

# Distinctions

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# **DISTINCTIONS**

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*Distinctions*, the journal of the Honors Program at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York, welcomes submissions of scholarly work written for Kingsborough courses.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The essays in this issue highlight particularly interesting and involving projects carried out by Kingsborough students. All of them demonstrate the students' engagement with the issues of today and of "yesterday." For instance, Malik Atadzhanov writes of how the poetry written by women in the Soviet Union and the United States of the 1950s and 1960s reveals different situations in the world-power countries: "The strong character of a Soviet woman was an essential part of the communist propaganda machine." Aundre Mignott continues his pursuit of history in "Three Landmark Cases: Separated but Equal." Hripsime Tumanyan informs us of events in her native Armenia and "the effects of a revolution." Kyle Aaron Reese, appearing in *Distinctions* for the third time, writes on the timely matter of "language required for transgender individuals to express themselves." Beckie Dugaillard and her professor, Laura Spinu, have conducted an interesting experiment that emphasizes "the need for a reconceptualization of bilingualism as a multifaceted construct made up of continuous, variables rather than a dichotomous category." Reflecting on her experience as a field-student in a Brooklyn public school classroom, Maleeha Khan writes: "People will always have disagreements, and they will always have different views on religion, politics, gun control, parenting, etc. What's important is the way a teacher separates themselves from that and can lead their class, bias-free." Finally, in an exception of my self-imposed rule of not publishing work done by students in my own classes, there is Tony Zheng's "Gravesend Observation Project," wherein he, in common with his classmates, conducted electronic-less hours-long "objective" observations of public space, documenting his neighborhood's social and physical surroundings. Finally, and long overdue, I would like to thank Tsubasa Berg, who has been designing each issue of *Distinctions* the last few years without official credit. (That's its own story.) If the journal looks good to you, it's because of Tsubasa. He has left the Kingsborough Center for eLearning office and Kingsborough, and I will miss his presence, patience, generosity, and his meticulous attention to detail. I am sure he will do well in his new ventures.

I've enjoyed seeing the evolution and development of *Distinctions* over its 15 years. It came into being through the initiative of Professor Barbara Walters, who wanted to showcase the re-search-writing of Honors Program students. Professor Robert Cowan continued Professor Walters's legacy and edited the journal for several years before he transferred his talents to Hunter College. It's been my privilege and honor to have edited the journal for the last five years, and I look forward to seeing its development starting this fall under the editorship of another professor.

My biggest thanks, during my editorship, have to go to Tsubasa Berg, formerly of the Kingsborough Center for e-Learning, who, though he has moved on from Kingsborough into other creative endeavors, has made the journal look good and professional through his design of the pages and covers. Please make a study of this issue's cover, a photograph by Tsubasa that is beautifully evocative of Kingsborough's unique landscape.

I offer great appreciation to my colleagues, Anna Karpathakis, Laura Kates, Sara Rutkowsky, Jacob Segal, Laura Spinu, and Jane Weiss, the professors who encouraged and advised these student-authors through their projects. I thank again the administrators who have given their support to this journal: Professor Homar Barcena, Director of the Honors Program; Dr. Luz Martin del Campo, Coordinator of the Honors Program; Dr. Eileen Ferretti, chair of the English Department; and Provost Joanne Russell, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

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Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, 2019

# Feminism in the 1950s: The United States vs. the Soviet Union

Malik Atadzhanov

Fall 2019  
ENG 2400 | Freshman English II  
Professor Jane Weiss

Unimaginable devastation was inflicted on the Soviet Union in World War II. The USSR had to defend itself against Nazi Germany in different vast areas. In the north front, there was the Siege of Leningrad; it lasted for almost three years and took the lives of 700,000 out of a population of 2.5 million, in addition to having 75% of the city destroyed (World Atlas). To the south-side of the front was the Battle of Stalingrad, which lasted for half a year and ended up with 85% of the city being destroyed (World Atlas). Almost all of the men ages 18-51 were drafted to protect the Motherland against the Nazi invaders and hence the job market was in desperate need of workers to sustain the country with resources. Women also served in the military and mainly took up the medically related jobs; moreover, the majority of the females played a very important role by working in agriculture, factories, and transport. By working tirelessly and over time females contributed to the production of military equipment and ammunition for the soldiers on the front lines of the war.

After World War II was over many cities all across the north western part of the Soviet Union, cities like Warsaw, Minsk, Kaliningrad, Stalingrad, Volgograd, and many others, were mostly demolished. In the post-war era the devastating destruction that had been done during the war had to be fixed even if it meant starting from scratch. A Soviet woman was able to pursue jobs from almost every sphere, whether it was working as a teacher or being an astronaut, and they were even encouraged to do so by the government. Essentially during the Soviet rule both men and women did not focus on having their rights and freedoms as individuals as much as they focused on their work duties to benefit the rest of the society. At the same time, Soviet women did not just work on an equal footing with men - in addition to paid work, all the traditional female affairs of home care and raising children fell on them (Medusa News). The research sponsored by the National Soviet Council and East European Research to the University of Illinois in 1987 thoroughly analyzed surveys completed by the Soviet citizens and have

con-cluded that in the period of the 1950s to the 1970s, “The women in the SIP General Survey (Soviet women) had even higher labor-force participation rates than American women” (James R. Millar). One of the factors that also contributed to the rates of the women employment being so high was the fact that there were Five Year Plans, which was an industrial tool of economic growth, which included achieving certain goals within a limited amount of time. To accomplish monthly, quarterly and yearly objectives everybody had to work tirelessly and efficiently in their designated areas. What that meant was that very often people had to work at night, and for a lot of women, working at night meant that “they who were employed at night also had a range of domestic tasks and family responsibilities which reduced their time available for sleep and rest during the day” (Melanie Ilic).

The strong character of a Soviet woman was an essential part of the communist propaganda machine because it encouraged people to courageously overcome obstacles that they faced, thus resulting in a more productive environment. The idea of both men and women being on an equal footing in the Soviet Union was just a seed of indoctrination planted in the minds of working people. The works of literature and art had to be monitored before being published because it was imperative for them to suit the ideological philosophy. “The principal task of Soviet poetry was to help readers develop their own identity as Soviet citizens. Aesthetic con-siderations were secondary” (Hodgson and Smith). That by no means

meant that the poets did not put their souls into their work; the quality of their work was incredible when it came to honoring the heroes of World War II. The feminist movement in the 1950s in the Soviet Union was not very active or almost nonexistent because of the deceiving equality ideology that had been brainwashed into the workers’ minds.



*The picture reads: “Long Live the Equal Woman of the USSR, Active Participant in the Management, Econom-ic and Cultural Affairs of the Country!”*



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The Russian 20th-century poet and social activist Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, or as she is more famously known, Anna Akhmatova, expressed her frustration about this issue. Akhmatova became famous for her anti-Stalinistic political views, especially her poems about the sadistic ways that the government was ruled under Stalin's power; however, she only became renowned after his death in 1953 (Wikipedia). In one of her poems called "The Muse" she touches on women's perceptions on life in the Soviet Union and the sense of unfulfillment in life:

When in the night I await her coming,  
My life seems stopped. I ask myself: What  
Are attributes, freedom, or youth compared  
To this treasured friend holding a flute?  
Look, she's coming! She throws off her veil  
And watches me, steady and long. I say:  
"Was it you who dictated to Dante the pages  
Of Hell!" And she answers: "I am the one."

In this poem, Akhmatova depicts an image of a strong woman who is looking for reassurance within herself. The author suggests this from the very title itself, "The Muse," which holds strong emotions such as love and confidence and connects to looking for revelation. The character, presumably female, does not feel alive mentally because her time has stopped and all she wishes for an inspiration. Her life is boring, without any taste, and she denies herself all of the characteristics of a human being such as freedom and youth, and she awaits her inner spirit. The character is awake and physically functioning but has lost the meaning of life and follows the flow of the river. In other words, she obeys the rules that are set in place by the higher authorities. To me the flute is a symbolic representation of magic and the divine power that is recognized by the character, the presence of an internal pure will. The final two sentences are the climax of the poem where the character restores her power. Her reference to Dante's *Inferno* is symbolic to me, because firstly it represents the journey of the soul to find peace, and secondly it brings up the problem with religions being discriminated against ever since the Bolsheviks took power.

Meanwhile on the other side of the world the United States of America was one of the main countries to be involved in World War II; combined with the Allied forces, the U.S. fought against the Axis alliance. The United States undoubtedly always had the advantage of being across the oceans, which meant it was harder for its enemies to reach their space; that is why the U.S. did not officially enter the war until the insidious attack on Pearl Harbor. However, the actual war was not taking place on American soil, which made things easier, since no reconstruction had to be done after the war was over and even further progress could be achieved.

The post-war time, after the soldiers had returned home and reunited with their families, signified that people could return to their ordinary lives and pursue their “American way of life.” The annual natural population growth increased drastically and the special term “baby boomers” came to describe babies who were born from the mid-1940s up until the beginning of the 1960s. The rates of birth got so high that “by the end of the fifties, the United States’ birth rate was overtaking India’s” (Lamb). American women who were working during the war were very efficient and helpful to their nation; the jobs that had previously been predominated by men were now available for women because the draft assembled most of the men aged 21-45. The symbol of a strong determined woman at that time of World War II was Rosie



the Riveter; the media icon was portrayed to have very beautiful facial features and at the same time muscular arms representing an independent spirit (Cokey). While women were running the factories’ production lines they did not only acquire new skills but also enjoyed getting paid and becoming more autonomous.

*Rosie the Riveter*

After the tough times of the Great Depression and World War II, the American people were introduced to a new way of living their lives. New suburban family-based values were introduced to the society where the man was the main family protector and provider who took charge of the production outside the house such as fixing the car, mowing the lawn, and minding the poultry, while the women took care of what was within the house like cooking food, doing laundry, cleaning the house and raising the children. “The American society in the 1950s was mainly founded on the ideology of the housewife, shaped by magazines and other media targeted to women” (Lamb). It was an upcoming model of life that became the morals and values of the American nation in the 1950s. For a lot of females in the 1950s, living in the new confined lifestyle where their duties were narrowed down

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to domestic work did not satisfy them because they felt that they are capable of doing better things in life. “The ideology of the ‘perfect housewife’ kept women from developing all their potential and from knowing the world outside the house and the family” (Lamb). American women were looking for ways to escape the societal boundaries, but most importantly women began to understand that there was an issue with the new system and that not all of them felt comfortable with having restraints and labels assigned them. Some found the simplest way to express their creativeness through work; others found their answer in activities outside the house and a few brought these activities to the house so that they might combine personal pleasure and also the family’s desires (Lamb).

The poem “Night Feeding” was written by the influential 20th-century American poet and activist Muriel Rukeyser who was known for her work on social justice, equality, feminism, and Judaism (Wikipedia). In this poem, Rukeyser represented American women at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s in their stereotypical roles as mothers and wives

Deeper than sleep but not so deep as death  
I lay there dreaming and my magic head  
remembered and forgot. On first cry I  
remembered and forgot and did believe.  
I knew love and I knew evil:  
woke to the burning song and the tree burning blind,  
despair of our days and the calm milk-giver who  
knows sleep, knows growth, the sex of fire and grass,  
renewal of all waters and the time of the stars  
and the black snake with gold bones.  
Black sleeps, gold burns; on second cry I woke  
fully and gave to feed and fed on feeding.  
Gold seed, green pain, my wizards in the earth  
walked through the house, black in the morning dark.  
Shadows grew in my veins, my bright belief,  
my head of dreams deeper than night and sleep.  
Voices of all black animals crying to drink,  
cries of all birth arise, simple as we,  
found in the leaves, in clouds and dark, in dream,  
deep as this hour, ready again to sleep.

The setup of the poem is a mother waking up at night to feed her child, but she feels as if something is missing in her life. The female character is in a half-dreaming state shifting from conscious to the unconscious; this can be deduced from the use of symbolic words. The words black and snakes seem to me to be associated with sleep or being not fully conscious while gold and fire are

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associated with being awake or more conscious. Rukeyser touches on a sensitive topic by examining the process of breastfeeding in the 1950s; because of America's post-war conservative literary culture, writers censored the physical aspects of a woman's life (Lamb). Rukeyser also mentions "the despair of our days and the calm milk-giver," which talks about the housewife values that were in place in the United States at the time, and the unfulfilled desire of women to be diverse.

