



# RUBIKON

JOURNAL OF TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

VOLUME 7 / NUMBER 2  
SEPTEMBER 2020

“Building Comic Imagination through Political Parody: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Donald Trump in *The President Show* and Saturday Night Live’s *The Presidential Debate*”

Isna Ardyani Fataya

“The Guise of U.S. National Referral Authority to ‘Othering’ Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A TWAIL Approach”

Alifa Salsabila

“Spiritual Hybridity of Native American in Louis Edrich’s *The Round House*: Postcolonial Studies”

Achmad Faqih & Muh Arif Rokhman

“The Paradox behind the Existence of Gay Conversion Therapy as Depicted in Garrard Conley’s Memoir *Boy Erased*”

Sekar Yolanda Azza

“Reshaping the Homosexual Identity of Middle-Aged Gay Men in America: A Sociological Study of Identity Process on Andrew Sean Greer’s *Less*”

Fairuz Su’da & Muh Arif Rokhman

“The Framing of Women’s Ideal Body in American Society in Instagram Illustrations by Julie Houts (@jooleeloren)”

Ni Wayan Eka Jayanti & Ida Rochani Adi



# RUBIKON

JOURNAL OF TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

Volume 7 • Number 2 • September 2020

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Prof. Dr. Ida Rochani Adi, S.U.

## CO-EDITOR

Dr. Aris Munandar, M.Hum.

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Michael Vann (SCOPUS ID: 26034940500) • Sacramento University of California  
Melani Budianta (SCOPUS ID: 14826353500) • Universitas Indonesia  
Prof. Carla Jones (SCOPUS ID: 7408259725) • University of Colorado Boulder  
David Palmer (SCOPUS ID: 26634245300) • University of Melbourne  
Dr. Shrimati Das (GARUDA ID: 250532) • GTICC Mexico

## ASSISTANT EDITOR

Galant Nanta Adhitya, S.S., M.A.

## JOURNAL MANAGER

Maria Elfrieda C.S.T, S.Hum., M.A.

## PEER-REVIEWERS

Prof. Dr. Juliasih Kusharyanto, S.U. • Dr. Nur Saktiningrum, M.Hum. • Muh. Arif Rokhman, Ph.D •  
Achmad Munjid, Ph.D • Dr. Dewi Haryani Susilastuti, M.Sc. • Dr. Purwanti Kusumaningtyas, M.Hum.

RUBIKON, Journal of Transnational American Studies (JTAS) is a journal published by Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and the Association of American Studies Society of Indonesia (ASSINDO) supported by UI, UNDIP, UAD, UNIMA, UMS, UNRAM, Unika Santo Paulus Ruteng, UNISSULA, Unika Soegijapranata, UNS, UNSRAT, UHO, IAIN Surakarta, UNHAS, UNM, UNG, and UTY. It specializes in American Studies especially transnational studies of the U.S. It is also intended to communicate American Studies issues and challenges. This journal warmly welcomes contributors from American Studies scholars, researchers, and those related to the discipline.

## COPYRIGHTS RESERVED

Editorial Office:

## RUBIKON

Gedung R. Soegondo FIB UGM, Jl. Sagan, Caturtunggal,  
Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta 55281 Phone: +62 812-3663-8111  
E-mail: [jurnal.rubikon@gmail.com](mailto:jurnal.rubikon@gmail.com) • Website : [jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/index](http://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/index)

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
<b>“Building Comic Imagination through Political Parody: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Donald Trump in <i>The President Show</i> and Saturday Night Live’s <i>The Presidential Debate</i>”</b>	
Isna Ardyani Fataya .....	83
<b>“The Guise of U.S. National Referral Authority to ‘Othering’ Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A TWAIL Approach”</b>	
Alifa Salsabila .....	99
<b>“Spiritual Hibridity of Native American in Louis Edrich’s <i>The Round House</i>”</b>	
Achmad Faqih & Muh Arif Rokhman .....	112
<b>“The Paradox behind the Existence of Gay Conversion Therapy as Depicted in Garrard Conley’s Memoir <i>Boy Erased</i>”</b>	
Sekar Yolanda Azza .....	122
<b>“Reshaping the Homosexual Identity of Middle-Aged Gay Men in America: A Sociological Study of Identity Process on Andrew Sean Greer’s <i>Less</i>”</b>	
Fairuz Su’da & Muh Arif Rokhman .....	135
<b>“The Framing of Women’s Ideal Body in American Society Instagram Illustrations by Julie Houts (@jooleeloren)”</b>	
Ni Wayan Eka Jayanti & Ida Rochani Adi.....	148

**BUILDING COMIC IMAGINATION THROUGH POLITICAL PARODY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON DONALD TRUMP IN *THE PRESIDENT SHOW* AND SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE'S *THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE***

---

**Isna Ardyani Fataya**

Interactive English Language Center (IELC Solo)  
e-mail: [isna.ardayani@gmail.com](mailto:isna.ardayani@gmail.com)

---

**ABSTRACT**

The number of Americans watching political comedy shows has significantly growing recent years. The views increase as TV channels spread their programs into social media, such as YouTube. The comic and funny aspects depicted in the political parody can be in the forms of imitation, impersonation, and reflection of one's character, expression, and appearance. This paper aims to investigate American TV programs, *The President Show* and Saturday Night Live's *The Presidential Debate*, by employing humor theory seen from Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis. The dialogues used by the impersonators are analyzed to figure out the elements of funny features, comedy, and parody. Hence, the purpose of this study is to answer whether or not the discourse mechanism can build humor in *The President Show* and Saturday Night Live's *The Presidential Debate*. The data apply ten Comedy Central's YouTube videos and four Saturday Night Live's YouTube videos. The data comprises of political and power discourse. The analysis concludes that both shows utilize some aggressive strategies to criticize Trump's character, such as *metaphor* to represent policies, *contrast* to illustrate positive self-representation, and *hyperbole* to demonstrate racism. While Saturday Night Live applies Hillary Clinton to contrast Trump's image. *Saturday Night Live* contrast Trump by applying strategies such as disclaimer, implication, incongruity, aggressive, and illustration to criticize his personalities and his controversial political decisions.

**Article information**

*Received: 13 August, 2020*

*Revised: 27 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 10 September, 2020*

**Keywords:** *Donald Trump; Hillary Clinton; impersonation; political parody; Saturday Night Live; The President Show*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62746>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62746>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

## INTRODUCTION

Humor can be referred to as an umbrella term to describe all forms of funny, amusing, or laughter-evoking situations such as the production of a sitcom, the performance of stand-up comedy, and the process of joke-telling. Recently, humor has often been employed in political parodies to get the public's attention. The infusion of politics into entertainment and the infusion of entertainment into news have proliferated to engage public culture (Hariman, 2008, p. 248). Moreover, the rise of political talk shows featuring political parody started to gain momentum approaching the 2016 US presidential election (Esralew & Young, 2012, p. 339). At the time, the media impersonations of political figures have become an effective device to promote some political campaigns. Rose, as quoted in Hariman (2008), argues that parody may define as "the comic functioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material." It means that the comic and funny aspect depicted in the parody can be in the form of imitation, impersonation, and reflection of the political figure's character, expression, appearance, and gesture.

According to Hariman (2008), parody defines as "the exaggerated imitation of a person to achieve a comic effect." It contains four intentional acts: the flaunting of objects, the imitation of texts, the critical acts, and the comic action meaning that these acts portray amusing style, physical character, self-deprecation, and dismissive attitude (Rossen-Knill, 1998, p. 32). Specifically, the relationship between comic and political elements makes parody "more complicated than simple critique" (p. 46). Hence, due to the implicit meaning in political parodies, viewers need some background knowledge to get the

jokes (Matthes and Rauchfleisc, 2013, p. 597). Rossen-Knill (2008) argues the following:

The parodic message, whether it highlights criticism or humor, cannot take an explicit form. Even the minimal parodic message must be "worked out" by an audience, with the understanding that the speaker expects her audiences to work it out (p. 46).

Based on these insights, it can conclude that parody may speak to different audiences in different ways. If the viewers succeed to understand the message, they will figure out the comic element intentionally transported by the parodist to the viewers. On the contrary, if they fail, they might respond with a simple sense of amusement due to the silliness of the parodic acts (Matthes & Rauchfleisc, 2013, p. 604).

In current times, there have been numerous trends of bringing political parody into talk shows. Sultan et al. (2019) argue:

Talk shows are most prominent among other shows as they are precise and present bitter facts in a very light way by commenting, satirizing, analyzing and criticizing in much funny style.

It conveys some news by exploring specific words, accents, tones, indirect speeches, or other similes and metaphors used by the impersonators. It airs on the television program emphasizing humorous coverage of current issues and parodies of political figures. In other words, a political talk show has become both an intriguing program for the public and a platform for the politician to administer power and dominance over society. Besides, some talk shows enrich viewers with recent American issues and influence them. Kucera, (as quoted in Sanchez, 2016) points out:

Last year, late-night shows and political communications had walked closely towards political discourse, showing that

the combination of political issues and humor has begun to have a real influence on the public's political knowledge and opinions (p. 6). Humor can serve as a powerful rhetorical tool when employed by political officials. For that reason, political discourse persuades and convinces different rhetorical styles, such as personalization, nominalization, irony. Consequently, this tendency is leading to the dramatization of politics (p. 18).

As the era of technological advancement skyrocketed, late-night comedy shows have moved forward to streaming platforms and social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The consumption of this genre unexpectedly raised by 50% in 2016 (Zoglin, 2016). This trend leads to viral momentum in political content, which mostly affects some political figures. Specifically, the viral phenomenon had an important effect during the 2016 US presidential election campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton (Brewer & Gao, 2008). Some late-night shows even reach high rating programs for provoking political campaigns to the viewers. Despite somewhat simplistic, presenting political issues in a particular manner can lead viewers to think that politics is enjoyable, thereby stimulating political participation (p. 92). From this perspective, the combination of political issues and humor began to have a real persuasive influence on the public's political knowledge and opinion (Kucera, 2015). In the end, this strategy is benefited by certain figures as the medium to pursue their political propaganda.

