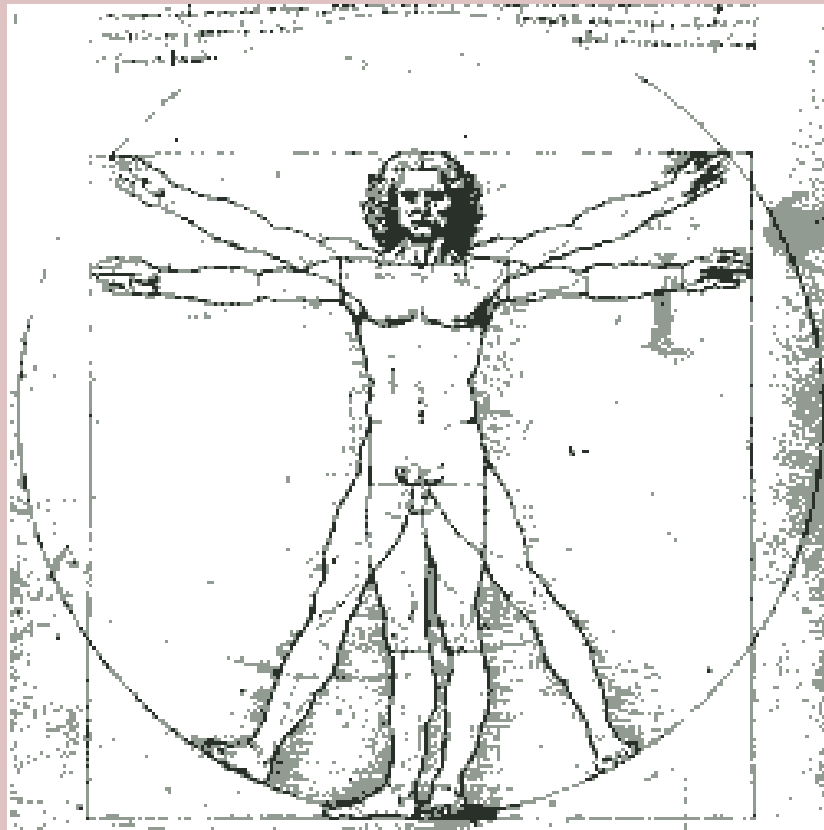


The Underground

Vol. 1, No. 1 / Spring 2011



**St. Lawrence University
Performance and Communication Arts
Journal of Undergraduate Research**

Editorial Policy

THE UNDERGROUND is a peer-reviewed journal for the work of students who are taking a Performance and Communication Arts course or are a PCA major or minor. The goal of this journal is to create an outlet that allows PCA students to share their findings and ideas with the rest of the PCA community; therefore, all submissions must be accurate and reflective of the PCA learning goals and the learning goals of St. Lawrence University. The journal will be published online once a semester. Each submission will undergo an editorial process by an editorial board of selected students. Submissions may undergo a series of revisions. The submissions will go through a blind-review by the members of the Editorial Board. A professor must sponsor each submission, meaning a signature of approval from a professor will be required. All work must be edited using the critiques of the professor before it is submitted. Submissions should be submitted with a hard copy and an electronic copy. Students can only submit two pieces of their work from the past academic year per semester. Submissions can include written pieces (plays, research papers, reviews, etc.) and visual art (photography projects or single photos, videos of performances, etc.). Submissions should be submitted by the time determined by the editorial board and submitted Juraj Kittler (jkittler@stlawu.edu).

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To the Reader:

Greetings reader. Welcome to the inaugural issue of the PCA Journal THE UNDERGROUND. This journal was created as a platform to demonstrate the scholarly work and progressive explorations of PCA students. We strongly feel that this journal will exemplify the best work of the department and so promote the academic standing of the department as a whole. We hope that through the creation of this journal we will initiate a long-standing tradition, which will continue to grow and flourish for years to come. In this inaugural issue, Samantha Foster examines Eastern European Jews in regard to Broadway's Yiddish roots. Danni Lanphear takes a closer look at gender fluidity and positive trans-imagery within the musical *Me and My Dick*. Haley Feickert suggests that mental illness could be a social construct that is perpetuated by cultural surroundings. Alyssa Halton inspects Artaudian "theater of cruelty" within the scope of the playwright Genet. Jonathan Stopyra uses queer theory to study "queer moments of distortion" within comic books. Hadley Deming critiques the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture Tourism's website while considering how Ethiopia can portray itself as a desirable location for Western tourists. Each of these pieces was selected by members of the department and was scrutinized carefully by members of the editorial board. We feel that they truly represent the best work of the department. We would like to encourage students to submit any work that they feel represents the department well and which will contribute to the positive development of the department. Congratulations to our authors and enjoy the first issue.

Sincerely,

Carla Ricci '11 and Jenae Nicoletta '12
Co-editors-in-chief

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Broadway's Yiddish Roots, Jewish Assimilation and Identity

By Samantha J. Foster '12

Abstract: The paper examines the conjunction of Yiddish musical theater and Broadway theater in the early twentieth century. Further, the author supports the argument that the Yiddish musical theater served as an assimilation vehicle for Eastern European Jews during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in New York City. The paper then describes both positive and negative effects of the assimilation into popular American culture and society. It notes the resurgence of Jewish identity in the 1960s and 1970s as a direct result of the assimilation process begun in the early twentieth century as immigrant Jews sought acceptance in mainstream American society. Finally, the paper concludes that the negative effect of assimilation, the loss of "Jewishness", is being counteracted by the current efforts of mainstream Judaism to assert a stronger identification with Jewish identity.

Keywords: Jewish identity, Yiddish musical theater, assimilation, "Fiddler on the Roof"

Without the success of the Yiddish musical theater in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, the assimilation of the immigrant Jewish population into mainstream American society would have been far more difficult because of the extant biases and racism throughout American culture. I argue, however, that there were negative connotations and stereotypes replicated within and around the theater that continued to isolate the Jewish population and caused lingering effects even to this day. The moral 'disruption' of young Jews and the dilution of Jewish identity were significant negative consequences that can be traced directly to the Yiddish musical theater as the leading edge of immigrant Jewish assimilation. The Yiddish musical theater paved the way for young Jewish immigrants to assimilate into mainstream America. Yet, assimilation carried consequences as younger immigrants adopted the ways of the American mainstream. The Yiddish musical theater became the focal point of the assimilation process as it mirrored the positive and negative connotations of the American musical theater of the time.

The social and political climate of late 19th and early 20th century America represented an era of nativism and Americanization. The sociopolitical climate had a significant impact on popular entertainment. Nativists were against immigration. Americanization was defined as a means to impose American ideas on immigrants. According to Professor James Byrne of Trinity College, the Know-Nothing party propelled the nativist movement. By the late 1800's, Americans believed that immigration posed a threat to their national identity. Byrne argues, "[t]his resulted in a two-pronged defense of national character, orchestrated largely by the nativist movement: Americanization of the immigrants already arrived and restriction of any further immigration of foreign nationals" (Byrne 119). Michael Rogin further confirms the

reality of ethnic immigrant life when he notes that Jews often struggled to hold a steady job in the entertainment industry. He continues, “[l]ike Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish movie producers, vaudeville performers, and songwriters occupied an insecure position between whites and peoples of color” (Rogin 1052). Scholar Andrea Most further explains the plight of the immigrant Jew when she notes:

Jewish assimilation into mainstream American culture in the early part of the twentieth century was largely a theatrical venture. In Europe, Jews had been oppressed by racial definitions that labeled them darker than “white” members of society and hence less privileged. In the United States, however, the presence of African Americans allowed Jews to launch an initiative to become white. (Most 77).

The life of the Jewish immigrant - not white, not “colored” - in the late 19th and early 20th centuries left many standing on the blade of a social dagger. The attainment of the “white” categorization in American society was the only way in which they would prosper in their newly adopted society; and, a crossover to the American musical theater was one of the primary routes to such prosperity.

There is a strong history of music rooted in Jewish culture that came to the United States with the immigrants. Eastern European Jewish immigrants fled to America to escape antisemitism in Eastern Europe and Russia. A heavy concentration of working class Jews grew on the Lower East Side of Manhattan as more and more immigrants entered the United States. This concentration of immigrants developed its own form of local entertainment in its rapidly expanding ‘ghetto’. Bechtel notes, “...a Yiddish theater geared to the popular entertainment of the immigrant Jewish masses had developed independently in America, and was flourishing on Second Avenue” (Bechtel 69). Other scholars observed that the American version of Yiddish musical theater started in the Bowery area of the Lower East Side in New York. Eventually, it began to expand outside of its cloistered neighborhood moving to places such as East Broadway and making its way into Jewish communities across the country. (Heskes 73). Heskes further argues, “[o]ver those decades around the turn of the century, this art form not only served its special Jewish patronage but was also the portal by which Jewish music entered into mainstream American life, and it illuminates a period of American social and cultural history” (Heskes 73). Thus, Yiddish musical theater was one of the key drivers of Jewish assimilation. It reflected the Eastern European Jewish culture, but it also created a point of exposure for more mainstream Americans as its melodies and entertainment began to show up in the parallel American musical theater.

Yiddish musical theater, especially at its peak in the early 1900’s, represented all the ‘morally corrupt’ aspects of American variety theater, at least in the eyes of the socialist newspaper publishers that had taken on the role of moral protectorate for Jewish immigrants.

Yiddish music halls, then, presented exactly those aspects that socialist intellectuals were fighting so hard to reduce on the stages of the theatres: bawdiness, vulgar jokes, gratuitous and showy singing and dancing. More important, they provided a false pleasure; not only were they

distracting the audience from the need for edification but, worse yet, they pulled them in the opposite direction (Warnke, 324).

It was a collection of low brow entertainment - singing, dancing and 'showiness' - that was especially popular with the uneducated, agriculturally raised Eastern European Jewish immigrant.

To add context to the discussion, it is important to note that Yiddish musical theater was not ethnically unique at the time. It was just one of many ethnic theater movements during the 19th century. Slobin notes that other ethnicities had been and were engaged in the theater business in the late 19th and early 20th centuries:

Above all, the musical drama of the Jewish immigrants needs to be seen as merely one of a number of such theatrical enterprises among the ethnic groups of the late nineteenth century. Though the scripts and records of these ephemeral stage traditions lie untouched in archives around the country, the glimpses available now allow us to see a certain consistency in all the ethnic attempts to create internal worlds of drama (Slobin 86).

Thus, the Yiddish musical theater carried on the developing American tradition of ethnic theater in much the same way as earlier iterations of ethnic theater in 19th century New York City.

It is also important to place Yiddish musical theater in the context of the broader New York City entertainment scene in the late 1800's. According to Czitrom, there was a relatively small concentration of theaters located in three areas of Manhattan, the Lower East Side, Union Square, and the Tenderloin District (Czitrom 528). Czitrom also notes, "[a]n 1875 'List of Theaters, Halls, Concert Rooms' counted fifty-seven licensed places for that year, a figure that remained basically constant for the next two decades. These were about evenly divided between places presenting straight drama, opera, music concerts, and circuses and the newer concert saloons and variety theaters" (Czitrom 528). Thus, the Yiddish musical theater essentially overran an early, traditional entertainment district on the Lower East Side as more and more Eastern European Jewish immigrants became concentrated in the area.

The late 19th century in America was also a time of 'moral turpitude.' Numerous moral overseers paid attention to the mainstream entertainment venues in the city. Organizations such as the Society for the Prevention of Crime and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children managed to get more involved in the licensing process for theaters (Czitrom 528). From the perspective of these overseers, American musical theater had become a venue for moral degradation that needed policing and regulation.

It is within the sociological context of 'moral turpitude' that Yiddish musical theater began to imitate the American musical theater of the time. Heskes notes, "[b]ased on historic traditions reshaped by dynamic cultural influences in the United States, the music and particularly the popular songs of American Yiddish theater properly belong to the dual communities of Judaic inspirations and American expression" (Heskes 73). Yiddish musical theater was not viewed positively by the traditional Jewish press and the elders at the time.

Although not specifically Yiddish *musical* theater, the attitude of the leading Yiddish playwright of the time, Sholem Aleichem, best expresses the ambivalence within the Jewish immigrant community regarding America, American theater, and musical theater. Bechtel argues, “[i]t appears now that Sholem Aleichem’s image of America is ambivalent: on one hand, America is the land of the realization of the Zionist ideal of return to the earth, of the *maskilic* ideal of a healthy occupation, but it is also the locus of assimilation and loss of Jewish identity” (Bechtel 75). Scholar Nina Warnke argues that in spite of the best efforts of the Yiddish secular and socialist press to steer young people away from Yiddish music halls copied from the American music hall, the establishment and growth of the genre was critical to the assimilation of young immigrants into American culture. She posits, “[t]he Yiddish music halls served as a bridge to Americanization for the immigrants and gradually moved performers from the Jewish culture into mainstream American theater” (Warnke 321). Clearly, the Yiddish musical theater played a key role in the assimilation of young Jewish immigrants. It served as the basis for ethnic parity among immigrant groups and between such ethnic groups and the white Western European majorities.

Assimilation was a two faced friend. On one hand, Jews were becoming Americanized as a result of the crossover effect to the American Musical Theater; but, in some ways, they were losing their ‘Jewishness’, much to the consternation of the elders of the community. According to Warnke, during the spring of 1902, debates regarding the effects of the crossover between Yiddish and American musical theater broke out in New York’s Yiddish language press. Conservative or socialist writers usually described the music halls negatively calling them a “plague” or “scandal” (Warnke 321). Warnke further argues:

As immigrant performers eagerly appropriated this American entertainment form and young entertainment seekers found in music halls a space in which to experience and express “American” modes of social and sexual behavior, the Yiddish press, particularly, the socialist *Forverts* (Jewish Daily Forward) and its editor, Abraham Cahan, regularly warned its readers of the immoral influence of this institution (Warnke 321).

By the early 1900s, assimilation, as represented by the increasing similarities between Yiddish musical theater and American musical theater, was viewed as a significant moral problem by the ‘protectors’ of morality among Eastern European Jews.

American musical theater was viewed as immoral and scandalous in the immigrant Jewish community. The development of a Yiddish musical theater that contained similar elements, only in Yiddish, brought the same taint of immorality and scandal to the Yiddish musical theater. Czitrom cites as an example the Belvidere Variety Theater on 23 Bowery. Prior to licensing by the city in 1875, owner John Schroeder most likely opened it as a saloon. Czitrom notes, “[u]pon orders of the local police captain in early 1879, Schroeder erected a seven-foot high wooden partition to separate the bar room from the stage area, thus technically complying with the laws requiring the separation of theatrical performance from the serving of alcohol” (Czitrom 528). Prostitution was also a significant underground business at the Belvidere theater. Czitrom argues, “[e]ven there, the real profit resulted from using sex to sell

liquor rather than the reverse" (Czitrom 528). There were clearly factual grounds for the labeling of American musical theater as immoral.

The social upheaval that was going on at the time is best exemplified by a New York State Supreme Court ruling.¹ Czitrom describes a ruling in which Justice Thomas A. O'Gorman revoked the license of the Victoria Theater because it violated an 1860 state law banning Sabbath entertainment: "O'Gorman asserted that the Christian Sabbath is one of the civil institutions of the state and that for the purpose of protecting the moral and physical well-being of the people and preserving the peace, quiet, and good order of society the Legislature has authority to regulate its observance" (Czitrom 534). American 'civil society' reacted vehemently to the 'immorality' of the musical theater. And, this reaction carried beyond the traditional American musical theaters to the ethnic theaters as well.

As a result of the crossover effect, one of the primary negative consequences of the Yiddish musical theater and its imitation of American musical theater was the 'moral disruption' of a population of primarily working class, agriculturally raised immigrants with little or no exposure to 'big city morality' in New York and other American cities. Warnke notes that urban recreation was a significant asset in Americanization:

For many immigrants, participation in urban recreation was part of the broader experience of Americanization. Saloons, lodges, socials, dances, and excursions were common in all working-class neighborhoods. Forged in an urban industrial society, these American amusements offered a novel conception of leisure to the newly arrived immigrant - the idea of segmenting and organizing leisure into a distinct sphere of activity, separate from work and family alike (Warnke 331).

Segmenting leisure activity into a "distinct sphere of activity" outside the family created a new set of incentives for the first generation American Jews (as well as most immigrant groups) to assimilate while still maintaining a locus of family in a 'separate segment' of their lives. This was essentially the compartmentalization of different components of the immigrants' lives - a Jewish compartment and an American compartment. In Eastern European Jewish agricultural lives, there was no such compartmentalization as family and entertainment were contained in the same sphere. The Eastern European agricultural family had little time for entertainment and what entertainment they had focused primarily on the family and religious interactions. This was also a function of the urbanization of the immigrants who worked long hours in local factories, lived in ghetto like tenement apartments, and sought relief from both 'worlds' in the form of popular entertainment (Warnke, 331).

The 'moral corruption' is likely to have been overblown by the 'social protection societies' of the time. Nonetheless, the Yiddish musical theater and its parallels with American musical theater introduced the elements of social immorality to an illiterate agricultural audience that had been extremely religious in their Eastern European homeland. And, the social

¹ For those unfamiliar with the New York State court system, the State Supreme Court is a court of first instance, not the highest court in the state as the name implies.

realities of factory and ghetto life provided the opportunities for the inculcation of American “values”, both positive and negative, into the immigrant Jewish population.

Another negative consequence of the development of the Yiddish musical theater as a parallel genre to the American musical theater was the ongoing loss of “Jewishness” as the assimilation progressed. One of the leading Lower East Side socialists of the time, Abraham Cahan, detailed his concerns regarding the loss of Jewish identity through the musical theaters, both Yiddish and American. According to Warnke, “[t]he problem, according to Cahan, was that the indiscriminate commercialization of mainstream American culture threatened the cohesiveness of the Jewish immigrants as a community” (Warnke 327). Other Yiddish journalists expressed concern that assimilation would somehow disrupt the identity of Jewish immigrants. Warnke posits, “[s]imilarly, the Yiddish journalists’ attack on the moral fabric of audience and performers was their response to transformations in immigrant social behavior which, in their view threatened the cohesiveness of the Jewish immigrant community as they knew it” (Warnke 328). The effect was the result of assimilation in general. But, assimilation was led by the gradual “conversion” of Yiddish musical theater into a genre that resembled its perceived corrupt sister, American musical theater. And, it was a growing problem. The music halls grew in size with regard to audience and employees:

Despite Cahan’s 1902 campaign, music halls continued to flourish. By 1905, every important street on the Lower East Side had its glaring electric sign which announced ‘Jewish Vaudeville House’ or ‘Music Hall’. A year later, the Lower East Side, Brooklyn, and Bronxville together boasted fourteen music halls, each employing 10-15 actors, actresses, and chorus girls as well as an equal number of musicians, projectionists for moving pictures, and stage hands. (Warnke 330).

The Americanization of Yiddish musical theater was now in full bloom. It led to the eventual crossover effect of Jewish immigrants into mainstream American musical theater which in turn led to the wave of Jewish performers into American entertainment. While immigrant audiences viewed music halls as places to try out American behavior, actors viewed their performances as a path to assimilation. Warnke posits:

Inspired by seeing the glamour of show business, they saw the process of becoming professional performers as the first step out of the drabness of industrial labor and the poverty of the immigrant environment. Some immigrants, such as Eddie Cantor, were able to start directly on the American vaudeville stage, but, even those who, for linguistic and possibly also social-psychological reasons remained within their own ethnic enclaves, managed to shed their perception of cultural marginality by appropriating American material into their performances (Warnke 332).

