen in the #MeToo era have fallen well short of what we might hope for in an apology. But these half-hearted apologies serve as an occasion to consider what would make for a morally satisfying, good apology. I have argued that the function of an apology is an attempt to restore the moral order, that is, as an attempt to restore the balance of justice. A good apology, then, is an expression of remorse for a moral wrong done, which affirms the dignity of the target and accepts responsibility for the action. And "remorse" as a desire to "undo" or "make up for" the moral harm caused by the morally wrong action. And I have argued that in the case of sexual harassment a good apology does have potential to make some progress towards undoing the moral harm that occurs. A good apology affirms the dignity of the target of the action and of women in general. A good apology acknowledges that the harassment occurred and helps to undo the gaslighting problem that often occurs in sexual harassment cases. A good apology accepts responsibility for the moral harm done and helps to undo an atmosphere where women are blamed for sexual harassment and violence and expected to plan their lives around avoiding it. In all of these ways, a good apology can make progress towards a cultural climate of justice that respects the choices and safety of women and girls and helps them to achieve their full potential at work and in their communities.

Endnotes

¹ Farrow, R. (2017, October 10). From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories. *The New Yorker*. [newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories](https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories)

Kantor, J. and Twohey M. (2017, October 5). Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades. *New York Times*. [nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html)

² Although use of the hashtag “#MeToo” surged on Twitter since October 2017. The “Me Too” campaign is a much older movement—predating Twitter itself. It was created in 1997 by sexual abuse survivor activist Tarana Burke. See Garcia, S. (2017, October 20) The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags. *New York Times*. [nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html)

³ In this paper, I am limiting my analysis of sexual harassment to the sexual harassment of women by men and the cultural conditions that allow for this. Men, too, can be targets of sexual harassment. But the cultural and other circumstances surrounding the sexual harassment of men are quite different, I think, from the circumstances surrounding the harassment of women.

⁴ Note that I am using the term “good apology” here as a technical term. Spelling out the precise details of what a “good apology” is is the project of this paper. For now, take it to stand for a morally satisfying apology, a sincere apology, an apology that does the moral work that we think an apology ought to do.

⁵ I am commenting on Weinstein's apology dated October 5, 2017. This apology was issued on the same day as the *New York Times* article by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey. It was issued before the *New Yorker* story by Ronan Farrow had been published. And before the full scope of the allegations against Weinstein were known. AP (2017, October 5) Harvey Weinstein Scandal: Read His Full Apology. *USA Today*. [usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2017/10/05/harvey-weinstein-scandal-read-his-full-apology/738093001](https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2017/10/05/harvey-weinstein-scandal-read-his-full-apology/738093001)

⁶ Read the full text: (2017, November 10) Louis C.K. Responds to Accusations: 'These Stories Are True.' *New York Times*. [nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement.html)

⁷ See: CNN (2017, November 17) Read Al Franken's Apology Following Accusations of Groping and Kissing Without Consent. CNN. [cnn.com/2017/11/16/politics/al-franken-apology/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/16/politics/al-franken-apology/index.html)
Phillips, A. (2017, December 7) Al Franken's Defiant, Unapologetic Resignation Speech, Annotated. *The Washington Post*. [washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/12/07/al-frankens-defiant-unapologetic-resignation-speech-annotated/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4c485e901019](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/12/07/al-frankens-defiant-unapologetic-resignation-speech-annotated/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4c485e901019)

⁸ See: BBC (2019, January 10). Harvey Weinstein Scandal: Who Has Accused Him of What? BBC News. [bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41580010](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41580010)

⁹ Note that Weinstein denies many of these charges.

¹⁰ France, L. (2017, November 11). Was that Louis C.K. Apology Really One At All? CNN News. [cnn.com/2017/11/10/entertainment/louis-ck-apology-reaction/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/10/entertainment/louis-ck-apology-reaction/index.html)

¹¹ Wynne, K. (January 17 2019) Louis C.K. Joke Mocks Misconduct Scandal: 'I Like to Jerk Off and I Don't Like to Be Alone.' *Newsweek*. [newsweek.com/louis-ck-joke-mocks-sexual-misconduct-scandal-i-jerk-and-i-dont-being-alone-1296119](https://www.newsweek.com/louis-ck-joke-mocks-sexual-misconduct-scandal-i-jerk-and-i-dont-being-alone-1296119)

¹² Whether someone requires an accusation as a catalyst for a subsequent apology is not a deciding factor, I think, in whether their apology is genuine or not. I don't think that it is especially surprising that in a society like ours, a person in power might need to be told that he has done something that is problematically harassing towards a woman or towards women in general. I would like to point out that many divisions of the Society of Jesus have recently opened their records and made public the list of priests who have been “credibly accused” of sexual misconduct.¹³ The reader may think that pointing out that the target of sexual

harassment or even violence is under no obligation to forgive her harasser is too obvious to mention. But I will point out that targets often experience a great deal of pressure to “forgive” her harasser. This is a particular problem in Christian religious communities. One example is the case involving Sovereign Grace Ministries. According to court filings, young children were required to forgive their abusers and even offer them hugs. The filing can be found here: thewartburgwatch.com/tww2/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/20130514115743611.pdf.

I would further point out that what is often meant here is not really forgiveness, but a mere overlooking of moral harm. For a philosophically rigorous discussion of the nature of forgiveness, see Hieronymi, P. (May 2001) Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

¹⁴ I recognize that a feeling of remorse is not the same as an expression of remorse. An expression of remorse can be faked—whether this fakery is convincing or unconvincing. On my view, a good and genuine apology must come from a genuine feeling of remorse.

¹⁵ The Franken-Tweeden case is not the most egregious case of sexual harassment we have seen, nor is it the most notorious. I have chosen to focus on this case because I think the widely circulated photograph that documents one part of this harassment is well-known and illustrates what I take to be some of the typical features of the moral harms of sexual harassment.

¹⁶ It is fair to point out that Franken's looks bring something to the joke of the photo as well. Franken brings a slightly goofy look and a zany energy to the photo. It is not just that Leeann Tweeden is an attractive woman being groped, she is an attractive woman being groped by a goofy, zany guy!

¹⁷ For more on Kant's view that it is a hallmark of moral wrongness to treat a rational agent in a way that she could not possibly agree to be treated, see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section 2.

¹⁸ As I discuss in more detail below, the term “gaslighting” comes from the 1944 film *Gaslight*. It describes the practice of trying to convince someone that she is mistaking the facts, that what she perceived to have happened did not really happen.

¹⁹ Rational autonomy, or rational agency, is one's ability to formulate and act upon a set of projects, plans, and goals of one's own choosing.

²⁰ Although Ellis “apologized” his apology did not count as a good one on my view. The groping incident occurred after Bishop Ellis joked that he thought Ms. Grande was “a new menu item at Taco Bell,” managing to make a racist, de-humanizing joke in addition to groping Grande. For more on this incident, see: Caron, C. (2018, September 1). Pastor Accused of Groping Ariana Grande Apologizes for Being 'Too Friendly.' *nytimes.com/2018/09/01/arts/music/ariana-grande-funeral-groping-bishop-ellis.html*.

²¹ This is the phenomenon that Kate Manne refers to as “himpathy” which she defines as “the inappropriate and disproportionate sympathy powerful men often enjoy in cases of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, homicide and other misogynistic behavior.” See: Mann, K. (2018, September 26) Brett Kavanaugh and America's 'Himpathy' Reckoning. *The New York Times*. [nytimes.com/2018/09/26/opinion/brett-kavanaugh-hearing-himpathy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/opinion/brett-kavanaugh-hearing-himpathy.html)

See also Manne, K. (2017) *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*

²² See for example, Hankins, M. (2017, November 27) Evidence Against Senator Al Franken Seems Rehearsed. *The Herald Dispatch*. [herald-dispatch.com/opinion/milt-hankins-evidence-against-sen-al-franken-seems-rehearsed/article_02cb9397-7194-5e71-bc84-eb3956f6f3d2.html](https://www.herald-dispatch.com/opinion/milt-hankins-evidence-against-sen-al-franken-seems-rehearsed/article_02cb9397-7194-5e71-bc84-eb3956f6f3d2.html).

²³ To be clear, Franken himself has not denied actually groping Tweeden in the photo.

²⁴ Flanagan, C. (2018, September 1). I Believe Her. *The Atlantic*. theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/09/me-too/570520.

²⁵ Bromwich, J. (2018, January 13) Megan Ganz on Dan Harmon's Apology: 'I Felt Vindicated.' *New York Times*. nytimes.com/2018/01/13/arts/dan-harmon-megan-ganz.html

²⁶ Two cases from another context are illustrative here. Elizabeth Eckford acknowledged feeling a great sense of relief after Hazel Massery apologized to her. Eckford was a member of the "Little Rock Nine" who initiated the racial integration of Arkansas' Little Rock High School in September 1957. Massery was captured in a famous photo of the American Civil Rights era yelling and sneering at Eckford, her face twisted with rage, as Eckford entered the school. David Margolick chronicled this relationship: Margolick, D. (2011). *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock*. Yale University Press.

The importance of a confirmation of events is supported by Desmond Tutu's groundbreaking work in restorative justice with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committees. In these committees providing a detailed, truthful account of the events that occurred was enough for amnesty. No outward show of remorse was required. Only the truth. Because just hearing the truth spoken out loud by the wrongdoer proved to have a healing effect in and of itself. See Tutu, D. (1999) *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

²⁷ Read this EEOC report in full: eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/upload/report.pdf.

²⁸ Unfortunately, this can easily work the other way as well. High-profile cases where a harasser walks away from the case "scot-free" and unrepentant can encourage others to engage in harassing behavior.

COLLECTIF
IDENTITY AND
HISTORY:
DECENTERING
THE NARRATIVE

Wendy J. McCredie, PhD

"[A novel] should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also work. It should have something to say that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe."

"[T]he best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time."

– TONI MORRISON, "ROOTEDNESS"

"[Stories] become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history."

