

The Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Issues



Media



Winter 2022

THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES & MEDIA

volume 3 issue 1 Jan. 2022



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Letter from the Editor



The past years have been tumultuous and troubling. It would be easy to say we are living in an historical moment, but that would be minimizing that it is our lived experience. Someone's history at later points is someone's current reality.

The volume we offer this year touches on some of the controversial issues that have demanded our attention and garnered a groundswell of support from society in the past few years: from food inequality to political correctness to mask-wearing, and more. In identifying and clarifying the conditions of our time we are better able to move society forward with greater knowledge and understanding to allow lives to be lived under the conditions in which they may thrive.

Maureen M.

In Recollection of Malintzin: A Rhetorical Analysis of Character

Alberto J. Herrera / University of South Florida

Abstract

In contemplating the role of origin relating to characters in the history of colonization, particularly concerning those of the Americas, their mystical and mythical legacies inspire questions of how the process of storytelling shapes the perception descendants of colonized people have of their predecessors. Without many direct writings and tellings the colonized can fall back on, personal accounts and histories are difficult to parse through beyond what information we have presently, whether that be gleaned from linguistics, dreams, inherited stories, accounts, spiritual practices, or biases. In further consideration of attachments assigned to the names of these colonial characters, their present interpretation may be used as a reflective tool for people to recontextualize their present identity, or more specifically, the difficulty of tracing back to that historical identity and what may hold back our identification with these characters. Through observing Bernal and Razo's evocative letter *Carta a Malintzin*, this paper utilizes a lens of ethos to analyze the role Malintzin, Hernán Cortés' translator, had in shaping the inherited character her descendants share with her, and why her mischaracterization and exclusion in the Mexican community can be reassessed and understood differently.

Keywords: colonization, deliberative rhetoric, evocation, ethos, Indigenous origin, Malinche, Malintzin, Mexican rhetoric

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Figure 1. "Monumento al Mestizaje," or Monument of Miscegenation by Julián Martínez and M. Maldonado (1982). This statue features Malintzin, Hernán Cortés, and their son Martín who is thought to be the first mestizo (someone who is half Mesoamerican and half Spanish).

In Recollection of Malintzin: a Rhetorical Analysis

The question of “where do you come from” may seem innocuous to some people, but for others it is a question laden with the difficulty of understanding how history and its figures have shaped colonized people. To understand this difficulty, we look to the story of Malintzin - a prominent and controversial figure central to the founding of Mexico. Malintzin’s origins are dubious, however. With no written records from Malintzin herself, much of her story comes with speculation. Her story begins in Potonchan where she was conscripted alongside twenty other women to placate Hernán Cortés and his band of conquistadors (McCafferty, 2009). In their search for gold Malintzin would stand out among the women and prove instrumental in the Spanish conquest through her lingual prowess as a translator. The communication between indigenous people and Cortés allowed the conquistadors to traverse the land and uncover plots of resistance that could have ended Cortés’ campaign in the Americas (McCafferty, 2009). Because Malintzin saved Cortés, she is widely seen as a traitor to her people and her descendents (McCafferty, 2009). But did she betray her people, and what do we make of her story and influence today?

To answer these questions, we look to an open letter written by Bernal and Razo (1993) titled *Carta a Malintzin*. In this letter, the authors utilize their writing to evoke Malintzin’s help in uncovering the past and what her motivations to help Cortés were. Given the mode of writing chosen by the authors, direct dialogue between themselves and Malintzin is intentionally omitted in favor of observing personal reflections that Malintzin’s presence brings to the authors throughout the letter. These very personal

contemplations allow the authors to channel Malintzin’s experience through their own lens, and as a result, the audience is invited to also take on the magic that possesses Bernal and Razo and reach their own conclusions about the legacy Malintzin leaves her descendants.

While this process of narrative reclamation through magic may seem like a novel literary movement at first, it is important to recognize the long standing tradition of storytelling decolonial writings tap into in order to compose their works. To understand why this



Figure 2. “Cortés arriving in Mexico, 16th century,” from *The Codex Azcatitlan*, artist unknown. Malintzin stands to the side of Cortés leading the conquistadors through Mexico.

writing process is used, we look to Barreiro (2013), who famously wrote his account of Guaikán, an adolescent Taino translator who was adopted by Christopher Columbus and renamed Diego Colon in his book *Taino*. In an interview featured on the Smithsonian Forums, Barreiro (2013) felt that while historical documents were important to uncovering information about Guaikán’s story, channeling Guaikán through dreams as well as recalling ancestral stories handed down to him allowed Guaikán’s presence to be felt more prominently throughout the piece. To those of us who descend from colonized groups, the necessity of breathing life to figures like Guaikán through a connection of magic works through Barreiro to help us

rethink narratives of our own people that have been long forgotten or lost.

Considering this deliberative action of retelling history, we hone our attention for a moment to rhetorical expression and magic and ask, does this elaboration imply that the subject of rhetoric and magic are not mutually exclusive? Not exactly. In response to rhetoric as primitive magic or magic as primitive rhetoric, Burke (1950) regarded rhetoric's essential nature in the following passage:

For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols. (p. 43)

In a sense, the primacy of persuasion itself is essential in the function of communication, such that magic becomes one mode of symbol, realm, or idea that is used to convey a special meaning to an audience. Considering their influence on each other, Barreiro and Guaikán work together to bring us their personal and communal message of origin, providing a space for the audience to extrapolate their own novel impression of origin and influence. This is not unlike the hypothesis proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) of how the orchid and the wasp exchange DNA in a symbiotic relationship that produces a fractal, or a "rhizome" with which each of these entities and derivatives germinate wildly from (p. 10). In other words, proliferation nurtures all entities - writer, inspiration, and audience - in producing offspring, or deliberate results from their continual exchange. The product from this particular persuasion on Barreiro's part is a call for action on the audience to consider how they have cultivated an understanding of themselves and their relationship with their ancestry.

Taking Barreiro's invitation into consideration, we return to Malintzin and enquire into the influence she has in forming Mexican identity (Almon, 1974). As we explore Bernal and Razo's (1993) work *Carta a Ma-*

linzin, the role of channeling and catalyzing a past figure like Barreiro did becomes essential in the formation of a rhetorically deliberative stance to recognize Malintzin's significance, as the authors are compelled to burrow into themselves for purpose and answers to who they are, and who Malintzin is.

Here we begin by parsing through what is written about Malintzin from a secondary source, Bernal Díaz del Castillo - a conquistador of the Spanish army who recorded his experiences during the colonization of present day Mexico (Almon 1974). Diaz's chronicle according to Almon (1974) is similar to the telling of Pocahontas, however. Through Díaz Malintzin's story is a "myth-by-analogy" which derives its wonder from the air of discovery and otherworldliness that comes from being an outsider separate from the subject with whom they are speaking of (Almon, 1974). This is to say that the storyteller is relating their subject back to an exaggerated effect or idealization that openly interprets the autonomous character whose story is being told. Considering Diaz's idealization, Malintzin was a godsend. Díaz professes, referring to Malintzin by her Christian name, in the following statement: "Praise to God, all things prospered with us. I have made a point of telling this story, because without Doña Marina we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico" (Almon, 1974, p. 222). Despite Diaz's praises, we do not know Malintzin's personal feelings or what motivated her to usher in this New World the conquistador praises her for creating.

In the absence of her story, we must find the truth. Though before we proceed further into this account, this rhetorical analysis should not be confused with a full historical account of Malintzin. There is a place for forensics, but this history is a facet of the larger effect this story has on the people with whom Malintzin's actions have affected. Therefore, if the magic of translation and language is the conduit of Malintzin's *miraculous* actions, then it is fitting to use and observe language in order to best understand and identify her.

In close observation, the language used in Bernal and Razo's (1993) introduction begins to make better sense of Malintzin's story. The authors address their

letter in the following passage by arranging the most essential characteristics of Malintzin that come to mind:

Malintzin, pensamos en ti. Evocamos tus cinco nombres, tu huipil de adolescente trágica, tu palabra-glifo, tu lengua irrepetible, tu otredad mítica; evocamos tus tiempos circulares y vertiginosos, que son los nuestros. Malinalli, como tú, seguimos sin entender, sin entendernos. (p. 381)

Malintzin, we reflect on you. We evoke your five names, your huipil of tragic adolescence, your glyph, your lost language, your mythical otherness; we evoke your cycles and turbulence, all of which are ours. Malinalli, like you, we come without mutual understanding, and without understanding ourselves.

As evidenced by their evocation (or, as the authors say, *evocamos*), the audience is presented elements of who Malintzin is by virtue of her names and features - a part Bernal and Razo gather for us as a channel locating the spirit they wish to speak to. Here, Malintzin's five names alluded to in the beginning are thought to derive from her linguistic capacity and the corruption of her name, Malinalli, being translated several times between indigenous people and the Spanish. This suggests that while she could communicate her name over many times, there is no consensus among these groups that agree upon a set name or perhaps even identity for Malintzin. Given the perplexity of these names, they are used throughout the piece for various arrangements, but we will turn our attention for a moment to the meaning of one of her names, Malinalli, to help expand upon the multifacetedness of her identity. The word Malinalli, according to Maffle (2014), refers to several different grasses that were twisted into threads used to bind, mend, tie, or fix things together for the Nahuatl speaking people (p. 261). Her names bind how the Spanish and indigenous people come together, while the cultural significance of Malinalli is grounded in how the Aztecs conceived the force behind changes of "how reality is ordered, how it processes, and how it transforms" (Maffle, 2014, p. 266). The scope of this transformation implicit in her name is substantiated by Bernal

and Razo (1993) when they refer to her later in the piece as "planta-traductora-madre," which roughly translates to the compounded title of *grassy-translator-mother*, or when they liken her life in the following comparison as "Tu vida permanece oculta, inédita, como plantita de selva, como hierba silvestre," which translates to *your life remains hidden, unaltered, like a jungle sapling, or a wild grass* (p. 381). As an invitation, one could play with several implications the name Malinalli may mean for Malintzin as the authors and many others have, though we may never know whether this was her given name or a name she intended for herself.

No matter the significance, Malintzin's name is steeped in a bind between perceptions of other people, including ourselves as the audience making sense of her as a person. Gleaning from what we are given from her character, however, we see she is presented as young and impressionable - a person assumed to be full of potential growth and influence, yet adorned by a tragic huipil¹ (*tu huipil de adolescente trágica*) - evidence of her troubled past that led up to her naive decisions. Coupled with the mysteries of her name, these features compound with them Malintzin's "mythical otherness" in both appearance and utterance, separating her from the pure mythical character of God's design, such as we have seen with Díaz when he praises God that "all things prospered" when Malintzin translated the languages of the new world for the Spanish. She goes far beyond the classifications of one group and carries with her a burden unknown to us, and within this outlier position we can begin to make better sense of the myth and the person.

Expanding this ethos of character further, we continue to see Malintzin's complex identity and actions as flawed - and by extension, so too are the descendants who inherit her image. Her descendants, in this case focusing on Bernal and Razo (1993), write with the intention of reshaping Díaz' (referred to by his

1 A Nahuatl dress that is thought to journey with a Nahuatl woman from the time she is born till her passing. Decorated colorfully with patterns and natural motifs inspired by the land woven into the fabric, it is worn by all castes of women and is central to their personal expression (Villegas, 2009).

first name Bernal) rendition of Malintzin's story in the following passage:

Malinalli, la de-los-cinco-nombres, eras, según Bernal, india de buen parecer, entrometida y desenvuelta. Pero no bien nos miramos en tu imagen, nos hallamos hambrientas, sedientas de identidad y definición. Tu reflejo nos conforma, nos abrumba, nos humilla. Tu sombra recorre el discurso patriótico y martilla la cabeza de quienes nos preguntamos todavía quiénes somos y quiénes son los otros. (p. 381)

Malinalli, of five names, you are, according to Bernal, an Indian of great beauty, yet equally meddling and boisterous. But we look no better ourselves in your image, driven by our hunger, starved for identity and definition. Your reflection forms us, inundates us, and humbles us. Your shadow travels in the words of our nation and bludgeons us with questions of who we are, and who are the rest.