This set the stage for the identification of the American entertainment world with Jewish performers. Assimilation progressed while at the same time continuing the negative stereotypes associated with the Jewish immigrants, the ‘others’ of the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century. Performers, producers, directors, and other entertainment jobs were more closely identified with their Jewishness than their skill or success. More than any other

ethnic group, Jews seemed to use the entertainment industry as a crossover industry, a transition to the American ideal.

Fast forward to the late 20th century, assimilation, as led by the Americanization of Yiddish musical theater, has created exactly the effects feared by the early Yiddish social commentators: a waning Jewish identity and the secularization of Jews. As a result, the late 20th century saw an effort by Jewish intellectuals to correct this course. According to Cohen and Fein, Jews transitioned their priorities during the late 1960's and early 1970's. When they arrived in America, integration into society was their top priority:

But, since about 1967, a discernible change of priorities has taken place; Jewish survival - that is, the survival of Jews as a distinct ethnic/religious group - has become a priority of at least equal, and perhaps greater, concern to many individual Jews and, more particularly, to the agencies and institutions that determine the collective agenda of the Jewish community. This shift has had profound consequences for the political, religious, and cultural life of American Jews, and also for the symbolic expression of Jewish group identity (Cohen and Fein 76).

This reawakening of Jews has also occurred in the context of contemporary American musical theater. The Yiddish musical theater died, but the musical about Jewishness and Jewish culture arose as a very popular art form. Referring to *Fiddler on the Roof*, Wolitz notes:

A gigantic substitution occurred in the musical. American ideals of individual rights, progress, and freedom of association are assimilated into the Judaic tradition which is presented as a cultural tradition parallel to the American. The class conflicts, which riddled the shtetl and which Sholem Aleykhem considered destructive of Jewish communal interests, are sidestepped in the musical. The musical posits, in fact, Jewish adaptability as key to Jewish continuity (Wolitz 527).

American values have become Jewish values, for better or for worse; so much so that Jewish identity has become intermixed with American identity. The seeds of this social outcome can be traced back to the development and evolution of Yiddish musical theater in the late nineteenth century - for better or for worse.

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“There’s so much more to what I think I see”: Positive Trans-Imagery in *Me and My Dick*

By Danni M. Lanphear ‘11

Abstract: Many queer theory scholars (Kate Bornstein, Jacob Hale, Judith Halberstam, Jordy Jones, etc.) lament the inaccurate, negative media representations of transgender and transsexual individuals, claiming that non-trans artists *cannot* successfully portray a trans lifestyle in a positive way. However, this essay examines a musical entitled *Me and My Dick*, using Bornstein’s concept of gender fluidity. Although the play contains some conservative, heteronormative themes, woven throughout the piece are elements that can be read as transgender or transsexual. The characters that are read as trans do not follow the traditional trajectory of trans representations, such as the comedian or the tragic figure; rather these characters have a depth that the audience can identify with, and their conflicts end happily. Ultimately, though it is unclear if any of the Team StarKid artists are trans, this reading of *Me and My Dick* indicates the younger generation’s acceptance of trans lifestyles as more “mainstream,” and also suggests that trans-identities are becoming more positively represented in the media.

Keywords: transgender, transsexual, gender binary, gender fluidity, drag

One of the current sensations storming the web is an original musical entitled *Me and My Dick*. It was written and performed in the fall of 2009 by StarKid Productions, a student-created theatre troupe now based in Chicago, also known as Team StarKid. As described by its creators, the show is about “a boy with a very special relationship with his very best friend ... his Dick! Together they face the trials of growing up, love, sex and high school, but these two best pals are in for the adventure of a lifetime” (Caulfield). The full-length play is wildly popular among young adults and has over 600,000 hits on YouTube. However, more people need to look at *Me and My Dick* as it is a substantial artwork that thoughtfully comments on societal structures and norms. Though the play contains some conservative, heteronormative themes, woven throughout the piece are elements that can be read as transgender or transsexual. Transgender is an umbrella term for identities that relate to socially constructed concepts of gender (man/woman, feminine/masculine, etc.), while transsexual relates to sex, to the male/female dichotomy (relating to the body via genitals, chromosomes, or hormones) (Stryker 3). Although conflation often occurs, neither transgender nor transsexual necessarily correlate to sexuality (sexual practices). *Me and My Dick* exhibits playfulness with gender and sexuality because, despite its focus on a heterosexual couple, the musical allows characters to experiment with and celebrate gender fluidity, indicating the younger generation’s movement towards positive representations of alternative, and equally viable, identities.

The musical focuses on the heterosexual relationship between Joey and Sally, and the connection between their personified genitals, Dick and Miss Cooter. While Joey loves the popular Vanessa, Dick falls for Miss Cooter, the vagina of Joey’s best friend Sally, and conflict

ensues when Dick runs away from Joey to find his love. Despite the oddity of singing genitals, all four characters have heteronormative genders, and the play ends with heterosexual closure when Joey and Sally, Dick and Miss Cooter reunite. However, several instances of trans-imagery complicate this seemingly ordinary hetero-tale: people exist without genitals and genitals exist without people; the leader of the Land of the Dicks was removed from his man in a sex change operation; Tiffany loses her vagina and gains a cross-dressed penis; and Old Snatch, a cross-dressed vagina, is the ambiguously gendered savior of the plot.

The musical is able to portray gender fluidity by demonstrating the separation between sex and gender, by utilizing different types of gender performances to illustrate that division, and by hinting at the innumerable identities it can produce. As Nikki Sullivan - among many other social theorists - stresses, sexuality and gender are “discursively constructed” concepts, influenced by the demands of cultural and historical moments (1). Our contemporary society operates under a gender binary - sex/gender equates to the separate realms of Male/Man and Female/Woman (Jones 455). This binary allows only two acceptable genders, male and female, and heterosexuality, or the sexual attraction for the opposite sex/gender, is *the* sexuality; as Gail L. Hawkes explains, these relationships function as, “Genitalia = boy/girl, boy/girl = masculine/feminine, masculine/feminine = heterosexuality” (262). This logic, which rigidly relates biology to body, performance, and desire, renders anyone who does not identify within these boundaries to deviant outsiders.

Trans-identities can dismantle heteronormative logic by bending its strict rules. Transgender in a collective sense refers to a range of gender-ambiguous identities, such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, and intersex people, allowing people to identify as something other than a man or woman (Sullivan 112). As Jordy Jones articulates, “the transsexual considers him or herself a member of the sex ‘opposite’ to his or her original physical embodiment and/or wishes to be or to become a member of that desired sex” (440). Kate Bornstein suggests that a transsexual is “anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself” (121). Those who identify as trans reveal the flaws of the gender binary by exposing the performativity crucial to that system; identity is constructed through “a process of reiteration (repetition/rehearsal) and citation (reference/quotation)” (Taylor 164). Trans-people can manipulate/exhibit gendered signifiers like clothing, hairstyle, body type, etc. to cite and repeat elements of expected gender performance while simultaneously denying the sex or sexuality usually attached to those signifiers. For example, an intersex person may have the genetic makeup of a “female” but due to a hormonal “imbalance,” that person may be born with ambiguous genitalia and later develop traditionally male characteristics, like facial hair and a deep voice during puberty (*Hormonally Yours*). These male signifiers do not correspond to male genitalia or even to heterosexuality, thereby showing the mis-linking between body, masculine/feminine performance, and desire, between sex, gender and sexuality.

Similarly, the genital-less people and people-less genitals in the play clearly demonstrate the division between sex and gender and consequently can be read as trans because these moments move through the gender binary. When Dick detaches himself from Joey, Joey continues to identify as a heterosexual male despite the fact that he has been unsexed: in lacking genitals, the human characters lack sex, but do not lack gender (Jones 444). The free-roaming genitals also lack (literal) sex without a person - the detached penises in the Land of the Dicks make it clear that they cannot have any sexual relations without being reattached (*Me and My Dick* 2.3). Without sex, both human and genital characters still exhibit gender identities; that one can exist without the other dismantles the binary, showing that gender cannot infer sex or sexuality, and vice versa. The fact that at various points throughout the play Dick and Miss Cooter separate from Joey and Sally illustrates that even the heteronormative, central couple is

not so “normal,” with their unfixed relationship to their genitalia highlighting the constructed nature of the identities they exhibit.

The shifting states of genitals in the musical intersects with Judith Halberstam’s articulation of “the potential of the body to morph, shift, change, and become fluid [which] is a powerful fantasy in transmodern [media]” (76). The genitalia transition from the original attachment to a person, to freedom, to choosing a new person to whom to attach, and linger or exchange between any of those phases. Dick leaves Joey, lives in the Land of the Dicks, and then Big T and Weiney try to attach themselves to Joey. Weiney, seeing an opportunity to connect to a new human, and Tiffany, having recently lost her runaway vagina named Old Snatch, decide to bond at the close of the play:

Tiffany: “Nessy, I can’t find my va-jay-jay!”

Weiney: “Who needs a va-jay-jay when you can have a pocket-sized penis?!”

This pseudo-sex change operation leaves Tiffany, a self-identified heterosexual female, with a penis, allowing both Tiffany and Weiney’s identities to morph continually according to their needs/wishes. This is the most obvious example of transsexualism in the musical; but, it is important to note that before meeting Weiney, Tiffany shows no desire to become the “opposite” gender, and, as Jones points out, this makes the substantiality of her transition to trans shallow (440). Nonetheless, Weiney and the other genitalia defy the social mandate to be or have one static identity (Halberstam 76).

Cross-dressing further denaturalizes the seemingly traditional gender identities of the four protagonists. Though the audience’s initial reaction to the cross-dressed characters is laughter, particularly at the taboo sight of a man in a dress, the audience sees the characters move beyond their initial limited role of comedic relief. Historically, theatrical cross-dressing did not always signify comedy or even sexual significance, but rather signified a challenge to social order through a rejection of gender roles for political or religious purposes (Hawkes 262). This may occur in a covert manner, such as with the transvestite boy actor on the Elizabethan stage (see Shapiro). Unlike Elizabethan playwrights who were forced to incorporate transvestite roles because of the law that banned women from the stage, Team StarKid purposefully chose to stage particular characters as cross-dressers.

The first two cross-dressed characters who appear in the musical are Flopsy and Old Snatch, two vaginas, both played by actors who identify as men. The actor who plays Flopsy passes as a woman, but in doing so, he reaffirms heteronormative discourses by successfully appropriating the societal position of the woman. Flopsy is an example of non-threatening heterosexually or homosexually-produced drag, which allows a man to fantasize about giving up his male place in society and being the object, i.e. the woman (Jones 440), who can attract other men. This kind of transgender performance is not transgressive because it involves denying the politics of gender choice and also reiterates the belief that gender means either man or woman (Sullivan 106).

In opposition, Old Snatch does not pass because she is not accepted as the female gender, and in fact she can be read as a man in drag. In drag, a man impersonates a specifically exaggerated version of a woman in a performance that utilizes breasts, elaborate hair, and embellished make-up and mannerisms (Hawkes 266). Old Snatch in some ways fulfills this definition of drag by wearing hyper-feminine clothes and a blonde wig. Yet, the actor does anything but act hyper-feminine; his lack of makeup, extensive facial hair, cigar, over-acted deep, hoarse voice and more masculine mannerisms provide the gender dissonance that results

in the drag's humor. However, Old Snatch is not solely a comedian - *not* an example of "using drag on stage as a gimmick, a *shtick*, [which] is an appropriation" (Bornstein 91-2). Rather, Old Snatch impersonates two misogynistic stereotypes at once: the masculine woman and the too-promiscuous woman. (S)he is at once the vagina of the femme Tiffany who "gets around" with many popular boys, while, conflictingly, she has a boxy body, behaves aggressively and independently, and is headstrong and tough. Old Snatch says, "I've been with so many members of the football team, they're gonna give me an honorary position!," probably because she is big and masculine enough to play, but also because they call her a "wide receiver" for her numerous sexual relations (*Me and My Dick* 2.3). Old Snatch's origin story reveals she was heart-broken when her first love disappeared after a night of romance, and has had a negative view of the world since. Her past does not make excuse for her masculine *or* promiscuous identity, but rather humanizes her and moves her beyond the empty shells of the stereotypes.

By humanizing the butch and slut stereotypes, and by portraying them partially in a hyper-masculine way, Old Snatch does much more than entertain with a drag performance: Old Snatch serves as a gender-ambiguous (read: transgender) mediator between extreme images of the masculine and feminine. She is campy, highlighting the gender dynamic, showing the silliness of the discrimination it creates, and violating the ritualistic misogyny of heteronormativity (Bornstein 136). Furthermore, Old Snatch is attracted to men, possibly making her performance one of a male-to-female transsexual gay, or of a transgender. Either way, she defies heteronormativity by showing that attraction between a man and a woman is not the only viable sexual relationship. It is important to note, however, that Old Snatch does not identify herself in terms of sex, sexuality, and gender, or speak directly to her appearance or positionality. Additionally, Old Snatch's reunion with Big T at the end of the play, though odd in its own right since they travel the world as a people-less genital couple that supposedly cannot have sex, may be seen as a twisted form of heterosexual closure. Unfortunately, this choice of ending does not further explore Old Snatch's identity.

Despite this missed opportunity, Old Snatch exemplifies gender fluidity by engaging with the potential for gender changing. Kate Bornstein defines this potential as, "the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender" (51-2). Old Snatch is a very fun, loveable character who embraces the changes in her life and eventually encourages that same adventurousness in Miss Cooter. The playfulness with identity that Old Snatch represents is evident throughout the musical in the Land of the Dicks where a dick can roam free, the Council of the Pussies who can fly, and the desire of each character to find peace with themselves. The characters all discover that it is a gift to love oneself first, and then to care for someone else. The musical, an example of creative works by young people, seems to advocate for a movement towards an acceptance of a wider variety of lifestyles. Early in the musical, in the song "We're Ready to Go," the entire cast sings, "We're finally ready, and the time is right for us to light the spark. We're keeping it steady, with our eyes on the prize to get us through the dark. I know there's so much more to what I think I see. I feel a change in the strange thing that's a part of me" (*Me and My Dick* 1.3). As they jubilantly sing these words, the characters smile, dance playfully, and caress the genitals they are beginning to know. The lyrics suggest a coming change, a (en)lightened view of relationships and ways of being freed from rigid, discriminatory structures that would exclude many of these unordinary characters.

Yet, the meaning of such nonconformist, possibly trans moments can be affected by the identity of the creators. It is not clear if any of the StarKid Production members are transgender, transsexual, etc. There could be serious, negative implications for the trans-moments of *Me and*

My Dick if none of the creators lives a trans lifestyle. Jordy Jones, Judith Halberstam, Jacob Hale, and Kate Bornstein all warn that non-trans people have incorrectly or incompletely portrayed trans individuals in the media, which perpetuates trans stereotypes, objectifying and exoticizing these voiceless minority groups: "We are the clowns, the sex objects or the mysteriously unattainable in a number of novels. We are the psychotics, the murderers, or the criminal geniuses who populate movies. Audiences have rarely seen the real faces of the transgendered. They don't hear our voices, rarely read our words" (Bornstein 60). All four theorists urge artists to tell their own stories to avoid further disenfranchisement of people who identify as trans. However, the play does not seem to violate an important rule laid down by Hale for non-trans artists' creative work about trans-lifestyles: "Beware of replicating the following discursive movement: initial fascination with the exotic; denial of subjectivity, lack of access to dominant discourse; followed by a [type] of rehabilitation." *Me and My Dick* does more than present the exotic without further examination; each character has agency and is not denied access to the dominant discourse. Their adventures allow them to revitalize their unique identities by the end of the play rather than being "rehabilitated" into heteronormative identities. In the final scene during a song called "Heaven on Earth," the entire cast sings, "We feel so free! Oh, oh oh, I am losin' all control, oh, oh, here we go!... Hallelujah! Makin' love, makin' love, like heaven above, so good to be getting laid. Makin' love, sweet love, can't get enough; rejoice now that love's been made," demonstrating this revitalization of identity.

By no means is *Me and My Dick* a play *explicitly* about transgenderism or transsexuality, and indeed an examination of Tiffany and Old Snatch reveal a lack of deep-seated investment by the playwrights in trans-politics. However, the fact that those characters not only exist but also thrive within the play's world suggests that the playwrights intended for the audience to witness the possibilities that arise when one explores sex and gender outside of the gender binary. These characters, who clearly cannot be read as traditionally gendered and/or heterosexual, invite a reading of them as trans since they move through and across the accepted gender binary. Tiffany and Old Snatch, for example, do not appear in the play solely for comic relief, or as tragic figures whose deaths reaffirm societal norms, but rather they are characters of depth that the audience can identify with, and their conflicts end happily. *Me and My Dick* is not just a play about heterosexuality, but rather it is clearly a story in which *all* the characters find peace and happiness with their bodies, genitals, sexual desires, and identities. The success of *Me and My Dick*, despite these motifs of transgenderism and transsexuality, may indicate the younger generation's acceptance of those lifestyles as more "mainstream," and suggests that trans-identities are becoming more positively represented in the media.

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The Social Construction of Mental Illness: Are the Illnesses we Suffer from Truly Universal?

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Abstract: The notion of mental illness is one that is often linked to biological explanations and is often explained through the lens of psychological arguments. However, there are theories that suggest that mental illnesses are, in fact, socially constructed categories that differ depending on how culture defines and constructs those illnesses. Within this cultural construction, several major factors contribute to the perpetuation of these definitions such as the mass media, pharmaceutical industry, and the popular discourse. In order to fully understand the ways in which mental illness is defined, categorized, and understood by mass populations, one must always take a deeper look into the culture surrounding the illness and the manner in which it has been culturally constructed and normalized.

Keywords: mental illness; social construction; pharmaceutical industry; intercultural communication; mass media

Introduction

“Mental illness is a myth” (Thomas Szasz)

Contrary to popular belief, the mental illness known and understood in the United States as depression does not necessarily exist in other cultures. In other areas of the world, depression is not defined and understood the same way the U.S. American Psychiatric Association has defined the symptoms and implications. While studying in Kenya, I was exposed to Kenyan peers who did not have the same understanding of depression as I and they were unable to provide a word that directly translated to ‘depression’ in Swahili. This intercultural interaction led me to ask: what it is that defines mental illness? This answer is a complex one, based on theories of social constructionism which trace the mechanism through which individuals and cultures create and perpetuate meaning. Culture at large can also be broken down into sub-cultural groups based on religion, social class, gender, race, or any other social group under an umbrella of a mainstream culture. Within this intricate system, the social construction of meanings and an individual’s subjective reality are impacted by the mainstream, hegemonic culture as well as by the particular culture of sub-groups. When applied to the case of depression, it means that what individuals from the United States are taught about the illness is wrapped up in social and cultural discourses and practices. Such discourses are consequently perpetuated and ultimately socially accepted and naturalized through hegemonic cultural institutions.

In the case of mental illness, depression in particular, the United States government and the economic interests of private sectors play a role in the categorization of mental illness and the social meanings attached to such categories. Large drug companies rely on industry spending and direct to consumer advertising in order to perpetuate the categories of mental illnesses. The pharmaceutical industry has a stake in this form of institutional constructionism because the drug companies depend on the American public continuing to suffer from an illness like depression so the companies will continue to sell a disease. Classifications of mental illness in the U.S. are driven not by individual prevalence rates, but by the available production and sales of pharmaceuticals. It is usually only after a drug is created that a dramatic rise in the prevalence of a particular illness occurs. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, total spending on pharmaceutical promotion in the U.S. increased from \$11.4 billion in 1996 to \$29.9 billion in 2005, the total spending increase being about 330 percent in just under a decade (Donohue, 2007, p. 676). This high level of direct to consumer advertising is what drives individuals in the United States to think they 'have' an illness and that they must also treat their 'symptoms' with drugs.