– EDWARD SAID,
CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM

The stories and histories we tell ourselves, that our families and our society or culture tell us, function like borders — borders that define not only who we are (as individuals and as communities), but also what it is possible for us to become or to envision. These borders can wall us in or open onto new or different vistas. While at one time we may understand a border as a protective wall, at another time we will understand it as an invitation to new experiences. However, we do not experience these two facets of borders at the same time, as closing off **and** opening up a possibility simultaneously. The very nature of literature, however, is to deal in such mutually exclusive views. Powerful literary narratives can present us with opposing views, without resolving that opposition. We cannot "decide" in favor of one view or the other without ignoring key elements of the story. This undecidability can be unsettling, even destabilizing, but when we allow literary texts to reveal multiple possibilities for community- and identity-construction, we open the possibility of revising not just our individual narratives, but our community or cultural narratives as well.

Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* is one narrative that provides its readers with such an opportunity. Like most of Morrison's work (both fiction and non-fiction), this novel re-inscribes black American experiences onto the canvas of American history, expanding its frame and revealing new perspectives. The result is a complex and potentially liberating narrative that, rather than establish a different center, works to decenter the very story that grounds the novel. This movement away from a singular point of origin disallows any privileging or privileged voice and expands the narrative's borders beyond itself. *Song of Solomon* thus challenges and exceeds even its own narrative structure.

That narrative structure, as it has become commonplace to note, both repeats and reverses that of the Great Migration — black Americans' migration from the South to the North and West. What has garnered somewhat less attention is the narrative's radical undecidability regarding what seems to be a core human need for knowing where one comes from, for knowing one's heritage, one's family tree and community of origin. Published a year after Alex Haley's immensely successful novel *Roots*,¹ *Song of Solomon* uses song, family stories and folk stories to tease out a fictional family's multiple, but incomplete, connections with its past.

¹ See Helen Taylor's discussion of *Roots* and its ensuing controversies in "Everybody's Search for *Roots*: Alex Haley and the Black and White Atlantic," 2001.

The Story

Prior to the opening of the novel, the death of Macon Dead Sr., the subsequent escape of his children (Pilate Dead and Macon Dead Jr.), and both their journeys further north ground the Dead family's story in black America's pattern of northern migration. After their father is killed defending the borders of their property, Macon Jr. heads north to escape both from white violence and to wealth that could not so easily be taken away. In his own mind, he succeeds. At the end of his journey (and by the time the novel opens), Macon Dead Jr. has literally bought into the American Dream of self-sufficiency, of propertied autonomy. He is a "propertied Negro who handle[s] his business so well and live[s] in the big house." The keys to his rental houses represent a "solidity," without which he "would have floated away" (MORRISON 20; 22)¹.

Macon's sister Pilate has gone in a different direction. After brother and sister part ways, she wanders from one community to another until she eventually arrives in the same city as her brother. Instead of establishing herself as a pillar of the community, as Macon sees himself, she and her daughter and granddaughter set up a bootlegging operation on the margins of the city's black community. Macon describes them as "a collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets" (21).

Macon's son, nicknamed Milkman, seems to be heading in the same direction as his father. However, at almost the precise center of the novel, when Guitar (Milkman's best friend) and he are planning how to rob Pilate of what they think is her bag of gold—thus ensuring their own American Dream—they encounter a white peacock and are sidetracked. They try to catch the bird (much as they are trying to catch Pilate's bag of gold) "But the bird had set them up." They stop chasing it, fascinated. Milkman asks, "How come it can't fly no better than a chicken?" To which Guitar knowingly responds: "Too much tail. All that jewelry weighs it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (179). Instead of continuing to plan the heist, the two men fantasize about what they will do with their future wealth. But Milkman

couldn't get deep into Guitar's talk of elegant clothes for himself....

He screamed and shouted 'Wooooeee!' at Guitar's list, but because his life was not unpleasant and even had a certain amount of luxury in addition to its comfort, he felt off center. He just wanted to beat a path away from his parents' past, which was also their present and which was threatening to become his present as well. (180, EMPHASIS MINE)

Milkman's path leads him south rather than north — first in search of lost gold on his father's assignment, then in a quest to find his family's history. That search for his family's community of origin doubles as Milkman's individual quest for self-knowledge and centeredness. His father had journeyed north to escape from the past and build a prosperous future. Milkman journeys south to escape the present and finds the past. Macon and Milkman embody what Robert Stepto has identified as the narratives of ascent and immersion:

In [narratives of ascent], the individual, in order to escape slavery and oppression in the real or symbolic South, leaves his or her family, friends and community and embraces a life of isolation and alienation.... The hero or heroine of the narrative of ascent is quintessentially a solitary person... On the other hand, the narrative of immersion involves a movement to the real or symbolic South. The hero or heroine seeks tribal literacy and knowledge. Less individualistic, he or she moves into the community, embracing its traditions and ways of life. (TWAGILIMANA 210)

Morrison herself has spoken eloquently of the importance of tradition, community and historical embeddedness. In a 2006 interview with NPR's Lynn Neary, after the publication of *A Mercy*, Morrison suggests that we need "an outside thing [to] hold [us] together."

¹ In-text citations follow MLA formatting conventions. The following Works Cited page lists complete references.

And she identifies American individualism as dangerous precisely because of its emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence from such structures. “[S]elf-sufficiency is not enough.... You really do need a community; you do need a structure, whether it’s a church or religion, or whether it’s just belonging to a military or belonging to a tribe.” Even as early as 1974, three years before the publication of *Song of Solomon*, Morrison stated, “I want to point out the dangers ... to the totally self-reliant if there is no conscious historical connection” (“ROOTEDNESS” 344).

Milkman’s journey and the knowledge acquired through that journey, in particular the stories he hears — the narrative processes themselves — transform his reverse migration in search of missing gold into a search for his family’s past and his present. The stories (and songs) Milkman hears as he journeys south flesh out, and correct, the stories his father and his aunt have told, and connect Pilate’s song with a community and a history. He fills in the gaps in the family history; he supplements their stories, and by so doing clarifies the family’s narrative boundaries and its origins.

Milkman’s recovery of the lost parts of his family narrative duplicates Morrison’s work as a writer intent on recovering lost parts of the narrative of American history. Black Americans have been cut off from and cut out of history written by and from a privileged white center. Morrison’s works recover that history, thus decentering an American narrative of white privilege. In this novel, Milkman’s discoveries uncover the narrative that grounds his family’s history. His deracinated family, cut off from the past because of a drunken white soldier’s mistakes, is regrounded, recentered, in its community of origin.

Prior to Milkman’s journey and subsequent discoveries, the Dead family has been “dead” to its past, except for Pilate who carries around the bag of bones that Macon Dead Jr. mistakes for a bag of stolen gold. This bag connects her to her past, but not in the way either she or her brother imagines. Pilate mistakes the contents of the bag to be the bones of a white man she believes she and Macon killed. Macon believes it contains the gold that they discovered after that killing. For each of them these mistaken identities are central to their own identities.

Pilate believes she is living out her father’s wish both by having gathered the bones and by singing. Macon believes only in gold. Both Macon and Pilate derive their own sense of identity, draw borders around their life narratives, by means of what they believe is in the bag. Pilate’s search for the white man’s bones and Macon’s search for gold are the mis-recognized objects of desire that they believe complete their respective stories. These misrecognitions are also the motivating force behind Milkman’s search for identity and community. They are the essential marginal glosses to the original song of Solomon and the originating community of Shalimar. As essential glosses, they are central to Milkman’s and his family’s story of origin in Shalimar. These marginalia are, in fact, central — just as Pilate, whose marginal existence Macon tries hard but ineffectively to ignore, is central to that story.

Because Pilate’s bag holds the bones of Macon Dead Sr., she carries with her both her and her brother Macon’s “point of origin.” In addition, since the song she sings frames the narrative, she also establishes the narrative’s borders. However, her understanding of the song (and why she is singing it) and what is in the bag, is a misunderstanding. Her grounding narrative rests on an unstable foundation of unrecognized incomplete knowledge. The supplemental fragments supplied from what seem marginal characters both in the novel and in the family history make possible the recovery of a more complete family story.

The Song

In the beginning of the novel, Pilate sings “O Sugarman done fly away...” as the crowd waits for Robert Smith, insurance agent and a member of the Seven Days, to “fly away on [his] own wings” and at the end of the novel, Milkman sings a revised line of the same song: “Sugargirl don’t leave me here...” as Pilate dies in his arms (3; 336). *Song of Solomon* opens with song and ends with song, thus emphasizing (along with the title) the role of song and of storytelling through song within the novel. The multiple apparently complete stories, along with the fragmentary pieces of song and story the reader and

Milkman “hear,” require an engaged search for understanding. Morrison’s written story refers us to story-telling forms other than the novel. Like Milkman, the reader must decipher oral and popular or folk traditions, such as Pilate’s and the children’s songs, to understand the Dead family’s story. Through deciphering the riddles these snatches of song represent and interpreting sometimes disjointed events, both the readers and Milkman reach a clearer understanding about the Dead family’s origins. Similarly, when we fill in the gaps in a history told from a single privileged perspective, we recover a more complete American story. Indeed, folklore and folk art, like the songs in *Song of Solomon*, may aid us in that endeavor.

Song, like oral storytelling and written narrative, is an art form. It is a lyric, a poem that contains layers of meaning and signification. It makes meaning, like other literary genres, on multiple levels. We are introduced to the titular song at the beginning of the novel (immediately prior to Milkman’s birth) and then over the course of the novel, as we learn the Dead family history and Milkman becomes an adult, it fades to the background. Its status as “background noise” is emphasized when we read of Macon Dead surreptitiously listening to it as he crouches outside Pilate’s window. The song returns in a children’s game just as Milkman has almost completed his quest to find his family origins. Milkman knits the fragments of geography, song, loss and love back together. Milkman’s father’s desire for gold, Pilate’s attentiveness to her dead father’s wishes, Milkman’s own journey, and the final recurrence of the song in Shalimar enable the readers and Milkman to recreate his family’s narrative. Together with Milkman, we fill in the blanks to create that narrative — in order for it to “work” it must be connected to and interlaced with a larger, historically or communally grounded one. Until he understands the latter, Milkman cannot locate himself within any meaningful narrative. He lacks a central reference point for his own identity. When he tells the family’s recovered story to Pilate, he creates the frame, or the borders, for his story as well—establishing from where and from whom he came. Once he shares those discoveries with Pilate, she, in turn — now in possession of the whole story — can take her father’s bones back to the family’s community of origin and bury them. Along with those bones, she buries the misconstrued past and the misconstrued treasure, making possible Milkman’s final flight.