Another remarkable 20th-century American poet, Anne Sexton, is known for her deeply personal works where she addressed social problems, her intimate long battle with depression, suicidal tendencies and details from her family's life (Wikipedia Contributors). In her poem "Self" Sexton writes about the standard housewife that lived in the United States in the 1950s and that woman's search for modification in life:

What is reality?  
I am a plaster doll; I pose  
with eyes that cut open without landfall or nightfall  
upon some shellacked and grinning person,  
eyes that open, blue, steel, and close.  
Am I approximately an I. Magnin transplant?  
I have hair, black angel,  
black-angel-stuffing to comb,  
nylon legs, luminous arms  
and some advertised clothes.  
I live in a doll's house  
with four chairs,  
a counterfeit table, a flat roof  
and a big front door.  
Many have come to such a small crossroad.  
There is an iron bed,  
(Life enlarges, life takes aim)  
a cardboard floor,  
windows that flash open on someone's city,  
and little more.  
Someone plays with me,  
plants me in the all-electric kitchen,  
Is this what Mrs. Rombauer said?  
Someone pretends with me—  
I am walled in solid by their noise—  
or puts me upon their straight bed.  
They think I am me!  
Their warmth? Their warmth is not a friend!  
They pry my mouth for their cups of gin

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and their stale bread.  
What is reality  
to this synthetic doll  
who should smile, who should shift gears,  
should spring the doors open in a wholesome disorder,  
and have no evidence of ruin or fears?  
But I would cry,  
rooted into the wall that  
was once my mother,  
if I could remember how  
and if I had tears.

The poem describes the image of a stereotypical woman/housewife that lives under society's standards and feels as if she does not physically and mentally live but is just an appearance of view and behavior. The Character says, "What is reality? I am plaster doll." She has all of the characteristics of a female that should be attractive in the social norms. However, at the same time she feels as if she is not being herself but rather just mimics emotions, and in the end, she signifies the lack of tears which is normal individual behavior. The background setting described by the author is very typical for the 1950s model of life. For example, the woman lives in this dollhouse on the suburban side of the city, she also details the "all-electric kitchen," which most likely refers to a refrigerator, toaster, eggbeaters, blender, television, transistor radio, etc., all of which refer to a new American way of life.

In conclusion, after the end of World War II, feminism both in the United States and the Soviet Union was influenced by government and culture. While in Soviet Union it was normal for women to participate in almost any of the jobs that they chose, they still had to bear the housing and child raising responsibilities. American women of the fifties were finally waking from a long and well-planned unconsciousness (Lamb). They transformed from the idealistic housewives to the self-conscious and self-analytical independent women that caused a spark that inspired the second wave of feminism in the early 1960s that would impact the future of the American people.

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# A Tongue-twister Study: Do Bilinguals Exhibit Enhanced Articulatory Skill

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CRSP | CUNY Research Scholars Program

Fall 2019

Professor Laura Spinu

**A**bstract. A vast amount of experimental data has revealed certain cognitive consequences of bilingualism, some of which have been collectively - although controversially - referred to as the ‘bilingual advantage’. Among these, phonetic and phonological learning (expressed as the ability to learn new sound patterns in an accent never heard before) has been recently found to be enhanced in bilingual speakers compared to monolingual ones. Most of the previous work attempting to uncover the mechanisms underlying the cognitive advantages of bilingualism has focused on executive function. When considering phonetic and phonological learning, however, we are faced with greater involvement of sensorimotor mechanisms, since audition, perception, and articulation are all important components in the learning of new patterns of pronunciation. This underscores the need for investigating alternative mechanisms that could support the cognitive differences resulting from language experience of various types. In the current study, we investigated articulatory skill in monolingual and different types of bilingual speakers using a tongue-twister task. Our results show that while there are no overall differences in accuracy between the two main groups (monolingual vs. multilingual), bilinguals who were first exposed to their second language later in life (typically in their teens) do exhibit an advantage in the articulation of tongue-twisters. Our study thus stands out in having found an advantage with sequential bilinguals, but follow-up studies are needed to understand this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** bilingualism, articulation, bilingual advantage, phonetic and phonological learning

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## Introduction

The effects of bilingualism on cognition have been examined in both behavioral and neuroimaging studies, and the resulting picture is that bilingualism is particularly beneficial to cognitive development in childhood and in preventing the rate of cognitive decline in dementia in old age (Bialystok et al., 2012). The bilingual advantage may also be maintained throughout adulthood and involve the skill of learning new languages or dialects (Cenoz, 2003). Recent findings in the field of bilingual cognition suggest enhanced phonetic and phonological learning ability (as reflected by more effective learning of a novel accent after initial exposure) in bilinguals compared to monolinguals (Spinu et al., 2018, Antoniou et al., 2015, Tremblay & Sabourin 2012). The positive effects of bilingualism have also been found for novel word acquisition (Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009), and vowel space restructuring when learning novel accents (Kondratenko & Spinu, 2014). These advantages are thought to lie beyond the explanatory power of a single process, cognitive ability, or a simple neural network (Bialystok et al., 2004, Bialystok et al., 2012, Crinion et al., 2006).

Given the diversity of language learning circumstances, the bilingual mind constitutes one of the most readily available sources enabling systematic inquiry into how experience modifies cognitive function. While other cognitive differences between these two groups have been identified in the past (sometimes discussed in terms of a 'bilingual advantage' although the term has recently been losing popularity, Marzecova 2015), the most frequently investigated mechanism potentially underlying them has been executive function (Bialystok 2018), in particular attention/inhibition mechanisms. A general conclusion has been that bilingual advantages stem from enhanced ability to actively select relevant information and suppress potentially interfering information (Anderson et al. 2018). When considering phonetic and phonological learning, however, we are faced with greater involvement of sensorimotor mechanisms, since audition, perception, and articulation are all important components in the learning of new patterns of pronunciation. This points out the need for investigating alternative mechanisms that could support the cognitive differences resulting from language experience of various types.

Recently, approaches focusing on additional mechanisms potentially underlying the bilingual advantage have emerged (see Higby, Kim & Obler, 2013 for a literature review). For example, the role of sensory mechanisms was posited to have been underestimated to date, in particular auditory sensory (echoic) memory (Calabrese 2012, Spinu et al. 2018). Bilinguals were shown to have improved function regarding auditory processing of linguistic stimuli (Krizman et al., 2012) and to perform better than monolinguals in tasks involving episodic memory recall (Ljunberg et al., 2013), and working memory (Signorelli & Obler), but the question whether their auditory sensory memory also differs from that of monolinguals remains open.

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Adding to these, the possibility also arises that bilinguals' advantage in phonetic learning may - at least in part - be due to superior motor control, as their articulators have had daily practice with more than one set of sounds since early childhood. In a sense, bilinguals could be said to have more 'athletic' articulators. As the main articulator, the tongue would be expected to exhibit such advantages most clearly (Browman & Goldstein, 1992). The main purpose of the current study is to initiate this area of research by determining whether articulatory differences exist between mono- and bilinguals through the analysis of tongue-twister production, following Goldrick & Blumstein (2006), and McMillan & Corley (2010).

## **Experiment**

Since to our knowledge this study is the first to address the question of articulatory skill in monolingual and bilingual speakers, our predictions are primarily based on previous results for tasks involving phonetic and phonological learning (Kondratenko & Spinu 2014, Spinu et al., 2018, Antoniou et al., 2015, Tremblay & Sabourin 2012). Because these studies have found a bilingual advantage in both the production and perception of novel sounds and sound patterns, we hypothesize that bilinguals will exhibit a similar advantage in terms of articulatory skill.

· *Hypothesis: Bilingual speakers will display enhanced articulatory control (expressed as overall accuracy or correct pronunciation in tongue twister production).*

## **Stimuli**

For this experiment, the participants read 64 tongue-twisters to a controlled beat of 150 beats per second provided by a metronome. To avoid issues related to language dominance, the tongue twisters consisted of simple nonsense syllables already proven to induce pronunciation errors in the lab, e.g. *kif tif tif kif*, or *zom dom zom* (Goldrick & Blumstein 2006, McMillan & Corley 2010).

The tongue-twisters, each consisting of 4 syllables, were created following McMillan and Corley (2010). Pairs of onsets (i.e. initial consonants within a syllable, e.g. 'k' in *kef*) were selected from the four stop consonants /k, g, t, d/, resulting in sequences in which the onsets differed by place of articulation, voicing, or both. One vowel was chosen for each tongue-twister from the set /ɪ, e, ʌ/; the different combinations resulted in four versions of the sequence, one in ABBA and one in BAAB order, and one each with the coda /f/ or /v/. The coda refers to the final consonant(s) within a syllable, e.g. 'f' in *kef*. The sequences were transcribed orthographically in the following way: the onsets /k, t/ and the vowel /ɪ/ were used to create the four sequences *kif tif tif kif*, *tif kif kif tif*, *kiv tiv tiv kiv*, and *tiv kiv kiv tiv*. In all, 15 onset-vowel combinations were used, resulting in 60 tongue-twisters. As in the original study, we also included control sequences without any alternation, consisting of four repetitions of the onset together with

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an arbitrary vowel and coda (e.g., *kef kef kef kef*). The final list to be read thus contained all 64 items. The full list of stimuli is provided in the Appendix.

### Participants

The participants were 40 undergraduate students at Kingsborough Community College (City University of New York). The group contained 20 males and 20 females, mean age = 21.2. They were all tested individually in a quiet room located on campus, in Brooklyn NY. As compensation for taking part in the experiment, each participant received a \$10 Amazon gift card.

The following groups of speakers were identified post-experimentally:

- Monolingual (n=19)
- Early bilingual (n= 8): age of acquisition of second language between birth and 5 years
- Mid bilingual (n= 5): age of acquisition of second language between 5 and 10 years
- Late bilingual ((n= 3): age of acquisition of second language between 10 and 15 years
- Trilingual (n= 5): typically early bilinguals who also learned a third language later in life

### Procedure

The experimental procedure consisted of the following stages:

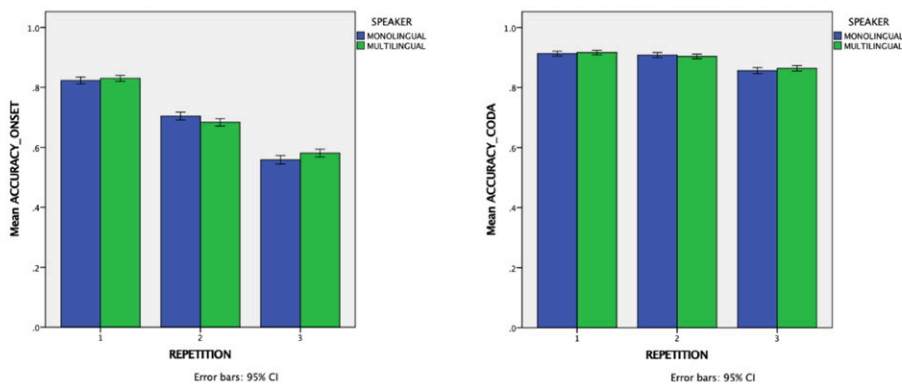
1. **Instructions** and administration of a demographic questionnaire, specifically the LEAP-Q (Marian et al., 2007)
2. **Practice.** The Microsoft PowerPoint software was used to show participants a sequence of four syllables (e.g., *kif tif tif kif*) centered on a computer monitor in black type on a white background. Each sequence was shown alone on a slide, and the subjects were instructed to read it in a fast tempo, matching 150 beats per second which were audibly marked by a met-ronome. The participants were instructed to read one syllable per beat, and to read each se-quence three times. If mispronunciations occurred, they were told to continue reading until the three repetitions of each item were finished. The experiment was self-paced: once a stim-ulus was read three times, the participants pressed a button on the keyboard to advance to the next item. The practice session consisted of 10 stimuli, followed by the experimental block.
3. **Testing.** The testing session was identical to the practice session, except that the participants proceeded on their own without any explanations, under the supervision of the experimenter. The experimental block included 64 items, which had been previously randomized using the RAND() function of the Excel software.

## Analysis

The sequences produced were manually inspected by the first author. Each oral production was matched against the orthographic sequence to which it corresponded. Any errors in pro-nunciation as well as any hesitations were recorded. Each single syllable received an accuracy score of either 1 (if produced in accordance with the orthographic sequence) or 0 (if any mis-pronunciations or hesitations were present). To investigate the effect of bilingualism on articulatory skill, a General Linear Model analysis of variance was conducted with Speaker (monolingual/multilingual) and Repetition (first/second/third) as independent variables and Accuracy as the dependent variable. To further understand the role played by different degrees of multilingualism, the analysis was then repeated with Speaker Type (monolingual/early bilingual/mid bilingual/late bilingual/trilingual) and Repetition as independent variables and Accuracy as the dependent variable. The finer grained information related to speaker type was obtained based on the analysis of the responses to the LEAP-Q questionnaire which had been administered to each subject. The different bilingual categories were assigned as described above in the Participants section.

