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Cover Art—“The Woman”

Clara Hollowgrass, Psychology*

This piece is part of a series I did which focuses on the refinement found in a face. The medium is scratchboard, which I made myself from wood and black and white paint, and I used an old, empty fountain pen as my carving tool. I focus on the face because it is the part of people that we usually judge first. Ancient humans used a person’s smile or eyes to distinguish between friend and foe. But why do we still make such snap judgements today, and what could we be missing by relying on the physical appearance of solely a face? What is going on beneath someone’s surface? What about them can we not see? The process of making art on scratchboard itself exemplifies this concept. Through the action of scraping back layers to reveal a new dimension on the board, I mimicked the process of getting familiar with a person. You work to look beneath the surface, realizing that there is more than meets the eye.

*Clara Hollowgrass is a freshman psychology major. She enjoys the outdoors as well as the exploration of creative expression. She aspires to partake in public relations or community outreach after her undergraduate degree is complete. Please direct correspondence to clarah@uoregon.edu
Dear readers,

When I try hard enough to remember my elementary school days, I can picture myself sitting next to my dad at the dining room table, legs swinging because my feet couldn’t reach the floor. While he graded his sophomore English students’ essays, I would read the papers he had just corrected, trying to catch some mistake that he had missed; I guess I’ve always fancied myself an editor. So when I learned about the Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal (OURJ) in the fall of my freshman year, I was thrilled at the prospect of joining the editorial board. I had always loved the challenge of helping people improve their writing, so OURJ seemed like a natural fit. But now, two years and five editions later, I’ve realized that the editing part isn’t my favorite aspect of working on the journal. Rather, I’ve discovered that the greatest reward that comes from serving as an editor, and now as Editor-in-Chief, is the ability to interact directly with fellow undergraduate students from a variety of disciplines who are conducting truly fascinating research. In return for this opportunity to engage with such inspiring and impressive young scholars, our journal provides these budding researchers the chance to publicize their work.

OURJ, however, is just one of the many platforms on campus that seek to broadcast undergraduates’ research achievements. I would be remiss to neglect mentioning the Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS), which celebrates its tenth anniversary in May of this year. This edition of the journal is fortunate enough to feature a guest editorial from one of the co-chairs of the symposium, Kevin Hatfield, Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research. Additionally, all four of the authors featured in this issue presented their work at the URS last year. Literature, political science, psychology, cultural anthropology—the types of papers featured in this issue represent merely a sliver of the breadth of research both OURJ and the URS are committed showcasing.

If the goal of this journal is to highlight the best of the university’s undergraduate research, it achieves this aim only because of the editorial board working diligently behind the scenes. Josh, Emma, Kayla, Shuxi, and David—thank you for your endless support and hard work. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Barbara Jenkins, whose constant advice and guidance make publication possible year after year. And finally, sincere thanks to the readers. There’s little point to a publication without an audience to read it.

On behalf of the editorial board, please enjoy the 16th edition of the Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal.
Guest Editorial—“Celebrating a Decade of UO Undergraduate Research”

Kevin D. Hatfield, Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research

In 2010 student leaders began advocating for three initiatives to support undergraduate research and creative work— an annual conference, a student-edited journal, and a dedicated office. They approached Karen Sprague, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, who shared their excitement about undergraduate research. First, Vice Provost Sprague wanted to find out how other universities were developing these areas, so I was asked to investigate the undergraduate research programs of the 62 universities that belong to the Association of American Universities (AAU). I found that 49 institutions hosted an annual undergraduate research conference, 31 sponsored a university-wide undergraduate research journal, and 59 had a dedicated undergraduate research office.

These results catalyzed efforts to develop similar programs at the UO. Vice Provost Sprague and the Division of Undergraduate Studies championed the effort and quickly gathered support from a broad coalition, including Undergraduate Council, UO Libraries, Robert D. Clark Honors College, University Housing, Division of Equity & Inclusion, and Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. Throughout the process, the early student leaders’ indefatigable energy and creative vision were integral to the development of these programs.¹

In 2011 the Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal (OURJ) published its inaugural issue, and the Undergraduate Research Symposium also debuted with 69 presenters and 40 faculty mentors (spanning 20 majors and four colleges). With a student editorial board and executive editor OURJ established a strong model for a peer-reviewed, student-led journal. Similarly, students assumed central roles on the Symposium Steering Committee to help plan and execute the event. They also formed the Associated Students of Undergraduate Research and Engagement (ASURE)—originally known as NEXUS—to create a place for peer-facilitated outreach and workshops on abstract writing, poster design, and oral presentations.

By 2019 the Symposium had vastly increased in size to 513 presenters and 290 faculty mentors (spanning 75 majors, 21 minor programs, 33 minors, and 8 colleges). Between 2011 and 2019 the Symposium has hosted nearly 2,100 students showcasing their research and creative work through formats ranging from poster and oral presentations to art installations, science demonstrations, film screenings, poetry slams, music, dance, and theater performances.
The 10th Anniversary of the Symposium in May 2020 promises to achieve several new and exciting benchmarks, including over $7,000 in awards for student presenters; increased participation of Lane Community College; McNair Scholar presenters from colleges throughout the Northwest; and the attendance of several hundred local high school students. 

The final objective of the original student leaders—a dedicated office for undergraduate research—was realized in 2014 with the founding of the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) and the creation of the Center for Undergraduate Research and Engagement (CURE) in 2017. These allied offices award over $300,000 annually to support undergraduate research experiences and conference travel. They also serve as central hubs for exploring opportunities in undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative work.

A new generation of students now leads OURJ and ASURE, and student voices actively invigorate the Undergraduate Research Symposium, CURE, and UROP programs. As we begin a new decade, I reflect on the singular privilege it has been for me to gain inspiration and wisdom from our students as they helped transform the undergraduate research landscape at the UO.

Please join us for our exciting 10th Anniversary on May 21, 2020.

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1 Early student advocates for undergraduate research included: Lucy Gubbins, Drew Serres, Alexandra Fus, Eva Wong, Jeff Tan, Matt Villeneuve, Erin Howe, Samantha Nesbitt, Vishesh Khanna, Emily Balloun, Alani Estrella.

2 Organized in collaboration with UO's Summer Academy to Inspire Learning (SAIL) program.
Art Feature—“Orange Cup Coral (Balanophyllia elegans)”

Lincoln Hopkins, Biology and Music*

This is a photo of a member of the species Orange Cup Coral (Balanophyllia elegans) taken underneath a dissection scope at the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology—one of the University of Oregon’s satellite campuses. The specimen was collected by University of Oregon students from the intertidal zones off the coast of Charleston, Oregon to better understand and examine different types of corals as B. elegansis is different from other corals in that it grows separately from a colony.

This photo represents the hands-on learning techniques undergraduate students used to investigate and observe a species rather than listening to a lecture. We noticed that the coral’s tentacles would only retract when organic matter touched it or if it were taken out of water. This made us question why, and we developed our own hypotheses to test in the hopes of answering this question. Not only was this coral beautiful to look at, but it sparked curiosity, questions, and critical thinking from the students observing it. I believe this fits the spirit of undergraduate research as it was an experience that encouraged intrigued students to learn further and conduct more research. Specials thanks to Mack Hughes for the assistance in taking this photo.

*Lincoln Hopkins is a biology and music double major at UO. In the future, he would like to pursue a career that focuses on the intersections between ecology and education. In his spare time, he loves to play piano and write music. Please direct correspondence to lincolnh@uoregon.edu.
Meet the Editorial Board

KAYLA DAVIS

Kayla is a senior in the Clark Honors College majoring in CDS (communication disorders and sciences) and minoring in special education. She works as a research assistant in the Optimizing Swallowing and Eating for the Elderly Lab where she is researching the impact of post-stroke swallowing disorders on caregiver burden for her CHC thesis. Outside of school, Kayla works as a personal support worker and enjoys knitting, playing piano, reading, and playing tennis in her free time. After graduating in the spring, she plans to attend graduate school to earn her Master’s in speech-language pathology.

EMMA DORINSON

Emma is a senior in the Clark Honors College majoring in math and minoring in Spanish and economics. In terms of research, she will be exploring how the news around assets affects their price for her CHC thesis. Besides her editorial position for the journal, Emma works in the library as a writing tutor, and she will be teaching an introductory course on art history for first year CHC students. Emma’s other interests include music, films, and traveling.

DAVID GRABICKI

David is a senior history and PPPM (planning, public policy, and management) major in the Clark Honors College. He has served as a research assistant for the Sustainable Cities Initiative working on a book project on designing streets for bikes and cyclists. His research interests lay at the crossroads between history and policy/planning. He is currently focusing on documenting a history of Oregon planning. His career goals vary by the day, but they center around transportation planning and further academic work. Outside of class or work, he can be found riding his bike around Eugene, reading, and bothering his friends.

JOSHUA PEARMAN

Joshua is a senior psychology major at the University of Oregon. He is a research assistant in the Social Affective Neuroscience Lab and Personality and Social Dynamics Lab, and is currently working on his thesis researching power, status, and group affiliation. He is interested in the science of teams in organizations, and hopes to both conduct and apply group dynamics research in the future. Outside of academics, Joshua enjoys reading sci-fi novels and watching films with his friends.
SHUXI WU

Shuxi is a junior majoring in anthropology, Asian studies, economics and international studies. Her research concerns globalization, urbanization, migration and new media. She plans to go to graduate school in anthropology. She is the associate director of the UO Associated Students of Undergraduate Research and Engagement and the vice president of the UO Anthropology Club.
Caliban Yisrael: Constructing Caliban as the Jewish Other in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*
DeForest Ariyel Rolnick-Wihtol*, English and Spanish

**ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to introduce new data into the discussion of William Shakespeare’s portrayal of Jewish people through intertextual and close reading of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice*, sections from the Geneva Bible, and primary documents discussing Anglo-Jewish life in the Elizabethan era. Shakespeare’s relationship to and purported views of Jewish people have been scrutinized for centuries. However, almost all conclusions put forth by scholars about Shakespeare’s ties to Elizabethan Jewish communities and anti-Semitism have been drawn from one work, *The Merchant of Venice*. *Merchant* contains Shakespeare’s only explicitly Jewish characters, Shylock and his daughter, Jessica, although she happily converts to Christianity. In this paper, I propose that Shakespeare has an implicitly Jewish character lurking in *The Tempest*: Caliban, the play’s main antagonist, a native to the island on which the play is set, and Prospero and Miranda’s slave. I will support the interpretation of Caliban as a Jewish-coded figure through cross-reading *The Tempest* with *The Merchant of Venice*, sections of the Geneva Bible, and non-fiction testimonials from English residents during and before the Elizabethan era. Using both these plays alongside other scholarly and historical texts, I will bring cultural and historical context to these portrayals in order to explore a deeper understanding of the complicated and nuanced depictions of Jewish people in Shakespeare’s work.

**CONTEXTUALIZING JEW-CODING: JEWISH PEOPLE IN SHAKESPEARE’S ENGLAND**

For hundreds of years, scholars and historians denied that there existed a significant Jewish community in Shakespeare’s England. Following King Edward I’s expulsion of the English Jewish community in 1290 C.E., England was thought to be entirely devoid of Jewish people until a few years before their informal re-admittance and resettlement in 1655 (Shapiro 48). Most modern historical accounts place the number of Jewish deportees at roughly 16,000. However, recent

*DeForest Rolnick-Wihtol graduated in Spring of 2019 from the University of Oregon with degrees in English and Spanish. During their senior year, they received the Humanities Undergraduate Research Fellowship in order to study portrayals of Judaism in Shakespeare’s work, which birthed this project. In their time at the University of Oregon, they were also involved in the Writing Associates Program, acted as the Executive Committee Director of the UO Poetry Slam Team, and worked as the Social Media Manager for the English Department and Folklore Program. They are currently residing in México and working towards publishing another book. Please direct correspondence to wihtol98@gmail.com.*
scholars have investigated long-ignored evidence of a Jewish population remaining from the 1300s onwards, including detailed records of poll taxes paid by Jewish individuals. With this new evidence in mind, modern scholars have generally asserted that 2,500 to 3,000 Jewish people were still residing in England after the expulsion (Lipman 65). Additionally, archival research shows that Jewish immigrants began trickling back into England almost immediately after the expulsion and arrived in large numbers during the Tudor period, between 1485 and 1603 (Shapiro 62). During Shakespeare’s lifetime, 1564-1616, a community of at least a few hundred Jewish people lived in the bustling city of London, as evidenced by a number of Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition records and from the repeated complaint of Catholic ambassadors residing in England that members of this small Jewish community would meet to observe holidays such as Passover and Yom Kippur. Additionally, the *Domus Conversorum*, a converts’ house on Chancery Lane, housed Jewish converts to Christianity from its establishment in 1232 through the 16th century (Shapiro 2018). Even as these former-Jews were labeled converts, it was common for communities throughout England and other countries that had propagated forced conversion to suspect that converts often Judaized in secret. As historian George Fredrickson states: “Historians of Jews and Judaism disagree on the extent to which these conversions created believing Christians or secret Jews. There is no doubt, however, that the Inquisition proceeded from the assumption that Jewish ancestry per se justified the suspicion of covert Judaizing” (32). Thus, despite the expulsion of the Jewish community centuries before, while Shakespeare was living in England, Jewish people were never far away.

While there is evidence of a Jewish community in England, it was not the size of the Jewish population during Shakespeare’s time that mattered, but rather the political and cultural status of the Jew. The population at large focused a disproportionate amount of attention on Jewish people, which implies that Shakespeare may have been more aware of Judaism and Jewish people than scholars previously assumed. Jewish people were a popular and complex topic that was significant to the English zeitgeist of Shakespeare’s era. There are a variety of examples of Jewish characters in English literature from the 1300s onwards — perhaps most famously Shakespeare’s own character Shylock, as well as Christopher Marlowe’s tale of Barabas in *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*. Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, published in the late 1400s, features a story about Jewish people murdering a Christian child that was widely praised by scholars and critics of the 1500s (Pearsall 298). The traditional English folk song “Sir Hugh,” also popular during this time, details a similar story of a boy who accidentally throws his ball into the garden of a Jewish man, whose daughter then lures the boy into the house and stabs him (Halliwell). In fact, the first recorded accusation of Jewish people murdering Christian children in Europe was made in England as early as 1144, and similar accusations plagued the country for centuries after (Trachtenberg 130). Jewish people are also mentioned in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which was popular and influential in England from its publication in the late 1400s through the mid-1500s (Nicholson 563). By Shakespeare’s time, the Jew had become something of an English cultural preoccupation, regardless of whether or not many Jewish people actually lived in England.
This cultural preoccupation was likely the result of the new concept of nationalism that was emerging in England. As the English began to look to define English-ness, racial and cultural lines were drawn between inside and outside groups. Jewish people in particular posed a problem to this delineation, because they often were not ethnically distinguishable from non-Jewish (goyishe) Englishmen. As Jewish Shakespearian scholar James Shapiro states in his book *Shakespeare and the Jews*:

> The erosion of recognizable difference paradoxically generated ever more strenuous efforts to distinguish Christian from Jew, and, with the increasing emergence of a sense of national identity, Englishman from Jew. One of the things that greatly complicated these efforts was that the answers depended on different ways of conceiving difference — religious, national, racial, physical, sexual — which often overlapped and just as often contradicted each other (35).

The construction of Caliban as Jewish or Jew-like illustrates the difficulties of this delineation, as Caliban also embodies the question of national belonging as the only mortal indigenous occupant of Prospero’s island. Caliban’s complexity has led him to be read in a variety of ways both racially and nationally, although he is traditionally conceptualized as indigenous to the Americas or African, rather than Jewish.

While Caliban is not explicitly Jewish, Shakespeare imbues him with numerous characteristics that Shakespeare and his audience would have recognized as Jewish or Jew-like. My assertion of Caliban as a Jewish-coded character is not meant to disprove reading Caliban in other ways, especially as a colonial or racialized subject, but rather to demonstrate how he is constructed as “Other” in a way that aligns him with and can provide insight into the conceptualization of Jewish people by Elizabethan audiences.

**THOU VILE RACE: JEWISH-CODING CALIBAN THROUGH STEREOTYPES**

Caliban’s construction can be perceived as Jewish in a variety of ways, although perhaps most notably through his adherence to stereotypes often applied to Jewish people in Elizabethan England. These stereotypes include the description of him as the inhuman offspring of a witch and the Devil, his association with sorcery, his portrayal as a rapist of goyishe women and a vicious murderer of goyishe men, his cannibalism, and even his fishy smell.

The characters of *The Tempest* clearly conceptualize Caliban as a different, devilish race; his alien inhumanity is a main tenet of his character, as Miranda says “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill! ... thy vile race, / Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures / Could not abide to be with” (I.ii.356-365). Miranda’s description of Caliban as being unable to take “the print of goodness” and being “capable of all ill” reflects language often used to describe Jewish people as racially different in Shakespeare’s England. As Shapiro states:

> The argument for a degenerative Jewish nature coexisted ... with the belief that the Jews inherited distinctive personality traits ... Robert Burton’s descriptions of the Jews’
“infirmities” and Samuel Purchas’s secondhand observation that Jews suffered from specific diseases ... offer additional evidence that the Jews were thought to be constitutionally different from Christians (Shapiro 36).

The dehumanization of Jewish people through assertions of racial difference and an inherently evil Jewish character quickly led to their association with Christianity’s Devil. By the medieval era, most Europeans thought of Jewish people as “demonic, diabolic beast[s] fighting the forces of truth and salvation with Satan’s weapons” (Trachtenberg 22). Scripture also figured into the construction: in John 8:44 (Geneva Bible), Jesus says to the Jewish leaders whom he is condemning “You are from your father the Devil.” While, in its original context, this quote was focused on corrupt politicians, rather than the Jewish people as a whole, by Shakespeare’s time it had become evidence for the devilish lineage of all Jews. Therefore, when Prospero describes Caliban as a son of Satan — “poisonous slave, got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam” (I.ii.324-5) — he evokes a paternal connection that Caliban shares with Jewish people, the supposed offspring of Satan.

Alongside being associated with the Devil, Caliban is deeply tied to magic, another similarity with the English conception of Judaism. Jewish people had a long history of being aligned with magic and sorcery throughout the Middle Ages and into the 16th century, largely due to “blood libel,” or the popular belief that Jewish people abducted and murdered Christians to use their blood for everything from sacred ceremonies to rouge (Fredrickson 20). The thought that Jewish people possessed an inherent magic was so deeply ingrained and widely held in England that in 1189, the suspicion of Jewish sorcery caused a Jewish delegation bearing gifts and pledges of allegiance to the coronation of Richard I of England to be evicted from the court. English historian Matthew Paris (1200-1259) wrote of the event that the delegation was turned away “because of the magic arts, which used to be practiced at royal coronations for which the Jews ... are infamous” (“Historia Anglorum”). The delegation allegedly planned to use this magic against the king. This event sparked widespread violence against Jewish people which continued into the following year and touched all corners of England — the earliest mass attack on English Jewish communities for sorcery (Trachtenberg 71). Caliban is first introduced in *The Tempest* through the context of his mother Sycorax, a witch. As Prospero says in conversation with Ariel: “This damn’d witch Sycorax, / ... Thou know'st, was banish'd / ... This blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child / And here was left by the sailors / ... the son that she did litter here, / ... Dull thing, I say so; he, that Caliban” (I.ii.266-288). Through the sorcery of his mother, and indeed Caliban’s own attempt at sorcery when he tries to cast a curse on Prospero (I.ii.326-329), Caliban is connected to Judaism, or at least implied as belonging to a Devil- and magic-affiliated race similar to the Jewish people.

The legacy of blood libel carries over into Caliban’s murderous desires, which he repeats throughout the play. Caliban is shown to be particularly creative and bloodthirsty in his bids for Prospero’s demise; he asks for butler Stephano to “knock a nail into his head” (III.ii.60), to “brain him ... or with a log / Batter his skull; or paunch him with a stake; / Or cut his weasand with thy knife” (III.ii.84-88). He also wishes an unusual battery on jester Trinculo: “Bite him to death, I prithee,” (III.ii.32) he begs of Stephano. This murderous tendency is perhaps one of the most striking similarities between Caliban and Shakespeare’s Shylock, who is similarly creatively
murderous. The explicit dynamic in *The Merchant of Venice* — bloodthirsty Jewish villain and forgiving Christian protagonist — is echoed in *The Tempest* between Caliban and Prospero. The murderous Caliban plots a number of bloody ways to end Prospero’s life while Prospero argues that he has shown Caliban undue mercy, — “Thou most lying slave, / Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee, / Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee / In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate / The honor of my child” (I.ii.349-353) — treating him as a son before his attempted assault on Miranda.

In Prospero’s accusation of Caliban’s attempt to rape Miranda, Caliban also falls into the notorious stereotype of a Jewish rapist of goyishe women. The image of Jewish men as “rapacious seducers” of Christian women ran rampant in England during Shakespeare’s time (Shapiro 38, 109). When English courtier William Brereton visited an Amsterdam synagogue in 1635, he noted that the Jewish ‘men are ... insatiably given unto women’ (Shapiro 2018). Caliban’s role as Miranda’s attempted rapist and his unrepentant attitude — “Would 't had been done! / Thou didst prevent me. I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans” (I.ii.354-356) — therefore aligns him with this conception of Jewish men.

As well as a murderer and rapist, Caliban is strongly coded as a cannibal, primarily through his name, which evokes the word “cannibal.” In the multiple spellings of cannibal in circulation in the 1500s and 1600s, one was “Canibal,” an anagram of “Caliban” (Oxford English Dictionary Online). The incredibly slight difference associates Caliban with cannibalism and creates another tie between him and the cultural perception of Jews. Cannibalism was perhaps the most famous presumed crime of Jewish people. Jewish people in England were frequently charged with cannibalizing their victims and consuming their blood for ritual purposes (Shapiro 109). A variety of stories of Jewish cannibalism existed before and during Shakespeare’s time — from a Jewess in Warwick, who was said to have eaten “the mouth and ears” of her victim (Trachtenberg 138) to the myth that Jewish witches ate human flesh at Shabbat meals and that “the meate they ordinarily eate is the flesh of young children, which they cooke and make ready in the Synagogue” (Trachtenberg 214). Although Caliban never explicitly states his desire or tendency towards cannibalism, his name creates the connection for him, and ties him again to the cannibalistic figure of the Jew.

On perhaps a less gruesome note, Caliban also seems to be plagued with an unholy stench reminiscent of the *foetor Judaicus*, or “Jewish odor” attributed to Jewish people throughout Europe (Shapiro 2018). When Trinculo first encounters Caliban, he immediately notes his odor: “What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish. He smells like a fish, a very ancient and fish-like smell, a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish! ... There would this monster make a man” (II.i.24-6). Caliban’s marked odor would have evoked the English belief that Jewish people smelled particularly foul. Anglo-Welsh Historian James Howell (1594 – 1666) reflected this popular thought by writing that Jewish bodies had “that rankish kind of scent no better indeed than a stink” (Shapiro 2018). While Caliban’s stench is not necessarily a sign of Jewishness, it was certainly meant to reflect his “beastliness,” a trait the *foetor Judaicus* shared. Smells were often given moral meaning in the Middle Ages, with “the common Christian belief ... that good spirits emit a marked fragrance, while evil spirits, and in particular, of course, Satan,
are distinguished by an offensive stench” and the related assertion that Jewish people “emit a foul odor as punishment for the crime against Jesus” (Trachtenberg 48). Through his stink, Caliban’s association with evil and the Devil manifests in all aspects of his being, a relationship that many of the English perceived Jewish people to share.

Through a multiplicity of stereotypes — racial difference, sorcery, violence and rapaciousness, cannibalism, and even body odor — Caliban is aligned with the construction of the Elizabethan Jew. This alignment is continued in scriptural terms as well, making the approach to understanding Caliban as a Jew both a cultural and religious one.

**ADAM, ISRAELITE, SON OF CHAM: JEWISH-CODING CALIBAN THROUGH SCRIPTURE**

Throughout *The Tempest*, Caliban also takes on characteristics typical of the Biblical role of a Jew. His position evokes Biblical stories\(^4\) in a way that casts him in Israelite roles — his role on the island is Adam-esque, an almost-man in an Edenic paradise that echoes the Israeli promised land, and his enslavement under Prospero connects both to the Hebrews’ slavery in Egypt and the endemic curse of Cham, son of Noah. Additionally, he puts himself in the position of Israelites by evoking the Old Testament story of Jael while proposing murder plans to Stephano.