Possession of the whole story makes possible, perhaps even necessitates, Milkman’s final flight. In the novel’s foreword, Morrison states, “Opening the novel with the suicidal leap of the insurance agent, ending it with the protagonist’s confrontational soar into danger, was meant to enclose the mystical but problematic one taken by the Solomon of the title” (xii). In the process of uncovering his father’s narrative — of filling in the narrative gaps and establishing more firmly its frame, or border — Milkman begins to shape his own. He differentiates himself from his father and simultaneously supplements his father’s and Pilate’s stories, filling in the gaps, providing new information and correcting misunderstandings. In the end, however, he flies out of the story — he exceeds the narrative bounds at the same time as he completes that same narrative. We can understand the individual leap into the air that is simultaneously a familial regrounding in community as a Derridean *supplément*.¹ It both completes and exceeds the narrative. Milkman supplies missing information so that his family’s origin in Shalimar is recovered and the family history is completed; then, he repeats his ancestor’s recourse to flight and appears to abandon that history, his family, and his new-found community by flying out of it.

Milkman flies out of his own story, which was limited by geographical, historical and narrative borders, and into the many folk stories of flying Africans. Henry Louis Gates and Maria Tatar identify two “narrative twists on that miraculous feat”:

In the first, newly arrived Africans take one look at the conditions facing them in the New World and turn their backs on slavery. Dismayed and revolted, they take wing and fly back across the ocean. In the other, an African shaman or some other charismatic figure chants verses to physically depleted slaves laboring in the fields and enables them to fly. Like the lead bird in a migratory formation, he brings them back home. (65)

¹ Derrida’s *supplément* simultaneously supplies what is missing adds to, supplements, something, in this case the Dead story, that is already complete. See Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*.

Milkman's flight thus simultaneously completes his family's story and connects it with the broader cultural one. His flight exceeds the narrative borders he helped establish and, by so doing, expands those borders. *Song of Solomon* suggests we need narrative borders — structures outside ourselves, shared with others — to establish our identity and to develop a sense of self within those limits. Those borders establish a grounding or centering story for individuals and communities. However, *Song of Solomon* also challenges any attempt to assign rigid singularity to such a narrative.

Milkman can only ever be free from his father's narrative when, instead of simply reversing the narrative journeys his father and Pilate take, he adds to those narratives and completes the story — by flying. That repetition of the original flight expands the family origin represented by the bones in Pilate's bag to include not just Solomon, but all the flying Africans. Thus, the song that frames the narrative also represents its point of origin beyond the origin in the bag. All the versions of the song refer to Solomon's leap into the ravine, his flight to freedom. At the center of this story, then, is an absent presence: Solomon (and the flying Africans). His presence as origin is marked by the repetition of the songs that sometimes celebrate his flight, sometimes mourn the absence caused by that flight. In fact, Solomon's absence, like that of the flying Africans, is necessary in order for his story in song to exist, to be present. Solomon disappears, abandoning his family and thereby creating its founding story. Milkman recovers this story, only to fly out of it. It seems that, like Solomon, he has abandoned his family, a new-found love, and a welcoming community, to fly free from the story. On the one hand, he escapes any narrative bounds; on the other, he fulfills that narrative.

What is gained by the repetition of Solomon's flight? Morrison's statement that Milkman "soar[s] into danger" suggests that, unlike his ancestor, Milkman flies to confront, rather than escape, the violence that his erstwhile friend Guitar represents. His flight also represents freedom from all that the white peacock's tail represents, especially from all his father's material concerns. We would not be reading the narrative well, however, if we gloss this flight as purely positive or unambiguous. Milkman is abandoning his dysfunctional family, leaving behind his mother and his two sisters along with his father. He has sacrificed two women who loved him: Pilate and Hagar. And he is abandoning a new-found community and the possibility of a future in that community.

Ultimately, Morrison's narrative structure, in addition to recentering and reframing the Dead family's story, subverts any complacent re-identification of a renewed grounding narrative. The expansion of one family's story beyond its singular borders reconnects that family with a larger historical and cultural community. However, that expansion does nothing to redeem the violence and dysfunction that motivated Milkman's journey and the narrative in the first place, at its origins. That violence and dysfunction continue to exist within the frame of the original narrative and within the recovered narrative frame.

Song of Solomon, thus, challenges its own narrative borders and subverts any centering story or boundaries that establish a privileged center or origin. The narrative demonstrates the hubris of believing that we understand what we "have in the bag," what we believe we have understanding or control of. It also reveals the damage we do to others and ourselves when we prize individual freedom over community. Finally, it reminds us of the inescapable role real historical and cultural events play in the lives of both individuals and communities. As Morrison has said, "The novel "need not solve...problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe" ("ROOTEDNESS" 341).

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COLLECTIF

U.S. MATERNITY CARE IN CRISIS

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Health equity is the aspiration that all people have the opportunity to achieve optimal health for themselves and their families. In the United States, health equity does not currently exist.

To understand why, we must first understand the social determinants of health: the external forces that influence an individual's health throughout their lifetime. In maternal-infant care, the social determinants of health affect outcomes beginning in fetal life, throughout pregnancy, during childbirth, postpartum and continuing throughout a person's life. The places we live, work and play, the social and physical environments where we spend our time, our access to healthy food, clean air and clean water — these are all social determinants of health.¹

From the beginning of our nation, historical inequalities in opportunity and access — in terms of social, educational and physical environments — have had a direct impact on the social determinants of health. Health justice² and reproductive justice³ are the social justice framework for issues of maternal-infant health.

In our nation, maternal-infant health outcomes are unequal along lines of income. However, when health outcomes are classified by race, Black⁴ maternal-infant health outcomes are worse, independent of income. This suggests that regardless of wealth, the pervasiveness of racism in the United States has a deleterious effect on health.

In order to repair and improve our current U.S. maternity care system, we must have a clear understanding as to how it was designed, whom it privileges and whom it marginalizes. Death during childbirth or early life is not the only measure to be considered when evaluating the U.S. maternity care system. A deeper dive into the latest evidence around women's lived experiences within our maternity care system provides another valuable perspective. To gain a broader understanding of the problem and uncover some possible solutions, this paper will provide a comparison to global maternal-infant health outcomes. The effect of racism on the female body, the physiology of labor and birth, and the connection between nervous system regulation and long-term health will be discussed. And a historical analysis of the system will reveal how the medical system, as designed, is a powerful driving force for the outcomes we see today. The systematic elimination of a huge midwifery workforce in this nation has left crucial social and emotional elements of maternal-infant care untended.

Contrast in outcomes: Maternal-infant health in U.S. and peer nations

Mothers and babies in the United States are at greater risk of death related to childbearing than any other developed nation. A recent Commonwealth Fund study of 11 developed nations ranked the U.S. last in maternal-infant outcomes.⁵

- The United States' maternal morbidity rate is almost four times greater than that of Sweden — and double Canada's rate.⁶
- The United States ranks 24th in infant mortality rates, trailing Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea and every European nation.⁷

Even though U.S. maternal-infant care spending exceeds that of other industrialized countries, our nation sees significantly worse outcomes.⁸ U.S. women carry the highest chronic disease burden, have the highest rates of emotional distress⁹ and are more likely to birth by cesarean section.¹⁰ U.S. women are least likely to rate their care as "excellent" or "very good."¹¹

Notwithstanding efforts to expand health insurance, nearly half of U.S. women report problems with medical costs, with more than one-third reporting they "skip needed medical care because of cost."¹²

Focus: Black maternal-infant outcomes

The domestic and global contrast in maternal and infant health outcomes can overshadow an even graver and persistent reality: In the United States, Black mothers and babies experience much worse outcomes than all other races.¹³ Racial discrimination and cultural bias¹⁴ are seen in both access to care and the experience of care.¹⁵

Maternal-infant health outcome data provide a stark picture of health inequity in the U.S.:¹⁶

- Black mothers die at 3.5 times the rate of white mothers during or after childbirth¹⁷
- Black mothers' death rate is 40 deaths/100,000 births versus 13/100,000 births for white mothers¹⁸
- Black infants are more than twice as likely to die than white infants, and three times that of Asian babies^{19 20}

Compared to all other U.S. racial groups, Black mothers suffer greater incidence of hypertension, more interventions during labor, higher mortality and more severe morbidity.²¹ Black babies have consistently lower birthweights, are twice as likely to be born premature²² and are least likely to be breastfed of all races.²³ These conditions impact lifelong health, meaning these babies are behind before they even get started.

Black maternal-infant health

There is no empirical evidence to support a genetic explanation of the outcome disparities between Black women and other women in low-birth weight and pre-term births. An important study comparing the birth weights of babies found:

"The overall birth weight distributions for infants of U.S.-born white women and African-born women were almost identical, with U.S.-born Black women's infants comprising a distinctly different population, weighing hundreds of grams less."²⁴

In this study, it only took one generation in the U.S. for these African-born Black mothers to have more prematurity and lower birth weight.²⁵ These data suggest the impact of living in a racist society has a deleterious influence on infant health outcomes.

While studies show poor mothers and babies suffer worse outcomes, socio-economic status offers little protection for Black moms and babies. Higher socioeconomic status does not necessarily lead to improved birth outcomes for Black mothers at the same rate as it does for white women.²⁶ Serena Williams,²⁷ Shalon Irving²⁸ and Kira Johnson²⁹ are prominent examples of mothers where financial security and education did not protect them from high-risk conditions. A common experience highlighted by these three stories is a Black mother's voice being devalued and disrespected by the medical community.³⁰

From the patient's perspective

A fuller picture emerges of the challenges facing childbearing families when morbidity and mortality outcome data are supplemented with qualitative findings. Two recent surveys help bring sharper focus to the lived experience of patients and families in the U.S. maternity care system. "Giving Voice to Mothers: Measuring Respectful Maternity Care in the United States," a nationwide survey that intentionally oversampled foreign-born and women of color, surveyed 2,260 women. Twenty percent of respondents were not satisfied with their role in clinical decision-making around birth interventions. Women of color reported more incidences of disrespectful care and reduced access to options for physiologic birth.³¹ Black mothers reported experiencing high rates of racism within the healthcare system.³²

"Listening to Mothers," conducted by the California Health Foundation, surveyed 2,539 women.³³ Although 74% of respondents agreed that childbirth should not be interfered with unless medically necessary, Black and Latina women held this belief most strongly. Yet, barely five percent of women actually gave birth without medical intervention. Epidurals, inductions of labor and cesarean sections are identified as overused interventions that can make labor and delivery less safe for mothers and babies.³⁴ High-intervention births lead to breastfeeding difficulties that can have a deleterious impact on the lifelong health of both mother and infant.