Politics, despite its formality and serious-mindedness, is still inseparable from humor and comicality. In this context, people who follow the political events of a nation might turn politics into something comical for the mass. Some preferred methods in obtaining

comicality from politics are through stand-up comedy, late-night television, and impersonation of political figures (Hakola, 2017). The phenomenon of turning the political figure into a comical show for the mass also commonly occurs in the United States. Some well-known figures are indisputably impersonated by talk shows' impersonators to demonstrate amusing aspects making viewers laugh as the depictions of negative stereotypes, shortcoming, fatal flaw, and personal character. Further, the former presidents, the current president, and the presidential candidate of the United States also have become the objects of political impersonations in the television programs and YouTube channels such as Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump. Several late-night shows such as *The Tonight Show*, *The Saturday Night Live*, *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, and *The Late Show with David Letterman* feature politicians as a prominent target of joke and impersonation (Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013; Becker, 2018; Hariman, 2008). The programs provide politicians with "a comic stage and an outlet for successful self-mockery and ridicule" (Becker, 2018, p. 794). As Gray, et al. argues:

Since its earliest days, *Saturday Night Live* has inserted itself into the political arena, mocking the politicians of the day—from Chevy Chase's caricatures of a clumsy Gerald Ford to Dan Akroyd's version of a grumpy Richard Nixon, to Dana Carvey's parody of George Bush's "thousand points of light" speech, to debate parodies during the 2000 election starring Will Ferrell as George W. Bush and Darrell Hammond as Al Gore (as quoted in Becker, 2018, p. 793-794).

The growth of political impersonations as part of humor has attracted researchers' interest in analyzing such a topic. There are

several previous kinds of research analyzing political humor in the United States from myriad disciplines. Compton (2016) takes a popular show in the United States titled *Saturday Night Live*. He explores the responses given by the presidents of the United States, such as Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, toward their impersonations in *Saturday Night Live*. His findings mark that some presidents can find the amusements from the mockeries targeted to them. Instead of feeling dejected, they laugh along with the mockeries and reply to the mockeries with other jokes (Compton, 2016). Another research is conducted by Sanchez (2016), who investigates the 2016 US presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump's interviews on the late-night comedy shows. The study aims to analyze the type of language, the rhetorical used, and the kind of viral elements found in their performance. The finding reveals that political discourses are mainly used by the impersonators when they are impersonating public figures and representative authorities of society while personalization humanizes the audiences.

Still, in the same medium of research, Hakola (2017) observes the contents of *Saturday Night Live* containing the topic of the presidential election. The selected objects of this research are the impersonations of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump when they were presidential candidates. The findings reveal that based on the contents, *Saturday Night Live* employs different aspects of impersonating Trump and Clinton. Trump's impersonators directly attack his physical characteristics and personality. Meanwhile, Clinton's impersonators focus on her political decisions. Similar to Compton's and Hakola's research, Becker (2018) also explores the political

humor on *Saturday Night Live* and Donald Trump. However, different from Hakola's research, Becker (2018) analyzes people's perceptions toward Trump when he shares his response regarding his impersonations via Twitter. The results of her research revealed that *Saturday Night Live* makes Trump gain positive response from netizens since they find Trump's impersonations in *Saturday Night Live* are biased and lack of amusement (Becker, 2018). From the previous researches, late-night talk shows, such as *Saturday Night Live*, become a favored medium to analyze political impersonations of US prominent figures. Hence, this researches attempts to look at another late-night show demonstrating Trump's impersonation over his character-based, personal failing, self-deprecation, and dominant power toward himself as the president. This research also looks at SNL's presidential debate. However, this analysis further explores the significance of the impersonations of Hillary Clinton in the presidential debate and another popular Donald Trump show that is *The President Show*.

In discussing humor in the political parody, talk show functions as an act that enables social actors to use humor for serious purposes. It becomes a communicative way to raise social issues regarding something important, reliable and significant, i.e., the struggles of the working class depicted by Charlie Chaplin to conform social codes and behavioral standards have invoked a humorous discursive mode of the severe suffering undergone by many working class in the era (Deveau, 2012, p. 36). The exposure of political comedy shows can enhance audiences' understanding of political issues and become an effective platform to lead viewers to perceive politics as less

complicated than it is. Thereby, political parody successfully attracts public attention and reach higher voting to the political agenda.

This research purposes of investigating an American comedy TV, *The President Show*, by employing humor theory from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. It analyzes the elements of dialogs used by the actors who impersonate Donald Trump, which is considered funny, intriguing, and provoking. This study aims to answer the question of whether or not the discourse mechanism builds *The President Show*. It utilizes qualitative research to present the analysis emphasizing the researcher's interpretation of the data (Cresswell, 2009, p. 175). The data source is ten YouTube videos from Comedy Central's *The President Show* and four YouTube videos from *Saturday Night Live's Presidential Debate*. Ten videos from Comedy Central are selected as they explore Donald Trump's personality more than other programs. In contrast, videos from SNL's Presidential Debate are chosen because they use another character which is Hillary Clinton, to expose Trump's personality. After investigating the data, Trump's impersonation is compared to Hillary Clinton's impersonation in the *SNL* to figure out the dissimilarity of humor strategy employed by the impersonators.

This research applies a critical discourse analysis approach to find out how social power, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text in a social and political context (Van Dijk, 1985; Van Dijk, as quoted in Schiffirin, 2001, p. 352). It gives insights into the connection between the use of language and the exercise of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1995, p. 23), i.e., how the language used by the impersonator shows Trump's character and dominant power as the

US president such as by uttering repeated use of words: huge, unbelievable, fantastic and genius to indicate power, populist leader and aggressive look (Hakola, 2017). Besides, the way Atamanuik, as the impersonator, utilizes facial expression, gesture, body position, and language to impersonate Trump's domination, power, including superiority, make the show even more appealing. The analysis of the expressive meaning of words and modes of speaking look at the persuasive strategies to inform American social issues.

According to Van Dijk (2004), power is not only a way to control the acts of other people, but it also controls the minds as the basis of action, which is discursive (p. 25). Media power, such as television, is generally symbolic and persuasive in the sense that it can control the minds of the viewers, but not directly their action. Humor emerges as a powerful tool when employed by political figures. In this line, Van Dijk (1998) brings discursive concepts linked to the use of language and ideology to reveal positive self-representation toward certain people supporting internal group and negative other-representation toward others (p. 69). In this case, CDA analyses the discourse to find the hidden meaning and to reveal that political discourse creates the power to certain dominated group.

*The President Show* is an American comedy television that began its premiere on Apr 27, 2017, on Comedy Central TV Channel, owned by Viacom Global Entertainment Group (Szalai, 2012). Anthony Atamanuik hosts the show as Donald Trump collaborated with Peter Grosz as US Vice President, Mike Pence. Atamanuik began impersonating Trump during the 2016 United States presidential campaign. Previously, he



also appeared on several talk shows during the campaign, including *@midnight*, *The Chris Gethard Show*, and *The View* (Sanchez, 2017). In contrast, *Saturday Night Live* is an American late-night television sketch comedy created by Lorne Michaels. Both the programs revolve around political jokes and social issues such as American-Mexican borders, Republican versus Democratic Party, US tax, environment policy, and global warming.

## DISCUSSION

After analyzing ten videos that impersonate Trump as US president, the findings figure out that there are political discourses and power discourses that are visible throughout the shows. From the political discourse, *The President Show* applies some strategies, i.e., metaphor strategy is utilized by Atamanuik to illustrate Trump's policies, contrast strategy to produce positive self-representation, and hyperbole strategy to demonstrate racism. In the power discourse, several discourses strategies bring audiences to realize the hidden meaning of comic aspects within the show, such as implication, incongruity, aggression, and illustration.

### Political Discourse in *The President Show*

In this show, Antony Atamanuik impersonates Trump's verbal utterance and body language. Even though this show mostly makes fun of Donald Trump and falls within the comic genre, the scripts contain political discourse related to American political issues. Based on Martin's and Ford's theory of humor (2018), the type of humor which frequently occurs in *The President Show* is aggressive humor. The selected videos represent Trump as a person who possesses a high level of self-confidence and has positive views toward people who support his policies. As for people

who disagree with his policies, the impersonator represents Trump as a person who is unnegotiable and unfeasible to understand. According to Martin and Ford (2018), aggressive humor intends to be a means for criticizing others in the form of insult. The impersonator uses it as a tool for criticizing Trump's mannerisms and the political decisions he has made during his reign.

Van Dijk's (2000) strategies analyze the aggressive humor in the videos, which are *metaphor*, *contrast*, and *hyperbole*. According to Van Dijk (1997), political discourse studies revolve around professional politicians such as president and prime ministers. Most of the scripts are based on what the President of the United States delivers or writes on the media. From Van Dijk's strategies (2000), the humor in *The President Show* consists of political contexts.

### Metaphor Strategy as the Presentation of Policies

Van Dijk's first strategy found in this show is a metaphor related to Trump's policies. The excerpt of the script is as follows:

Trump: "It's great to be back in America. How very much I've loved you, how very much I've tried my best to give you a good life. It's hot in here, or did I pull out of the Paris Accord. Nothing good. What a terrible deal that was for America everyone says, "Trump. Trump. What about the melting ice caps?" Don't worry. My environmental policy will take care of the Penguins. The Pittsburgh Penguins. A tremendous hockey team. The bird penguins can get incredible

jobs as coal miners.” (Comedy Central, 2017, 00:18)

The context of this humor refers to Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change. The impersonator uses the metaphor 'the melting ice cups' to refer to 'global warming.' This kind of text belongs to Van Dijk's metaphor strategy in which the impersonator of Trump represents Trump's image when he declares disbelief toward climate change (2000). Since Trump regards climate change as unreal, the impersonator uses the metaphor 'the melting ice cups', referring to melting ice in North and South Poles due to global warming. The metaphor shows the disinterest of Trump regarding climate change. Melting ice in the North and South Poles is as unimportant as melting ice cups. The life of real penguins is less necessary than Pittsburgh Penguins, or colloquially known as the Pens, an epithet emanated from a professional hockey team based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Hence, the impersonator criticizes Trump's derogatory view toward climate change, which is, in fact, very crucial.