Before Prospero and Miranda, Caliban is the first and only mortal on an island meant to rival Eden, both in its bounty and the innocence of its inhabitants. As Lord Gonzalo describes it: “here is everything advantageous to life / ... Had I plantation of this isle, my lord — / All men [would be] idle, all. / And women too, but innocent and pure. / ... nature should bring forth / Of its own kind all foison, all abundance, / To feed my innocent people” (II.i.45-139). The island and its comparison to Eden gives it a scriptural connection to the land of Canaan, the land promised by G-d\(^5\) to Jakob, the father of the Israelites.\(^6\) In Genesis, when Abraham, his wife, and his nephew Lot settle on the land of Canaan, Lot compares it to “the garden of the Lord” (13:10). The ancestral claim of Israelites to the Edenic land of Canaan resonates with Caliban’s genealogical claim to the paradisiacal island: “This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou takest from me” (I.i.337-8). He is connected to the island as a promised land, much like the Israelites were to the land of Canaan and, tangentially, Eden. This connection is strengthened by Caliban’s Adam-like position on the island. Just as “[Adam] named the liuing creature, fo was the name thereof. / The man therefore gave names unto all cateel, and to the foule of the heauen, and to euerie beaft of the field” (Gen 2.19), Caliban speaks of his connection to naming in his first interaction with Prospero: “Thou strok’st me and made much of me, wouldst give me / Water with berries in ‘t, and teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less” (I.ii.338-40). The language of the island is central to Caliban’s connection to it, just as it defines Adam’s role in Eden. In Act III, amongst its wild jungles, Caliban waxes poetic: “Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not. / ... Sometimes voices [Will hum about mine ears] / That, if I then had waked after long sleep, / ... I cried to dream again” (III.i.129-37). His punishment at Prospero’s hands even echoes that of Adam’s — first that he is “All wound with adders who with cloven tongues / Do hiss me into madness” (II.ii.12-3), then his exile from the garden: “here you sty me / In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me / The rest o’th’island”
(I.ii.339-44). In every aspect of his existence on the island, he is Adam-like, and his genetic claim to the island even further connects him to the Israelites of the Bible and their Edenic promised land.

As Caliban’s exile from and connection to an Eden echoes Adam’s and so aligns him with Jakob and the Israelites, his slavery too puts him in a Jewish role reminiscent of Hebrew slavery in Egypt — a slavery that reinforces his entitlement to the land. In Exodus, when G-d demands Moses fight to free the Hebrews, He connects the liberation directly with the promised land: “Furthermore as I made my couenant with them to giue them the land of Canaan ... I haue heard the groning of the children of Ifrael, whome the Egyptians kepe in bondage, & haue remembred my covenent” (6.4). Perhaps it is not ironic or accidental then, but a biblical fate that Caliban is granted his most profound wish and left to his Edenic island at the end of the play.

His slavery also connects Caliban to another figure in Genesis, Noah’s son Cham and his son Canaan, father of the Canaanites, a Semitic group that lived in the Levant and were eventually conquered by the Israelites. Canaan’s descendants were popularly believed to bear the curse of slavery in England in the late 1500s and through the 1600s, and this belief often connected Canaanites to the conceptualization of Jewish people. The first known invocation of the curse of Cham in English writing was in George Best’s 1578 account of Martin Frobisher’s voyage in search for the Northwest Passage, and merchants in the growing slave trade frequently referred to it in the sixteenth century (Fredrickson 45). As the story goes, Noah summons his sons in preparation for the flood, and then gets quite drunk and passes out nude in his tent. Cham happens upon his father’s naked body and tells his brothers, who then respectfully cover their father, never looking at him. When he wakes, Noah realizes what Cham has done and curses Cham’s son, Canaan, to slavery. This descent into slavery echoes Caliban’s own story: one who was “first mine own king” (I.ii.347) but then passed into slavery through a sexual transgression — his attempted rape of Miranda.

Although Canaan is not necessarily genealogically linked to Jewish people, his curse linked them theologically and morally. Notable Anglo-Christian theologians, such as St. Augustine of Canterbury, likened Cham’s view of his father’s nakedness to the Jewish observers who saw Jesus Christ naked on the cross, and Cham’s mocking of his father was believed to be archetypal for all mockers, heretics, and unbelievers, including Jewish people (Braude 133). Additionally, English law and religious statutes had long dictated that Jewish populations should unilaterally serve Christians, often citing scripture. The 1222 council of Oxford issued the statute “because it is absurd that the sons of the free woman [Abraham’s wife, Sarah] should serve the sons of the slave [Hagar] ... we decree that from now on Jews may not have Christian servants,” and Henry III’s 1253 Statute of Jewry states “no Jew may remain in England unless he does the king service; Just as soon as he is born, every Jew, male or female, serves us in some way” (Grayzel 315). Thus, through Caliban’s condemnation to slavery based on his “vile race,” and Cham-like plot, he and Anglo-Jewry are connected by a common enslaved ancestor. Additionally, even in Caliban’s attempts to escape his enslaved position, he keeps his association with the Israelites.

Caliban’s plot to overthrow Prospero and escape his life of slavery mirrors a biblical story that links Caliban to the Israelites and Prospero to an invading army. While all of Caliban’s murderous plans are peculiar, his insistence that Stephano “knock a nail into [Prospero’s] head” (III.ii.60) is
particularly curious because the plan echoes the story of Jael from the Book of Judges. The leader of King Jabin of Canaan’s army, Sisera, fled from a defeat at the hands of the Israelites, and Jael, a Kenite woman sympathetic to the Israelites’ cause and disapproving of Jabin’s harsh 20-year-long reign in Hazor, invited Sisera into her tent to sleep. Once he slept, “Jael ... toke a nayle of the tent, and toke a hammer in her hand, and went softly vnto him, and smote the naile into his temples and fastened it into the grounde ... and fo he dyed ... So God broght downe Jabin the King of Canaan that day before the children of Irael” (4.17). In echoing this story, Caliban casts himself in the role of the Israelites — as he explains to Stephano, his territory has been seized by an oppressive ruler, Prospero, and he languishes under his rule. He pleads with Stephano to play Jael’s role: an outsider who liberates his kingdom by knocking in his enemy’s head.

Caliban’s construction as Jewish goes beyond stereotyping and into biblical belief. Throughout the play, he echoes biblical positions that Shakespeare and his audience would have known well and connected back to the history of Jewish people. These associations are further strengthened by the similarities between Caliban and Shylock, another Jewish Shakespearian character from The Merchant of Venice, which was published a little over two decades before The Tempest.

TWO JEWS WALK ONTO A STAGE: COMPARING CALIBAN AND SHYLOCK

Reading Caliban and Shylock against each other highlights their many similarities and strengthens the reading of Caliban as Jewish, even as it complicates both of their readings by revealing a pattern that casts neither of them as clear-cut villains.

Many of the traits that define Shylock as Jewish are similarly present in Caliban, such as their shared murderous tendencies, associations with the Devil, and cannibalism. For instance, both Caliban and Shylock are held up as pinnacles of cruelty. In The Tempest, Caliban is castigated thoroughly for trying to curse his master. Meanwhile, in The Merchant of Venice, Shylock’s demand for “a pound of flesh” from Antonio is used as an example of Jewish cruelty and bloodthirstiness. His disposition is contrasted by Christian generosity and forgiveness in the court scene, where the Duke apologizes that Antonio must come up against such a ruthless and bloodthirsty foe: “I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer / A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch / Uncapable of pity, void and empty / From any dram of mercy” (IV.i.3-6), and Antonio resigns to his fate saying “You may as well do anything most hard, / As seek to soften that—than which what’s harder?— / His Jewish heart” (IV.i.79-81). Additionally, Shakespeare evokes the Jewish connection to the Devil in The Merchant of Venice when Solano, upon seeing Shylock, says “Let me say ‘Amen’ betimes lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew” (III.i.22). Later in Merchant, the fool Launcelot also comments on the connection, saying “Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnate” (II.ii.27). Caliban shares this explicit connection to the Devil with Shylock, along with their individual associations with cannibalism. Whereas Caliban’s connection comes from his name, Shylock describes using Antonio’s flesh to “feed my revenge” (3.1.50-1) and speaks with Jessica explicitly, if figuratively, about his desire or intent to consume Christians when he is invited to dine with Christian merchants and says, “But wherefore should I go? / I am not bid for love; they flatter me. / But yet I’ll go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian” (II.v.11-15). However, while these similarities strengthen the association
between Caliban and Shylock and other Jewish people, they complicate the narratives these stories are telling about Jewish people.

Even as both Caliban and Shylock are viewed as bloodthirsty villains beyond contempt or redemption, they are given unusually poetic voices which they both use to criticize systems of power. Shylock even goes so far as to criticize Christianity and Christian morals in his historically famous plea for religious tolerance:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, ... affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, ... warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? ... If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute—and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction (III.i.55-66).

This monologue accompanies Shylock’s role as the most religiously faithful character in Merchant. Even as the play’s supposed protagonists condemn Shylock as a “misbeliever, cut-throat, dog / And spit upon [his] Jewish gaberdine” (I.iii.107–108), they delight in recounting the tales of the ancient Greek and Roman gods and goddesses — Solanio refers to Janus, a Roman god (1.150); Portia names Greek Sibylla, lover of Apollo, and Diana, goddess of the moon (1.2.103-104), as well as Cupid (2.9.99), Alcides (3.2.55) and Hercules (3.2.6); Salarino calls on Venus (2.6.5); Bassanio also names Hercules, Mars (3.2.85), and Midas (3.2.102), and Lorenzo and Jessica compare their love to that of endless Greek and Roman tales in the final act (5.1.1-13). Meanwhile, Shylock strictly adheres only to biblical references, highlighting the irony of his fellow Venetians’ religious contempt.

Caliban has a similarly poetic speech appealing to the injustice of his position when he is first introduced:

This island’s mine ... Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first, / Thou strok’st me and made much of me, wouldst ... teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less, / ... And then I loved thee / And showed thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle, / The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile. / Cursed be I that did so! ... / For I am all the subjects that you have, / Which first was mine own king. And here you sty me / In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me / The rest o’ th’ island (I.ii.337-49).

Although Caliban does not fight against Prospero’s accusation of rape or his claim that Caliban was well-treated before it, he is given the chance to speak about his experience before Prospero, granting his view validity and giving him a voice not usually given either to Jewish communities or to the indigenous communities of the countries Europeans were beginning to expand to and colonize. Additionally, Caliban takes the “gift” of language that Prospero gave him and uses it to curse them: “You taught me language, and my profit on ’t / Is I know how to curse” (I.ii.168). In this curse, Caliban echoes Shylock’s sentiment from Merchant; it is with the master’s own tools that he rebels against them.
Finally, the question of Jewish access to paradise is complicated in both Tempest and Merchant. Both characters are permitted to enter paradise at the ends of their plays, although Shylock gains access in a decidedly more ambiguous manner. Where Caliban is left with his beautiful island, Shylock is forcefully converted at Antonio’s request — “for this favor / He presently become a Christian” (IV.i.378-9). While audiences could have presumed Shylock would follow in the footsteps of other forced converts and continue Judaizing in secret, his conversion does imply that, in Christian eyes, his immortal soul should go to Heaven upon his death. Caliban and Shylock are both antagonists and villains — so why do they both have an ultimately desirable fate?

THIS THING OF DARKNESS I ACKNOWLEDGE MINE: THE JEWISH OTHER AND THE JEWISH SELF

How does revisiting Jewish characters like Shylock and Caliban influence how we see Shakespeare and Judaism? They may be showing us that something more complicated than just “Othering” is happening. After all, despite the small Jewish population in England, Judaism and representations of Jewish characters were integral to defining what being English meant during and before Shakespeare’s time. Truly, the anxiety around Jewish people that Merchant and Tempest reveal reflects more on the English anxieties around defining the self than they do around the real lives and actions of English Jewish people.

The proximity and shared Abrahamic root of Christianity and Judaism has always complicated how the two communities interacted with each other. The Apostle Paul was the first to pose the question of how proto-Christians should treat Jewish people who rejected Jesus Christ. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul portrays the Jewish faith as a preparation for the True Law that followed the resurrection of Christ, and the promise of “their moral correction in the future – emblemized by the allegorical tree of salvation in Romans 11:17-24 – ensured that [Jewish people] retained a special, albeit problematic, status” (Potter 34). This complicated status was present in England before and during Shakespeare’s time as well. In the 1160s, before their eviction, Jewish moneylenders had gained prominent positions and increasing power in England’s economy, and many were particularly intimate with the royal government, which caused further suspicion of both royals and Jewish merchants (Potter 3). The political shifts of Shakespeare’s era were slowly evoking a nostalgic reconstruction of the “civility of dying feudal institutions” (Lipton 10), and the construction of the Jew as usurious and bloodthirsty, common by the end of the 12th century, along with the Jew as murderer, poisoner, and political interloper (Shapiro 92), reflects the anxieties of the English at that time not only about Jewish people and other populations perceived as “different,” but also about their own governments and institutions. Whatever the crime, there was always an emphasis on Jewish people’s ability to counterfeit: “In England, Jewish crime — like Jewishness itself — was invariably hidden and insidious, a secret waiting to be unearthed” (Shapiro 9), and this suspicion lent itself to the general air of suspicion that permeated Elizabethan England.

These same suspicions and doubts existed about the Catholic Christian Church as well. The Church’s institutional rise and its expanding influence over Western European society before and
during Shakespeare’s time meant that it was better equipped to spread and compel popular consent to Christian dogma, even throwing its weight behind controversial “miracles,” prompting doubt among increasingly skeptical Christians (Potter 20). The Church used the Medieval and Early Modern claims of Jewish murder, poisoning, and cannibalism to combat this religious skepticism among Christians. While the claims lacked evidentiary support, they effectively assured Christians that even the “crafty Jew” recognized and believed in the power of Christianity, and that their religious rituals circulated around the inherent holiness of Christian blood, bodies, and artifacts (Rubin 99). These stories imbued the Church with power even as they betrayed the widespread psychological disturbance the new Christian doctrine was causing.

In their respective plays, Caliban and Shylock both highlight the internal nature of these anxieties and make it explicit in their monologues on their own mistreatment. Prospero furthers this dynamic; even as Prospero takes on a protagonist role, he, too, can be seen as Jew-like, a politician who manipulates those around him with violence and magic. His association with Judaism is furthered by that fact that, in 1542, a few decades before The Tempest was written, a report from Charles V’s naval excursion against Algiers mentioned a Jewish magician who damaged the imperial fleet to the point of retreat by raising a terrific storm (Trachtenberg 80). The mention of “Argier” (I.ii.263) in the beginning of Tempest, as well as the very name of the play and its opening on a violent storm, connects it back to this folkloric Jewish sorcerer, who would be playing the role of Prospero. Additionally, Prospero evokes the witch Medea when he paraphrases her boasts of magic in Metamorphoses VII: “I have bedimmed / The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, / And ‘twixt the green sea and the azured vault / Set roaring war / … graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let ’em forth / By my so potent art.” (V.i.41-50). By creating a parallel between him and a known witch, he also connects himself back to the “damn’d witch” Sycorax. Medea and her magic also appear in Merchant (V.i.12-14) and tie these plays together in how they evoke and discuss this witch figure. The magic that connects him and these witches also ties him to Caliban, even after he spends the whole play condemning Caliban’s inhumanity and “Otherness.” Perhaps this is why, in the last Act, he says of Caliban “This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (V.i.289-90). The anxiety Jewish people raised for English Christians sprouted from the acknowledgement of a shared root and belonging that their cultural construction of the Jew betrayed, even as it attempted to dehumanize Jewish people and use them as crutches towards defining Englishness and bolstering Christian belief. With this conclusion, we must then consider: perhaps there is not only one implicitly Jewish character in Tempest, but two.

CONCLUSION

Although Jewish communities never fully disappeared from England, the cultural construction of Jews, in which Shakespeare, the Tempest, and the Merchant of Venice all play a part, reveals a web of anxieties much more concerned with the English and Christian conception of the self than with Jewish people themselves. By calling on a wide variety of societal, ethnic, and religious tropes, Shakespeare’s Caliban is effectively “Othered” through Jewish or Jew-like means, even as both he and Shylock’s stories lend an otherwise unheard voice to important debates on nationality
and belonging in Elizabethan England. Their identification with and criticism of their enemies, as well as their fates in paradise despite their religious status further call into question the role of Jewish people and other “outsiders” in England and identify a core insecurity in the construction of English identity. More than revealing the historically accurate experience of Jewish people and those around them, these plays demonstrate a deeper and more insidious look into the lives, experiences, and anxieties of goyishe Englanders. With this in mind, modern scholarship on Shakespeare, especially from scholars working with themes of race, belonging, and ethnicity, should take seriously the possibility that Shakespeare knew more about Jewish people than previously presumed and often cited cultural constructions of “Otherness” in a variety of ways that reflected broader English thought and experience.

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NOTES

1 “Goyishe” is a word with Hebrew and Yiddish roots used to refer to non-Jewish people. “Goy” is a singular noun meaning “non-Jewish person,” “goym” is the plural version, and “goyishe” acts as a descriptive adjective.
2 The more traditional readings of Caliban as indigenous do not necessarily conflict with reading him as Jewish. See Richard H. Popkin, “The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory,” in Menasseh Ben Israel and His World, 63-82.
3 All quotes from The Tempest are from Oxford University Press, 1993.
4 In discussing scripture, I cite exclusively from the Geneva Bible, the primary Biblical text Shakespeare worked from; see John W. Harris, Written in the Margent: Shakespeare’s Metaphor of the Geneva Bible Marginal Notes.
5 Many Jewish people choose to use this spelling to avoid erasing or defacing the Name, which is forbidden in Jewish law.
6 “Moreover G-d faid vnto him, Thy name is Iaakob: thy name fhal be no more called Iaakob, but Iafel fjalbe thy name: and he called his name Irael. /Againe G-d faid vnto him, I am G-d all sufficiet. growe & multiplie: a nation & a multitude of natios fhal fprig of thee, and Kings fhal come out of they loynes. / Alfo I wil giue y land, which I gau to Abraham and Izhak, vnto thee: & vnto they fede after thee wil I giue that land” (Gen 35.10).
7 Cham was also a famously powerful sorcerer in his own right (Braude 124), another thread that connects Caliban as a magical being to Cham and them both to Elizabethan English conceptions of Jews.
8 “he droke of y wine & was dronke & was vncouered in y middles of his tent / and when Ham the father of Canaan fawe the nakedness of his father, he tolde his two brethren without. Then toke Shem and Iapeth a garmet and put it vpon bothe their fhulders and wet backward, and couered the nakednes of their father with their faces backwarde: fo thei fawe not their fathers nakednes. / Then Noah awoke from his wine, and knewe what his yonger fonne had done vnto him, / and faid, Curfed be canaan: a feruant of feruantes fhal he be vnto his brethren” (Gen. 9.21).
9 See Lupton 16.
12 “As I told thee before, I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island” (III.ii.45)
13 All quotes from The Merchant of Venice are from Oxford University Press, 1987.
Technology and Scientific Authority in United States Abortion Policy: Concerns Over a Mechanistic Approach and a Better Way Forward
Momo Wilms-Crowe*, Political Science

ABSTRACT

Building on the pragmatist philosophical tradition and work done by scholars in the field of feminist technological studies, this paper considers abortion as a case study to examine how science and technology interact with systems of knowledge, truth, and power. Paying special attention to how technological authority and notions of expertise have influenced public policy and legislative agendas, I consider the role of technological artifacts in shaping our realities and our legal frameworks. Through a historical review of changes in abortion policy and in conversation with various social philosophers, I make the argument that scientific information has not objectively informed abortion opinion and policy, but rather always been a tool of power, reflective of and contributing to larger systemic inequalities. Moreover, because the fundamentally nuanced biology of human fetal development directly conflicts with the legal and moral urge to clearly demarcate personhood from non-personhood, I outline why any attempts to define personhood or viability based purely on biological evidence is arbitrary, deceptive, and ultimately inappropriate. For this reason, I conclude by advocating for the use of a more contextual approach to policy making, considering larger sociopolitical dynamics of gendered power and oppression as well as the lived experiences of those impacted directly by the legislation. In the current political moment, technology is playing an increasingly large role in our lives, and access to abortion and reproductive rights are being actively threatened by those in the highest ranks in the US government. This paper attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the philosophical journey our society took to reach this junction and suggest a better path forward, centering the values of democracy, dignity, and justice.

INTRODUCTION

*Momo Wilms-Crowe is a senior majoring in political science with minors in ethnic studies and international studies. She is a dedicated member of the activist community and is especially passionate about food justice. She also interns with the UO Prison Education/Inside-Out Program, dedicated to providing quality educational opportunities for incarcerated students. Momo has many hopes for her future as an agent of social change and is considering pursuing a J.D. and working in human rights law and/or opening a community garden and sustainable bakery cooperative with her single mom. Please direct correspondence to annamagd@uoregon.edu.
On February 14th, Kentucky lawmakers on the senate floor listened to the beating heart of a pregnant person’s unborn baby projected over loudspeakers before voting to pass a bill that bans abortions in all cases where a fetal heartbeat can be detected. Republican Senator Matt Castlen defended the bill using the same logic used to pass countless similar bills across the nation in the coming months, announcing unequivocally, “That child in her womb is a living human being, and all living human beings have a right to life” (Schreiner 2019). Fundamentally, this bill, like all abortion policy, rests upon the metaphysical and moral questions of what qualifies as human life and when human life begins. Senator Castlen, like many contemporary law makers, drew answers to these questions from information made possible only through technology – in this case a heartbeat detected by vaginal ultrasound – highlighting the power of technology and science in shaping the human experience of and in the world and our understanding of complex moral issues.

The realm of law and policy is where answers to these questions become institutionalized and conceptions of personhood become operationalized, offering a key space to analyze how scientific development influences public health and discourse through its influence on legislation. The controversial nature of the debate and rich legal history demonstrates that abortion is a prime topic to examine the mutually informed and reinforcing relationship between science, morality, power, and policy. It also invites reflection on how scientific knowledge and technology reflect and reinforce broader constructions of power and value. Accordingly, this paper will explore diverse perspectives relating to ontological personhood with reference to philosophical, theological, anthropological, and biological arguments to explore how power and authority are inextricably tied to the creation of knowledge. This linkage requires us, if we are operating with intellectual integrity, to consciously state our values, and choose to prioritize sources of authority that align with those values in the creation of public health policy. This essay will make the case that democracy, dignity, and justice are the relevant values at play in choosing sources of authority for this issue. Science as a discipline struggles to comment on those values, necessarily abstract and ambiguous, which is why progress on narrow, technical questions – such as fetal personhood – mistakenly leave the genuine issues by the wayside while maintaining structural inequalities. For these reasons, I maintain that scientific authority alone should not dictate reproductive health policy. Instead, this paper will argue that the conversation about abortion will only address the most important questions if we consider the broader context surrounding this issue and explicitly incorporate appropriate sources of moral and intellectual authority in the policy making process alongside scientific knowledge.

A PRAGMATIST ACCOUNT OF TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

Various philosophers and historians of science, especially those of the pragmatist tradition, contend that so-called scientific “truths” are not absolute, apolitical, nor objective, but socially constructed, open to change and influenced by power and political interests (Rorty 1991; Kuhn 1979; Latour & Woolgar 1986; James 1907; Dewey 1927). For example, emphasizing the fluid and procedural nature of verifying truths in the general sense, leading American philosopher William James wrote that, “The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events.” (1902: 920, my emphasis). Likewise, Bruno
Latour and Steve Woolgar, both sociologists of science, challenge rationalist ideas about truth and consider science specifically as a discipline according to a pragmatist framework. In an anthropological account of life in a laboratory, they explain how scientific facts are neither objective nor intrinsic reflections of reality, but rather are created by scientists who are influenced by socialization much as any other member of society (Latour & Woolgar 1986). Under this construction, knowledge is not necessarily correspondent to reality or “truth” (in the universal, impossibly abstract understanding of the word) but instead the outcome of a cyclic process of legitimation and consensus building among scientists, which dictates which questions are asked, what methods are available for answering said questions, and ultimately what scientists are willing to identity as a fact. In his landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, American philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1970) describes these bounded conditions as the existing “paradigm,” asserting that all science is necessarily constrained by conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and instrumental commitments and assumptions about how the world operates. This understanding of knowledge recognizes the inherent subjectivity in all human activity, which interacts with the universe and material conditions but necessarily rests on human translation, interpretation, and analysis of the material world. While many scholars and practitioners alike mistakenly conflate our bounded interpretation of material conditions with notions of rationalistic, unbiased truth and assert that science is therefore objective and apolitical (Tyson 2015), a look at history reveals clearly how scientific facts have changed periodically and been influenced by factors supposedly beyond the bounds of science such as politics, ideological interests, and power.

To illustrate the construction of scientific facts within the larger environment of power dynamics, we can consider the notion of biological sex. Sex according to a male/female binary has traditionally been considered a neutral category of biological analysis in mainstream Western culture, inscribed in laws and resting on the assumption that it is natural and scientifically predictable. Meanwhile, gender is often considered to be a more social phenomenon, an identity not determined purely by biology. Judith Butler (1999) however, along with other postmodern feminist scholars, challenges the commonly held distinction between sex and gender in which sex is viewed as biological and gender as culturally constructed. She asserts that both are culturally constructed and neither neutral (see also Beauvoir 1949; Delphy 1984; Hood-Williams 1996; Hird 2000). Employing an approach to discourse and knowledge-power informed by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, she argues that so called “natural” facts around “biological” sex have been discursively produced by scientific discourse in service of other political or social interests, chiefly maintaining a hierarchical system of patriarchy. The cultural construction of biological sex as a phenomenon is evident in how it does not make sense or exist outside of an understanding of and contrast to gender; we can only describe biological sex because we rest on assumptions about gender. Butler argues sex is not inherent but rather a product of gender, which is a product of the patriarchy. In this way, understanding sex as a neutral, objective, apolitical condition of reality mistakenly overlooks the intimate connections between constructions of knowledge and broader power dynamics. The result is the perpetuation of unequal power, under the dangerous guise of neutral, objective truth. The pragmatist philosophical understanding of the construction of scientific facts is therefore core to an analysis of abortion and reproductive
rights politics. These policies, and the debates around them, increasingly revolve around supposedly neutral scientific arguments without an adequate recognition of their history, social context, and inherent relationship to gendered power dynamics.