Over-medicalization of birth varied when classified by race and income with women birthing in higher-performing hospitals less likely to receive medical interventions.³⁵ Women birthing in lower-performing hospitals (specifically Black women) are more likely to receive interventions that can lead to complications.³⁶

Women of color and foreign-born women reported more incidences of disrespectful maternity care and increased pressure to accept interventions like induction of labor or cesarean section.^{37,38} Black mothers reported being spoken to in harsh, rude or threatening language and being handled roughly during their labor and birth experience in greater numbers than white mothers.³⁹ Institutional racism is cited as a factor in these outcomes.⁴⁰

Black mothers disproportionately reported feeling anxious or depressed prior to and following their birth and reported fewer sources of practical and emotional support after childbirth.⁴¹

Findings from the 2018 “Listening to Black Mothers” report point to opportunities for improving social and emotional supports. Fifty-seven percent of respondents expressed interest in using a labor doula⁴² for a future delivery, and 54% would consider using a midwife.^{43,44} When asked about community birth setting (out-of-hospital) birthing options for future deliveries, 40% would consider a birth center and 21% would consider a home birth.⁴⁵ Black women expressed greatest interest in these more physiologic birth options. Of Black women surveyed, 15% reported using a labor or postpartum doula.⁴⁶

Disparity contributing factors: Overall U.S. Maternal-infant health

BIRTH CARE RELATIONSHIP

Birth is an intense and overwhelming experience in any setting. Too frequently, however, birth can be traumatizing for a mother and her family. For women that have previously experienced trauma, an empowering birth⁴⁷ can be a profound healing experience.⁴⁸ Conversely, disrespectful care during birth can re-traumatize a woman.⁴⁹ The manner in which a family is cared for during pregnancy, labor and birth can have a strong effect on how that family initiates this new life chapter. Unfortunately, there is scant appreciation in our system for birth as a potential catalyst for healing or as a force for promoting family cohesion.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF BIRTH

Birth and care of the normal⁵⁰ newborn are unique diagnoses within our medical system. Virtually every other hospital admission involves some type of disorder, be it a disease, surgery or intervention to restore health. While our current maternal-infant outcome data presents a daunting image, it is important to remember that the data also can be viewed as reassuring: Birth is still a normal function of the human body and the number of U.S. women who die in childbirth is relatively small (about 700 per year),⁵¹ “...thus the majority of people who get pregnant and make it through childbirth will actually be ok.”⁵²

Despite technological advances, the birth process remains, physiologically, very primitive. Labor, birth and breastfeeding are ruled by physiology we share with our earliest ancestors. Childbearing is a unique life event. It is both an intensely personal journey, and a social event that unfolds within the community of the birthing person. Birth is widely experienced as a sacred event in the life of the family and their community. When a baby is born, parents are born. A new baby is a new member not only of the family, but of the community as a whole. Worldwide, every spiritual and religious tradition includes customs to welcome and bless newborns. The social environment into which the baby is delivered influences the birth process and the postpartum attitude of the mother towards herself and her newborn.

A complex physiological and hormonal interplay supports the new mother during this potentially overwhelming journey. Oxytocin is released in small pulses and works to regulate and organize the nervous system, prompting sensations of contentment. Oxytocin enhances social and emotional bonding, helping us to fall in love and to feel connected. Known as the “hormone of love,” oxytocin is released when a baby breastfeeds, during an embrace, when we sit together to share a meal, and during orgasm. Oxytocin also stimulates uterine contractions that open the cervix during the labor, allowing the baby to descend through the pelvis.

Given its importance in the birthing process, the understanding of ways to boost oxytocin release is imperative. The medicalized approach is to administer Pitocin, the synthetic form of oxytocin through an intravenous (IV) drip. Pitocin is the most widely utilized medication in the modern labor ward. While Pitocin strengthens contractions, the synthetic form does not induce the sense of contentment and safety that endogenous oxytocin stimulates in the body.

Oxytocin naturally increases under distinct conditions: When the birthing mother feels safe and unhurried, supported by trusted people, when external stimuli are quieted, and lighting is dimmed, and when time and privacy are provided for the labor to unfold. It is well known that labor often begins or strengthens at night, when daytime stimuli are diminished. Labor proceeds more normally with the support of trusted individuals. Nervous system regulation is supported by these environmental interventions.

In contrast, when a birthing person is overstimulated by loud noises, bright lights and unfamiliar environment, or is afraid or subjected to questioning by strangers, the stress response is activated, and the nervous system becomes disorganized. The stress response redirects blood flow from the uterus to the extremities to prepare for possible flight, leads to decreased natural oxytocin production, bringing fewer contractions and reduced labor progress. The primitive nature of our physiology reacts to stress as a threat to the well-being of the offspring. The body naturally puts the brakes on the labor, believing their environment is not a safe place to birth. This scenario is seen repeatedly in the hospital setting: Labor was progressing at home, but once the expectant mother arrives at the hospital labor stalls. Given how the system works, when a person is admitted to the hospital, they must show progress in labor — thus an intervention is “required” to restart or augment the labor. This will most frequently be administration of synthetic Pitocin through an IV. This sequence of events puts the patient on a path to a cascade of interventions, where one intervention leads to another. The IV limits mobility in labor and Pitocin causes strong contractions that require pain relief. Pain relief measures further limit mobility and bring further risks that can lead to further complications.

It is common in this scenario for a laboring mother to feel her body is not “performing” as it should; that her body is perhaps defective. Concern for the baby is primary. The natural stress response in this case is to “tend and befriend;” to affiliate with the provider who is exhorting the next intervention. In order to alleviate her stress, the expectant mother may agree to unwanted interventions encouraged by an authoritative “expert.” The “tend and befriend” stress response in females has been carefully studied over the last 20 years. In contrast to the “fight or flight” stress response, the bio-behavioral mechanism in the female brain stimulates action to affiliate, form social bonds and to protect the offspring.⁵³ The “tend and befriend” response can be seen when women go along with a suggested intervention even where they were previously opposed to it — particularly when the safety of the baby is held as justification.⁵⁴

Improvements to the labor routine could provide greater agency to the laboring mother. From the beginning, the care team could encourage the woman to regain her body’s natural rhythm. Support from a labor doula,⁵⁵ a non-medical support person,⁵⁶ could become a routine expectation. Reduction of unnecessary external stimulation, the dimming of lights, providing privacy, speaking in low tones and shared decision-making could be the norm. Once the laboring mother is reassured, oxytocin will naturally increase, and labor progress will resume. In cases where these interventions do not suffice, the provider may practice shared decision-making⁵⁷ and provide truly informed consent for necessary interventions. For as much as is known about birth, each one is different. Care must be individualized to meet each family’s needs. A more holistic team approach to supporting childbearing families, if more widely adopted, can improve outcomes.

ORIGINS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM: HISTORY OF BIRTH IN AMERICA

Today’s maternal-infant care system traces its roots to the turn of the 19th century and was indelibly overlaid with that era’s systemic political and social racism and sexism. A brief review of the development of the U.S. maternity care system over the intervening 120 years lends insight to today’s challenges.

Historians report that pre-Columbian birth among the native population was either attended by other women or in solitude. Specific cultural practices around pregnancy and childbirth included nutritional care and infection control.⁵⁸ Early waves of European migration brought community midwives to the “New World” with their respective immigrant groups. Birth took place at home, assisted by female family and friends, attended by midwives.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade⁵⁹ included the human trafficking of midwives and healers who continued to care for their communities. In much of the largely rural South, “granny” midwives attended both Black and white births.⁶⁰ “Granny” midwives (referred to now as “Grand” midwives as a term of respect) descended from a lineage of healers and carried ancestral and cultural knowledge. Grand midwives served as the women’s health workforce and were respected for their experience with herbal medicinal and healing skills.⁶¹ The health of slaves was a matter of economic priority and plantation owners encouraged their fellow slave owners to allow women to train in the healing arts in order to care for each other.⁶² In this way, “Grand” midwives’ skills were utilized in service to the antebellum economy.⁶³

In the colonial North, the practice of midwifery was common, with men being restricted from birthing rooms up to the early 1800s.⁶⁴ Male physicians were initially only involved in high-risk births where forceps were necessary but gradually began attending most normal deliveries as well. This takeover of birth by male physicians introduced delivery-of-care challenges. Husbands were highly suspicious of a male attending their wives in childbirth and thus doctors were instructed to take measures to not “embarrass” the laboring mother. The more physiologic position of the upright squat for delivery was abandoned when women were made to lie flat in bed, completely covered so as to preserve their modesty. Male physicians delivered care “blind” underneath the sheets. Injuries to both mothers and babies increased as the use of forceps grew in popularity. Doctors were instructed to bring a “grave deportment” to the scene.⁶⁵ Birthing women became isolated as friends and family, seen as distractions to the doctor, were banned from the birthing room.⁶⁶ Thus, the birth experience has transitioned from a social event within the community that’s attended by women to an isolated scientifically managed event between a woman and her male doctor.⁶⁷

THE ADVENT OF HOSPITALS

Men trained in the European medical system returned to the U.S. to build medical schools in the European model. The 1910 Flexner Report describes the first medical schools in the U.S., established in the late 1700s. This was soon followed by an expansion of medical schools from 1800 to 1876.⁶⁸ Formalized medical education and the establishment of hospitals further isolated medicalized childbirth to the domain of the medical man. A hospital birth attended by a male doctor became a status symbol for the well-to-do white mother.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, rural and poor white and enslaved Black women, continued to be served by midwives.⁷⁰

The medicalization of birth and the wholesale movement into the hospital was accomplished by effective public relations and philosophic campaigns. As one front of this campaign sought to malign midwives, the pincer movement was an authoritative mass communications effort to convince Americans that birth itself was pathologic, a diseased rather than a normal process. The prevailing social doctrine of sexism both affirmed and sustained the campaign.