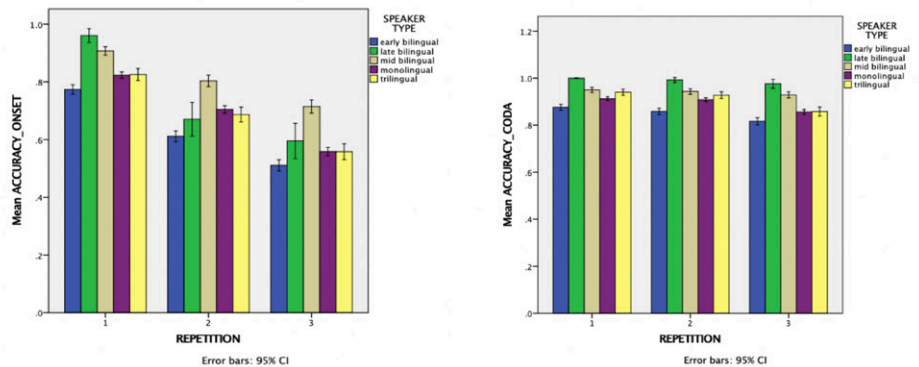
## Results

Figure 1 shows the mean accuracy for each repetition by consonant type (onset consonants on the left side, and coda consonants on the right side). Three main generalizations can be formed based on these results: (1) that onset consonants are overall more vulnerable than codas, yielding decreased accuracy across the board, (2) that for the onset position, each consecutive repetition is more problematic, with most of the errors found in the third repetition, and (3) that no major differences exist between the monolingual and multilingual group. The descriptive statistics were validated by the ANOVA test we conducted, which showed no significant effect of Speaker. By contrast, there was a significant effect of Repetition ( $p < .05$ ).



**Figure 1: mean accuracy for onsets (left) and codas (right) for each repetition.**

**Figure 2** provides the same information as Figure 1, this time broken down by speaker type in terms of the specific bilingual or trilingual experience of each participant. To further understand the role played by the specific type of multilingual experience, we conducted a second GLM ANOVA replacing Speaker (monolingual/multilingual) by Speaker Type (monolingual/early bilingual/mid bilingual/late bilingual/trilingual) as an independent variable. Two of the main patterns noted with Figure 1 (i.e. higher vulnerability of the onset position compared to the coda and decreased performance with each additional repetition, such that the third repetition was associated with the highest number of onset errors) were observed with all groups of speakers. In terms of the different speaker groups, the new analysis revealed a significant effect of Speaker Type ( $p < .001$ ) as well as Repetition ( $p < .001$ ) on both onset and coda accuracy. As Figure 2 shows, the mid and late bilinguals exhibited the highest accuracy rates across the board. A post-hoc analysis with the Bonferroni correction showed that for the onset position all groups were significantly different from each other, with the exception of monolinguals and trilinguals whose performance did not differ significantly. All groups differed significantly from each other for the coda position. Finally, in the onset position, all three repetitions differed from each other significantly, while in the coda position the third repetition differed significantly from the first and the second, which did not differ significantly from each other.



**Figure 2: mean accuracy for onsets (left) and codas (right) for each repetition, broken down by speaker type (monolingual, early/mid/late bilingual, and trilingual).**

## Discussion

Our results partially support the hypothesis formulated above. While no significant differences were found between the monolingual and multilingual group overall, differences did emerge when the multilingual group was broken down into different subgroups depending on the specific type of multilingual experience possessed by each. Mid and late bilinguals outperformed all other groups in terms of articulatory skill, exhibiting the highest accuracy rates across



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the board, including in the most vulnerable positions noted (onset consonants during the third repetition of an item). The effect of bilingualism on sensorimotor mechanisms thus promises to be a fruitful avenue for research. Bringing together multiple components (motor, sensory, and attentional) and investigating their relationship with phonetic ability has the potential of enabling a uniquely rich perspective on the phenomenon of phonetic and phonological learning. This will lead to a greater understanding of why and in what specific ways some individuals are good at learning sound patterns in novel accents while others are not.

Crucially, our findings emphasize the need for a reconceptualization of bilingualism as a multifaceted construct made up of continuous variables rather than a dichotomous category (Sulpizio et al. 2019). Even though bilingualism has been treated for decades as a categorical experience in order to accommodate the requirements of experimental design, in reality it reflects a much more complex, multidimensional, and dynamic construct (Bialystok 2018). Supporting these observations, recent literature on the neurobiology of bilingualism (DeLuca et al. 2019, DelMaschio & Abutalebi 2018) suggests that proficiency, rather than age of acquisition, is the critical differential factor in the functional organization of bilingual language processing. Even more recently, second language age of acquisition, proficiency, and usage were all found to modulate the functional connectivity of language and control networks in the brain, with the effect of age of acquisition being modulated by both proficiency as usage.

A third interesting aspect of our study is that we have found positive effects of bilingualism with young adults in the mid/late bilingual category. Both of these groups (young adults and late, sequential bilinguals) are typically least likely to differ from monolingual speakers when tested on various cognitive aspects and, even when differences are found, they are often not replicated in follow up studies (Bialystok 2018, Bialystok et al. 2012, Marzecova 2015). As mentioned above, the lack of replicability of such studies is thought to arise from the difficulty of quantifying the bilingual experience (DelMaschio & Abutalebi 2018), but also from the fact that some of the posited advantages of bilingualism are thought to be (1) a property of early bilinguals who have learned two languages simultaneously from birth and (2) most evident in childhood and old age, but ‘muted’ in adulthood (Bialystok et al. 2012). Our study suggests that there are at least some aspects in which sequential bilingualism might result in beneficial effects on cognition.

The most important limitation of our study is the limited number of participants examined, particularly as a result of dividing the multilingual group into subcategories. Consequently, we can draw no strong conclusion based on the findings reported here, and we propose that future work address these issues using larger samples of speakers. A welcome avenue of research involves imaging of the articulators through the use of ultrasound or MRI instrumentation, which have both become more available to phonetic research in recent years and provide safe and effective methods for visualizing structures inside the body, such as the

tongue, larynx, palate and other articulators employed in speech. In particular, such studies should employ a more nuanced, multidimensional way of assessing bilingual knowledge and incorporating it into experimental design. Lastly, future work should also be aimed at determining the extent to which results such as ours may reflect motoric rather than planning difficulties (McMillan & Corley 2010).

## Conclusion

Our study was among the first to focus on differences between monolinguals and multilinguals in terms of sensorimotor aspects. We have found a bilingual advantage in articulatory skill as expressed in tongue twister accuracy during a fast production task elicited through the use of a metronome. Contrary to expectations, the advantage was restricted to a specific subset of bilingual speakers, namely those who had acquired their second language in their mid and late teens. These findings open new directions of research and underscore the importance of directly measuring bilingual language proficiency and incorporating this information to experimental design. In line with very recent work, this approach will help us determine the extent to which factors in addition to the more commonly used self-reported information (such as age of acquisition, type of exposure, and amount of language use) modulate behavioral findings in the field of bilingual cognition.

## Acknowledgments

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## Appendix

Full list of stimuli used in the experiment (following McMillan and Corley 2010):

1	kefkefkefkef	17	divkivkivdiv	33	kevgevgevkev	49	kefteftefkef
2	givkivkivgiv	18	tufgufguftuf	34	gifdiftifgif	50	dufgufgufduf
3	kiftiftifkif	19	tuftuftuftuf	35	difkifkifdif	51	gevkevkevgev
4	duvkuvkuvdudv	20	defkefkefdef	36	tevgevgevtev	52	kivgivgivkiv
5	guvtuvuvuvuv	21	tivkivkivtiv	37	devgevgevdev	53	kifdiftifkif
6	tuvguvguvtuv	22	kevtetevkev	38	tifgiftiftif	54	gufkufkufguf
7	defgefgefdef	23	dufkufkufduf	39	kuvguvguvkuv	55	givtivgivgiv
8	kuftuftufkuf	24	kevdevdevkev	40	divgivgivdiv	56	gevdevdevgev
9	tivgivgivtiv	25	givdivdivgiv	41	gefteftefgef	57	tifkiftiftif
10	tufkufkufuftuf	26	gefkefkefgef	42	tefkefkeftef	58	guvduvduvguv
11	gifkifkifgif	27	duvguvguvdudv	43	tevkevkevtev	59	gevtevetgev
12	devkevkevdev	28	gufdufdufguf	44	givgivgivgiv	60	kivdivdivkiv
13	giftiftifgif	29	tuvkuvkuvtuv	45	kuvduvduvkuv	61	guvtuvuvuvuv
14	guftuftufguf	30	kivtivtivkiv	46	kifgifgifkif	62	kuvtuvuvkuv
15	difgiftifdif	31	kefgefgefkef	47	gefdefdefgef	63	duvduvduvduv
16	kufdufdufkuf	32	kufgufgufkuf	48	tefgefgeftef	64	kefdefdefkef

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# Should a Teacher's View on Religion, Politics, and World Issues Affect How They Treat Their Students?

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EDC 90 | Seminar and Practicum in Teacher Development  
Professor Laura Kates

In this day and age, being objective when it comes to politics, religion, and world issues is difficult, especially for teachers and students who witness the affects of these issues first hand in their classrooms and in their day to day lives. However, in order to maintain the equilibrium in educational facilities, it is important that we not let our own personal biases and expectations get in the way of how we treat our students. Students and teachers should all be given the same respect, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political views, etc. A teacher's job is not dependent on whether or not they like their students, or agree with their or their families' views. A teacher's job is to educate, and to give all children the same opportunity to learn new things, regardless of their own personal feelings. The way a teacher chooses to set the tone of their classroom is the tone that is set for the rest of the school year. If a teacher presents a warm, welcoming, accepting environment for all their students, even whose views they don't agree with, their students are more likely to be comfortable in that classroom.

A blog post, "Politics Are Always at Play in Our Classrooms" by José Luis Wilson, discusses how politics play a major role in the classroom environment, no matter how much a person does to deny the fact. He discusses how hard it is for teachers to keep themselves "apolitical," especially when it is the lives of their students being negatively affected. He says:

Most importantly, politics are at play in classrooms. Everything from the number and composition of students in our classrooms to the adults who end up in front of them and the buildings they're situated in are political positions. What would make us impervious to the body politic? Don't our racial attitudes affect our interactions with students and parents regularly? Don't our school rituals and routines reflect the political beliefs of a handful of people in the building? For every teacher who gets put on

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leave for comparing the president-elect with Hitler, there's a teacher who can't wait for him to come into office so he can deport anyone that doesn't look American. (para. 8)

I believe that this is so true in our society and it always has been. People always have and always will have their own views, but what is important is the way we react to other people's differences. Regardless of how much you disagree with a child it is so important to respect them. This can only occur through conversations and understanding where the student is coming from. Teachers must create an environment where they can express how they feel and not be afraid of their government or what people will do to them.

The way people are so openly expressing their hatred and prejudices is scary, and our current president is what makes it easier for them to do so. Children are so easily influenced and when they hear their parents, siblings and other relatives spewing hate, they bring it back into the classroom with them. The same goes for teachers; they bring their negative views into their classes and now believe that they have the right to express the hidden prejudices they may have had before. In my opinion freedom of speech does not mean that people can openly be prejudiced; people are entitled to their own opinions, but not if their opinions dehumanize the existence of other human beings.

In the article "Teacher Bias: The Elephant in the Classroom" by E. Austin, the author discusses the power unconscious biases can have on the performance and growth of students:

Put more generally, teachers' belief in their students' academic skills and potential is "a vital ingredient for student success" because it is linked to students' beliefs about "how far they will progress in school, their attitudes toward school, and their academic achievement. When teachers underestimate their students, it affects not just that one student-teacher relationship but also the student's entire self-concept as well as more tangible measures like their GPA. (para. 10)

The way a teacher perceives a student is the way the student tends to perceive himself or herself. If a teacher talks rudely and talks to a child like he/she is dumb, then that is how the children will think of themselves. Teachers, educators and people who work at schools should not succumb to the types of biases that hinder the growth and development of children because it limits their abilities. Some children that aren't given the same chance to grow and develop as their white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, companions, may end up perpetuating further into the negative stereotypes that people keep on believing, and it is something that cannot be ignored.

As an Orthodox Muslim girl growing up in New York City, prejudice is



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always there, and having teachers and classmates ignore the blatant discrimination and injustice hurts. I don't want any person, student or teacher to feel that they don't belong in a school setting. Even now as a field student, going into a different school every semester is unsettling. I feel like I do not belong in the school, teachers don't smile or acknowledge me and they are often distant. I understand that a lot of fear and prejudice comes from being uninformed. I hope that through exploring issues such as these will give me the opportunity to discuss how important it is to be open minded and willing to learn new things.

I have a 13-year-old neighbor who is currently in the 8th grade. She is my friend and someone I tutor. Every year, since she was in 6th grade, when September rolls around she dreads doing her homework. It is the same thing, year after year, after year, she has to do some type of project, poem, or essay about 9/11 and how people, who claim to be the same faith as her did it. She hates it, she pretends she isn't Muslim and when I read her work I feel sad and disheartened that she writes about the topic as if she isn't Muslim and as if this event does not personally affect her or the people around her. I asked her why her work portrays us so negatively and she said it was because her teacher is "kinda racist" and she just wants to get a good grade. I was outraged! How could a teacher be that way? Why did he even become a teacher? Didn't he know that this wasn't Europe in the 1940s? After I ranted about her teacher for a good thirty minutes, I regrouped and started to ask myself if just because his political views are different from mine, does that make him a bad teacher? No, what makes him a bad teacher is his inability to conceal it from the students. My neighbor is sweetest, most intelligent, kindest girl I know, and the fact that she doesn't like such an important part of herself because of her teacher is disgusting.

With tactfulness and a respectful approach a teacher can create a dialogue with their class about any biases or misinformed fears they may have, and can address the differences within the class as a whole. A teacher can discuss how "different" does not mean "bad," but it should not play a role in how a teacher treats their student. Or a principal/ school district can run a workshop whose main purpose is to discover the root of the unconscious biases teachers possess and to help control them.