In relation to abortion, a similar dynamic is visible in the biological construction of the trimester system and conditions of fetal “viability.” These now common concepts are not inherently reflective of biological development, but rather products of legal and political pressure which has molded scientific research and knowledge creation. Landmark Supreme Court case Roe v. Wade (1973) established the constitutional right to obtaining an abortion, qualified with temporal conditions under which access is restricted. Growing from an assumption that the state has a legitimate interest in protecting both the pregnant person’s health and the “potentiality of human life,” the ruling outlines the trimester system and conditions of viability, establishing three stages of development where the rights of the pregnant person and the rights of the State (acting on behalf of the “potential human life”) compete at “compelling points” as the pregnant person approaches term. The ruling asserts that the state obtains the power to regulate abortion only in the second trimester, the “stage subsequent to viability.” This profoundly significant legal language implies biological articulation of the moment of fetal personhood and scientists have consequently made efforts to define viability through technical means.

Despite the importance of scientifically defining personhood and viability for legal jurisdiction, biological study of prenatal development has revealed principally that conception and fetal development are continuums, with many points and processes between conception and birth that one may relate to be the beginning of human life (Beller & Zlatnik 1995, Flower 1984; Rysavy et al. 2015; Jones 1989). Nevertheless, biomedical research has explored a various markers of personhood, giving rise to various biological terms such as implantation, conception, viability, and neuromaturation that have been strategically employed by policy advocates and philosophers alike to argue for the scientific backing of their moral claims about abortion (Brody 1975; Goldenring 1985; DeFede 2019; Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith). Ultimately though, the grey area inherent in biological development reflects that attempts to demarcate the process according to biological attributes are arbitrary and artificial. Scientists have attempted to define these categories because lawmakers constructed them. As with sex and gender, the facts reflect construction through legal discourse and not any underlying, neutral, objective truth about reality or observable material conditions.

Because knowledge creation is subjective, scientists often have difficulty reaching clear technical conclusions when articulating their findings and often refrain from making conclusive moral claims. Beller & Zlatnik (1995), for example, in discussion of the trimester system, reflect hesitation in using hazy biological evidence as the basis of legal rulings, asserting that, “it is a questionable practice to use weeks of pregnancy to determine viability.” They argue that the question of viability and fetal personhood is less a scientific enterprise than a “spiritual” one, and that the various biological measures of personhood upon which legal jurisdiction are based (i.e. neuromaturation, implantation, viability, potentiality) are reflective more so of the political interests dominating legislative bodies at the time than fetal developmental reality. Similarly
reflective of the haziness of biological evidence, Flower (1984) discusses the results of his research on neuromaturation:

We can say a few things about fetal neuromaturation with some assurance: central nervous system activity begins early in development; fetal motor activity is spontaneous; and the neocortex completes its inclusion into the neuraxis after mid-gestation. On the other hand, these findings fall far short of serving the tasks we would like to ask of them. They permit us to make very little headway on the question of fetal sentience, for example. (248)

Jones (1989) also writes about the failure of his research on electroencephalogram (EEG) technology in providing clear evidence in favor of absolutist views of personhood, claiming it allows only for generalizations. He asserts that the overwhelming impression of brain development is only that of its gradualness and “what follows from that is that, at present at least, it is impossible to recognize a distinct point of transition from a 'non-brain' to a 'brain', or from a non-functioning nervous system to a functioning one” (176). Scientists themselves seem to recognize the subjective nature of their knowledge creation, and the difficulty of coming to clear technical solutions. This reflects, perhaps unwittingly to them, the danger of compounding scientific truth, authority, law, and morality in a rationalist sense in which scientific truth holds unlimited authority over policy and law - and thus our morality and lives.

Scientists’ tentative positions stand in stark contrast with how some bioethical philosophers have appropriated the “evidence” of neuromaturation in moral arguments against abortion. Goldenring (1985), for example, asserts that “brain birth” is the morally significant threshold for life, at which point abortion becomes morally impermissible. By implying that the brain has a definite moment of life and using scientific evidence (albeit misunderstood) in defense of moral claims, he not only fails to recognize that scientific facts are not absolute or inherently true but also suggests a belief that technical answers have the capacity to answer philosophical or moral questions. Legislators have taken a similar approach, visible in the plethora of proposed state policies that ban abortion according to technical biological criteria, including conception, gestational duration, and viability (Guttmacher Institute 2019). Nevertheless, common across discussion among scientists is the conviction that their findings fall short of answering the central questions at hand and of urgent desire for policy makers: what constitutes human personhood and when does it begin? The fundamentally nuanced biological reality directly conflicts with the legal and moral urge to clearly demarcate personhood from non-personhood. This tension makes any attempts to define personhood or viability based purely on biological evidence arbitrary, deceptive, and ultimately inappropriate.

TECHNICAL AUTHORITY, MORALITY, AND POWER

The dynamic interplay between law, science, and morality is not a recent phenomenon and a historical account of abortion legislation across time reflects how scientific knowledge has influenced and been influenced by social, legal, and political factors. While the contemporary context may lead us to assume that abortion has always been a source of controversy or
criminalized in some capacity, historical records reveal that abortion was largely a non-issue until the 1900s and today’s legal approaches are, much as the medical diagnostic technology invoked in their support, in the words of Justice Blackmun, of “relatively recent vintage” (Roe v. Wade 1973). Ancient societies across the world engaged in practices of fertility control through contraception and abortifacients and abortion was not commonly banned (Riddle 1994). Over time, building on Aristotelian ideas of embryology which described a process of gradual hominization and defined the “quickening,” the moment when the pregnant person first perceives fetal movement, as the moment in which life in the womb becomes human, laws began to shift in favor of restricting mid- to late-term abortions. English Common Law in the Middle Ages, for example, declared abortions a criminal offense only after the “quickening,” permitting them freely before (Mohr 1978). Across this time period, medical diagnostic technology remained limited and engagement with life in the womb rested generally on directly tactical physical perceptions and abstract metaphysical conceptions of life. Laws rested primarily on the authority of moral arguments rather than modern scientific or technical evidence.

The late 19th century introduced a turning point, establishing the roots of the legal regime still in place today and unmistakably tied to the development of modern scientific-technological systems. In 1857, the newly formed American Medical Association (AMA) created a Committee on Criminalizing Abortion and adopted an unprecedented resolution calling on states to criminalize removal of any zygote, embryo, or fetus growing inside a pregnant person (Castuera 2017). Growing from post-Enlightenment ideals of scientific rationality and built upon technological advancements, especially the stethoscope (developed in 1816), the doctors forming the AMA realized that the “quickening” was not the beginning of human life and conception and gestation constituted a continuous process of development. As science increasingly replaced religious doctrine as a source of authority in a widening set of public domains, especially education and law, the AMA’s medicalization of and technical approach to abortion caused key changes in public policy (Castuera 2017). Science attained an unprecedented level of cognitive authority as academic disciplines became operationalized and technical medical experts gained direct influence over policy unlike ever before, a result of the concentration of divisions of knowledge (Barnes 1985). Accordingly, restrictive abortion legislation gained traction in the 1860s, first criminalizing abortion as a misdemeanor with only the abortion practitioner at fault, and then evolving into a felony charge with the pregnant person and the abortion practitioner facing charges (Crosby 1980: 357). These laws, which relied upon newly available technical knowledge in answering moral questions, remained in place until questioned by legal challenges in the late 20th century, namely Roe v. Wade (1973).

Interestingly, medical diagnostic technology and the AMA’s technical approach to abortion also influenced religious perspectives in unforeseen ways, indicating the influence of science on religious morality as well as secular. With reference to the absence of direct discussion of abortion in both St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica and the Bible, Castuera (2017), argues that “religious dogmatism and ethical certainty on abortion were rare in the past and only became dominant themes in the 19th century” (121). This is clear when one considers that the Vatican became staunchly rooted in the belief that conception marks the beginning of the sanctity of life.
only in the mid-1800s. Only after the AMA began to push their anti-abortion campaign did the Catholic church incorporate abortion into the framework of the 5th Commandment (“thou shalt not kill”) and declare abortion at any stage a grave sin with the rationality that “human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human must be recognized as having the rights of a person, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). This bioethical perspective, inspired largely by technical advances and AMA’s scientific approach to the moral question of abortion has held fast and many contemporary Catholic leaders remain staunch in their position that abortion is a “serious evil” and morally equivalent to homicide (Pacholczyk 2018). The influence of these ideas has permeated beyond the Catholic church into politics as well.

In response to Roe v. Wade, various groups have challenged the assumption that viability constitutes personhood, often combining religious arguments with information only recently accessible with new technological advances. Especially influential in national politics, the Republican Party broke from a historically pro-choice position and adopted a platform in 1976 that promised an anti-abortion constitutional amendment, with the assertion that the sanctity of life begins at conception (Williams 2011). This decision radically shifted national legislative politics and political culture and led to increased state-by-state legal restrictions resting on the treatment of an embryo as person from the moment of conception. Accordingly, states began to criminalize the killing of early embryos with feticide or fetal homicide statutes, recognized civil claims for damages against anyone who negligently causes the wrongful death of an early embryo, and gave early embryos all the rights and protections conferred on children (Peters 2006: 200-201). With further development of medical diagnostic tools and the advancement of ultrasound technology, technical scientific arguments were employed to further support bans on early abortion. “Heartbeat bans” such as that introduced in Kentucky earlier this year which restrict abortion from the moment a fetal heartbeat is detected have gained popularity recently, drawing on data collected with the help of vaginal ultrasound technology (Heartbeat Bans Legislative Tracker).

As evident in the historical shift in approach to abortion spurred largely by increasingly technical methods of analysis, technological artifacts, as manifestations of scientific theory, have a core role in shaping perspectives and carry an inherent political salience. In the translation of the ideas revealed with technology into public policy, technology has the indirect capacity to perpetuate hierarchies of power and therefore must be considered in their larger socio-political context much in the same way we do so with scientific truths. The context of abortion politics requires this particularly given the heavy reliance on medical diagnostic technology. Political theorist Langdon Winner (1986) proposes that technological advancements are not merely neutral aids to human activity, but rather powerful forces that actively shape human activity and meaning. In Winner’s view, technologies carry political significance because they shape arrangements of power and authority in society. Although many describe technology as neutral in the same way that scientific knowledge is viewed as neutral and objective, Winner makes it clear that technology is assuredly political and subjective, writing that “technology is [potentially]
implicated in perpetuating antidemocratic power relations” (7). In the context of abortion, this dynamic is visible in how the technological regime in place in a given historical context directly influences how politicians and religious leaders alike think about personhood and manage questions of reproductive rights, making claims of control over people’s bodies accordingly.

Developments in ultrasound technology in particular reflect a key example of how technological innovation drastically shapes not only understandings of the phenomenon in focus but also broader social questions and power dynamics. To understand how dramatic the development of ultrasound technology was, we must first consider how the introduction of this technology created a shift in perception. Flower (1985) writes that, "If once the fetus was a stranger to us, such is not the case today. The fetal human no longer develops unseen but is photographed in utero...With the aid of ultrasound, a woman can view the fetus within her body, seeing it move about long before she will be able to feel its stirrings” (237). Ultrasound technology offered an unprecedented opportunity to “peer inside the womb,” in doing so radically altering not only norms and practices in pregnancy but conceptions of personhood and the bodily autonomy of people with the capacity for pregnancy (shortened PCP from now on). At its most dramatic, this new technological viewpoint has led some to view PCP in strictly reproductive terms, reducing the pregnant person to simply an objectified vessel for new life, lacking agency or subjectivity themselves. For example, incoming Florida house speaker Jose Olivia recently referred to PCP as “host bodies” five times in an interview with CBS News when asked a question about abortion, placing moral emphasis entirely on the fetus and overlooking the pregnant person’s fundamental personhood (DeFede 2019).

Technological advances, in their seeming ability to show us a reality “more real” than that which we observe without the technology, also fundamentally change our relation to truth. Cultural anthropologist Lisa Mitchell (2001) asserts, like Winner, that technology, in this case sonography, is not passive nor neutral. Rather, she argues it changes our relationship to ourselves, each other, and larger metaphysical ideas of truth. She writes, “I look at ultrasound images not as neutral windows onto the fetus but rather as artefacts emerging out of particular historical, social, and cultural contexts” and encourages us to consider “the extent to which fetal images may engage, contest, and transform other meanings, for example about nature, technology, identity, normality, gender, and motherhood” (4). Viewing ultrasound technology in the way in which many view sonographic images - as a “neutral window” that lets us better “discover nature” - reflects a rationalist tendency to view scientific development as the key to understanding the abstract nature of the universe. Yet as I have discussed, this view is mistaken because it overlooks the fundamental subjectivity of scientific truths, as well as the broader impacts of technologies that stem from those scientific facts. Mitchell, like Kuhn and Latour & Woolgar, make clear that we must come to a better understanding of how technologies and the scientific knowledge they inform are connected with the surrounding historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Scholars in the field of feminist technological studies (FTS) have done precisely this. In particular, they have considered how technology interacts with gendered social hierarchies and reinforces dynamics of power and privilege and how technological regimes are both productive and reflective of the surrounding cultural and political regimes. This is surely the case with
medical diagnostic technology such as ultrasonography. Taylor (2008) argues that ultrasound technology, in entering public consumer culture, has changed women’s perceptions of their own subjectivity and embodiment, which are now “rendered newly problematic by technologies of visualization” (29). Her use of the word “problematic” references the increased erasure of pregnant people’s agency from conversations about abortion, seen for example in Olivia’s characterization of PCP as mere “host bodies.” American Political Scientist Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1987) similarly highlights the critical social and political significance of sonographic imagery in an analysis of how ultrasound photographs and videos operate within a larger “rhetoric and politics of vision” to increase the medical intervention in pregnancy that ultimately renders pregnant people as increasingly objectified and under state control. As the focus shifts to fetal life, adult pregnant people themselves become nearly invisible (or rendered non-human) given the emphasis on their identity in purely reproductive terms.

This dynamic is visible in how the Christian Right and the Republican Party utilized ultrasound technology in their pro-life political strategy, beginning with the Women’s Ultrasound Right to Know Act (Rodrigues 2004). Inspired by a study that claimed that early fetal ultrasound examination increases maternal bonding and possibly resulted in fewer abortions (Fletcher & Evans 1983), they began pressing for mandatory ultrasounds in the hope that it would dissuade abortion. Rodrigues characterizes these measures as an intervention of gendered Foucauldian biopower, highlighting how women’s bodies and agency became increasingly under State control in the process. Rodrigues describes biopower as “the processes by which human life, which includes biological and anatomic ‘mechanisms’ as well as vital processes at the population level (e.g., birth and death rates), are rendered measurable and controllable by discourses, practices, and institutions of power” (57). In this framework, Right to Know measures gave the State increased permission to control PCP bodies while simultaneously diminishing PCP’s bodily and sexual autonomy. In this way, technology “mediated reality and the politics of gender and reproduction” (Mitchell 2001: 4). Therefore, discussion of the fetus and ultrasound technology is inseparable from talk about gender and power. Viewing medical technology in this light changes our understanding of scientific development and adds a critical layer to our understanding of abortion history. If we consider the technological regime as fundamentally tied to dynamics of power, it becomes clear that the increased technological management of pregnancy across time (by predominantly male medical professionals) has rendered PCP with less power and autonomy over their own bodies. We are thus presented with the question of what we can do to address this historic imbalance and create a more egalitarian and democratic future in which “as a matter of justice, people [are] able to influence the basic circumstances of their lives” (Sclove 1995: 25).

AN ARGUMENT FOR PRIORITIZING DEMOCRACY

Before continuing to suggest a possible path forward with regards to the role of science and technology, it is worth taking a moment to justify my preference for democracy and explain what I mean by the term. My preference for democracy is rooted in an understanding of strong democracy, in particular. Strong democracy, as theorized by political philosophers and political scientists, describes a condition in which citizens have access to power and say in society in a
substantive sense, giving them control over the conditions of their lives. Ample literature has suggested the urgent need to “deepen” democracy in societies around the world, emphasizing that strong democracy entails more than just establishing a set of policies and institutions that appear democratic in the minimal sense (Dewey 1927; Skopkol 2003; Rice et al. 2015; Crenson et al. 2002; Cornwall 2002; Collier & Levitsky 1997; Gaventa 2006; Lukham et al. 2000; Fung, Wright, & Abers 2003). Gaventa (2006) pictures democracy as an ongoing process and explains the need to critically examine the inclusivity and substance of democracy, “especially in terms of how citizens engage with democratic spaces to create more just and equitable states and societies” (8). Along similar lines, Rorty (1999) claims we must be maximally inclusive of all citizens, “extend[ing] the reference of ‘us’ as far we can see.” Citizens’ participation in this framework goes beyond the “trivial role” of simply engaging in representational electoral politics; in a deep democracy, lay people have access to not only voting but the agenda setting process itself, built upon access to technical knowledge and the authority that comes with it (Sclove 1995: 241). Sclove suggests that deep democracy gains legitimacy, ostensibly over other forms of non-democratic governance (i.e. authoritarianism, oligarchy, dictatorship, monarchy), because “only democratic forums can supply impartiality born of the balance among multiple perspectives, the opportunity for reflection, and the full range of social knowledge needed to reach this determination” (38). Inspired by thinkers such as these, I am convinced that a strong democracy, in which politics is deeply participatory and responsive to citizens, there is a distributive access to authority over agenda setting, and citizens have substantive agency in political processes, is an ideal political arrangement. It seems to provide the best means of ensuring citizens are treated with dignity and equality.

Relevant in the context of this paper with its consideration of medical diagnostic technology, sociologist S. Barry Barnes (1985), building on the work of German political philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, considers the role of technology in democracy. He describes two types of anti-democratic societies that restrict access to authority and power and limits the public’s engagements with the agenda setting process. First, “technocratic” societies are those in which technical experts alone have direct control of political activity. In contrast, “decisionist” societies include a layer of political elites who mediate between the public and technological experts. In both cases, the great mass of society is largely still “depoliticized,” or effectively cut off from any real involvement in ongoing political activity (100). Barnes asserts the danger of falling into the trap of technocracy, in which important social questions become reduced to “small problems of management and maintenance,” and “society becomes perceived as a smoothly operating machine needing regular servicing and occasional repair” that only technical experts can provide. This monopoly over power is undesirable according to our framework of strong democracy and should be avoided when we consider how technology and science interact with public policy.

A CONTEXTUALIST WAY FORWARD

Informed by a commitment to a strongly democratic approach, I suggest we can ground a framework for moving forward with regards to abortion politics in an understanding of what American philosopher Stephen Pepper calls “world hypotheses.” An analysis using Pepperian
world hypotheses both offers a suggestion of what might be contributing to the challenge of answering the questions posed in the debate currently and gives us a more desirable way forward. Pepper (1942) proposes that four “world hypotheses,” each grounded in a root metaphor, explain how most people operate in and make theoretical sense of the world. They are broad collections of assumptions about the nature of systems and objects and their relationship to each other that dictate how people integrate information and how they approach problem solving. Mechanism, grounded in the root metaphor of the machine, is the world hypothesis that describes the dominant approach to abortion policy. Mechanism attempts to provide cohesive explanations of concrete phenomena and strives to makes causal claims, with the assumption that one can understand how the world works if one understands the “cogs” at play in the “machine.” A mechanistic approach suits most scientific endeavors well and is visible in the approaches taken by the biologists and policy makers with regard to defining fetal personhood and drawing moral claims from technical biological evidence. Most researchers studied a limited aspect of fetal development and attempted to explain a particular fact in depth by studying the parts at work in the fetal “machine.” Lawmakers and contemporary legal history reflect similarly mechanistic tendencies in their acceptance of and reliance on this purportedly concrete and cohesive scientific evidence, such as markers of fetal viability. Policy-making has restricted its focus to the technical question of when human life begins and attempted to answer that question by looking at specific information collected through technology such as ultrasounds or EEG, assuming that if we can come to technical answers we can create good public health policy. That emphasis has been the driving force, overshadowing the larger moral questions of agency and bodily autonomy. This singular focus on technical answers with limited involvement of other sources of popular authority reflects tendencies that are common in what Barnes called “decisionistic” societies, which we should recall are not strongly democratic given their concentration of power.

An alternate world hypothesis, contextualism understands everything in the world to be operating in “intrinsically complex” and “interconnected” events (Pepper 1942: 233). In contrast to mechanism, contextualism is better suited to explain a concept in relation to the bigger picture and is less firmly rooted in an attempt to fit phenomena into a cohesive answer. I propose that a conceptual gap exists in the discussion of abortion between the proposed questions and the mechanism for answering, lending to the difficulty in using science in the debate around reproductive rights and morality. The question of when personhood begins is necessarily broad. It inherently contains considerations of justice, ethics, and personal freedom. So to attempt to answer it using a mechanistic approach that narrowly draws on a constrained collection of biologically evident information is a mistake. A purely mechanistic approach cannot possibly answer a resolutely contextual question, explaining scientists’ inability to conclusively do so. Moreover, there is a danger in an overly mechanistic approaching to this issue, as is evident in Olivia’s “host body” comment. The constrained scope of mechanism can lead people to view pregnant people as fetus-hosting machines, incubation devices devoid of agency, rather than as a full people. Failing to look beyond the “cogs” thus carries the potential of objectifying PCP according strictly to their reproductive capacities and ignoring the critical importance of human dignity.
Beyond being too narrow, a mechanistic approach may simply be incompatible with the question, making any appeals to biological “evidence” in defense of moral claims purely scientistic. Hanlon (2019) describes “scientism” as the “untenable extension of scientific authority into realms of knowledge that lie outside the scope of what science can justifiably determine.” He argues that scientism constitutes an illegitimate appeal. Barnes (1985) remarks that, “the authority of science does not have unlimited scope. It does not extend to the realm of morals” (90). Thus, any attempt to do so is a scientific misuse of scientific information and must be regarded with skepticism.

All this is not to say science has no part in the making of policy, with regards to abortion or otherwise. Questions involved necessarily rely, in part, on scientific knowledge about the human body and technology has surely led to many social goods in our increased understanding of these processes of development and reproduction. We must only take care in deciding which questions are appropriate for the application of science and which are perhaps better answered by another type of knowledge, say lived experience. As Rorty (1999) writes, “there is nothing wrong with science, there is only something wrong with the attempt to divinize it, the attempt characteristic of realist philosophy” (34). In forming a cohesive policy, Pepper would recommend we employ instead an approach of “reasonable eclecticism,” drawing from various world hypotheses and knowledge bases to avoid dogmatism or concentration of authority that results if we remain in a strictly mechanistic worldview. Different problems and questions require different approaches. Recognizing that reality offers us a better opportunity to solve problems, according to the goal of fostering a strongly democratic society. Humphreys & Piot (2012), drawing on their extensive experience in the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, assert that scientific evidence alone is not a sufficient basis for health policy, especially with regards to issues of critical moral significance. They write, “although science should inform health policy, it cannot be the only consideration” because “in a democracy there can be no experts on values.” Although they do not use Pepper’s terms, their conclusions highlight the importance and efficacy of a reasonably eclectic approach to health policy on a similarly controversial topic.

With the understanding that technological artifacts have political salience, scientific knowledge is imbued in complex dynamics of power, and technical knowledge can be arbitrarily employed in support of political interests, we must approach abortion policy with a more contextualist approach that recognizes and incorporates other sources of moral and intellectual authority, especially that of everyday people who are impacted by policies. To do so requires first a reconsideration of who we consider experts on the matter and who we give authority over policy. Currently, abortion policy reflects a decisionistic tendency with technical experts holding authority and lawmakers relying heavily on biological evidence. If we wish to be more deeply democratic, that must change. Grassroots feminist activism has suggested another, more deeply democratic possibility and urges us to question who we are listening to as authorities on the matter. In 1969, the New York Joint Legislature Committee on the Problems of Public Health gathered to consider reforming the state’s abortion laws. Outraged that lawmakers were making this decision based solely on consultation with a panel of “experts” that included just 14 male medical practitioners and a Catholic nun, members of the radical feminist group, the Redstockings, organized a speak-
out and protest. Disguised, activists infiltrated the hearing audience and then disrupted mid-proceeding, shouting at legislators: “All right, now let’s hear from some real experts: the women!” (Mahoney 2015, my emphasis). The activists were removed, and the hearing was eventually moved to another room behind closed doors, reflecting yet again a decisionistic tendency that concentrated power and put a gendered monopoly on authoritative knowledge. Despite ultimately not changing the policy outcome, the Redstocking activists’ bold reframing of who should be considered “experts” with regards to abortion offers an important reminder about the value of citizens’ knowledge, rooted in lived experiences. This example reveals the critical significance of considering “the full range of social knowledge” in the policy making process.