Dr. Joseph DeLee, prominent obstetrician and author of the first U.S. textbook on obstetrics, made the case that labor and birth are not normal. In his fourth edition of the textbook, revised in 1925, he called: “...the function of reproduction in women pathologic.”⁷¹ He cites obstetrician colleagues who make the argument that labor and birth were once physiologic but “...that modern conditions are such that child bearing has largely ceased to be a physiologic process.” Dr. DeLee continued, “Something has gone wrong with this normal physiologic process...,” adding “...tradition and ignorance are alike combined in spreading the fable that child bearing is a physiologic process.”⁷² Advancing a narrative that the defective female body is used up in child-bearing and that birth is pathologic, the “father of modern obstetrics” contributed to removing agency from women and made a formidable case for the medical man to be present as a savior at each delivery.

ABROGATION OF MIDWIFERY

The anti-midwife campaign intensified by the early 1900s, as solutions to “the midwife problem” targeted foreign-born and Black midwives as illiterate, careless, lazy, incompetent, filthy and a danger to women.⁷³ In the wake of this assault, statutes and regulations systematically led to the near elimination of the profession of midwifery.⁷⁴

Female midwives of this era had no access to medical education, and no professional organizations, thus little opportunity to protest their loss of livelihood. Medicine and the business of medical education was a man’s world. At the turn of the 20th century, medical schools and hospitals expanded, as did the need for birthing women on whom the profession’s evolving practice would be applied. Teaching hospitals were opened in nearby low-income neighborhoods, ensuring a reliable supply of vulnerable patients for new doctors to practice on. A simultaneous campaign for the “modern” way of birth appealed to women of means as the early consumers of medicalized childbirth.

While New York City’s population increased thanks to steady immigration in the opening decades of the 1900s,⁷⁵ immigrant midwives continued to serve their communities. The growing professional medical organizations stoked both anti-immigrant and anti-midwifery sentiments, and its impact was soon evident. A 1912 Boston Medical Journal cites a study of New York City’s midwife workforce showing “only nine percent were born in this country.”⁷⁶ The “midwife problem” was promoted as an “immigrant problem.” Between 1907 and 1922, a series of regulations and restrictions led to a reduction in the midwifery workforce in New York City from 3,000 to 1,600.⁷⁷

“Grand” midwives in the South continued serving their communities as the primary providers of maternal-infant care for both Black and white mothers well into the 20th century.⁷⁸

The beginning of the takeover and elimination of both the immigrant and the “Grand” midwife can be traced to The Sheppard Towner Act of 1921, which provided funding for the improvement of maternity care. The Act enabled the predominantly white male medical establishment to enlist mostly white public health nurses to “educate” the midwife community in normal birth. These nurses and doctors thus became the profession’s “gatekeepers,” disallowing the practice of traditional or herbal medicines, and requiring midwives to meet increasingly complex standards and regulations. White nurses acting as enforcers of regulation of a predominantly Black midwifery workforce echoes the white supremacist environment that separated white and Black women at the time: There was little shared experience of womanhood.⁷⁹

North Carolina’s story is offered in detail as an example of how the elimination of the practice of midwifery occurred in the South. In 1917, the year midwives were first licensed in North Carolina, 9,000 midwives were registered.⁸⁰ Between 1920 and 1940, North Carolina saw the progressive regulation of midwifery. From 1924 to 1926, the state board of health reported that midwives delivered more than 30% of babies in North Carolina and that more than 5,000 midwives were in active practice. New regulations increased requirements to practice included a mandate to receive instruction from doctors and nurses in conducting normal birth.⁸¹ By 1928, 2,500 midwives were registered in North Carolina. By 1953, increased regulation left only 663 midwives in North Carolina.⁸² By 1959, the total number of midwives in North Carolina was less than 350.⁸³ As of 2015-2016, there was no licensure available for direct-entry midwives in North Carolina⁸⁴ and only 373 Certified Nurse Midwives were licensed to practice in North Carolina.⁸⁵

As the immigrant midwifery workforce in the North was eliminated, white women increasingly went to hospitals to deliver their babies. In the South, meanwhile, the decimation of the midwifery workforce had a more devastating effect for Black women. The Jim Crow era saw either inferior hospitals or no care at all for Black birthing mothers. In 1940, infant mortality in North Carolina was 75 deaths per 1,000 births for Black babies, more than five times the 13 deaths per 1,000 births for white babies.⁸⁶

A robust workforce of Grand midwives once served the antebellum southern states. Today, these states have some of the lowest numbers of midwives in the country, with considerable barriers to practice for midwives.⁸⁷ This region has the greatest proportion of Black births in the U.S., along with some of the worst health outcomes. Black

mothers in these states have some of the worst outcomes in terms of low birth weight, premature births and highest incidence of cesarean sections, along with some of the lowest numbers of Vaginal Birth After C-section (VBAC) births and low breastfeeding rates.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, Black women commonly experience “vigilance and anticipatory stress” as they access the healthcare system.⁸⁹

PROFIT MOTIVE

Maternity care is a massive source of profit for U.S. hospital systems and has evolved into an important component of our national economy. In 2017, more than 98% of U.S. babies were born in a hospital.⁹⁰ From the dawn of the practice of obstetrics, a woman’s reproductive function was recognized as a sought-after source of profit, and secondarily as a pathway to the loyalty — and subsequent business revenue — of the mother and her family.

Texts of early letters provided advice on this point to new medical doctors:

“Obstetrics was found to be a good way to establish a successful general practice. The man who conducted himself well in the lying-in room won the gratitude and confidence of his patient and her family and they naturally called him to serve in other medical emergencies. It was midwifery, concluded Sr. Walter Channing of Boston, that ensured doctors ‘...the permanency and security of all their other business.’”^{91 92 93}

Medical education, strictly a man’s realm, was also valued for its profit potential: “The schools were essentially private ventures, money-making in spirit and object. Income was simply divided among the lecturers, who reaped a rich harvest...”⁹⁴

This profit motive stands in stark contrast to the thousands of midwives who functioned as the maternal-infant care providers in their communities. These midwives often accepted nominal payment, barter of food or livestock, and sometimes received no pay at all. The marginalized nature of this gendered profession and underpayment of midwives left them an easy target for elimination.

Today, women are recognized as the healthcare decision-makers for their families.⁹⁵ A quote from an article by an interior designer of health facilities reminds their readers:

“Hospitals cannot afford to lose their maternity patients. Maternity care is a major marketing tool for hospitals. Women tend to make a family’s healthcare decisions, and when she or her family needs future care she’ll likely return to the hospital where she gave birth — if she had a good experience.”⁹⁶

Maternity care is a profitable business in the United States.⁹⁷ California represents about 13% of all U.S. births. In 2016-2017, childbirth was the most common reason for hospital admissions in California. Including normal vaginal births, births with complications, cesarean sections, normal birth, normal and high-risk newborn care, California hospitals charged nearly \$16.7 billion in 2017.⁹⁸

Black women and medicine

The evolution of the American maternity care system is intertwined with our nation’s racist and sexist history. Historically, the earliest interaction of Black women and doctors occurred in the examination of female slaves prior to sale to vouch for their fertility.⁹⁹ Black women’s health was valued only for their ability to make more slaves.

“Even as black women were sexually exploited and suffered physical and psychological scars, often inflicted by the men who owned them, the maintenance of enslaved women’s bodies was still considered a priority. White southerners knew black woman literally carried the race and extended the existence of slavery in their wombs.”¹⁰⁰

The trans-Atlantic slave trade brought approximately 350,000 trafficked humans from Africa over a 200-year time period.¹⁰¹ Census data from 1860 reports a slave population of nearly four million people.¹⁰² This growth in population represents a “natural increase,”¹⁰³ the reproductive work of enslaved Black women. Young Black women’s bodies captured higher prices at auction for their reproductive value. Lactating Black women served as wet-nurses to white babies, while their own babies received inferior

sugar-water and milk blends. Black women were often raped in order to increase the number of births of new slaves, generating greater profit for white slave owners. According to the Gilder Institute of American History, “In the U.S., on average, a slave mother gave birth to between nine and ten children, twice as many as in the West Indies.”¹⁰⁴

Gynecology in the antebellum period was a nascent profession and Black women served as key players. Dr. Marion Sims subjected enslaved women living in his “hospital” to experimental surgical research without consent. These women were also used as operating room attendants.¹⁰⁵ Sims, considered “the father of gynecology,” was in search of a surgical answer to obstetric fistula.¹⁰⁶ Enslaved women were restrained and operated on repeatedly (30 operations in one case) without anesthesia, in order to perfect a surgical technique that was eventually offered to white women under anesthesia, another example of the use of Black woman’s bodies for the benefit of whites.¹⁰⁷

Numerous other cases of non-consensual medical experimentation, forced sterilization, targeted abortions, varied access to birth control, and unequal healthcare have continued to current day.¹⁰⁸ Against this historical background, modern Black women justifiably experience suspicion and anticipation of racist treatment when accessing health care.¹⁰⁹

Morbidity, mortality and patient satisfaction data show that navigating the U.S. medical-industrial maternity care complex carries disproportionate risk for Black mothers and their babies. Unequal access to care, combined with the near elimination of the Black healthcare workforce, perpetuates distrust between Black women and the medical system.

Evidenced-based models for improved maternal-infant outcomes

The midwifery model of care thrives in the developed countries that enjoy better maternal-infant health outcomes than in our system. Low-risk patients in other developed countries are routinely offered access to community locations for birth (birth centers and home births) and midwifery care. Pregnancy, labor and birth are seen as normal functions that require social support as much as medical surveillance. When the mother is at the center of the care experience, she is valued as the expert in her own body, family and life.