There are many factors at work here, intertwined in a way that creates a cycle of first labeling and constructing a meaning for an illness, convincing the public it suffers from said illness through public awareness campaigns, and then a drug is marketed to the potential consumer for a profit. The relationship between the individual, culture, sub-cultures, and the economy is a complex one that makes it difficult to understand the root of why mental illnesses are thought to be the same across cultures and 'natural.' However, mental illnesses do not simply 'exist' in the physical world waiting to be discovered. What makes mental illness 'real' is a complex result of multiple social, cultural, economic, and political factors.

Theories of Social Constructionism and its Impact on Culture

"People can sometimes enjoy food that they would normally consider repulsive, as long as they are not told exactly what is on their plates" (Harris, 2010, p. 33).

In the United States the notion of 'human nature' is often used as a phrase to explain human behaviors and social interactions with one another. Most of our language and popular culture centers around the idea that humans come into the world with inherent personality traits and individual qualities that are inborn and static. Western culture has developed over time many discourses that reinforce the notion that there are inherent ways in which all humans act. The English language perpetuates and naturalizes the idea that there are "essential characteristics of people" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 7). The social constructionist however argues that we, as humans, are not born with any essential qualities but rather, the way in which one makes sense of the world and of his or her lives is dependent on how one is socialized. As Heasley and Crane also note:

...social constructionism is a theoretical framework that says that "objective reality" doesn't really exist. Rather, we make subjective interpretations of what we experience, and therefore, by interpreting the world around us, we come to construct our own

reality... what is important is not what *IS*, but *what we interpret something to MEAN* (2003, p. 29).

Through the lens of this theoretical framework, the notion of what constitutes the 'mind' comes into question. It is often implied that the notion of the 'mind' is linked with biology in Western culture, something that is not necessarily true. In fact, many social constructionism theorists argue that what makes up an individual's 'mind' is in itself socially constructed. The 'mind' is governed by sets of symbolic meanings and definitions that cultures agree upon and perpetuate. Culture, according to Wood, refers to "beliefs, values, understanding, practice, and way of interpreting experience that a number of people share" (2005, p. 59). With this notion that the human mind is influenced heavily by culture follows the idea that all humans navigate through the world with a differently socialized perception of their social reality and social positionality within a culture. "Since meaning is not inherent, any aspect of human experience can be classified and acted towards in various ways. Human beings must therefore interpret" (Harris, 2010, p. 27). It is this "interpretation" that is the root of social constructionism theories. Humans interpret their own realities and this is always affected by culture, race, class, gender, and any other social position in a given society. As George Herbert Mead notes: "language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes it possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created" (1934, p. 78). Meanings are not inherent. Humans interpret and make sense of the world through language and interactions with others. There is no reality without the symbolic system of language and meaning.

It follows then that different cultures view life and reality in very different ways because "human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have towards them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). This is the notion of symbolic interactionism in which meanings are seen as "social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (ibid, p. 5). Blumer further argues that all meanings are symbolic in the sense that we create our meanings of the world based on the physical realm, but that in fact our actual reality is one step removed from that physical world. Therefore 'reality,' as we have come to understand it, exists purely in the world of the meanings assigned to the physical realm.

Theories of social constructionism contrast with theories of essentialism. Essentialism refers to "the notion that there is a Truth that exists independent of the observer and that ultimately we can know that Truth" (Gordon & Abbott, 2003, p. 29). The essentialist would argue that there are certain aspects of the world that are universal and that such things exist in the universe until humans address them and create a space for that 'thing' within a culture. The main difference between constructionism and essentialism is this notion of objective reality and whether anything can truly 'exist' without interpretation. An essentialist would argue that there are truths that exist apart from human reasoning and the constructionist would argue the existence of anything relies on human subjective interpretation (ibid., pp. 29-32).

One of the first individuals in the West to theorize about the notion of social constructionism was Giambattista Vico. He took the leap away from Western notions of human nature about 300 years ago and outlined the important aspects and theories of social constructionism that current sociologists and philosophers understand and cite today. Vico made the statement that human nature is not fixed and that we "create" our own worlds based

on our interpretation of culture and our external environment (As cited in: Lock & Strong, 2010, pp. 14-15).

About two hundred years later, George Herbert Mead added to this sociological conversation. Throughout his work, Mead discussed the notion of the 'mind' and what social meanings are used in order to construct such a complex social concept. Mead stated that the 'mind' is not necessarily something we possess or are born with; it is something that exists in the realm of meaning. Following from this notion that the 'mind' is something separate from the brain, Mead also addressed the concept of the 'self' throughout his works. He argued that the 'self' cannot, like all other concepts, exist outside of our socially constructed meanings. Mead's 'self' is also a unique concept because he described it as not static and stated that it is constantly impacted by culture, other 'minds,' our perceptions of our environment, and culture. The 'self,' according to Mead, cannot exist outside of its "relation to the selves in the other members of his social group; and the structure of the self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs" (Mead, 1934, p. 164). Mead argues that the 'self' and the 'other' are always impacted by one another and it is this "social process out of which selves arise." (ibid., p. 164).

For the greater part of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault played a major role in the development of theories surrounding social constructionism and its impact on societies. According to Lock and Strong, Foucault outlined three ways in which individuals make interpretations: "dividing practices; scientific classification; and subjectification itself" (2010, p. 247). These dividing practices refer to the way in which individuals create, maintain, and perpetuate arbitrary classifications. Foucault suggested that we often 'police,' or regulate, our behavior and physical appearance in order to maintain the construction of a particular category. Along with this 'policing' of our selves, we also pressure others to do the same, meaning that within a culture each individual works to uphold the arbitrary categories that have been defined through language.

Erving Goffman contributed to this discussion with his theories of the 'self' and the "performance of the self" (Lock & Strong, 2010, pp. 203-206). Like Mead, Goffman was concerned with how we perform our 'selves' in everyday life and how the 'self' is impacted by other selves, culture, and language. Goffman was also curious about how the 'self' is impacted by the various social roles we are taught to perform based on our social positionalities and cultural perception. Goffman argued that the manner in which individuals interact and communicate with other humans is not an innate quality, nor is it an inborn ability; we are socialized by various social communities such as family, schooling, religious communities and other sub-cultural groups in a way that teaches us these social scripts which govern our behavior (Wood, 2005, pp. 167-172). The media also plays a large role in the degree to which these social norms and scripts are practiced in hegemonic culture. Thus, in order to see that the social rules and norms are followed, we resort to regulating our own selves as well as other selves. Goffman also argued that humans adopt various 'fronts' in order to perform various selves, and these "fronts tend to be selected, not created." (1959, p. 28). According to Goffman, we, as individuals, are always performing the selves through interactions with other individuals and such performances are always learned and selected within the frame of culture.

As humans, we make sense of the world around us through the meanings that have been created within a culture. We assign meanings to colors, shapes, and bodies. Concepts such

as emotions, time, or even science are all social constructs. That is, these concepts are all created by a meaning that has been defined, maintained, perpetuated, reinforced, and ultimately naturalized through cultural communication practices. Take the concept of time for example. In the West, time is viewed as a linear phenomenon and those who are a product of that particular culture interpret events as happening in a linear manner, with a clearly defined past, present, and future. All of these ideas are a result of the way in which we have defined and constructed time (Jandt, 2010, p. 200). Because we have no physical way to understand time, we must construct what it means to us in our culture so we can all share a common definition and understanding of the function of time (Lock & Strong, 2010, p 132). Along with time, constructs such as gender and race for example are also socially constructed and perpetuated within a cultural frame.

The social constructionist argues that all categories within the human language are socially constructed, just like the example of time, through discourse and behavior. Race, class, religious beliefs, and even Western science are social constructs. A human being cannot make sense of the physical world without first having a meaning and understanding to apply to that thing. All behavior, however seemingly ‘natural’ is learned through language and thus a meaning.

“Mental Illness” as a Social Construction: Individual, Cultural, and Institutional Constructions

“Mental health is really about performing your self in socially appropriate ways.” (Fordham-Hernandez, 2010)

“The question of whether mental disorders are discrete clinical conditions or arbitrary distinctions along dimensions of functioning is a long-standing issue, but its importance is escalating with the growing recognition of the frustrations and limitations engendered by the categorical model” (Widiger and Samuel, 2005 p. 494)

A major aspect of society which is constructed through social interactions and culture is mental illness. The key concept of this study is whether or not mental illnesses can exist outside of culture. For example, in some areas of the world the term ‘mental illness’ does not even exist. Even in the West, the concept and discourses surrounding mental illness have changed drastically over time.

Because ‘mental illness’ in U.S. society has been placed in the domain of scientific research, the argument of essentialism is often used to combat claims that mental illnesses might be a product of our own meanings. The argument of ‘what came first, the illness or the meaning’ is at the core of this dispute. The social constructionist would argue that the meanings created to define ‘mental illnesses’ indeed come first and that it is only after the meanings and categories are created and perpetuated within a society that the mental status of individuals is defined based on these arbitrary definitions. Thus, there are no objectively existing essential illnesses; they only come to exist when a label, and a meaning attached to that label, is created and perpetuated through culture; a place for them to exist in our minds. This argument becomes even more complicated when biology is used as an essentialist argument for the

existence of mental illnesses. It is only relatively recently that scientists have discovered certain bio-physiological explanations for what is perceived as mental or chemical imbalances. However, the point here is that these biological explanations did not exist up until a few decades ago, so what were the explanations for mental abnormalities before then? Theories of essentialism argue that the illnesses were the same and that we just have a better scientific understanding now, but theories of social construction argue that without a meaning, the illness does not exist. What individuals suffered from before there was a name for depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or any other category was not what the illnesses are defined as today. Because there was a different name and meaning for what those people were feeling, there was a different illness altogether. In his book *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Thomas Szasz addresses this issue:

It is customary to define psychiatry as a medical specialty concerned with the study, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illnesses. This is a worthless and misleading definition. Mental illness is a myth. Psychiatrists are not concerned with mental illnesses and their treatments. In actual practice they deal with personal, social, and ethical problems in living. I have argued that, today, the notion of a person “having mental illness” is scientifically crippling (Szasz, 1961, pp. 296-297).

Szasz states here that the ways in which mental illness and its social implications are taught and the language used to construct and define mental illness has ultimately become problematic. In US culture, it has become natural and expected that there are essential characteristics and symptoms regarding mental illness. However, the symptoms used to classify an individual as ‘depressed’ in the United States may not be true in other areas of the world, and ‘depression’ may not even be considered an illness.

Along with this view of essentialism, there is a strong case of ethnocentrism present in this debate. By arguing that as a result of science and what individuals view as ‘fact’ is how mental illnesses are understood is a problematic way to view the situation. There are myriad cross cultural examples of what Western science defines as ‘mental illness’ that in other areas of the world and in other social settings might be viewed as something completely different, or simply not exist at all. For example, in Swahili speaking East Africa, there is no term equivalent to our word for depression. During my time studying in Kenya, the closest term in Swahili my Kenyan peers could relate to depression was ‘sononeka’ which actually translates closer to ‘sadness’ or ‘feeling down,’ which does not have the same connotations as the term does in the West (Njema, 2009). It may seem that these two terms are close enough to draw a connection, but the Swahili translation does not really mean the same thing as the definition for ‘depression’ in the West. In fact, during this seminar, all of my Kenyan classmates were unable to say what the direct translation for depression would be in Swahili. The only way they knew and understood what ‘depression’ meant was because they also know the English language. However, even though my Kenyan peers had an understanding of the English term, the concept of ‘depression’ as an illness was still foreign. The concept of eating disorders is another example of a cultural discrepancy over a mental illness. Although the Kenyan members of my class had some idea of what we in the West call depression, they had never heard of anorexia or bulimia and there was absolutely no word in Swahili they could think of to define those disorders.

These illnesses do not carry over across cultures and social landscapes. Depending on social positionality, an individual's perception of a specific illness, or even their knowledge of its 'existence' is not the guaranteed or inevitable, meaning the knowledge of a mental illness category is culturally constructed. Because mental illnesses are not essential identity categories or inherent performances of self, they can only exist in cultures where the meanings are created in order to develop a discourse for said illness.

Although social constructionism can result in the 'existence' of mental illnesses in some cultures and not in others, the process of constructing meanings surrounding a particular way of being can also be different across cultures and time. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the desire of a 'man' to become a 'woman' (what we really should say here is the desire for a person of the male sex who wishes to perform what we understand as femaleness, or femininity) or vice-versa is classified as Gender Identity Disorder. During the period of European exploration of North America in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, European travelers encountered many instances of individuals performing gender outside of the traditional way they were accustomed to seeing in Europe. Feinberg is a gender activist who has carried out a great deal of research in this area, and she explains in her article "Transgender Warriors: Making History" about the terms used by the explorers:

"Berdache" was a derogatory term European colonizers used to label any Native person who did not fit their narrow notions of woman and man. The blanket use of the word disregarded distinctions of self expression, social interaction, and complex economic and political realities. Native nations had many respectful words in their own languages to describe such people; Gay American Indians (GAI) has gathered a valuable list of these words... Native people ask that the term "Two-Spirit" be used to replace the offensive colonial word (Feinberg, 2003, pp. 273).

She then tells of her experience with two-spirited native individuals living in the present and has quoted many of them regarding this issue, one two-spirited poet saying that "I think the English language is rigid and the thought patterns that form it are rigid, so that gender also becomes rigid. The whole concept of gender is more fluid in traditional life. Those paths are not necessarily aligned with your sex, although they may be" (ibid, 2003, p. 277). Feinberg has also discovered that two-spirited individuals were, and are, highly respected in native societies because their notions for gender performance were not based on such 'rigid' and arbitrary distinctions.

This is a great example of how the social construction of a concept plays a major role in the way others perceive and make sense of something. What this example reveals is the notion of gender as a performance and how different cultural norms surrounding that performance can alter perceptions regarding which performances are accepted. On the one hand, performing a gender in multiple and fluid ways in Native American cultures is something highly revered. On the other hand, enacting a similar performance in Western cultures is considered a mental illness! There are numerous other ways in which humans can express what we know of as gender, and even what we define as gender in another culture could be non-existent.

There are also specific examples of how Western perceptions of mental illness have been altered over time. Much of this has to do with the explanations that have developed within the

scientific community. The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is a good indicator of how Western scientific definitions, categories, and classifications of symptoms have altered over the past several decades. The APA is currently in the process of revising the DSM for a fifth time. This means that since this manual was first published, the categories surrounding what constitutes a 'mental illness' in our society has changed almost every decade. Christopher Lane explains in his book "Shyness" the process in which the APA DSM Task Force made the changes to the publication:

Embarrassed by DSM-II's diagnostic "holes" the task force tried to fill or replace them with numbered "axes" and "subcategories,"... Yet each of these spawned so many inclusive criteria and symptoms that the terms frequently buckled and merged. Undeterred the task force "discovered" 112 new disorders and disease categories (Lane, 2007, p. 42).

In the DSM-II, there were 180 categories of disorders; in the DSM-III-R there were 292 illnesses listed in the index; and in the DSM-IV there were 350 (Lane, 2007, pp. 42-43). As Lane comments: "In just 26 years... the total number of mental disorders the general population might exhibit almost doubled" (ibid., p. 43). Along with 'discovering' brand new mental illnesses, the task force also reorganized the categories from the previous edition of the DSM in order to broaden the spectrum of "Anxiety Neurosis." This rapid increase in the number of existing mental disorders and the alterations of pre-existing categories of diagnosis reveals that there may very well be more at work here than simply 'discovering' more illnesses.

A specific controversial change that occurred was the removal of homosexuality from the second edition. The DSM II included homosexuality as a "sexual orientation disorder" and then in 1973, after many meetings and social movement activism, the APA decided to remove homosexuality and changed the disorder name in the DSM III to either "ego-syntonic towards their sexual orientation, and not in need of treatment, or ego-alien and therefore, suffering from a mental disorder" (Silverstein, 2009, p. 161). By the time the DSM III was revised to the DSM-III-R, the sexual disorders section no longer included homosexuality. These changes prove that what is defined as "mental illnesses" is not essential and thus an arbitrary form of classification. We know (and knew back in 1973 for that matter) that there are many areas of the modern world and many other cultures throughout history that practice homosexuality. In these places and times homosexuality was certainly not considered an illness. What makes something an 'illness' is the way in which it is defined and categorized. For those who were "diagnosed" by the DSM II and III with homosexuality, the 'disease' was most certainly real to them because it impacted their lives. The question is however, is whether or not this system of categorization or classification is accurate or essential in any way.

Another major change that occurred in the DSM was the categorization of 'depression.' The difference between these two versions of depression classification is staggering. In the DSM-III-R, published in 1987, there are five specific classifications for depression and in the current DSM IV on-line index there are fourteen distinct categories. This means that in just over a decade, a significant number of clinical diagnoses were added to the list under depression / mood disorders. In the DSM-III-R, there are the following categories for "Depressive Disorders," a sub-category of "Mood Disorders," listed in the classification index:

1. Major Depression, single episode
2. Major Depression, recurrent
3. Dysthymia (or depressive neurosis)
 - a. Specify: primary or secondary type
 - b. Specify: early or late onset
4. Depressive disorder NOS [not otherwise specified]

In the DSM IV on-line index, the following categories are listed under “mood disorders:”

1. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, In Full Remission
2. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, In Partial Remission
3. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Mild
4. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Moderate
5. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Severe With Psychotic Features
6. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Severe Without Psychotic Features
7. Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Unspecified
8. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, In Full Remission
9. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, In Partial Remission
10. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, Mild
11. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, Moderate
12. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, Severe With Psychotic Features
13. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, Severe Without Psychotic Features
14. Major Depressive Disorder, Single Episode, Unspecified

This begs the question, did these additional categories of depression actually *exist* before the APA named them? Were these versions of depression always existing within humans before they were ‘discovered’ or are more individuals suffering from these illnesses now because there are more categories. This is almost a version of the age-old question: which came first, the chicken or the egg? In this case, I argue that the categories, definitions, and meanings for mental illness come first, and the manifestation of the symptoms in humans comes second only to the meaning. Without a definition, without a classification, and without a way to make sense of an illness, one cannot *have* it because it *does not exist yet*. Widiger and Samuel address this dilemma in their article concerning diagnostic categories and revisions: “Each revision to the manual creates the confusion generated by the fact that seemingly minor changes to diagnostic criterion sets often result in unexpected and quite substantial shifts in prevalence rates that profoundly complicate scientific theory and public health decisions” (Widiger & Samuel, 2005, p. 500). This shifting of prevalence rates that Widiger and Samuel describe is what many social constructionists are taking a look at. If indeed the name and definition of an illness comes first, then it is logical that once there is a diagnosis for a particular mental illness, more individuals would ‘have’ that illness. This is the most difficult part of explaining mental illness through the lens of social constructionism. Questions about what is ‘real’ and what is ‘natural’ seem more

daunting when we are talking about an ‘illness,’ or something that appears, to us at least, to take on both a mental and physical manifestation such as depression.