Consciously considering medical diagnostic technology’s relationship with democracy is yet another way we can encourage a strongly democratic approach in line with a more contextualist worldview. Historically, there has been a strongly undemocratic—and often openly misogynistic—approach to reproductive and gynecological technology with cis men hegemonically dominating medical research (intellectual authority), spaces of medical practice (practical authority), and policy spaces (political authority) (Bray 2007; Crosthwaite 2014; Miles 1991; Scully 1980). Given such a trend, adopting a more conscious approach with the critical awareness of how this technology has engaged in gender hierarchies across history is all the more urgent, assuming equality and justice are goals we choose to prioritize. Sclove (1995), in explaining the need for approaching technology with democratic design criteria, asserts that lay people, especially those impacted by the technology, should be involved in both the processes of technological design and policy-making that involves technology and science. In the case of abortion and medical diagnostic technology, that implies PCP’s roles have been vastly underrepresented, as the Redstocking activists highlighted in their protest. Using democratic design criteria could change that, in doing so simultaneously avoiding what Winner calls “technological somnambulism,” which describes the undesirable process by which we fail to recognize the profound political significance of technology and create or adopt technology without thinking about its larger social implications (9). It could help ensure that technologies and the policies resting on them pass what Sclove called the “reality test,” grounded in the daily experiences and concerns of everyday people that expert conclusions often routinely fail to consider in their overly technical approach to problem solving.

Luckily, a more democratic policy-making process is already in practice in other contexts, offering a worthwhile example to consider. To cite but one example, Irish Citizen’s Assembly was established in 2016 as a groundbreaking “exercise in deliberative democracy, placing the citizen at the heart of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society” (The Citizens’ Assembly; Irish Citizens’ Assembly Project). With the help of expert evidence, 100 citizen members (from various backgrounds who were selected to be both random and electorally representative) considered the most pressing and controversial legislative topics, including abortion, gay marriage, and climate change. As a collective, they formed conclusions which were then outlined in reports and submitted to Parliament for further debate by elected officials. In the case of abortion, the Citizens’ Assembly recommended, with two third support amongst the participants, a reform of the current Eighth Amendment (which restricted abortion and inscribed an “equal right to life of
the pregnant women and the unborn”) to allow unrestricted access to abortions. Motivated by the Citizens’ Assembly report, a public referendum to remove the constitutional ban on abortion was put to popular vote and passed with over 66.6% support from Irish voters in May 2018. In a context where touching abortion had been viewed as political suicide by politicians give in controversial nature, this outcome stands as a stunning breakthrough for a seemingly intractable issue that nevertheless carries critical importance for the majority of the population.

This example reveals the possibility of tangible legislative results coming out of such a process and the power of considering alterative models for deep democracy. Doing so can radically transform conversation around highly controversial topics by including the lived experiences of those impacted by policy. For example, one participant member of the Citizens’ Assembly explained that, “the members of the assembly were faced with expert testimony on medical and legal matters but also testimony from their fellow citizens whose lives were deeply impacted by the 8th” (Guardian readers and Bannock 2019). The result, as another member described, as increased empathy and the centering of “real people” in policy. Moreover, the process had the impact of encouraging citizen engagement and cultivating civic confidence, at a low in Ireland since the financial crisis of 2008 (Taylor 2019). By taking the debating of contentious issues “right back down into the hands of the people on the electoral roll,” it established the belief that this was a transparent process and that voting citizens “were not being preached at or lied to,” so often the case in politics (Guardian readers and Bannock 2019). Louise Caldwell, a participant member of the Citizens’ Assembly recounted the impact on public trust stating that, “I would definitely take part in a Citizens’ Assembly again. I felt empowered and informed – it gave me the language and skills to have difficult conversations” (Caldwell 2019). Another participant called it a “unbeatable process” and suggested Citizens’ Assemblies may hold the key to some of the most gridlocked political issues, such as Brexit. With the Irish example appearing an apparent success, perhaps it is time we in the US consider implementing a similar model. Of course, the context is vastly different, and it is not a matter of simply replicating the process exactly, but I believe we could benefit greatly by considering new political arrangements, or at least experimenting with new models, with reproductive health as just one arena that appears ripe for this approach.

CONCLUSION

It should now be clear that abortion laws are not and have never been pure reflections of scientific consensus but rather, “reflections of the interests of a given society at a given time” (Beller & Zlatnik 1995:482). This recognition is powerful as it allows us to move beyond naively rationalist concerns over scientific objectivity and questions of technical accuracy and into broader, more contextualist, conversations that are firmly grounded in the people’s lived experiences and hope for a better future. If we hold truth to be the “best pattern of action,” as Rorty (1991) writes, we can consciously embrace the subjectivity in knowledge and decide explicitly which values to base our truth on. I have argued democracy, dignity, and justice are worth upholding with regards to this moral question, so will base my concluding analysis on that. With those goals in mind, I argue we ought to consider how best to address needs in society and serve a maximally inclusive community, based on democratic design criteria that incorporates
sources of authority beyond technical medical experts. As abortion is inherently complex and interconnected with many other social considerations, any policy debate thus should incorporate consideration of surrounding dynamics of power and authority and how they engage with technology, knowledge creation, and law. Instead of getting caught up in questions of what constitutes human life and when life begins with reliance only on science and technical authority, a pragmatic and reasonably eclectic approach to abortion policy would suggest that we focus instead on a different set of questions: How are lived experiences being impacted by these policies? How are these technologies engaging in structural power dynamics? Do they deepen democracy with maximal inclusivity?

These questions will re-center the dignity and agency of already living pregnant people and PCP, avoiding the danger of objectifying them in an overly technical approach. Feminist ethicists hold this as critical to any analysis of abortion, maintaining the pragmatic belief that “only by reflecting on the meaning of ethical pronouncement on actual women’s lives and the connections between judgements on abortion and the conditions of domination and subordination can we come to an adequate understanding of the moral status of abortion in society” (Sherwin 1991: 757). A more contextual approach will require us to be more creative in our solutions. We might consider, for example, what drives people to receive abortions in the first place, what we might do to better support PCP’s sexual agency with birth control and sexual education, and how systems of poverty play a role in the dynamics of sexual agency. Make no mistake that addressing those interrelated and complex questions through policy process promises to be far more difficult than if we continued with a purely mechanistic approach. But I am resolute in my belief that doing so is nevertheless worthy of our time and energy, unless of course we are perfectly comfortable making policy that is undemocratic, misunderstanding of the nature of scientific truth, and actively engaged in perpetuating inequality; I would hope we are not.18

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NOTES

1 This paper deserves a note describing my thought process as it relates to gendered language. Conversations around abortion and reproductive rights, both in academia and beyond, often focus on “women,” a term often used with the assumption that a “woman” is someone who has a uterus and can become pregnant. Yet we know that not all pregnant people are women and not all women have the capacity to become pregnant; both human biology and gender constructions are much more nuanced. What this means is that those who are impacted by restrictive abortion legislation are not reserved to “women.” Even if these policies were envisioned to target cisgender women with the capacity for pregnancy, transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people are impacted in very real ways. This reality highlights the interconnections between various forms of oppression, including misogyny and transphobia. For the purposes of this paper I will therefore be referring to People with the Capacity for Pregnancy (shortened to PCP) and “pregnant people/person” in an effort to be more inclusive of all experiences. I will use the term “women” when using direct quotes and referencing scholars who specifically discuss “women.” This approach may be imperfect but it is my best attempt. I gladly welcome any feedback from readers who have other thoughts on how best to navigate the complexities of language!

2 As a last word, I would like to hold the space to acknowledge that this paper deals with a very personal matter. Despite my rather abstract approach to the topic of abortion, I want to remind readers that real bodies and real lives are directly involved, including my own. I am a researcher and a writer but I am also someone that can become pregnant and am thus directly implicated in the politics I describe throughout. For this reason, this research process was extremely difficult at times. Researching is obviously an intellectual act and less obviously to some, a political act. But it is also an emotional act. To uncover this logic of oppression and these stories of power impacted me deeply in very visceral ways. I share this honestly with you, my reader, because my experience in the research process is as much a part of this story I am telling as my “findings and conclusions”; it deserves recognition and inclusion. More importantly, it does not take away from my credibility as a researcher. I hope that by sharing this vulnerability, I can help open the door for greater discussions around researcher subjectivity and provide space in the often sterile hallows of academia for emotion and self-reflection. Let us not forget that researchers, just as those we write about and for, are human too.
Behavioral and Neural Predictors of Individual Differences in Concept Generalization
Takako Iwashita*, Psychology

ABSTRACT

Concept learning involves linking related pieces of information to a shared label, such as learning that furry creatures that bark are called “dogs.” People vary in how well they learn concepts and apply them to new situations (generalization). What factors drive these individual differences? In the present study, we tested whether stable aspects of intelligence or transient activations in the brain best predicted concept generalization abilities. To measure aspects of intelligence, subjects underwent an assessment that included measures of working memory, processing speed, perceptual reasoning, and verbal comprehension, which could be combined into an overall IQ. Subjects also completed a concept generalization task while undergoing functional MRI, allowing us to measure activations in brain regions that are part of the explicit rule-learning system (hippocampus, prefrontal cortex) or part of an implicit system that learns without awareness (caudate, posterior visual cortex). To elucidate the shared or dissociable roles of behavioral and neural predictors in concept generalization, we tested the relationship between accuracy in concept generalization and individual differences in measures of intelligence and activation in each brain region of interest. Behaviorally, we found that overall IQ, but not its subcomponents, predicted concept generalization abilities. Neurally, we found that only the activation in the hippocampus predicted concept generalization abilities. Finally, we found that IQ and hippocampal activation each predicted concept generalization independent of each other, indicating that they represent two separate processes that both contribute to generalization success. These results show dissociable contributions of behavioral and neural predictors of concept generalization, suggesting that both stable cognitive abilities and transient brain states influence the ability to learn new concepts.
Every day, people make associations between the commonalities of different experiences to form general conceptual knowledge. For example, a child learns what a dog is after noticing common features across many encounters with individual dogs. Successful concept mastery involves being able to recognize new examples as being members of a given category (concept generalization). However, concept generalization abilities vary among individuals, and it is still unclear what drives these individual differences.

1. BEHAVIORAL PREDICTORS OF CONCEPT GENERALIZATION

Individual differences in cognition, historically known as cognitive style, involve stable variability in cognitive processes (e.g., memory, perception, and logical reasoning) across people (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978). Although this specific term is no longer commonly used, individual differences in various aspects of cognition have still been studied extensively since they are a useful tool for understanding the mechanisms of cognition. One of the well-studied individual differences in cognition is intelligence, which is the ability to solve problems and learn from experience. Intelligence quotient (IQ) is the score that is most commonly used as a measure of general intelligence (Nessier et al., 1996). In the past, IQ has been a good predictor of cognitive performance in separate tasks, such as explicit learning processes and executive functions (Friedman et al., 2006; Reber, Walkernfeld, & Hernstadt, 1991). Here, we focus on IQ as a general cognitive ability that is derived from multiple component processes, such as working memory capacity, logical reasoning, and verbal comprehension.

Past work investigating how cognitive abilities relate to concept generalization has largely focused on working memory capacity. Working memory is “the system that is necessary for the concurrent storage and manipulation of information” (Baddeley, 1992). Studies have shown that differences in working memory capacities are related to concept learning abilities (DeCaro, Carlson, Thomas, & Beilock, 2009; DeCaro, Thomas, & Beilock, 2008; Lewandowsky, 2011; Tharp & Pickering, 2009). However, there are conflicting views in the literature as to whether individuals with high working memory capacity will always be better at concept generalization (or categorization) than those with low working memory capacity. Previous research has indicated that people with higher working memory capacity could be better at generalizing concepts because they can better track the features and their relationship across items (e.g., Craig & Lewandowsky, 2012). However, some suggest that better generalization results when information is discarded and only the most relevant features are maintained in memory. Those with higher working memory capacity may be less likely to discard details (DeCaro et al., 2009; DeCaro et al., 2008; Tharp & Pickering, 2009). Thus, the nature of the relationship between concept learning and working memory remains an open question.

Besides working memory, past research shows that individual differences in logical reasoning abilities and semantic knowledge can predict some types of concept learning. Better logical reasoning skills are associated with better discovery of category structures, especially when there are explicit rules behind them (Ashby & O’Brien, 2005). Regarding semantic knowledge, Varga and Bauer (2017) demonstrated that the ability to comprehend semantic information (i.e., passage comprehension and concept formation) was correlated with successful self-derivation of
a novel fact by integrating two studied related facts (memory integration). Concept-learning abilities have been linked to a number of other cognitive abilities; hence, investigating the relationship between concept learning and different aspects of intelligence is imperative to know if any of them are stronger predictors than the others.

2. NEURAL PREDICTORS OF CONCEPT GENERALIZATION

The most common way to study human behavior in the brain is to examine its task-based activations. Task-based activations index how strongly the level of brain activation in a given region fluctuates on a trial-by-trial basis with the task that is being performed. Task-based activation has been shown to track various transient cognitive states such as levels of sleep deprivation and task engagement (Berka et al., 2007; Mu et al., 2005). Thus, task-based activation may predict concept generalization performance by indexing task engagement.

Research shows that two memory systems are involved in concept learning: a procedural learning system that learns without awareness and a declarative memory system that supports explicit learning (Ashby & O’Brien, 2005; Seger & Miller, 2010). Among procedural memory regions, activation of the striatum has often been observed when individuals perform categorization tasks regardless of the levels of task familiarity (Seger & Cincotta 2002). Particularly, recruitment of the caudate, a sub-region of the striatum, is often found in implicit category learning tasks (Seger, Dennison, Lopez-Panigua, Peterson, & Roark, 2011), especially when subjects learn incrementally (Ashby & O’Brien, 2005) or through feedback (Cincotta & Seger, 2007). Another procedural learning region that has been implicated in concept learning is the visual cortex. Visual areas responsible for processing of low-level features are thought to be involved in indexing familiarity with individual category members when learning visual categories. For instance, Aizenstein et al. (2000) examined the task-related activation of the extrastriate visual cortex (V3), and found changes in activation through learning, with decreased activation during the implicit tasks and increased activation during the explicit tasks. Thus, differences across individuals in caudate and early visual activations may index how strongly they rely on implicit learning when forming new concepts.

In addition, recent research in concept learning has shown the involvement of regions typically associated with memory for individual episodes: the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC) and hippocampus. In concept learning tasks, neuropsychological patients with damage in their hippocampus (amnesiac disorder and Alzheimer’s disease patients) have performed significantly worse than their healthy counterparts (Zaki, Nosofsky, Jessup, & Unverzagt, 2003). Also, a study showed that patients with impaired VMPFC performed worse on concept learning tasks compared to healthy controls (Schnyer et al., 2009). These two regions (the hippocampus and the VMPFC) have also been studied together in categorization research. Previous studies have demonstrated task-based activations of these regions during concept-learning tasks (Bowman & Zeithamova, 2018; Zeithamova, Maddox, & Schnyer, 2008). Hence, individual differences in hippocampal and VMPFC activations may index how strongly they rely on declarative memory systems during concept learning.
3. THE PRESENT STUDY

We investigated the relationship between cognitive abilities, neural categorization effects, and concept generalization. Subjects completed neuropsychological testing to assess their IQ and the subcomponents of IQ (working memory, processing speed, perceptual reasoning, and verbal comprehension). On a separate day, subjects performed a task where they learned to classify cartoon animals into two imaginary species. Subjects completed both concept learning and generalization testing during functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) that allowed us to measure the brain processing underlying conceptual knowledge. This study focused on the final concept generalization (categorization) tests, where subjects were asked to classify novel cartoon animals that had not been given a species label previously. From this data, we measured task-related activations in several brain regions of interest (hippocampus, VMPFC, caudate, and posterior visual cortex) and behavioral accuracy in the generalization task. We then tested whether cognitive predictors generated from the IQ testing and/or neural predictors generated from the categorization task predicted concept generalization abilities.

3.1. METHOD

3.1.1 SUBJECTS

Forty volunteers were recruited from the University of Oregon and surrounding community and were financially compensated for their research participation. All subjects were provided with and signed a written informed consent form and were screened for neurological conditions and medications known to affect brain function. Research Compliance Services at the University of Oregon approved all experimental procedures prior to data collection. Two subjects did not complete the tasks due to discomfort in the scanner, and two subjects were excluded due to poor performance (less than 50% correct, where 50% correct corresponds to accuracy achieved by simply pressing one of two response keys randomly). This resulted in a sample size of 36 subjects (age: range=18-32, $M=22.03$, $SD=3.53$; 23 females) for behavioral analyses. For the fMRI analyses, one more subject was excluded because of excessive motion, which left 35 subjects reported in all fMRI analyses (age: range=18-32, $M=22.09$, $SD=3.57$; 22 females). One participant scored very high on behavioral measures: 100% accuracy and IQ of 147. While 100% categorization score was within a normal range (within two standard deviations away from the mean of our sample), his or her IQ was outside a normal range (more than three standard deviations away from the population mean of $\mu=100$, $\sigma=15$). Because regression can be strongly affected by extreme values, we computed all regression analyses with and without this particular subject. As the sample size is relatively low for an individual differences analysis, the current study should be considered as preliminary. A larger scale fMRI study would be necessary to ensure the robustness of the findings (Button et al., 2013).

3.1.2. MATERIALS

WECHSLER ADULT INTELLIGENCE SCALE: To assess the intelligence scores for each subject, we used the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale Fourth Edition (WAIS-IV) (Wechsler, 2008). It
measures the IQ of individuals based on its four subcomponents: verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory, and processing speed. Each subcomponent is derived by combining scores across two subscales. The working memory subcomponent is made up of digit span (recalling a sequence of numbers read by an experimenter in either the same order, reverse order, or ascending order) and arithmetic (solving a series of mathematical problems within a specified time limit). The processing speed subcomponent consists of symbol search (indicating if one of the target symbols is in the search group in a predefined time limit) and coding (drawing symbols that are previously paired with numbers in a certain time limit). The verbal comprehension subcomponent is made up of vocabulary (defining words that are presented visually and orally) and information (answering questions about general knowledge in various areas). The perceptual reasoning subcomponent involves matrix reasoning (completing incomplete visual matrices and series) and visual puzzles (reconstructing a puzzle based on a completed puzzle). The WAIS-IV subscales were administered in the following order: digit span, matrix reasoning, vocabulary, arithmetic, symbol search, visual puzzles, information, and coding. Also, the WAIS-IV has demonstrated to be a highly reliable measure of IQ. The test-retest reliability for the general intelligence is $r = .96$, and four main components also have high test-retest reliability: verbal comprehension ($r = .96$), perceptual reasoning ($r = .87$), working memory ($r = .88$), and processing speed ($r = .87$) (Wechsler, Coalson, and Raiford, 2008).

CATEGORIZATION STIMULUS SET: Stimuli consisted of cartoon animals (Bozoki et al., 2006; Bowman & Zeithamova, 2018) that differed on eight features with two possible versions of each feature (Figure 1a): neck (short or long), tail (straight or curled), feet (fingers or round), snout (rounded or pig), head (ears or antennae), color (purple or red), body shape (hexagon or round), and pattern of a body (polka dots or stripes). All the animals were classified as either Febbles or Badoons based on the combination of the aforementioned features. Each category was organized around a prototype – the stimulus that contained the most common feature values for that category. There were two prototypes whose eight features were different from each another. Animals were labeled as one category or the other based on the number of features they shared with either prototypes (i.e., category A members shared more features with prototype A than prototype B). There was no one feature that defined a given animal as either a Febble or a Badoon.
Figure 1: a) Example of stimulus set. There were two prototypes whose eight features were different from each other. Animals were classified as one category or the other based on the number of features they shared with either prototypes (i.e., category A members shared more features with prototype A than prototype B). b) Study design.

3.1.3. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Our study was divided into two sessions. Subjects first came into the lab and met with one of the researchers individually to complete the WAIS as part of a larger cognitive battery. After completing all neuropsychological tests, subjects were then given instructions about the scanner. The entire first session lasted approximately an hour and a half.

For the second session, subjects entered the scanner and first completed a learning phase. They were told to learn two imaginary species of cartoon animals (Febbles and Badoons). Subjects completed four study-test cycles. In each cycle, subjects completed two blocks of observational study where they saw individual animals with their species label and were told to try to learn what makes some Febble and some Badoon. They then completed a single test block to assess how well they had learned the concepts so far. Then, four runs of a final generalization test followed (Figure 1b). Subjects were asked to categorize 68 animals into one of the two imaginary species (Febbles and Badoons) using the same button press while the stimulus was on the screen. Within 68 stimuli, 16 of them were from the 8 training exemplars presented twice, and 4 stimuli were repeatedly presented two prototypes. 48 stimuli were 8 exemplars for each 6 distances from prototypes. These stimuli were presented for 5 seconds with 7 seconds inter-trial interval (ITI).
where subjects viewed a fixation cross. Lastly, following the scan, subjects were verbally debriefed about the study.

3.1.4. fMRI DATA ACQUISITION

Scanning was completed on a 3T Siemens MAGNETOM Skyra (high-resolution MRI) scanner at the University of Oregon Lewis Center for Neuroimaging using a 32-channel head coil. The scanning sessions started with two anatomical scans to reveal the structure of participant’s brain which allowed us to localize their activation into specific brain regions. This was followed by 16 functional scans while participants performed experimental tasks. Functional scans measured signal related to the blood oxygen level (a marker of neuronal activity) every two seconds to track the changes in brain activation related to task performance. A detailed description of fMRI data acquisition method has been reported previously (e.g., Bowman & Zeithamova, 2018). The analyses presented here focus on task-related activation during the final 4 functional runs, while participants were tested on their category knowledge.

3.1.5. BEHAVIORAL STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

We examined final concept generalization test data using MATLAB (MATLAB_2017b, MathWorks) and SPSS (version 24, IBM). First, each subject’s overall concept generalization accuracy was computed by averaging all four runs of the final generalization test. We only included new trials whose stimuli subjects had not seen during the learning phase. Then, a one-sample t-test was conducted to compare generalization accuracy to chance. As cognitive (behavioral) predictors, we used the overall IQ and its four subcomponents. We also compared our sample’s scores with the population mean (100) using one-sample t-tests to test whether our college sample was above the population average for their age group.

3.1.6. fMRI ANALYSIS

Data were prepared for analysis using standard procedures (e.g., Bowman & Zeithamova, 2018). We then used functional MRI analysis program FSL to obtain estimates of brain activation related to the performance of the categorization task for each participant. To localize regions of interest (ROIs) in individual participants’ brains, we used a tool called Freesurfer that automatically segmented anatomical images into different brain regions. We then extracted for each participant’s task-related brain activity in each ROI. We focused on four ROIs: hippocampus, VMPFC, caudate, and lateral occipital (Figure 2).
Figure 2: We examined the task-based activations of the declarative memory regions (hippocampus and the VMPFC) as well as procedural learning regions (caudate and lateral occipital)

3.1.7. REGRESSION ANALYSES

To investigate how behavioral/cognitive predictors would track individual differences in concept learning, we conducted a single linear regression to identify if IQ would predict generalization accuracy. Then, a multiple regression was performed. All four subcomponents of IQ were entered as predictor variables to determine whether it is overall IQ or a specific component that predicts generalization. For our neural predictors, we performed a multiple regression using task-related activation in each ROIs as predictors and generalization accuracy as outcome. Lastly, as an exploratory analysis, another multiple regression was performed to test whether significant behavioral and neural predictors would predict shared or distinct variance in concept generalization.

3.2. RESULTS

3.2.1. BEHAVIORAL PREDICTORS

Table 1. One-sample t-test of behavioral variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>111.19</td>
<td>13.44</td>
<td>5.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM</td>
<td>104.84</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>106.84</td>
<td>13.98</td>
<td>2.98**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>117.97</td>
<td>17.72</td>
<td>6.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>105.51</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>3.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>24.01***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means, standard deviations, and results from one-sample t-tests comparing these results to population averages are presented in Table 1. Our sample showed above-chance generalization accuracy and above-average IQ scores for everything except working memory. A single linear
regression was conducted to test if IQ was a significant predictor of individual differences in concept learning. The result revealed that IQ significantly positively predicted generalization accuracy ($b=.002, r=.38, p=.024$; Figure 3a). To further investigate if this relationship was driven by any of the subcomponents of IQ (working memory, processing speed, verbal comprehension, and perceptual reasoning), a multiple regression was performed. The model including all of the subcomponents of IQ as predictors of generalization accuracy was not significant ($F(4,31)=1.72, R^2=.18, p=.172$) and none of the individual predictors were significant (all $ps>.158$). This indicates that the contribution of IQ to generalization is not driven by any single one IQ subcomponent. However, when the subject with the highest IQ and generalization score was excluded from the analyses, neither the single regression ($p=.160$) nor multiple regression (all $ps>.189$) reached significance.

![Figure 3](image.png)

**Figure 3:** IQ (a) and hippocampal activation (b) tracking individual differences in concept learning.

3.2.2. NEURAL PREDICTORS

We then examined if task-based ROI activations predicted generalization accuracy using a multiple regression analysis.

While the overall model did not reach significance ($F(4,30) =2.14, R^2=.22, p=.100$), hippocampal activation significantly tracked individual differences in concept learning ($b=.003, p=.017$; Figure 3b). The VMPFC, caudate, and lateral occipital activation predictors were not significant (Table 2). The pattern of results remained the same even after excluding the participant with the highest generalization score, indicating that the significant hippocampal contribution to generalization was not driven by data of a single participant.
Table 2. Task-related activations of ROIs predicting the categorization accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hippocampus</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMPFC</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>.365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caudate</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral occipital</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, we conducted an exploratory analysis to test whether cognitive and neural predictors explain common or complementary variance in concept learning by putting IQ and hippocampal activation in one model to predict generalization accuracy. The model significantly accounted for 28.0% of the variance in generalization scores ($F(2,32)=6.32, \ p=.005$). The result also revealed that IQ ($b=.002, \ p=.012$) and hippocampal activation ($b=.001, \ p=.013$) both remained significant when the other was controlled for. Thus, IQ and hippocampal activation tracked unique aspects of concept learning. When excluding the positive outlier, the model was still significant ($F(2,32)=6.32, \ R^2=.20, \ p=.005$); however, only hippocampal activation remained a significant predictor of generalization accuracy ($b=.001, \ p=.019$). Thus, while the hippocampal activation predicted generalization success robustly, the IQ results were to some degree driven by a participant with an extreme IQ score who also achieved perfect generalization accuracy.