To find out more on the importance of a politically neutral educational environment I interviewed Mary-Jane (pseudonym), who is a teacher at Brooklyn New School. This is her first year teaching at BNS and her first time co-teaching in an ICT classroom. She stated that as a teacher who wants to promote civility and respect in her classroom, it is important to establish clear boundaries: "Throughout the school year it is important to establish and re-establish all of the differences in our classroom, and make sure that all of our students know that everyone is accepted." She continued: "Accommodation is also key in maintaining order in a classroom. I don't know how other teachers do it, but personally if a child's or their families' views don't align with mine, I will try my best to make sure that that child

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still has the same opportunities as the rest of their classmates. ... Furthermore, what a child and their family choose to believe has nothing to do with me, nor does it hinder my ability teach them.” I agree that this is key in maintaining a safe, respectful, and intellectually stimulating classroom environment.

People will always have disagreements, and they will always have different views on religion, politics, gun control, parenting, etc. What’s important is the way a teacher separates them-selves from that and can lead their class, bias-free. No one is telling them to become best friends with their students, but they should keep their biases, discrimination, and prejudices in check and evaluate themselves. Are they justified in making 13-year-olds feel bad about them-selves because of the way they view an entire religion based on an unfortunate event? Or making children of a different sexual orientation feel bad because they don’t confine to the heteronormative standards of our society? Or make children feel like they are dumb because of the color of their skin? Or belittle a person with a disability? These things stick with kids their whole lives and it really affects the way they view themselves and the world around them.

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# Three Landmark Cases: Separate but Equal

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In the United States, the human right to be free and treated as an equal was a struggle, even after it was a right protected by the highest law, the Constitution. Even though the 13th Amendment of the Constitution of 1868 abolished slavery, and the 14th Amendment gave all citizens the same rights and protections under the law, local and state laws were passed and up-held by the United States Supreme Court that took away the rights of individuals. The three landmark cases of Plessy v. Ferguson 1896, Brown v. Board of Education 1954, and Loving v. Virginia 1967 will demonstrate how the rights of individuals can be taken away and how the fight to overturn an unjust Supreme Court decision can take decades. This paper will show the unique connections and how a legal seed that was planted in the form of a judicial dissent took decades to bear fruit, and how Loving fought racial state laws against a state that initially draft-ed the law nearly 300 years ago.

Understanding the importance of these cases and the new precedents they set is crucial to grasping how the evolution of our laws plays a central role in the development of our society as a whole. The tactic of deprivation of access has been and continues to be one of the most powerful and effective ways to maintain inequality. Working to deny personal liberty and mobility while systematically programming Black Americans to feel inferior demonstrates how agents of White supremacy were effective in maintaining systemic oppression.

We must take a closer look by unpacking the details of the case, Loving v. Virginia. An African American woman named Mildred Jeter and a Caucasian male named Richard Loving got married in Washington, D.C., in 1958. The Lovings decided to move back to Virginia not long after their honeymoon. Upon arriving in Virginia, they were arrested for violating Virginia's state law banning interracial marriage. The Lovings pleaded guilty on January 6, 1959. Their sentence was suspended in exchange for a plea bargain promising to leave Virginia and not come back for a duration of 25 years. Sometime afterward, the Lovings contacted the American Civil Liberty Union to assist in overturning their conviction. They

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argued that “their sentence was cruel and unusual and violated due process and equal protection and was a burden on in-terstate commerce” (Moran, 15). It must be noted that there was a long history and many cases before the Lovings challenged the state.

The first example of these issues with inter-racial marriage was in 1681, when Irish-born indentured servant Eleanor Butler married an African slave named Charles. “Irish Nell,” as she was called, chose a life of slavery for her and her children in order to marry the man she loved and keep her family intact (Moran, 3-4). This union provides a critical example of the intersec-tionality between social, legal, and gender inequality. Most notably, it highlights the role that gender inequality played in the selective enforcement of the laws under examination. This point will be expanded on later in my essay.

It is essential to present a brief background of how and when these laws were put in to place. Let us make the argument very clear: the state of Virginia wanted to continue the practice of anti-miscegenation. Anti-miscegenation laws are laws that work to preserve and maintain racial segregation by criminalizing interracial marriage, and, in some cases, sex between the members of different races. These laws were based solely on the bias of race and inter-racial relationships that started around 1660 in colonial America. The colonies of Virginia and Mary-land were the first to enact laws criminalizing marriage between races, more specifically, be-tween whites and nonwhites, to create a hierarchy of races. Virginia was the first to enact this law, in 1691, criminalizing marriage between free blacks and whites, and Maryland, in 1692, followed in the same direction (Head). Mulattoes were characterized as the product of interra-cial breeding, predominately classified as white and black. White slave owners were adamant that mulattoes posed a severe problem because they blurred the distinction between races. The increase in interracial procreation after 1830 was thought to be a problem that could no longer be ignored. It was “dealt with” through the introduction of the “one-drop rule.” The evolution of the one-drop rule in the decades between 1850 and 1915 transformed race relations in this country (Kinney). As Emancipation ushered in Reconstruction, the United States saw a brief period where there was an attempt to dismantle the structures of oppression built into American society.

After the Civil War, as a result of Reconstruction efforts, there was a surge in mixed mar-riages. This was seen more prominently between black men and white women. Beginning in 1870, governments began to nullify laws against intermarriage. As Reconstruction failed, and American society moved into a post-Reconstruction era, there was a resurgence of anti-miscegenation laws. Coming back with a vengeance, “these new laws also incorporated the “one-drop rule,” and most lasted on the books of Southern states until desegregation and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. One of these laws defined “black” for purposes of prevent-ing cross marriages “anyone with 1/32 Negro heritage,” and this law “was still in place in Loui-siana until 1983” (Kinney).

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The case of *Loving v. Virginia* played a significant role in how the civil rights movement stimulated a 63 percent increase in interracial marriages during in the 1960s. This was almost exclusively attributed to White women marrying Black men. There was an actual decline in the number of White men marrying Black women during the same time period. A study of mixed marriages in Philadelphia between 1922 and 1947, showed that white women cross-married more. One sample of 50 mixed marriages, showed that 44 were by white women (Kinney). Fast forward to the post-civil rights era of the 21st century, and we see how diversity is nurtur-ing multicultural unions. A more recent study showed, of the 3.6 million adults who wed in 2013, 58 percent of American Indians, 28 percent of Asians, 19 percent of blacks, and 7 per-cent of whites have a spouse whose race is different from their own. Asian women are more likely than Asian men to marry interracially. Of newlyweds in 2013, 37 percent of Asian wom-en married someone who was not Asian, while only 16 percent of Asian men did so. There is a similar gender gap for blacks, where men are much more likely to intermarry (25 percent) com-pared to only 12 percent of black women (Foster).

The relationship between white women and black men brings us back to the blatant display of gender inequality within the crafting and execution of anti-miscegenation laws: “As sociolo-gist Gunnar Myrdal reported in the 1940s, white America traditionally has tolerated a white man’s involvement with a black woman, as long as the affair is kept from the public eye and doesn’t lead to marriage. However, a much stronger taboo has existed against any relationship between a white woman and a black man” (Kinney). This is a clear demonstration of the United States’ patriarchal society dictating the boundaries in which women are forced to live their lives. White men structured this prohibition to establish that it was only through white women pro-creating with black men that the purity of whiteness would be polluted because any offspring of black women with white men would simply follow the mother’s caste and be black. This ine-quality is illustrated in the declaration that, “whatsoever freeborn woman shall intermarry with any slave from and after the last day of this present assembly shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband, and that the [children] of such freeborn women so married shall be slaves as their fathers were” (Head).

The ways in which social practices were codified into law, during the Jim Crow era is a bla-tant illustration of how social inequality had a significant influence on legislation and court rul-ings regarding segregation. *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the foundation on which many of the Jim Crow Laws were built. In 1892, a man of mixed race boarded a “whites only” car, which was a direct violation of Louisiana’s Separate Car Act of 1890, “separate but equal.” This man’s name was Homer Plessy. Mr. Plessy was obligated to inform the conductor of his racial status and that he was not going to sit in a segregated car. We must keep in mind that this was a deliberate orchestration by Plessy and the railroad officials. Both parties wanted to get rid of Louisiana’s segregation law. The railroad did not want to deal

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with the inconvenience and financial burden of having to maintain two separate cars. There was a third-party that also played a role in this orchestration. They were a group of Creole Businessman from New Orleans, who created a Citizen Committee that hired an ex-judge and social reformer as legal counsel. His name was Albion Tourgee. The committee handpicked Mr. Plessy based on his biracial identity, which they felt would support their argument that racial identity cannot be consistently applied (Dui-gnan). Their goal was to have him get arrested, and then challenge Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890 in court. As planned, Mr. Plessy was arrested and charged with a crime.

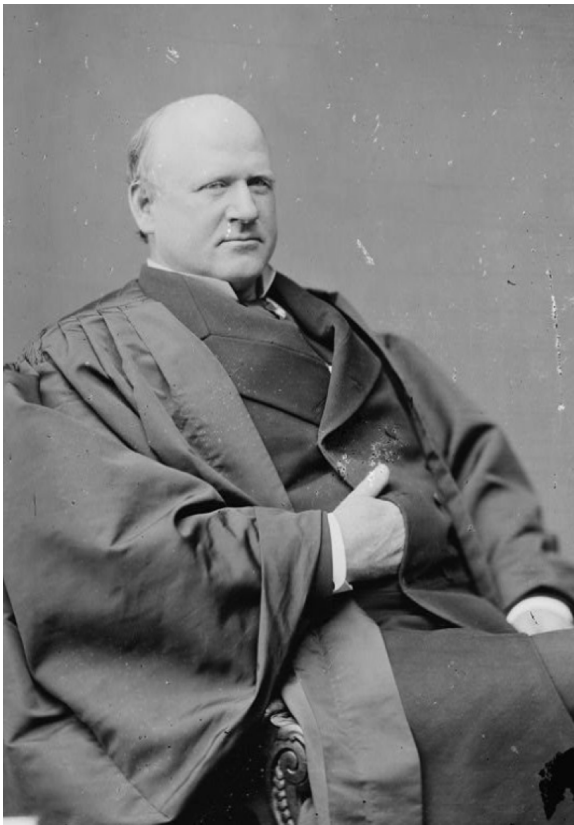
The case of Plessy v. Ferguson hit the Supreme Court in 1896, where the argument was made that segregation violated the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law for all citizens. Unfortunately, in a majority decision, the court ruled Louisiana's segregation law did not violate the 14th Amendment because Louisiana law gave accommodations for both whites and blacks, and even though they were separate, they were equal. The court's stance was, "Legal equality was adequately respected in the act because the accommodations provided for each race were required to be equal and because the racial segregation of passengers did not by itself imply the legal inferiority of either race—a conclusion supported by numerous state-court decisions that had affirmed the constitutionality of laws establishing separate public schools for white and African American children. In contrast, social equality, which would entail the 'commingling' of the races in public conveyances and elsewhere, did not then exist and could not be legally created" (Duignan). This is where the court was attempting to deny the intersectionality of social and legal inequality. A point that played a significant role in the Brown v. Board of Education decision.

In summarizing the court's ruling, Justice Henry Brown wrote, "We considered the underlining fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this is so, it is not, by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it." One might suggest that not much has changed in the utilization of the trope that claims of inequality are nothing more than displays of Black Americans' over-sensitivity.

The one dissenting opinion in Plessy v. Ferguson was by a former slave-owning Kentuckian who had fought on the Union side during the American Civil War, Associate Justice John Marshall Harlan (1833-1911). Justice Harlan wrote in his Plessy v. Ferguson dissent: "Because it presupposed—and was universally understood to presuppose—the inferiority of African Americans, the act imposed a badge of servitude upon them in violation of the Thirteenth Amendment." He argued that the effect of the law was to interfere with the personal liberty and freedom of movement of both African Americans and whites. Because it attempted to regulate the civil rights of citizens on the arbitrary basis of their race, the

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act was repugnant to the principle of legal equality underlying the Fourteenth Amendment's equal-protection clause. (Dui-gnan). Justice Harlan's legal arguments are essential for not just historical legal precedent but for the motivational aspects they had on future litigators who fought for equality. These two quotes by Harlan were used by a great legal hero in his darkest hours and were quoted by him in front of the Supreme Court. "What can more certainly arouse race hate, what more certainly create perpetuate a feeling of distrust between these races, than state enactments, which in fact, proceed on the ground that colored citizens are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coach occupied by white citizens? That, as all will admit, is the real meaning of such legislation." Then there is his most famous quote: "Our constitution is colorblind." Associate Justice Harlan's opinion was clearly not consistent with the majority of white Americans' opinion of the time.