Beauty as prescribed by Díaz (when paraphrased to describe Malintzin as [un] india de buen parecer) is starkly contrasted by the reality Bernal and Razo (1993) present in the inheritance of the shadows they take on. These shadows are the *elsewheres* of Mesoamerican rhetorical space contending with colonization, coined by Rabasa (2011) to be “forms of affect, knowledge, and perception underlying what a given individual in a given culture can say and show about the world . . . a not that lacks any reference to a previous state of affairs or even a positive entity. Elsewheres are ineffable though intuitable” (para. 3). Bearing in mind the lack of definitive history in the present, past realities can only be conceived within the gaps of understanding or lack of history as we imagine the mass of image that inundates these questions of intention on Malintzin's part. Here we can trace these words as lighting pieces of motive for Bernal and Razo as they relate themselves to Malintzin not as an ideal, but as the flawed shadow they come from.

These evocations of shadow, identity, loss, beauty, and recollection fold over themselves to add to the potency of the magic Bernal and Razo hold in their

letter, to which the audience is then prompted to feel how meddling and boisterous this evocation is, if Bernal and Razo are willing to bring Malintzin to our attention with a purpose. Honing on this facet of being incisive with provocation points to their shared profanity of identity as their purpose is given more clarity in the following excerpt:



Figure 3. “Malinche (c.1496-1529). Engraving,” artist unknown. Malintzin is featured with a headdress and her floral huipil.

Marina-esclava, Marina-lengua, Marina-amante. Dijiste, dicen, del complot contra Cortés allá en Cholula y eso te ha merecido el insulto de vendida y de traidora. Pero ¿es que no habías sido ya vendida muchas veces antes? ¿Es que no lo fuiste después? ¿Quién puede traicionar sino un amigo, un hermano, la madre? ¿Tuviste, tú, Malinche, amigos? ¿Te amó alguien? ¿Compartiste patria, tú patria envilecida? (p. 382)

Marina the enslaved, Marina the tongue, Marina the mistress. They say you revealed the plot against Cortés in Cholula – that you deserved to be insulted as a sellout and a traitor. But were you not sold off several times before? Were

you not forgone after the fact? Who can betray without a friend, without a sibling, or a mother? Could you, Malinche, see any comrades? Did you hold any love for them? Did you share a homeland, in your motherland debased?

Ultimately, this profanity of name and action is treachery, yet we must ask ourselves who was truly betrayed. In Bernal and Razo's (1993) arrangement, they begin by referring to Malintzin in her Spanish name Marina, but they intentionally couple this name with *esclava*, meaning slave. According to Almon (1974), Malintzin was sold off to the Xicalangos so that her brother could succeed their father, and subsequently afterwards, the Xicalangos sold her to the Tabascans, who then gave her to the Spanish. Perhaps this is why she betrayed her people. Perhaps after being sold so many times, she could not identify with the people who cast her off as a slave.

This echo of treachery between Malintzin and Mexicans is revived by evoking her name Malinche – a Spanish corruption of her native name. To understand the gravity behind this name, we hear Anzaldúa (2012) recite in her reflection of *The Wounding of the India-Mestiza* that Malintzin as Malinche is “the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos” (para. 1). In this vein, Malinche is a cyclical term that confounds the Mexican identity to that of betrayal - that in the existence of naming each other Malinche, we are bound to betray each other like we did in Cholula. This othering that forms from this term stratifies Mexicans in a way that with what culture is shared, it is difficult to collectively recognize one's self within this history of responsibility and victimhood. Is it just to use this term given its implication?

With this question we understand Bernal and Razo's epiphany. By calling *her* a traitor, we suffer calling ourselves traitors. Parsing this evaluation together may be best seen when Bernal and Razo (1993) contend with the image of Cortés in the following passage:

Nuestro Cortés, monstruo de mil cabezas, nos aplasta y lo amamos, nos sobaja y lo enaltecemos, nos pisa y besamos sus pies, nos miente . . . y le creemos! Como tú, y como la patria a la que en-

carnas y te encarna, nos acogemos a su sombra. A falta de triunfos propios, exaltamos sus hazañas y, consoladoras, justificamos sus fracasos en la intimidad. Para nosotras no hay epopeya, sólo recuerdos y esperanzas. Vivimos de ellos y para ellos: traductoras de cultura, repetidoras, reincidentes, cíclicas, informadoras, abyectas, Malinche, abyectas y sin culpa. Marca terrible, espantoso sueño: en el ciclo de los tiempos infinitos, culposas somos, e inocentes. (p. 383)

Our Cortés, monster of a thousand heads, you overwhelm us and we love you, you humiliate us and we praise the floor you stand on, you lie to us . . . and we believe you! Like you, and like the patriotism that possesses and possessed you, we gather your shadow. In the absence of victory, we exalt your feats, and, in consolation, justify your failures in intimidation. For us there is no epic - merely memories and hopes. We live as them and for them: translators of culture, relapsers, repeat offenders, cycles, informants, the abject, Malinche - abject, and without guilt. A terrible scar, a frightening dream: in an infinite cycle, we are guilty, and innocent.

In effect, we recall the cycles and turbulence evoked in the introduction. In the form of a vision, or dream, this vivid reflection encapsulates the shame and innocence Mexicans share in Malintzin's image. By cursing Malintzin as Malinche, we evoke the cycle of violence and betrayal that sold her off to slavery. In effect, the audience is invited to recognize the scars held by Malintzin's descendants – scars fraught with relapsing in guilt and the abject for past actions. These scars resemble the cycle of abuse we observe in contemporary attachment theory where “working models of the self, others, and self-other relationships are derived from early relational histories and, carried forward, account for continuity in abuse” (Egeland, Jacobvitz and Sroufe, 1988, p. 1081). As it stands, we also cannot ignore how this cycle perpetuates at the utterance of Cortés in continuity. Cortés, as Almon (1974) suggests, “is a good example of a type prolific in European history,” as “when it came to ‘Christianity’ he was more than a nominal Catholic, he was a bigot” (p. 233). His intolerance and view of Malintzin impacts the cycle of abuse we feel, for once again, she

was turned into a commodity by virtue of her lingual utility. Almon (1974) remarks that “[Malintzin] was for [Cortés] ‘the interpreter whom I had with me, an indian woman of this country,’ as he wrote to Charles V. He made use of her as long as he could not get along without her, and then disposed of her to Jaramillo,” another conquistador. We note the word disposal in Almon’s excerpt and reflect back upon Bernal and Razo’s (1993) mention of being fed lies while feeling absent of victory. Behind the shadow of Cortés it is clear the future we previously considered in Diaz’ perception of New Spain and Mexico does not include Malintzin and her descendants. As descendants we must contend with what it means to be continually stratified and pushed to the shadows of someone else’s agenda.

We can assume then that Bernal and Razo’s (1993) evocation, or truly - their call to action - is acknowledging this cycle of abuse and absolving future generations of this inherited pain. Bernal and Razo (1993) put to rest their evocation by virtue of custom, concluding it in the following recitation of rites:

Estás presente cada vez que se habla de nosotras, tanto como de la tierra que pisaste. Tú, la otra. Tú, la traicionada, la amorosa, desamada, desarmada. Tú, intérprete de mundos. Tú, imagen y paradigma. Querida Malinalli, hermana-madre nuestra queridísima, eres la gran ausente, la invitada de jade, traductora agazapada, interlocutora muda. Madre nuestra que estás en la tierra y eres la tierra umbrosa y asoleada, agua marina, axolote, tórtola, obsidiana, óyenos, entiéndenos. Madre-matriz, te lo pedimos, aspira nuestro humilde copal, escucha el teponaztle, regresa a tu tierra, vuelve a ser tú misma y descansa en paz. (p. 383)

Now every time someone speaks of us, we retread the ground you walked on. You, the other. You, the betrayed, the lover, the unloved, the unarmed. You, interpreter of worlds. You, memory and paradigm. Beloved Malinalli, our beloved sister-mother, you are the great exile, the allure of jade, the

buddled translator, the young interlocutor. Our mother who is in the earth who is the shaded and sunstruck soil, costal water, axolotl, turtledove, obsidian, bear us, listen to us. Mother-womb, we beg of you, breathe in our humble copal, hear the teponaztle, go back to your earth, return to your place and rest in peace.

We see that they do not necessarily forgive Malintzin, nor do they condemn her – rather, by recognizing the totality of who she is, and by extension, who they are, the authors come to terms with themselves and move on. Recalling Burke’s (1950) observation of rhetorical action, contending with the character and the symbol of Malintzin’s utterance is put to rest after serving its intended purpose. Bernal and Razo (1993) call on the elements, offer their incense, and strum the beats of the teponatzle² to reverberate their intentions of putting to rest the name Malintzin. The act of remembrance in this case may be seen as symbolic, gathering from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome that the authors created in ritual, bestowing to the audience an invitation of coming to peace with history as well. Whether this ritual is successful or not is contingent on whether we the audience can accept that atrocity and beauty are a part of identity. In the words of Gorgias, “the inspired incantations of words can induce pleasure and avert grief; for the power of the incantations, uniting with the feeling in the soul, soothes and persuades and transports by means of its wizardry” – and to that end, I choose to take this magic in remembrance of my ancestry and history. Like the authors before me, I choose to accept myself and move on (Freeman, 1948, p. 132).

2 A wooden slit drum used in processions sacred to the Nahua people. It is thought to bridge union between dualities through its beat, bridging connections and passings between those beyond the realm of the living, such as the gods or in this case, the dead (Pareyón, 2005).

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“Conceal Me What I Am”: Benefits of Wearing Masks in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in Today’s Context of COVID Masks

Veronica Dougherty / University of Notre Dame

In the wake of the coronavirus, masks have become a hot topic of discussion. However, this isn’t the first time they’ve been in the spotlight. Masks have been a subject of interest in literature for centuries — at least, they were a subject of interest for Shakespeare in many of his works. Shakespeare often explored the theme of masks and disguises in his plays to make an ironic statement about their use. Masks, which are commonly used to conceal one’s identity — or in the case of coronavirus, to protect from outside pathogens — are worn in Shakespeare’s works to reveal one’s identity. Shakespeare argues that masks are beneficial not just to prevent outbreaks of viruses, but to allow people to achieve their desires and truly express themselves. In his play *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare suggests that masks are freeing objects that allow characters to achieve their desires; that masks, while they may seem constricting, ironically allow one to be his or her true self.

A History of Masks

Masks have been a century-old European tradition. Visards, or vizards, were a popular type of mask, however, their purpose was a bit different from a masquerade or Venetian mask. Visards, like the one shown below, protected a woman’s face from the harsh sun and other effects of the outdoors.

Primarily, visards kept the sun off of a woman’s face in order to preserve her pale skin color. Paleness was a sign of high class; the paler the skin tone, the higher the status. In Shakespeare’s time, “a woman’s exterior would be carefully scrutinized in the belief that it manifested her social or spiritual identity” (Pritchard,

31). Therefore, women wore visards in order to preserve a modest impression. However, masks soon undertook “an ironic reversal” and rather than being considered a sign of innocence, they became a tool used to deceive and conceal one’s identity (Pritchard, 44). In the 1660s and 1670s, the vizard became a bawdy symbol and any woman seen wearing one risked being labeled as indecent. Interestingly, our society has had its own ironic reversal of mask wearing during the pandemic. Two years ago, if someone walked into a store with a mask covering their face, that person would be judged suspiciously or even asked to leave. Today, however, someone would be given those same judgemental looks or asked to leave if he or she were not wearing a mask. In Shakespeare’s time (1564-1616), women came to take advantage of vizards and would wear masks primarily for their deceptive nature.

Specifically, masquerade, or Venetian masks were commonly used to hide one’s identity or social status. Venetian masks were traditionally worn in Venice, Italy during the Carnival of Venice. The Moretta depicted below is a traditional Venetian mask worn year-round. It was first made in France before gaining popularity in Venice. The oval shape made of black velvet highlighted feminine features, which contributed to its popularity among Venetian women.