The nationwide study “Mapping Integration of Midwives” shows that increased access to midwifery care in the U.S. is correlated with improved outcomes for families, specifically increased breastfeeding rates, increased access to vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC), reduced interventions and lower rates of neonatal death.¹¹⁰

Integration of midwifery in the U.S. — meaning the ease with which midwives practice and are accessible to birthing families — varies state by state. Midwifery practice is governed by state statute and the willingness of medical staff committees to grant hospital privileges. In states where midwifery care is more easily accessible, improved outcomes are seen in all measures related to maternal and infant health, which in particular benefits women of color. The lowest integration of midwives is found in the Southeastern region, which also has the highest number of Black births. States with the most midwives have the best outcomes and vice versa.¹¹¹

While out-of-hospital births make up a small percentage of all births in the United States, the numbers have steadily increased since 2005.¹¹² Between 2004 and 2014, out-of-hospital births doubled across the United States, with the greatest increase seen in the Pacific Northwest. One and a half percent of all births in 2014 occurred in an out-of-hospital or community birth¹¹³ setting.¹¹⁴ The breastfeeding initiation rate among out-of-hospital births — 98% — is significantly higher than hospital births at 80%.¹¹⁵ Community-located births can be looked to for examples of true mother-centered care, informed consent and shared decision-making.

Access to care is critical to improving outcomes. Trauma-informed care is care that is careful to not re-traumatize and is guided by support, education and respect. These approaches can mitigate the effects of life in a racist society. Jennie Joseph’s easy access clinic¹¹⁶ is an example of this work with strong evidence that certain approaches can shift the needle on outcomes.¹¹⁷

“African-American women, like ALL women, thrive when treated fairly, with respect, dignity and support during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. The statistics that insist Black women and babies are at risk simply illustrate our COLLECTIVE willingness to ACCEPT the impacts of multiple broken systems, rather than acknowledge and FIX them (while continuing to blame mothers I might add).”¹¹⁸

Education, workforce, research

Provider demographics have been identified as a crucial element in solution-focused approaches to improving maternity care outcomes. For a Black woman accessing care, the difference can be transformative. Nurse practitioner Jerusalem Makonnen describes patients who regularly travel more than an hour each way for care — patients who tell her she is the first Black “doctor” they had ever seen.¹¹⁹

Having more Black providers available to care for Black patients is crucial, explains researcher and educator, Monica McLemore, PhD. She describes the concept of cultural health capital and anticipatory racism.¹²⁰ When a provider has a shared cultural experience with the patient, it allows “women to let their guard down, to be authentic and vulnerable in way that they don’t feel they have to perform for their healthcare provider. The way they communicate and talk about their lives is different.” This “cultural health capital” leverages the strengths of both the provider and the patient and allows the patient’s knowledge of their own body to be part of the care experience.

“I’m a nurse and I’ve never had a Black person take care of me,” Dr. McLemore explains, adding, “I’ve also never had a Black professor and I have three degrees. That is sad and it’s exhausting.”¹²¹ As a researcher, she adds, it is crucial that every team working on solving these problems be diverse, including members who have a shared cultural experience with patients being studied. A rich conversation around relevant research questions to pose and how to go about answering them will make research stronger.¹²² In the same way that a greater representation of women in medicine has led to improved data collection on women’s health issues, we can expect Black maternal-infant health to improve with stronger, more inclusive, workforce teams.

More doulas, nurses, midwives, doctors and researchers of color must be brought into the workforce to meet the need for a more personalized, culturally relevant and skilled approach to birth. It is imperative that schools of midwifery, nursing and medicine create and strengthen anti-racism programming, work to create inviting and inclusive atmospheres, develop skills in providing culturally competent delivery of care, and enhance recruitment and retention of ethnically diverse and specifically Black students.¹²³

Conclusion

While many modern medical and technological developments have benefited childbirth and maternity care, the essential elements of support for the social, emotional, physical, spiritual journey that is birth have been eliminated from the hospital environment. The loss of this support, combined with the enculturated racism of the hospital system, lead to outcomes for mothers and babies in our nation that lag those of other developed nations. The medicalization of the United States childbirth industry has created a system that is neither welcoming nor safe for many mothers, especially Black and non-English speaking women.

The U.S. medicalized maternity system still exhibits vestiges of its sexist and racist origins. The transformation in the U.S. of normal birth from a social and physiologic process into a profit-driven system with production and census goals has left birthing women marginalized and often unsatisfied. When birth was medicalized — and its “experts” trained in technology rather than compassion — the reverence for this uniquely sacred event was lost.

The patriarchal origins of the U.S. medical system linger: The provider and patient are caught in a lopsided power dynamic, with the provider as the all-knowing authority and patients as passive receivers of care with little or no agency for their own decision-making. In this dynamic, the patient is expected to trust the doctor intrinsically. Patients who ask too many questions or have their own birth plans can be labeled as difficult or

demanding. Provider-patient connection is fleeting, as contact is limited to brief prenatal visits followed by the provider appearing at the end of labor to deliver the baby. Care during labor is delivered by nurses who are unknown to the family, and who may or may not respect the patient's birth preferences.

Relatively few U.S. health providers have attended a "community" (out of hospital) birth. However, most other developed nations offer community-based birth as a routine option in addition to hospital birth. These nations enjoy a tradition of the midwifery model of care with demonstrably better outcomes reflected in maternal and infant mortality and breastfeeding rates. Affording patients agency to make decisions for birth, respect for time, and holding space for the sacred moments are relevant factors. As research teams become more diverse, routine midwifery care is being "scientifically validated" and introduced into the medical environment.¹²⁴

Unequal morbidity and mortality outcomes show that Black mothers and babies face significant risk when interacting with our current health care system. The increase in community birth¹²⁵ reflects a trend of American family's interest in seeking holistic birth options. This small movement represents a paradigm shift towards a more individualized and culturally congruent approach. Education in social justice, systemic racism, bias and inclusion must be implemented in every school of nursing and medicine. Developing a diverse healthcare workforce is imperative at every level. Teams including and lead by people from the most marginalized groups are essential to shifting the results.

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COLLECTIF

THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY FOR THE AFRICAN- AMERICAN-MEXICAN WOMAN IN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

Ana V. Thorne, PhD

P rologue

Travel back in time to the 1950s in the Midwestern United States where a Mexican woman is the wife of a Negro World War II veteran, and the mother of three “mixed” children. As the oldest and closest child to my mother, I understood and empathized with the conflict and circumstance that characterized her efforts to assimilate her Mexican self into what she termed the Gringo way of life.

“You kids are not Negroes, you are White like me,” my mother said in her accented English. Mother’s skin was White and she reminded us of that almost daily.

In support of her claim to Whiteness, Mother asserted the purity of her European-Spanish bloodline and, at the same time, denied her Pima Apache great-grandmother by announcing periodically, “I am no Mestiza, I am Castilian!”

My Mexican mother was partially correct that she was White, and not totally wrong in the claim that her children were not Negro. Like her English, and by virtue of how we looked, we were “accented” Negroes. On a brief sojourn to Tecate, Mexico, where we stayed with mi abuela, Ana Yanez Prado, I learned that in Español, I was Negrita. A term of endearment... I was told.

Alicia, my mother, was born and raised in Hermosillo, Sonora, in Northern Mexico, and came to los Estados Unidos in 1946 as the wife of a Negro U.S. Army veteran. Thomas, my Dad, was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and came North with his family right before the 1930s Great Depression. Dad was what is referred to as “brown-skinned.” His grandmother was an ex-slave and his grandfather was a White man. Dad’s half-White mother married a Negro whose mother was part of the Cherokee nation.

Our lineage made me and my siblings a racially, color-coded mix that included Native American, European and African. We were brown enough to be considered Negroes, especially in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the 1950s.

Mother claimed that she did not know what it meant to be a ‘Negro’ en los Estados Unidos before she crossed the border and arrived in El Norte. Soon enough she learned the truth about the prevalent forces of racism and that her marriage to a Black man presented more than a steep, cultural learning curve.

My father forbade her to speak Spanish to her children. He said it would confuse us. In resistance, she taught us a few songs, words and phrases in Español. Mother adapted and learned to read, speak and write English. But even on the day of her death at 83 years old, not one of her children could carry on a conversation with her in Español.

After their divorce, we lived with mother for a year or so. She positioned herself as a White woman in a Black community in the belief that she held an elevated social status because of the Whiteness of her skin — even though she was married to an identifiable Black man, had given birth to three brown children and dwelled within the confines of the same marginalized community inhabited by Negroes.

Mother became overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for three little brown children, and the challenges of living in all-Black, segregated community without the protection and support of her Negro husband. When she left, we lived with Dad in the same neighborhood and he raised us to young adulthood, nullifying the myth of the ineffective and absent Black father.

My Mexican mother was wrong. Her children were not White. The intrinsic existence and extrinsic evidence of racism in our lives – segregation, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion — marked us as Negroes, like our Dad.

Introduction

Even though I thought of myself as Negro, certain racially designated phenotype characteristics such as hair texture, skin color, shape of nose and lips made me suspect in my segregated community. This resistance and the fact of Mother's testament to her Whiteness prevented my unchallenged acceptance into the all-Black community. I felt under the scrutiny and surveillance of neighborhood eyes, a feeling that forced me to develop tools and strategies that helped me survive the specter of racism as it expressed in Lincoln Heights, Ohio. Transactions that involved me, me and Mother, or me and Dad within and without the community, set the tone for and approach to what would emerge as my brand of cultural proficiency.

The issue of cultural proficiency may be defined as the "values and behaviors of an individual that enable the person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment."¹

Cultural proficiency — rooted in equitable practices — engages with elements that include the assessment of cultural knowledge, the value of diversity, the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity and the institutionalization of cultural knowledge.² This theory manifests as a survival mechanism for the individual of mixed racial lineage who is neither fully this, nor that.

The individual and community perceptions of what it meant and what it felt like to grow up Negro, Mexican and female in an all-Black town determined the scope and complexity of the identity formation factors that resulted in my *Blaxicana* identity. The coupling of a white Mexican woman and a Negro man in an all-Black environment seems to have been fraught with both private and public drama that reflected emotional longing and lost dreams. In Mother's view, her children suffered a social disadvantage because of the golden brownness of their skin. Mother's position revealed the experiential meanings of the social construct of race framed not only by nationality and skin color, but also by the parameters of specific times and places.