Obviously, there are no inherent similarities of mental illness across cultures, time, and geography that would lead us to conclude that these illnesses are somehow essential forms of being that exist prior to the construction of them through social discourses and cultural norms. What we have even come to define as mental illness within the context of the United States culture is dependant of the historical time period in which the illness came into existence as we can see with the DSM’s categorization of certain illnesses.

The DSM is not the only way in which the construction of mental illness has been institutionalized. Along with the APA, drug companies, doctors offices, and hospitals all aid in the distribution of pharmaceuticals that reinforce the construction of a particular illness. Direct to consumer advertising has also become a major way in which drug companies are able to convince the public it suffers from an illness and is in need of a particular drug.

The Political Economy of Mental Illness

“...information *itself* is conditioned and structured by the social institutions and relations in which it is embedded” (D. Schiller, 1988, p.41).

Over the past fifty years or so, the pharmaceutical industry has jumped onto this diagnostic bandwagon with the introduction of ‘blockbuster’ drugs to treat mental illnesses. The mass media’s representations of drugs along with cultural norms and expectations shape the way mental illness is viewed and has a direct impact on Western society. With the introduction of medical ‘remedies’ in the form of pills, there is more of a drive in the media to perpetuate essentialist ideologies surrounding mental illness. That is, the notion that mental illnesses are linked to biology and thus universal to the human race. Once a drug is patented, it is then marketed to society in order to get the word out that help is available to those who suffer. What is still unclear about this process of discovery, marketing, and consumption, is whether or not there have been individuals suffering from an illness before a medical treatment was invented. Or, are a greater number of individuals ultimately diagnosed with the illness because with a medicine there is a more distinct socially constructed category?

Although individuals construct their own realities on a personal level, there are also institutional pressures in place within our cultures that impact our social lives on a political and economic level. The study of political economy revolves around “the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Mosco & Reddick, 1994, p. 12). Political economy also refers to the idea of control. Control over the way in which institutional organizations, businesses, political offices, and other larger institutions affect how we, as consumers, construct our reality based on these institutional influences. When referencing political economy, one would most likely be considering the “social relations that constitute the economic, political, social, and cultural fields” (ibid., 1994, p. 12). Political economy also focuses on hegemonic culture. Institutions help to frame what a culture deems socially acceptable or

necessary (Lipschutz, 2010, p. 2). Cultural constructs such as gender, race, class, sex, sexuality, and all other social categories are impacted by institutional forms of social construction.

Another aspect of political economy that impacts cultural values is the presence of the media and the political economy's relationship to information and communication, direct to consumer advertising being one of the more influential mediums for such communication. According to Mosco and Reddick, this relationship is "manifested in the sheer growth in size of media firms, measured by assets, revenues, profit, employees, or share value" (1994, p. 23). This link between the free market and the delivery of information through direct-to-consumer advertising to the United States impacts what information is actually received by the public. Cultural values, norms, and expectations are increasingly being shaped by the information we obtain from the media, and the media is impacted by profit margins and political gain. Thus, our very culture and what we come to perform and believe to be societal norms are, in a sense, driven partly by profit. Of course, this spread of information is also perpetuated through sub-cultural groups such as schools, religious groups, and social class groups, and these social communities impact how information is interpreted (Wood, 2005, pp. 167-171). Information, its content, and how it is presented to us as a culture "has become the essential site of capital accumulation within the world economy" (D. Schiller, 1988, p. 27). This "information is what creates our cultural limits through the legal control of the economy and capitalist system" (Mosco, 2008, p. 55). Throughout the past century, the last 20 years in particular, the control and delivery of information has been impacted by the introduction of the television, internet, and other digital media. Mosco calls this "new" media and many theorize that the use of the internet in particular will alter the political economy of information forever (*ibid.*, pp. 56-57).

As we negotiate this new media and its cultural implications, the institution of psychiatry is changing as a result. Szasz argues that: "organized psychiatry in the United States is an example of a favored social institution" that is maintained through mental hospitals, the DSM, legal issues surrounding crime and the mentally ill and other institutions (1963, p. 79). Szasz argues that psychiatry is just as much wrapped up in the law, power, and profit margins as any other social institution. Thus, what constitutes a 'mental illness' is likewise wrapped up "in terms of psychosocial, ethical, and legal concepts" (*ibid.*, p. 14).

Large corporate drug companies also play a major role in the creation, perpetuation, and naturalization of a mental illness. The process of creating and selling a drug, and thus an illness simultaneously, is a complex one. The drug company first looks for a hole in the current market and finds a gap in which they might be able to create and sell something to willing consumers. Direct-to-consumer advertising is usually the manner in which a drug company convinces the general public to consume a medication. Companies selling SSRIs in particular spend a large amount of money on marketing their products to the public. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in the year 2005 the total sales revenues of SSRIs was \$12,500 million and direct to consumer advertising costs for SSRIs from the same year were \$12 million (Donohue, 2007, p 677). This means that drug companies marketing SSRIs to the public in 2005 spent almost as much money as they generated from sales on direct to consumer advertising. This



intense method of advertising is a crucial stepping stone in the creation, perpetuation, and naturalization of mental illnesses.

The “chicken or the egg” question resurfaces during this market process when we must ask ourselves once more: which comes first, the drug or the illness. Lane states that: “Before you sell a drug, you have to sell a disease” (2007, p. 104). But does this selling of a disease rely on its previous ‘existence’ or is the illness created as it is being ‘sold?’ A new drug for depression made its way onto the scene when Prozac was launched in 1988 (Healy, 2004, p. 37). This new drug raised many similar questions regarding the prevalence of depression pre- and post-Prozac, as well as questions concerning its effectiveness as a drug. The introduction of Prozac sparked a dialogue about the relationship between mental illnesses and the drugs to treat them.

“Prozac Nation” How an Illness Was Sold to America

“Enter Prozac, and suddenly I have a diagnosis. It seems oddly illogical: Rather than defining my disease as a way to lead us to fluoxetine, the invention of this drug had brought us to my disease” (Wurtzel, 1994, p. 301).

Elizabeth Wurtzel, author of a memoir *Prozac Nation*, reveals in her life story what it was like to grow up in the United States in a state of chronic depression and not knowing how to make herself feel better. Wurtzel describes herself as suffering from chronic depression since around the age of eleven when she first started attending summer camp. From the time Wurtzel was a teenager up until her later college years at Harvard, taking anti-depression medication was not the common course for someone who was feeling depressed. Wurtzel herself saw a series of therapists as a child and adolescent before she actually began taking medication for her ‘illness’ when she was at Harvard. What is most interesting about Wurtzel’s account of her battle with depression is her relationship to medication. As Elizabeth Wurtzel notes herself, it was not until Prozac was released as the new drug for depression that the new category was created in the DSM which gave her a solid diagnosis, something she had been missing up until the late 1980s.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Major Depressive Disorder currently affects almost 15 million Americans. Elizabeth Wurtzel reminds us in the epilogue in *Prozac Nation* that:

...those born after 1955 are *three times* as more likely as their grandparents’ generation to suffer from depression. In fact, of Americans born before 1905, only one percent had experienced a depressive episode before the age twenty-five, while those born after 1955, six percent were already depressed by age twenty-four” (1994, p. 337).

In terms of the impact Prozac has had on these numbers, Healy adds: “Something must surely be going wrong if the frequency of depression apparently jumps a thousandfold since the introduction of the antidepressants” (2004, p. 10).

There have always been individuals in the United States who expressed feelings of unhappiness or sorrow. One of the more common words used to describe this sort of sadness was the term “melancholy.” Actually, for the greater part of the 1900s when individuals

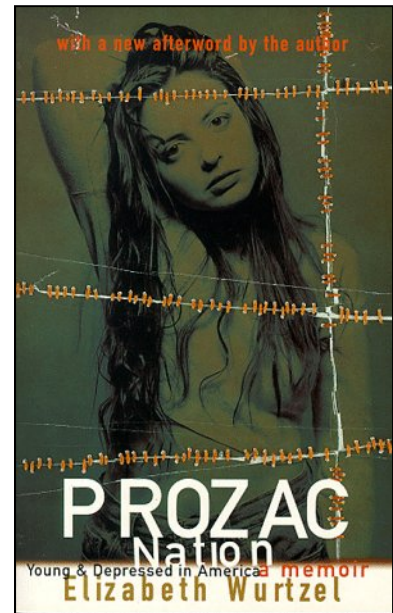
expressed feelings what would now be labeled as ‘depression’ they were usually referred to as “anxiety” or “nerves” (Healy, 2004, p. 4). In 1957, when the first modern drug for the treatment of depression was introduced to the American public, depression began to receive more recognition from mainstream American culture as an ‘illness.’ It was this year that Roland Kuhn discovered the tricyclic antidepressant called Imipramine and Nathan Kline developed the monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) Iproniazid (ibid., p. 7). This development of antidepressant drugs marked the beginning of modern biological and political discourses surrounding depression in the United States. At this point in history however, the DSM was still in its second edition which labeled very few categories for anxiety and depression and the number of diagnosis were far fewer than we are used to seeing today. The development of drugs to treat depression resulted in a greater number of diagnoses of depression as opposed to anxiety. How convenient, considering this could allow for an increase in sales of MAOIs and tricyclic antidepressants as opposed to anti-anxiety medication.

After these discoveries in the late 1950s, for the greater part of the next few decades more and more antidepressant medications were researched and produced. These drugs were not necessarily brand-new compounds, but rather a version of ‘me-too’ drugs that were the same chemical make-ups of the original drugs but manufactured and marketed slightly differently, making the market more competitive (Huskamp, 2006). Around this same time period, it was discovered that serotonin may have an impact on anxiety and depression in the brain, and the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) was created. The first SSRI produced was called Zelmid and was patented in Sweden in 1972. Contrary to popular belief, Prozac was the second SSRI to be officially patented two years later, in 1974 (Healy, 2004, pp. 15-18). Unfortunately, according to the FDA, during the testing process of a new drug, clinical trials do not have to prove that the new drug is more effective than the older drug (which in this case would be Prozac compared to MAOI’s and tricyclics). Instead, the clinical trials for a new drug like Prozac just have to prove more effective than a placebo (sugar pills), which essentially means they have to prove to be more effective than nothing (Big Bucks, Big Pharma). This means that SSRIs were not even compared to the older anti-depression medications. The companies are also not required to publish the results of the clinical trials so the only information that is marketed to the general public is the one successful trial where Prozac was more effective than the placebo as opposed to the other nine out of ten trials where the studies show that the drug was not more effective than the placebo (Healy, 2004, pp. 33-39). Shortly after Prozac gained its popularity, other drugs followed in its footsteps in order to have a place in this new booming market of blockbuster drugs for depression and anxiety. However, these ‘me-too’ drugs were proven to be just as ineffective as Prozac itself. In fact, the studies on the effectiveness of these drugs when presented to the FDA “found that Paxil, Prozac, Zoloft, and other SSRIs show negligible improvement over placebos. With results so poor, the researchers concluded that these drugs should never have been approved to treat depression or anxiety” (Lane, 2007, p. 118). These studies also showed in most cases of treatment with SSRIs that the patient had a greater risk for suicidal behavior and increased depression before actually seeing an improvement of the symptoms of depression. The drug companies know what their clinical trials and research studies show, but they are not required to report these findings to the public. Most of the major drug companies producing SSRIs have managed to continue to advertise and sell these ineffective medications to the general public without question (ibid., pp. 118-138).

Around the same time SSRIs were being patented and tested in the 1980s Elizabeth Wurtzel was hospitalized once again for what we know now was her ‘depression.’ Throughout her time at Harvard she was in and out of various mental hospitals sometimes because she was not eating or sleeping or attending classes, sometimes because of an adverse reaction to one of the older anti-depressant drugs. At the end of her junior year, after she returned from living in London for several weeks, Wurtzel agreed with her psychiatrist that she should begin a regimen of a new drug that was just released to the public called fluoxetine, also known as Prozac. Her doctor warned her that the side effects may cause suicidal thoughts and tendencies and that the drug usually took several weeks before patients began to notice an improvement in their condition. Wurtzel began taking Prozac and attempted suicide in just a matter of days later.

So, how did the drug company that patented Prozac (Eli Lilly and company) convince Americans that they needed a drug that was a) not effective, b) linked to suicide attempts, and c) a cure for something that just fifty years earlier no one suffered from? The answer is marketing. Marketing to medical schools and the students who attend the institutions, doctors, private practices, and of course the common consumer. The drug companies subsidized the writing of articles for medical journals in order to make sure that what is published about the drug in Medical Journals is favorable, even if that means hiding or stretching the truth (Big Bucks, Big Pharma). The drug advertisements themselves are also subsidized by the drug companies which usually pressures advertisers to leave out important information and only informing the consumer of the bare minimum. These advertisements often rely on branding in order to create an emotional bond with the consumer, especially when they are advertising a drug that is related to mental health. According to the documentary *Big Bucks, Big Pharma*, the safety of the drugs that are being advertised to the general public is misrepresented and “we get an incomplete picture of the drugs” (6:30 minutes). Jerome Hoffman, a doctor at UCLA medical school says of this false advertising: “it’s not surprising that so much of what we think we are learning is tremendously distorted” (48:15 minutes). Instead of revealing to the public exactly what the drug is made of and how it works, most advertisements show the image of an individual who has taken the drug in question and it portrays how much better the character’s life is now that he or she is taking this drug.

In the case of Prozac and its ‘me-too’ drugs like Paxil and Zoloft, we first see the image of a depressed person but shortly thereafter we see another image of just how much better off they are now that they are on the medication. Commercials for SSRIs often show the individuals smiling, playing with their children or pets, and leading a ‘normal’ life uninhibited by depression. This results in the increase of sales for a drug not because of “a rational reason for taking medications. It’s not so much about the efficacy of the drug, but about our emotional response to the kinds of social meanings they have attached to the product” (ibid., 4:53 minutes). Advertisements also convince the public that they have an illness to begin with by



listing symptoms and ailments that are so broad one may begin to think they suffer from the illness presented when really their 'symptoms' could all be a result of other environmental factors. However, the general public does not usually stop to think about reasons why it is drawn to a drug. In this society, individuals are programmed by culture to want the quick fix, the fastest way to recovery, even if it means not actually targeting the root of the problem. It makes sense then that an individual suffering from symptoms of 'depression' as listed on an advertisement (even though they may truly only suffer from a fraction of them and for different reasons) would want to take a pill instead of trying to get to the root of the problem, if there even is one. The United State's task-oriented culture plays a large role in how drug



Figure 1

companies can convince the public it must take a certain medication in order to fit the cultural 'norm.' Wurtzel also notices this connection between our current prescription happy culture as opposed to when she was first suffering with her depression:

Sometimes it frustrates me to see fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds who have read my book, and who already, at such a tender age, have been put on several different medications and can speak with an eerie knowingness about SSRIs... sometimes they almost make me feel glad that I had a few extra years to play my depression out with therapy and other means, because I think it's useful in youth... to have some faith in the mind to cure itself (Wurtzel, 1995, p. 361).

While some arguments in this passage conflict with the social constructionist approach to mental illness, there is still something valid about the notion of time in U.S. culture, the stress put on finding answers in a timely manner, and its relationship to drug use, and overuse.

One of the more salient examples of the power marketing holds over drugs prescribed in this country, SSRIs in particular, is the introduction of Sarafem. About one year after Eli Lilly and Company lost its patent for Prozac, the company patented Sarafem, the exact same drug. The differences include the color of the capsule, the price, and what it was advertised to treat (Huskamp, 2006). Lilly and company also patented Prozac Weekly, but Sarafem is the drug that the public did not realize was the same as the original Fluoxetine chemical compound. Sarafem was advertised for the treatment of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, known as PMDD for short. This 'new' drug is marketed to women who feel that they are suffering from symptoms of PMDD which,

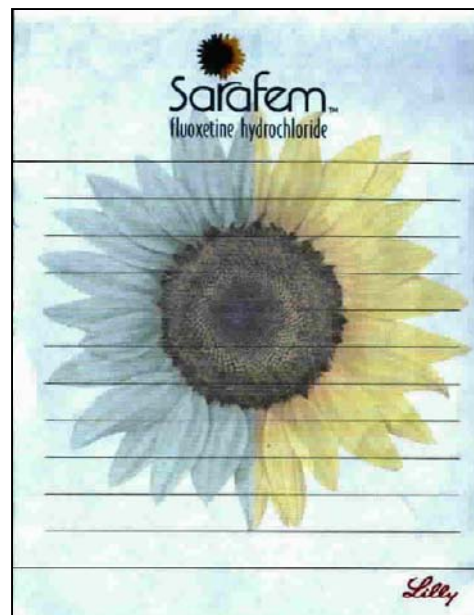


Figure 2

according to Sarafem marketing strategies, includes: “mood swings, irritability, bloating, and breast tenderness” (Pub Med Health, 2010). The distributors were also careful to represent the gender of the consumer by making a large multicolored sunflower the main image related to this ‘new’ drug, as seen in Figure 1. The point here is that Sarafem is actually the exact same chemical compound as Prozac, except the public has been tricked into thinking that it is somehow different and that it will alleviate symptoms of PMDD more effectively than other drugs, or even no drug at all.

Currently in this country, knowing about Prozac and what it is used to ‘treat’ is something most members of the United States culture are familiar with. Chances are also that many know individuals who are taking Prozac, or at least one of its cousins. To use Wurtzel’s phrase, the United States has become a “Prozac Nation.” Prozac and the illness it stands for are common knowledge in United States culture, so much so that the popular media representations of the drug have generated into comedy. Prozac and its uses are so accepted as a norm in American culture and society that it has even become a joke. Much like how celebrities know they have truly become successful in popular entertainment when they are made fun of on Saturday Night Live, Prozac has reached this level of public popularity as well. Cartoons such as Figure 2 featuring Prozac as a form of detergent are an example of such a commentary. The caricature of the drug highway (Figure 3) comments on the degree to which these drugs are so widely accepted in modern U.S. society and that the new norm is to medicate individuals for their ‘mental illnesses’ rather than find a long-term solution (Lane, 2007, p. 196). SSRIs and the illnesses that they have come to represent now stand alone in the American culture and need no explanation or justification for their existence. These drugs are now accepted as a part of daily life, rarely questioned by those who consume or prescribe them. Taking a pill to treat depression was not something that was considered the norm even two decades ago.

So many factors have come together within the United States in order to sell a drug and the disease it represents to the American public. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders must first categorize an illness so individuals can be diagnosed with the symptoms. The drug companies then manufacture either a breakthrough blockbuster drug or a ‘me-too’ drug that is marketed for the illness that was just categorized in the DSM. Then, doctors will prescribe these medications to their patients who are most likely already asking for the drug by name because they saw an advertisement for that drug. In the case of Prozac, the DSM expanded the categories for the illness known as depression in the third and fourth editions of the manual. Prozac was soon patented and manufactured for those who may be suffering from the symptoms listed in the DSM. Then, people like Elizabeth Wurtzel, who before the knowledge of Prozac was simply suffering from sadness, loss of appetite, and bouts of anxiety regarding her family and social life realized “suddenly, I had a diagnosis” (1994, p. 301). In the course of a decade, an illness was created, sold, and ultimately suffered by many.