By analyzing the example above, metaphor in the political context function as a tool to attack political opponents, the presentation of policies, or the legitimation of political power. In this case, Trump's impersonator points out the way Trump acts toward people who are in a disagreement with him on the debate over climate change. The term 'melting ice cups' is the metaphor of global warming, and at the same time, it becomes the presentation of environmental policy in the United States. The metaphor of global warming as the melting ice cups functions as a hint to the audience for what political context the impersonator wants to deliver. Trump declares, "The Paris Accord

would undermine our economy, hamstring our workers, weaken our sovereignty, impose unacceptable legal risks and put us at a permanent disadvantage to the other countries of the world.” (as quoted in Chemnick & Sobczyk, 2019). The metaphor in the script considers Trump's confirmation on the global warming issue, which is different from his statement that he disregards Paris can impose the administration.

### **Contrast Strategy as the Medium to Positive Self-Representation**

Van Dijk's second strategy (2000) is the contrast strategy. According to him, this strategy functions to emphasize someone's positive quality by comparing it to others. The following script shows the contrast strategy between Trump and a climate scientist. The political context is still related to global warming. The excerpt of the script is as follows:

Interviewer: "But all the scientific studies indicated...."

Trump: "Oh, who cares about science? That's Bernhardt's. I'm fighting for the forgotten man. He doesn't read studies. He's the man who forgot to read." (Comedy Central, 2017, 01:01)

The scene indicates that Trump disbelieves science and evidence of global warming. The impersonator employs the contrast strategy used to emphasize the positive quality of Trump by comparing it to the said climate scientist. This scene is under the news in which Trump accused scientists of having a political agenda by using climate change as their tool and also considered that climate change as a hoax (Blumberg, 2018). The name Bernhardt in this scene might refer to Trump's interior chief, David Bernhardt. He is leading the environmental groups in Trump's Cabinet.

However, his political strategies in the cabinet do gain unpleasant remarks from the media.

Politically, the contrast strategy emphasizes the polarization between self and other (Entman as quoted in Van Dijk, 1997). By looking at this scene, it is clear that the impersonator tries to depict Trump's positive representation by letting down his chief's name. People can formulate hypotheses about self, and others, which represent the self-group in more positive ways than the other group (Van Dijk, 1997). In this scene, the impersonator points out the difference between how Trump sees himself and how Trump sees other people. The impersonator's acting depicts Trump as a person who has positive self-representation toward himself but does the opposite when it comes to others.

### **Hyperbole Strategy as the Medium to Demonstrate Racism**

The following scene is regarding the issue of immigrants, and the impersonator uses the hyperbole strategy to play his role as Trump:

Interviewer: "Why does your immigration plan place so much importance on the ability to speak English?"

Trump: "If you want to live here, you need to talk English very well. As a president who English great, I know job good is important for a job done. My stand with good Americans like local milk people. So true. So true." (Comedy Central, 2017, 00:41)

In this scene, it seems that Trump is making fun of immigrants who are not fluent in English by imitating how they speak in broken English. Hyperbole strategy is commonly used by political speakers when they are elaborating on their groups and

other's groups (Van Dijk, 2019). The other group, in this case, is the immigrants who come to the United States without having proficiency in English skills. The impersonator is exaggerating the way Trump impersonates how the immigrants speak. Simultaneously, the impersonator also shows that Trump's ability to speak English is not as excellent as it seems. There is a website that attempts to measure the complexity of Trump's vocabularies by using a common metric, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The results show that Trump's vocabulary and grammatical structure ranks the last compared to the former presidents of the United States, and his speaking ability is equivalent to a fourth-grade level. As stated on the website:

By every metric and methodology tested, Donald Trump's vocabulary and grammatical structure are significantly more simple, and less diverse, than any President since Herbert Hoover, when measuring "off-script" words, that is, words far less likely to have been written in advance for the speaker (Firschling, 2018).

Firschling (2018) reaffirms Trump's language use of English is, in fact, less qualified than the previous US president. Trump's statement seems to exaggerate the condition in which he compels immigrants to master English with a proper grammatical rule before transporting to America. He forgets that America is a multicultural country where many immigrants come there without mastering English fluently. Thus, his speaking tends to underestimate the majority of immigrants who unable to speak English well.

### **Comical Points in Political Discourse**

After taking a glimpse of the examples above, it can conclude that aggressive humor dominates the show consisting of teasing and

insulting a person. In *The President Show*, even though the impersonator acts like Donald Trump, what the impersonator does is mocking Trump in several ways. Warren and McGraw (2015) propose an idea that people laugh as they perceive the situation as playful, amusing, acceptable, or benign. The audience regards the show in the playful context where they know what the impersonator says about the president is merely a joke. In this case, the displays of disrespectful behavior toward Trump is a violation of moral norms. In some scenes, the impersonator teases Trump's habits and political decisions upon US policies in his administration. However, it is benign in some way because the audience enjoys the show alongside his/her family or friends. It would turn out to be unfunny if they sat and watched *The President Show* with the actual Trump by their side. The situation indeed would be threatening and would lose its comicality. Thus, the context and situation make something funny.

There are several scenes in *The President Show* which apply aggressive humor as a means to criticize Trump. The ways these aggressive jokes are through different strategies such as metaphor, contrast, and hyperbole to disclose Trump's character and personality in offending such derogatory statements toward others. Since Van Dijk's strategies focus on positive self-representation and negative other-representation, it sees from the jokes that real-life Trump has positive self-representation. As for the outer groups who do not in agree with him, the impersonator shows him as a person who sticks to his guns – in a negative way. The aggressive humor also reveals the injustice treatment carried out by Trump toward the outer group, prompting some contentions with his policy. Sanchez (2017) argues, "In current times, Trump's

language is dominantly aggressive and negative when he refers to the 'others.' The way he answers is always with short phrases and political content. However, he fills the discourse with emotions and rhetorical tools to show his personality dealing with others". Thereby, Atamanuik in *The President Show* comprehensively impersonates Trump by uttering language as a rhetorical tool to indicate his strength as a stiff and a powerful president. Furthermore, some derogatory words emerge as an insult, euphemism act as an indirect word to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, "sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than what it is" (Hornby, 2004, p. 339-428).

### **Power Discourse in *Saturday Night Live***

According to Van Dijk (2001), political discourse represents the enactment, reproduction, and the legitimization of power and domination. Power discourse is also employed in the political impersonation on *Saturday Night Live* during the 2016 US presidential election. Here, Hillary Clinton was impersonated by Kate McKinnon in her character as an entertaining, easy-going, and ambitious woman (Hakola, 2007, p. 5). She debates her competitor, Donald Trump, impersonated, by Alec Baldwin. In the first section of the debate, the impersonator uses other-directed hostile to attack Trump by emphasizing negative opinions such as failure and disaster. Other-directed hostile humor functions when "the comedian acts as the satirist, presenting a hostilecritique of a politician" (Becker, 2012, p. 792). The theory argues that seeing people from their body language, characters, accent, expression, choice of words, and weakness could find jokes that result in something funny.

### **Implication Strategy as Personal Discourse**

The *Saturday Night Live* depicts Hillary Clinton as a woman having the capability to control her mind and behavior as a politician to solve the social problem.

Clinton: "Listen, America. Donald Trump cannot be president. He would be a disaster. A failure. A complete "f." And America, you deserve better than an "f." So on Nov 8, vote for me, and I promise I will be a stone-cold "b." (The *Saturday Night Live*, 2017, 09:08).

The statement above represents the power discourse of Hillary. She shows that if she wins the election, she will give her best. Van Dijk (2001) argues that power can control the social power of someone. In Hillary's speech on *Saturday Night Live*, she shows her power as the presidential candidate. However, her power is different from Donald Trump since she is controlling her minds in the way she talks during her speech compared to Donald Trump, who tends to show off his power. In this dialog, the impersonator utilizes personal discourse to construct Clinton's image and mark strong motivation. The choice of personal discourse can identify the discourse markers that the speaker intends to convey. Alavidze (2017) insists that the choice of deictic words such as personal pronouns is the weapon used by politicians to achieve their goals. Karapetjana (2011) suggests that the pronoun 'I' implies a personal level to show authority and personal responsibility as well as commitment and involvement (p. 43). 'I' evokes the speaker a personal voice that distances her from others. "This means that it cannot expect that the other members of her party agree with the speaker's opinion when the pronoun 'I' is employed."

Besides, the individual speaker attempt to express her principle, morals, power, and someone who is not afraid to take action when necessary (Bramley, 2001, p. 28). As he argues:

Doing "being a good politician" involves showing oneself in a positive light. The use of 'I' in conjunction with talking about what the interviewee is doing to be a good politician. Self is also represented as an individual when the politician expresses opinions about and responds to situations, gives descriptions or narratives about oneself, recounts actions that the politician has performed with his/her job as a politician, shows his/her authority, knowledge or responsibility towards certain issues (Bramley, 2011, p. 37).

Bramley's argument concludes that pronoun in political discourse represents the speaker as a good politician by showing her promise, reputation, and commitment to choose as a candidate.

### **Incongruity as Political Discourse**

Host: "That was incredibly rude to secretary Clinton."

Clinton: "Thank you, Chris. That's exactly the kind of language that has poisoned and debased this election. and if you agree, go to hillaryclinton.com and buy a limited edition nasty woman mug.com (The *Saturday Night Live*, 2017, 07:04)

In Clinton's statement above, it shows that previously the host asked some raising taxes to save the programs like social security that will be executed by her. Then, Clinton tries to explain what kinds of social security and Medicare previously mentioned. She confirms that she takes her responsibility to contribute to social security and Medicare. Trump responds by saying Clinton is anasty woman

considered rude and offensive statement during the political debate. As a masculine leader, he tends to deploy his strength to mock others by bullying and offending vulgar utterances. In the end, Clinton normally responds to him by promoting her website on hillaryclinton.com and selling her mug through an online shop.

Clinton deliberately gives the unreliable and unrelated answer to drive the host move to another question and forget to fulfill the previous question. Here, incongruity comedy tends to give some missing information that might become useful information to the viewers expecting a significant answer. The effect of incongruity is that somehow viewers end up with a disappointing feeling as the answer do not fulfill their expectation. Based on Van Dijk (2000), he argues that incongruity has a meaning of giving incomplete explanation to the recipients. It implies that the strategy happening here is the unsatisfying comment given by Clinton. When the host supports her as Trump ridicules Clinton by saying 'a nasty woman,' the impersonator promotes her product by asking audiences to visit certain websites and buying a mug instead of giving a relevant answer.