In Shakespeare’s late 16th and early 17th century works, masks were most commonly used for masquerade balls. These masks gave their wearers the freedom to interact with whoever they wanted without social pressures or restrictions. Masks came to represent freedoms and the absence of rules associated with anonymity. In a mask, “a servant could be



A 16th Century "Vizard" Mask. (n.d.). Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <http://www.houseffg.org/belphoebe/Research/Masks/Index.html>

mistaken for a nobleman — or vice versa" (History of Venetian Masks). Furthermore, masks gave people a new found confidence to say what they felt without fear of retribution. The concealment of one's identity permitted a greater sense of freedom because, "with no faces, everyone [has] voices" (History of Venetian Masks). Shakespeare took advantage of this unique nature of masks in many of his plays. He used the deceptive and concealing nature of masks to suggest their ironically liberating qualities.

Masks in Romeo and Juliet

Like their use in 16th century Venetian society, masks are invoked as a tool to escape the pressures of society in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Masks

that hide a character's face or change their appearance were worn as a means to be free of the pressures of such a structured community. Along with masquerade masks, Romeo and Juliet use darkness to mask their identities and free themselves from the expectations of their families and the rest of the community. Romeo "shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, and makes himself an artificial night" to hide from the constant dueling of a hyper-masculine world (Shakespeare, 1.1.142-143). He does not align with the standard idea of masculinity and possesses a more emotional persona, one typically associated with women. Romeo is a Petrarchan character who cares about "having that which, having, makes [hours] short" — love (1.1.169). Because he does not fit the standard concept of a man, society views him as a "weak flower" or a "bud bit with an envious worm," so Romeo must hide his true self (2.3.23) (1.1.154). Romeo wears a literal mask to the Capulet feast, which allows him to fall in love with Juliet. With his mask, he is free of the pressures and expectations of his family and realizes that he "ne'er saw true beauty till [that night]" (1.5.60). This mask becomes a way for Romeo to show his true identity and break free from his prescribed role. Darkness allows both Romeo and Juliet to reveal themselves in the famous balcony scene. Both characters are able to confess their love for each other in the balcony scene because their faces are hidden by "the mask of night" (2.2.90). The darkness allows their true identities to come to light which permits them to exchange "love's faithful vow" (2.2.134). Both Romeo and Juliet feel so constrained by society that they only feel liberated when they wear a mask of some sort. Furthermore, light and dark become inverted, so that, ironically, "the dark night hath so discovered" their personalities (2.2.111). Shakespeare comments on the effects of a community so strict that it leads its youth to only feel free when they are hidden. The mask of darkness and the Venetian masks Romeo and Juliet wear allow the two to reveal themselves to each other. Shakespeare

suggests that masks, which are meant to conceal, can have the opposite effect and allow characters to unveil themselves. In a society where people are forced to act in accordance with certain prescribed roles, masks are used as a tool to temporarily escape from these restrictions.

Contemporary Masks and COVID-19

Wearing a mask to protect oneself from the spread of the coronavirus has become a part of daily life. Today, some members of our society feel that masks limit them. However, the reality is that they are an escape from other restrictions in the same ways that masks were an escape in Shakespeare's works. In light of the current pandemic, "wearing a face mask is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of the virus" (Maragakis). Masks prevent one's respiratory droplets from infecting others as well as preventing other's germs from entering your nose or mouth. However, masks today, like in *Romeo and Juliet*, provide a sense of freedom and liberation. With our masks, people do not have to stay inside anymore and can go out and achieve a level of freedom that was not possible during quarantine. Without masks, we would still be in quarantine and confined to the constraints of our homes. If it were not for masks, schools would not be in session and sports or other activities would not be possible. Furthermore, masks have provided a sense of freedom from societal beauty standards. With a face half covered by a mask, people see less of a need to wear makeup to fix blemishes already hidden by a mask. Physical characteristics like acne or bad teeth, which are typically cause for judgement, are hidden during first impressions and until after perceptions have been formed. Therefore, masks allow for people to be judged according to their personalities rather than their appearances. By concealing wearers' physical characteristics and allowing them to partake in otherwise prohibited activities, masks provide a sense of freedom and liberation for their wearers.

Furthermore, masks today allow people to truly express themselves. At first, face coverings were

only worn as means to keep oneself and the rest of the community safe, however, now, people express themselves through their masks. With one's face partially hidden, people are less self-conscious and more willing to act true to themselves. As with the Venetian masks, this newfound confidence that comes with being disguised provides a sense of security which allows people to lower their guards and express themselves. Thirty-eight-year-old author and business consultant, Saurav Dutt, suggests, "I can let my guard down... You're minimizing any risk of contact with other people. All they can see is your eyes" (*Why Some People Like Wearing Masks*). Furthermore, with one's identity concealed, it is harder to analyze people's facial expressions, which reduces social anxiety like blushing or stuttering. As well as lowering anxiety



History of Venetian Masks. (n.d.). Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <http://magicofvenezia.com/history-of-venetian-masks/>

and increasing confidence to allow people to express themselves, people have also started to customize their masks in order to reveal their identities. There are multiple types of masks one can choose from, including surgical masks, fabric masks, bandanas, or neck gaiters. Moreover, there are a wide variety of customizations from different patterns and fabrics to slogans, sports teams, college logos, and so much more. One can find a mask for almost any occasion. For example, Black Lives Matter protesters have adopted masks with their sayings on them to further express their views and opposition against police brutality as shown in the image above.

This is just one example of how the ability to choose and customize a mask allows wearers to reveal themselves in a way that was not possible before. Like in *Romeo and Juliet*, masks have become freeing tools as well as a means to express one's identity. In a mask, people have the opportunity to go out and feel free to truly express themselves, therefore, masks positively affect not just people's physical health but their overall well-being as well.

As masks become an integral part of daily life once again, their advantages seem to be just as important as they were in Shakespeare's time. Masks have proven to be effective tools for protecting against and limiting the spread of the coronavirus, while

gests that masks are ironically freeing tools that allow one to achieve his or her desires. Therefore, there are more benefits to wearing a mask today than just protection against and prevention of the coronavirus. Masks provide the same sense of freedom and liberation as they did to *Romeo and Juliet*. Furthermore, the customization and variety of masks today allows people to express themselves and their identities. While the times and circumstances for wearing masks are different now than in Shakespeare's day, their advantages have remained the same.



Humanities, S. (n.d.). The meanings of masks. Retrieved March 27, 2021 from <https://news.mit.edu/2020/meanings-of-masks-shass-series-0924>

also greatly impacting one's identity. As Shakespeare argues, masks are more beneficial than they appear because they allow one to discover his or her true identity. One can be free from societal pressure when his or her face is concealed by a mask as suggested by the masked scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*. Today, people are less confined to society's beauty standards and have the liberty to make a first impression based on personality rather than appearance. Shakespeare sug-

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Paying Attention to the Soil, But Not the Workers: The Limitations of Localism in Addressing California Farmworker Food Insecurity

Trevor Cambron / Stanford University

Labor Justice Labels are important; just because something is grown organically or comes from a “local” farm, that’s no guarantee that the people who grew it were treated well.

- Dana Geffner, director of the Agricultural Justice Project (Nargi, 2019).



Migrant laborers pick strawberries in California’s Salinas Valley. Photo credit, Carlos Chavarría for [The New York Times](#)

California’s Alternative Food Movement has been flourishing in recent years: from organic produce sold at the Arcata farmer’s market to farm to fork restaurants in Sacramento and vegan grocery stores in San Diego. Despite the success of a food production system that claims to offer a more ethical replacement to the conventional system, the farmworkers who produce the actual food are not sharing in that prosperity — minimal labor protections, deplorable working conditions, and low wages all contribute to this reality. The unfortunate and ironic outcome is that farmworkers are often unable to afford the food that they harvest. Instead, they face high rates of food insecurity, leading to hunger, poor diets, and food-re-

lated illness. When money is tight, farmworkers are incentivized to stretch their income by purchasing inexpensive and often unhealthy food, which may satisfy one’s hunger but can lead to poor health due to the overabundance of fats and lack of nutrients. Worse off are those who can’t afford to put food on their plates and go to bed hungry after a day of producing food for the rest of the nation.

The alternative food movement, which is a general term describing several “movements (that) emerged primarily as a response to a food production system that has become increasingly industrialized, standardized, and impersonal,” has taken steps to address farmworker food insecurity (Grauerholz and

Owens, 2015). Many of these programs and actions are regional and community-based. However, there has been a significant lack of analysis regarding the implications of regional strategies on producing widespread improvements in farmworker food security. I will attempt to address this by offering a criticism of the alternative food movement's "localist approach" to farmworker food insecurity as one that produces limited benefits and stifles collective action. I will focus on the three primary methods of outreach currently being employed in California, namely, farmers market programs, community gardens, and food label certifications. The implications of other food security programs that did not arise from the alternative food movement but which may be inherently localist, such as food banks or rural food delivery, will not be analyzed. By analyzing the case study of the Downtown Palo Alto Farmers Market, Everyone's Harvest, Market Match Programs, the dynamics of Mesa Verde Gardens, and emerging labor justice certification labels, it is my goal that a more equitable, systematic, and widespread solution may be illuminated.

California's Agricultural Irony

There are an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 farm workers in California, the State with the largest agricultural industry (Get Informed; Snibbe, 2017). Agricultural regions of the state have some of the highest rates of food insecurity, with many working in the agricultural industry (Harrison et al., 2002). Cathy Wirth and colleagues found that 45% of farmworkers surveyed were food insecure and that 11% were food insecure with hunger (Wirth et al., 2007). The researchers also found that during the winter, farmworker's mean monthly income is hundreds of dollars lower than in the summer, which corresponds with more hunger (Wirth et al., 2007). During the summer, many spend their disposable income on fast food, which contributes to diet-related illnesses, such as diabetes and obesity, which the Latin-x community experiences high levels of, as shown in the gradient map below (Wirth et al., 2007; Hanni et al., 2009).

The food insecurity experienced by farmworkers has complex origins, the first of which is that farm-

workers have less access to food, especially healthy foods.

In Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties, on the heavily agricultural Central Coast, areas with higher proportions of Latin-x residents had less dense food retail (Howard and Fulfroost, 2008). Although access is undeniably a major factor in determining what and how people eat, poverty remains the main driver of food insecurity. Many farm workers keep their families fed with cheap calorie-rich diets, often sacrificing nutrients (Minkoff-Zern, 2014). To combat this issue, most strategies have focused on regional approaches. In the 1960s, social movements began to shift their focus from universal to particular, an idea which became a major factor in the localism of the alternative food movement in the 1990s, as both a response to and a continuation of neoliberal ideologies (Allen, 2010). This encouraged individual consumers to voluntarily act in ways that would align their consumption with the food system they desired, following the neoliberal "shift from the state as a regulatory force to a facilitator of markets, and from the provision of basic services and entitlements to a privatized, entrepreneurial approach" (Alkon, 2013). This is exemplified by Michael Pollan's advice to "vote with your fork... three times a day" (Pollan, 2006).

Localism has become ubiquitous in the alternative food movement, since for many, "the value of local food systems has become almost common sense" (Allen, 2010). Local food systems certainly have benefits, such as decreased transportation-related Carbon dioxide emissions or the community aspect of consumers getting to know growers. By analyzing the limitations of Market Match programs and farmworker gardens, an alternative to the dominant narrative of localism emerges, providing the framework for a more transformative approach to increasing farmworker food security.

Farmers Markets and Food Insecurity

The regional nature of farmer's markets indicates that they are designed to address the needs of the communities in which they are located, rather than

those of the communities where the food is grown. This is especially true of farmer's markets in urban and suburban areas that do not have an agricultural industry. The Downtown Palo Alto Farmers Market was created to "address the critical need of bringing fresh food to Downtown residents" (Board Members). Board President Bob McDiarmid also says that the market "curate[s its products] like a great art gallery or museum," focusing on the quality of the food as well as the community aspect of the market (Board Members). But, by comparing the market to institutions of upper-class society, he makes clear who the high-quality food is intended for. Environmental, social and economic issues are not included in the core philosophy. And, the Silicon Valley shopper is very much removed from the reality of food production and may not be aware of the labor conditions and associated effects on the livelihoods of farmworkers. In this way, California's urban farmer's markets have little positive impact on the food security of farmworkers, instead benefitting primarily the communities in which they are located.