Figure 3

Conclusions

What does this all mean for the 'mentally ill?' If there are no essential characteristics of mental illness, if mental illness is defined as a deviation from 'normal,' socially accepted behavior, then it would follow that what is defined as a mental illness would constantly be changing due to the ever changing tendencies of culture. 'Mental illnesses,' in this case depression, can go from being a rare occurrence in society to a completely normal and naturalized phenomena. This progression from definition to drug to increased diagnosis is a common occurrence in the United States, especially over the past several decades. According to Wurtzel, "the discovery of a drug to treat, say, schizophrenia, will tend to result in many more patients being diagnosed as schizophrenics. This is strictly Marxian psychopharmacology, where the material - or rather, pharmaceutical - means determine the way an individual's case history is interpreted" (Wurtzel, 1994, p. 301). This is perhaps why the role of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) play such an integral role in the existence and prevalence of mental illnesses. The social constructionist argues that without the classifications and agreed upon understandings of mental illnesses, they would not be seen in individuals. The definitions themselves perpetuate the illness. Depression cannot exist without a meaning, thus before the APA found it and categorized the symptoms, what individuals suffered from was a different disease. If one does not have the cultural knowledge or meaning of a particular illness, there is no way an individual would 'have' it. The very 'having' of a mental illness exists only within the realm of meaning which exists purely in the mind. Without this meaning, there is no illness.

This argument becomes then not about which came first in the chicken or the egg analogy, but rather the relationship between the chicken and the egg and the fact that the two cannot be separated. All aspects of the construction of a mental illness are interrelated such that without the relationship between the constructing institutions, the meanings surrounding mental illness would not be as strong or seemingly natural. The process begins with the assumption that all cultural concepts and social meanings are rooted in theories of social constructionism. The remainder of the process should almost be thought of as a complicated web, not necessarily with a clear beginning or ending point, but rather a complex arrangement of social constructions, institutions, politics, economic factors, cultural sub-groups, and hegemonic norms and cultural expectations. All of these aspects of society ultimately work together towards the creation, perpetuation, and naturalization of a 'mental illness.'

For those suffering from a 'mental illness,' the experience is certainly real to them. For those who know individuals suffering from a 'mental illness,' the perception of that illness and how it impacts relationships is also very much a reality. There may also be proof of biological realities that exist within the human brain that impact human behavior. However, how these behaviors are interpreted by society at large and how the behaviors are defined and acknowledged by individuals and institutions, is socially constructed. How the social expectations for individuals afflicted with what a society deems 'mentally ill' are regulated and policed, how the symptoms are categorized and periodically altered is also socially constructed.

The 'reality' of 'mental illness' and its impact on the individual and on culture is a product only of language and meaning, manifested in all different forms across cultures and time.

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The Balcony: Genet's use of Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty

By Alyssa J. Halton '11

Abstract: Antonin Artaud, a well-known French actor and playwright from the 1920's, was the first to conceptualize "Theatre of Cruelty," an Avant Garde movement which advocated for a departure from the traditions of theatre as literature. As one of the main principles of this theory, Artaud believed that theatre should utilize a novel means of communication which disrupts the comfort of reality for the audience, implicating them in the action onstage. In *The Balcony*, by Jean Genet, many of these theoretical principles are immediately evident. Genet deviated, however, from the strict outlines for "Theatre of Cruelty" in that he did not entirely abandon the role of the written word; through a careful use of language, he incorporates both aspects of traditional theatre and Artaud's fresh way of regarding the world on stage.

Key Words: Theatre of Cruelty; Avant-garde; disruption of reality; judgment of society

Antonin Artaud, a French actor and playwright who grew in renown in the 1920s and 30s, was the originator for the conceptualization of "Theatre of cruelty." In 1938, Artaud published the book, *The Theatre and its Double*. Within this work, he defines his impressions of how theater has been historically, and how it ought to progress to inspire new life, intensity and passion into an art form which he believed had become artificial. To do this, he believed that stage actors, playwrights and directors must develop a new means of communicating with the audience, one which implicates them as a part of the action, disrupts the comfort of reality and forces the audience to accept the distress of existence. It is in this way that the theatre would be "cruel." Artaud stated, "This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid," (Artaud, 66). In effect, he believed that truly revelatory emotional experiences could not come from texts, but rather from experiences and sensations which distance the audience enough from their perceptions of society that they might gain deeper insight into their own human condition. Only through losing control of his reason can a spectator gain access to his subconscious for a greater understanding of himself.

In *The Balcony*, by playwright Jean Genet, it is hard to miss the deliberate measures taken to utilize the theory and techniques behind Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. In his lifetime, Artaud had little luck with manifesting his vision within a successful piece of theatre. He believed staunchly that dramatic literature had no place in Theatre of Cruelty, as it traditionally relied too heavily on the use of words to convey emotion and meaning. In the hand of Genet,

however, we can see how a careful and deliberate use of language, paired with precise stage directions for everything from movement to lighting to comportment, it is possible to achieve the ends which Artaud had in mind for his philosophy of theatre, while at once making productive use of spoken word to further this aim. It may be seen as ironic that one of the most spectacular and well known examples of Theatre of Cruelty today in many ways contradicts the impulses of the founder. Despite the divergence from the purist theory in which the literature of the performance plays the role of least importance, Genet successfully crafts a piece true to Artaud's philosophy for the aims of theatre—it is more introspective than observatory, more disconcerting than pleasurable.

Genet sets *The Balcony* in a brothel in an unnamed city. It quickly becomes clear, through the dialogue between Irma, the Madam of the brothel and “the Bishop,” one of the patrons, that there is a revolution going on in the city and that society is full of political unrest. Here, Genet uses a combination of dialogue and screams heard from offstage (Genet 8) to set an invisible scene behind the one inside of the staging. From the very inception of the play, there is already a created sense of the disquiet for the audience, a technique that is decidedly Artaudian. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that at first, the instability of society is introduced in quick references which build in importance and severity throughout the play. In its conclusion, the mayhem of the scene outside overwhelms the action within the brothel. The audience is placed in the disconcerting position of having to choose between focusing their attention on the private delusions happening onstage or on the menace of instability happening behind the scenes.

Artaud believed that Theatre of Cruelty ought to be an assault on the senses. Genet carries this notion throughout the staging of *The Balcony*. The contrast between random bursts of sound from offstage and the unchanged demeanor of the players onstage establishes in a way that is cumulative a sense of altered reality in which the action inside the brothel is disconnected from the world outside. Only during the brief scenes which take place outside of the brothel do we get a direct look at the destruction taking place in the city. Chauntal and Robert's love affair serves as an interlude to remind the audience that it is not all play—the rebellion is humanized, and also characterized as the real-life version of the staged scenes within the brothel.

One carrying theme throughout the play which seems to particularly draw in and implicate the audience in the action on stage is the roll of the characters playing out fantasies as the Bishop, the Judge, the General and finally, the Chief of Police. The dreamlike state of each of these characters, as each assumes a position of imaginary power serves to expose that impulse in each of us—the human attraction, when acting as a member of society, to achieve the position of power and through this, esteem. By staging this role play in a brothel, Genet comments on the darker side of this desire—that there is something amoral inherent to it. Although the fantasy world within the walls of Irma's brothel seems to be physically separate from the collapsing society outside of the doors, the hunger for power is found culpable in the revolution

in the concluding scene when the Queen announces that the holders of the positions of power being emulated in the role play have all been slain by the uprising. Much in the vein of Artaud's principle of theatre as a means of moral exploration, Genet draws the audience to see that to participate in society is to participate in this struggle for power – one is either hungry for power or hungry for its destruction; either way, the audience members find themselves implicated in the action.

Another principle of Artaud's which becomes increasingly visible throughout the progression of the play is his belief that words ought to act as incantations during the performance of a play, rather than as explanations or progressions in the plot. This is to create the dream-like state for the audience, drawing upon realistic possibilities while at once accessing the individual's subconscious. In each of the scenes where the patrons have dressed to play the part of various positions of political power, the language in the dialogue becomes performed – the audience is suddenly witness to a play within a play, and the boundaries of reality begin to blur. The dialogue loses intent, as it serves only to further the dream-like trance. If actors on the stage, such as Irma, are playing audience members to the action between the prostitutes and the patrons, then what does the audience in the theatre become? By doubling the effect of being an observer, Genet achieves the result of disorienting the audience – a means by which the action on stage takes on a personal nature, as each individual observer begins to feel as if they are inside their own dream. The stage becomes a mirror for their impulses.

The role of the brothel as a microcosm for society is reinforced as powerful members of the government begin to show their roles in its functioning. George, the Chief of Police, is a former lover of Irma's. The patrons of the brothel, after the death of their real life counterparts, assume their roles with nothing more than costumes. Irma herself takes on the role of the Queen. The characterization of these individuals serves as a commentary on the fact that very little separates those in power from those seeking power – nothing more than the title itself. In light of Theatre of Cruelty, this might be interpreted as a means to expose the fallacy of the socially constructed hierarchy. The "pillars of society" are revealed to be nothing more than icons.

The circumstances which are established in the beginning of the play help to work under the functions of Artaud's standards of cruelty as the lines between eroticism, violence and megalomania become blurred. The sexual setting of the brothel turns antagonistic as the patrons focus on the humiliation of the women as part of the role play. Impotence also becomes a growing concern – George replaces himself with Arthur in Irma's life to mask the fact that he could not fulfill her sexually, and yet he seeks to establish himself as an icon represented by a phallus. In a final twist which reinforces the circularity and doubling effect established by the play within a play and the use of mirrors in staging, Roger, while at once dressed as the Chief of Police and being observed by George, castrates himself in the mausoleum studio. Genet, in

this way, uses Roger to represent the sacrifice of power required to embrace the subconscious impulses of humanity. In effect, by castrating himself as the image, Roger castrates the icon.

The actors move through the roles which they are assigned through the visual cues of changing outfits. The disorienting effect of the final scene where Irma reverts back to her former self, and abandons her assumed role as Queen, leaves the audience lacking certainty as to their own role in the society which has been named guilty of the dehumanization of individuals in favor of a struggle towards power. George, seemingly acting against what one might consider to be the impulses of human nature, chooses death and timelessness over life and impermanence. Their world assumes an uncomfortable circularity—even after the conclusion, the audience is left ensnared in the established promise that events will repeat themselves, as though it has all been done already before. This loss of grounding in reality is the essence of what makes this spectacle cruel—what began as a microcosm for a society which was familiar becomes a twisted dream state in which reality comes to mirror impulses; the audience, having already been drawn in with the establishment of realism, is left questioning their own urges in a way that is uncomfortably conscious.

Although Artaud rejected dramatic literature in his vision for Theatre of Cruelty, Genet manages to use of his principles while at once creating a piece which is also viable as a literary accomplishment. By utilizing language as a tool for characterization, Genet develops a series of icons which come to represent more than just the words or individuals alone. In *Theatre and its Double*, Artaud states, “All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to dissimulate it. True expression hides what it makes manifest” (71). He believed that to convey emotions or revelations in a way that would truly resonate with an audience, one must find means of expression which needed no words or direct references. Genet, contrary to first assumption, in fact remains true to this principle. By separating individuals from their language through establishing the notion that every part is acted, he removed the explanatory nature of dialogue. The true beauty of his creation is in that what is conveyed most loudly—the judgment passed on the society’s self castration and bastardization through its thirst for power— and is not communicated through what is said, but rather what is not. The critique depends on the audience; it depends on its successful absorption of accountability.

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Icarus Falling: Audience Vulnerability Achieved Through “Queerly Distorting” the Superhero Genre

By Jonathan J. Stopyra '13

Abstract: In the genre of superhero comic books, characters are often portrayed and viewed as invincible and such a portrayal creates a reader-text relationship based on fantasy and desire. However, this paper argues that *Divided We Stand*, a story arc in the X-Men series, serves as a “queer moment of distortion” in the superhero genre that reflects both a changing genre and drastically changing reader-text relationships. Through *Divided We Stand's* use of trauma, time, and death, readers become empathetically able to connect to the characters due to increased emotional and physical vulnerability. It is through this empathetic connection based on vulnerability that readers gain the ability to look inwards and explore their own humanity and mortality.

Keywords: queer, superhero, comic-book, audience, trauma

In 2008, after Charles Xavier was presumed dead following the events of the *Messiah Complex* series, Marvel Comics released the *Divided We Stand* story arc. Detailing the disbanding of the X-Men, it follows the lives of different mutants as they adjust to their new “post-superhero” lives. One theme, trauma, is especially salient in the story arc as exemplified by Anole and Surge, both of whom exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Throughout comic book history, trauma has shaped the motivations of different characters. Traditional superhero narrative structure presents trauma as *external* to their status as a superhero, as is the case with Batman and Spider-Man. However, in what I would describe as a “queer moment of distortion,” Anole and Surge’s trauma is instead *integral* to and in fact caused by their superhero status. This disrupts traditional superhero form while also allowing readers to more emphatically connect with the characters due to their vulnerability, despite the fact that the cause of the character’s vulnerability, trauma, is unintelligible.

What I mean through my creation of the term “queer moment of distortion” is not simple. Consequently, an explanation of the different ways in which I use it must be established. First, with the word “distortion” I am implying that the subjects involved undergo a twisting or morphing from their traditional form. Their boundaries become fluid, malleable, and hard to understand. However, this distortion still relies on and is based off of the original form—it doesn’t create anything completely new. I also use distortion in ways that cut across different themes and mediums because I believe that a complex distortion, such as this, cannot

simply be reduced to or affect one topic or idea at a time. It has complex intersectionalities that prevent one from taking a reductionistic or singular approach. Consequently, sometimes distortion will refer to the comic book genre, while other times it will refer specifically to the characters analyzed or something entirely different. The majority of the time I use it, however, will be in reference to the distortion that *Divided We Stand* caused in the superhero genre and the audience's experiences with/connection to said genre.

Second, when I use the word "moment" in the term "queer moment of distortion" I am specifically referring to the "moment" that is the release of *Divided We Stand* into the contextually and historically specific setting of the superhero genre. Furthermore, when I use the word "moment" I am also referring to the complex and ongoing nature of the history of the superhero genre. The "moment" that is *Divided We Stand* does not simply engage with the present—it also engages with the accumulated history of the superhero genre. Part of this "moment" is also the way in which the readers of *Divided We Stand* interpret and connects to the content of the comic. During this "moment" of "distortion" they engage with the past and present of the superhero genre in complex ways, and consequently, begin to realize that comic books—and their interactions with them—might never be the same.

Finally, when I use the word "queer" in the term "queer moment of distortion" I am using it in two different ways: as a distortion restoring reality instead of tampering with it and as a new place to explore. The word "distortion" implies a slight breaking or morphing of reality or our perceptions. However, in *Divided We Stand*, distortion instead *restores* reality by bringing the superhero genre closer to the "rules" and emotions of everyday life. Hence, "queer" is used to refer to how distortion restores reality instead of morphs it. It is also used to describe how by distorting the superhero genre—by breaking norms—characters are able to go to a place of queerness (as a noun) within the text (Sullivan, 2003). A place in which there are new possibilities and new directions that readers may engage with that weren't necessarily possible before the distortion occurred.

The history of the superhero narrative form can allow for an understanding of how *Divided We Stand* ultimately serves as a queer moment of genre and narrative distortion. Often, as film/media theorist Line Nydro Petersen describes in his analysis of superpowers in contemporary television fiction, when we read comic books or see movies, "the narratives in stories of superheroes...are controlled. This means that whatever we wish to happen will happen" (2008, p.99). The narrative structure is both predictable and caters to the audience's pleasure. This normative, controlled narrative structure originates from what is known as "The Golden Age of Superheroes," or the time generally characterized as beginning with the release of *Superman* in 1938 and ending with the debut of the new superhero, Flash, in 1956. The normative structure that began in the "Golden Age" is well explained by John Cawelti, a popular cultural theorist: "The true focus of interest...is the character of the hero and the nature of the obstacles he has to overcome...[there is] triumph over death, triumph over injustice...the saving of the nation... [and] the overcoming of fear..." (as cited in Bongko, 2000). In essence, "traditional" superhero narrative structure details a hero, usually male, always triumphing in

you can't kill the pain...only hide it. Watching a bus full of my teammates explode made that crystal damn clear" (Kyle et al., 2008). Furthermore, the visual of the panel this was stated in (displayed to the left) uses a montage of traumatic events to show how permeated her life is by death and trauma while also showing her helplessness in preventing any of it. Images meld into one another in a visual of memories that Surge can't escape from.

In the narrative of Surge's experience the invincibility of superheroes is shattered, thus distorting normative superhero form while also adding a sense of time to the narrative. Similar to how the death of Gwen Stacy serving as a groundbreaking work due to its introduction of failure into the superhero genre, Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* provides a groundbreaking sense of time. Mila Bongco, a philosopher and comic historian, discusses the effect of death and Batman's aged, weakened body on superhero narrative structure: "The possibility of death gives the dimension of a past and the appearance of 'real' time in the life of Batman who never aged in the last 50 years" (2000, p. 153). *Dark Knight Returns* is often referenced as *the* most significant comic book in the superhero genre. By adding the elements of death, age and time it brought life back to what many were calling a dying genre. It paved the way for future "revolutions" within the industry and allowed it to become more experimental/appealing to mature audiences. Roots of *Dark Knight Returns* can be seen in *Divided We Stand*. This is because, just like *Dark Knight Returns*, the use of death in *Divided We Stand* disrupts the timelessness of most superhero narratives. It instead presents a past filled with pain and a precarious future in which one's own death, regardless of superpowers, is still a possibility.

Ultimately, both *Dark Knight Returns*, which added time, and the death of Gwen Stacy, which added failure and the death of main characters, could be argued to be queer moments of genre distortion in their own right that paved the way for *Divided We Stand*. The understanding of these two comics allows readers to understand how *Divided We Stand* is neither ahistorical nor the first queer moment of narrative distortion of its kind; instead, it is part of a complex series of distortions that has slowly continued to morph and evolve the superhero genre in order to allow for its continued existence and popularity. When viewing *Divided We Stand* in such a light, one can then see how it embodies two different modes of being in terms of how it functions as a moment within a genre: one, it exists as a reflection and continuation of the previous genre distortions in superhero comic books such as the death of Gwen Stacy and *Dark Knight Returns*, and two, it exists as a queer distortion of those exact same distortions. This, in turn, reveals how *Divided We Stand* is part of a complex unfolding and overlapping of moments in the superhero genre that has created a tradition of breaking and returning to normative narrative and genre structures.

Regardless of how important it may be for the genre, the sad fact is that this permeation of death and combat in these young mutants' lives ultimately results in severe trauma. This serves as a queer moment of distortion in traditional superhero narrative form in two ways: one, instead of protecting the state and America's citizens, they are hunted and hated by the state and society and are forced into combat and self-defense; and two, not only is the core of their trauma caused by them being a superhero unlike like most superheroes, it is also disabling

instead of strengthening. Analyzing their trauma in the light of academic work on evil is particularly illuminating in regards to the distortion it causes.

The need to analyze evil is because the hate towards mutants—the hate that forces Surge and Anole to fight unless they want to die—is a form of intolerable evil that Jon G. Allen, trauma/psychotherapy specialist and author of *Evil, Mindblindness, and Trauma: Challenges to Hope* describes as “depriv[ing] others of the basics necessary to make a life possible, tolerable, or decent[...]. Atrocities are at the extreme end of harm; atrocities are large-scale evils such as genocide” (2007, p.12). The very citizens/government that superheroes such as Spider Man protect perform the mutant genocide. Consequently, by presenting evil—evil that forces Anole and Surge into combat, and thereby trauma, out of self-defense—in such a manner the traditional narrative of the superhero genre is “queerly distorted” due to the twisting of both why Anole and Surge fight and the victim-savior relationship. Even though patriotism is still an important issue in modern comic books and superhero media, the evil and trauma expressed in *Divided We Stand* allows us to understand how patriotism/nationalism can be equally oppressive as it is helpful (Petersen, 2008). Anole and Surge, ultimately, are forced into being heroes for themselves and their fellow mutant friends. This, in turn, removes agency and choice from being a superhero because superheroism becomes a battle of survival for oneself instead of for others.