3.3. DISCUSSION

We investigated concept learning from several angles. First, we were interested in how concept-learning ability would be related to other cognitive activities (IQ, working memory, processing speed, verbal comprehension, and perceptual reasoning). We found that overall IQ positively predicted generalization accuracy, and this was not driven by any single subcomponent of IQ. However, the relationship between IQ and generalization accuracy was partially driven by a subject with an extreme IQ score and did not reach significance when that participant was excluded from analysis, though it remained in the right direction. Our findings are not in accordance with previous studies on the relationship between working memory capacity and concept-generalization abilities. Regardless of the direction of the relationship, previous work supports the notion that individuals’ working memory capacities are correlated with their concept generalization accuracy (e.g., Craig & Lewandowsky, 2012; DeCaro et al., 2008; Tharp & Pickering, 2009). However, we did not find any significant correlation between generalization accuracy and working memory capacity nor any other subcomponents of IQ such as logical reasoning and semantic knowledge. While other studies have identified individual cognitive abilities that predict concept learning (Ashby & O’Brien, 2005; Lewandowsky, 2011; Varga & Bauer, 2017), we found that a more holistic measure of overall cognitive abilities was the best predictor of concept generalization. This may be because there are multiple routes to acquire concept knowledge and no single ability captures the multifaceted process of learning a new concept.
Secondly, we examined task-related activations of concept learning regions and found that only the activation in the hippocampus tracked individual differences in concept learning. Importantly, the hippocampal finding was independent of the activation in other ROIs (the VMPFC, caudate, lateral occipital). This finding supports the important role of the hippocampus in concept learning as previous work also indicated (e.g., Zaki et al., 2003) However, in contrast with previous studies with similar stimuli sets, we did not find any significant activations in the VMPFC, caudate, or lateral occipital. The lack of activation in the VMPFC found here is not in line with previous studies in this field, which found the VMPFC to be activated with the hippocampus during concept-learning tasks (Bowman & Zeithamova, 2018; Zeithamova, Maddox, & Schnyer, 2008). Moreover, we did not find any significant activations in procedural learning regions. In our study, subjects learned by observing category labels rather than by learning through guessing and receiving feedback. Procedural learning regions contribute primarily to feedback-based learning (Cincotta & Seger, 2007; Seger & Miller, 2010). This might explain why they did not show a strong relationship to individual differences in performance in our task. Therefore, our results suggest that the extent to which individuals’ task engagement in the hippocampus is a key determinant of how well they perform in generalization.

In addition, both IQ and hippocampal activation individually predicted unique variance in concept generalization, suggesting that each captures a distinct aspect of what makes individuals vary in their concept-generalization abilities. The role of IQ needs to be verified or refuted in a larger-scale study, as this result did not reach significance without the positive outlier. However, the current study is one of the few, if not the only one, that speculates both stable cognitive abilities and task-based brain states are responsible for the learning of new concepts. If confirmed by future studies, our results indicate that both stable aspects of cognition (IQ) and transient activations of the brain are important for successful concept learning. One possible explanation of our finding that IQ and hippocampal activation explain distinct variance is that our IQ measures and our regions of interest in the brain were not well-aligned. Since IQ is complex and consists of different subcomponents (i.e., in WAIS-IV, working memory, processing speed, verbal comprehension, and perceptual reasoning), we could not find any specific “IQ region(s)”. Instead, differences in IQ likely arise from complex interactions between networks of brain regions. Similarly, the relationship between hippocampal activation and generalization might have remained significant even when IQ was included in the regression model because the WAIS-IV does not capture the episodic memory process that the hippocampus is responsible for. Thus, without a better alignment of the behavioral and neural predictors, it is difficult to definitively conclude that each variable uniquely contributes to concept generalization abilities.

3.4. LIMITATIONS

A primary concern arisen from our behavioral results was that the significant relationships we found between IQ and concept generalization accuracy were driven by a subject with a 100% accuracy and IQ of 147. When computing the same statistics without this particular subject, the relationship between IQ and categorization performance did not reach significance. Thus, our behavioral results were largely driven by this one subject. This issue is compounded by the small sample size of our current study. With only 36 subjects included in the behavioral analyses and
35 subjects in the exploratory analysis before excluding the positive outlier, a relatively large effect size was required to reach statistical significance. With a bigger sample size, we would be able to attain more reliable data on the relationship between stable aspects of intelligence (e.g., IQ and working memory capacity) and concept learning (e.g., DeCaro et al., 2008; Little & McDaniel, 2015). Thus, a future study with a larger sample size is necessary to more decidedly determine the contribution of IQ to concept learning. Although the current study is preliminary given its small sample size, the results we presented in this paper detailing the relationship between IQ and individual differences in concept learning are an important first step in determining the relative contribution of both stable cognitive abilities and transient task-related brain states to performance.

3.5. CONCLUSION

In the present study, we demonstrated the possible role that overall intelligence plays in concept learning. We show that a composite IQ score, rather than its separate subcomponents, predicts concept generalization abilities across individuals. Our results also support the contribution of a declarative memory region in concept learning – the hippocampus. Finally, we have initial evidence that concept generalization is supported by both broad cognitive abilities and activation in a core long-term memory region. Thus, we suggest that both stable cognitive abilities and transient brain states influence the ability to learn new concepts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


Negotiating Freedoms: Women Experience Homelessness in Eugene, OR
Violet Fox*, Anthropology

ABSTRACT
This research includes a literature review, historical background and policy overview, as well as three interviews with women experiencing homelessness, and two interviews with shelter staff in Eugene, Oregon. The purpose of this research is to inquire into the unique nature of women’s homelessness using feminist ethics and urban anthropological methods. Notable facets of existing research include postfeminist and neoliberal perspectives, issues in defining “homelessness,” worthiness, mental health, domestic violence, and much more. This paper offers a place-based approach that is meant to lead to more specific and achievable local change for women in the Eugene homeless community. The findings include a rich and diverse array of stories that indicate the spectral nature of women’s homelessness, as well as highlight flaws in the current bureaucratic structures which are meant to support women out of homelessness both locally, and nationally. Stories and experiences within this paper include themes of resistance, addiction, victimhood, and relationships. The conclusions and recommendations indicate the need for more transitional housing, “wet” shelters, prevention and intervention initiatives, and increased opportunities for healthy relationship and skill-building.

1. INTRODUCTION
Recent scholarship and federal counts of homelessness show that the number of homeless people has been steadily increasing since the 1980s. The growing class disparity has left working-class people increasingly vulnerable to homelessness, causing a previously unprecedented influx of women and their children being unhoused (Wright, 1989). Research from Europe, Canada, and large U.S. cities shows the insecurities that women face living on the streets are different than men’s, and in the last 10-20 years, frameworks have emerged to better understand their lives (Koegel, 1986; Savage, 2016; Gonyea, 2017). Oregon, however, has one of the largest homeless counts in the United States, currently ranking fourth in the nation in unsheltered people, yet, despite this, has little to no targeted qualitative or ethnographic research on women.

Women’s unique social vulnerabilities and responsibilities make their experiences an important
site of study in order to understand the causes of homelessness, as well as to offer pragmatic solutions, which is why I have chosen to look into the particularities of women’s homelessness in Eugene, OR.

Why should women be prioritized in the study of homeless people? Contemporary feminist though implores us to consider the most vulnerable women in society as a priority for radical action.\(^1\) The idea is that all people will be free once the most oppressed have been liberated. Homeless women occupy the intersection of extreme poverty and womanhood, which contains themes of violence, trauma, lack of education, vulnerability, and dehumanization. In the 1990 study, *Homeless Women and Men: Their Problems and Use of Services*, researchers Benda and Dattalo found that homeless women are considerably more likely to blame themselves for their situation as opposed to men who blame external factors. A lifetime of sexist indoctrination from society undermines women’s ability to feel competent and capable, which puts them in a position of passivity when coping with trauma and high-stress events (Benda & Dattalo, 1990). The difference in opportunities between men and women makes it so that women have less access to well-paying jobs and/or education, and with the responsibilities of child-rearing, they are more likely to lose even those routes out of poverty (Benda & Dattalo, 1990). In lower-paying jobs with little to no higher education, women not only have no ability to secure childcare for their work hours, but they are also more easily taken advantage of, or let go and replaced. In instances of domestic violence or addiction, women are often punished more harshly by family members, friends, and jurisdiction decisions than men due to social expectations of women to be passive, innocent, and “good mothers” (Benda & Dattalo, 1990). It is not hard to see how homeless women are positioned precariously and in need of direct intervention and prevention initiatives.

This research is relevant to our current socio-economic climate as working-class Americans have become increasingly exposed to homelessness through rising housing costs and stagnating wages. For example, in the last year, the government shutdown under the Trump Administration put around 800,000 federal employees out of work or working without pay, making thousands increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. On top of that, tens of thousands of people working for federal contractors were out of work as well (Kaufman, 2019). As working-class people experience homelessness and (hopefully) successfully emerge out of it, our society needs to be held accountable for understanding the reasons and conditions in which they experienced being unhoused. Women, with their multitude of socially imposed responsibilities and barriers to success, are central in the mission to eliminate unsheltered homelessness. I chose to title this research “Negotiating Freedoms” because that is exactly what women must do to navigate different systems of oppression in both housed and unhoused worlds.\(^2\) Having a roof over your head and living outside each bring different sets of compromises and sacrifices for women that constrain their ability to act autonomously.

My research includes a) an examination of the current climate and policy surrounding homelessness drawing from government publications, news articles, and an extensive literature review; and b) original ethnographic material from the Eugene Mission Women’s Center, including interviews with three shelter personnel in Eugene, Oregon. This research was conducted for three main reasons: to explore women’s experiences of homelessness in Eugene, elaborate on any patterns
found within the data in an effort to supplement existing policy and/or contribute to future research and legislative action, and inform the public and destigmatize women living in shelters and on the streets.

The following section provides a brief summary of history and policy surrounding homelessness in the United States, Oregon, and Lane County, followed by an in-depth literature review covering neoliberalism and postfeminism, definitions of “homelessness,” the “hidden homeless,” worthy vs. unworthy homeless, domestic violence, gender performance, shelter life, mental illness, and relationships. Then, after a methods overview, the body of the paper includes the following sections: “The Eugene Mission” contains a description of the shelter I volunteered at to conduct this research as well as a discussion of the Women’s Center and its various rules; “Findings” looks at the different subgroups of women that emerged from a large shelter environment and examines what is advantageous about these separations; and the sections “Conclusions” and “Recommendations” summarize the findings and contain some informal policy recommendations.

1.1. HISTORY AND POLICY

**THE UNITED STATES:**

In the 1970s and ‘80s, a new homeless population appeared on the streets that did not consist of the typical lone adult male working through addiction and/or mental illness. In a study of 12 large US cities, low income and emergency housing dropped 30% from 1970 to 1980, and during that same time, the population of homeless or at-risk homeless increased 36% (Wright, 1989). Theories about the mass defunding and deinstitutionalization of permanent mental health facilities permeated the attitudes on homelessness, as many ex-patients were released to the streets with nowhere to go. In reality, however, only about 30% of the homeless population deals with severe chronic mental illness. As the ‘90s rolled around, the number of unhoused women and families increased, and the average age of these women dropped as people in their 30s started becoming homeless, which many scholars contribute to drug use (Golden, 1992). In 1960 homeless women were less than 3% of the total population, then 25% in 1980, and around 30% in 1990. From 1981-89, Reagan-era politics painted a picture of homelessness as an avoidable choice and something unhoused people would leverage in order to take advantage of welfare programs without having to work (Wright, 1989). These sentiments then informed policy and consequently made life much more difficult for homeless folks. Economics scholars have since shown that the severity of homelessness is dictated by housing affordability and rent increases, not personal dysfunction. That is not to say personal circumstance does not play an important role, but rather that it is not typically the driving factor. In Wright’s study conducted in Chicago in 1990, the number of people who could become unhoused at any moment was about 50,000, whereas those who were literally homeless was around 3,000. For perspective, as of 2018, Eugene had around 1,600 homeless folks, which is just over half the count for the city of Chicago in the 1990 census. Now Chicago reports around 5,400 homeless but estimates the actual number of people living in housing insecurity is more like 80,000 (Olumhense, 2018). This comparison exemplifies how previous systems for estimating homeless counts are inaccurate if the goal is homelessness prevention. If prevention were more in the forefront, the estimates concerning at-risk population would be more alarming, and the counting
system would include those who are housing insecure but not necessarily living on the street.

After such an unprecedented increase in homelessness, the ‘90s brought on a policy shift from “recovery first” to “Housing First” initiatives, which were characterized by the prioritization of providing housing over providing mental health treatment. This stimulated an increase in affordable housing units that would be made available for low-income adults and families to get them housed quickly, and this model has been called “rapid rehousing.” In 2007, right at the beginning of the Great Recession, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) created the Point in Time count (PIT), which is a volunteer-based count of the unhoused population in an attempt to generate a number of all the people in emergency shelters, transitional housing, safe havens, as well as on the sidewalks, under bridges, abandoned buildings, camping, or any other places deemed “not meant for human habitation” (End Homelessness Organization, 2019). This count is conducted on one night in January each year, and many homelessness organizations consider it to be largely unrepresentative of the actual amount of people experiencing homelessness, as it completely misses people living doubled up, in the homes of friends and family, or in any other, less obvious living situation. PIT counts produce many challenges as counting methods change between regions, and they are typically low and miss hard-to-find populations (as mentioned before); they rely on unverified self-reporting, and language barriers often prevent full accuracy. Keeping this information in mind, from 2007 to 2018, the total number of homeless people nationally has decreased from 647,258 to 552,830, which is approximately a 100,000-person difference. It is impossible to know the full accuracy of these counts, but they show averages over time and attempt to track states, cities, regions, and counties to look at what areas are fluctuating in what ways, which ideally sets up policymakers to enact targeted prevention and remediation legislature.

Currently, the 10 states with the highest counts are California, New York, Florida, Texas, Washington, Massachusetts, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Illinois. Combined, these states make up 67% of the nation’s total homeless population. Nationally, close to 39% are women, and while white Americans are the largest racial group at around 50%, Black and Native American people are grossly overrepresented in PIT counts when comparing their proportion to the general population. Women experiencing homelessness increased by three percent in the last year compared to one percent of men, which was broken down into a two percent increase in shelters and four percent unsheltered. It is also important to note that there was a staggering 22% increase in trans people experiencing homelessness in the last year, albeit not something that is investigated in this research. New York, Hawaii, Oregon, California, and the District of Columbia have the highest rates of homelessness (which is measured differently from the PIT count) and unsurprisingly, some of the highest housing costs in the country as well.

OREGON:

Looking at national averages and numbers on homelessness is a helpful tool to gauge the larger climate surrounding unhoused people, but it does not tell the entire story. When we take a closer look at the numbers, it is clear that while the national count is going down steadily, individual states show an alternative trajectory of growth. According to the 2018 HUD PIT report, Oregon is second
only to California for having over half the overall homeless population being unsheltered at 61.7%, and it has had one of the largest increases in homeless since 2007 (12.8%), and even in the last year (6.8%). This puts Oregon in the top five states for the highest unsheltered count, the highest rate of homelessness, the highest increase in the last 10 years, as well as the highest increase in the last year.

Within those percentages is a plethora of demographic information that parses out which populations are impacted by homelessness the most. HUD primarily looks at families with children, individuals, veterans, unaccompanied youth, and chronically homeless folks. If we take a look at the demographics captured in this report, we see that out of the unsheltered population, Oregon has the highest rate for families in the nation (54%) and is third for unaccompanied youth overall (53%). Additionally, Oregon has experienced one of the largest increases in chronic homelessness (28.6%) in the last year, as well as in the last 10 years (41.9%), putting it in the top four states. However, the rates of homelessness fluctuate from year to year, and while Oregon has had consistent overall increases, there are also statistics that indicate the rates have gone down. For example, from 2010 to 2018, the overall rate of homelessness in Oregon decreased by 25.7%. Fortunately, homelessness counts have declined since the Great Recession generally, but in the last four years, unsheltered and chronicity numbers have increased.

**EUGENE:**

With almost double the percentage of unsheltered homeless compared to the Portland area (69% of the homeless are unsheltered in Portland and 39% in Eugene), Eugene has a tense relationship to homelessness, as residents, business owners, policymakers, and homeless folks each have a different stance on what should be made the priority in getting people housed. A recent protest by homeless people camping out downtown shook Eugene as it came in response to a federal appeals court ruling that the criminalization of people sleeping or camping in public when they have nowhere else to live violates the 8th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Badger, 2015). However, the city of Eugene fines homeless people instead of jailing them and maintains that this does not fall under true “criminalization” and that they are, therefore, not violating federal law. A Register-Guard article by Christian Hill, in October 2018, covered the potential lawsuit that was forming in retaliation to the fining. One Eugene resident said, “The bums have more rights than the business owners,” and that city leaders were fostering a “no-responsibility community” by making extra accommodations for the homeless (Hill, 2018). In March of 2017, Oregon Business ran an article stating that the homeless population downtown is “killing businesses,” mentioning the dog ban that the city of Eugene had passed, which has been routinely critiqued as a backhand attempt to ban homeless folks (Buskirk, 2017). The idea that homeless folks have essentially ruined downtown is not an uncommon perspective from Eugene residents. The evidence for this can be found in both the comments section of the above-cited news articles, as well as everyday casual conversation concerning the downtown strip. It has been additionally exacerbated by the fact that approximately 130 people per month are becoming newly homeless in Lane County. The county’s poverty rate compared to other regions and the national average is unusually high, as shown in the below table:
This table was created by the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC), a Boston-based consultant company, which assembled a report through documenting homelessness and formulating potential solutions for the county. The 2018 report noted the complete lack of low-barrier shelter beds as well as the fact that 43% of the people on housing waitlists are bumped off due to high demand. Additionally, even if they receive permanent housing, 20% of these people return to the streets within two years. The 2018 TAC report contains 10 recommendations for both Lane County and Eugene city leaders, which is estimated to cost tens of millions of dollars of public funds to implement (Hill, 2019). They consider this cost acceptable as it is considered an investment away from all the public spending currently allocated for emergency homeless services.

One of the key systems in evaluating and servicing the homeless in Lane County is the VI-SPDAT, which stands for Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool. It is the scoring system that measures the vulnerability of homeless individuals and families and translates this into their ranking in the housing waitlist. The higher their vulnerability score, the higher they are on the housing waitlist. The score ranges from 1-16, and the client receives more points for the number of years they’ve been living outside uninterrupted as well as for factors like disability and trauma.

Out of the three interviews I had with shelter personnel in Eugene, the use of the VI-SPDAT came up as a site of contention in all of them. At ShelterCare, a local program for homeless folks that helps them find permanent housing, I spoke to the Assistant Program Manager, Risa Holden, about the Coordinated Entry Process. This is when nonprofits serve as Front Door Assessors, which is a title for organizations that score homeless individuals and families upon entry to services. Then, they are appropriately sorted into the centralized housing waitlist according to said score, and finally, they are referred out to a housing program.

However, this process belies a tremendous service gap. Housing programs pull from the top of the centralized waitlist, and according to the previously mentioned score criteria, the majority of the highest scoring people are single adult men. This is in part because ⅔ of the homeless population are men, but it also indicates a disconnect in gendered experiences of homelessness. It is men that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lane County</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Oregon</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marion County, OR</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multnomah County, OR</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
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are the most likely to be living outside for years on end, and it is men that are most likely to be veterans with brain trauma and physical disabilities, and therefore, it is men that tend to be at the top of this waitlist. Women more readily stay with family and friends, drug dealers, abusive partners, etc., or sleep in their cars to avoid living in the streets, making them less likely to score highly on something like the VI-SPDAT (Paradis, 2009; Klodawsky, 2006; Mayock, Bretherton, & Baptista, 2016; Savage, 2016; Bretherton, 2017). Another facet of this conundrum is that if someone is situationally homeless and has found themselves on the street for the first time, the system is set up in such a way that they may never make it onto the centralized housing waitlist. For instance, if a single mother and her two children just became homeless after the death of the earning partner, they may never qualify for the housing waitlist as opposed to a single, disabled man who’s lived outside for 25 years. This does not mean that people who have been living outside for 25 years are less deserving than someone who is newly unhoused, but it reveals a flaw in the system that systematically under-prioritizes situationally homeless folks.

Ultimately, there is an incredible amount of policy information from the federal to city levels that involve highly complex bureaucratic loopholes, formulas, strategies, and barriers. For the purposes of this paper, I cannot address all of them but hope to have included the most relevant and pressing policy concerns in a summarized format that indicates some of the legislative webbing homeless folks must navigate through to gain resource access.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**NEOLIBERALISM AND POSTFEMINISM:**

Neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives are fairly common points of consideration in the contemporary literature on women’s homelessness in American and European contexts.

Neoliberalism as a framework for government and society considers power to be attainable through individual choices, as opposed to structural ones, putting an enormous amount of pressure on the single subject. Postfeminist thought implies that, after the 1970s, the major goals of feminist action have already been addressed; therefore, sexism or gender-based discrimination is not a widespread societal concern anymore. These ideologies ultimately impact women experiencing homeless negatively and do not allow them to consider their situations as multi-faceted structural failures that have left them in positions of heightened vulnerability. A considerable number of the women researched experienced their homelessness as an individual defeat, which renders the “structural foundation of homelessness invisible” (Watson, 2016, p. 257). Notions of neoliberal individuality paired with concepts coming from postfeminism position the single woman’s “ability to choose” as a remedy to gender-based discrimination and victimhood. This leaves women with the idea that they are ultimately responsible for what happens to them and should be able to avoid the subject position of “victim” (Watson, 2016; Gonyea, 2017).

Unfortunately, a framework of this kind posits victimhood against narratives of success and thus contributes to the ignorance of the highly complex negotiations within intimate relationships in which homeless women necessarily engage. Existing oppressive power structures play an enormous
role in their journey in and through homelessness, but due to the indoctrination of neoliberal individuality and postfeminist discourse, the women often adopt and internalize these ideas, causing them to blame themselves and their peers for being homeless on account of laziness and irresponsibility. This is a perspective that the general population tends to adopt as well. Even problems such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness are considered avoidable and symptomatic of individual dysfunction (Gonyea, 2017).

Welfare services are additionally critiqued by neoliberal agendas that argue “handouts” de-incentivize those receiving them to contribute to the capitalist economy (Ralston, 1996). In a five-year study with 20 interviews, Ralston (1996) found that taxes that fund welfare programs are thought to punish those who should be rewarded for their compliance with capitalist economic growth and reward those with little value or initiative in society. Ralston does, however, note that many homeless women agree with neoliberal critiques of the welfare state in that it not only pays better (with benefits such as health care) than some jobs, making it an attractive alternative to working, but also allows the government to police and control people’s individual choice—such as with food stamp restrictions, time monitoring, childcare, etc. Therefore, the relationship between women experiencing homelessness and welfare is complicated in the sense that many women have internalized neoliberal beliefs about who deserves help from the government and who does not. The women in Ralston’s 1996 study seemed to simultaneously express the need for more access to resource support (disability payments, housing vouchers, etc.) as well as resentment towards homeless peers who appeared lazy or unmotivated.

DEFINING “HOMELESSNESS”:

One of the main challenges found in literature about homelessness was the changing definition of the term “homeless” over time. James D. Wright notes in his 1989 book, Address Unknown: The Homeless in America, that homelessness cannot be properly understood by any one definition or example; therefore, it should be determined by the ability to choose one’s housing situation. In other words, do they have any other options besides their current environment? If someone is renting a motel room three out of four weeks of the month and then the fourth week is spent in a shelter, are they homeless? What if they are living in an abandoned building or their car? Or, most common among women, what if they have been moving from house to house between friends and family and have never actually been on the street? Wright (1989) posits that the majority of people that are homeless are periodically so, and they move into more or less stable housing for a while, only to end up in unstable situations again.

The bulk of the research on homelessness was done from the late ‘80s to the mid ‘90s, and people who were experiencing this kind of periodic flux of unstable housing became referred to as “episodically homeless,” meaning they were not able to secure permanent stable housing and drifted in and out of homelessness (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). The other two categories that developed around this time were “chronically homeless” and “situationally homeless,” which is also occasionally called “transitionally homeless” (Savage, 2016). Chronic homelessness is sometimes characterized as being without a permanent home for over a year or having experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless in those occasions
is at least 12 months. In a 1990 article, *A Feminist Approach to Working with Homeless Women*, researchers Brown and Ziefert found that most chronically homeless women had trouble with the basic elements of participating in the housed world. Lease agreements, paying rent and bills on time, housework and maintenance, application processes, rental history, etc. were all foreign and taxing responsibilities that could rarely be managed independently due to learned street-adaptive behaviors. These behaviors might include unwillingness to commit, distrust, aggression, and difficulty with regular communication.