*Justice John Marshall Harlan*  
[https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1700972#/media/File:John\\_Marshall\\_Harlan-LC-DIG-cwpbh-03603.jpg](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1700972#/media/File:John_Marshall_Harlan-LC-DIG-cwpbh-03603.jpg)

A possible explanation for Harlan's divergent opinion was that he had a half-brother named Robert who was black. Harlan's father had been a prominent slave owner who had biracial children and unsuccessfully tried to send all his children to the same school. This left a permanent mark on Harlan's life, having



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to see his beloved brother not be able to attend the same school as he did. Harlan always resented the way white America treated his brother, and some would argue this is the basis of the legal origins of the judge that would be known as Justice Harlan “The Great Dissenter.” Harlan’s brave and eloquent defense for Negro civil rights inspired one of the greatest lawyers of our times, the late and great Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Harlan’s words kept Marshall going in the dark and gloomy hours of despair when deliberating as lead attorney for the NAACP. In Marshall’s low moments in his struggle to end segregation, he would read aloud Harlan’s dissents to pick himself up. Marshall even cited it in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 case that overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Thompson). Sometimes in a legal world, the dissent can lay the foundation for the precedent, to set the new argument, and then the ruling. It is important to embrace the fact that our legislative system was constructed in a way that allows room for growth and change within our society. It is this adaptability that enabled the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to have such a monumental impact on American society and become one of the key elements to usher in the Civil Rights Movement.

Looking forward to the *Brown v. Board of Education*, an additional argument was made to address the effects of segregation in the U.S. public school system. One of the determining factors was, “To separate black children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone. The court supported this conclusion with citations—in a footnote, not the main text of the opinion—to a number of psychology studies that purported to show that segregating black children made them feel inferior and interfered with their learning” (Chemerinsky, 737). As a result of school integration and busing, for example, millions of American children from different races and socioeconomic status have grown up together over the past few decades. No longer do black and white Americans, particularly American youth, live in two isolated cultures, with no knowledge of the others’ social lives, values, music, dress, work. “The black and white young people today are the first generation of Americans since the 1890s to be raised in steady social contact with each other, just as the generation that came of age in 1915 was the first to grow up under total segregation and the one-drop rule” (Kinney).

Although we still deal with the burden of classifying people by racial groups, the integrated school system lends itself to multi-racial children. They are not the outsiders that some members of society would have us believe. In a more integrated environment, these children can see diversity and are more likely to come across children who look like them. Additionally, studies now show that a multi-racial background gives kids a stronger appreciation for diversity, the ability to understand multiple sides of controversial issues, and enhanced creativity when it comes to problem-solving. It is important that parents of biracial children do not avoid talking about differences, because it might signal to the child that something

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is wrong with it. Interestingly, psychologists suggest not to use fractions when describing their race; this could make them feel outside of all races or groups (Torres). Diversities in schools and social acceptance can be very influential when interracial families are deciding what communities they wish to live their lives and raise their children. The racial elements under the façade of good Christian virtue to protect the sanctity of whiteness was clearly at work during, and throughout, the duration of miscegenation laws. Additionally, the prejudicial laws are meant to be an example of how white men justify themselves in protecting and controlling what they think is their property, white women. The villainization and condemnation of black bodies have been the driving force behind many constructed agents of oppression.

It is through the analysis of efforts over time to restrict the liberties of women and people of color that we see how social, legal, and gender inequalities intersect to restrict the pursuit of happiness for the oppressed and persecuted. Stripping people of their right to choose how they live their lives, and build their family is unconstitutional, and any entity attempting to deprive that liberty to an individual should be abolished, or resisted.

Virginia's court shot down the Lovings' argument, "concluding that their punishments were far too light to be cruel and unusual, that marriage was a domestic arrangement unrelated to interstate commerce, and that the legislature was justified in keeping the races separate as divinely ordained by Almighty God" (Moran, 15). The Lovings then appealed their case to the Supreme Court, which heard their argument on April 10, 1967, with a decision following two months later, on June 12, 1967. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of the Lovings. Chief Justice Warren delivered the opinion of the court, citing that it was a clear violation of the equal protection and due process clause of the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court rejected Virginia's racial classification and their justification as "measures designed to maintain white supremacy," and the Supreme Court also maintained in its opinion that "there was a fundamental right to marry and that Virginia's anti-miscegenation law wrongly invaded that right without due process of law" (Moran, 16). The most important statement made by the court that is consistent with the argument being presented is Chief Justice Warren's statement, "characterizing the choice of a marriage partner as an individual right essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by a free man" (Moran, 16). It is this fundamental liberty that clearly compelled the court to rule in favor of the Lovings. The case of *Loving v. Virginia* is a foundation case, along with *Brown v. Board of Education*, with *Plessy v. Ferguson* playing a critical role in the success of these future Supreme Court decisions.

In conclusion, this paper shows a connection between three cases over the span of more than a hundred years. *Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896 ruling gave us "separate but equal"; *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* 1954 overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*; *Loving v. Virginia* 1967 reinforced equal protection and due

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process. Some of these connections are from the historical point view, some are connections from a personal motivational perspective, but all are connect-ed from a legal jurisprudence perspective. But the biggest connections are Freedom, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

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# Words Matter: Our Authentic Transgender Selves

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ENG 2400: Composition II  
Professor Sara Rutkowski

New language is emerging every day in our society, and much of it revolves around identity. Many of the changes in language come from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community, because the members of this community are experiencing more freedom to express themselves and they need to find words to do this. The language required for transgender individuals to express themselves hasn't before existed or been understood to function in this manner. With anything new, there will always be pushback from dissenting entities. This could be attributed to simple confusion, but language is often weaponized as a means to oppress minorities. It is more common for the transgender community to experience interactions with people who choose to ignore the words that are most important to their identity altogether, which leads to a feeling of erasure and can be more detrimental. While this behavior is utterly harmful to any disenfranchised demographic, the nearly 1.4 million transgender adults and 150,000 transgender youth in the United States are particularly vulnerable because the language surrounding the transgender community is so integral to each individual's identity (Flores, Herman).

Let's start with a little bit of linguistic history. In 1910, a German sexologist named Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term "transvestite" for people whose expressed gender did not align with their sex assigned at birth. Hirschfeld was working towards a de-pathologized concept of gender transition until Adolf Hitler burned his facility – and all of his work – in 1933 (Kohler). Because of a sweeping lack of understanding, society labelled them as sexual deviants and assumed that

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they cross-dressed for sexual gratification. People who were labelled as transvestites were often institutionalized and subject to tortuous “therapies” that attempted to cure them, including electric shocks and lobotomies (Condon). Cross-dressing was also a criminal act from the late 1800s until the late 1900s. Those who were unfortunate enough to be charged with crimes faced anywhere from two years of hard labor to much worse fates (Whittle).

In 1949, British sexologist David Oliver Cauldwell came up with the term “transsexual” as a way to describe the same community which Hirschfeld served. In 1969, Harry Benjamin, one of Hirschfeld’s students that relocated to the United States to escape the Holocaust, began using the word frequently in his classes at New York’s City College. Dr. Benjamin made tremendous progress in alleviating some of the stigma or transsexuals by introducing his patient Christine Jorgenson to the world. Ms. Jorgenson underwent surgeries and hormone therapy in order to transition and left herself open to be interviewed by newspapers and television stations (Reese). This era in trans history was very medicalized and while it helped move away from a criminal-ized stigma, it opened the door to a pathologized one. That is, people thought that something must be wrong with transsexuals if they required medical intervention to be well; they must be sick! The word transgender was created at about the same time but was not often used until much later.

The Stonewall Rebellion occurred in 1969 and spurred Marsha P. Johnson, a trans woman of color, who had finally had enough of the constant police raids of gay bars. Ms. Johnson re-fused to comply, and this led many other patrons of the bar to refuse. Violence soon erupted. This standoff lasted for three days and spurred an uprising of the LGBT community nation-wide. In 1978, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna published their groundbreaking book addressing gender and transgender individuals. They were the first to think of gender as a social construct and begin to re-forge the path to de-pathologize transness. At an event where I was fortunate enough to meet them, I asked Dr. Kessler what made them begin to think of gender in this way when nobody else was. Her response was, “I talked to trans people, and I listened to their stories, and I realized that their gender is just as real as anyone else’s” (Kessler).

The word transgender has become the word of choice in the last twenty or so years. This linguistic evolution has been the trans community’s way of moving away from its violent past of criminalization and pathologization. Thus, it is imperative that proper language is used when speaking to or about transgender individuals. Of course, that is impossible without knowing what the properly vernacular is, so let’s start with “binary.” Binary is a word that is used to describe the dichotomy of male and female. The gender binary, as a dichotomy, implies that there are only two possibilities in the realm of gender, but researchers are finding this to be fundamentally incorrect. The word “transgender” (often shortened to just “trans”) is commonly used as umbrella term for people who were assigned one sex at birth, based on their visible sex characteristics, but express their gender

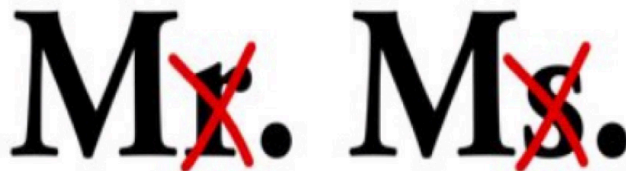
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identity outside of the culturally accepted norms for their sex assigned at birth (Human Rights Campaign).

This is where things get interesting, and we begin to break the binary. A person who falls under the transgender umbrella could identify as simply transgender; that is, they have transitioned from male to female or female to male. In doing so, they are often transitioning to their correct gender in order to express that gender within gender norms. I am a female to male transgender person. While I generally fit into the binary, I absolutely respect and embrace my nonbinary counterparts and acknowledge that my own behaviors and mannerisms are some-times outside of accepted gender norms.

They could also identify as nonbinary, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender-fluid, or gender-expansive. All of these are similar in that they lie outside of the dichotomy of gender. However, they are all very different in their individual nuances. A gender-fluid person does not identify with a fixed gender and whose gender expression may change. A gender-expansive person is one whose gender expression in their physical appearance lie outside of their gender identity; these folks generally identify as masculine or feminine. Gender nonconforming people have a similar definition to gender-expansive people. Genderqueer people reject social norms around gender altogether and see themselves as every gender and/or no gender. Nonbinary simply means that a person's gender falls outside of socially accepted gender norms for either binary gender (Human Rights Campaign).

With all of this linguistic manipulation of gender, other grammatical items come into play; one of the most significant of these are pronouns. Binary gender is so ingrained into our society that most cisgender people use gendered pronouns without even thinking about it, but this is something of great concern to transgender individuals. Of course, binary trans folks will use binary pronouns. But what happens when you don't fit into either binary gender? The community has created alternative pronouns which include "xe," "xir," "ze," "phe," "ou..." And the list goes on. Interestingly, in the 1880s a few newspapers attempted to use "thon" as a gender neutral pronoun (Brooks). In addition, we have come up with a gender neutral honorific, "Mx." Mx. comes from a visual where the "s" and "r" are crossed out of traditional, gender-specific honorifics, effectively making a visual "Mx." This has been entered into Merriam-Webster Dictionary:



**Mr. Ms.**

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Not all of these have stuck, but the most common of them that one will see used include “xe/xer/xem” or “ze/zir/zim.” Mx. does seem to be sticking, if for no other reason than because there are no other options for an honorific.

The biggest pushback to gender neutral pronouns seems to be, however superficially, pro-noun agreement. Speakers and writers should never use “it,” because this dehumanizes the in-dividual being referred to and this type of dehumanization often leads to the worst kind of op-pression. The most commonly used are “they” and “them,” which both have traditionally car-ried a meaning of plurality. Of course, this is not the case when referring to a single nonbinary person and does force one to think about how the words in the sentence need to be framed. However, these pronouns have been used for centuries in the binary, including by Shakespeare and Charles Dickens (Dictionary.com). An example would be, “They went to a store.” We don’t know their gender, but it doesn’t matter. We don’t go crazy trying to figure it out in day-to-day conversation. When we are unsure of a person’s gender, we use “they” without hesita-tion. It seems that it is only with trans people that people start to have problems.

Another word of significance is “cisgender.” Cisgender was created by the transgender community in order to describe people who are not transgender; that is, they identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. The word was created in the 1990’s as a way to easily describe cisgender people in discussion, but recently has come under fire by mostly opponents of the transgender community. In 2014, an opera singer decided that he needed to publicly revolt against being called cisgender and this was, unfortunately, published by the Huffington Post. Even the title is offensive: “I am NOT Cisgendered” (Aviance). Vocabulary and grammar have been a point of contention with these queer new words. The community has been ardent in en-suring that we are not called “transgendered.” This would indicate an action, which would con-sequently imply a choice – which gender identity and sexual orientation are not. This has been a dangerous notion used against the larger LGBT community since before Stonewall Rebellion in 1969.