Their trauma being represented as disabling instead of strengthening directly contrasts the narrative form that Sharon Packer (2010), psychiatrist and author of *Superheroes and Superheroes*, describes as the normative model of “post-traumatic *strength* disorder” in the superhero genre. In this model, each superhero “has a tragic flaw, a wound of war, an origin story [that] might doom someone else to failure or perpetual trauma” but instead inspires them to greatness and superheroism (Packer, 2010, p.237). Instead of being damaged or emotionally disabled by traumatic events, Packer argues that superheroes “turn potential psychopathology into a psychological strength” (2010, p.235). Standing in stark contrast to “post-traumatic stress disorder,” Spiderman for example turns the trauma of his uncle’s death into the iconic concept of “great power means great responsibility” and a new hope for self-achieved justice. The narrative tendency, then, in the superhero genre is for traumas that happened outside of one’s experience as a superhero to be the reason *for* one to become a superhero.

Anole and Surge’s experiences are far from this model, and in fact, one can argue that their experience serves as a “queer moment of genre distortion” in trauma representations in the superhero genre. The primary means by which they do this is by explicitly describing how being a superhero, not everything else, is the reason for the core/beginning of their trauma. This is especially salient in Anole, who experiences oppression by being both a mutant and gay. However, as pictured to the right, he states in *Divided We Stand*, “it’s not about being accepted as a mutant, or for being gay! They accept me, man!” Instead, he argues, “we were...ARE...KIDS! We’re supposed to be learning, playing video games, going on dates. Not

fighting the #\$\$% DEVIL!! But you robbed us of that” (Kyle et al., 2008). The image this quote is framed within is also of significance. As any reader can clearly see, his eyes are narrow, the color scheme is very dark and there are deep shadows. He is also, at the same time, drawn more childlike than he usually is. The dual effect of the darkness and the child-like body causes the reader to realize how different Anole is from the bright, colorfully drawn character he usually is. In summation, by detailing how his experience as a superhero, not being gay, has robbed him of his childhood and thus traumatized him, Anole’s experience serves as a “queer moment of distortion” in the normative narrative representation of trauma in the superhero genre as well as traditional gay young adult novels in which homosexual identity is always the trauma that must be overcome or dealt with.

Anole’s experience also greatly highlights how trauma has not lent him strength, but instead, has completely disabled him. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, a trauma psychologist, has detailed the three beliefs that are shattered once trauma occurs: “the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy. [This] can be associated with distrust, cynicism, resentment, bitterness, hate, self-loathing, and a sense of futility or meaninglessness” (as cited in Allen, 2007, p.11). Not only are these beliefs expressed through his feelings of isolation and worthlessness, they are also expressed through his inability to function in everyday society. Such an inability to perform day-to-day functions is indicative of disabling trauma instead of strengthening trauma (Armsworth and Holaday, 1993;). For as van der Kolk, a trauma psychoanalyst, explains in terms of the effects of trauma on the young psyche, “they may not be able to complete developmental tasks, for example, the development of secure attachment relationships, of a stable and integrated self-concept, and of the competence to self-regulate emotion and behavior” (as cited in Klasen et al., 2010, p.1098). The two panels below are prime example of this.

When his father drops a coffee mug on the ground, Anole responds violently to someone he loves due to his reflexive reaction to sounds of “violence”. The visual of the panels presents Anole with the body of a child, but shows that body

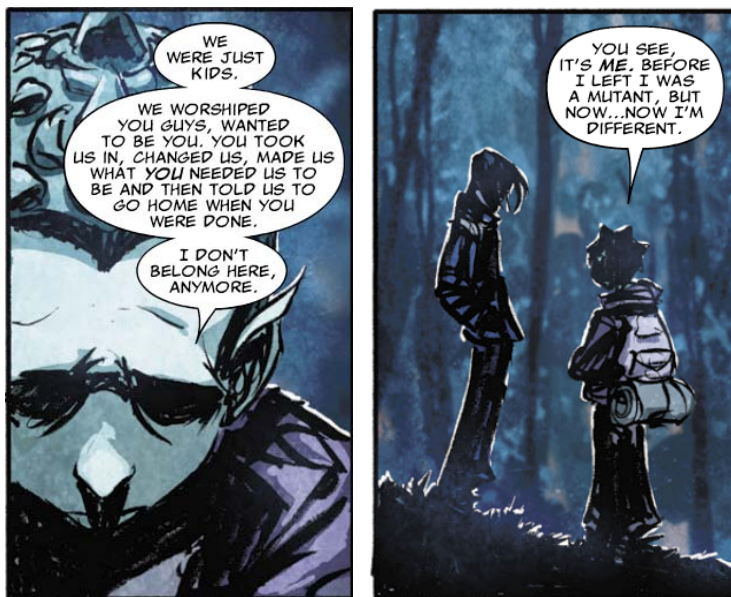


immersed in uncontrolled violence that he himself regrets but can’t stop (Kyle et al., 2008). The muted, warm tones and deep shadows used show the surreal nature of the memory while also illuminating the pain of the moment. Minor occurrences now serve as triggers to his trauma and interpersonal relationships are nearly impossible to maintain. After having watched 47 of his friends die in a terrorist attack and spending time fighting and being tortured in hell (literally), Anole finds functioning in everyday life nearly impossible. He has been so immersed in

violence that peace is in of itself dissonant with his now shattered psyche. Consequently, Anole's experience ultimately serves as a distortion of the "post-traumatic strength disorder" narrative structure by presenting trauma as damaging as it can be in real life. It's a distortion that restores reality.

When a "queer moment of distortion" occurs that shows the life of a superhero as permeated with death, how does the readers' connection with the characters change? The normative appeal of comic books, in which we as readers are drawn to their invulnerability,

reflects how "any accountant in any American city secretly feeds the hope that one day, from the slough of his actual personality, there can spring forth a superman who is capable of redeeming years of mediocre existence" (Petersen, 2008, p.96). They tap into our desires for greatness and invincibility (Taylor, 2007; Trushell, 2004). As Petersen further explains, superheroes "provide a refuge from the insecurities of every-day life...and they are at the same time valid places to live out egocentric thoughts and desires" (2008, p.98). This theme is even directly explored in *Divided We Stand* when Anole in a sense "breaks" the 4th-wall and directly confronts the superhero genre when he states the following to an older gay superhero and his mentor, Northstar: "We were just kids. We worshiped you guys, wanted to be you" (Kyle et al., 2008). Anole speaks directly to the desire for superhero fans to become superheroes, but expresses how that desire partly led to his trauma. Also of artistic significance is that, as pictured above, Anole's eyes are now completely shadowed over. This signals his lack of willpower and sense of being overwhelmed by the world that he can't bear to see anymore. So how does hero worshiping resulting in pain, as Anole describes, affect the connection between reader and comic?



As Petersen further explains, superheroes "provide a refuge from the insecurities of every-day life...and they are at the same time valid places to live out egocentric thoughts and desires" (2008, p.98). This theme is even directly explored in *Divided We Stand* when Anole in a sense "breaks" the 4th-wall and directly confronts the superhero genre when he states the following to an older gay superhero and his mentor, Northstar: "We were just kids. We worshiped you guys, wanted to be you" (Kyle et al., 2008). Anole speaks directly to the desire for superhero fans to become superheroes, but expresses how that desire partly led to his trauma. Also of artistic significance is that, as pictured above, Anole's eyes are now completely shadowed over. This signals his lack of willpower and sense of being overwhelmed by the world that he can't bear to see anymore. So how does hero worshiping resulting in pain, as Anole describes, affect the connection between reader and comic?

The nature of this connection begins with the way in which Anole and Surge's vulnerability allows readers to form strong connections with them. Pedagogical researcher Elizabeth Dutro, in her analysis of trauma as testimony in response to classroom literature titled *'That's why I was crying on this book': Trauma as Testimony in Responses to Literature*, details how trauma and its strong negative affect serve as an apt way to readers to connect to literature: "Reading literature is often an emotion-filled experience. Encountering other's experiences on the page can bring our own rushing swiftly, viscerally, back to us" (2008, p.425). In essence, by

presenting Anole and Surge as flawed just like readers often are, those who read *Divided We Stand* are able to connect to the characters on an emotional level based off their own life-experiences instead of a level based on wishes and fantasies (which is the normative connection in superhero stories, as previously detailed) (Palmer-Mehta and May, 2005).

This strong affect-based connection (instead of a fantasy based one) between Anole/Surge and readers is also supported by research on Batman. As detailed in analysis by Jules Feiffer, the key to Batman's popularity in mature audiences is "Batman's humanness. He bleeds, he hurts and needs to persevere...Feiffer even suspects that kids involved with Batman have 'healthier egos.' To be a fan of Superman, however, was safer" (as cited in Brody, p.177). Idolizing Superman might be safer, because one only needs to rely on fantasy, but connecting with Anole and Surge allows for more understanding of the nature of reality and pain. Consequently, one can argue that it is Anole and Surge's vulnerability, and thus humanity, which allows readers to establish deep connections with them. This in-itself serves as a "queer moment of distortion" that distorts the audience's connection with the superhero genre because it causes them to establish a connection based on reality instead of fantasy.

Connecting with Anole and Surge's vulnerability also causes the readers to make themselves vulnerable, for "to be effective witnesses...we need, in turn, to allow them to be our witnesses—even when it is hard, even when it feels too risky" (Dutro, 2008, p.424). Taking risks, making yourself be opened up by someone else, promotes emotional self-exploration and a "healthy ego," as Feiffer argued. Anole and Surge tap into our reality instead of our fantasy and thus rip asunder the superhero genre and our own understandings of it.

However, the nature of this connection is also queer, and somewhat confusing, because even though Anole and Surge's vulnerability makes it easier for readers to connect to them, the reason for their vulnerability, trauma, is unintelligible for the readers (including myself). Readers can connect to and feel empathy for Anole and Surge—they can act as their witnesses—but it is impossible for them to fully understand the severity of their experiences due to the impossible to understand nature of trauma. Unintelligibility, something that is hard to understand because it is in fact a lack of understanding, is well explained by Kelly Oliver, author of *Witnessing Beyond Recognition*, in her description of Allied forces finding holocausts camps: "Seeing the concentration camps meant going blind; they literally lost their sight at the sight of the incomprehensible world of the Holocaust" (2001, p.98). It is used in a similar fashion in this essay: if readers attempt to identify with Anole and Surge's experiences they are confronted, painfully, with the "blindness" of their own vision and understanding. The cause of this blindness is detailed later.

I argue that this dissonance between being connected to Anole and Surge but not fully understanding them creates an unease in the audience that serves as a "queer moment of narrative distortion" in the way the audience interacts with the text. Genocides, such as the one against mutants, reveal "the limits of language—worlds crumble, clarity of explanation evaporates in light of major trauma" (Dutro, 2008, p.424). Due to the limits imposed by

language, and the severe nature of their experiences, the images and words in comic books are not enough to allow for full understanding.

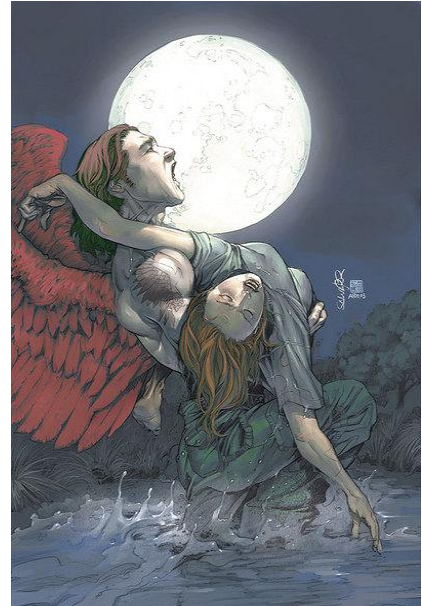
Furthermore, due to the relatively healthy psyche of most readers compared to Anole and Surge, we find it difficult to understand that healing is not always possible, as explained by Brody when detailing the nature of trauma: “the regenerative ability of the ego is not limitless, and some traumas are beyond repair...[this all causes] a shattering of the illusion of invulnerability” (Brody, p.173). To begin understanding Anole and Surge’s experiences—to move towards becoming witnesses—we must acknowledge our own vulnerability (Butler, 2004). This is especially interesting in the superhero genre because when we see superheroes—beings that are supposed to be stronger than us in both body and mind—with completely shattered psyches we are forced to confront our own immanent humanness. When the people that are supposed to save us fall from the sky like Icarus we find our own invincibility shattered (Taylor, 2007). For example, when Americans saw the Twin Towers crash on 9/11, they quickly became aware of their own vulnerability despite the fact that America was viewed as invincible. *Divided We Stand* achieves similar means by disturbing the reader with their own vulnerability.

Turning towards the exploration of trauma studies in feminist theory is also fruitful in understanding the unintelligibility of Anole and Surge’s traumatic experiences. As Kelly Oliver explains, “the experience of becoming an object cannot be described, since it is the experience of becoming inarticulate” (2001, p.99). During traumatic experiences one becomes an object due to one’s lack of agency and the overwhelming nature of dominant and oppressive discourses. This, in turn, shatters subjectivity. However, when Anole and Surge try to explain the removal of their own subjectivity during *Divided We Stand*, a paradox is created because losing one’s subjectivity is a process of becoming an object, and “becoming an object means becoming inarticulate” (2001, p.99). This in turn further stalls understanding because it is impossible to describe that which can’t be understood but yet still exists; their trauma and our connection to it then becomes a never-ending paradox (Butler, 2004). Anole and Surge’s testimony becomes a paradox in a genre that is usually simple, and thus, creates a “queer moment of distortion” by creating dissonance between the reader’s emphatic connection with Anole and Surge and their unintelligibility regarding their trauma.

So, in the end, why does it matter that Anole and Surge’s testimonies have served as a moment of distortion in a genre that many people feel is very normative and traditional? It matters because if readers are able to overcome their vulnerability and lack of understanding they can begin to learn how to acknowledge their own humanity from a genre in which characters are often treated like Gods. *Divided We Stand* creates a “queer moment of distortion” in the superhero genre in which these “Gods” fall from the sky. Consequently, it’s a distortion that begs readers to ask themselves one very important question: if Gods, if superheroes can’t escape gravity, how can I? By asking readers if they can escape death, self-exploration

regarding their own vulnerability can occur that was not previously possible in interactions with the superhero genre.

Moving towards Icarus (pictured, ComicVine), a mutant character with angel wings from the X-Men series that was a friend of Anole and Surge, is an apt way to fully realize the way in which Anole and Surge's experiences interacts with both the audience and the genre. In the comic books, Icarus is a mutant who loves a girl, and when she dies, he repeatedly attempts to commit suicide but can't do so due to his mutant healing ability. He spirals out of control in cycles of sadness and depression as his invincibility is his greatest enemy. Icarus never fell, never died until his wings were brutally ripped off of his body, but also never shined or was as brilliant as he could have been. The superhero genre could be viewed as existing in a similar manner. Though the genre does not seek to end its own life like Icarus does, just like him it is undone by repeated cycles where it is trapped by the invincibility and godlike status of its characters. If the superhero genre seeks to shine it needs to break free from its own norms. *Divided We Stand* served as that break. It acted as a queer moment of distortion that rejuvenated the superhero genre by using death and trauma to restore reality. It ended the fantasy of superheroes and critically engaged with the reality of what it would be like to *be* a superhero, and thus, it rips asunder reader's desires to be superheroes by forcing reader's to engage with their own vulnerability. In the end, *Divided We Stand* and the queer moment of distortion it created used death to stop the superhero genre from dying; it served as a queer moment of distortion that created life by ending life.



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Ethiopian Tourism: A Critical Analysis of the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism Website

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Abstract: Today, tourism is prevalent throughout the world. Underdeveloped countries could benefit from tourism. The question is: How does one make an underdeveloped country desirable to a Western culture? Tourists participate in tourism because they have the desire to travel, however, they still obtain the instinct to feel comfortable within their Westernized culture setting. Ethiopia is an underdeveloped country that has great tourism potential that should be exposed to Western society. This is a detailed examination and analysis of current Ethiopian tourism through the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism's website. The analysis is concluded with possible additional tourist markets that could attract Western culture to Ethiopia, however, to create new niche markets, there must be a surge in investment in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopia; tourism; tourism development; niche marketing; website critique

Travel and its Economic Impact

As the general topic of this study is travel, the definition of travel must be addressed. Berger defines travel as involving "a break in our everyday routines and movement to distant places, for short periods of time, and then return to one's starting point. Touristic traveling, as I interpret the term, is a leisure time experience; its goal is pleasure, entertainment, and education" (Berger 7). Berger argues that traveling is associated with an adventurous personality, one that gets thrills from being outside of its comfort zone (Berger 95). No matter the location of tourism it is difficult to "avoid the confluence of places and the people that inhabit them" (Chambers 2).

With the increase of income within Westernized societies, there has been an increase of desired leisure time; tourism has expanded, benefitting the tourist industry (Williams and Shaw 1). Tourism not only benefits travelers as they are exposed to a variety of cultures unlike their own, but it is also important to the economic development of a destination country (Williams and Shaw 3). "The importance of tourism to national economic development can be measured in a number of ways, the most important of which are its contribution to the balance of payments, income/GDP, employment and other sectors of the economy" (Williams and Shaw 3). According to Lundberg, Krishnamoorthy, and Stavenga, in 1992 the worldwide

gross output for tourism was \$3.2 trillion, employing 127 million people (ix). This is evidence that tourism across the world greatly contributes to generating employment and economic development in countries all over the world.

Tourists are expecting to be put out of their comfort zone. “We should see the tourist as... a public asset, in search of sensation and who wants to acquire a diversified cultural baggage” (Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel 158). However, at the end of the day he/she prefers to be within a familiar Westernized element (Berger 11). Since Westernized tourists are accustomed to different standards of living compared to other cultures, it is necessary for travel destinations to have developed and suitable accommodations for the tourist, as well as desirable food, transportation, and entertainment (Berger 11). Due increasing interest in a particular location, the tourist industry was developed in many popularly traveled locations, thus creating “tourist meccas” (Berger 12).

Sadler and Archer argue that tourism is a form of export, as they refer to it, “invisible export” (180). The authors call tourism a form of export, however, there are no tangible objects, and the government is not responsible for travel arrangements, as all of the exchange between the country and the tourist takes place within the location being visited (Sadler and Archer 180). Sadler and Archer continue to lay out the advantages and disadvantages of tourism which are; 1) effects on foreign exchange earnings; 2) income effects; 3) employment effects; 4) infrastructural changes; 5) effect on domestic price levels; 6) economic dependence upon tourism; 7) environmental and ecological effects; and 8) social and psychological results (180). With certain changes in a developing country, tourism can be a useful tool to boost the country’s economic status, however, this is where ethical dilemmas play a significant role in tourism.