Besides, during this scene, several singing moments on the show effectively utilize incongruity in comedy in which humor arises from the unexpectedness of a singing politician. It implies that Clinton could control her trait, which is different from Trump's impersonation. Hakola (2017) argues that Clinton wrote an article in a 'human of New York blog' telling that women must control her emotion when she wants to make a career in a man's world. Therefore, Clinton's impersonation in *Saturday Night Live* reveals that she turns up to be an ambitious woman

controlling her emotion while arguing her opinion. The incongruity also occurs in the following scene:

Host: Wikileaks has been releasing your campaign e-mails, many of which raise some serious questions.

Clinton: Thank you for bringing up my e-mails, Chris. And I am very happy to clarify what was in some of them. Sorry, what, Carol? What? I'm sorry, I thought I heard my friend Carol (The Saturday Night Live, 2017, 04:04).

The dialogues uttered by the impersonator reveal that she prefers to throw out the question by giving irrelevant answers. Based on Van Dijk's theory, the dialog above belongs to the incongruity strategy. When the host asked her to clarify some emails containing political campaigns, she disrupts it as if she listened to the voice of her friend, Carol, who called her name. These implications strategies create a shock to laughter as the impersonator gives an unrelated answer.

### **Illustration Strategy as Power Discourse**

Clinton: "I don't know if you've heard this before. But I was instrumental in taking down a man by the name of Osama bin Laden (The Saturday Night Live, 2017, 05:48)

Clinton tries to reveal her statement after hearing Trump's utterances of answering the host's question of the economy that he is better equipped than Clinton. She also provokes a statement regarding the economic system that it arrives at a serious problem. She admits the problem needs much careful attention (*The Saturday Night Live*, 05:32-05:58). In her statement, she shows unexpected ridiculousness by acting as a singer while

mentioning a name, Osama bin Laden referring to the Twenty Years' War between the United States and Al-Qaeda, a conflict that both sides have ultimately lost. During the administration of George W. Bush, America aimed against the Taliban regime, declaring war against the Middle Eastern country (Tierney, 2016). The worst risk, America spent a multitude of economic budget on its military forces in the time combating the massive attacks. In this case, the illustration strategy is used by Clinton to illustrate the name of Osama Bin Laden behind the incident Twenty Years' War towards American foreign policy. Van Dijk (2000) argues that powerful argumentation is acceptable if the illustration is provided by depicting actual information. Illustration in the power discourse functions to highlight important issues toward social problems to reveal the hidden meaning of the language uttered by the speaker.

### **Disclaimer Strategy as Power Discourse**

In the following script, Clinton applies a disclaimer as a discursive strategy to promote herself to be a president after Trump ends up his statement. Her statements invite some persuasive way from her basis of power. This statement indicates that, due to her previous experience as a politician, she convinces the viewers that she could achieve her goals.

Clinton: "Listen, America. You hate me, my voice, and my face. Well, here's a tip. If you never want to see my face. Gain, elect me president, and I swear to god I will lock myself in the oval office and not come out for four years. But if you don't elect me, I will continue to run for president until the day I die, and I will never die" (*The Saturday Night Live*, 2017, 08:00).

The scene above brings the audience to the last session of debate when Clinton demands the viewers to elect her as US president. According to Van Dijk (1998), the disclaimer serves as a discursive strategy in which the speaker presents a positive representation of self-legitimation and rejects it with a particular term such as 'but.' It functions to preserve the face of the speaker; in this case, Clinton does not expect the recipient to have a negative perception of her. Therefore, the disclaimer strategy typically serves as a positive-self representation. Additionally, it also works to "maintain the political stance by maintaining the respect to the audience and legitimize the in-group and the outgroup member" (Van Dijk, 1995). It uses to show prejudice, mitigate, or to respect the audience since they may have a different perspective of a particular case (Irfam & Wahyudi, 2012, pp. 93-95). Based on the theory, Clinton's statement is involved in disclaimer apparent effort in which the speaker portrays the effort to show her persistent desire to be a president.

### **Comical Points in Power Discourse**

Compared to Donald Trump's impersonator in *The President Show*, Hillary Clinton's impersonator in *Saturday Night Live* portrays more on Clinton's character as calm, direct, persistent and brave women. Through the entire dialogues, the impersonator wants to show Clinton's strength as a woman dealing with her competitor, Trump, in the presidential debate. Whereas in *The President Show*, the impersonator, somehow, reveal Trump's personality as uncompromising, self-exaggerating, and arrogant man. From his speeches, he tends to respect others, supporting his thought. Contrastingly, he does the opposite by disregarding people rejecting his policy. As *Saturday Night Live* has been

airing since 1975, in 2016, the audience got their new refreshing on *Saturday Night Live*. In that year, the United States had a big year of the presidential election between Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, and Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton. However, *Saturday Night Live* shows more on how Hillary Clinton tries to defend her opinions toward Trump. Her defenses are mostly in the form of aggressive humor, which tends to create comic aspects in the midst of her speaking toward political issues.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of turning political figures into a comical show for the mass has commonly occurred in the United States. The former presidents and the current presidents of the United States have become the objects of political impersonation in late-night talk shows. Hillary Clinton in the *Saturday Night Live* and Donald Trump in *The President Show* are among talk shows, which ultimately impersonates US political figures. It even combines the comic over political campaign to obtain the public vote, especially in the period of the presidential election. Some late-night shows achieve high rating programs to provoke political campaigns to the viewers and boost political purposes to spread the rhetorical agenda. Hence, political talk shows involving political parody emerge as the platform to familiarize public with the infusion of humor, amusing, entertaining aspects so that viewers funnily enjoy political issues.

There are several scenarios on *The President Show* that use aggressive humor as the means to criticize Trump. Here, political and power discourse criticizes his personalities and political decisions, such as how he handles the issue of global warming and his viewpoint

of immigrants. By analyzing the political and power discourse, the data figure out how Trump's character is criticized and utilized to depict his behavior and personality. Besides, the ways some aggressive jokes on the show are through different strategies such as metaphor, contrast, and hyperbole. Compared to Hillary Clinton impersonated by Kate McKinnon in the *Saturday Night Live*, some other aggressive strategies are employed to depict Clinton's character. The impersonator uses strategies such as disclaimer, implication, incongruity, and illustration strategy to depict Clinton's character as an entertaining, easy-going, and ambitious woman. In sum, it can conclude that jokes regarding stereotypical, physical traits and character flaws of political figures dominate US political parody to get the jokes, such as by commenting, satirizing, and criticizing ironical fault, indiscretion, self-deprecation toward other people.

## REFERENCES

- Alavidze, M. (2017). "The Use of Pronouns in Political Discourse." *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 9(4), 349-356. Retrieved from <http://www.universitypublications.net>
- Bayram, F. (2010). "Ideology and Political Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Erdogan's Political Speech." *Arecls*, 7, 23-40. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>
- Becker, A. B. (2012). "Comedy Types and Political Campaigns: The Differential Influence of Other-Directed Hostile Humor and Self-Ridicule on Candidate Evaluations." *Mass Communication and Society*, 15(6), 791-812. DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2011.628431
- Becker, A. B. (2018). "Live From New York, It's Trump On Twitter! The Effect of Engaging with *Saturday Night Live* on Perceptions of Authenticity and the



- Saliency of Trait Ratings.” *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 1736-1757. Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b6d5/4263f1d3989df18e0d36c6a26b3a8ac82cee.pdf>
- Blumberg, A. (2018). “Trump on Climate Change Report: ‘I don’t believe it.’” *HuffPost*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-climate-change\\_n\\_5bfc516be4b0eb6d93128997](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-climate-change_n_5bfc516be4b0eb6d93128997)
- Bramley, N. R. (2001). *Pronouns of Politics: The Use of Pronouns in the Construction of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Political Interviews* (doctoral dissertation). Australian National University, Australia. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.125.4780&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Cao, X., & Brewer, P. R. (2008). “Political Comedy Shows and Public Participation in Politics.” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20(1), 90-99. DOI. 10. 1093/ijpor/edm030.
- Chemnick, J., & Sobczyk, N. (2019). *US Moves Closer to Withdrawing from Paris Climate Pact*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/11/us-moves-closer-withdrawing-paris-climate-pact>
- Comedy Central (Producer). (2017, Aug 4). There’s No Chaos [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LcO4UuTcPE>
- Comedy Central (Producer). (2017, Jun 2). Screw Science! Bye-bye, Paris! [Video File]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofR5FXtAIQQ>
- Compton, J. (2016). “Live from DC: *Saturday Night Live* Political Parody References in Presidential Rhetoric.” *Comedy Studies*, 7(1), 62-78. DOI: 10.1080/2040610X.2016.1139808.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approach*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publication.
- Davis, J. L., Love, T. P., & Killen, G. (2018). “Seriously Funny: The Political Work of Humor on Social Media.” *New Media & Society*, 20(10), 3898–3916. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818762602>
- Deveau, D. J. (2012). *English Canadian Stand-Up Comedy as a Field of Cultural Production* (doctoral dissertation). Simon Fraser University, Canada. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/56376645.pdf>
- Esralew, S., & Young, G. (2012). “The Influence of Parodies on Mental Models: Exploring the Tina Fey-Sarah Palin Phenomenon.” *Communication Quarterly*, 60(3), 338-352. DOI: 10.1080/01463373.2012.688791.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Frischling, B. (2018). “*Stable Genius*”- *Let’s Go to the Data*. Retrieved from <https://blog.factba.se/2018/01/08/stable-genius-lets-go-to-the-data/>
- Hakola, O. J. (2017). “Political Impersonations on Saturday Night Live during The 2016 US Presidential Election.” *European Journal of American Studies*, 12(2), 1-20. DOI: 10.4000/ejas.12153.
- Hariman, R. (2008). “Political Parody and Public Culture.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 94(3), 247-272. DOI: 10.1080/00335630802210369.
- Hornby, A.S. (2004). *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Irham & Wahyudi. (2012). “Treating Disclaimer as a Power Strategy of Self-