The singer goes on to declare cisgender a slur, which is absurd for several reasons. First, it simply does not and has never meant anything negative. Second, a slur is a word used from a position of power or privilege to oppress those with less power. Third, where there is a dichot-omy, there is privilege (Kessler). Cisgender people have never been discriminated against or oppressed for their gender identity. While a trans person can be angry and say rude things, that trans person will never have the power to oppress a cisgender person. Thus, cisgender cannot be a slur. My cousin, with whom I no longer speak, used this article several months ago to rant on my personal Facebook page against the transgender community. This was on a post regarding Transgender Day of Visibility, which celebrates trans people in a very positive light. A white cisgender man degrading transgender people on such an important day is a clear example of the oppression that transgender people face every day. This oppression happens at school, work, in public places and can



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be perpetrated by strangers, acquaintances, friends, teachers, medical pro-viders, and even family members.

In order to explore firsthand accounts of how language affects trans people, I sent a list of questions to several people. Two transgender men and three supportive family members of trans people sent me a video or audio recording of themselves answering these questions. Among these questions were, “What does the word transgender mean to you?” “How does it feel when people use the correct pronouns and name?” and “How does it feel when they use the wrong pronouns or name?” Their answers echoed one another and carried several themes, the most significant being that language really matters and can hold power.

The participants answered similarly to the meaning of the word transgender. Seth Meyer, this project’s first participant who has three transgender siblings, had the most sweeping definition: “It is not only a term to describe a very large group of people, but it’s also a term to describe three of my siblings.” The participants’ more common definition focused on the cognitive dissonance experienced between brain and body. Austin Thornton, a transgender man in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas, stated: “My mind and my heart don’t match up with the body that I was born in ... and my gender doesn’t align with the sex I was born as.” This dissonance is the core of being transgender and is expressed by nearly every person that fits under the transgender umbrella.

When asked how they feel when people use the correct pronouns and name for them or their loved ones, the participants all mirrored the notion that it felt really good. The exception was Oliver Dayton, age 14, who voiced some ambiguity: “It used to be like, a nice surprise, but now it just feels normal. Like when I first came out, when I was first coming out to people, they would call me ‘Oliver’ and ‘he,’ or a lady at Walmart would call me ‘sir.’ I’d be like, ‘oh! Wow!’ Now it’s just like, yeah, that’s me.” Jon Dayton, Oliver’s father, expressed the strongest reaction to correct gendering and naming, “Something I’ve seen in the trans people that I know is that it’s just so heartwarming for them to see somebody, you know, try to get it right, and slip up, and catch themselves, and apologize and get it right ... trying to get it right is the biggest deal to them.” This alone shows how powerful words can be when in regard to a person’s identity. The respect shown and felt when a person makes an attempt, even failing, is a profound boost to a transgender person’s wellbeing.

In contrast, using the wrong pronouns (misgendering) and name (deadnaming) are devastating and put an additional burden on many trans individuals’ struggles. My own senior thesis and likely life’s work is arguing to de-pathologize transness on the basis that the mental health problems that trans people are more prone to are either independently existing or caused by social stigma. Austin illustrates the initial reaction and following chronic difficulties: “When people use the wrong pronouns and like, your old name, it cuts like a knife ... because it does hurt and every time you hear it, it’s like a chip. It chips away at you.” He

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then goes on to chronicle recent difficulties with family outright refusing to refer to him appropriately:

I've been using the same name for four years now, and I have a couple of family members that refuse to call me by that name because they just don't want to ... and there are times when we just bite our tongues and just let it happen because it's not the right time or place, or we don't want to cause a scene or make somebody else uncomfortable, when in reality our skin is crawling and we're hurting

Jon reflects this in his dealings with Oliver's teachers at school: "We had an experience with a couple of teachers that just flat out refused to get on board with [Oliver's transition]. It causes the opposite amount [from correct gendering] of frustration and anger."

We clearly see here how deeply trans individuals are affected by the refusal to respect their identity. Many trans people report feeling like they are being told they simply don't exist.

Further documentation of the struggles trans people face due to this stigma and these refusals are shown in the raw data obtained by the Williams Institute of UCLA. The rate of suicide attempts by transgender youths is a staggering three times that of their cisgender counterparts, and averages at 41 percent of transgender adolescents (Haas). Furthermore, the misgendering and deadnaming of transitioning and post-transition individuals can ultimately put them in danger of violence or death.

Austin states, "Here I am presenting male, and then you call me 'she' in public, you've now outed me to people I don't even know, which by the way is dangerous, that puts me in danger." Austin lives in Dallas, Texas. The LGBT-related hate crime rate in Dallas is nine times that of any other city in Texas (Sanchez). When I lived there, there was a group of people that were targeting the "gay strip" (a road in downtown Dallas with a slew of gay clubs), and several times a week for over a year someone would get very badly hurt. Austin and his husband often asked me to walk with them to and from the strip, because they were not yet able to fully pass for binary men and they were afraid they'd be next.

I also asked my participants what they wish people would do better. Each one requested more respect. Austin stated: "All we want is to love and be loved." Oliver requested, "If some-one asks you to use different pronouns or a different name, just do it. Don't ask them why." His dad followed up, "Ya know, just a little bit of acceptance, it's not that bad." The participants also expressed a desire for people to educate themselves and ask questions when appropriate. Austin encouraged: "If you don't understand, in the right time and place it's okay to ask questions." Jon stated, "I also wish people would do a little better on self-education ... it's super easy to get educated. Heck, you can just find a trans person and ask them!"

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Austin followed up, “At the end of the day, even if you don’t get it, you don’t have to.”

These testimonies clearly illustrate the power of language to validate or invalidate a person’s identity. In addition to speaking about how language affects them, the participants offered solutions: ask appropriate questions, self-educate, realize that you don’t need to understand every minute detail in order to be respectful. We in the transgender community know exactly what needs to happen to heal the schism between our community and the rest of the world. This is why it is so important to allow an underprivileged group to take the lead in their own activism and battle for liberation.

Transgender individuals are particularly susceptible to invalidation and harm because their language used by them is so integral to their identity and they feel that they are at risk of erasure and violence. This is often confirmed in the real world, such as recent transphobic legislation to keep us out of the army, the rash of violence Austin and I experienced in Dallas and the hundreds of deaths of transgender people by violence each year. Three trans women of color were killed in single week at the time of this writing. It is clear that we are in dire need of social change in order to overcome these burdens. My goal is for those of us in activism and academia can figure out exactly how to crack the code and bring our society to a more affirming place. It would be a beautiful thing to see some of the most misunderstood people able to be happy and safe in their homes, jobs, and the world at large.

**Note:** This essay is accompanied by video of the same name: <https://youtu.be/rHc8B1l1w5c>

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# The Armenian Political System vs. the American Political System: The Effects of Revolution

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POL 5100 | American Government and Politics

Professor Jacob Segal

The leader of a country is an essential political figure who should speak for the people and embody their beliefs and values; if such a leader is not in place, the country is set up to fail. In this paper, I will explore the effects of ill-suited leaders on a nation. I will be discussing the current U.S. political system and comparing it with my country Armenia's situation, specifically discussing the 2018 Armenian Revolution. I will also be focusing on the countries' differences in government structure and immigration matters.

Political parties in general carry three major functions: electing candidates, educating or propagandizing citizens and governing. American parties, however, don't have a monopoly on educating citizens, working to elect candidates or governing.

Different countries have different political systems. For example, the United States of America has only a two-party system because Americans found that to be more beneficial for their economic growth and stability. Armenia, on the other hand, has a multiparty system, hence things happen quite differently here and over there. What is different between a two-party and multiparty system is "whether this basic tendency toward dualism is expressed in every aspect of the electoral process or only in the creation and functioning of a government." Can a two-party system or multiple party system help the situation to change? Partially, yes! In my understanding, the wider selection we have to vote, the bigger the picture gets. Global-ly, we can see where our beliefs intersect with a party's beliefs on a much more detailed scale.

Revolutions in a small countries often fail because of police force, limited opportunities, and lack of news. If citizens wish to carry out a revolution, they must have a way of communicating with the government about the problems that citizens face. If the revolutionaries cannot, the revolution will not gain the necessary support and momentum. For instance, with the very recent attempt of revolution in

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Sudan, the only way to get the “bad news” spread was done by Instagram users by a blue profile picture – Blue for Sudan. Similarly, and not surprisingly, countries like Armenia get less support; most foreigners are not interested in the history of small countries, let alone the current situations. Brutally said, the Armenian Genocide, which was one of the most severe historical events, caused the deaths of a million and a half Armenians, but it is still not recognized properly. That sounds problematic to me, and I am openly concerned about that. Those countries who struggle for a change, and fight for it by any possible means do deserve attention. Being informed about what is going on in the other side of the world is important, no matter where you live and what your heritage gravitates to. Due to the genocide and mass movements, we, as survivors, have expanded our knowledge of internal political issues and have become involved more in countries’ inner and outer peace.

The aforementioned tragic and victorious events formed the socialization of a typical Armenian, such as I. Not only can culture and the past influence one but also the current circumstances. I remember sitting in class in 10th grade while knowing that there were soldiers being killed right at the very moment in Armenia. Our constant awareness of the danger around us formed a way of thinking. This is due in large part to how families raise their children in Armenia. We are always told to watch around to stay safe from outer danger. My family always told me to speak my mind, and to do everything in my power to create a better future for myself, no matter where I would end up living. There is also a lot of effort and attention put on our political beliefs because of the chaotic political climate in Armenia.

I remember people used to take toddlers to armed protests in 2016, right in the neighborhood where I grew up. They were absolutely not afraid of what was ahead of them. The presence of women was epic in the revolution. More and more mothers joined the others with their little children, closing the streets with them. Many among the women were pregnant. That made the police more sympathetic. There is a lot of unfairness going on in prisons, on the other hand. People still did their best to fight against the system; for nearly a decade, the situation back there



*A representative/student of the nonprofit organization Restart.*

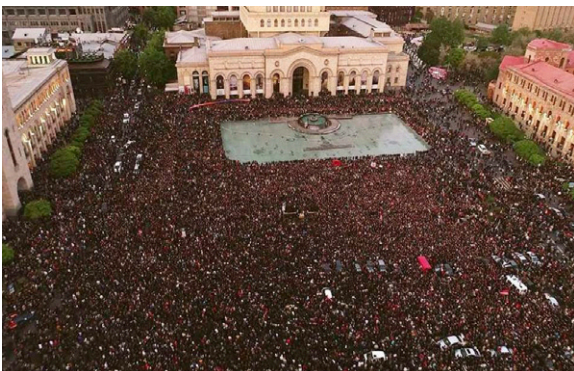


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was no different than a tyranny. Being well aware of that, nobody can deny that prisons are nearly ten times better in America than in Armenia.

The late 1990s and early 2000s were the uprising years of my country's and folks' history. War after war, then, surprise, surprise, partial loss, partial victory, step by step closer to the very Armenian Dream. So many eternal issues were going on that having a solid political viewpoint to strive for a better life was a necessity. Specific beliefs and behaviors are still pre-sent in our generation, and our political ideology and views are way different than the ones which were acceptable for dozens of years. The country that suffered genocide gained official Army forces, official independence from the USSR (which took place on September 21, 1991); the emphasis was put more on the internal enemy, which was the corrupted system and government. The beginnings of revolutions are usually not promising. The steps which lead people to their ultimate destination are nothing close to those momentary situational steps when people have the right leader. That is exactly how it all started, the "My Step Alliance," which changed the entire land of Armenian people. It would be unfair to call it just a change, because it was also a movement which offered people enormous hope, designed a new destiny, and made those who had left come back. Change was needed everywhere, from the bottom to the top.

The determining factor was how the young flipped history. Everything started from a single step, which was made by Nikol Pashinyan (who is the current prime minister in Armenia) and his peers. In the beginning of April 2018, Pashinyan started to walk from the edges of the country (from village to the village, town to town), and the people, mainly young students, were already waiting for them in the city. The majority of the elderly never took social media seriously. However, the youth seemed to take as much advantage as possible from it. Social media incredibly helped the participators. Live videos, sharing locations, recording any type of mistreatment from the police, posting/sharing names/pictures of people who were arrested to seek for help from lawyers helped to speed up the process. Protestors were sleeping outdoors in the main streets, regardless of the weather. Not leaving the streets and not going home became a habit for them from day one to the end of protests. One of the protestors was asked: "Why don't you go home?"



*Police using force.*



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There is no point in sleeping outside. It won't change anything." The protester replied: "In each street of my city I am home!"

People were so concerned about the bribe and fake elections, that all of them actually were watching the voting on live stream. Walking, nonviolent protests were spontaneous, because all Armenians had been waiting for a change for longer than a decade. The plan was to totally shut down the transportation in the center, so that no one could go to work or school during these days. All of the folks seemed to unify and find a common denominator for their agreements/disagreements. Henceforth, the plan was done on its finest terms. No transportation worked there, streets were closed by everyone and by any means. The trains were out of order, and students just lay down between the doors preventing the trains' movement. Street resistance was the strongest point of the revolution. The school security doubled during the days and locked many students inside the universities, so that they wouldn't join the movement.