Methodology

In my study of Ethiopia tourism, I used the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website in which I analyze the text and images produced by the Ethiopian government and displayed on its website to promote tourism. According to the United Nations Population Fund, Ethiopia has a population of 66 million people, however, today there is still no internet access used by the general public (Klotz 201). Though there is little internet accessibility in Ethiopia, there are a large number of English speaking countries that have a widely increasing number of internet users. In the United States, 15 percent of the population used the internet in 1997, and transitioned to a mere 54 percent in 2002- thus, internet usage increased 39 percent in 5 years (Klotz 190). It is important to acknowledge that smartphones (phones with internet access among many other features) were first introduced to the United States in 2001 (Brownlow 1). Thus, internet marketing is important to promote any product, as there is an ever-growing population of internet users every year.

Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel review Tourism Specialist David Ogilvy's guiding principles to tourist marketing. According to Ogilvy, it is important to include the following within tourist marketing: 1) highlight particular locations in which the tourist will find a different experience; 2) announcement of the affordability of the tourism product; 3) use of specific facts; 4) present the product as 'first class' because mediocre advertisements makes the product seem mediocre; 5) the sale should be placed up front so it is not looked over; 6) news about the product; 7) avoid a list of issues, choose a theme; 8) use images of natives to make the destination seem more exotic; 9) intentionally chosen photos and captions because the photos are more important than the text (Iordache, Ridea and Parpandel 157). These nine important factors of tourist marketing will be used to analyze and critique the webpages that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism produced to promote Ethiopian tourism.

There will be a brief summary of the text produced on each webpage, followed by a critique of how well the government communicated its intentions, examples within the text will be displayed (Bullock 50). Within textual analysis, "we attempt to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them" (McKee 2). Within textual analysis, one must be aware of the societal norms that are present within the text. McKee claims that "studying other cultures makes clear that, at many levels, the ways of making sense of the world employed can be quite different" (4). With this notion in mind, the text within the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website will be analyzed from the American social culture perspective.

Ethiopia: Historical Background

Ethiopia is a very historically vibrant country as Ethiopia bears the *Australopithecus afarensis*, a human fossil found in the Omo Valley in 1974, but dates back at least two million years (Marcus 1, Henze 5). Though Western cultures call her "Lucy", Ethiopians call her "Dinkenesh", which means "she is wonderful" (Marcus 1). "Lucy" is not the only link that can tie human civilization back to today's *homo sapiens*. The *Australo-pithecus africanus*, *Homo habilis*, and *Homo erectus* were discovered in Ethiopia as well, leading to the *Homo sapien* age in which we live in today (Marcus 2). Over



Figure 1: Map of Ethiopia

time the *Homo sapiens* in Ethiopia learned how to communicate, and survive by living off of the land (Marcus 3). “Ethiopian history has largely been determined by the country’s geography which reflects the working of dramatic geological forces, most of them still operative. Much new light has been shed on these processes during the past quarter century. Study of the geology and history of Ethiopia is a continuous adventure in discovery” (Henze 1). As new discoveries are constantly made, there is a possibility that there is more historical evidence of *Homo sapiens* descendants within Ethiopia today (Henze 1).

Similar to most country’s history and geology, the geography of Ethiopia has changed over time, however Ethiopia still inhabits major cities that are historically vital to the country’s origins. Ethiopia resides on the “horn of Africa” and is landlocked by Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and Eritrea, a country that was part of Ethiopia until 1994 (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia”). Though Ethiopia is landlocked, the Blue Nile flows through the North West region of the country (see “Map of Ethiopia” on page 5). The Blue Nile is the “largest river in Ethiopia in terms of volume discharge, second largest in terms of area, and contributes over 50 percent of the long-term river flow of the Main Nile” (Conway 49). The Blue Nile begins in the North West region of Ethiopia, and contributes to Sudan and Egypt’s main water resources (Casaco 14). As Egypt is the most powerful country that receives the resources of the Nile, Egypt has recently claimed “rights to utilize as-yet immobilized water resources, and increasingly demand a more equitable distribution of the Nile waters” (Casaco 14). This spurred the development of the Nile Base Initiative (NBI), in which the distribution of the Nile waters was discussed and settled despite Ethiopia’s silence in the past due to the state’s lack of priority to the development of the state’s water sectors and policies (Casaco 14).

The Nile only flows through two of the eleven Ethiopian regions - nine federal states and two autonomous cities (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia”). Ethiopia has a lot of rainfall for its geographical location so close to the equator (Sukkar 2). Thus, rainfall is scattered, leaving it hard for water to be distributed equally throughout the country (Sukkar 2, Kilot 55). In more developed locations within Ethiopia, such as the capital, Addis Ababa, it is easier to accumulate water (Kilot 55). Addis Ababa is one of the many historically and culturally rich locations in Ethiopia, along with Yeha, Axum - the cities with historical ruins, Gondar, also known as the “Camelot of Africa”, and Harar, known as the “The holiest place in Islam” (Sukkar 4). These five locations are not the most important cities in Ethiopia, but they are well known for their historical significance (Sukkar 4).

Each city has a story to tell, as does each Ethiopian ruler. As most African countries have been colonized, Ethiopia has restrained from total occupancy (except the Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941), leading it to stand apart from other African countries (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia” 4). Emperor Haile Selassie took over Iyasu’s three year reign in 1916 (Marcus 115). Selassie was extremely politically active before his reign, as he played a large role in the formation of the OAU (Organization of African Unity, El-Ayouty, Zartman 9). Selassie ruled until 1974 when the military council, also known as the Derg, overtook his power and made Ethiopia into a socialist state (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000:

Ethiopia” 4). For years there were protest and battle from the Ethiopian people, until 1991, when the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was formed. Three years later, an official constitution was devised and formal elections for government were held in 1995 (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia” 4).

Though the government of Ethiopia is slowly developing, the population of 70 million continues the cultural traditions despite some of the continuing Westernization (Sukkar 2, 4). Ethiopia is a widely diverse country whose population warships belong to three of the world’s most popular religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Ethiopians speak “80 languages and more dialects” (Sukkar 4). Ethiopia’s array of different cultural norms gives the country a unique façade. Though Ethiopia has a large population, Ethiopia is also one of Africa’s poorest countries where about two thirds of the population is illiterate (“Ethiopia Country Profile”). The majority of the Ethiopian economy revolves around agriculture, coffee, quat, gold, leather products, live animals, and oilseeds (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia”). These products are Ethiopia’s greatest export commodities contributing to their economy (“CIA - The World Factbook: 2000: Ethiopia”).

Role of Tourism In Ethiopia

Today, tourism in Ethiopia is very limited. Ethiopia’s Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mohamud Dirir, reported that in 2009 Ethiopia received 421,341 tourists, gaining \$211.5 million in revenue (“Ethiopia Ministry of Culture and Tourism Reveals Plans to Attract One Million Tourists by 2020”). Consequently, tourism plays a relatively insignificant role within the Ethiopian economy accounting for just two percent of the country’s GDP in 2004 (Sukkar 2). As previously discussed, tourism can influence a variety of industries within the country’s economy, however, with a lack of tourism and tourist industry, tourism is not contributing to the economy as it could. At the same time, Ethiopia has a variety of aspects to offer, ranging from historical sites, the cultivation of famous Ethiopian coffee, or the historical tradition of successful long - distance runners. Though Ethiopia has a lot to offer, there is unsubstantial development in the country to be able to support potential Western visitors.

Evaluation of Existing Tourism

Between Emperor Selassie’s reignation and the transition of a new government, Ethiopia had a lack of domestic assistance which prohibited the development of its tourist industry. In 1961, the Minister of Tourism at the time, Habte Selassie Tafesse, first introduced the concept of tourism to Ethiopia (“Thirteen Months of Sunshine”). Tafesse’s peer, Congress Chairman

Hagos Legesse claimed that Tafesse is known as the inventor of tourism in Ethiopia (“Thirteen Months of Sunshine”). Due to Tafesse’s invention of the slogan “Thirteen Months of Sunshine”, tourism has spurred since (“Thirteen Months of Sunshine”). Today, Ethiopia’s minister of Culture and Tourism, Mohamud Dirir, has further developed the government’s tourism sector by pushing for more private investment in the country. In August 2010 Dirir admitted that, “expansion of infrastructure development has a significant contribution to the development of tourism industry in the country. To this end, the government has given prime attention to private sector and now the number of hotels, lodges, and tour operators is increasing” (“Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism Reveals Plans... 2020”).

Today, the internet has a great impact on the tourist industry. According to Rayman-Bacchus and Molina, “the internet as a communication medium and market space is growing at an unprecedented rate” (2001, 589). In August 1999, 215 million people had access to the internet, an increase from the 133 million people the year before (Rayman-Bacchus and Molina 589). “Of the 215 million, 57% are English language users, while 26% access the Internet using European languages (excluding English)” (Rayman-Bacchus and Molina 589). As these statistics report from 2001, internet usage has still increased, particularly within Westernized culture. It is important for developing countries to reach out to tourists through every possible medium. “The internet provides a fundamentally different economic environment for doing business, its key differentiator being rapid communication of information, accessible globally, and at negligible cost” (Rayman-Bacchus and Molina 590). The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism is evidently making an effort to develop tourism through the internet to adapt to the cyber culture to appeal to potential tourists within the technologically advanced Western society.

Analysis: Ministry of Culture and Tourism - Tourist Opportunities Offered

Though the Ethiopian government has made some efforts to develop tourism through the internet, the government has instigated very little development in this area. Due to the fact that the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism has produced a website in English, the Ethiopian government is evidently attempting to appeal to the English speaking culture. On the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, there are tabs for the website visitor to learn more about Ethiopia historically and culturally. These tabs are labeled “About Ethiopia”, “About Addis Ababa”, “Cultural Attractions”, “Natural Attractions”, “Historical Attractions”, “Hotels, Tours, Air”, “Archeological Attractions”, “Travel Info & Tour Operators”, and “Contact Us” (“13 Months of Sunshine”). Each of these tabs address the topic corresponding to the label, however, each page only addresses the topic in a brief paragraph or two.

The graphic layout of the “13 Months of Sunshine” website is inadequately designed, as there is a lack of specific tour promotion material that are available to the potential tourist. “An

important category of promotional means used tourism as a source of information is tourist information documents in which graphical advertising has a great importance. In a harmonious combination between an informative text and a picture suggestive of its different forms visualize products of interest” (Iordache, Rizea, Parpandel 153). Thus, it is important for the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism to use graphic images as well as text to appeal to the potential tourist.

The initial webpage (Figure 2) of the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism is quite graphically basic. The picture that it displays is a compilation of images from different historical sites that can be found in Ethiopia. The tabs previously discussed are displayed, allowing the potential tourist to click on whichever tab he/she so chooses. Eight of the sections on the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website will be discussed to address the issues within. First, the “About Ethiopia” tab is critiqued, as it is the first option within the initial Ministry of Culture and Tourism webpage. Once one selects to look at one of the pages on the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, the top of the website has all of the same tabs as that of the initial webpage, however there is a lack of parallelism with the “Natural Attractions”, “Archeological Attractions”, and “Travel Info & Tour Operators” tabs. The inconsistency is displayed as follows:



Figure 2: Landing Webpage

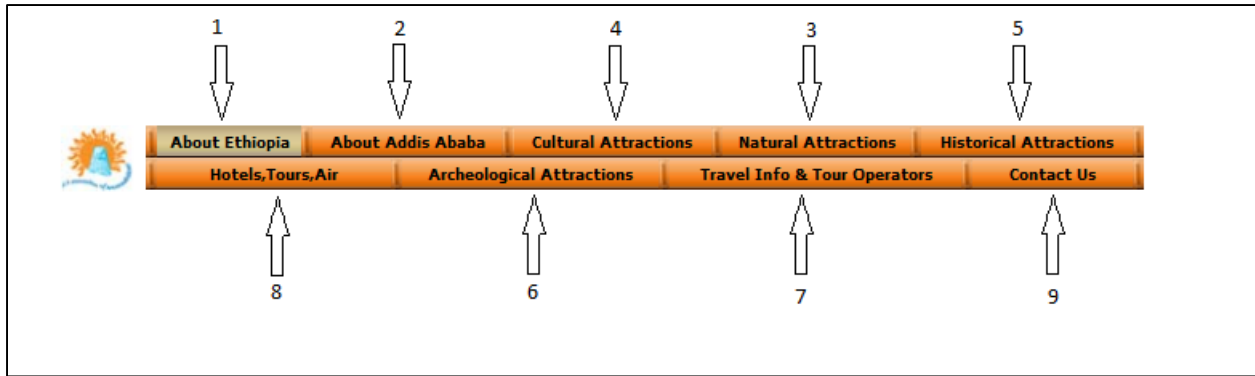


Figure 3: Individual Page Heading

As displayed (Figure 3), there is a lack of consistency within the Ethiopian Ministry of Tourism and Culture website. According to Treder, as humans see natural symmetry on a daily basis, humans look for symmetry everywhere. On the Ministry of Tourism and Culture website, the multiple “Attractions” tabs are infused with the tabs about travel information, which disrupts the symmetry of the website. This could potentially allow the consumer to view this website as unprofessional due to its lack of professional presence. The following visual and textual analysis of each webpage will be presented in the order in which it appears on the initial Ministry of Culture and Tourism website.

“About Ethiopia” [1]: On the “About Ethiopia” section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website (Figure 4) there is little graphical design displayed. As previously discussed Journal article “Information Documents – Primordial Instruments in Tourist Communication” touches upon the importance of graphical tourist advertising. A large aspect of marketing and advertising is within a display of relevant images that captures the audiences’ eye. Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel state, “A single carefully chosen photo is worth more than a set of small photographs, which distract the attention of the receiver” (157). Though there is one large image on the “About Ethiopia” webpage, within the image there are detailed images of different touristic locations within Ethiopia, not to mention, they are hardly visible images. It would be more beneficial for the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism to display one or two images that are discussed within the text next to the image. The images should also have blurbs explaining what they are.

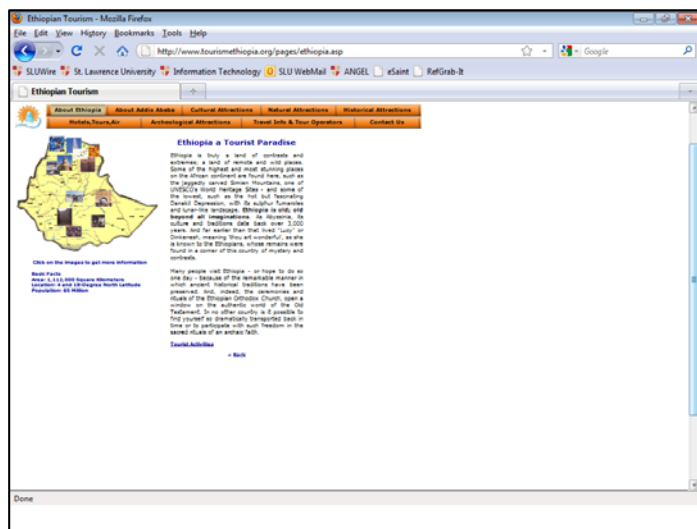


Figure 4: About Ethiopia

The text within the “About Ethiopia” section, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism attempts to give the reader a general overview of what Ethiopia has to offer discussing the Simien Mountains, the ancient Ethiopian legacy, and the dramatic rituals. The following is how the text reads.

Ethiopia a Tourist Paradise

Ethiopia is truly a land of contrasts and extremes; a land of remote and wild places. Some of the highest and most stunning places on the African continent are found here, such as the jaggedly carved Simien Mountains, one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites - and some of the lowest, such as the hot but fascinating Danakil Depression, with its sulphur fumaroles and lunar-like landscape. **Ethiopia is old; old beyond all imaginations.** As Abyssinia, its culture and traditions date back over 3,000 years. And far earlier than that lived "Lucy" or Dinkenesh, meaning 'thou art wonderful', as she is known to the Ethiopians, whose remains were found in a corner of this country of mystery and contrasts.

Many people visit Ethiopia - or hope to do so one day - because of the remarkable manner in which ancient historical traditions have been preserved. And, indeed, the ceremonies and rituals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, open a window on the authentic world of the Old Testament. In no other country is it possible to find yourself so dramatically transported back in time or to participate with such freedom in the sacred rituals of an archaic faith. (“Ethiopian Tourism- About Ethiopia”)

The text states that “some of the highest and most stunning places on the African continent are found here” (“Ethiopian Tourism- About Ethiopia”). Though Ethiopia may have some of the highest points of Africa, the website uses the word *stunning* to emphasize beauty within the context of the Simien Mountains. According to Berger, such promotional materials should “use [word] associations that people will find positive and attractive” (Berger 71). Though the Ministry of Culture and Tourism attempts to make the potential tourist associate Ethiopia with beauty, it also makes daring claims without any supportive evidence, such as the heading claiming that Ethiopia is a “Tourist Paradise” (“Ethiopian Tourism- About Ethiopia”). Because the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is attempting to appeal to the Westernized, English speaking culture, there is a lack of proof that Ethiopia is in fact a “Tourist Paradise”.

Berger, in his book Deconstructing Travel, points out how travel writers have a tendency to exaggerate (81). This exaggeration is evident within the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, in which there is consistent amplification of the touristic opportunities offered. Below the text on the “About Ethiopia” webpage, there is a link titled “Tourist Activities”. When the potential tourist selects this link, there is in fact no website that is connected to the link. This dead end leads the potential tourist to no offering. Though having a link connecting the potential tourist to possible tourist activities, the dead end leads the potential tourist to think that there is nothing to do in Ethiopia, which is evidently not the case

considering the website does nothing but prove that there in fact *are* things to do in Ethiopia. Thus, on the “About Ethiopia” it would be beneficial to either link the “Tourist Activities” tab to eliminate the link or create the link to provide an outside source of possible tourist activities.

“About Addis Ababa” [2]: Above is the image of the “About Addis Ababa” tab on the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website (Figure 5). The image on this website is a beautiful hilltop view of Addis Ababa, displaying that the city is in fact urban, natural, and mountainous all in one. Though it is a beautiful picture, the visual website is lacking in color and originality. There is a lack of visual imagery that is appealing to the potential tourist, which, as previously discussed, is a vital aspect of

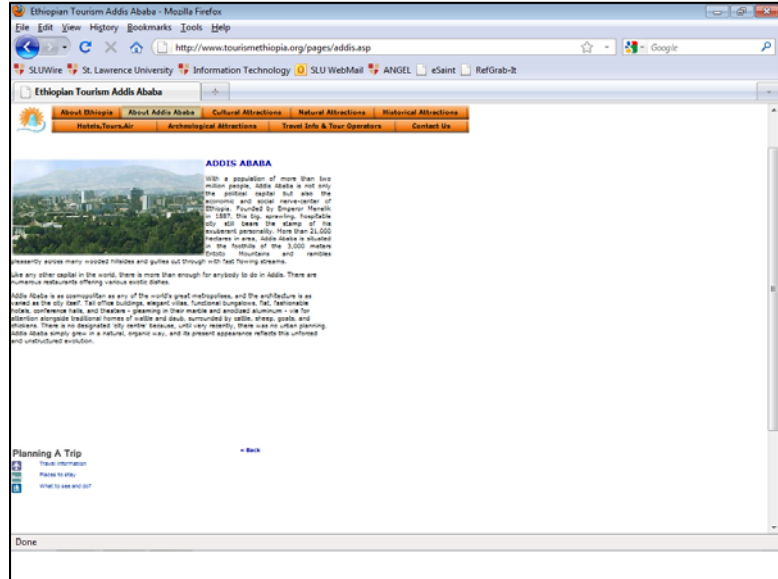


Figure 5: About Addis Ababa

tourist marketing (Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel 157). This image does not display the outstanding beauty of Ethiopia, as one could mistake this image with many other capitals across the world. Within tourism marketing there must be “illustration to highlight the architecture and the interior structures of delivery, recreational opportunities, attractions, and environmental elements (Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel 155). Though this image displays the rooftops of Addis Ababa, it does not display the physical architecture itself, but the height of the architecture in general.