- Legitimation and Other De-Legitimation in Netanyahu's Unga Speech." *Language Discourse & Society*, 2(1), 89-106. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu>
- Karapetjana, I. (2011). "Pronominal Choice in Political Interviews." *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, 1, 36-45. Retrieved from [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/1\\_u\\_portal/apgads/PDF/BJ-Eng-Laguage\\_Literature\\_Culture-1.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/1_u_portal/apgads/PDF/BJ-Eng-Laguage_Literature_Culture-1.pdf)
- Kucera, E. (2015). *Late-Night Comedy and Its Effect on the Public's Political Opinion* (bachelor research). California Polytechnic State University, United States. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu>
- Martin, R. A., & Ford, T. E. (2018). *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing.
- Matthes, J., & Rauchfleisch, A. (2013). "The Swiss 'Tina Fey Effect': The Content of Late-Night Political Humor and the Negative Effects of Political Parody on the Evaluation of Politicians." *Communication Quarterly*, 61(5), 596–614. DOI: 10.1080/01463373.2013.822405.
- Riggio, R. E. (2015). *The Four Styles of Humor*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201504/the-4-styles-humor>
- Sanchez, F. (2016). *Political Communication and Virality in the US Presidential Campaign a CDA Analysis of the 2016 US Presidential Candidates' Discourses and Performances in Late-Night Shows* (master's thesis). Jonkoping University, Sweden. Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1116821/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Saturday Night Live (Producer). (2016, Oct 16). Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Town Hall Debate Cold Open [Video File]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVMW\\_1aZXRk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVMW_1aZXRk)
- Saturday Night Live (Producer). (2016, Oct 2). Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Debate Cold Open [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://digg.com/video/snl-debate-hillary-trump>
- Saturday Night Live (Producer). (2016, Oct 23). Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Third Debate Cold Open [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kjltrKZSY>
- Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D., & Hamilton, H. E. (2001). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sultan, B., Rafique, N., Tariq, R., & Imran, M. (2019). "Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani TV Comedy Talk Show 'Khabarnaak.'" *American Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 3(2), 106-111. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net>
- Szalai, G. (2012). *Viacom to launch Comedy Central Extra in Adriatic Region*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/viacom-comedy-central-extra-launch-adriatic-357169>
- Tierney, D. (2016, Aug 23). "The Twenty Years' War." *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/twenty-years-war/496736/>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). "What is Political Discourse Analysis?" *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 11(1), 11-52. Retrieved from: <http://discourses.org/OldArticles/What%20is%20Political%20Discourse%20Analysis.pdf>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. SAGE Publications. London. Retrieved from <http://www.discourses.org/OldBooks/Teu>

n%20A%20van%20Dijk%20-  
%20Ideology.pdf

Van Dijk, TA (1985). *Introduction: Discourse Analysis as a New Cross-Discipline*. USA: Academic Press, Inc.

Van Dijk, TA (1995). "Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis." In C. Schaffner & A. Wenden (Eds). *Language and Peace*, 17-33. Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing.

Van Dijk, TA (2000). *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Unpublished manuscript, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona. Retrieved from <http://www.discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Ideology%20and%20discourse.pdf>

Van Dijk, TA (2004). *From Text Grammar to Critical Discourse Analysis: A Brief Academic Autobiography Version 2.0*. Unpublished Manuscript, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>

Warren, C., & McGraw, A. P. (2015). "Opinion: What Makes Things Humorous." *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 112, 7105–7106. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1503836112>

Zoglin, R. (2016). The News Politics of Late Night. *Time*, 188(12), 42-47. Retrieved from <https://time.com>

---

**THE GUISE OF U.S. NATIONAL REFERRAL AUTHORITY TO “OTHERING”  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS: A TWAIL APPROACH**

---

**Alifa Salsabila**

e-mail: [alifafauziar@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:alifafauziar@mail.ugm.ac.id)

---

**ABSTRACT**

President Trump’s issuance of Executive Order 13769 titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” restricts and even bans access to refugees and asylum seekers from seeking international protection in and from the United States. It is done by creating narratives that refugees and asylum seekers are capable of committing “potential threats” under the umbrella of terrorism. This study aims to dismantle the paradoxes the Executive Order conveys. It focuses on the international refugee regime under the ambit of international law and a broader context of immigration debates—socially, economically, and culturally. This study uses the Third World Approach to International Law (TWAIL), making it possible for academic legal discussion to correspond in cultural context. The findings show that Trump’s Executive Order 13769 functions as the tool for the United States to “othering” refugees and asylum seekers as foreign terrorists in order to wage its national interests while ruling out humanity and the regime.

**Keywords:** *asylum seekers; Donald Trump; foreign policy; refugees; terrorism*

**Article information**

*Received: 16 August, 2020*

*Revised: 30 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 13 September, 2020*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62747>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62747>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

**INTRODUCTION**

In September 2020, President Donald J. Trump spoke for the United Nations General Assembly and let the guests and audiences know that in order to function best as an (international) organization, the United Nations must focus to tackle down the ‘real’ problems of the world. The ‘real’ problems, he briefly addressed, included persecutions such

as religious persecution and ethnic cleansing of religious minorities. The speech has, then, gone controversial. Trump perhaps, as the Mister President of the United States and an identified ‘American’ himself, forgot to look at his own backyard before delivering the speech. In other words, Trump might have forgotten the ‘real’ problems he, arguably, has been ‘creating’ in his home country—under his administration—which has become the

huge concern of humanity. That is Trump's Executive Order 13769 titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" that restricts visas issuance and bans permission of travels from seven Moslem-majority countries, including suspending the United States Refugees Admissions Program (USRAP). In the Executive Order, Trump is clearly assuming people (including but not limited to) such as refugees and asylum seekers as foreign terrorists capable of committing "potential threats" to harm the American nation and citizens. In antithesis to its own history of immigration as part of the establishment of the American nation whose in it lies the very dear memory of refugees and asylum seekers seeking protection in a 'foreign land' while being persecuted under colonial rule, Trump's administration chooses to deny entry for refugees and asylum seekers and even has deported 30,000 of them throughout the COVID-19 outbreak (Williams, 2020).

As part of the American history, the fact that the United States was partially built upon the notions of individual freedom as well as state protection for people to be free from persecutions (Library of Congress, n.d.), especially religious persecutions, are undeniable. It requires the rule of law to put such of these spirits live into action. But Trump's perceptiveness on refugees and asylum seekers as foreign terrorist—capable of committing what he fears of potential threats—affects his legal behaviour to create such a policy. Trump performs the signs of fear—economically, politically, and culturally—over refugees and asylum seekers that, he believes, will likely to strike down the American civilization in general or the established social structure of the American white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant citizens in

particular. The policy positions refugees and asylum seekers as "potential threats". It means that there is a sense of something that Trump, as a President, must prevent, anticipate, and even overcome before it gets the nation, of which he is responsible of protecting, devastated by what 'foreign terrorists' are capable to commit. The word "threat" is repeatedly found throughout the text of the Executive Order. This article refers to the "threat" as "potential threats," since there is no official statement on what kind of threat, or public evident-based of threat, that explains the "threat" Mister President tries to articulate.

Trump exercises his executive power as if he is not aware that the United States is a state party to the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol, created upon the urgency of human rights issues for refugees and asylum seekers, and has established international system of "international protection" to refugees and asylum seekers. The United States, in the manner of its legal commitment, shall respect and 'obey' the law as part of the responsibility in coalescing in the international community. In 2020 alone, the enforcement of the Executive Order has cut 84% of refugees and asylum seekers quota compared to President Obama's final year of administration. From asylum to deportation issues, restricting visas to banning enters from some countries, and cutting quotas of refugees and asylum seekers provided by the United States, Trump's administration, arguably, has taken the United States immigration policies to rather "anti-immigration" (Glennon, 2020). Trump's administration claims that it most 'saves' the United States and American citizens from falling into unwanted labour forces, security issues, and unfavoured economic growth rate, which, instead, is likely

to affect the future of the country itself (Anderson, 2020).

Under the ambit of international law, banning people from seeking protection caused by persecutions in their home country—as what does happen in the refugees and asylum seekers context—means violation to commitment on human rights in respect of international protection and the principle of “non refoulment.” The 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol forbid state parties to the Convention to ban, block, reject, let alone forcibly deport refugees and asylum seekers to their home country where their lives are put at stake. Customary and normatively, the United States, is legally bound to the substantives of the Convention. But neither of the commitments, normatively nor customary, is performed properly—not because the United is unable to do so but because Trump administration is rather unwilling to do it. And this legal proposition is what the article will be dismantling using the Third World Approach to International Law (TWAIL) in respect to the United States so-called “commitment on human rights” at the global level, as part of the international community.

## **DISCUSSION**

TWAIL is best understood as an approach as a journal suggested (Singh, 2019, p. 1):

It is an approach drawn from the history of the encounter between international law and colonization. As a distinctive way of thinking about international law, TWAIL is a historically aware approach that, through academic scholarship and discussion, makes innocent third worlds aware of an openly colonizing and dominating first world and works towards eliminating the disadvantages of an underdeveloped in the Third World.

It offers a critical view where people could use international law as an eye-opening tool rather than, ‘a supplier of biased dreams’ in seeing international politics between the divided world consists of the first world countries and the third world countries, the developed ones and the developing—and even the underdeveloped—ones, or the Western and the non-Western. One might guess that the ‘dreams’ as such as of the concept or parameters the Western-based civilization creates, refer to the standards of the so-called ‘development’ and ‘human rights’ which favor the Westerners more than anyone else in the rest of the world. In the realm of the divided world, international politics favor international law to be predominately dominated by the great powers conveyed by the Western, capitalist, developed, first world countries such as France, England, and the United States. The history of these countries is well-known as the colonizers, especially the United States case perceived as countries that still manage to project the legacy on the counter of the colonial power in any social, cultural, economic, or political dimensions throughout the world that benefit their existence. To narrow down the case, Trump’s foreign policy 13769 falls under the ambit of international law which closely works with the legal framework of the refugee regime.