Chronically homeless women were found to be highly distrustful of others from past exposure to violence or trauma of some sort, paired with a long history of relationship loss (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). Episodic homelessness is differentiated from chronic homelessness by the desire to find and secure housing, as well as a general competence in the shelter system and other social services. However, these episodically homeless women are often still living with mental illness, addiction, and behavioral volatility. They may struggle with independent living as these facets of their lives are strong factors in their housing instability. This is in contrast to those who are situationally homeless, who find themselves out of housing due to an acute crisis such as loss of a partner, sudden unemployment, or perhaps an expensive medical emergency. It is usually their first time being unhoused, and often they just need to find affordable housing quickly. Situationally homeless women typically come to shelters after exhausting all other outlets (car sleeping, friend or family homes, motels), and they are the most receptive to social services and housing programs as their housing situation usually stabilizes after a quick and early intervention (Brown & Ziefert, 1990; Savage, 2016).

Interestingly, there has also been some discussion about shifting the terminology from “homeless” to “houseless,” as the emotional and psychological implications of being without a “home” may feel inaccurate to people who have created homes in non-traditional spaces such as camps, cars, shelters, or the streets (Savage, 2016). This language shift particularly affects women experiencing homelessness as their gendered relationship to the word and concept of “home” is highly complex and deep-rooted. Ultimately, there is a lot of material to research in the formation of language around homelessness, houselessness, or even “rooflessness,” as some have coined it, as none of these terms are without certain connotations and social meanings. For the purpose of this paper, I will primarily be using “homelessness” as that is how the women I have worked with refer to their situation. However, the consequences of such an unclear system is that we encounter a categorical issue where there are no truly accurate counts of homelessness due to these differing definitions and boundaries, which disproportionately impact women due to their being, what many scholars have called, the “hidden homeless” (Savage, 2016).

**WOMEN ARE THE “HIDDEN HOMELESS”:**

The aforementioned definitions of homelessness have historically been so restrictive that they exclusively meant literally not having a roof over your head. These criteria made women’s homelessness “invisible” as women are at a much higher likelihood to experience inadequate or insecure housing as opposed to solitary street-living due to their socio-cultural positionality (Paradis, 2009; Klodawsky, 2006; Mayock, Bretherton, & Baptista, 2016). Contemporarily, there is
a greater understanding of insecure housing, but much of the research available is from the ‘90s, which uses the limiting definitions. Whereas homeless men are often pictured as failed men and given less compassion or “hand-outs” on account of their situations, homeless women are viewed as being more vulnerable and victimized; therefore, they often find themselves in and out of shelters, as well as the homes of friends and family (Savage, 2016; Bretherton, 2017). A topic of great interest in the late 1980s and ‘90s was the underrepresentation of women on the streets. At the time, many researchers writing on the topic wondered why there were fewer homeless women than men when women were statistically making less money through their jobs and were poorer overall than men. What they discovered was that women are much more likely to find, and secure familial and community support when faced with homelessness before ending up on the streets, thus making them more “hidden” (Klodawsky, 2006; Mayock, Bretherton, & Baptista, 2016).

It was in the 1950s and ‘60s when “hidden homeless” became a term associated with homeless women, as the socioeconomic realities women faced at the time were stark. This is because women usually had little to no education or job training beyond domestic work, and they were unlikely to remarry after losing a partner, which at the time may land them in rough waters if they did not have family to take them in. In the mid-1970s rapid deinstitutionalization set in as mental hospitals and permanent care facilities started shutting down, and in the ‘80s came the influx of younger, single mothers becoming homeless in tandem with the War on Drugs and the surge in crack cocaine usage and access to prescription drugs (Golden, 1992). Golden (1992) notes in her book The women outside: Meanings and myths of homelessness:

The breakdown of our two permanent systems of care- that is, of the stability and permanence of marriage and of the state hospital system- by creating such numbers of visible homeless women, betokens real structural flaws in a society where the childish dependency of women has its complement in the parental authority of men. (p. 187)

Drawing on four years of experience in a shelter, Golden (1992) found that women were far more likely than men to seek out, and exhaust, informal supports (partners, friends, and family) before seeking formal support systems such as welfare services. This is supported over 20 years later in Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness, a study from the United Kingdom, in which researcher Joanne Bretherton (2017) examines gender and agency in the homeless world. She speculates that exhausting all social resources over living outside is a choice that arises out of complex negotiations, such as trying to avoid the possibility of children being taken away and occurrences of violence and sexual assault on the street or in shelters. However, as the above quote from Golden (1992) insinuates, women’s historic struggle to contact welfare resources also indicates a toxic passivity that immobilizes more dependent women. In some ways one could say that women “benefit” from their social standing as passive or weak subjects in this case, but as Bretherton (2017) states in Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness:

The idea here is that women are seen as non-threatening and are more likely to be perceived as victims in need of support due to cultural constructions of women as more ‘vulnerable’ than men. Also within this of course, is the possibility that sexual exploitation can be used to barter for somewhere to sleep. (p. 8)
Sexual currency, or the body as currency, is a frequent theme of discussion in the literature on not only women’s homelessness, but also between homeless women themselves. It was not uncommon to hear women discussing prostitution or strategic sexual relationships at the Mission as they recounted experiences or discussed other women they knew. Although trading sexual acts for a roof over their head can at once protect women from the unknown dangers of the street, it can also open a door for cycles of domestic violence to occur. This will be analyzed at length in the Domestic Violence, and The Sexual Subject sections of this literature review.

**WORTHY VS UNWORTHY HOMELESS WOMEN:**

In studies that involved popular understandings of homeless women, the framework of worthy versus unworthy homeless people came up frequently. Different criteria emerged through the neoliberal lens concerning who was deserving of government assistance, petty cash, or welfare benefits of any kind; unsurprisingly, homeless women with children figured prominently in this discussion. Meabh Savage found in her 2016 study, *Gendering Women’s Homelessness*, that homeless mothers were divided into “deserving” and “undeserving” based on whether they still had custody of their children. Homeless women that had been separated from their children felt judged and that they were not “good mothers” because they could not keep their children with them; conversely, homeless women accompanied by their children felt powerless as a parent from keeping their children out of homelessness. These kinds of social stigmas and double-binds that surround motherhood often motivated women to stay out of welfare systems for fear of losing their children and incurring judgment on their ability to parent (Savage, 2016).

Wright (1989) found that housed people considered worthy homeless to be children, lone women, families, elderly, physically and/or mentally disabled people, veterans, and homeless people with jobs that were trying to help themselves. Unworthy homeless people were single, middle-aged men, addicts, and people that are not looking for work or taking visible steps to try and help themselves. Further, Wright noted that this “unworthy” homeless person only matched up with about 1 in 20 homeless people. The idea that there are all these homeless people out there that have chosen to become isolated and unhoused and are not looking to improve their situation is absurd, and the roots of this idea can be found in the era of the previously mentioned War on Drugs and the myth of the “Welfare Queen,” who gets rich off government assistance checks. What we then see is the enforcement of neoliberal, individualistic values on people who have been let down by numerous structural failures in society. Hopper (1998) states in his article *More than passing strange: Homelessness and mental illness in New York City* that:

> ...what is arguably the most intriguing thing about the social response to homelessness [is] the degree to which it has consistently embodied the tension between providing sanctuary for the helpless and disciplining the unruly. (p. 163)

This dynamic has been shown again and again in research on shelters, as staff police the homeless on moral grounds, almost as if punishing them for being unhoused (Koegel, 1986). Ironically enough, as Paradis (2009) points out, “the status of ‘deserving’ is contingent on accepting a label of incapacity,” which creates yet another double-bind where the homeless person is put in a situation
of having to perform or prove certain levels of disability to receive benefits, only to be socially disciplined for this and realize those same benefits still keep them under the poverty line (p. 160).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Unfortunately, a unanimous finding is that massive amounts of women experiencing homelessness have been victims of domestic violence and often childhood sexual violence. As the culture changed around women’s rights with more women entering the workplace after the 1970s and 80s, and awareness grew around the Battered Women’s Movement, a flood of women found themselves escaping abusive partnerships and fleeing to either domestic violence-specific shelters or all-encompassing women’s homeless shelters. In a study conducted in 2012, with around 430 sheltered homeless women in Los Angeles, Harold Green found that abuse in adolescence leads to women forming risky social networks later that contained less stable support people. These “risky networks,” combined with other factors associated with homelessness, such as poverty or mental illness, made them much more vulnerable to losing secure housing. Another important finding was that intimate partner violence and drug use are both often resultant of experiencing childhood abuse, and that those risky social networks that women made as adults replicated toxic relationships from their childhoods (Green et al., 2012). Historically, however, homeless women experiencing intimate partner violence are barred from battered women’s shelters. This has tragic irony as domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women; therefore, to refuse shelter to this population is antithetical to supporting survivors (Green, 1991). This point is reiterated by Savage (2016) when she states the:

...lack of support led some homeless women to return to abusive relationships from where they subsequently re-emerged into homelessness again, and were separated from their children, who were placed in the care of the state (p. 45).

This kind of cyclic relationship trauma has proven to be unique to the position of episodically homeless women, where domestic violence, motherhood, and childhood abuse intersect and prevent women from being able to form secure and healthy attachments.

Juliet Watson’s 2016 article Gender-based Violence and Young Homeless Women: Femininity, Embodiment and Vicarious Physical Capital employs Pierre Bourdieu’s framework of social capital to the complex, intersubjective negotiations homeless women engage in to protect themselves, calling it “vicarious physical capital.” Watson (2016) explains that vicarious physical capital captures the phenomenon of women leveraging the value of male bodies that can be “transferred to female bodies symbolically through intimate relationships,” thus obtaining a less vulnerable position (p. 257). However, it becomes a precarious trade-off where the protection gained from the intimate male(s) is only available for as long as the relationship is maintained, requiring the women to sacrifice their dignity, safety, and security in other ways. She states:

...intimate relationships that involved vicarious physical capital were marked by instability and could be a source of violence. They also undermined access to other resources such as stable accommodation and support from friends and family. Despite this, as this
study revealed, even a relationship that involved intimate partner violence could be perceived as a viable context-specific option to manage the external violence of homelessness (Watson, 2016, p. 257).

What emerges from this study is the fact that women experiencing homelessness are forced to navigate street dangers and social attachments to men through a variety of contextual strategies that both expose and protect women from certain kinds of violence. This becomes particularly relevant in the following section as traditionally, women who use their bodies as currency and leverage their sexuality in interpersonal relationships have been considered exclusively in terms of oppression and victimhood. Alternatively, these findings complicate the idea that women are passive participants in their struggles, instead suggesting that there is a sizeable amount of empowered decision-making in the series of measures, strategies, and sacrifices that are made to protect themselves.

**THE SEXUAL SUBJECT AND GENDER PERFORMANCE:**

For women experiencing homelessness, it does not take long for them to intuitively realize that they must perform gender in highly strategic ways that the housed population does not experience on a day-to-day basis. Much of the earlier research had investments in providing ways for homeless women to feel more feminine as a method of improving their lives by helping them feel more “normal” (Koegel, 1986). This is certainly an important facet of homelessness research concerning women, but many women experiencing homelessness that I spoke with were not interested in discussing gender performativity and their expressions of femininity (or masculinity) in straightforward terms. Rather, the women consider gender performance in relation to their techniques of avoiding dangers of the street and navigating the disciplining bureaucracy of social services. Gender performance becomes a central tool for women in making their way through dangerous situations on the street and in shelters, but also through interactions with welfare agents and law enforcement (Passaro, 1996; Golden, 1990; Paradis, 2009; Watson, 2016). What emerges is a system where women dress as men, and “make themselves as undesirable as possible” in order to survive the streets, which is then juxtaposed by the elaborate performance of femininity to gain access to increased services (Passaro, 1996, p. 11). Support organizations, whether governmental or religious, police gender by withholding resources and aid to those women who do not conform to dominant feminine ideals. This is exemplified by restrictions on things such as volume when talking and laughing, swearing, sexual content of conversations, parenting choices, and visitations from men. If the women do not abide by the rules to act, look, and behave as women are supposed to, they may be made to leave a shelter (Passaro, 1996).

The fact that gender-based violence, poverty, and social exclusion affect homeless women so strongly proves their exposure to circumstances in which their survival could be obstructed or furthered through gender performance (Watson, 2016, p. 262). By living on the margins of society, the dangers of uncontrolled female sexuality become increasingly potent. Golden (1990) states:

...any woman whose sexuality appears unregulated must perform become marginal in order for society to feel safe. In fact, all forms of the female marginality collapse into this one
issue, which comes to define any female deviant. Thus, any single homeless woman is immediately suspected of promiscuity, since thanks to the blurring effect she becomes virtually indistinguishable from a prostitute. (p. 2)

Regulation, in this case, demands that women be in a heteronormative relationship and that they comply with social expectations of acceptable forms of female sexuality. Women, by consequence of being homeless, immediately deviate from traditional femininity as women's value is ascribed strongly to concepts of home; they become objects of great societal consternation. Passaro (1996) makes an additional point that the conceptualization of gender as performative is a powerful analytic stance that is “capable of capturing the contextuality and ephemerality of the many gendered acts any subject performs;” it can implicate more freedom of choice than is actually present (p. 11). Marginalized communities often experience gender as a mandatory performance, which can be hidden by this framework.

She eloquently elaborates that “Each of us may choose at different times and in different contexts, from among the performative dances of gender that are available and apprehensible to us, but dance we must” (Passaro, 1996, p. 11). The stakes of this “dance” are considerably higher for homeless women whose access to resources may depend on it.

Homeless women that are specifically targeted for expressions of non-normative sexualities are mothers and homosexual women. Single mothers receiving welfare are heavily monitored and subjected to mandatory intrusions by government agents within their private homes, so one can imagine the amount of increased attention garnered when they lose housing (Paradis, 2009). Following Watson’s previously discussed incorporation of Bourdieu’s notion of social capital, society places so much value in expressions of heteronormative femininity through complex cultural reward systems that it can easily be understood as a form of capital itself. Thus, femininity is a “potential source of capital accrual” for women experiencing homelessness making “gender performativity inevitable” (Watson, 2016, p. 261).

**SHELTER LIFE:**

Like how homeless women are a heterogeneous mix, so too are shelters, each unique. Keeping in mind the different categorical terms used to understand different kinds of homeless women (chronic, episodic, situational), the fact that they all often end up in the same shelter system has been amply critiqued since each group has drastically different capabilities and needs (Golden, 1990). The studies done on shelter life found that many guests relied emotionally on the shelter, and it was the relationships they made with other homeless women inside that dominated their perceptions of the shelter as a home (Hill, 1991). This meant that the women were very observant of new faces and personalities that may upset their balance, finding disruptive guests to negatively impact the “quality of their home life” (Hill, 1991, p. 304). Hill (1991) states that situationally and episodically homeless women, who tend to have more stable backgrounds, were found to be much more resentful of the shelter rules and restrictions of personal freedom that accompany communal residency, whereas chronically and episodically homeless women, with instability and abuse in their past, found the structure understandable or even comforting (p. 305).
One of the major observations by researchers on the topic of shelter life is that shelters tend to be understaffed and underfunded. During a two-day colloquium in 1986, sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, Program for the Homeless Mentally Ill, dozens of researchers whose work centered on women’s homelessness discussed different facets and themes of their findings. Paul Koegel (1986), who cataloged these discussions, noted that “Colloquium participants were unanimous in their belief that those who serve the homeless—particularly those who staff shelter programs—often lack the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which underlie the effective delivery of services” (p. 44).

What they found was that shelter workers mirrored societal values about the homeless, which understand homeless women as unpredictable and that “one should not make it ‘too easy on homeless individuals,’” as they are deserving of only the most basic level of care (Koegel, 1986, p. 46). Alternatively, one researcher commented that they encountered “a sense of acknowledgment of society’s responsibility for the homeless mentally ill” during their research in France and that the ways in which we train, pay, and educate staff of shelters betrays the moral ambivalence American culture holds towards our homeless (Koegel, 1986, p. 50). It should be additionally noted that many staff enter the field with generous and humanistic intentions, but due to emotional burnout, find themselves unable to offer compassionate care. Emotional exhaustion from social workers and therapists working with sexual abuse survivors can be especially high when it is in conjunction with mental illness (Mennen, 1990).

In the 1990 study Housing Homeless Women: A Consumer Preference Study, researchers Goering, Paduchak, and Durbin asked what the women would prefer for their housing situations; they stated that they wanted independent apartment-style living and that the primary support they needed was money, furniture, transportation, tools for crisis avoidance, finding something to do with their time, and friends. One point where women were willing to put up with increased structure and regulation was if it would promise them adequate security against aggressive behavior and violence from outsiders. All women involved in the study strongly desired stable housing environments. This did, however, become rather ironic to the researchers as the women expressed that they did not want to live with anyone struggling with substance abuse, disruptive mental health issues, criminal charges, or aggressive/negative behavior. If the housing unit they wished for were to discriminate against tenants on the above stated grounds, most of those women would not be allowed to live there either (Goering, 1990). This showed more than anything the women’s desire to live in a normalized environment, despite having speckled records themselves.

MENTAL ILLNESS:

In one of the previous sections, Women are the “Hidden Homeless,” I mentioned that, after the 1970s, many permanent care facilities for people with mental illnesses were shut down and the residents were released, sometimes into the streets. This is frequently dramatized and overrepresented in the discussion on how homelessness has changed over the decades. Even in the 1990s, 10 to 15 years after deinstitutionalization, only around 30% of homeless women had been accurately diagnosed with a mental illness. Interestingly, another 20-30% exhibited similar symptoms due to their stressful context; however, many of those behaviors have been shown to be
adaptations towards their highly volatile environment (Koegel, 1986; Brown & Ziefert, 1990; Paradis, 2009). Golden (1992) notes that there are certain gendered elements as well to the idea of the crazy homeless person, and she states:

...deinstitutionalized mental patients have played a role in perceptions of the homeless out of proportion to their actual numbers... [they are] more helpless, but also more fearsome, to the degradation of poverty these homeless added the mystery of madness- a quality particularly potent in women (p. 162).

Considering homeless women as deranged and dangerous negates the realities of street living and the isolation and violence that can accompany it. Occasionally, intensive treatment plans were conjured up to try and address mental illness in homeless women, but these strategies proved to be ineffective at best, and psychologically damaging at worst, as what the women truly needed was continued emotional support and safe housing (Koegel, 1986, p. 33).

Koegel (1986) adds to this perspective a compelling line of questioning:

Were they chronically mentally ill or were they simply reacting very sanely to the enormous stress of an insane situation? Was the fact that they wore four pairs of pants during the summer a reflection of an inability to properly identify weather-appropriate clothing or was it a highly conscious strategy aimed at frustrating potential rapists? Was their confusion a function of psychopathology or was it the result of longstanding sleep deprivation? Was their poor hygiene the result of poor self-management skills or their restricted access to sinks and showers?... The enormous difficulty of sorting out these factors suggested that the question of who is and who is not chronically mentally ill was not a meaningful one. (p. 30)

Ultimately, the lived experiences of homeless women are vastly different from the lives and maladies of housed patients. Therefore, it is not absurd that healthcare professionals would be diagnosing homeless women with all kinds of pathologies that may be entirely context dependent. This pattern of misdiagnosis indicates a need for more client-specific services targeting the needs of the homeless. For the homeless women who do deal with mental illness, their psychological condition has been shown to be correlative to untreated childhood sexual abuse amongst other traumas of adolescence, often presenting itself as severe depression, anxiety, and dissociation (Mennen, 1990). Studies have concluded that early therapeutic intervention is the most effective in the healing process for survivors of sexual abuse; otherwise, it can easily manifest into greater social and behavioral issues when paired with other stressors such as extreme poverty, pre-existing mental health conditions, and other forms of abuse (Koegel, 1986; Mennen, 1990).

RELATIONSHIPS:

From women who have been isolated on the streets for years to those who have recently left their lifetime home seeking refuge from domestic violence, all share in the need for secure attachments and emotional support. Recent research on intersections of gender and class found that women tend to “seek and mobilize social support,” particularly during periods of stress, and that this is one of
the greater differences between adult men and women. In other words, women exhibit “preferences for affiliation over power” (McGinn, 2017, p. 85). However, what we see is that economically stable, middle-class women tended to report secure and strong relationships of trust with friends and family, whereas economically vulnerable women and/or women in extreme poverty had heightened reliance on themselves and distrust of outside relationships (McGinn, 2017, p. 86).

Due to the social expectations and indoctrination of feminine ideals into girls from a very young age, homeless women, unsurprisingly, gave great value to relationships in which they were able to take on a nurturing role. In Judith Gonyea’s 2017 article on older homeless women’s perceptions of self, all the women spoke strongly of their experiences taking care of family members and fellow shelter residents. She elaborates that:

By sharing these nurturing or caring narratives, the participants lodged claims as valued persons who are living meaningful lives. Although the participants lacked hearths, their nurturer narratives, largely perceived as an extension of the feminine role, affirmed their “goodness as women.” (p. 80)

This phenomenon was common in research on women’s shelters, and it was noted that women often identified as caretakers and nurturers despite being categorized as “single” women by shelter personnel, implying that they were without families. Visitations from partners, children, or friends reinforced their self-worth as women, even if economic factors made them unable to fully care for their children or stay with their partners and families (Koegel, 1986, p. 24).

This recurrent theme made it clear that opportunities to give and receive emotional support are central to women’s ability to survive in such an isolated and often dehumanizing environment. The relationships formed inside women’s shelters may have been some of the most impactful in the women’s lives in terms of healing from the effects of homelessness. Community becomes a crucial reason to stay inside as relationships, friendships, and just basic human contact over time leads to the stabilization of many homeless women (Golden, 1992).

Much has been said about the necessity of support groups and feminist-informed therapeutic groups that would help women understand the roots of their trauma as symptomatic of a multitude of structural failures, as opposed to personal failures. Most women who report feeling stuck and immobilized see group engagement as a way to becoming “unstuck” (Benda, 1990; Paradis, 2009). However, it has also been noted that “Psychotherapy will not feed a hungry woman; rental subsidies will not address the rage and fear of an incest survivor,” for example (Harris, 1991, p. 193). This is also to say that there is no one solution to homelessness, but rather a complex web of resource assistance and prevention work that needs to be done before we as a society can even begin to tackle it.

**SUMMARY:**

Research on women’s experiences may be a newer addition to the study of homelessness, but there are many avenues in which to take it. At the crossroads of class, gender, and race, many women fall through the cracks and end up on the streets, and each researcher cited has done their part to
advocate for, describe, and explain the conditions of those women's lives. However, there is so much more research that can be done with topics such as gender performance, sexual/bodily currency, effects of extreme poverty on gender identity, social isolation and mental health, etc., with particular attention paid to those who are most marginal in these groups, i.e. women-identified and trans people of color.

Through conducting research that is place-based and thus allows for more multi-faceted subjectivities to be heard, my aim is to contribute smaller-scale and community-based knowledge that can be applied to the local struggling population more rapidly. Utilizing ethnographic research methods to target smaller groups of women allows for quick mobilization within communities as opposed to overarching plans that may take a generation or longer to work through federal bureaucratic structures, only then to trickle back down into towns and cities. The above sections of literature review and history demonstrate that while many generalized government initiatives are at play, the various homeless populations would benefit from a more specialized approach.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research study was designed using urban anthropological methods with particular attention to feminist and community psychology ethics. Urban anthropology is a subset of cultural anthropology that examines the sociocultural experiences and practices of urban people within their larger socioeconomic and cultural contexts (Basham, 1978; Hannerz, 1980). These frameworks are important to the success of this project as research of vulnerable populations (notably the extremely poor, people of color, LGBTQ folks) has a history of being extractive and, at worst, misrepresentative towards the studied group(s). Therefore, it became my epistemological undertaking to work with the women and portray them in ways that felt accurate to both of us. Through reading Emily Paradis' (2000) article, Feminist and Community Psychology Ethics in Research with Homeless Women, it became clear that there are many ways to conduct research unethically with this particular population. Particularly, Paradis (2000) warns against participating in the legacy of literature around homelessness that posits it as reflective of an individual’s moral and personal deficits. She states “...research resembles a colonial economy when researchers enter uninvited into the world of participants, extract a resource called data, process this resource into a product called theory, and use the product only for their own ends” (Paradis, 2000, p. 2). Taking this warning to heart, I attempted to find ways to make the research a mutually beneficial project for the women and myself by going out of my way to have interactions with them that were not research related, such as by participating in Art Night (explained further in the Compensation section). Even something as small as titling the research in a way that would not capitalize on our popular understanding of homeless women as sad, broken, and disempowered became an important part of my process. By not assuming that every homeless woman is necessarily broken, I hoped to allow the women to describe their conditions without fear of judgement. Paradis (2000) mentions this and says, “…transforming exploitative aspects of the traditional model can yield research that promotes the interests of marginalized people and advocates for changes to an oppressive social system” (p. 2). Therefore, I adopted many of her theoretical and practical approaches in this research in an effort to
continuously “transform” the power dynamic of researcher-researched so that the women would remain the experts on their lives despite their potentially distressed mental states.

Irene Glasser’s (1999) book, *Braving the Street: Anthropology of Homelessness*, was similarly formative in my theoretical construction of this research as she was one of the pioneers of using ethnographic field methods with the homeless population. Glasser (1999) states that ethnography allows a researcher to use participant observation, interviews, and simply time spent with the population to observe, interpret, and describe cultural phenomena. She places great emphasis on the need to attain and include many different perspectives on the topic of homelessness, including those of policymakers, housed residents, shelter staff, and the homeless themselves. This is why I chose to incorporate interviews with different shelter personnel as well as women experiencing different stages of homelessness.