The ones who dared to speak a single word were arrested and held for the next 24 hours. Fortunately, they could not keep a person for nothing more than 24 hours. Most of the lawyers volunteered to help the students for free. In comparison to that, in 2011 at the University of California at Davis, students were on strike against tuition increases. The university security was instructed to remove the tents. According to the video, after being asked to move, students got pepper-sprayed for not doing so. Afterwards, protesters standing nearby started screaming, "Shame on you," and everyone else followed. Therefore, the police stepped back. This is the perfect example of how power shifts between two levels in less than a minute: from police to students, from the ones who have more authority to the ones who had less. When all the pro-testers – the ones who were sitting on the floor, and the ones standing in front of them – screamed the same thing, with the same idea, the police couldn't continue to hold their power over the students. In other words, this was the students' step forward, the autonomy of students; they started to live in it, with it, within it.

Armenia's former president's last words before resigning were written in an open letter to everyone: "Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was wrong. There are a few solutions to the current situation, but I am not one of them. I am resigning as the country's leader, and leaving the post of Armenia's Prime Minister. The movement in the street is against my leadership, and so I am fulfilling your demand."

The current political situation is undergoing dramatic changes in both Armenia and America. The city of Yerevan is healing from past wounds and gaining a new reputation and moving forward. My generation was raised to be thankful, grateful, proud of all victories and our ancestors' steps. We stay as open-minded as we can and attain only to our freedom as much as we can. Whereas, America is going through impeachment and is very close to the president's removal. There are obvious reasons why the president should be impeached, but gaining two-thirds of the votes to convict him in the Senate sounds a little tricky and hard

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to achieve. Although he is possibly going to be impeached soon, what will be the outcome of it is the question.

In America, when it comes to politics, many citizens try to avoid talking about it, because there are a lot of disagreements. My theory about it is that disagreements are caused by cultural differences and diversity. People do not get involved as long as they can avoid it. Therefore, diversity unintentionally opens the door to racism and aggression. In fact, a perfect example of it will be how immigration is not welcomed by citizens, usually with a false belief that immigrants take over jobs that were essentially created for citizens. But immigrants bring gifts and talents to U.S., and in exchange they take the low-level jobs, and sometimes are not even paid enough, even less than minimum wage.



*Midtown West, 21 November 2019.*

“If the rights of immigrants are denied, the rights of citizens are at risk.” There is a basic explicit, clever message behind those two lines. It’s not accidentally written on a trash can either.

Additionally, all the struggles which immigrants cope with are not valued by a fair amount of people. The lives of immigrants and the changes which the illegal ones are forced to under-go are ridiculously awful. Wherever we go we try to make ourselves as home. Imagine how many people there are who have lived here for decades saying that they “don’t feel at home.” The college community should fully protect undocumented students in order to make them feel comfortable and more productive. The reality is, the research shows how beneficial immigrants are for the country. Most immigrants are criminalized for a simple human error. It can be even for a traffic issue. Immigrants are told they don’t belong in the U.S. They are taken to detention center, which look like jails; they are treated as criminals for simply staying in the country when their visas expire. Their woes

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are a network of suffering, which makes people who are close to them anxious. Violence doesn't have to be physical, it can be psychological. Deportation is a form of violence. The government and our current president are focused on issues like immigration, but there is enormous unfairness taking place which truly needs the government's attention, instead of separating working class families.

For instance, survey responses indicate several significant, moderately strong relationships between immigration status and feelings of belonging and membership. Thus, when you don't feel like you belong somewhere, you are never willing to improve your environment. Factually, in America, where we have 1.18 million legal immigrants, the political situation will be puzzling and perplexing if immigrants are under terrible circumstances. Consequently, when America's own residents' rights are taken away, the possibility of having a prosperous tomorrow is most likely non-existent. Immigrants are labeled, and those labels often keep residents and citizens away from pursuing their "American Dream."

To conclude, the "American Dream" and immigrants themselves are core components of America's identity. Thus, if we have a leader who goes against immigrants and tries to stop people from pursuing the American Dream, then the country experiences a sort of identity crisis. Therefore, the leader of a country has an enormous responsibility to its country and must uphold the values and beliefs of that nation.

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# The Gravesend Observations Project

Tony Zheng

Professor Bob Blaisdell  
Spring 2019  
ENG 2400 | Freshman English II

## Introduction

Anybody can look at me and tell that I am of Asian/Chinese heritage. I have the stereotypical characteristics that all if not most Asians have, small eyes, a single eyelid and natural straight black hair. If you look at me from a school setting, then I would also pass under the stereotype of being good in school and in math.

Before you start reading my observations, you should know that they were an assigned task given to me by my professor to do, whereby I was to find a public area and record on paper all that I could sense. The area I chose was the pavement in front of my house; I live in a quiet neighborhood where not much happens except the occasional car, walker, jogger or pet owner.

## Estimated (Wild-Guessed) Demographics of My Neighborhood Gravesend

Population: 30,000

Religions: predominantly Christian; Buddhist/Taoist (mine: not applicable)

Race: ? (mine: Chinese)

Gender: More males than females (mine: male)

Nationalities: Americans, Chinese, Russians (mine: Belizean)

Income: low- to mid- (mine: I'm just a freeloader)

Education: high school to college (mine: college)

Languages: English, Chinese, Russian (mine: English, Cantonese)

Number in household: 4 (mine: 4)

## Gravesend Demographics and How I Fit In

1. Population: 106,535 (I maybe was part of this count)

2. Education level:

Master's and higher ... 11%

Bachelor ... 19%

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Some College/Associates ... 19%  
High School Diploma ... 28% (I fit in with this)

3. Racial Diversity:

White ... 46%  
Asian ... 31% (I fit in with this)  
Hispanic ... 15%  
African American ... 5%  
Two or more races ... 2%

4. Gender:

Male ... 48%  
Female ... 52% (I don't fit in with this)

5. Ages:

<10 – 17 ... 22% (I fit in with this)  
18 – 34 ... 22%  
35 – 54 ... 26%  
55 – 65+ ... 29%

Source: <https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/n/gravesend-new-york-city-ny/residents/>

Accessed: May 23, 2019.

**Observations #1**

23 April 2019

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Location: Sidewalk in front of my house at 241 Avenue Z

As soon as I sit down, I feel the plastic padding of the chair that I am sitting on. I can see two cars zooming past me with another black car stopped by a glaring red light. There are no other people in my line of sight, but I see a lot of cars parked

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<sup>3</sup> This is a chair that I brought from inside my house. Its frames are made of wood with a cushion. It seems that the cushion is made of leather, but it's a type of plastic made with the intention of looking like leather.

<sup>4</sup> Seems a lot like a muscle car. Cars that are as defined as an "American term for high-performance cars, usually rear-wheel drive and fitted with a large and powerful V8 engine." That's according to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muscle\\_car](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muscle_car), accessed 27 May 2019. As for its exact model I cannot say for sure, but does look a lot like the models of Rambler Rebel [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambler\\_Rebel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rambler_Rebel), accessed 27 May 2019.

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on the sides of the streets. There is a huge white van at the end of the street from where I am sitting. There are black, white, and red cars and even a yellow car. They range from SUVs to sedans and a car with an archaic de-sign . A man is now passing by walking his dog. The weather is chilly; he is wearing a North Face jacket with blue jeans holding onto a red leash. At the end of the leash there is a French bulldog with fur that is mostly white with some large black spots on its back and some are on its face. Another car just zoomed past me and an MTA bus just went past as well in the opposite direction; on its side is a big “Not in Service.” A lady in a long jacket is holding a little girl’s hand. I can now hear an ambulance blasting its sirens. In the distance I can hear the distinct sound of cars speeding on the Belt Parkway. The wind is occasionally loudly blowing into my ears. I can hear the leaves rustling above me. I can also hear something else flapping and rustling. As I look up, I see a large plastic bag that is caught up in one of the higher branches. Across the street from my position, I can see my neighbors and a couple of other men dressed in construction clothing with hard hats, gloves and safety goggles. One of them took out a jackhammer and various other tools and wires and began to observe the driveway situated in front of my neighbor’s garage. It is a simple garage with white doors that are pulled up. There are no cars parked in the garage. The man who had the jackhammer started it up but isn’t using it yet, as a lady pushing a black stroller is walking past. She is wearing a blue jacket with black pants. She has blonde hair and she just stopped to put a pink blanket to cover the child in the stroller. She then takes out a baby bottle and a Fiji water bottle. She drinks from the Fiji bottle while giving the other to the child. Meanwhile, the men are organizing and conversing amongst themselves. The woman then moves on. As this is happening, I can hear some birds chirping above me. As soon as she moves on, the man starts up the jackhammer and begins destroying a corner of the driveway. The sound of the rhythmic “dut dut” drowns out every other sound I can hear. I can see the tree and leaves sway from a powerful gust of breeze that blows past. I can smell dirt and mud emitted from the base of the tree in front of me. I look to the left to see a man walking his chihuahua. The dog is wearing a white shirt meant for dogs and as it walks closer, I can see a heart stitched at the center of it. The man is wearing black shades, shorts and a t-shirt. He has a tattoo on his left arm that is holding onto his phone. I can see a brown squirrel scurry past the streets up into a tree. Further down the streets I can see some kids playing basketball, but instead of a full court they’re only playing on the sidewalk with a hoop hanging from the top of a garage. I hear a piercing “beeeeeep” from the left of the street. The strong wind is blowing on my paper, rustling it. To my far right, I now see a man and a woman walking towards me. They are holding hands and conversing with each other. I hear a low rumbling as a large cement mixer truck sped past the duo and into the distance. The male is wearing a black leather jacket while the female is wearing a white fur-lined coat. She has on blue jeans and knee-high leather boots, while the male has on black sweatpants and

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sneakers. The guy said something in a language other than English or of the other languages I can identify and the lady in response laughed in between replying to him. I can now hear some rattling sounds from my left. As I look over, I can see a hunchbacked lady pushing a cart full of plastic bags that are filled to the brim. I can see some carrots, canned goods and onions. She is slowly approaching my direction and that's when I hear the alarm from my phone go off.

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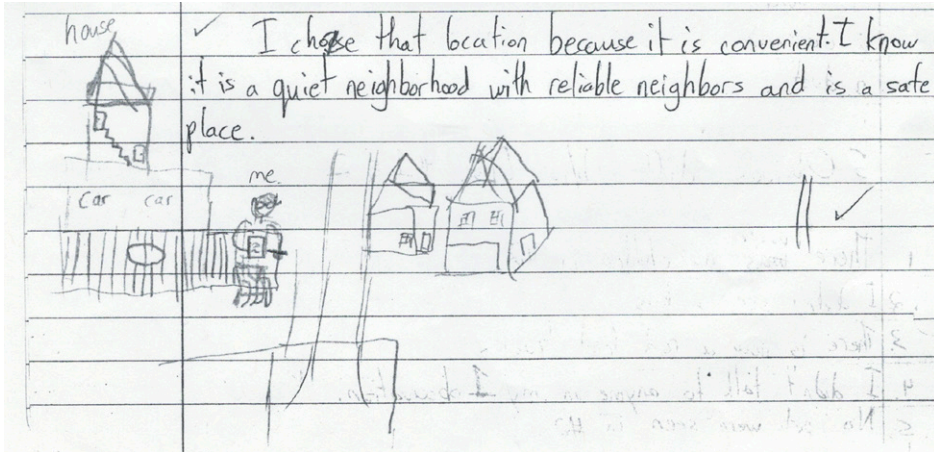
<sup>5</sup> There is no actual MTA bus route on Avenue Z, West 15th Street, so it was quite unusual and strange to see a bus passing by this street despite it being not in service.

<sup>6</sup> “Pneumatic tools (powered by compressed air) began appearing in the 1840s, typically in connection with the mining industry. The first ‘jackhammer’ was the percussion drill developed in 1849 by Jonathon Couch. The first true, functional jackhammer with the chisel-shaped head was invented by Englishman William Mcreavy, who promptly sold the patent to Charles Brady King of Detroit, Michigan.” <https://www.onestoprent.com/the-history-of-the-jackhammer/> accessed 27 May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> The tree is of the genus *Quercus Palustris*, or more commonly known as a Pin Oak tree. Using the website <https://tree-map.nycgovparks.org/>, accessed 27 May 2019, allowed me to find the type of tree it is.

<sup>6</sup> I can confirm it is not Cantonese, Mandarin, English, Spanish, Japanese, Korean. I don't speak some of these, but I know each language enough to identify its speech.





## Observations #2

10 May 2019

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Location: Sidewalk in front of my house at 241 Avenue Z

I look up to watch the blue sky with the occasional puff of clouds. The tree in front of me is filled with vibrant green leaves populating the entire tree. The sun is shining brightly and glaringly. I can see a pick-up slowly driving past on the road in front of me. The driver is a man with a pale white skin tone, stubbled face and black hair. He has one hand on the wheel while the other is half leaning out of the car's window. It makes a "brdum, brdum" noise as it passes by. I can see 3 men across the street from my house. One of them is in a worn-out black shirt with spots of paint of different colors on it, blue jeans and brown boots. He is using an electric saw to cut some wood planks and beams into smaller lengths. Another is in a red shirt and a pair of jeans of a light shade of blue, sneakers and gloves. He is using a grinder and chipping at an angular piece of metal stick. The last man in gray shirt with the words, "Keep Calm and Work Hard!" imprinted on the front of it. He is holding onto a hammer and is nailing pieces of lumber together into the form of a frame. Besides their work area, I notice a red sedan

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<sup>9</sup> The neighborhood I live in is Gravesend. Demographics shown by <https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/n/gravesend-new-york-city-ny/residents/> has it that the population currently is predominantly comprised of people of white descent followed by Asians. However, in the book *The Neighborhoods of New York City*, "Russians began moving to the neighborhood in the early 1980's and many of Gravesend's newer residents are Indian and Haitian immigrants and settlers of Asian & Irish descent" (140).