### **Approaching the Nature of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Foreign Terrorist, and Potential Threats by Normative Definition**

We start by discerning the big key terms in this article which are “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” “foreign terrorists,” and “potential threats.” According to international legal regime that already exists for quite some time, which most of the terms here are very well-understood concepts generated from

Customary International Law (CIL) that has been acknowledged practiced by the Western civilization:

1. “Refugees,” defined by UNHCR in its official website (UNHCR, n.d.), are understood as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed international border to find safety in another country” in order to simplify the definition of refugees from the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR) that defines refugees as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” It is well understood that, “to employ the term ‘refugee’ is both to describe it and ascribe a value to it” (Haddad, 2008, p. 25). Consequently, the acknowledgment to refugees is not merely political. It is not an acknowledgement of labels done by “free” labelling of who is labeling whom, based on what, and to achieve what; but a form of acknowledgment that demands a distinct legal recognition in which some people do perform “exceptional circumstances” where their life is threatened due to particular reasons. The concept is thus descriptive and normative.
2. “Asylum seekers,” according to USA for UNHCR, are understood as people who “flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance” (USA for UNHCR, n.d.). And adding the emphasis, it further stated that, “An asylum seeker must demonstrate that

his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded” (USA for UNHCR, n.d.). Amnesty International further explains (Amnesty International, 2019), “in countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker.” What needs to be highlighted here is that there are two procedures in recognizing asylum seekers and refugees. First, is done by international organization that is responsible for doing the job, which is UNHCR. And, second is by individual countries who are state parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and thus has its own procedures in doing the job—which the United States, in this case, is one example of countries having its own procedures in acknowledging asylum seekers and recognizing refugees.

3. “Foreign terrorist,” understood as subject labelled as “foreign terrorist fighters” (FTFs), are “individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict” (United Nations, n.d.). FTFs, consequently understood, are capable of committing terrorism, international and domestic. International terrorism is “Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated

foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored)” while domestic terrorism is “Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature” (FBI, n.d.).

4. “Potential threats”—with no clear definitive reference—only hover around the sense of fear of (indescribable) attacks that must be prevented, anticipated, and even overcome, before any serious one, such as in refer to the 9/11 tragedy, happens (again). But at the very least, in light of the “potential threats,” we could know that the threat “ranges from the possibility that they will get involved in terrorist acts outside of their home country, to the threat that, once they return to their home countries, they will utilize their knowledge and experience of handling weapons and explosives in order to plan and carry out terrorist acts, set up new terrorist cells, recruit new members, or provide funds or training for future terrorist acts” (UNODC, p. 4). And the challenge to tackle down the FTFs, other than internationally acknowledged, falls as a right to full self-referral authority of every country to identify so. This right, known as the right of “self-defense,” possessed by individual countries, is generated from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) whose foundation is derived from the Chapter VII of the UN Charter that rules about “international threat to peace and security”, in which FTFs are considered to bring threat to international peace and security. Hence, “the resolutions oblige

states to take wide-reaching measures to prevent and suppress this flow” (ODIHR, p. 6).

The nature of each concept performs a clear ‘nature gap’ between refugees and asylum seekers and how the international community, then, must treat them, compared to who foreign terrorists are and how the international community must quell them. The concepts of refugees and asylum seekers are derived from the urgency to treat well humanity regardless of the man-made reasons—which are persecutions—blocking its way. International legal regime on refugees, asylum seekers, and human rights articulate the distinct system to treat these people the way they deserve and must be acknowledged as humans merely because they are humans. Meanwhile, the concepts of foreign terrorists and potential threats depart from the sense of fear. And this fear generates responsibility to envision the future where acts of terrorism—i.e., the “potential threats”—is in best form to prevent such attacks and cause such devastation. Or, is it another form of “potential threats” that Trump is trying to convey?

As the result of Trump administration’s issuance and enforcement of the Executive Order 13769, which has become the primary source that provides shades in Trump’s continuous anti-immigration policies, more policies restricting and banning access for refugees and asylum seekers to seek for international protection from the United States government continued to follow. In 2018, Trump enacted another “asylum ban” that strongly restricted immigrants coming to the American soil who sought for asylum, despite of, once again, failing international law to be committed to its own human rights commitment at the global stage followed by a



“nationwide block” in 2019 claiming to protect the United States borders from refugees and asylum seekers seeking sanctuary in the American soil, reinstated by the federal court (Ibe, 2020). Immigration in the United States has been polarized to degrees where immigration has no longer been an issue to law and politics (including economic), but rather culture. At the very least, the last thirty-five years has been a significant period where income inequality plays a very important role in shaping anti-immigration narratives. Since 1970s, the income gap in the American society, between the low-class and high-class society, has gone beyond just financial matter than in anywhere else across the globe (Xu, Garand, & Zhu, 2016). Escalating from just financial and economic, the income gap leads to political consequences in state and federal levels where policy of immigration is being made from, including giving rooms for cultural debates to grow in between. Even though economists have been debating on the effect that immigration has caused to the country, which some suggest that immigration is beneficial to the economic welfare and others suggest that it only has a little impact that is insignificant to the economic growth of the country, they might have something more than just profit and loss analysis of immigration policy which is how the existing income equality itself politically influences the nation’s policy toward its immigration attitudes. Therefore, it is understood that “based on a complex intersection of economic interests, foreign policies, racial and ethnic biases, and other factors, immigration laws are the gates that allow some immigrants into the country while shutting others out” (Ueda, 2006, p. 6).

### **TWAIL Challenges: The Paradoxes**

There are at least two paradoxes in this case. First, when it comes to the image of the United States that we are familiar with international campaigns and commitment on upholding human rights, Trump’s perceptiveness on refugees and asylum seekers as foreign terrorists capable of committing potential threats is backlashing the United States stance as a state party to the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol, normatively and politically. As we have discussed the nature of refugees, asylum seekers, foreign terrorists and potential threats, we have understood its distinct difference that Trump is trying to intertwine. Unless, he is trying to convey other forms of “potential threats” that could actually fall under the bigger umbrella, which is under the ambit of more political, social, cultural issues. But when we try to read the “potential threats” here as an act of terrorism as is stated in the Executive Order 13769 that:

Section 1. Policy and Purpose. (a) It is the policy of the United States to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, including those committed by foreign nationals. The screening and vetting protocols and procedures associated with the visa-issuance process and the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) play a crucial role in detecting foreign nationals who may commit, aid, or support acts of terrorism and in preventing those individuals from entering the United States. It is therefore the policy of the United States to improve the screening and vetting protocols and procedures associated with the visa-issuance process and the USRAP (National Security & Defense, 2017).

The Executive Order further rules to suspend the USRAP if any indication of threat is found by the government and “grant case-by-case

waivers when they determined that it was in the national interest to do so”. It is written in Section 1(b) (ii), in which “they” refers to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security. Furthermore, it clearly states list of countries whose “nationals continue to present the heightened risks to the security of the United States” as written in Section 1(e) (National Security & Defense, 2017): Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.

In the first paradox, Trump creates a narrative where the USRAP, as the United States procedure and mechanism of screening asylum seekers and granting the status of refugees, is among other ways that could lead “foreign terrorists” enter the United States. By suspending the USRAP altogether and naming the list of countries he believes is presenting threats to the security of the United States, he generalizes the applicants—the people who, under the international legal regime, are trying to get international protection from and in the United States—as foreign terrorists capable of committing “potential threats.” The generalization that Trump is making through the Executive Order 13769 is crucial and can be fatal. It is crucial since the standard or parameter of potential threats to national security falls entirely in the hands of the national referral authority. It is, then, on the hands of the authority to justify a case relies, whether to accept or to reject one. And it is fatal because it can lead to a biased narrative.

The national referral authority, which could be perceived as the country’s exercise of sovereignty, is confidential and this means the generalized narrative based on confidential investigation should be put into a question to the system rather than a ban or block of an entire entry of a country and falsely claim that

its country nationals are all, for example, involved in the act of terrorism. This part in this proposition favors human rights for refugees and asylum seekers by intertwining them with foreign terrorists capable of committing potential threats. Notwithstanding, international politics of the United States on the global stage keeps campaigning to uphold human rights. Even though the issue of human rights is not assessed from an ethical point of view, it is rather clearly seen from the perspective of legal positivism. The United States model of modern legal positivism is the later element that needs to be questioned. H.L.A. Hart, as one of the distinguished positivists “agree that the law can be entirely based on social sources but also believe that this does not have to be the case. Instead, when law refers to moral standards, these standards become incorporated into the law” (Janmyr, 2013, p. 31). However, there are no part on the proposition dedicated to the acknowledged law—international law on refugees and asylum seekers—let alone the moral standards. It creates confusion about the kind of legal positivism being performed by the United States under Trump’s Executive Order 13769.

The second paradox comes with a distinct logic that falls under two circumstances that all, at the end of the day, favor the position of the United States. Firstly, the Executive Order’s rule on suspending the USRAP—after offering all the justifications it tries to make as conveyed in the first paradox—tries to clarify that the policy, representing the stance of the United States, is not trying to discriminate any particular religion. Instead, it tries to make an effective attempt to tackle down foreign terrorists trying to enter the United States through the USRAP. To sustain the “human rights issues,” it further explains that, “any

foreign national who has been granted asylum; any refugee who has already been admitted to the United States; or any individual who has been granted withholding of removal, advance parole, or protection under the Convention Against Torture.” Secondly, adding another emphasis on the United States’ exercise of national referral authority, the Executive Order states that it does “grant case-by-case waivers when they determined that it was in the national interest to do so”. The word “they” refers to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security (National Security & Defense, 2017).