While farmworkers are not on the mind of a shopper in Palo Alto, in areas with significant agricultural industries, the priorities of farmer's markets shift. Compare the Downtown Palo Alto Farmers Market to Everyone's Harvest, a market that operates in Monterey County with locations in the agriculturally significant Salinas Valley. The vision of the market is for "every community to have a fair and sustainable food system," with an emphasis on access for diverse communities and low-income consumers (OUR HISTORY). Everyone's Harvest attempts to increase the purchasing power of farmworkers through their Market Match Program, by providing low-income customers with an additional \$10 to buy produce when they spend \$10 using CalFresh (Food stamps) benefits (OUR HISTORY). This allows low-income consumers to purchase more fresh, healthy food with the same amount of money.

The Market Match program attempts to solve the issue of low farmworker wages by increasing the value of their benefits at markets, yet, the program has notable limitations. The maximum increase in benefits

that farmworkers can receive is \$10 per market; that is simply not enough to purchase enough food for an individual, let alone a family, incentivizing farmworkers to purchase conventional and unhealthy food elsewhere to supplement their diet. Transportation is also a significant barrier to farmer's market access. When shopping, over half of farmworkers drive their own car, around a quarter get rides from others with the majority paying fees averaging \$20, and the rest walk (Wirth, et al., 2007). Given the rural nature of agriculture, many farmworkers live far from farmer's market sites. For many, the amount they pay to get to the markets may be more than they actually plan to spend using benefits, which would disincentivize shopping there. Additionally, because so few actually use food stamp benefits, Market Match programs fail to reach a majority of eligible farmworkers, with undocumented workers being specially excluded due to immigration anxieties (Wirth, et al., 2007). Low increases in purchasing power, barriers to access, and low rates of food stamps participation prevent Market Match programs from creating large scale improvements in farmworker food security. The programs may be most effective at helping those farmworkers with access to transportation and documentation, but many others are overlooked.

Farmworker Gardens and Exclusivity

In contrast to Market Match Programs, farmworker gardens aim to allow farmworkers to grow their own produce. These gardens, such as Mesa Verde Gardens in Watsonville, provide families and individuals with small plots of land to produce organic fruits and vegetables for their personal consumption (Mesa Verde Gardens.). The program allows farmworkers to gain access to the same quality products offered by farmers markets and CSA's, yet, because they are able to employ their own labor and knowledge of agricultural practices, the food comes at a far lower cost. These gardens allow farmworkers to save on grocery costs, as well as have more agency in the varieties of food that they grow, even varieties that are difficult to find in the US (Minkoff-Zern, 2014). What fits Mesa Verde into the contemporary alternative food movement, rather than the community gardens movement, is its

focus on sustainability through pesticide-free requirements and drip irrigation or watering cans only (Mesa Verde Gardens). In this way, Mesa Verde is concerned with not only increasing farmworker food access but also the environment, encouraging organic agriculture and water conservation.

While farmworker gardens provide benefits to certain farmworkers, they fail to provide those benefits broadly. By emphasizing individualism, these gardens may be preventing collective action. Responding to the contemporary American urban garden movement, Mary Beth Pudup argues that “non-state and

collective actions that would more broadly increase food security.

Inherent in the design of community gardens is exclusion. There are only a select number of plots available for cultivation, necessarily limiting who can grow and how much can be grown. Again, there is the issue of transportation, as the over 40% of farmworkers who lack a personal vehicle will be unable to participate unless they live within walking distance of a garden or have enough money to pay for a ride (Wirth, et al., 2007). This means that the gardens are more available for comparatively better paid farm-

workers, who can afford transportation, as well as housing near the gardens. Lastly, the long hours spent in the fields may not leave enough time for transportation and working on the garden, or even the required 2 monthly hours spent on common projects (Mesa Verde Gardens). While farmworker gardens may play a role in increasing food security for a select group, their inherent exclusion and stifling of collective action means that they are unable to broadly increase food security.



Image 2, Fresh produce displayed on a table at a farmers market, featuring the Food Justice label.

quasi-state actors deliberately organize gardens to achieve a desired transformation of individuals in place of collective resistance and/or mobilization,” meaning that gardens may be used to substitute individual improvement for collective (Pudup, 2008). Similarly, these gardens reflect the lack of community organization that is an unfortunate standard in the agricultural industry. Farmworker gardens promote individualistic ideals of self-sufficiency that promise reward for those who are able to attain a plot of land to grow food for themselves, without addressing the needs of the others. In this way, the structure of farmworker gardens may actually be unfavorable to

Labor Certification Label Models

As Market Match and Farmworker Gardens approaches demonstrate, the rights of farmworkers are only just beginning to be recognized as a priority for the alternative food movement. Customers of alternative food institutions are already familiar with food labels such as “organic” and “non-GMO,” both of which require certification that various standards and requirements have been met by growers (Food Labels Explained). However, recently, labels have emerged that focus on the fair treatment of farmworkers. One food justice label, The Agricultural Justice Project (AJP), requires that organic growers provide a host

of benefits including workman's comp, disability pay, unemployment coverage, social security, unpaid sick leave and maternity/paternity leave for farm workers (Nargi, 2019). Most significantly, AJP certification requires employers to pay farmworkers a living wage that allows them to pay for the needs of a family, including "nutrition" (Agricultural Justice Project, 2012). By ensuring access to nutrition rather than food, AJP recognizes the difference between feeding a family food that will allow them to thrive and food that will cause health issues. The Agricultural Justice Project requires that employers respect "the right to freedom of association and to organize and engage in collective bargaining, free from retaliation of any kind" (Agricultural Justice Project, 2012). This gives farmworkers a collective power to improve the situation for all, and reinforces collective action as a means of achieving widespread improvement.

It is quite clear that the most well-known alternative food movement certifications focus primarily on environmental problems. Organics are characterized by their prohibition of certain substances, such as synthetic pesticides, which have adverse environmental impacts, while the non-GMO Project's certification of its products is in response to the engineering of crops for herbicide tolerance, including the unknown impacts that "superweeds" and "superbugs" with increased resistance to poisons will have on the environment (GMO FAQ, 2014). While the environmental impact of food production is undoubtedly important, the certification labels also expose the ways that the alternative food movement undervalues farmworker labor. But by addressing the needs of farmworkers, the new food justice labels represent a fundamental shift from the traditional labels of the alternative food movement and are evident of an emerging consciousness of the issues facing farmworkers.

One farm certified by the Agricultural Justice Project is Swanton Berry Farm, in Santa Cruz County. Swanton Berry pioneered organic strawberry production in California in 1983. However, when they signed a contract with the United Farm Workers union in 1998, few other growers followed their lead (Brown, 2011). The decision to unionize came because Jim

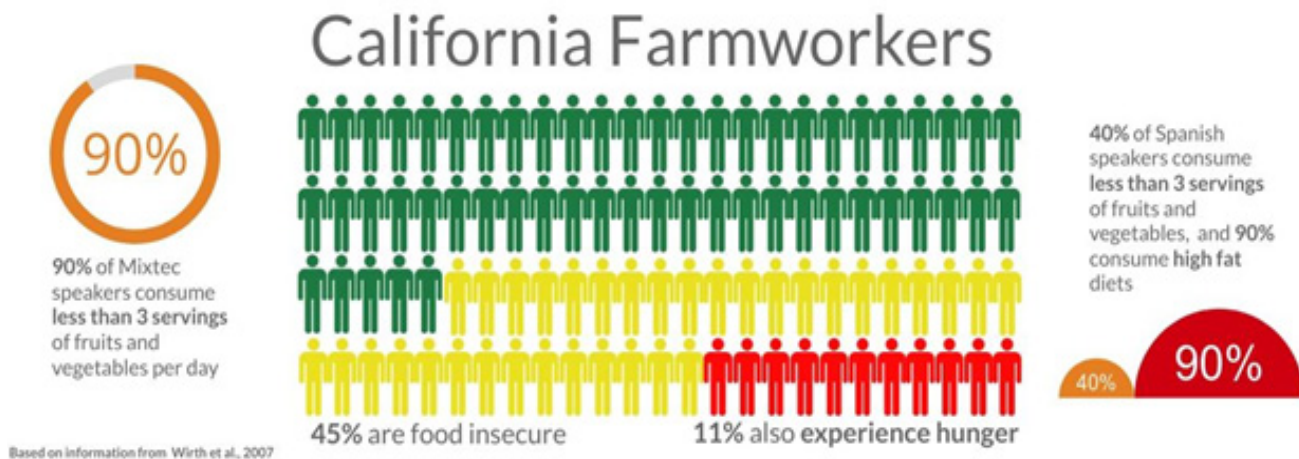
Cochran, owner of Swanton Berry Farm, believed it was "wrong to pay so much attention to the soil and not the workers" (Brown, 2011). "I want them to be middle-class. They deserve it," says Cochran (Romeo, 2016). In the case of Swanton Berry Farm, the owner advocated for unionization, but not all growers share Cochran's beliefs. Nonetheless, labor justice labels appeal to those with an ethical business model who follow self-imposed standards and regulations. A top-down approach to labor rights produces the same results as a grassroots campaign, with farmworkers gaining power regardless of the method.

The Regenerative Organic Certification, associated with the Agricultural Justice project, and an advocate of farmworker protections, is in the process of creating a set of standards after undergoing a pilot program with the backing of ethical business leaders like Patagonia and Dr. Bronner's (Farm like the World Depends on It). Leveraging corporate power to increase farmworker wages is proving successful and should be embraced by the alternative food movement. Though some in the movement may be wary of corporate power, when utilized for improvements in labor rights, large companies present a large opportunity for widespread improvements in food security.

Certification of fair labor practices creates certain hardships for growers, though this issue is not insurmountable. Unlike an organic certification, a labor certification, such as the AJP, does not currently mean a higher price premium for the certified products, while the certification has considerable costs associated with it (Nargi, 2019). That means that fair labor growers operate on an extremely small profit margin, 2.5% in the case of Swanton Berry Farm (Mazurek, 2014). However, the farm is still able to stay in business after 22 years of unionized work, meaning that businesses will have to make an informed decision about how they value growth versus workers rights. While short-term profits may be lower, this is countered by providing a living wage and benefits to employees, so that the quality of life of everyone involved in production is increased. In this way, the benefits of labor justice certification are social, rather than strictly economic.

Labor justice labels provide both market and nonmarket opportunities for growth. Underlying the food label model is the implicit logic of consumer choice prioritizing companies with preferred business practices. However, Alison Alkon points out that labor certification organizations “also go after businesses engaging in egregious practices to demand they improve, using not only consumer choice but also demonstrations and lawsuits to achieve this” (Alkon, 2013). Though certification is limited to the number of employees on a certified farm, certification pro-

fer a more effective alternative to localist approaches to farmworker food insecurity. When a large corporation that relies on several farms in its supply chain announces that it will be food justice certified, farmworkers working at different farms in various regions are benefitted. By broadly benefiting farmworkers throughout the supply chain rather than at a singular farm, the certification of large companies provides a wide-reaching solution, avoiding the strictly regional benefits that localist solutions provide.



grams move beyond a market-based model to support collective and legal actions that create solidarity among farm workers. By leveraging corporate power, more farmworkers are able to be benefitted, though collective action will remain necessary in order to ensure that rights continue to be respected. Additionally, these campaigns “challenge the neoliberal logic by restricting harmful practices rather than providing optional alternatives” (Alkon, 2013). In order to move beyond the framework of individual consumer choices, consumption must also be viewed as a collective action. This could come in many forms, from markets requiring labor standards for the products they sell to education campaigns that inspire the boycotting of companies with reprehensible practices. While these approaches may still rely upon the choices of consumers, they reframe choice as collective rather than individual. This reframing of choice is the best method for creating wide scale transformative change.

Moving Toward an All-Inclusive Approach

Increasing access to fresh, healthy foods through programs that increase purchasing power, like Market Match, or that allow farmworkers to grow their own food, such as farmworker gardens, can increase food security for certain groups who are able to access the services; yet, none systematically address farmworker food insecurity for those who cannot access its services. While each approach is beneficial for the population it is intended to serve, none are beneficial to all farmworkers. Patricia Allen acknowledges that while market- and consumer-based food security programs do increase food security, they “have created great inequalities among regions and within regions themselves” (Allen, 2010). Those with documentation, access to transportation, and housing within a close proximity to alternative food institutions are most benefitted, while those who do not fit that demographic are largely unaffected. While the regional approaches of the alternative food movement have been successful for some, there are still many who

Ultimately, corporate-backed food justice labels of-

are left behind.