### 3.2. SETTING

This research was conducted in the city of Eugene, which has a population of approximately 168,916 people and is the second largest city in the state of Oregon. Eugene is home to the University of Oregon, as well as a major train station and a small commercial airport. The Willamette River runs through the middle of the city and the weather is largely agreeable to someone living outside, minus the frequent rains. A range of emergency, transitional, and rapid rehousing services are provided by the Eugene Mission, ShelterCare, St. Vincent de Paul, Looking Glass, Catholic Community Services, Laurel Hill, Hosea Youth Services, and WomenSpace, with the Eugene Mission being the largest. This research is set in the Eugene Mission Women’s Center, which is located within the seven-acre Eugene Mission campus in the industrial neighborhood. It is also a rapidly gentrifying portion of the city. The city of Eugene also has what many people refer to as a “homeless problem,” which is to say that the people experiencing homelessness are visible to the housed population as there is an unusually high unsheltered homeless count. The HUD Point-In-Time count of homeless people from January 2018 reported 1,642 homeless people, with approximately 1,135 of those people being unsheltered.

**THE EUGENE MISSION:**

The Eugene Mission is the largest of the sheltering programs in the city, serving over 700 meals a day, sleeping 350 to 400 per night, and assisting around 3000 people each year. The campus is in the heart of the industrial neighborhood, which is a rapidly developing part of the city with one of the trendier restaurant strips in Eugene, just a 10-minute walk down the road from the Mission. Turning down the dead-end road, the smoke yard is on the right with a chain link fence and a covered tent with picnic tables; tulips and daffodils bloom alongside it in the spring. Across the road and on the left is the Women’s Center, attached to the Women and Children’s Center. Neither permit men inside unless they are staff. Then, as you near the middle of the stretch of road, there are administrative offices on the left, and tiny homes for veterans on the right. Lastly is the Men’s Center (which contains the dining hall downstairs and is four times the size of the Women’s Center), and across the road from that are residents of the Life Change program, which is a more intensive faith-based rehabilitation program that residents must apply for. Other buildings on the campus include
donation warehouses and places where visiting nonprofits can set up shop.

The Mission itself is a non-denominational Christian nonprofit dedicated to getting homeless folks back on their feet. In the last few years, they underwent a massive rebranding and structural shift from being a temporary emergency shelter to a “Wellness Center” for the homeless. This is exemplified through their combined overnight and day services such as haircuts, foot care, pet assistance, showers, meals, and case management. These services exist in tandem with the other nonprofits the Mission hosts on their campus such as Goodwill job connections, Pro-Bone-O, St. Vincent De Paul, and more. All residents must be “safe, secure, and sober” to stay at the Mission, which means they are drug tested upon entry and cannot be in active crises during their stay nor exhibit violent, aggressive behavior. What makes the Mission unique is that they receive no funding from the government and very little from grants, which enables them to avoid changing their services in accordance with outside institutional agendas. About 80% of their donations are from individual community donors, 8% from churches, 6% from businesses, and the remainder comes from grants and miscellaneous sources.

THE WOMEN’S CENTER:

Out of around 50 women, approximately 20 lived at the Mission the entire course of my time there, another 15 to 20 would come and go sporadically through the weeks and months, and the rest only stay a night, or a week. Lights are on at 5:45 am every morning and curfew is at 7 pm every night. Each volunteer shift starts at 4 pm, and every day when I walked up to the front gate of the Women’s Center, I found myself surrounded by about 10 to 15 other women within 10 minutes from ages 18 to 65. The Mission is closed from 1 to 4 pm, and all residents must go out into the world to get some fresh air, so at 4 pm, they line up for reentry. The outside gate and interior door can only be opened by the front desk person who sits facing both doors as well as a computer monitor that shows security videos of both. Only the female residents are allowed in the building, so buzzing people in also means recognizing around 40 to 50 different faces. My duties were to run the “hygiene station,” which supplied menstrual pads, razors, deodorant, brushes, combs, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and the occasional shampoo and conditioner or hairspray (each shower was equipped with those already). I also ran the shower schedule, which was a time map showing the loosely scheduled times during the day that certain women had requested to have shower time based on work schedules or preference. All women had to shower once a day. The buzzing system and the gates protect the women from stalkers, predators, and ex-partners, and all windows facing the street have the blinds closed. They were allowed three pieces of baggage, which were locked in a storage closet so they didn’t have to worry about theft; however, food could only be stored in the Women’s Center kitchen if the women had doctor’s note for special dietary needs. No cooking was allowed in the kitchen for liability reasons, and the dining hall served breakfast, lunch, and dinner at 6:30 am, 11:15 am, and 5:15 pm.16 However, if the guests were not in the mood for Mission food, some could use their food stamps to buy processed and/or packaged food on their own since they could not prepare any food in the center’s kitchen.

Additionally, each resident had a 1-hour daily chore that helped keep the communal living space clean and comfortable. Some of the entry-level chores were doing the dishes, cleaning counter and
bathrooms, taking out the trash, and baggage check-in. Then there was a senior team that controlled laundry, and this group of women never changed as it was the most complex and high-responsibility task. The laundry women held somewhat authoritative roles in the Women’s Center, and many times I overheard them communicating with staff about which women were not doing their part, such as bed-making, sheet-stripping, or moving their laundry through in a timely fashion. The staff then served as middlemen to relay this info to the slacking women, creating an interesting power dynamic where the laundry team often served as additional enforcers to the Women’s Center staff in order to maintain obedience and compliance with the rules. This, however, was not entirely uncommon, as many women depended on the rules for structure and had no problem reporting their fellow residents for non-compliance. Typically, this was not a dramatic affair unless it involved theft.

Every evening, chapel service is available from 7-8pm. This service is volunteer-led, so if there are no volunteers available to lead a religious service, it does not happen. Some volunteers, I included, used this time to lead other activities such as yoga or arts and crafts. Many women strongly desired more opportunities to express themselves creatively through crafting and art. Others just wanted to find activities to distract themselves to take up time in the evenings since the curfew was so early. In a discussion I had with an older transgender woman, Jenny, and one of the interviewees, Robin, we laughed at how the only other people with curfews at 7 pm were 14-year-olds on school nights. They expressed the thought that some of the rules at the Mission felt like they were meant to restrict, rather than protect, them.

3.3. STUDY PARTICIPANTS

WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

The women self-selected for the interviews by signing up with a staff member at the shelter, where the staff members determined the women’s ability to participate in the research without the possibility of reexperiencing trauma or agitation to an existing mental health issue. The only requirements were that the women be above 18 years of age, able to consent to research participation (as deemed by themselves and familiar shelter staff), and at the time of the research being performed, were living at the Eugene Mission Women’s Center in Eugene, OR. I often use the phrase “women experiencing homelessness” because not all of the women consider being homeless a large part of their identity and would not elect to be labeled “a homeless woman,” particularly because many of them have never actually lived on the street, but rather in cars, friends’ houses, abusive partner homes, or went straight into the shelter system after losing housing. Of the women I interviewed formally, two of them identified as white and one as Hispanic with undocumented Native American ancestry. All three were between the ages of 40 and 50. The dominant majority of all the women I spoke to during my time there (both in interviews and casual conversations) were between 40 to 70 years of age, white, and heterosexual. It is important to note that nationally Black Americans and Native Americans are excessively overrepresented in the homeless population. This is not reflected in my research findings, as at any given moment in my eight months of volunteering, there were five or fewer people of color staying at the Women’s Center. This research is not meant to be representative of all homeless women, but rather a focused look at the women at the Eugene
Mission Women’s Center.

SHELTER STAFF:

I conducted open-ended interviews with four senior staff at various sheltering organizations in Eugene that directly serve homeless individuals and families. These interviews were intended to be supplemental to the interviews of the women as well as the literature review. They are meant to provide a well-rounded approach to the topic of homelessness since other resources will be policy outlines, state and federal reports on homelessness, scholarly/theoretical articles, and interviews with homeless women. The staff were contacted directly via email and informed of my research project and request. The interviews lasted approximately an hour each and did not need follow-up discussion. They were recorded and transcribed, and all data was kept on a flash drive. All shelter personnel were given an option to remain anonymous, but none found that necessary. These perspectives became particularly valuable in understanding the ways that homelessness is approached in Lane County, where Eugene is located, and more generally, how it is handled in Oregon.

3.4. PROCEDURE

Due to an increase in research that has shown the effectiveness of ethnographic research of marginalized populations in the last 30 years (Koegel, 1986), I chose to use this framework and began volunteering at the Eugene Mission Women’s Center weekly for 3 months before starting interviews with the women, meaning I worked at the shelter for a total of 8 months, starting in September 2018 and ending in May 2019. This was an important pillar of the research as my regular time spent with the women allowed me to form positive and trust-based relationships with them on their terms, as well as observe naturally occurring dynamics between the women, staff, and space. This was done in tandem with shelter personnel interviews, as well as the relevant literature review. Therefore, both direct investigation (recorded interviews) and non-direct investigation (participant observation, casual conversation, and a literature review) were used in this research to better capture a full picture of the women’s situations. Permission to conduct research on-site was granted by the director of the Women’s Center and Eugene Mission and the University of Oregon Research Compliance Services office approved the research plan as exempt from the full Institutional Review Board (IRB) process prior to me starting to volunteer in September 2018.

RECRUITMENT:

There were many challenges and considerations in the recruitment of study participants as homeless women are a very vulnerable and marginalized group. I chose not to recruit women off the street directly due to the likelihood of drug use, incoherence, or ethical conundrums should the women reveal information that, as a mandatory reporter, I would be compelled to take to the Department of Human Services or the police, such as child/elder abuse, sexual and/or domestic violence, etc. Additionally, without access to comprehensive emotional and mental health care, I was concerned that interviews might re-traumatize some women on the street and consequently leave them worse off. Even then, a sizeable element of this research is the mutability of “reality” and
“truth” in these women’s lives. Walking the line between accepting their life stories as truths versus questioning their experiences became an unavoidable theme in our interactions. Therefore, by recruiting women from a shelter, I knew they were at least much more likely to have the resources they needed after a sensitive conversation, as well as access to case managers and law enforcement if necessary, whereas women on the street may struggle to benefit from those encounters.

**COMPENSATION:**

Due to the financial and material insecurity of the women, it became clear that compensating them for their time in the interviews would be inappropriate. Offering money, food, gifts or even smaller privileges such as a ride to an appointment were considered unethical to use in the recruitment of the women by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as many of them may have felt pressured to agree to an interview exclusively for the benefits.

Therefore, no compensation was offered. To give back to the women in a way that would not be considered persuasive for them to participate in my research project, I led “Art Night” every Thursday evening from 7 to 8pm where I would bring my personal art supplies and we would all try different art projects and mediums. This was relatively well-attended as 5 to 10 women would participate each week, which was considered normal for activity attendance.

**INTERVIEWS:**

There were three formal recorded interviews, countless casual, non-recorded interviews with the women at the shelter, and three formal interviews with shelter personnel in Eugene. For the interviews, I met the women one-on-one in the employee office at the Eugene Mission Women’s Center during the inside hours after 7 pm, after they had done their chores and eaten for the evening. Their interviews were recorded with their permission through the signing of a comprehensive informed consent document. I read the document allowed to the women while they looked it over as their literacy and educational backgrounds varied, then employed the teach-back method.17 Additionally, the informed consent document was written in simple and succinct language at a 9th-grade reading level for increased comprehension. The purpose of these interviews was to allow the women to speak about the aspects of homelessness that affect them the most and that they consider the most formative or impactful. The information they provided was analyzed to look for patterns in tandem with the casual conversations, participant observation, staff interviews, and literature review, but it is ultimately meant to bolster our understanding of women’s experiences of being homeless in this era and area. The formal, recorded interviews were each under an hour as many of the women felt more comfortable sharing naturally over multiple days or conversations. They were first prompted with questions about demographic information (age, sexuality, education level, race, etc.) and then were asked open-ended questions. The tone was conversational and was meant to help the women feel like they were having a discussion with a peer rather than an interviewer.

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION:**

A research journal was kept during the duration of my time at the Eugene Mission that allowed
me to take comprehensive notes describing relationships, interactions, and casual conversations with the women. No identifiable information was used in this note-taking process, and a flyer detailing my research was posted on the door to the women’s baggage room that ensured they would see it multiple times a day, no matter how long they had been staying at the Mission. The flyer stated my name, photo, university affiliation, and intention to observe the women in their daily activities for research purposes without the use of their identifiable information. The data gathered from these notes were invaluable in capturing and observing the uninhibited daily lives of the women.

4. FINDINGS

In my time at the Eugene Mission, what struck me the most in my observations were the different groupings and social relationships that developed between the women. Physical disabilities, mental illness, histories of abuse, age, class backgrounds, addiction, and sexuality were among the many pathways of differentiation and identification that women made to find or avoid other residents. Some divisions were strong enough that they were rarely breached, and it became clear that many women preferred the separation. Small cohorts formed most strongly along lines of addiction, “realism,”\(^{18}\) and class, but all of these identity categories overlapped, clashed, and contributed to each unique woman. What became clear through these divisions was the need for different shelter spaces for women going through radically different paths of homelessness. Below are some of the most prominent separations that I observed through my volunteer shifts as well as the interviews with the women.

4.1. FROM NO RULES TO ALL RULES

One resident that I became close with was Rogue. She was easily one of the more rambunctious women at the center and her tricky personality always brightened up my volunteer shift. Every Wednesday, she would come over and sit next to me at my hygiene station and ask what goods I had that day, as she knew that at the start of every shift, I would sort through the many drawers of donated hair ties, nail files, razors, toothbrushes and pastes, deodorants, etc. and organize them. This was a strategy I had developed to not only make my life easier when women would come asking for a specific product, but also because I knew certain women were always looking for certain items, and sorting the products thus allowed me to develop a circuit of communication with those residents by letting them know when we had those items in available. One woman was always looking for floss, another for little lotion bottles. Rogue, particularly, was always on the hunt for cute accessories like hair ties and pins, makeup, and nail polish.

Over the many months that I volunteered at the Women’s Center, Rogue learned about my research project and was excited to help, so much so that she was the first to sign up for an interview. She was 42 years old, white, with eyes like a hawk and a killer sense of style, always taking the time to color coordinate her eye makeup with her outfit and various accessories. She and another woman, Nico, were the dynamic duo of the Women’s Center with their raunchy humor, distinctive laughs, and uninhibited style. One of my main interests in speaking with Rogue was to find out how someone so opposed to “the system” was handling such a restrictive space like the shelter. Rogue, who was a self-identified rebel and rule-breaker, regularly waxed on about the overbearing rules of
the Mission, but she had been living there for around 8 months by the time I interviewed her. Her story revealed a series of compromises and sacrifices that demanded she stay put for a while:

Rogue grew up in San Bernardino but had lived in Eugene for the past 22 years. She moved because there had seen three drive-by shootings on her street, and she knew that she had family in Oregon and took that as a sign to change scenes. Her mother had moved to Bend and had two other children by another man, but Rogue was 19 years older than one and 23 years older than the other. Since Rogue’s mother was involved in her own family’s life, she migrated to Eugene instead of joining her parent and half-siblings. Rogue’s daughter had been in foster care for the last two years, and Rogue was currently in drug treatment trying to get her back. The previous summer when she lost her housing (for what seemed like the second time), she lived under a bridge and then on an island in the Willamette River.

Two years ago, when she lost her daughter to the state, two drug dealers who were supposed to be staying for two weeks in her house of 15 years decided that they were not going to leave. When I asked her what kind of drugs she was using, she mentioned meth, which is how she knew the dealers, and it turned out her boyfriend at the time was involved with the drug dealers as well. Rogue became homeless when she asked them to leave, and they threatened to kill her and shoot her five-year-old daughter. After 5 months she told them she was taking her daughter and that they were just going to abandon the house, but that night DHS came and took her daughter away. Rogue then locked herself in her room for 14 days and stopped using meth. She ended up having to give up the house to prove that she was no longer associating with “that kind of life.”

At the time of the interview, she was supposed to graduate from treatment in three months. Eugene Mission was the only shelter she had ever stayed in and she didn’t much care for the other women staying there besides Nico. She had contempt for the “old ladies” that got $800 a month from welfare checks but would not get up and move out to make room for other women who needed serious help getting off the street. Rogue mentioned that she only worked part-time as an event security guard because she had so many treatment, case management, and counseling appointments, but that if she were getting $800 checks, it would only take her a matter of months to get out of the Mission.

In a discussion about the structured environment of the Mission, she led with, “I fucking hate rules.” Among her protestations were the 5:45 am wake-ups, as well as the mandatory outside time from 1 to 4 pm. She mentioned, “It would be nice to get some rest sometime” as she hadn’t “had a nap in fucking months.” Rogue felt like even if women were sick with pneumonia, they had to leave from 1 to 4 pm. She’d rather be back on her island, where privacy was no concern, and she could have sex if she wanted to, instead of constantly being surrounded by “petty bullshit” from other residents and unable to lie down in her bed when she wanted a break. But she had no choice, because in order to get her daughter back, she had to prove herself to the state, and as she said, they wouldn’t release a child to a homeless woman. Rogue struggled with her speech being monitored, not being able to cook for herself, and not being allowed to have guests—all these rules that she never had to deal with before,
particularly since she was coming from living on the street.

As the interview went on, Rogue revealed that she had actually been in a shelter before when she ran away for about a week at age 13. Her father was a drug dealer, so she was exposed to that lifestyle from a young age to which she attributed her anti-authoritarian attitude and disdain for rules. She still talks to her mother and father over Facebook messenger a couple of times a week, and she sees her daughter every Monday for two hours, supervised by someone from Willamette Family, which handles people with substance abuse issues. The father of her daughter is out of both of their lives, as he abused Rogue for 10 years until she finally got a restraining order when her daughter was two years old.

When she spoke of her time outside, Rogue said that for her it was liberating, and she felt empowered and confident in her ability to defend herself, but when I asked her about the other homeless women she knew, she did not sound so enthused. Apparently, many of the women Rogue knew had sex with men for drugs, and she said when you’re homeless you’re always cold and hungry or too scared to sleep, but alcohol and drugs erased those feelings.

What we see from Rogue’s story is that there are some women who end up in the shelter system because they have a strong goal and understand that compliance with rules is mandatory to achieve them. Without the desire to get her daughter back, Rogue would never have chosen to stay at a shelter. Compared to her previous lifestyle, anything other than complete freedom felt like an overly structured and oppressive environment. Therefore, what follows is a population of homeless women who find the rules too drastic a change from their life on the street and can’t manage the tight scheduling, monitoring, and policing that happens at dry shelters. The Mission, for instance, has “safe, secure, and stable” requirements for all residents, so many people who have become accustomed to street life and have developed adaptive behaviors, such as hostility, yelling, stealing, etc., do not assimilate easily. Others find the threshold of compliance insurmountable and would rather take their chances outside.

In an interview with the Assistant Program Manager for Permanent Support Housing at ShelterCare in Eugene, I asked what kinds of obstacles women face trying to get access to housing and other resources. She replied that solving homelessness is so much more complicated than getting someone into a house and expecting them to be alright. Living outside has its own complex cultural system of rules and relationships that don’t just go away when you manage to get under a roof. Learning to abide by the rules of the “normal” housed world can be an impossible task for someone who has become assimilated into the isolation and relative lawlessness of the streets. Therefore, the next step is to invest in some low-barrier shelters in addition to the existing ones that allow for homeless people to come as they are without immediately having to adjust to the web of social expectations and rules that accompany high barrier shelters.

4.2. ADDICTION RECOVERY

A recurring theme in many of the women’s stories was drug use and addiction, whether it was their own experience or that of a partner or family member, drugs always seemed to make their way
into the picture. Most notably, meth was the drug that caused the problems. In the 2000s, Oregon experienced a spike in meth-related deaths until policymakers made one of the key ingredients—pseudoephedrine, found in nasal decongestants—illegal without a prescription. However, it seems that it only caused a brief decline as the death toll went up again in 2016. Oregon has unfortunately become known nationally for its meth problem. Take Nico for example, who grew up in Salem, Oregon and started using meth at around age 17 when she began dating a drug-dealer twice her age. She came from a stressful and low-income family and found the community around meth preferable. Nico lived with this group for years, but when she broke up with her boyfriend, he stole her trailer that she was living in. This led to her staying in a shelter for the first time, but she managed to keep her job. Now, she’s been sober for about 5 months.

What is important to look at in this anecdote is that while drugs certainly decreased her quality of life and made her more susceptible to homelessness, meth was not the explicit reason she ended up in a shelter. It informed her choice of relationships, living situation, and health, and in the end, one of these precarious pillars of her life came down and she ended up without a home. Plus, since there are no wet shelters in the area, she was forced to sober up. Many stories I heard had this relationship to drugs. Meth, alcohol, and occasionally heroin would work their way into women’s lives, and then for one reason or another, they would end up without a place to live. To get into the Mission, women like Nico, had to get clean and work with case managers to enroll in rehab or support groups with sponsors to keep them on track. These women found community in one another and were able to offer guidance to newcomers that were on the recovery track. They shared stories, experiences, and even recommendations of doctors or services in town as many women working through addiction were often working through mental illness.

One of the women I communicated with the most was Rhonda. She had a thick, sleek, black bob with deep, black eyes framed by large glasses and a stocky body that was typically supported by a walker due to a car accident a number of years prior. She was 44, Latina, and had never been to college but made sure to mention that she had finished high school. Her story, while particularly tragic, captured the ways in which drug use can be intertwined with an already unstable situation.

Rhonda was born in California but raised in Eugene after she and her sister were removed from their mother by DHS. Apparently, their nanny had been hitchhiking on I-5 with them at the ages of one and two, and this was the cause of their separation and consequent adoption. Rhonda was adopted separately from her sister and reunited with her biological mother in 1996, then moved back to Eugene in 1997 and lived at the Mission for the first time. From the age of 19, Rhonda was episodically homeless after getting pregnant and kicked out of her mother’s house, but she lost the child due to malnutrition in the third trimester. She had also been doing meth with her boyfriend before she knew she was pregnant but did not consider this a reason for the stillbirth.

After the loss of her first child, Rhonda moved to California and then to Florida with her boyfriend and became addicted to cocaine and meth until her boyfriend cheated on her with their cocaine dealer. The next time she became pregnant, she lost her child again from her abusive partner kicking her in the abdomen during a fight. Her water broke, and she was
rushed to the hospital, but the infant’s neck had been broken by the impact. After birth, he was alive only for a matter of minutes. Rhonda never reported the incident out of fear of being killed, but she reminded me that there’s no statute of limitations on murder.

Her next relationship was with another abusive man who was a part of the Aryan Brotherhood and a motorcycle gang. They were together for 8 years, but after spending a night in jail for fighting him in their home, she decided to leave him, which was her current reason for staying at the Mission. She was trying to locate her birth certificate so she could file for divorce, get Social Security Income (SSI) payments, and renew her license, but between two adoptions and being born in California, it was a struggle.

At the time of the interview, Rhonda was mostly concerned with taking care of her adoptive mother who was suffering from Alzheimer's and getting her things back from her abusive husband’s house. She regularly communicated with her many siblings (half, full, and adopted) but almost never with her adoptive father, who she revealed had also been abusive. At the Mission, she often stood up for other women and got along well with the staff; she struck me as a simultaneously sensitive and fierce woman.

When I asked her about how women experience homelessness, she got frustrated and mentioned how many women just don’t have “street smarts” and end up being taken advantage of. While all her past relationships had been characterized by violence and drug addiction, she had been clean for the last 11 years and was very protective of other women going through the recovery process. One of her main issues was the proximity of the needle exchange program put on by the HIV Alliance, which was often set up right down the road from the Mission. Drug users could get rid of their used needles and pick up clean ones, as this was a method of preventing the spread of bloodborne pathogens such as HIV or Hepatitis C. Rhonda’s concern was that it was dangerous for the people trying to become sober (not to mention the kids that stayed at the Mission) as well as the fact that it made it look like all homeless people are drug addicts. She didn’t want the residents at the Mission to be lumped in with the users of the needle exchange and said: “Not all of us homeless people are nasty...we shouldn’t be treated like shit ‘cause we’re homeless.”

Rhonda’s story shows the complex ways in which drug use may be wrapped up in a host of other contextual hardships and not always present as the obvious reason for someone becoming unhoused. However, it is important to note that drugs are the main cause of homelessness for many people, or at least, make up a larger part of their identity than in Rhonda’s case. The women at the Mission who had more severe experiences with drug addiction were largely uninterested in sharing their stories with me. Mission staff and the women that did speak with me thought that their avoidance of sharing was due to the amount of shame associated with substance abuse.

Women at the Mission became friends through group therapy, bonding over the difficulties of getting clean, or missing certain parts of their past, and cliques formed to chat about what medications they were on and who was going to group later. These women were able to band together because of shared trauma, or rather, shared recovery, but they acknowledged that not
everyone can make it to that stage without the presence of a wet shelter. Cold weather nights are the only times you do not have to pass a drug test to stay at the Mission. Therefore, if you want to get into the shelter, you have to start the recovery process on your own, but many women do not want to go through withdrawals on the street, potentially leaving them and their belongings vulnerable to predation. While requiring sobriety for residence is surely a strong motivator for some, it completely alienates others. Consequently, women who have not been living outside for very long (or at all), may find this sacrifice worth it to have a roof over their heads, whereas women who have been living on the streets for months or years and have become adjusted to that lifestyle may not find the reward of shelter for sobriety compelling enough.