The two circumstances prevail to design a situation where it is best possible for the United States to not be “wrongly-accused” of violating basic norms of international law regarding refugees and asylum seekers, rather, performing of itself being highly alert on “potential threats” while making itself favorable to do things based on national interests. Here are how the two circumstances works with the second paradox, the flawed logic in the Executive Order:

- First, when Trump’s Executive Order 13769 decides to ban entries from a list of seven Moslem-majority countries and further in the statement make clear of himself that the United States is not trying to discriminate any particular religion rather to carefully re-screen the entries from the seven countries, the Executive Order becomes peculiar. It becomes peculiar as the Executive Order states that, “the risk of erroneously permitting entry of a national of one of these countries who intends to commit terrorist acts or otherwise harm the national security of the United States is unacceptably high” (National Security & Defense, 2017)

followed by a special case of Iraq which by the United States investigation is becoming an active combat zone making the Iraqi government incapable to “identify fraudulent travel” as written in the Section 1(f) and (g). The peculiarity lies exactly at the incompetency that the United States system of travel and admission that, at the end of the day, permits such entries. If later, in the future, the United States begins to learn that there are some foreign terrorists who manage to get in the United States—in refugees and asylum seekers context—through the USRAP, then the flaw is in the USRAP system itself. Why bother to blame the incapability to the Iraqi government, let alone generalize all the Iraqi people who seek for international protection, when the United States does perform some incompetence in the system too? An article writes that Trump’s anti-immigration policy has been diverging previous administrations in tackling down terrorism by blurring it in the bigger context of contestation. The article of interview with Peter Neumann, a professor at Security Studies at King College’s London, says, “Trump is the first president of the post-9/11 era to so firmly link terrorism to immigration”. It further states “the single most important difference between Trump and his predecessors—the extent to which he conflates Islam, immigration, and terrorism” (Gilsinan, 2018). Trump keeps on linking terrorists with immigrants and Moslems, blurring the lines between them as if the generalization narrative he creates is the most accurate version of all. “His rhetoric diverges from that of previous post-9/11 administrations, which took care

to not implicate all Muslims or all immigrants” (Gilsinan, 2018). However, to justify its meaning, it needs to be seen that it still is a country that supports human rights of the refugees and asylum seekers. This adds more condition that it does not remove people with special circumstances as in written in the Section 3—which includes those who have been granted refugee status and given asylum.

- Second, even though the phrase “would be in the national interest to do so” seems to just pass through sections in the Executive Order 13769, it is really a highlight for TWAIL to discuss. For this, let me borrow Antony Anghie’s introduction on the war on terrorism:

Imperialism has once again become the focus of analysis in international relations, initially, as a consequence of the victorious emergence of the United States as the single global superpower intent on exercising its unprecedented influence to ensure its own security and further its own interests and, following 9/11, the commencement of a ‘war against terrorism’ (WAT) animated by principles and policies that, when taken together, closely resemble, if not reproduce, imperialism (Anghie, 2004, p. 273).

Anghie provides a postcolonial point of view in seeing how the United States—along with the war on terror (WAT) generated by the 9/11 tragedy—is able to manage its imperialism by imposing their national interests on the field, from security issues to social, economic, and cultural issues. There are political and legal considerations underlying the use of word “war” in the narrative, especially as to characterize terrorism more as “armed attacks” that must be massively overcome

by war against it and thus the war to it is justified to take place than just crimes. Anghie further suggests that the WAT uses the pre-emptive self-defense concept as what might be described the “Bush-doctrine”. As the most justifiable way of response to terrorism, it carries the narrative in the modern realities that all nations, with the ample support of the American government, must all fight against terrorism (Anghie, 2004). The concept is also well acknowledged in Article 51, Chapter VII of the United Nations (UN) Charter. Article 51 of the UN Charter states:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security (United Nations, n.d.).

President Bush was able to use this concept and expand it to his version of war—what to do about terrorism and how to fight it—to convince international community that WAT, the way America does it, is permitted under international law. The divided stance of the world has always been clear since Bush stated that, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (The Washington Post, 2001). The war does not

have to deal with those who are, seen at case by case level, running away from it to save their lives. The war does not have to bother the fact that some who flee terrorism might be the victims of it. The war does not have to “provide” mercy for those who might have (ever) been involved then seek asylum from it. The distinctions are crystal clear, the world only consists of those who are terrorists—in whatever involvement it is—and those who are not—which is those who fight against it. Moreover, this legacy of such making distinctions, explained in post-colonial view, is coming from what remains of the imperial culture.

In short, the first world countries, specifically the United States, can project and impose their power, soft and hard, politically and legally, to justify whatever favors them the most. Whether it is the campaign of human rights they like to do at the global stage—which is commonly done by making accusations of violations of human rights in other countries, added with a little bit of spice of lack of democracy in the narrative—or the all-justified means they use in fighting against terrorism on the WAT—anything from causing civilian casualties, destruction of environment, or in this context is outlawing humanity in the practices of law regarding of refugees and asylum seekers with its very different nature from FTFs—the United States is able to perform and impose their national interests. Borrowing a metaphor from Makau Mutua, the “Savages-Victims-Savior” (SVS), that explains the three dimensions in the human rights discourse and narratives that always spin around the non-Western states—which refer to the third world countries whose lack of democracy is so visible from the Western, democratic eyes—as the savages that

always violate human rights, the victims whose human rights have been taken away by the savages, and the saviors, the light to all and every problem which is the Western, democratic countries—whose societies and government respect and uphold human rights (Mutua, 2001); the United States in its paradox is the savior, the sanctuary, and the perfect model for the compliance and fulfillment of human rights issues while making itself clear, asserting that they have never been the savages in the narrative that violate the law, rather, again, always be the savior in other issues too, such as terrorism, even though flaws and contradictions are found in their footprints. At the end of the day, it is just everything that the United States is based on their national interests. And to wage their national interest, they do justifications and narratives that favor their stance and position so they are never to be accused of doing mistakes, let alone committing something wrong.

## CONCLUSION

Whenever placed in a ‘new’ or ‘foreign’ land as part of their journey in pursuing life without persecution, refugees and asylum seekers often live with discrimination, especially experiencing both overt and covert forms of racism. They are being labeled for their identities and associations—including but not limited to—race, religion, and origins of countries. Refugees and asylum seekers experience unequal access to human rights such as asylum and protection to be free from persecution. It all undermines the fundamental assertion that human rights are universal and apply equally to everyone, as it is conveyed, even in the American Constitution. From the attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers, there are exceptional circumstances in the name of humanity of which people, carrying

these labels must urgently be protected under the law that transcends politics, economic, even other cultural issues. If, what President Trump is believing that immigration, including that comes from refugees and asylum seekers, does contribute to income inequality which makes the federal government takes side on the anti-immigration policy, why then many researches prove that immigration has always had and will always have been substantial to the country’s economic growth.

The threats, then, seem to go beyond financial matters. What Trump makes are mere assumptions, and he is, under the country’s guise of “self-defence” or best termed as the “Bush doctrine” in the WAT chooses to rule out humanity by imposing narratives that refugees and asylum seekers are foreign terrorists who are capable of committing potential threats. It can be concluded that it is not the law that is being upheld in the status quo, but rather such self-referral and self-justification of law that give foundation underlying Trump’s anti-immigration policy to othering refugees and asylum seekers as foreign terrorists who are capable of committing potential threats to the American nation and American citizens by creating narratives—as urgent as possible—in “othering” refugees and asylum seekers. Trump, then, through the enforcement of the Executive Order 13769 exercises his power to protect his nation, without bothering the paradoxes—the flaws—he creates in the United States stance and position as part of the international community.

## REFERENCES

- Amnesty International. (2019, January 24). *What's the Difference between a Refugee and an Asylum Seeker?* Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org.au/refugee-and-an-asylum-seeker-difference/>
- Anderson, S. (2020, August 20). *A Review of Trump Immigration Policy*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2020/08/26/fact-check-and-review-of-trump-immigration-policy/#52c95d7b56c0>
- Anghie, A. (2004). *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dolmage, J. T. (2018). *Disabled Upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration, and the Construction of Race and Disability*. The Ohio State UP.
- FBI. (n.d.). *What We Investigate*. Retrieved from [https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=9ba7012176404742a1eb82c78435de632dd91a82-1606732032-0-AYZ41Wfkn\\_A7aLeXpnKMmKfJqnMVuZwzJjAW8QUx3Rpx2iuBnGLmBLFqfiBIj7iJcE5JASsnobPdGzJNTGa39c\\_mFt4yihIgwKM0N9jxuUvNhCQTZ7SChlrMcxU1lx2FaDrtj9uwYTM](https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=9ba7012176404742a1eb82c78435de632dd91a82-1606732032-0-AYZ41Wfkn_A7aLeXpnKMmKfJqnMVuZwzJjAW8QUx3Rpx2iuBnGLmBLFqfiBIj7iJcE5JASsnobPdGzJNTGa39c_mFt4yihIgwKM0N9jxuUvNhCQTZ7SChlrMcxU1lx2FaDrtj9uwYTM)
- Gilsinan, K. (2018, December 11). *Trump Keeps Invoking Terrorism to Get His Border Wall*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/12/trump-incorrectly-links-immigration-terrorism/576358/>
- Glennon, B. (2020, July 2020). *Why the Trump Administration's Anti-Immigration Policies are the United States' loss and the Rest of the World's Gain*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/20/why-the-trump-administrations-anti-immigration-policies-are-the-united-states-loss-and-the-rest-of-the-worlds-gain/>
- Haddad, E. (2008). *The Refugee in International Society, Between Sovereigns*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- History. (2019, May 14). *U.S. Immigration Timeline*. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/immigration-united-states-timeline>
- Ibe, P. (2020, November 2). *How Trump is Making It Harder for Asylum Seekers*. Retrieved from <https://www.afsc.org/blogs/news-and-commentary/how-trump-making-it-harder-asylum-seekers>
- Janmyr, M. (2013). *Protecting Civilians in Refugee Camps: Unable and Unwilling States, UNHCR and International Responsibility*. Leiden; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Klug, F. (2000). *Values for a Godless Age: The History of the Human Rights Act and its Political*. Penguin.
- Library of Congress. (n.d.). *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/re101.html>
- Library of Congress. (n.d.). *U.S. History Primary Source Timeline*. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/colonial-settlement-1600-1763/overview/>
- Mutua, M. (2001). "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights." *Harvard International Law Journal*, XLII(1), 201-245.
- National Security & Defense. (2017, March 6). *Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2/>
- Ngai, M. M. (2007, July). "Nationalism, Immigration Control, and the Ethnoracial Remapping of America in the 1920s." *OAH Magazine of History*, 11-15.
- ODIHR. (n.d.). *Guidelines for Addressing the Threats and Challenges of "Foreign Terrorist Fighters" within a Human Rights Framework*. Retrieved from [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/393503\\_2.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/393503_2.pdf)
- Pittaway, E., Bartolomei, L. A., Pittaway, E. E., & Doney, G. (2018, June 26). "Freedom from Persecution or Continued Abuse? An Analysis of the Meaning of Rights in Refugee Communities." *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 10, 248-267.
- Singh, A. S. (2019). "Third World Approach to International Law." *International Journal of Law*, 01-06.
- The Washington Post. (2001, September 20). *Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html)
- Ueda, R. (2006). *A Companion to American Immigration*. (R. Ueda, Ed.) Malden; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell Publishing.
- UNHCR. (n.d.). *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>
- UNHCR. (n.d.). *What is a Refugee?* Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Foreign terrorist fighters*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/foreign-terrorist-fighters/>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*. Retrieved from <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml>
- UNODC. (n.d.). *Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Manual for Judicial Training Institutes, South-Eastern Europe*. Retrieved from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/FTF%20manual/000\\_Final\\_Manual\\_English\\_Printed\\_Version\\_-\\_no\\_foreword.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/FTF%20manual/000_Final_Manual_English_Printed_Version_-_no_foreword.pdf)

USA for UNHCR. (n.d.). *What is a Refugee?*  
Retrieved from  
<https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

Williams, J. (2020, April 11). *Trump Administration Using Pandemic to Deport 30,000 Refugees and Asylum Seekers to Mexico.* Retrieved from  
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/04/11/immi-a11.html>

Xu, P., Garand, J. C., & Zhu, L. (2016, June). “Imported Inequality? Immigration and Income Inequality in the American States.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 147-171.