The text within the “About Addis Ababa” section of the website, discusses the population, history, and landscape of the city, but there is a lack of explanation of what there is to do. Though there is a lot to do in Addis Ababa, there is a lack of description of possible activities describing how the tourist will benefit from the city. The only possible opportunity for the potential tourist to explore what there is to do in Ethiopia is to click on one of the links below the city description under, “Planning A Trip”. Though it could be beneficial to have this link on the page, again, the link is a dead end.

“Natural Attractions” [3]: In the “Natural Attractions” section of the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, the map of Ethiopia is again the main image with various small images of different natural attractions throughout the country. Assuming that the tourist has looked at each section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website in the same order as this analysis, the potential tourist has seen this image before. Though visual repetition is acceptable,

this image is not visually interesting. Messaris's book, Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising, analyses how images generate emotions in the perceiver (4). "Images might make us feel we simply *must* visit this or that historic city or rain forest. Images help advertisers bypass any constraints that our logical faculties might want to impose on our decision making when it comes to spending money" (Berger 78). Therefore, it is important for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to use imagery that will make a tourist desire to travel to Ethiopia. The small images displayed on the map of Ethiopia are difficult for the potential tourists to see, prohibiting him/her from making any connection with the natural attractions in Ethiopia.

Textually, "A Land of Beauty" offers a detailed, yet simple explanation of landscapes and wildlife that Ethiopia has to offer. The last paragraph of the text reads:

The wildlife consists mainly of East African plains animals, but there are now no giraffe or buffalo. Oryx, bat-eared fox, caracal, aardvark, colobus and green monkeys, Anubis and Hamadryas baboons, klipspringer, leopard, bushbuck, hippopotamus, Soemmerings gazelle, cheetah, lion, kudu and 450 species of bird all live within the park's 720 square kilometres. ("Ethiopian Tourism - A Land of Beauty")

To begin, this text is merely a list of Animals that can be found within Ethiopia. Though the text implies that this list refers to a specific park in Ethiopia, it fails to tell the potential tourist where these exotic animals can be found. Though there are very few countries that have this range of Animal population, the abundance of animal names, and lack of imagery prohibits the potential tourist from connecting with the natural attractions throughout Ethiopia.

"Cultural Attractions" [4]: The "Cultural Attractions" section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website is titled "Land of Culture". Visually, this page is unexciting to the potential tourist. The only imagery offered displays a map of Ethiopia and smaller images scattered on the map. Below the map the caption states, "Click on the images to get more information", yet none of the images connect to a working website ("Ethiopian Tourism - Land of Culture"). Though the title of the webpage is "Land of Culture", the images fail to display this culture by any means. "Photography is a major force in the handling of images and therefore affects tourism behavior without appearing to do so. These photographs provide information to potential consumers of tourism, information that influence their attitude destination" (Iordache, Rizea and Parpandel, 158). Thus, one or more photographs depicting the variety of culture within Ethiopian would be beneficial to the potential tourist.

In his book Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, Eliot reviews the concept of culture, displaying that *culture* is the social system in which there are norms, values, social class(es), religion, diversity, devotion, stating that "culture should be analyzable" (13). Despite that today's Western society attempts to export its cultural values to third world countries,

Ethiopia has still maintained its culture in many ways (Berger 95). Through its website, the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism textually displays Ethiopia’s cultural values to the potential tourist. Following Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel’s list for strategic tourist marketing, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism highlights the 3000 year old culture and variation of ethnic groups that are found in Ethiopia (157). Within the “Cultural Attractions” section of the website, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism only highlights the significance of religion within Ethiopia (“Ethiopian Tourism- Cultural Attractions”). Though Ethiopia is an extremely religious country with a high population of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic believers, there are particular aspects of their cultures that are left unexplored in the initial writing (these aspects of Ethiopian culture and more will be discussed prior to this analysis).

Under the image on the “Land of Culture” webpage are five possible links for the tourist to learn more about culture. Unlike the “About Ethiopia” and “ADDIS ABABA” sections of the website, four of the five links on the “Land of Culture” section connect to more information on the topic. Though the “People” link does not work, the “Festivals”, “Alphabet”, “Calendar/Time”, and “English-Amharic” links direct the potential tourist to more information on the desired subject. Small images of these links are displayed below (in order as listed).

The “Ethiopian Tourism- Festivals” webpage displays prominent imagery that accurately displays a variety of cultural values, some of which were discussed within the “Land of Culture” webpage. This webpage is appealing as it provides positive imagery and textual supplement, however, it is found within the fine print of a large section of the website, leaving it to be slightly inaccessible to the potential tourist. The “Ethiopian Tourism - Alphabet” webpage is graphically interesting as it displays the Ethiopian alphabet - a foreign language written and spoken outside of Western society.

As Ethiopia has a different calendar than Western society, the potential tourist could have interest in the different calendar year. Though the Ministry of Culture and Tourism states that “Ethiopia follows the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian one used by Europe and the Americas” it remains unexplained as to why there is a different calendar (“Ethiopian Tourism- Calendar/Time”). This is an unexplored opportunity for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to further display its country’s culture that is unknown to Western society. The “Ethiopian Tourism - English-Amharic” webpage is a visually uninteresting, yet extremely detailed section that could interest the potential tourist.

All four of these sections of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, are exceptionally important for the potential tourists to explore, however, he/she may not do so for two reasons. First, due to the fact that no link prior to the “Land of Culture” webpage have connected to a website, there is little reason that the potential tourist would attempt to select these links. Second, because they are in very small print, the potential tourist may not even see the options displayed.

“Historical Attractions” [5]: Again, the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism uses the map of Ethiopia with images on it as the visual representation of the “Land of Great

Civilization". Berger argues that "images play on our desire to escape from our mundane everyday lives - if only for a short period of time - or to do the things that people we identify with (movie stars, well known travelers) do. People often decide to visit places they see in movies or television shows. Images, then, can be powerful and maybe, in certain cases, even coercive" (78). The absence of images of the historical site in Ethiopia prohibits the potential tourist to identify with the country. Because of the lack of focus on the images of the historical locations the potential tourist is unable to use their imagination and explore the possibilities of touring Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism briefly highlights the history of Axum, Lalibela, and Gondar to display how rich Ethiopia's history is. For a country of such extravagant history it seems brief and afflicting to discuss Ethiopian history in two brief paragraphs. After displaying a brief history of Axum and breezing over Lalibela and Gondar's historical significance, the section is concluded with: "All these would be enough to make Ethiopia a fascinating place to visit and travel through, but Ethiopia has so much more to offer" ("Ethiopia Tourism - A Land of Great Civilization"). The beginning of this sentence reads as if it is unnecessary to address Ethiopia's historical significance, because it is known for its copious history - which is untrue. In fact, because Ethiopia is one of the few countries in the world with such historical relevance, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism should use its country's history as frequently as possible to appeal to as many tourist markets as possible.

As if the two paragraphs on the "Historical Attractions" webpage addresses more than Axum, Lalibela, and Gondar's historical relevance, a "View List" button appears underneath. If the potential tourists was interested enough to click on this link, it would not lead the potential tourist to anything but another dead end. This makes Ethiopia seem as if the statements in the above two paragraphs were exaggerated to begin with.

"Archeological Attractions" [6]: The "Archeological Attractions" section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website looks visually similar to that of the "About Ethiopia", "Natural Attractions", "Cultural Attractions", and "Historical Attractions" sections of the website. The map of Ethiopia is displayed with only one small picture placed on the map. Compared to the other sections on the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, the "Archeological Attractions" only displays two picture, suggesting to the potential tourist that there is not very much archeological tourism within the country, which in fact, is untrue.

Interestingly, "A Land of Discovery" is the longest description of all of the attractions discussed on the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website. However, the six paragraphs delve into detail about the archeological discoveries that have occurred in Ethiopia. Though it is not addressed in Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel's article, there is an overuse of detail within "A Land of Discovery", leaving no questions for the potential tourist. Due to the fact that there is

also no visual imagery for the potential tourist to imagine, the facts given are not associated with one particular image, prohibiting the potential tourist to crave more information.

“Travel Information and Tour Operators” [7]: Though there is no imagery on this section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, there is a lot of text to assist the potential tourists. Firstly, there is a link titled “Tour and Travel Agencies”. This is extremely important to Ethiopian tourism, as it is necessary to make information on travel agencies as accessible as possible for potential tourists. The website also lists and discusses the following: Health Requirements, Customs, Air Transport, Road Transport, Time, Currency, Climate, Topography, Economy, Language, Electric Supply, People, Excursions, Hotels, and Taxis (“Ethiopian Tourism - Travel Info & Tour Operators”). The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is successful at addressing the variety of topics that a potential tourists would be curious about if they were to travel to Ethiopia.

“Hotels, Tours, Air” [8]: The image that initially appears on the “Hotels, Tours, Air” webpage is a overlapped image of a waterfall and vague images of historical sites in Ethiopia. Though visually attractive and creative artistic, these combined pictures are difficult for the potential tourist to view as it is difficult to see exactly what they are. When scrolling over the “Hotel”, “Restaurant”, “Airlines”, and “Tour and Travel Agencies” buttons, different images are displayed for each (Figure 6).

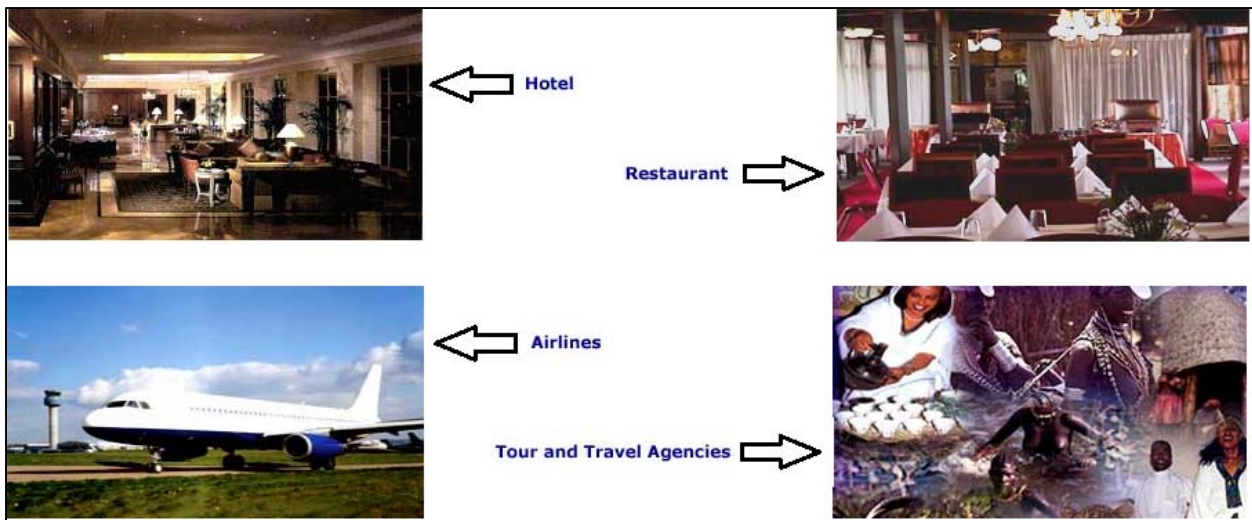


Figure 6: Hotels, Tours, Air

The “Hotel”, “Restaurant”, and “Airlines” images are basic images, displaying an unidentified hotel, unidentified restaurant, and unidentified airplane. The ambiguity of these images makes Ethiopia seem westernized, even though the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is most likely trying to display how its country’s social culture is fit to accommodate Western

tourists. The image displayed for “Tour and Travel Agencies” is another compilation of images, and though aesthetic, the image does not pertain to the title, nor is the image simple for the potential tourist to comprehend.

The text on the “Hotels, Tours, Air” section of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website reads as follows:

Many tourist attractions and important offices are found along the Capital’s main roads. Several restaurants, duty free gift shops, conference halls and many hotels that cater for all budgets have always been to the utmost satisfaction of tourists and traveller visiting Ethiopia. Airlines giving services in Ethiopia are: Ethiopian Airlines, British Airways, Lufthansa, Saudi, Egypt Air, Kenya Airways, Sudan Airways and Yemen Airways. There are more than 130 tour operators and travel agencies, out of which are 66 tour operators. (“Ethiopian Tourism - Hotels, Tours, Air”)

The analysis of the above information vernacular is critical for a thorough study of the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website. The first sentence of the paragraph is poorly constructed, as tourist attractions and “important offices” are two separate entities that a tourist would be looking for when exploring Ethiopia. Secondly, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism challenges Iordache, Rizea, and Parpandel’s view of tourist marketing, as they fail to give specific details on where to find this information.

Though the Ministry of Culture and Tourism fails to give detail on where the restaurants, gift shops, conference halls, and hotels are located, it allocates details on which airlines offer flights to Ethiopia. However, the next and last sentence states that there are “130 tour operators and travel agencies, out of which are 66 tour operators”, again lacking detail on how to contact any of them (“Ethiopian Tourism- Hotels, Tours, and Air”).

Suggestions for Improvement

Ethiopia is a relatively non-Westernized country that is attempting to merge into the Westernized world through tourism. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism website is an attempt to lure tourists into traveling to Ethiopia. Through the analysis of each webpage linked to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, there are some changes that should take place to improve its current website context and design.

First, the initial website page has the different sections listed within a graphical display. However, once the potential tourist has entered the website, the sections are listed in a different order. As previously discussed, symmetry is important to the consumer whether the symmetry is conscious or subconscious.

Second, the main attractions listed, (natural, cultural, historical, and archeological) need more realistic visual representation of the country to display what Ethiopia has to offer in each of these potential tourist markets. If three or four images of the location and/or object being discussed is displayed, the potential tourist would be able to use his/her imagination to create his/her idea of what Ethiopia is like. This will lead the tourist to build his/her curiosity and interest in traveling to Ethiopia.

Thirdly, the title of the pages are inconsistent. The titles of the webpages are: “Ethiopia a Tourist Paradise”, “ADDIS ABABA”, “A Land of Beauty”, “Land of Culture”, “A Land of Great Civilization”, and “A Land of Discovery”, while two of the sections are left untitled. The titles are yet another instance in which there is a lack of symmetry within the text. “Ethiopia a Tourist Paradise” should read, “Ethiopia: A Tourist Paradise”. “ADDIS ABABA” should not all be capitalized. And “Land of Culture” should be “A Land of Culture”. Though these small inconsistencies seem insignificant within the big picture, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism seems unprofessional to the potential tourist.

Finally, within the text, some of the pages offer a great deal of detail, and others offer very little detail on an extremely important aspect of Ethiopian tourism. The text published on the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website should be written to touch upon the various forms of entertainment and discovery that Ethiopia has to offer (Berger 79). Detail should be given, however, not to the point where there is nothing left for the tourists to learn when his/her arrive to Ethiopia. Vernacular must be used that is alluring to the potential tourists, as his/her should be drawn into the visual images and text displayed.

Developing Ethiopian Tourism

Niche Marketing: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘niche’ in the most relative definition is “a specialized market”. Niche marketing is used to target a specific audience to obtain a specific product. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism only discusses four different tourist sectors and argue that Ethiopia has much more to offer. This, in fact, is true. Ethiopia has multiple potential tourist markets that are undeveloped.

These potential tourist markets could use financial assistance. The Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, D.C. produced a packet to brief tour operators, in which the “current tour operator environment” is addressed, as well as infrastructural development, transportation, “trainable labor”, the economic environment, “a conducive tax environment”, “security of investment”, land, and security. These ten discussion points were published with a document titled, “Investing in Ethiopia: 10 Reasons to Invest in Ethiopia”, in which many of the prior topics are elaborated on (2).

Through exploration of these documents, there is a lack of niche marketing. Thus, the following are niche markets that could be explored and utilized to benefit Ethiopian tourism

along with the markets that Ethiopia has already developed (natural tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, and archeological tourism).

Religion: Religious tourism would tie into history because Ethiopia has a large history of religious life. Christianity Today International is a non-profit communications ministry that produces and distributes its magazine, websites, e-newsletters, blogs, podcasts, videos, and social networking. According to Christianity Today International, only the magazine is distributed to 634,000 readers. The webpage has reached 5 million hits monthly, and the associations e-newsletter has 1.3 million subscribers. Thus, advertisers who display their product with Christianity Today International have greatly increased the number of potential consumers.

As Ethiopia has the potential to appeal to a Christian market, advertising within the Christianity Today International media system would greatly improve the religious Ethiopian tourist sector. There are plenty more potential religious markets available for Ethiopian to tourism to develop.

Coffee: As coffee originated in Ethiopia, it is only fitting that Ethiopia appeal coffee connoisseurs across the world. Though coffee advertising is more difficult to apply to the mainstream media, there is opportunity within a variety of coffee companies world-wide. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism could potentially propose an exchange of any product, with coffee corporations around the world, in exchange for opportunities to promote Ethiopian tourism within the store and product.

Bird Watching: One of the main aspects of natural tourism that Ethiopia prides itself on is bird watching. “Ethiopia’s Protected Area (PA), which includes national parks, game reserves, wildlife sanctuaries and controlled hunting grounds, covers about 14% of the country. The protected areas offer ecotourism and leisure activities such as wildlife viewing, trekking, mountaineering and bird watching” (“Travel and Tourism in Ethiopia” 1). The 450 species of bird found in the Ethiopian National Parks allows for yet another niche marketing sector. To appeal to potential consumers, advertisements in magazines such as *Bird Talk* would create curiosity, interest, and hopefully tourism within Ethiopia.

Runners: Ethiopian runners have always been outstanding runners, in fact, “since 1993, Ethiopians have won all but one World and Olympic 10,000 m titles” (Tucker and Dugas 1). As Ethiopia is well known for their small, powerful, champion runners, another possible niche market is runners. As previously discussed, potential tourists become interested in a travel destination when there is a visual appeal for them, often displaying famous people that the potential tourist identifies with (Berger 78). Thus, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism could

flaunt their successful running history, and advertise to Western runners. Potential magazines for advertisement could be, *Runner's World*, *Running Times Magazine*, or *Trail Runner*. All three of these magazines publish e-newsletters as well, allowing for a cheaper means of distributing the content.

Conclusion

Though Ethiopian tourism has a long tradition, Ethiopia has much more to offer potential tourists. Prior to development and distribution of any type of tourist advertising, Ethiopia must develop a brand, to be sure to display the country in the best light possible. "Creating a brand is defining and expressing the personality of an organization or destination, not only in creating a logo, but also creating verbal and visual identity at the same time building a brand by its strategic platform and by all its marketing and communication activities" (Iordache, Cebuc, and Panoiu 151).

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism website is a solid beginning to development of the Ethiopian tourist sector, allowing for a lot of room to expand the advertising techniques and niche markets. Restructuring every webpage linked to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website would greatly benefit the tourist industry by making the website look more professional and graphically interesting. The use of emotionally moving imagery will appeal to the potential tourist greatly. The text within the website must relate to the images shown. There will be no false links within the website, yet another way of reinforcing validity in the website. Within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website, there will be detail on investing in Ethiopia, as economic funding is required to even begin the process of reconstructing the Ethiopian tourist industry.

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