4.3. VICTIM VERSUS REALIST

It was a rather muggy September day in Eugene, and it was my first day volunteering at the Mission. Upon entering, a young woman with light brown skin and black hair pulled into a bun pushed a purple stroller to the front desk. Her round face held two large, dark, round eyes and quickly enough matching large tears were streaming down from them. She had been harassed three times that day by the same man in a white pickup truck who had been cruising the blocks surrounding the Eugene Mission campus all day. He looked around 60, had a reddish-white beard, and among other things had offered to buy her a car seat for her daughter if she’d get in his truck and go to the beach with him, an offer that he had apparently given to a number of other women staying at the Mission with or without children. She said that this triggered her PTSD from similar incidents with men, and that she was afraid for her daughter. Her daughter, meanwhile, laid on her back in the stroller, gurgling or squealing occasionally, and vaguely looked around with the same dark, round eyes as her mother. The woman listening from behind the counter was the only staff member in the Women and Children’s Center at the time, as oftentimes each staff member worked either by themselves or with a volunteer at any given moment. After taking down the details of the incident to make a police report and to prepare an announcement to the other residents, she asked the young woman if she could do anything else for her, and most importantly if she was okay. Her reply was “I could really use a hug.”

Over the next few months, it became clear that it was not only common for these kinds of incidents to occur, but also something residents had to learn to live with. Beyond the predators that came to the Mission campus to target women, there was also the Men’s Center, which was down the street about 100 yards from where the women stayed. A couple women on separate occasions expressed anxieties over running into men that had been previously jailed for violent crimes or sexual abuse. Countless times the women would make remarks in passing about walking down to dinner in packs or verbally defending themselves from the men that lingered on the sidewalks and trailed women as they walked the stretch of road between the cafeteria and the Women’s Center. Certainly not all the men had spent time behind bars, and many of the women were good friends with some of the residents at the Men’s Center, but it seemed to be an unsaid rule that if they approached you first, you should be suspicious. Dinner started each night at 5:15 pm for the women, and any men that were present during this time had to be approved as being a partner or related to the women in some way.
One evening, over a plate of salad and hard-shell tacos, Rogue, Nico, Robin, and I passed around Rogue’s personal hot sauce and gave the tacos a few ample dashes. Spices were a rarity in the Mission meals, as they had to accommodate hundreds of people each night with all kinds of dietary requirements.

“Oh it’s so bad, it’s so bad, some of these women don’t know who they’re datin’...” Nico said in more-or-less hushed tones, “they date these dudes from the Men’s Center and they won’t even look ‘em up to see what they’ve done.”

I leaned in, and asked her to elaborate, curious at this remark. Nico went on to tell me that much of the time men would approach women staying at the Women’s Center and want to date them, but sometimes they were con artists or just plain dangerous. The women, however, enjoying the attention and company, would refuse to run their names on the internet as a sort of informal background check, something Nico and Rogue swore by to avoid “rapists and murders.” Then the conversation quickly took a turn as another woman entered the dining hall. “There she is! Now she’s got a whole other thing going on with some dude on the internet, always messaging and sayin’ they’re gonna meet up.” Nico looked side-to-side and said, “Some of these ladies just don’t have any street smarts...”

What followed was a long discussion of being victim to your own fantasies as suddenly the three women each took turns recounting stories about women who had fallen for internet catfishing scams, sold on the idea that they were in love, and ended up being cleaned out of what little money they had and never meeting the “man” on the other side. The women would meet these people on forums or chat rooms and soon be wiring them their Supplemental Security Incomes (SSIs). It was only a month or so before this conversation that I had been chatting with Fran during my volunteer shift, who told me that she was engaged and about to leave the Mission. Fran struggled to see out of one eye and walked with a cane. Heat-damaged grey hair framed her long face and crooked smile, although she had been particularly sad lately as her little dog had been put down by the person watching it. Excited for her engagement, I asked where she would be moving and when, and tried to stifle my shock at her reply.

“Oh, he’s already gotten me a Lamborghini, he asked what color I wanted and I said, ‘I don’t know, red!’ He owns two yachts and a cruise ship, so maybe I’ll live on one of those, he said I could have whatever I wanted...I’m just waiting to hear back from him, and then I’m out of here, he’s going to take care of me.”

I smiled from a mix of discomfort and confusion, and in an attempt to carry on the conversation normally, I asked how they had met.

“Online...yeah...but we are going to meet up, I’m just waiting to hear back from him.”

After Fran had left and was out of sight, I slid over to the front desk and leaned over its mottled grayish counters with my eyebrows raised, “So Fran is leaving the Mission for a man who got her a red Lamborghini?”

The two attendant staff pursed their lips and furrowed their brows in different iterations, the one
closest to me rolled her eyes slightly and said, “It happens all the time, they get messaged from guys on the internet about buying them stuff, traveling, whatever, and then when it comes time to meet up no one is there... Ruth over there, she’s supposed to be moving to Miami with some dude she’s never met... We try to tell them to be careful, but there’s nothing we can do, sometimes they give up their beds here thinking they’re gonna get on a train or something, but no one ever comes, and they come right back. They keep sending them money for this or that, ‘Oh, I couldn’t make it ‘cause my car broke down, can I borrow some money?’ or ‘Oh, my daughter is really sick and I can’t come to visit you until I pay for her treatment can you send me some money?’ They don’t listen, they get angry when we try to tell them.”

My heart sunk remembering that conversation as I sat in the dining hall with Rogue, Nico, and Robin, because the woman they were stealing glances at was Ruth. She awkwardly lumbered through the line with her heavyset body, and then sat down alone. Even Fran came back after a few days and found many of her previous friendships were broken upon return. Distraught, she confided in me that she didn’t understand why it mattered who she was dating, that it was none of their business, even if it was a scam. She felt like no one would talk to her anymore, and she was angry at the other women for abandoning her. Ruth perhaps learned from Fran’s isolation and kept her “relationship” largely quiet, but the loss of the friendships was devastating to both women after returning to the shelter with yet another excuse from a made-up man.

It was clear that these catfished women were considered victims by the others; no “street smarts,” low self-worth, and living in a fantasy despite the warning signs. The victims frustrated the realists terribly; they were haunted by the strength of these fantasies. They thought, how could it be that these disabled, older homeless women were somehow so “lovable” that they managed to secure a billionaire? Rogue looked seriously at me across the table and said that there was no way anyone was going to want an old homeless woman, let alone some guy with five yachts. The real lie, she seemed to imply, was that homeless women were desirable at all.

I was moved by the tenacity of both groups. The victims, steadfast in their illusions of radical class-jumping, sailing the world with diamonds draped around their necks and a man by their side, when they could hardly afford a fast-food dinner and needed to sleep with an adult diaper, and the realists, angrily pressing for the truth, embracing the harshness of their situations and fired up by the impossibility of such fairytale nonsense. Just the thought of being swept away from this place was like a drug for some women, and they were willing to pay to keep the high. Older women, who had grown up in a society with far fewer options than we have today, found themselves homeless and alone. They were stripped of their positions as nurturers and sexual beings through the channels of homelessness and time, and yet these women held tightly to conventional social ideals. In the eyes of traditional society, a woman who is neither desirable to a man nor needed by her family is not a real woman, and these women desperately needed to feel real.

Many months prior, I was speaking with a woman in her mid-70s who had taken the last name “Lamb” due to the close relationship she felt with God and her ability to communicate with angels. She had just made it to the top of the housing waitlist and was in the process of being approved for an apartment, and I congratulated her wholeheartedly as we walked around the Women’s Center,
looking at empty spaces on the walls that might benefit from her artistic touch. She was a painter, and we were discussing the possibility of her creating some art for the walls once she got settled into her new apartment. When I returned for my volunteer shift the following week, she had already moved out, but when I asked the staff how her transition out of the shelter went, they told me she did not end up moving into the apartment. Confused, I inquired more and found out that Ms. Lamb had met a man who had offered her a place to live with him instead, and that she turned down the apartment she had waited months and months for to move in with practically a stranger. Whether it be dating a dangerous man and refusing to ask him about his past, paying for affection online, or simply choosing partnership over stable housing, these kinds of relationships show us that homeless women are particularly vulnerable to predation.

4.4. “RAISED” OR “NOT RAISED”

Most of the women who formed friendships with me were women who would be considered situationally homeless and were experiencing homelessness for the first time. This could be read several ways. Perhaps they felt more comfortable than other homeless women did about talking to a college educated volunteer, or maybe they felt that they had little to hide and more to prove about why they were experiencing homelessness in the first place. One of the women I spoke with over dinner one night was Jane. She was a white woman, about 45 years of age, and she had bright blue-green eyes with tousled caramel-colored hair and had moved to Eugene from Palm Springs, California. We chatted about life over a boiled vegetable medley.

She had gone to college for agricultural economics and had wanted to help developing countries with food production, and so we talked about travel and research and all sorts of school-related topics. I found myself a little shocked by the conversation, and maybe a little guilty as well for being so surprised. There were in fact a number of women at the Eugene Mission who were college educated, but I had been operating under the assumption that casually discussing educational backgrounds was inappropriate, as it is true that the majority of the women had never been to college. As she asked me about the research, I mentioned how I had been reading about the frequency of staff burnout in high-stress workplaces and inquired if she had ever found that to be true at the Mission. I expected her to mention something about staff exhaustion or rigid discipline, but she expressed deep appreciation for the staff who she found to be very supportive, kind, and patient. Upon reflection, it was often the chronically homeless women who struggled with the staff, and even then, their struggles were primarily with the rules. When I questioned her about life at the Women’s Center, she stated the importance of maintaining her “inner balance” when so many energies in one space are hectic and chaotic. “You can’t control the external,” she said with a slight shake of her head. I never did find out why Jane was at the Mission and how she had gotten there, but I appreciated our discussion nonetheless.

Robin, however, was a resident I maintained regular contact with. The first time we met, I was leading Art Night and had brought dozens of old magazines to be made into collages. Robin sat at the table, but instead of cutting the magazines up, she started reading National Geographic. As the activity ended, and I cleaned up, she stuck around, and we started talking. She revealed that she was interested in archaeology and was learning Hebrew as well. This was the start of our friendship as
her mellow attitude and curious nature led us to have pleasant conversations about life, the Mission, and more. Robin, like many women at the Mission, did not look homeless. She dressed well, had beautiful long silvery-blond hair and smiled frequently.

Once, on a walk on Skinner’s Butte, she told me that she was looking for bald eagles and when she happened upon other walkers she asked if they had seen any. Their reply was that there weren’t eagles around anymore because of the homeless. She was shaken by this, asking herself “Do they know I’m homeless? Can they tell?” and she confessed that these kinds of interactions with fellow Eugene residents were not uncommon. Robin was humbled by staying at the Mission and found the other women largely amicable, but she resisted the identity of “homeless.” Her story below is revealing as to what many situationally homeless women go through in their journey to becoming unhoused:

Robin was born in Colorado and lived in the Bay Area for a while before moving to Redding, California for many years. She was 56 years old at the time of our interview, never married or had children and said she had been living in Eugene for the last 20 or so years after coming up to be closer to her mother. She went to school to become a massage therapist and later entered a pre-med program, but she ended up working with Amtrack and later doing field work for a drug abuse and mental health study through Duke University for the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), coordinated by the Health and Human Services Department. She bought a house in 2003, had two dogs, and lived a fairly regular life.

Along the way, Robin had undergone a series of highly traumatic surgeries including a botched hysterectomy, removal of intestinal blockage cysts, and operations to correct a congenital heart defect. All these procedures had to be done in Redding because she had MediCal insurance. But in the last couple of years, when she tried to file for disability, the doctors denied that any medical procedures had been performed. They claimed they had no record of it.

When Robin went down to California to get an MRI and to try to retrieve her medical files to get the procedures confirmed, she moved in with her previous roommate from Redding who had been a long-time friend. What she found out when she arrived was that her friend had become addicted to meth, as had her ex-boyfriend, whom she had been communicating with about her return to California.

After developing a skin disease in her nose from the amount of cat urine and feces in her roommate's house, she took a position as a caretaker for her ex-boyfriend’s brother who was getting out of the hospital for broken ribs and pneumonia. This enabled her to move out of the meth house and obtain employment. Sensing that she might be in Redding for a while, Robin found a renter for her house in Eugene and came back up to clean up and move out her things. During her journey, the man she had been hired to take care of in Redding passed away from an aggressive form of cancer that had been previously undetected in his hospital visits.
Saddened by the death and wanting to support her ex-boyfriend, who had just lost his only remaining family member, Robin returned to Redding to help with the funeral. Upon her return, she stayed with the ex, but he became abusive. He threatened to “bash [her] head into the wall,” but she was terrified of becoming homeless, so she stayed. She expressed that it was an incredibly difficult situation for her, “If this is what the person who supposedly loves you is like, what is it going to be like on the outside? Sometimes we have to put up with abuse just to have a roof over our head.” Robin did eventually move out and started living with another old friend in Redding, but during the wildfires around 2013, the woman’s house burned to the ground along with all the medical files and paperwork Robin had been amassing over the last few years. At the time of the fires, Robin had been in Eugene getting surgery for an obstructed bowel and got the news that she had been evicted by her friend, meaning she wouldn’t be able to file with Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration (FIMA). During our interview, she explained that she had just gotten her birth certificate back.

Realizing there was no reason to return to Redding, she got a job at the Springfield Country Club but was not doing well after the surgeries. Then she got feedback from her manager that her mouth smelled, and after going to the doctor, she found out her wisdom teeth were rotting. Now she was driving back and forth from Eugene to Redding for healthcare. After losing her job at the Springfield Country Club, she stayed at a Mission in Redding, but they were a low-barrier shelter, so no one was drug tested or screened for aggression and severe mental illness. The women she slept next to were often completely high on meth, wide awake for the night. After she witnessed four or five people die from laced drug use, she came back to Eugene to try to live in her house.

Robin’s house no longer had electricity, and while she managed to get disability payments of $910 a month, the house payments were $830; although she tried to save the house, it was foreclosed. Currently, she is trying to file Chapter 13 bankruptcy to retake the house, as well as file with Amtrak for permanent disability. When I asked her if this was the first time that she truly felt homeless, she stated that she had never actually lived on the street, but that she hadn’t had secure housing in years. After trying to live in her car when the house got too cold, she came back to the Eugene Mission.

When I asked her about her family, she said her three half-sisters are over ten years older and do not like her. Her father passed away in 1999, and their mother is in hospice, and her half-sisters won’t let Robin visit her. She does not even know if they would tell her when she passes. The closest sister to Robin’s age thinks she’s a hypochondriac and that doctors and attorneys would never lie about medical records and procedures. Robin said sadly, “It’s easier for people to believe that I did something wrong, than that there’s something wrong with the system.”

In our discussion about the Women’s Center and her experiences at the Mission, she praised the friendly (though overworked) staff and the quality food from Food for Lane County, but she also had a few ideas for improvements. Namely, Robin thought there should
be more expressive activity opportunities. She mentioned that one resident plays the piano and harmonica and that her friend Jenny is talented at playing guitar, implying that some sort of musical group could be formed. She wants there to be a meditation or spiritual service more regularly and says there is a lot of anger at the Mission, and the women need to be able to redirect that energy. But mostly, Robin thought everyone could benefit from two different shelter spaces, she said, “...some of these women, I don’t think they’ve ever been raised by somebody...nobody to say ‘cover your mouth’ when you cough.” She thought that if there were a separate low-barrier facility for women going through drug issues, severe disabilities, and disruptive mental illness they could “better address” those issues, in a way that is not insulting or degrading. Robin elaborated that it is difficult to share space with so many women going through radically different issues and that it can be scary to be around people who are volatile, “You don’t know what they’re going to do.” Her compassion for the other women was obvious, but so was her discomfort at having to share a communal space with women who didn’t understand basic hygiene or perhaps could not practice it due to their various conditions.

Jane and Robin show us that there is a world of homelessness that is largely misunderstood by the popular imagination. These are the women who have college degrees, held jobs their whole lives, and then experienced some sort of series of traumatic events that upset the balance. Jane and Robin are good examples of the situationally homeless as they can seek out services and manage the responsibilities of the housed world. The issue is that due to unforeseen circumstances, they are without housing and find it difficult to get out of shelter life. The need for transitional housing for specifically situationally homeless women is clear.

5. DISCUSSION

There are many things to be said about women’s homelessness in Eugene, and ultimately, I feel as though this research project has barely scratched the surface. The women I spoke to were certainly not the most diverse group, and only having time to work from a single shelter additionally impacted my findings and my ability to collect an accurate spread of data. That being said, my eight months working with the women at the Eugene Mission were invaluable.

The time and stories that the women shared with me made this research possible, and it was their tenacity, vibrancy, humor, and resilience that inspired it in the first place. The reader will notice that I have left a large gap in the research concerning homeless women who experience mental illness and severe disability. I have left this out intentionally as, due to my lack of training and inability to ethically and accurately advocate for those women, I came to the conclusion that it would be more helpful for me as a researcher to leave that to future professional inquiry. Other sites of study that should be investigated further would be single fathers’ experience of homelessness, LGBTQ youth, immigrant homelessness, relationships between women in shelters, and the complex culture of living outside.

Until our society stops undervaluing women and socializing them to be dependent on men, we must accept and remediate the consequences of a capitalist patriarchal system that abandons
impoverished women. As Meabh Savage writes in her 2016 article *Gendering Women's Homelessness:*

> In a society where the primary moral responsibility for providing love and care continues to rest with women, the salience of the affective domain for developing gender-sensitive approaches in homeless policy cannot be overstated. This is because the affective sphere is the most relevant site for understanding the importance of the more acutely gendered capitals and the role they play in influencing women’s journeys into, through, and out of homelessness. (p. 56)

As Savage (2016) states clearly, if care continues to be offered within a service model that is designed to meet the needs of homeless men, this will be a great loss to humanitarian causes that aim to promote and implement equitable social practice.

On a smaller scale, with more immediate opportunities for change, the importance of healthy friendships and relationships should not be underrated, and the shelter is an excellent space to start these kinds of interventions. Groups that meet about healthy boundaries, expectations, and expressions of intimacy should be a regular occurrence. As it has been previously elaborated in the literature review, homeless women are often victims of both childhood abuse and domestic violence, and these kinds of discussions might help in helping women find stability and safety in their journey in, and through, homelessness.

Largely, it is most important to me that this project will allow for housed readers to consider the inherent value of these women and others like them in making informed and productive policy changes that could change the system of care entirely. The feedback offered from this project is another incentive for the city to provide low-barrier shelter access to the homeless population that will never be able to make the jump into places like the Mission without a transitory period in a lower-stakes environment. Homelessness is a spectrum of unhoused states; therefore, providing services that can meet people at these different levels is key to bridging the gap between the chronically homeless and the housed world. Public policy and ethnographic research have the potential to be powerful allies in the creation and implementation of effective care procedures, and as one of the women at the Mission has aptly said, “Nothing about us, without us.”

### 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

**SHELTERING FOR THE SITUATIONALLY HOMELESS:**

As previously mentioned in the section on History and Policy in Eugene, the way Lane County utilizes the VI-SPDAT scoring system and centralized housing waitlist leaves situationally homeless women in an awkward position. They do not make enough money through unemployment, disability, or a job to find a house themselves, yet they never land atop the housing waitlist; this situation turns shelters into a purgatory space for situationally homeless women who cannot afford to leave but feel that they do not belong in a shelter. In an interview with another ShelterCare employee about what they had observed in their time working with the homeless, we discussed the potential benefits and drawbacks of combined sheltering for people experiencing all forms of
homelessness. A chronically homeless woman who is in deep psychosis and recovering from a meth addiction may share a bunk bed with a situationally homeless woman who has just entered the shelter to flee from an abusive partner. Is this advantageous to either women? In what ways? The interview revealed that while there were some cases of positive relationships being formed between a more stable woman and a less stable woman, the need for separate transitional housing for situationally homeless women was clear. Therefore, beyond providing more low-barrier shelters, there may also be value in transitional spaces for women experiencing homelessness for the first time, allowing those precious beds at places like the Women’s Center to be filled by women who desperately need to get off the streets.

INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION:

In the larger scale issue of unsheltered homelessness in Oregon, and specifically in Eugene, it would seem that opening up beds in shelters to get people inside is the highest priority. While my previous comment about supplying transitional shelters for situationally homeless women is one potential way to free up shelters like the Mission for episodically and chronically homeless women, another solution would be stronger intervention and prevention programs. Interest-free loans for those who qualify or temporary assistance for women experiencing, for example, a medical emergency or the loss of a partner, could go a long way in keeping people housed while decreasing public spending on homelessness once they are on the street or in shelters. Prevention-focused organizations like Ophelia’s Place are one way to intercept patterns of extreme poverty and homelessness through expressive, creative, and social outlets that allow young women to develop relationships with mentors and peers in healthy ways. These kinds of multifaceted holistic approaches to prevention and intervention are invaluable in the fight to end homelessness.

RELATIONSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES:

Without fail, all the women I spoke to at the Mission expressed their appreciation for Art Night, Yoga, and Chapel Services. Homelessness is dehumanizing enough, and not engaging creatively, spiritually, and socially on a regular basis was difficult for the women. Previous scholarship has unanimously shown that the ability to form healthy social relationships with other women as well as distract oneself from chronic stress and the daily battles of homelessness and communal living is incredibly formative in women’s ability to recover, stabilize, and enter the housed world. The first and easiest thing to implement at shelters would be an increase of available activities. If the issue is not enough volunteer labor, the women have a plethora of skills and abilities they could share. As Robin mentioned, these women are musicians, artisans, meditators, craftspeople, and more. Allowing women to have responsibility as activity leaders would undoubtedly raise their confidence and benefit the group as a whole.

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Thank you.

REFERENCES


Paradis, E. K. (2000). Feminist and community psychology ethics in research with homeless


NOTES

1 This is in reference to the Combahee River Collective Statement published in 1986 by Black feminists with a foreword from Barbara Smith. In short, their platform is centered on an intersectional approach that prioritizes poor Black women (particularly LGBTQ+) for liberatory action, as they are the most oppressed in our society. It additionally has a strong socialist, Marxist element that considers economic class instrumental in social movement mobilization. In the 2010s, there has been an increased academic and popular interest in Black feminist teachings.

2 The other literature I was able to find on homeless women covered many topics such as addiction, sexuality, neoliberalism, postfeminism, mental health, and motherhood, but very little of it was focused on specific communities of homeless women with the explicit goal of remediate action.
This is particularly important to note when we consider women experiencing homelessness as they have been considered the “hidden homeless” due to their likelihood to stay off the streets and exhaust all other housing situations first. This will be discussed further in the Literature Review.

This term is defined by HUD as an individual under 25 without dependents or family.

See Appendix


8 From my understanding, this term seems to be used more prominently in European research on homelessness, therefore, I have chosen to stick with “situationally homeless” as it seems to be the standard in the US.

9 Brown and Ziefert mention that most of the women who participated in the study had been greatly impacted the removal of one or more children from their care.

10 It is worth noting that this has been overrepresented in the literature on causes for homelessness as well as in the dominant understanding of this nation’s homeless. However, this will be covered more in the section Mental Illness below.

11 The War on Drugs refers to a US government-led initiative that aims to stop illegal drug use, distribution, and trade by creating harsher penalties for offenders. It started in the 1970s, and while it is often associated with US presidents such as Nixon and Reagan, it is still evolving today. It has also been the subject of thorough critique, as many of its policies blatantly target Black and Hispanic Americans, such as increased punishment for crack cocaine over powder cocaine.

12 See footnote 10.

13 Women’s Advocates opened one of the country’s first documented shelters for battered women in 1974. By the end of the 1970s, there were about 250 shelters for abused women and now there are several thousand domestic violence organizations, some of which offer shelter.

14 I will be using the terms “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” interchangeably.

15 This information can be found on their website at https://eugenemission.org/about/facts-and-financials/

16 Men have separate meal times, typically right after the women.

17 The teach-back method is a way of checking understanding developed out of ethical healthcare practice that entails asking participants to state in their own words what they need to know from what was just explained to them- in this case consent forms. It is a way to confirm that you as the researcher have explained the data collection process in a manner the participants understand.

18 Some women described themselves as “realists,” as opposed to relying on faith or fantasy to comfort them.


20 “Wet shelter” meaning a low barrier shelter where you do not have to be sober to be a resident, as opposed to “dry shelter” such as the Mission requires sobriety to stay.


22 Cold weather policy kicks in when the temperature at night is below 33 degree Fahrenheit, and the Mission brings out cots and sleeping pads to let men and women get inside from the cold. For these nights, they do not require sobriety.

23 Finding a home after serving time in prison can be incredibly difficult, and many released inmates need to stay in shelters upon release before figuring out how to secure housing. This is certainly another avenue of potential research and policy change.

24 “Catfishing” is a term used to refer to when someone misleads you over the internet about their appearance, identity, etc. It is often used in the context of dating apps, or in this case for money.

25 This is in reference to the phrase “Lamb of God” which is sometimes used to refer to Jesus. Additionally, I do not feel that I am in a position to judge what is real or not real about these women’s stories, which is why I do not say “supposed ability to communicate with angels.”

26 See Literature Review section, Relationships.


28 https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-2-Section-1.pdf