Labor certification is a viable strategy that must continue to be pursued by the alternative food movement. A shift in labor practices provides a framework for an equitable alleviation of food insecurity for all farmworkers. Certification programs ensure that farmworkers have a space for collective action long opposed by growers, which allows farmworkers to take greater control over their own collective conditions, substituting individual for collective liberation. These certification programs also do not rely on consumer choice alone, and instead incorporate legal and organized action to achieve labor justice.

The alternative food movement's goal to bring fresh and healthy food to certain communities has left behind the very people who produce the food. Policies, such as Market Match and community gardens, are implemented without realizing that the regionality of these approaches fails to create large-scale impact. Labor certification labels, however, present the alternative food movement with the opportunity to systematically address food insecurity for all Californian farm workers by ensuring widespread improvements in the wages, and thus ensuring food security for farmworkers whose reach will be maximized by partnerships with socially conscious corporations. Stakeholders should pursue this approach; and I invite all Californian food consumers to.

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Check the Box: An Autoethnography

Heather Graham / University of Utah

My ballpoint pen hovered over the bright orange paper on the cluttered table in front of me as I paused at the question that was being asked. It was one of those early summer days that felt just a little bit too warm but by mid-July would have felt like heaven. The vibrant green park was alive with celebration. Pop-up tents sat in rows across the grass, guiding the river of revelers past their colorful laughing mouths, selling rainbow flags and cleverly-sloganed crop tops, or providing glossy pamphlets about the services and support that they offered. A steady stream of reds and blues and pale naked skin danced behind me, as the tents and people joyfully mixed and mingled. A lanky blonde with haphazard body paint and a baby blue tutu bumped into me, apologized, calling me “hunny” and excitedly hugged another painted body that was posing and bouncing near me. Their happiness and all the other acts of jubilation and excitement spread through the park like juicy gossip, until it seemed that the entire universe was celebrating too.

It was not my first Pride Festival. I’d spent several other days in a handful of other years over my short lifetime dancing and cheering with the LGBTQ+ community on hot days and rainy days and days that were more about yelling back at the protestors on the corner than singing karaoke with drag queens. I had been a friend and supporter for so long but it was today, at this Pride Festival, as my pen continued to pause over the volunteer form for the Pride Center, that I wondered if I knew where I fit at all.

In January 2019, The Williams Institute at the UCLA

School of Law examined the results of a Gallup Daily Tracking Survey and found that 4.5% of a sample of



Rainbow Lights Photo Credit: Unsplash – Jason Leung

approximately 350,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and up who reside in the 50 states and the District of Columbia identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender.

That's roughly 11.3 million people. While that seems like a lot of people, the LGBTQ+ community is still a very small and very oppressed minority in our country and around the world. LGBTQ+ people are faced with many obstacles from discrimination and the violation of human rights to bullying and "othering." Like many groups and subcultures, the LGBTQ+ community has unique literacies and languages that are an important part of the lives of those within the community that provides safety, recognition, empowerment, and identity; and the relationship between literacies, technologies, and identities support and shape queer people and their experience in our social narrative. (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2019)

I wasn't confused about the choices listed on the paper. The words were ones that I was familiar with. *How do you identify?* the paper asked. This seemed like a pretty simple question, and one that I had always had a quick answer for. *Straight. Gay. Lesbian. Bisexual. Asexual. Cis. Transgender. Non-binary. Queer. Write-In-your-(very valid)-other-identity-here.* I knew all of those words. Terms shared in the places I lurked on Tumblr. Concepts explored in fanfics I perused on Livejournal. Judgment shouted by the pious men outside the festival gates. Platitudes boasted by the self-congratulating allies in all the queer spaces. I knew the shapes and colors. Splashed across bare skin as the hugging pair sashayed back into the waves of jubilation. Stitched-across patched jackets as sun-kissed revelers wove through the fabric of festivity. I knew the sounds. Creating. Recreating. Empowering. Destroying. Defining. I knew the words. I knew what they meant and I knew why they held such power for everyone in this little park.

Language and sexuality researchers have demonstrated how sexuality is discursively shaped by the way we use language to talk and write about sexuality-related aspects. This issue becomes even more clear when it is investigated. Sexuality-related language use changes over time, since differences in language evolution from a comparison of historical periods, tell us something about how our conceptualization of sexual phenomena has developed (Green, 2018). Older generations of LGBTQ+ people relied

on unique language and literacy in order to find one another and community, while still hiding those differences from society. This was especially necessary for places where homosexuality was illegal. Queer people used "code words" and slang to allow them to speak openly about their identities and experiences. Additionally, sociolinguistics have found that "she-ing," an academic term that refers to the linguistic practice of feminizing people and things, is also a performative part of the language that queer people speak. It was initially practical: enabling gay men to talk about sex and lovers in public without fear of arrest or persecution.

The Williams Institute data also showed that the average age of the LGBTQ+ identified Americans was 37 years old, with the largest percentage of them falling between the ages of 18-24. (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2019). The Millennials and Gen-Z still rely on a lot of the pre-Stonewall language of the community, but they also have forced change in the relationships between these words and the social narrative. Sometimes there is pushback from the older generations as younger LGBTQ+ people reclaim the word "queer," redefine terms to be more inclusive, fight for states to put transgendered names and pronouns on driver's licenses, or speak loudly for their rights to equality. It's a shift away from meeting in secret and using codes, but much of the word choices and performance still include older vocabulary. This younger generation acquires and shares their language differently than the older generations did, and there are entire scopes of literacy that can be found online and through social media. Technology carries the language and vocabulary around the world, and reaches and connects more people than ever before. Twitter, Tumblr, and other social sites provide young queers with the means to learn and understand their shared experiences. It also allows those who are questioning, or who are allies, a window into the language that may help with better understanding and acceptance.

Somewhere in the park behind me the winner of a drag contest was announced and a crowd ignited with cheering. A tanned arm, dripping with purple

and yellow yarn bracelets reached in front of me, grasping for their own pen and volunteer form while a short, tattooed flannel-shirted person discussed the finer points of “queering contemporary art” with a lanky, rainbow-wigged teenager to the right. A kaleidoscope of color and sounds danced like wildfire in every direction. My friend Benny suddenly bounced up next to me, excitedly shoving a folded piece of fabric under my nose. Silky white, baby blue, and soft pink hugged symbolically as Benny unfurled the flag and wrapped it around his soft arms like a protective cape. I watched him twirl around, basking for a moment in his new safe cocoon, then dash off to

hoped this flag would wrap Benny in safety and hope, and let him express himself in the same way that the words and language helped others feel authentic, heard and validated.

Recognizing and respecting the language of identity is crucial to the well-being of members in the LGBTQ+ community. Identities are closely linked to self-image and self-worth, and when those chosen labels are invalidated or discriminated against, it can cause physical and mental distress. LGBTQ+ teens are twice as likely to attempt suicide as straight adolescents, according to the Centers for Disease Control (LGBTQ Youth). However, risk factors for suicide



SLC Library Photo Credit: Heather Graham

find his older brother, who was somewhere among the colors with a guy whose hand was begging to be held in the safety of the festival. I smiled, hoping that Benny’s flag would make him feel safe from the hurtful words of those who didn’t care to understand. From his dad, who still misgendered him. From his mom who argued that this identity was “just a phase” and criticized Benny’s therapist for encouraging this confusion. From straight men who would tell him that he just needed to “find the right man.” From every conservative woman who told him what bathroom he is allowed to pee in and from every single person who called him “she” without correction or apology. I

among LGBTQ+ teens are actually similar to risk factors for suicide among all teens and include hopelessness, major depression symptoms, impulsivity, past suicide attempts, conduct disorder (i.e. destructive, aggressive, deceitful behaviors, and violation of rules), victimization, perceived family support (support from peers does not have the same impact), and the recent suicide or attempted suicide of a family member or close friend. Some of these risk factors, such as family rejection or victimization, might disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ teens, which would explain their overall higher rate of suicide attempts (Barker, & Parkinson, 2016).

When the wrong language is used in regard to a person's identity, it can make them feel unsafe and stigmatized. A 2014 study of transgender individuals, for example, found that 32.8% of participants felt "very stigmatized" when they were misgendered (Jagannathan, 2019). Misgendering is one of the more subtle forms of enacted stigma that transgender spectrum individuals' experience, as it has the potential to shape how they feel and how they evaluate themselves and their social identity (McLemore, 2014). The experience can result in a loss of "the sense of belonging, of being seen," (Jagannathan, 2019).

Being seen, validated and accepted predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status; it also protects against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). This is one of the many reasons that language and the acquisition of language have such a strong connection with identity and the queer experience. Labels can hurt people when used to discriminate, but they can also be very important and helpful for identity and community and can play a poignant role in the LGBTQ+ narrative.

I grew up in a home where gays were welcome and loved. I went to my first lesbian wedding when I was seven and understood, without a doubt, that love is love. I recited Shakespeare on stage with men who

felt more comfortable in dresses and talked about attractive teen hunks with the half-back of the high school football team. Non-heteronormative was normative in my world. I knew, staring at the checkboxes, that whatever I box I chose wasn't going to make my parents cry. The swift stroke of the pen wasn't going to make the people dearest to me run away - though it's the kind of thing that could (and does) happen to a lot of people. The inky x wasn't going to change the world around me. But it was going to change the world inside of me. It was going to make me feel different. It was going to start a new fresh page in the sloppy book of my life. In his article "On The Cusp of Invisibility," scholar and writer Romeo Garcia cited Judy Rohrer's work. She wrote, "We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories." I am these stories (Garcia, 2017). Maybe now, with this hesitation about checking a simple little box on a neon orange square of paper, it was time to change my story. Maybe this early summer day in this festive green park, dancing in a river of paint and glitter, was the perfect place to wrap up in my own flag and my own identity. I took a deep breath and guided the pen to leave its inky, blue kisses on the paper, then stepped back into the river of color, swallowed by hope and potential. I might fit after all.

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A night and a half later: I decide to be silent.

Ironically, it's taken me an eight of that time to finish explaining why the Proto-Nahuatl form is spoken in a deep region of the mouth.

It takes no time for me to realize I'm not silent during the former; muttering is always present when I do not understand.

2.79 hours into my shift, I ask my cousins if my silence is wrong.

I'm still mad, and she didn't do anything to me, the oldest says.

My aunt: You have every right to be mad, she should be apologizing to you. *No dobles las manos por ella*—don't fold your hands for her; don't do something you don't mean.

But I'm not mad, she is. She might still be mad that I'm not mad, but silent.

I can't imagine how long their anger lasts. My cousin can be mad at her partner for months—pregnant, it can last longer. My aunt has held her anger for the family longer than her daughter's lifespan—the family's anger. 34.89 years? She says she has let it go.

My father's half-brother has been quiet for that long.

Pronouncing the vowels in Spanish during the Phonology lecture, I begin to formulate my thesis for the final paper.

English is a difficult language to learn for 94% of the world, as a first language. *Ah, eh, ee, oh, oo.* Span-

ish closer resembles the phonetics of where it came from.

Proto-Indo European, the mother and father of the modern languages also teaches its young *Ah, eh, ee, oh, oo.*

In the research the professor requires, I stumble on "English as a Bastardized language." The reason I don't choose it is because its mother is its father, and its father is implied not to be.

"Is the Past a Foreign Country?" Sometimes it feels like a different world.

But good question.

In Spanish, it's said, *Mas sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo.* The devil knows more from being old than from being the devil.

Like celestial mandate. For adults.

My sister (at 11.54 years): I'm the oldest and I know more than you, that's why. I'm in charge while mom's not here. As I mutter to myself, her saying does not carry the same tone that it does with our mom, grandmother.

I'd always look towards my sister with confusion. So what?

Knowing mom wasn't around when my sister would watch scary movies made me feel like I was going to die. My sister would laugh and spur courage toward visiting cousins.