Concerning the identity issues associated with Latin *racismo* and North American racism, the historically prevalent Black/White racial binary, or colorism that exists in the United States, showed in my father's dark brown skin color that evidences his Negro-ness and diminished societal status. Mother's White skin color provided the basis for her claim to the privilege of Whiteness. Marriage to an African American situated her and her children in the same over-determined place in the social strata as her husband. The Mexican culture in which she grew up presented an alternative variation of the articulation of racialization. Through Mother, I learned a Latin American version of racism — *racismo* — founded in the denial of its Africanness.

Mestizaje/Racismo/Racism

Racismo is heavily laden with the symbology of color even as it denies its African connections. Neil Foley's *Quest for Equality* points out that despite the fact that several Mexican independence leaders were "afromexicanos" with acknowledged and recognized "African ancestry," Blacks in Mexico are omitted from "*la raza cosmica*" that characterizes the Mexican citizen and the Mexican nation.³ The idea of the "cosmic race," advanced by the Mexican intellectual Jose Vasconcelos, is based

...upon the White supremacist assumption that 'The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type.' In this manner ... the Black could be redeemed, and step by step, by voluntary extinction, the uglier stocks will give way to the more handsome.⁴

Foley uses language that describes the variations in skin color in a fashion reminiscent of eighteenth century "*la casta*" designations of race that attempted to organize a society of Spaniards, indigenous peoples and Africans. Foley conveys that it is not the words themselves that affirm or deny *racismo*, but rather their understood meanings — among Mexicans — that transcend the harsh racism that is associated with the history of the United States.⁵ Certain descriptors function to preserve the lines of skin-tone color that delineate class hierarchies in Mexico. Alicia had been raised on these color-coded messages.

The Latina Black/White binary is expressed as “*Guero*” and “*Negro/Negrito* (*Negrito* is also positioned as a term of endearment); brown, *Moreno*; “light brown, *Claro Moreno*; dark brown, *Moreno Oscuro*, or *Prieto* for dark-skinned or Black, “often used in a derogatory manner” and in some cases in a flattering way, “as in *mi prieta linda*, my beautiful brown skin.”⁶ Foley notes that the term *Indio* for Indian “always implies dark skin and low social status and is not used in polite company.”⁷

From the time I was a child, I listened to Mother say, “I am no *Mestiza*. I am Castilian.” In this statement she denies any *Indio* or African heritage in her family line and declares herself as pure Spanish, European and White. Faye V. Harrison’s treatise, “The Persistent Power of ‘Race’ in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism” pointed out that in “Hispanic countries” there exists an under-recognized form of racial inequality” that applies to Mother’s assertion of race.⁸

As the ‘master symbol of the nation,’ *mestizaje* exhibits an ‘uneasiness about Blackness’ and indigenous ethnic-bloc formation. Despite the ambivalence toward Indianness, valorizations of ‘mixedness’ privilege European-Indian heritage marginalize — if not erase — Blackness and Africanness from the national landscape.⁹

Within the “national ideology of *mestizaje* — the fusion of indigenous peoples and Spanish colonizers” — Blacks as a distinct group are invisible.¹⁰ Historian, Colin Palmer, an authority on “slavery and Afro-descendant peoples in Mexico” described the racial hierarchy in Mexico as one

... based on skin color, with White the higher value as opposed to those who are brown and those, God forbid, who are Black. In that regard ... [Mexico’s *la casta*] is worse than in the United States...¹¹

Harrison presented that the issue of *Mestizaje* “represents the absorption, denial, and purging of Blackness through miscegenation and cultural assimilation” and that other means of hegemonic principles are applied as a counter-narrative.¹²

Throughout Latin American, the national norm encodes an ideal of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), which ‘accepts the implicit hegemonic rhetoric of the [United States] with regard to White supremacy, and often blames those classed as Black and indigenous for the worsening state of the nation.’ In some settings, this process of associating whitening with advancement and darkening with backwardness and stagnation has been facilitated by U.S. military occupation, colonial rule, and/or corporate presence.¹³

Foley, however, reported another view that acknowledges that in spite of the practice of “prejudice based on skin color and phenotype in Mexico and virtually all Latin American countries, Mexicans continue to insist that discrimination against their indigenous and Afro-Mexican population is grounded in social, cultural, and class distinctions, not race.”¹⁴

The Mexico that Mother lived in had been subject to U.S. military presence, Spanish colonial rule, and the corporate presence of U.S. interests in Mexico’s natural resources. Mother claimed what she perceived as the benefit of *los Estados Unidos*’ historical racial policy toward Mexicans as outlined by Harrison.

...after the United States annexed Mexico’s northern frontier, it racialized its policy toward Mexican-Americans’ rights to citizenship: Only those who were White were entitled to the privileges of citizenship ... Racial status was much contested and negotiated in legislative and judicial arenas...¹⁵

In the United States, the relationship between Mexicans and African Americans suffers when it comes to working cooperatively in a united political front against repressive laws and customs.

Foley attributes this circumstance to “Mexico’s racial amnesia” in which Mexicans “acknowledge and officially celebrate their indigenous roots” but “do not ... regard Afro-descendant people as kith or kin on either side of the U.S.- Mexico border.”¹⁶ Foley reports that Latinos tended to “distance themselves from African Americans and the stigma of Blackness” even while each was “aware of the presence of the other” and at times worked closely together.¹⁷

As an example, Foley cited that African American and Mexican American veterans returning from World War II held different perspectives on the rights they felt they had earned. African American veterans based their demand for full citizenship privileges on their contribution to the U.S. war effort. On the other hand, Mexican American veterans based “their claim for equality on belonging to the White race.”¹⁸

Nicholas Vaca’s “The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and What it Means for America,” affirmed Foley’s account of “adversarial relationships” between Blacks and Latinos and pointed out that Latinos have “learned the ‘lesson of racial estrangement’ well.”¹⁹ The opportunity to identify as White, near White or honorary White is perceived as a benefit and the way to a better quality of life. Foley affirmed that light-skinned Mexicans were not subject to the “same degree of exclusion as their darker-skinned, working class compatriots.”²⁰ On this point of skin color coding, the principles of racism and *racismo* converge.

In the article “Lati-Negra: Mental Health Issues of African Latinas,” Lillian Comas-Dias explained...

Racismo or Latino style racism, permeates all spheres of the society from education, politics, religion, arts, and business; to social, personal, family, sexual, and interpersonal relationships (Zenon Cruz, 1975). *Racismo* is a classic example of internalized racism. For example, many Caribbean Latinos have difficulties accepting their own Blackness and often accuse each other of being Black and/or having African ancestry (racial projection). The reply *el que no tiene dinga tiene mandinga* (the individual who does not have *dinga* has *mandinga*) asserts that Latinos who don’t have *dinga* (Indian heritage) have *mandinga* (African heritage).²¹

Foley posited that Mexico adopted the idea of a “‘racial democracy’ where citizenship, not race, forms the bedrock of national identity and belonging — and class, not race, the bedrock of inequality.”²² While a fine line of distinction may be drawn between racism and *racismo*, it appears that the socially constructed class hierarchies based on skin color, from light brown/*morena* to dark-skinned/*prieta*, that characterize U.S. racism and Mexican *racismo* are both part of the triumvirate of race, class and gender that compose the intersecting oppressions of race.

The notion of *racismo* functions contrary to the precept of hypodescent wherein “one drop of African blood makes you Black” and takes the view that “one drop of White blood makes you at least not Black.”²³ The shadow of *racismo* allows an acknowledgement of the Latin “rainbow racial composition” in which an individual can testify to several racial heritages and still be White. Comas-Diaz characterizes *racismo* as “covert” to distinguish it from North American overt racism — *de facto* and *de jure* — and attributes this characteristic to the statement that “the Latino Caribbean society is historically more racially integrated than the North American one.”²⁴ The recognition of an “African heritage” remains a fact of the legacy of the institution of slavery in the Americas and is recognized through the question, “Y tu abuela donde esta?” (“where is your grandmother?”) – suggesting that *tu abuela es Africana*.²⁵ This suggestion could signify that the line between black and white is not as tightly drawn south of the border as it is north of the border.

According to Foley, the acknowledgement that both Latinos and African Americans occupy the bottom of the class and race pyramid in the United States, makes them subject to the ordinary “divide and conquer” strategies and tactics that promote suspicion and adversarial relationships, especially on the subject of “competition for jobs.”²⁶ Both groups hold the worst stereotypical views of the other; Mexicans are perceived as “poor, dirty and foreign” and African Americans are identified as being “racially inferior.”²⁷ Couple the covertness of *racismo* with the one-drop-of-White-blood rule, and the ability to erase color with membership in an elevated “social class,” and *racismo* could be understood as a highly visible and recognizable tool in a feudal arsenal used to maintain a concentration of power based on elitism and affluence.

This understanding of Latino *racismo* aligns closely with the tenets of North American racism. Racism and *racismo* seem more alike in their nature and purpose than they seem different; and they intersect at the point of color coding necessary to enjoy the privilege of Whiteness, near Whiteness or honorary Whiteness. Foley, Vaca and Comas-Diaz present that the political and interpersonal relationships between African Americans and Latinos show themselves to be weighted with intersecting difficulties around several historical and current issues.

Blaxicana

In spite of the implications of racism and the complexities of *racismo*, Richard and Rachel Moran reveal, in "Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance," that marriage between Blacks and Latinos is evidenced throughout the historical timeline of the United States even as the legal system decreed the regulation and prohibition of what it considered "interracial" relationships. Moran and Moran reported that as a measure of control against interracial marriages between Mexicans and Negroes in the state of Texas in the 1920s, "people of Mexican origin were [considered] White and could not marry Blacks."²⁸ Moran and Moran note, however, that the Mexican's "unofficial status as non-White" caused authorities to turn a "blind eye to the marriages" between Negro men and Mexican women.²⁹ According to Moran and Moran, the children of these marriages could not escape the specter of segregation.³⁰ The fact that our father was a Black man determined every aspect of our lives and made us subject to the same forms and expressions of civil, social and economic discrimination that he experienced.