There were a lot of colors on it and it seems pretty worn out. The colors I can clearly make out were white, blue, red, brown, orange and black.

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parked in the driveway in front of the house. In front of it lies another tree ; it has bright green leaves growing on it. A loud “clang, clang” draws my attention. The man who had the hammer is now slamming it down on a sheet of metal. He does so on one side for a couple of hits, holds it up and then looks at it from eye level. He then sets it down again and gives it 4 more hits. As this is happening, I smell chicken and hot dogs being cooked. I look to my left where the source of the smell of the foods is coming from. I see smoke rising from a red van-like vehicle . I see cars of all variety parked around: sedans, vans, minivans and hatchbacks. They come in colors of red, silver, white and black. To the left of my house, I see a white wooden building of two floors, with the side I am seeing, there is a white plastic fence, slightly higher than I am, at 5’ 8”. In front of the fence, there is a shopping cart parked there. The metal frames are blue with bits of paint chipped, exposing rusted metal. The handle is made of a red plastic. It has a yellow sign where children can sit. The pavement in front of me is lightly uplifted. I can see a man and a woman walking past me. Both are holding red plastic bags in both hands. The man is wearing cargo pants and a black T-shirt while the woman is wearing dark blue pants and a blouse. Further down the street, I see a maroon motorcycle . I now see a man dressed in full blue, coming from the West 15 Street perpendicular to the street I am on. He is pushing a stroller that has three wheels in a triangular formation with three bags stuffed full of mail and other parchment. He walks up to me and I see his ashen skin complex-ion and a gray and black handlebar mustache and a blue cap with the logo of the U.S. post of-fice. He asks me what I am doing. I respond, “I am doing my English assignment that my pro-fessor assigned me to do over the weekend. I am to sit outside and just write down everything I am experiencing with my senses ... err ... including the conversation we are having right now. Excuse me for being rude.” He looks at me and I look back at him. He then starts to search for something within his bags and hands me a white envelope. “This for your house?”

“Yes, it’s actually for me.”

“Alrighty then, here you go, take care and don’t stay out too long, kid.” He smiles at me then pushes his cart onwards.

I look at the envelope. At the middle there is my name and address. To

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<sup>11</sup> According <https://tree-map.nycgovparks.org/#treeinfo-2431143> this tree is a Thornless Honey Locust (*Gleditsia Triacanthos* Var. *Inermis*).

<sup>12</sup> This vehicle looks a lot more like a refurbished firetruck merged with a van. The front part where there is the driver and the front passenger seat, while the back is of a fire truck that has been hollowed out and installed with grills. At the roof of the car there is an attached exhaust vent.

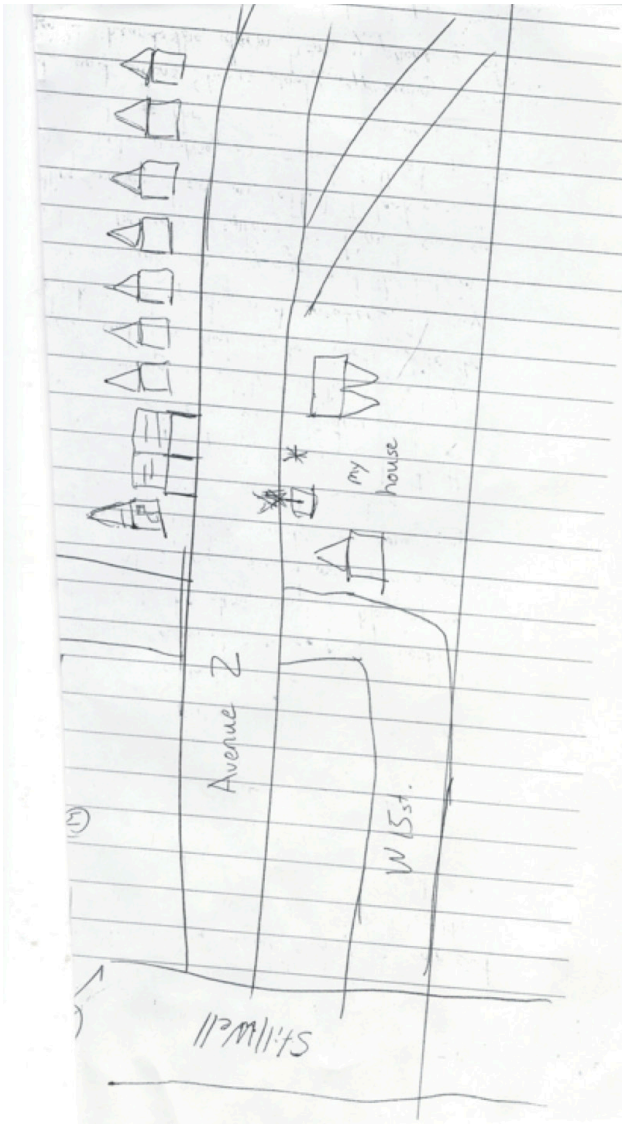
<sup>13</sup> The closest model I could find was that of a typical power cruiser motorcycle: <https://www.liveabout.com/definitions-of-different-types-of-motorcycles-4122761>, accessed 27 May 2019.

<sup>14</sup> “The name Belt Parkway is the name given to a series of connected limited-access highways that form a belt-like circle around the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt\\_Parkway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt_Parkway), accessed 27 May 2019.

the top right there is a stamp with the image of a hummingbird. I hear the faint rumbling of tires on asphalt. The sound is coming from the highway in the distance, the Shore and Belt Parkway . I see the men packing away tools and equipment. They are putting it inside the garage. The garage has two white wooden gates that slide up. It fits two cars.

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### Map of Location of Observations



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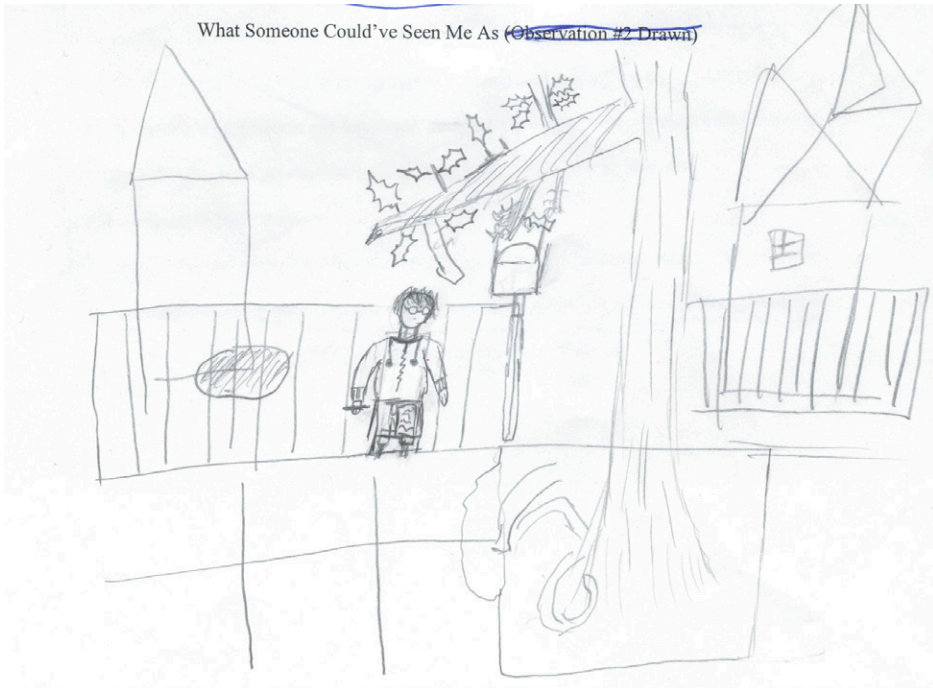
### Things I May Have Seen but Didn't Mention

I didn't mention about the flower petals I saw piled up on the side of the trees opposite to me. I didn't mention all the garbage bins placed outside. I didn't mention some birds that I saw flying overhead at some point.

\*

### What Would Someone See Me As

To the eyes of the scant few passersby, they would see an Asian kid sitting on a wooden chair that doesn't belong on the sidewalk. He is hunched over the side of a flat fence and is scribbling and writing on a piece of paper that is laid flat on a black and white covered note-book. They would see that he is dressed in a thick jacket with grey sweatpants and sneakers.



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### **10 Things I Did Not See/Hear During Observations #2**

1. Ambulance Siren
2. Fireworks
3. Children
4. Dog
5. Squirrels
6. Police Sirens
7. A table
8. Bicycles
9. People I know the names of and recognize.
10. Construction vehicles, i.e., bulldozer etc.

### **5 Obvious Differences Between Observations**

1. There were no children in Observations #2.
2. I didn't see a bus.
3. There is now a red food truck.
4. I didn't talk to anyone in Observations #1.
5. No pets were seen in #2.

### **10 Things I Don't Know about What I Observed**

1. I don't know for how long the mailman has been delivering mail.
2. I don't know if the construction workers are hired or friends of my neighbor.
3. I don't know what the workers were working on.
4. I don't know where they went to after finishing their work.
5. The destination of the cars passing by.
6. If all the cars parked are useable/drivable.
7. Who the customer(s) of the food truck were.
8. The area of residence of the people passing by.
9. The purpose for them to leave their house.
10. What the customer ordered specifically from the food truck.

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### **Why Did I Choose That Location?**

I chose that location because it was convenient for the purposes of the assignment. Also, because I knew that my neighborhood is a very quiet and safe place. It has reliable neighbors that are willing to help each other.

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## **Conclusion**

To me this project is a fun little snippet of my English 24 experience. It pushed not only me but the other students as well, for two hours within a month, to put down all electronics and just watch and observe our surroundings, to view and appreciate the world around us. What could've made this better, maybe, is not to sit for one hour straight but rather split it across many portions of time over a week or as low as 3 days. Having the students do the observations over a longer period and for a shorter duration may help them to better understand their environment. Differences can be seen and maybe pick up on trends and routines of other people. It can help most of not all students to be the only 10 minutes of their day awake, where they are resting their mind and eyes from the strain that electronics cause.

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## CONTRIBUTORS



**MALIK ATADZHANOV**

“Transformation of the human mindset is a time-consuming process. If you seek knowledge about women’s history, look no further.”



**BECKIE DUGAILLARD**

“To anyone reading this if you have an idea, put it on paper and find help to develop it. Every-one wants to read what you have to write, so share your knowledge! I would have never known my purpose was to conduct research till I met my mentor, Dr. Laura Spinu. I thank the Lord, Dr. Spinu and my mom for encouraging me to conduct research in a field I hold dear to my heart--speech.”



**MALEEHA KHAN**

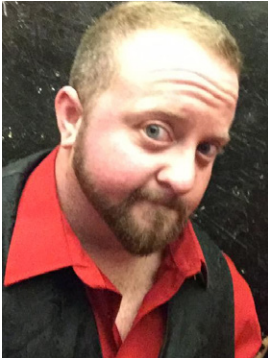
“Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity,” said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



**AUNDRE MIGNOTT**

Audre wrote his essay in Professor Anna Karpathakis’s Sociology of the Family course.





**KYLE AARON REESE**

Kyle Aaron Reese is a student at Brooklyn College in the CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies program, studying Queer Psychosocial Research. His work centers around the destigmatization of TGNC individuals and creating real and lasting social change through pedagogy and direct action.



**HRIPSIME TUMANYAN**

“I am Armenian; my language is one of the oldest in the world with its own unique independent alphabet. I moved to New York at the age of 17 (two and a half years ago) knowing three languages (Russian, English and Armenian). I was accepted to a university back there, thinking that was my biggest accomplishment, but a new task was awaiting. My own ideas jumped out of my imagination when poems, written in my third language, got published a few times. I have become the president of the Poetry Club and vice president of *Antheon*.”



**TONY ZHENG**

“Starting this project, I was clueless at first of what was the point. As we progressed through the different parts of the project, I started to see the point of my professor for us to take a trip to the past without all the technological distraction and to appreciate the little things surrounding us.”

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## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

*Distinctions* welcomes submissions year-round. The deadline for the Fall 2020 issue is August 15. Submissions that come in after that date will be considered for the Spring 2021 issue (deadline: February 1).

**STUDENTS:** Please submit to *Distinctions* any outstanding research-related course work, whether you wrote it for Honors credit or not.

**INSTRUCTORS:** Please encourage your students who have conducted original and compelling research to submit it to *Distinctions*.

Email the file to the Honors Program director, Homar Barcena (homar.barcena@kbcc.cuny.edu) with the subject line DISTINCTIONS SUBMISSION and on paper to the Honors House in M377. Include your contact information.