Our mom can—even now—just place her hands on her hips, and her eyes sharpen when she means to

scold us. Or use her *chancla*.

That would no doubt send her running. To me, her scowl was a comfort.

Angels wouldn't bother guiding souls to heaven during those times.

And a size 5 converse (even now) isn't threatening.

Ay niña, hablas sin pelos en la lengua.

Around the time I was 7.13 years, I'd get scolded for asking questions. Grandma would tell me I spoke without hair on my tongue—I imagine everyone would speak that way.

It's a gross enough thought at that age to stop speaking completely.

But I had mistakenly thought these sayings were only reserved for the adults to use.

My heart always stops beating for .75 seconds when I am yelled at. My silence lasts as long as I sleep. 7.14 hours. Maybe less. Rarely more.

I had asked once if I could take belongings to Heaven.

I parroted some words I heard from my guardians—at the worst of times.

Cousins not even two years older than me would yell that I slowed them down by being a child and that's why I couldn't come with them on adventures.

They yelled because I am not my sister. Five years older and by default an adult.

Then I had the idea to ask why Mom and our father saw each other on occasion in secret, but weren't together.

At times, I still can't feel blood running remembering that.

My own words hadn't registered to me when my sister shrieks *because Dad cheated on my mom, that's why they're not together*.

At 8.57 years, I cannot feel my heart during the

anthem at school.

My mother always had the superpower to recognize words before they were uttered.

It was no wonder that even with the hairball in my throat she sat me down.

Your sister lived through some tough times. She was there when I left. Twice. You were inside me. I don't think she recovered.

I don't think Mom has either.

After, your grandma yelled at her for carrying your father's family on her face. Your sister yelled back that it was better than carrying hers. Mom's lips are a brim line.

Guilt. But for leaving, or because her face weighs, too?

My cousins giggle when my aunt looks in astonishment toward me.

By God, you even eat like your father.

Your voice is as deep.

Your eyebrows.

Your walk.

He shat you out. You were not born. But she says *te cagó*.

That can also mean messed/fucked (you) up.

Giggles turn into cackles.

My eye color is my mother's.

And I don't do confrontations like her or him.

But I can't help but snort as I take my break.

Half of the eight of them have their father's forehead. *That* was a big shit.

At 16.33 years, my sister yells again. Our parents have not spoken for 1.29 months. Same house this time.

I bet he's talking to that bitch again. Just like my partner. It's not fucking fair.

They've done it before (I was 11.54). But I knew then mom wanted to pronounce /divɔ:ɪs/. It requires good control of the tongue. A steady voice.

She picks me and our younger sibling from school. She smoked in front of me once doing that.

Dad does it outside.

I'm not dad.

That's not what I said.

With a sharp look, she tells us, if you want to come with me, tell me and I'll pick you up. I hate living like this.

vinced her to move in, with you. With me.

When Mom made the choice to leave.

She never found it necessary to reconstruct the word father for him.

She was content with the nickname we gave him. The one I can't remember how it was born.

I like to pretend I inherited his manner of speaking.

Without a doubt, I know you haven't.

Around the time I was 7.13 years, I'd get scolded for asking questions.

Grandma would tell me I spoke without hair on my tongue—I imagine everyone would speak that way.

It's a gross enough thought at that age to stop speaking completely.

I mutter the word living. And I don't like her partner. Figures.

My pulse is silent as I tail my sibling inside.

It's easier if you stay in your room, I mutter to them. Being on the phone blocks out the silence.

Why not *I'm not grandpa*? Why sleep when you can think.

That's also true. That's also relevant.

Grandpa was there to the end—for Mom; for you and me. He did hate scolding us, though. That was too rough on his voice.

I think that's why the house was silent when he slipped away, and why we weren't.

He endured the same yelling that echoes through your ear canal. He never yelled.

Grandpa had to marry his way in, like our aunt. Everyone had their past. No family anger infected him like the asbestos, though.

Mom tells me of how his soft-spoken voice con-

vinced her to move in, with you. With me.

I controlled the curl of my mouth: I'm not going for good. I'll be here for you on weekends. I can teach you what I'm learning.

Who said I was going to miss you, nerd? You're the worst shift leader, all you bring me is trouble.

I wish that saying was reserved for jokes.

Moments later, my sister: *Call after work. Emergency.*

I panicked and called her in the restroom. .01 seconds and she demanded to know why her sister-in-law was upset coming home.

I try to find my heartbeat and argument. Why? I—

She told me you had said something. What the hell did you say?

To go home—her shift was over during lunch rush, and our cousins had wanted to serve *her* carnitas for continuing to be on her phone.

Or is it about the alcohol—?

Stupid slip of the tongue.

First of all, telling her what to do is not your job, our cousin is in charge. Second of all, how the fuck do you go assuming shit without making sure it's true? You never fucking do that—

I only caught certain words as I felt my body drain of fluid.

Beat. *Fuck*. Beat. *Shit*. Beat—pause. You better *fucking apologize*.

After 4.81 minutes in the restroom, my cousins ask for her number.

Eldest cousin: Let me clear things up for her. If it's *my* job, then your dumbass sister should've yelled at me.

Tears. My cousins, my aunt tells me she chose someone else to listen, trust over me.

She's wrong, but I can't tell her that. Who am I to?

My aunt calls my father. It's a game of Spartacus to try to reach her. To yell first.

Our father wins. Who told you it was your job to yell at her? You don't even have the slightest damn clue of what happened, and it seems like you don't know what the difference is between sister and sister-in-law either.

My sister was there.

But I remember things. Or I try to.

Memories of Dad aren't documented until 8.11 years. Grandma had told me (at 5.44 years) to call Grandpa *dad*.

Do you know why the Spanish pronounce their /s/ differently than Latin Americans?

The same reason the word *Dad* couldn't come out of me to address my father until I was 16.42 years.

Two dads. Two s's. We loved them both. One was favored by the Andalusians—Grandpa, the dental ç. They merged at one point, the modern /s/ sound and

the dental enunciation. Theta. It's voiceless.

The dental ç didn't make it to the new written system. The Nahuatl had their own variation of /s/. But it's still regarded as the daintiest and most proper way to speak.

At least, in some foreign country.

You're five years older, practically an adult; Five more years of opportunity—with Dad: 21.32 years and counting; Grandpa:15.5.

The last thing that came to mind after your yelling was this: I was 13.77 years. You left with him, knowing better.

Not like Mom. More like Dad.

I forgot to mention something maybe insignificant, maybe important.

Something the Nahuatl did to distinguish their speech—they recognized how blood tied their sibilant use was.

They couldn't exactly teach the young the written system with as many variants for the same sound.

So they let the Spanish have their dental. And focused on the future.

Linguists are simply curious on the road that led to the present. Sometimes that means unearthing truths best left forgotten.

Maybe, too, to be ready for the questions that'll be yelled about why we speak the way we do. Maybe, to untwist some tongues.

Our cousins ask what happened.

Dad was burying his own dental ç 18.96 hours away from the nursery.

He returned to say sorry. Mean it; knowing little of what happened while he was gone.

You deserve the truth. I told you mine, but I wouldn't ask your father.

I'm home after that shift: wiping my tears, my snif-
fle asks Mom for me. Dad's fuming from the phone
call with my sister, after telling her what I told them.

He's not sure how you'll react if he tells you his
version.

I'm an old soul. At the very least. 19. *something*.

Despite all my research, I can't find why people yell
to communicate. Why my sister does.

Is it because / don't yell? Seems like a good place
to start.

You can't be devilish against a dense mind. It can
do it itself.

My anger flushed out with the amniotic fluid.

Ah, *shit*. I was even born the same way as Dad.
Almost. Not quite.

My heartbeat's managed to return, but my voice
hasn't. I don't think my sister's has ever been there.
That's the family voice.

I want her to find it. Then we can talk.

But I can't fold my hands. I'm an old soul.

And arthritis runs maternally and paternally.

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Defining Political Correctness

Ean Tam, Alexandra Hernandez, Roberta Geffrard, Jennifer Lee, & Emma Casey
/ **Stony Brook University**

If you were to comb through early 20th century transcripts of the United Kingdom’s House of Commons sessions, you would find yourself stumped by the vocabulary—not the long-winded mannerisms of 20th century speech, rather the ways in which the politicians reference groups of people. Take, for example, a debate that occurred on May 7th, 1906.



Credit: erhui1979 / Getty Images, 2016

Within the transcript, you can read the words of Winston Churchill, then Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and other Members of Parliament as they refer to Chinese workers in South Africa as “Chinaman” and “coolies.”

Reading this document 115 years later, it would be bizarre to think that the contemporary House of Commons—where comments like “dodgy” and “stupid woman” are shunned—would still be

receptive to “Chinaman” or “coolies.” Recently, there has been a discussion about Churchill’s legacy. Questions about his stances on race have led some to wonder if idolization of the former Prime Minister is misplaced. But the reexamination of Churchill is not an isolated case, and as we read more historical texts, we often find ourselves asking, “Can we still say that?”

In today’s working society, diversity has become harder to ignore. Classrooms and workplaces are opportunities for people to meet others of different backgrounds. As people become better informed, their way of communicating changes. So, when these lessons in diversity become incorporated into our shared language, we are confronted with the term

“political correctness.”

Political correctness carries a lot of weight. Some see it as an aggressive revision of historical conventions, impeding the way in which we can speak or write freely. Others will agree that historical conventions are being reconsidered but that this reexamination of our language encourages a more informed and equal society.

To help inform others and develop a society of acceptance and equality, political correctness must accomplish two main things: remove damaging stigma, and create a “people first” mentality. By achieving these two goals, individuals can be separated from historical inequalities. Then, individuals can be appropriately recognized for their contribution to diversity. To observe political correctness in action, we can examine how it has affected the way we speak of race, gender, and sexuality.

Race

If you do not believe history affects our use of language, all you need to do is compare question nine of the 2010 and 2020 United States Census. It asks the participant to fill out which race they identify themselves with. In the 2010 version, you will notice that “Negro” is still an option alongside “Black” and “African American”. In the 2020 Census, the term is omitted, and the answer choices have become incredibly more specific (United States Census 2010 Questionnaire 1; United States Census 2020 Questionnaire 2). Between 2010 and 2020, the United States government had changed its stance on the term to acknowledge the change of racially appropriate vocabulary. This is but one instance among a plethora of challenges the Black community has had to face in their fight for acceptance, equality, and political correctness.

Another prominent issue the Black community faces is a lack of understanding for the use of the “N” word. The “N” word is commonly accepted within the Black community, but it takes on a different meaning when used outside that community. Historically, it has been used as a “term of exclusion” holding a tremendous amount of negative connotation (Higson). Political correctness is about aiding the Black community in giving them their own agency over part of a painful collective past. As stated by

Osa Fasehun, the “N” word is a “derogatory racial slur that whites historically used to degrade free and enslaved Africans for over four centuries.” Essentially, the Black communities have taken this word of degradation and changed its meaning, known as linguistic reappropriation. And although the word has become a celebration of Black camaraderie within the community, it is still an offensive term stemming from hatred when used by anyone else outside this community (Brontsema 7). It is important to understand the political correctness of abandoning this word (and others) if one is not part of the Black community.

Even in American sign language there are disparities between being objectively correct. Throughout the language, there have always been two signs for white: one for the color and another to reference white people. Even so, there was only ever one sign for Black, whether it be in regards to color or a person. Fortunately, the deaf Black community created a sign to differentiate between the two. As explained by Rorri Burton in the Los Angeles Times, there are two versions of the sign: one for Black people to use and another for non-Black people to use. Burton breaks down how to sign “Black Lives Matter” and explains why some people sign it differently. She summarizes the history of the sign for “White” versus the sign for “Black.” Out of respect to Black culture, non-Black people should sign differently than Black people (00:01:30-00:02:40). This further demonstrates the importance of being socially aware of Black culture and respecting the dialect of language, even in sign language.