Comas-Diaz reports that the dynamics of the overarching issues of color coding (that harass both African Americans and Latinos), and what color coding means, are played out in an individual — the *Blaxicana*, the woman who is both Latina and African American. Comas-Diaz' discourse situates the *Blaxicana* as a "classic example of racial exclusion, marginality and disconnection" that results in her being a "minority within a minority."³¹ Comas-Diaz allows that the *Blaxicana* in North America faces racial exclusion and an emphasis on the denial of her Latinness that places her squarely in the box of what it means to be Black.³²

I was raised, for the most part, by my Negro father. A large family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins lived nearby. Holiday dinners, birthdays, various celebrations and an annual family reunion were the events that held the Turner family together and exposed me to what at the time passed for middle class Negro culture. I lived in a segregated community, had Black friends growing up and attended all Black schools until the ninth grade. All through elementary school, a few of the Black girls taunted me, "You think you cute cuz you light-skinned and got good hair." A few shook their fists at me, an indication that they wanted to engage in a physical fight to 'beat me up.' A group of young teenage boys called me and my sister 'half-breeds' or 'Ugga' and 'Agga' instead of our real names, Olga and Ana. Despite the regular disruptions, we were accepted as members of the community because of the presence of our Dad who was a respected and recognized Black man in a Black town, as well as the only single male parent in the community.

The internalized ideas about racism that resided in my eight year-old mind traveled with us by train from Cincinnati to San Diego at the end of the summer of 1955 during a period of marital separation. We stayed with Mother's relatives in Chula Vista and San Diego and finally with *mi Abuela* Ana Prado, then a widow, in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. When it came time for me to enroll in the fourth grade, Mother took me to St. Ines, the local Catholic elementary school where the nuns put me in the first grade because I did not speak *Español*. They chattered in Spanish, pointed at me and whispered "*negrita*." My back stiffened and I lowered my eyes from their gaze. Racism had crossed the border with us and in my mind, the nuns called me the n-word. I refused to return to St. Ines. Later, Mother informed me that '*negrita*' is considered a term of endearment. I did not mind being '*negrita*,' but I wondered why it was necessary to call attention to the color of my non-white skin. I was accustomed to the 1950's lifestyle we enjoyed in Ohio. It was too late for me to be a *Mexicana*.

Assimilation and acculturation were Mother's paramount concerns when she arrived in Cincinnati from Mexico with her Negro husband. At the same time that she shed parts of her Mexican cultural identity, she learned to speak, read and write English. She became acclimated to her new all-Black family and community and became attuned to the nuanced differences that characterized what it meant to be White, Black and in proximity to Blackness. Even though I didn't learn the Spanish language from Mother, nothing can erase the sound of her voice speaking Spanish to her mother and sisters on the telephone. At will, I can conjure the mispronunciations of her English-speaking accent and the inflections and accentuations of her Spanish-speaking accent. The language I was forbidden to learn resonates in every memory of my Mother.

I could read and write at age four. Together, Mother and I learned the alphabet and numbers from phonics and math workbooks that Dad brought home. We practiced printing our names and address on the chalk board. Mother drew pictures of food on the easel and I spelled the item. We studied the color pictures of birds in Volume III, Banff to Boxing, and butterflies in Volume IV, Boy to Caucasoid, in the *American People's Encyclopedia* set that Dad purchased from a White, door to door salesman.

When Dad was at work, Mother played his 78 rpm records on the hi-fi console. We sat near the speakers and memorized the English words to the songs. We sang Nat King Cole's *Mona Lisa* and *Too Young*. Kay Starr's *Wheel of Fortune* was our big finish, "Oh, wheel of fortune, I'm hoping somehow, if you ever smile on me, please let it be now!" Our evening bath was a song fest of the three Mexican songs she taught us. We imitated mother's vocals without understanding the words that we sang — *Solamente Una Vez* (*Only Once in My Life*), *Cielito Lindo* (*Lovely Sweet One*), *La Cucaracha* (*The Cockroach*).

Mother cemented our Mexican connection through religion. Mi Abuelo Prado passed away before I turned three years old and we all took a trip to Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico to attend the funeral. While we were there, Mother secreted me and my baby sister off to the local Catholic Church to be baptized. I can't say I remember the trip, but I have seen the Baptismal Certificates written in *Español*, dated in 1949 and signed by Father Zaragoza. For the next ten years, she said our nightly prayers with us by crossing her thumb and the finger next to it and administering a benediction, "In nombre del padre, el hijo y el spiritu santo, Amen."

Mother stopped living with us and even though her influence ceased to exert itself on a daily basis, it did not disappear. Through the years we were together, I learned that I was 'in' but not 'of' the neighborhood I lived in and the family I was born into. Mother inculcated in us that part of her life that we knew nothing about and that was in effect 'walled off' from us. The accumulated small lessons imparted from her to us cannot be discounted and must be recognized as part of the construction of the sensibilities of our *Blaxicana* natures.

Alicia embodied and inhabited what Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* termed a "hybrid location of cultural value"³³ that she passed on to her children. Bhabha posited that history and "testimony" can lose their influence in displacement, thus making the "process of cultural translation a complex form of signification."³⁴ Bhabha affirmed that in "displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting."³⁵ On the home front, Mother received messages to subdue her cultural expressions; and in the public arena, she enjoyed and was encouraged to share aspects of her Mexican culture through food, dance and song. In the all Black community in which we lived, Mother was a student of American and African American culture and a teacher of her Spanish-derived Mexican culture.

Conclusion

The cultures that formed the experiences of my childhood instilled a set of social 'cross-over' models that positioned me as a small component in an ongoing trial of what it means to be Black and Brown in a particular time and place. In 1950's Ohio, the lines between the races were drawn hard and fast. Skin color — not class or social status — determined where families lived, worked, attended school, traveled and socialized.

My racial and cultural sensibilities developed along several parallel lines and ideological intersections. Factors concerning 'race' and some of its implications included the lives of three children of mixed race, the shadow of *Mestizaje*, the distinctions between racism and *racismo*, and *de jure* and *de facto* contested racist practices. The triangulation that expressed a private blend of White American/European, African American and Latina/Mexican influences resulted in a publicly lived cultural and social performance based foremost on my particular phenotype. The lure of an American White woman's identity put Mother at odds with the *El Norte* racist forces into which she entered via marriage with a man of color. Other factors for consideration include the nuance of insider (family) scrutiny and outsider (community) surveillance, presumed alliances between African Americans and Mexicans, and the reality of a lone, single Negro Dad raising three mixed children in an all-black town. These frames influenced and shaped my ability and capacity to practice cultural proficiency without knowledge of such a concept. I realized at about the age of eight that the world I lived in had no precedent.

In the case of the *Blaxicana*, the ability to be culturally proficient supports the capacity to participate in and benefit from two historically and culturally rich societies and enjoy the intersecting and powerful heritages of each. The invalidation of racial categories based on skin color, religion or national origin can only be accomplished in the place where they reside — in the imagination where the hold is strong. That imagination in me expresses in an identity rooted in African American culture, accented by a Latina experience, assimilated within the paradigm of Whiteness. The recognition and practice of cultural proficiency helped me to piece together the fragments of a divided psyche that at first embraced Blackness, acknowledged Latinness, and resisted Whiteness to form a third socially constructed identity that emerged as a broader framework for the work in progress that constitutes my *Blaxicana* identity.

Endnotes

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⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 10.

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¹⁴ Foley, 7.

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¹⁸ Ibid, 17.

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³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Comas-Diaz, 36.

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COLLECTIF

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: MOUNT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY'S FIRST LEGISLATOR IN RESIDENCE

Emerald Archer, PhD

“The women at ‘The Mount’ remind me each and every day that the future of California is safe in their capable hands. And I’m thrilled to play a small role in their collective leadership journey.”

– SEN. HOLLY J. MITCHELL

In 2018, the Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary’s University invited California State Senator Holly J. Mitchell to be the first Legislator in Residence. As the only women’s university in Los Angeles, Mount Saint Mary’s works with government agencies, non-profits, and elected officials from both sides of the aisle to promote gender equity. This partnership extends the university’s mission by connecting students, faculty, staff and alumnae to a California legislator who actively advocates for women and girls across the state. It was only natural that we turned to Sen. Mitchell who represents the 30th District, where our Doheny campus is located, to serve as our first legislator in residence.

Sen. Mitchell is no stranger to our campus. In Spring 2017, she led a semester series for History & Political Science students, covering her path to elected office, her career in the California legislature and bills then moving through the California Senate. The seminar series culminated in a wage inequality committee hearing held by Sen. Mitchell at the Doheny Campus, convening researchers, impacted individuals and social-change makers to better understand gender inequality and begin to craft solutions. The committee meeting was jointly hosted by the Senate Select Committee on Women and Inequality; the Senate Labor Committee; the Legislative Women’s Caucus; and the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. Helen Boutrous, PhD, Chair of the History and Political Science department notes that “It was an incredible experience for our students. They had the opportunity to be in a seminar setting with a California Senator where they gained insights on the lawmaking process, and were inspired to consider their own path as change-makers of the future.” It’s these kinds of collaborations and learning opportunities that give students academic insights beyond the classroom.

The connections that Sen. Mitchell created with our students lead to the Director of the Center for the Advancement of Women to explore the role of a legislator on campus. Working collaboratively with Sen. Mitchell, the ‘Legislator in Residence’ series was crafted to create an intimate platform for conversations related to women’s leadership, civic engagement, and activism. The series is meant to provide hands-on trainings that empower our students to get engaged with their community at the university and beyond.

The event series involved two on-campus events that included curated conversations with Sen. Connie Leyva, LA City Councilwomen Nury Martinez, and LA City Councilwomen Monica Rodriguez. The series culminated in the conversation Sen. Mitchell moderated with California’s First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, at The Report on the Status of Women and Girls in California research release on March 28, 2018.

By any measure, the inaugural Legislator in Residence series was a success! We hope to host local legislators in years to come — on either side of the aisle — to inspire debate, civic-mindedness and leadership.

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