Similar to the issues with the use of the “N” word, a current debate of political correctness revolves around the NFL football team, the Washington Redskins. The term “Redskins” is an offensive term in reference to American Indians. Sports continue to brand names that were born in an era accepting

of racism and bigotry. Names such as “Redskins” offend and uphold a hurtful part of history through American traditions, degrading the history and culture of a people. Erny Zah, a spokesman for Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, explains that it is okay for Navajos to “assert themselves as Redskins,” but it does not change the fact that the majority of Native Americans have a “negative history with the word” (Peirano). Susan Harjo, an advocate of Native American rights, wants people to recognize the distinction between the use of “Redskin” within the Native American community versus the term’s use by those outside of the community. Just as the “N” word may be used as a means of camaraderie within the Black community, “Redskin” can be used by Native Americans to the same effect. Again, as Harjo explains, the use of “Redskin” by Native Americans does not “sterilize it” so that others can use the term as they wish. While “Redskin” may hold a sense of pride for some Native Americans, it does not replace the history of how the word came to be imposed on their community.

As a society, the ways in which we address other people is constantly changing. The term we believe to be acceptable now may not be appropriate a few years later. And it may seem strange that some people can use a word but others cannot. However, clarity on this matter can be obtained when taking into consideration the cultural significance behind these words. Linguistic reappropriation is a way for communities to reclaim words for themselves—to no longer allow certain phrases or terms to restrain them to historical inequities. The “N” word and “Redskins” are prime examples. When Black and Native American communities are able to inform others of the stigma perpetuated by these words and help others understand their communities’ preferences, political correctness has achieved its goal of creating understanding and awareness.

Post-Civil War: African Americans are commonly referred to as colored.

1896: Plessy v. Ferguson is decided by the US Supreme Court, establishing the standard of “separate but equal.” The court document uses colored 54 times and negro only three times.

1920: The “Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World” is ratified.

1954: Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka is decided by the US Supreme Court, ending the standard of “separate but equal” and school segregation. This time, the court document uses colored only six times and negro 39 times.

1966: The Black Panther Party is founded.

1968 - 1974: The Nixon Administration advocates for the “Black Capitalism” initiative to better the economic status of African Americans.

1988: Ramona H. Edelin, President of the National Urban Coalition, advocates for black to be discontinued in favor of African Americans.

1997: Federal surveys and forms add negro as an option when a study finds older African Americans still refer or prefer the term.

2008: Senator Barack Obama is elected President of the United States. Subsequent news media will refer to Obama as either the first black president or first African American president.

2013: The US Census Bureau announces it will discontinue the use of negro. Later that year, the Black Lives Matter movement is formed in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin.

2016: President Obama signs a law that stops the use of negro on federal forms. The term is replaced by African Americans.

2020: The US Census fulfills its promise to discontinue the use of negro. It provides black and African American as options, as well as further options to specify ethnic origins.

Gender

Since the 1970's, women have begun to enter the American workforce and receive higher education (Goldin 9-10). With the rising number of women taking on jobs that were once mainly held by men, Americans have become more conscious when referring to occupations. A salesman is now a salesperson. A policeman is now a police officer.

In general, Americans have become more accustomed to titles being attributed to women. But, this wasn't always the case. In a 1962 speech, President John F. Kennedy supported the work the federal government did to "help young men become doctors" (00:18:42 - 00:18:50). Now, a doctor, lawyer, and professor are no longer positions assumed to be held exclusively by men. However, there are still battles to be won in the fight for gender neutrality and equality.

Last year, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez delivered a speech against offensive language towards women. She referenced an event in which she had been verbally attacked by her colleague Rep. Ted Yoho. Cortez spoke about the continued harassment against women within the workplace and why she could not allow Yoho to use his own daughters and wives as an excuse for his behavior. Cortez explained, "[H]e called me disgusting, he called me crazy, he called me out of my mind, and he called me dangerous... I could not allow my nieces, I could not allow the little girls that I go home to, I could not allow victims of verbal abuse and, worse, to see

that—to see that excuse and to see our Congress accept it as legitimate—and accept it as an apology and to accept silence as a form of acceptance" (00:14-01:43; 04:35-05:49). Through his words and actions, Yoho implies that women can be verbally assaulted even in a well-respected position in office. His actions contradict the social contract we hold to treat others fairly and respectfully. There are some who say political correctness is about being too sensitive and easily offended, but political correctness is a matter of putting language in context of culture and identity.

Inaction to reprimand Yoho's language would represent a failure to address how language can be used to diminish the standing of women who stand up for their beliefs.

An important step to achieving greater respect for one another is through gender neutrality. Gender neutral language is language that avoids bias towards a particular sex or social gender.

It refers to words that do not identify a gender. This includes the use of nouns that are gender neutral to refer to roles or professions. Moreover, it includes the avoidance of gender pronouns, "he," "him," and "his" in assumption of an unknown person. As previously mentioned, some examples of gender neutrality are the use of "police officer" instead of "policeman" or the use of "mail carrier" instead of "mailman". Gender neutrality eliminates exclusivity and bias. It is a form of keeping everyone included.

Reformation of gender bias has already begun in other cultures around the world, such as with the Latinx community. Latinx is a gender-neutral form of Latino/Latina. An assistant professor in higher education at Florida Atlantic University, Cristobal Salinas Jr., found that the usage of this term has



gained popularity in higher education settings as Latinx students understand and relate to the term. Latinx is an attempt to provide a new approach in disrupting traditional social constructs of gender. As stated in the article, gender is a socially created concept that is consistent with what society considers appropriate in relation to characteristics, behaviors, and expectations. Most of society has adopted gender identity as a two-gender system (Salinas Jr 150). By creating a term that is gender neutral, it is all inclusive of those not identifying as either male or female. People within the LGBTQ+ community, such as nonbinary and nonconforming people, can feel included within their Latin American community.

Sexuality

On June 28, 1969, New York City police officers raided the Stonewall Inn, emptied the establishment, and arrested several patrons and employees. Many New Yorkers saw the Stonewall raid as another instance of police crackdowns on homosexuals. On the night of the raid, New Yorkers took the streets and rioted for the next five days. The Stonewall Riots are considered the first major protest for gay rights in America. Forty-six years later, in 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* and legalized same-sex marriage in America. When delivering the opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy stated, “Until recent decades few persons had even thought about or considered the concept of same sex marriage... Outlaw to outcast may be a step forward, but it does not achieve the full promise of liberty.... The nature of injustice is that we do not always see it in our own times ” (qtd. in Biskupic 297).

Then, in 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. The court found that discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of sexual preference and gender identity. Thus,

the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects members of the LGBTQ+ community from discrimination in the workplace.

The greater recognition and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community has led to Americans becoming more aware of how we refer to one another. This means no longer using “he” as a general pronoun, and using “they” instead of “he or she” when gender is not specified. Americans are also more willing to display their preferred pronouns on social media profiles or in emails. Pronouns are used in everyday speech and writing in lieu of people’s names. “They” is used to refer to either people talking, such as the words “you” and “I,” or used for someone or something being talked to, such as “she,” “they,” and “this.” Gender pronouns, such as “he,” “she,” “they,” and “ze,” specifically refer to people that you are talking about. Mistaking or assuming a person’s pronouns without asking first can send a harmful message.

As the article “Pronouns Matter” stated, “Using someone’s correct gender pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their identity” (LGBT Resource Center). By discussing and correctly using gender pronouns, it sets a tone for allyship. Furthermore, it celebrates and appreciates the differences of others when gender pronouns are emphasized. A safe environment is created for people of all sexes and gender identities, creating a place of inclusion.

Sometimes, using the wrong pronoun can make that person feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, and hurt. It’s important to recognize the political correctness of it through usage of the right pronouns and being aware of asking first if unsure. In summary, using the pronouns a person asks of you to use is a sign of respect and inclusivity. It is all about basic human dignity.

Overall, political correctness is occurring all throughout language in many different forms and groups. It is important to acknowledge that although political correctness has been often put in a negative light, we should not ignore the positive benefits it has had for marginalized groups.

Opinions on Political Correctness

In its purest form, political correctness is the effort to use language that is inclusive, non-discriminatory, and non-offensive. This is especially important concerning issues and topics about race, gender, sexual orientation, and culture. Using politically correct language attempts to rectify the prejudiced and Eurocentric viewpoints that were supported in the centuries before.

Today, political correctness can be a very polarizing term. Its portrayal in the media is not always flattering. This makes the writer's decision to include this type of language extremely frustrating and controversial. Let's take a look at some opinions of every day and acclaimed writers.

Lilly Dancyger:

"I continue to make these adjustments all the time in my writing and speech as I see various marginalized groups request them, like replacing the phrases "either gender" and "men and women" with "any gender" to include nonbinary people or not using words like "crazy" or "psycho" pejoratively (which reinforces the stigma against mental illness) when I actually mean 'dangerous' or 'irrational.' I make these changes because I believe that if a marginalized group tells you that something is harmful to them, they certainly know that better than you,

and you should listen – because I believe it's the right thing to do. But also because as a writer, I welcome the opportunity to become more precise and thoughtful in my use of language."

Lilly Dancyger is an editor at Narratively, Catapult, and Barrelhouse. Her writing has been featured in Rolling Stone, Psychology Today, the Washington Post, and many other news/media outlets. In this article, Dancyger describes a choice many writers must make today: to use politically correct language or not. Many writers see politically correct language as an act of censorship. They believe that writing should be personal, authentic, and reflect their own experiences including their language. For many, it would be a personal affront to actively exchange terms that come naturally to them. While Dancyger agrees that "nothing should be off-limits to the creative mind," not using more sensitive language is doing more harm than good. Using words and phrases that are offensive only further stigmatize and marginalize the groups of people who are fighting for equality and undermine their efforts to reclaim their identity. Dancyger believes utilizing more inclusive language can be an opportunity for writers to show growth and mastery of their language. Writers who are unable or unwilling to keep up with the changing lexicon will not be able to keep up with future shifts in society. Writing and language are always evolving as society guides it, writers must not "hold back progress" by refusing to evolve as well.

Lionel Shriver:

"There are a lot of people who now think white writers should not be allowed to write any characters of any race or different gender or sexual orientation than the author. But if you are going to create characters that are different from yourself they have to be nice. That's the understanding. Now, I reject that out of hand. I actually think this anxiety about if you're going

to make a minority character they have to be terribly attractive - I think that's kind of racism, as it's condescending. We're all people, we all have flaws. There are dislikable people in every race and therefore to treat your minority characters with kid gloves is like not treating those characters as real people" (qtd. in "Lionel Shriver on Lockdown, Brexit and Her Latest Book").

Lionel Shriver is an acclaimed writer, most notably known for her 2003 novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. Shriver's position on political correctness in literature and language is unlike the opinion of Dancyger. Shriver instead warns that the "censorship" created by political correctness would make the literature a "timid, homogenous, and dreary" place. She also has a negative view of sensitivity readers, regarding their use as unwarranted scrutiny of "perceived slights." Many of Shriver's novels include non-white characters but many of these characters have been widely criticized for their inaccuracies and inauthenticity. She was even told by her agent to replace a non-white character with a white one. Regardless, Shriver believes that she has a duty to continue to push back against the criticism. Writers should not fear the "blowback" of using nonwhite characters in the fictional world. She asks writers to have "a little more courage."

Pam Withers:

"These days, fiction writers cannot write about someone of a different culture, skin color, religion, disability or sexual preference without hiring a 'sensitivity reader' (one for each of the above categories, if multiple characters are involved) – generally at their own expense, even if it is the publisher insisting on it before agreeing to publish the book. The given reason is for more

authenticity and respect (a good thing), while a secondary reason is to cover their butts when media controversy by the politically correct (PC) brews."

Pam Withers is an award-winning young adult author who also runs a blog about her experiences as a writer. In one of her posts, Withers chronicles her experience with politically correct language in her fiction writing. Withers believes that politically correct language and usage of sensitivity readers can be a tool to provide readers with a full cast of authentic characters. Her recent revelation comes after she hired a sensitivity reader to review her Canadian-Korean character Mr. Kim. The sensitivity reader gave Withers suggestions to adjust the broken English Mr. Kim spoke to sound more Korean than how she wrote it. Withers had been using grammar and words that sounded more like a Chinese version of English than the Korean one she intended. Withers had previously believed and still partly believes that the demand for sensitivity readers can be "over the top" and that their vetting can't begin to represent an entire community. It's a writer's job to create a fully diverse cast of characters, even if they don't necessarily reflect the world or appearance of the writer.

Conclusion

So what is political correctness? Is it a monstrous offender of our free speech? Is it the end of being frank and honest? No, it is not.

In a society such as ours, it is easy to point out how different we are from one another culturally, physically, emotionally. While we cannot control where we come from or what differences divide us, we can all make the conscious effort to create a language that is fair and informed—a language that represents all of our experiences and backgrounds.

Political correctness is a tool. It informs us that language does not belong to one group or person. Language is always changing and belongs to everyone who can speak it. Language is defined by us. Political correctness does not take away words from you, it gives you more options—more tools—at your disposal. You are not scrutinizing every word, you are reflecting on their cultural and societal significance.

Political correctness puts people first rather than holding onto traditions or conventions that leave people out. Very rarely does ‘But that’s the way we’ve always done it’ function as a proper excuse.

Businesses get swept away under that mentality. But when it comes to language, it is our fellow citizens, with their cultures and histories, that will be swept away and forgotten. Whether it be race, gender, or sexuality, the world is a diversifying place. We have to keep learning and adapting, or else we fail to recognize the advantages that a diverse society can give us. Political correctness is the mechanism by which we can keep on learning, adding to our tool belt, and building upon our foundations. And these foundations—our conventions and traditions—can never be gone, but we can rise above them to make room for everyone else.

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How Two Idiots Shined a Light on My Social Inactivity

Peter Lachance / California State University San Marcos



Image credit Craig Hewitt

I hated working at that Quick Stop. I needed to find another job, a better job. I knew I was a smart white kid from a good school, I would have bet I could get a great job — a job where I didn't wear a smock; a job without idiot co-workers. Like Tip — he's a dope, always late, but most of the time he shows up, eventually.

As I was sweeping the parking lot during a lull between customers, Tip comes tearing ass into the parking lot on roller blades.

"Sorry, man," Tip said, out of breath. "I had to return movies; I am so dead."

"You're three hours late!"

"Well, I had an issue with my girlfriend's car."

"What happened?" I asked, already kicking myself for what is about to come.

"So, I was sleeping, and Nat came in and started to scream at me that I was late for work," Tip said. "And she told me to drop off the movies in the Red Box first."

"Dude, you were late, and you stopped at the Red Box?"

Tip had worked there longer than me. He's a 20 something white kid that lives with a crazy girl. All his stories are about him being yelled at by her for some ridiculous thing he did or bought. Maybe she isn't crazy, who knows. His name is John, but everyone called him Tip. According to the boss, Tip got his name on an overnight shift. The details are fuzzy, but appar-

ently there was a zipper, some girly magazines and Tip being startled by a customer. Tip thinks his name is cool, so I just go with it. I didn't care, my life sucked no matter if people called him Tip or not.

"I was late, Nat was pissed, so I grabbed almost everything and ran out of the house." Tip continued.

"What do you mean, almost everything?"

"She scared me, screaming not to mess up her car, she needs mine cuz it's bigger, so I had to drive her car."

"Wait," I interrupted. "Where's her car?"

"That is why I am dead. The thing I forgot was my glasses."

"I am not following?"

"I went to the corner store because there's a Red Box and I got a Dr. Pepper."

"You stopped at a convenience store on the way to your convenience store job?" I asked.

"They have a better soda fountain," he explained. "It's on the way, but I was half asleep, and well, I had an accident."

"What'd you hit, a car?"

"No, I hit 7."

"What's wrong with you?"

"I couldn't see; I am blind without my glasses."

"Where is her car now?"

"I left it," he said. "The cop that was there getting donuts told me to just leave Nat's car and some notes on the cars I hit."

"Are you serious? You hit 7 cars and a cop let you just leave?"

"Hey, I was late for work, you're welcome." Tip said. "Lucky my roller blades were still in the trunk."

"You really are unbelievable; I had to work alone!" I said as he walked in the store. I went back to sweeping the parking lot. This job sucks, I have to do every-

thing and Tip the genius forgot shoes. Now he has to work in socks. I need to find another job. Why can't things be normal just once? Why can't I just work at a better place with normal people?

"Hey Daryl," Rat Tail said as he walked up.

"My name is Rick," I told Rat Tail for like the hundredth time.

"Hey!" said Tip as he came out of the store in his socks to greet Rat Tail.

I think Rat Tail only hangs around here because Tip whacks his ego off. Tip must have been screwing around that is how he saw him walk up. Rat Tail's always wet and stringy hair is out of its rat tail today. I hate sweeping the parking lot, and Rat Tail and his stories make it worse. Why can't I just sweep in peace, why can't I just have a normal job?

"Tell him the story you told me the other day," Tip said to Rat Tail. "You are going to love this one."

"Oh, yeah, right," Rat Tail said. "So, I am in San Francisco with a stash in this hostel, and I needed to hide it somewhere, ya-know?"

"Whatever you say," I respond.

"I am looking around and I see a cubby, over the sink."

"And tell him what happened," Tip said.

"Perfect, right? So, I climb up on the sink to reach the cubby."

"You climbed up and stood on a sink?" I stop sweeping to ask.

"Yup, and I hid my stash in this cubby."

"Wait, you stood on a sink?" I asked.

"Yeah, and that is where I kinda ran into a snafu," he said.

"You fell?"

"Better," Tip said.

"The sink broke," Rat Tail explained. "I went ass

over teakettle. Water everywhere. The sink smashed into pieces.”

“Wow, ruining a hotel room, I never would have guessed you would ever do that,” I said. “How much did that set you back for the damages?”

“Nothing.”

“Why?”

“I ran, screw them. It was only a lousy hostel. That sink should have held two people.”

“Why two people?”

“Because of the gays.”

“What?” I ask.

“It was San Francisco, in the 80s. It was a gay mecca. You know what those people do?”

“What do you mean, those people?”

“Gays screw, like a lot,” Rat Tail explained. “Weird shit too.”

“Look, Adolf, people have lots of sex, gay, straight, whomever. All people screw.”

“My point, exactly, someone could have been doin’ it on the sink,” he said. “It should have been able to hold more weight.”

Rat Tail is short for Old Man Rat Tail Skullet. He is this old white hippie guy that seemed to only stop in when we were working. Same thing every time, he would walk up, searched the garbage cans for a used coffee cup. (The store has a deal when you bought a cup of the day you could get a refill for free.) He never bought a cup; he always just went through the garbage cans to find one. All that work to get a free coffee. When ole Rat Tail came in, Tip acted as if Elvis just entered the building.

“Hey, nice socks,” Rat Tail said to Tip.

“Yeah, I had an accident,” Tip told him.

“What happened?”

Tip retold his morning. Having already told the sto-

ry, he now embellished areas of the tale and added a pantomimed sequence: Nat’s actions, my total disgust of the entire ordeal, and his stance that he is somehow a victim. At the end of the story, in typical Rat Tail fashion, everything turns to how great Rat Tail is.

“You know my man,” Rat Tail started. “It is all because you don’t have the mental edge. Oh sure, you’re bright enough for this job, but you don’t possess the superior mental prowess to turn a bad situation into a win over the man.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“Gentlemen, I can see that you lack a... mental raciness. Let me tell you about my night and it all will be clear.”

“I agree you are mental and racist.” I said.

“I am glad you agree,” Rat Tail continues. “So last night I got a box truck full of mattresses that I need to get rid of. I spent too much time at the titty bar...”

“Dude, come on this is a public store.” I reminded him.

“So, I am headed home, too late to get rid of them at recycling, so I pull off the freeway and pull around under the overpass. I hop out and start to toss them in the street under the freeway.”

“Wow, that is so outlaw,” Tip said.

“Outlaw, it’s criminal! Do you realize that taxpayer money will have to clean up those mattresses?” I said.

“I am unloading the last one when a cop pulls up. That pig gets out of the car, shines his flashlight on me and tells me I can’t dump mattresses there, me.”

“Oh, man, what’d you tell the cop?” Tip asked.

“That is where the mental edge takes over.”

“I hope you got a ticket.” I said.

“No way my man, no ticket with the mental edge. I told him I am not dumping them. I am taking them.”

“What?” I asked.

“I told the cop I was taking them, and do you know

what the pig said? He told me I couldn't take them. So, I took the last mattress out of the truck. Dropped it on the pile and left."

"Wait. You said you were taking them not leaving them, the cop believed you and you got to dump them under the freeway somewhere?" I asked.

"That is the power of the mental edge."

"Aww, I need to be more mental edgy!" Tip added as he stands there in the parking lot in his socks.

"Yes, you do," Rat Tail said. "Fuck those notes..."

"Dude, language." I interrupted.

"Whatever, I would have gotten each of the car's plates and sued them for parking in my way."

"He hit them!"

"Cars can't talk, man; it is his word against the cars."

"I never would have thought of that." Tip said.

"You guys are unbelievable," I said. "I don't believe that you talked that tough to a cop."

"Believe it, man," Rat Tail said proudly.

"You guys are the epitome of white privilege," I said.

"Privileged? I am broke, just like those other people," Tip argued.

"Yes, but you just hit 7 cars, and left."

"I will be in trouble; Nat will kill me."

"Figuratively, Tip." People are really being killed by police out in the world."

"That is just left-wing media hype," Rat Tail said.

"No, it is not, the police kill people of color all the time," I say pointing at Rat Tail. "This burned-out hippie, dumped tons of garbage off the freeway and the cops told him to leave it. Why? Because he is an old white guy."

"I'm not a hippie, I am a surfer."

"You're idiots, the two of you," I said.

"I don't know if people are dying or not, but I'm not privileged," Tip said.

"How many jobs have you had?"

"A bunch," Tip said. "Why?"

"That is my point, you are a shitty employee, and you keep getting jobs. You have been hired and fired at every video store, home improvement store, and trendy coffee shop in town."

"Hey, I had problems," Tip said. "The ones I got fired from weren't my fault."

"I've had a lot of jobs too," Rat Tails said. "When the man pushes me, I push back."

"You guys are proving my point, People other than you privileged assholes struggle to get these crappy jobs and you entitled shitheads couldn't care less about them. You missed an entire day for the third time in a week, all to get a limited-edition Wolverine statue," I said as I point at Tip.

"It was limited," Tip said. "I got another job."

"There are tons of people that would take the jobs you screwed around on and lost, and they would work hard to keep them," I said.

"They can have them," replied Tip.

"Yup, they can have my crappy jobs too, I will just get another one," Rat Tail said.

"That is my point, you guys take these jobs for granted," I said. "You guys can't say that all the jobs you got were on merit and not because you're white guys?"

"That don't happen, Lincoln freed the slaves, like hundreds of years ago." Tip said.

"Yes, and systemic racism has been in place like forever. People are still racist."

"I am not racist; I know plenty of black people." Rat Tail said.

"I can't believe that you just said that," I said. "If

you make statements like that then you're racist."

"I find that offensive kemo-sabe." Rat Tail said.

"That is racist too!"

"Sorry to break up this bleeding-heart stuff, but I gotta take off," Rat Tail said. "Let me leave you with this. I don't mean harm; it's just how I was raised."

Rat Tail tossed his used coffee cup on the ground and walked away. I was too tired to say anything else. After Rat Tail left, I went back to sweeping and Tip went into the store to work the register. I let the dust settle before I went in the store and said anything else.

"I was not trying to make you feel bad, but you have to think."

"I am not a bad guy; I am not doing anything wrong." Tip said.

"But are you doing anything right?" I asked.

"Are you?" he replied.

I was surrounded by idiots, and Tip shocked me. In high school I didn't care about my SATs or college. I assumed I would have plenty of opportunities. Looking back, I see I was too scared, too dumb, or too privileged to even try. I wish I had; I preached about

making a difference in the world, but I was the same as them: not as racist, but one job after another. Lazy, privileged. I had opportunities I squandered. I realized that other people have actual problems. The world is full of hate. The world will hate you because you're black, gay, lesbian, Muslim. Hate. What was I doing about anything in the world? I was standing in a crumby store and complaining about how an old hippie and idiot sock-boy ruined my day while I was sweeping a pockmarked parking lot. I didn't have any real problems, but maybe I could do something. Maybe I can make a difference, maybe not — but I won't know until I get off my ass to do something. That was the day that I started to do something other than complain.

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