---

## SPIRITUAL HIBRIDITY OF NATIVE AMERICAN IN LOUIS EDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE*: POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

---

**Achmad Faqih**

e-mail: achmad.faqih@mail.ugm.ac.id

**Muh Arif Rokhman**

e-mail: arokhman@ugm.ac.id

---

### ABSTRACT

Louis Edrich is a contemporary Native American writer who writes *The Round House*. The novel portrays the complexities of individual and cultural identity, focuses on the exigencies of marginalization and cultural survival, which happened to Native Americans, as well as concerns about spirituality and the hybrid form of religion, known as spiritual hybridity. Spiritual hybridity appears to be common practices for Native Americans after the arrival of European and the massive spreading of Christianity. This study is conducted to probe the representation of the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. The novel is examined using Bhabha's theory on Hybridity. The dialogue and narration in the form of words, phrases, and sentences in the novel are treated as a data source representing the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. The analysis results in the representation of the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans, which can be considered as their defense against Christian hegemony. Besides, the representation of spiritual hybridity, as a form of third space, occurs due to a mixture of religious beliefs committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. Spiritual hybridity can be concluded as a new pattern of the struggle and resistance of Native Americans to fight for their tradition. Nowadays, spiritual hybridity for Native American remains a form of resistance towards Christian hegemony.

### Article information

*Received: 14 August, 2020*

*Revised: 28 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 11 September, 2020*

**Keywords:** *hybridity; resistance; spiritual hybridity; spirituality*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62748>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62748>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

### INTRODUCTION

The spreading of religion is filled with a lot of suspicion and criticism because it always disputes cultural understanding that has been

established for a long time ago. Religion is used as a medium to control others. As stated by Althusser (2014) that religion can be the ideological apparatus to dominate other people (p. 136). Such experiences happened to Native

Americans after contact with Europeans. However, long before the European arrival and settlement period— despite not structurally — Native Americans have had a well-established culture, such as literature, history, and religious belief. Those elements are parts of the landscape of Native Americans. According to Vernon (1999), since their arrival, Europeans have been prohibiting Native Americans to maintain their traditional ways of worship (p. 75). Her statement is in line with Axtell, who said that Europeans challenged the authority of religious leaders and banned Native Worship, penalizing and jailing those who continued to practice their traditional ways of life (Axtell, 1986, p. 227).

The relation between both Christianity and Colonization among historians, anthropologists, and culture researchers is still debatable. However, some perspectives on this debated relation explain that Christianity is viewed as the religious arm of colonialism. Both of them have almost the same mission that goes hand in hand. According to Gray (1982), Christianity and colonialism is one package; missionaries convert the colonized and colonizers civilize the colonized (p. 71). Loomba (2005) also states that Christianity can be used as an ideological instrument to build a myth, perspective, or doctrine that makes colonized people submit to the colonial power (p. 32-33). Christianity is the only justification used to exploit Native American tradition. However, the focus of Christianity is to spread the teaching of Jesus Christ. The colonial power was thus planted inevitably followed by Christian missions.

On the other hand, colonization has produced the emergence of heterodox communities, instead of spiritual uniformity, due to their obscure identity or spiritual

hybridity. Cox (in Sommers and Harushimana, 2016) states that spiritual hybridity is a common practice in many colonized societies (p. 56). This statement is in line with Tore (2009), who writes that spiritual hybridity is a cultural mixture of spiritual and religious belief systems and practices (p. 536). It comes as a result of the European invasions and colonization of the American continent. It then makes their faith and religious practices to mix. Thus, spiritual hybridity can be said as a form of resistance or as maintaining Native American cultural heritage towards colonization.

On the other hand, the term “*spirituality*” has an important role for Native Americans, as an outlet to express their religious visions in reaching a higher dimension. Martin explains that spirituality stood at the center of Native American societies before European colonization and has continued. Their spirituality can affect their daily lives, including how they cook, tell stories, organize their village, and marry. It means what Native American has done can carry extraordinary significance to their religious meaning. However, the importance of spirituality can change due to the hybridization of their spirituality with the Christian faith.

Moreover, *The Round House* by Louis Edrich is chosen as a material object. The novel carries an issue of spiritual hybridity that has not raised attention because many scholars tend to focus on exploring the discriminations experienced by Native Americans. Furthermore, the colonization discourse towards Native Americans is still widely discussed. However, the recent study focuses on the spiritual hybridity experienced by the characters in the novel. With its richness of the portrayal of the characters that cannot be

found in other novels telling the similar topic, the material object is expected to give more understanding about the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. Henceforth, this study aims to reveal the spiritual hybridity of Native America and the factor that drives or influences them.

This research is conducted under American Studies, precisely the Post-Nationalist point of view. This new approach towards American exceptionalism is to criticize the cultural imperialism and its exclusion of many different cultures that have been marginalized by traditional American studies (Rowe, 2000, p. 23). Post-Nationalist focuses on two aspects; revising cultural nationalism and criticizing American exceptionalism. It means Post-Nationalist tries to consider other nations that are not only America, but they are historically crucial to the American social, political, and economic development. At its best, Post-Nationalist tries to cover many different social systems and cultural affiliations of the United States, rather than treating such cultural differences as discrete entities. Post-Nationalist discusses the interaction and intersection of different cultures and the core of this study is the importance of marginalized groups. Moreover, Postcolonial studies, as one of the parts of Post-Nationalist, also focus on the marginalized and minority groups, while also analyzing the cultural hybridity that occurred historically among many cultures constituting or shaping America's identities. Hence, postcolonial studies in the Post-Nationalist American Studies paradigm is in line with the theme of this study.

The foreground of postcolonial studies, according to Stayers, refers to the opposition or resistance of colonized societies. The form

of resistance can be done by various things, one of which is by using religion. Religion becomes a media that bridges the colonized groups against the domination of the colonizers because it provides a platform for expressing spirituality (Stayers, 2009, p. 851-852). Indeed, spirituality can be used to reject a hegemonic of a particular religion because it requires a belief that significantly provides power in its internalized forms. The resistance of the hegemonic religion is expressed by performing spiritual hybridity.

Further, the study needs another theory to analyze the spiritual hybridity performed by Native Americans. In general, the term 'hybridity' means a new transcultural form within the contact zone as a result of colonization (Aschorf, 2007, p. 108). Hybridity has been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic, and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as the replication of assimilationist policies by masking or 'whitewashing' cultural differences. In a simpler assertion, the emergence of hybridity within the cultural sphere can eliminate the authenticity of that culture. It also can change and remove all hierarchical strata. It happened due to all have blended without authenticity. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority. It does not merely indicate the impossibility of defining its identity, but to represent the unpredictability of its presence (Bhabha, 2012 p. 163). The existence of hybridity creates what Bhabha Callas 'third space' which is the function is to displace the histories that constitute it, and sets up a new structure of authority, new political initiatives (Bhabha, 1991 p. 211). The emergence of 'third space' is

a consequence of the culture clash where there is a negotiation. The negotiations include cultural interest that wants to be articulated and fought for by each party involved in the 'third space.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Sense of Multiple Religious Belonging**

The story tells that Joe's family consists of a wife named Geraldine Coutts and his Father is Bazil, who works as a Tribal judge. Joe is a thirteen years old Chippewa boy who lives with his family on a reservation in Minnesota. He and his family are characters that have blood Native Americans but converted as Christian. They prefer to choose to be Native Christian rather than Native American religions. However, it does not necessarily make the life of Joe peaceful. He and his family face a difficult situation after his mom Geraldine Coutts was raped by someone in the sacred place that calls "The Roundhouse". For Joe, he has a sense of multiple religious belonging, which implicitly influences his spirituality.

I have blood Indian who was baptized and undergone confirmation (Edrich, 2012 p.13)

My family doesn't hedge about things. Though Catholic, my aunt was not one to let the butter melt in her mouth. When she spoke, answering me, her voice was quick and cool. (Edrich, 2012, p.8)

As Catholic depicted in the novel, Joe's portrayals can be assumed that the spreading of Christianity in the reservation is widely recognizable by Native Americans. There is no such conflict that can lead to cleavage among Native Americans in the reservation. Although Joe is seen as a Christian who is devout in his religion, he cannot escape from the influence of indigenous Native American traditions. It can be seen in "Every time I got a pitying or

curious look from another kid or a teacher that day, I touched the stone Cappy gave me" (Edrich, 2012, p. 10). His fervent baptize and worship are not fruitful, for his need is incompatible with Christianity. The multiple religious belonging of Joe arises when he cannot handle the problem that is faced by him and in Christianity cannot provide safety what Joe wants. Despite all his striving to devoutness and whatever Joe tries to worship fervently. He still operates within the reference system to Native religious beliefs because Christianity is not the only way to solve his problem. The stone that Cappy gives is taken from a tree struck by lightning, grown in a sacred place for the Chippewa tribe.

Moreover, the sense of multiple religions was felt by Joe as colonization, which was experienced by Native Americans. Besides, the purpose of the multiple religion, Joe could obscure the importance of religious identity. According to Cornile (2002, p. 3), the simultaneous belonging to various religions implies discrimination and self-sufficiency, precisely what needs to be left behind. It is because Native religion and Christianity are ideologically regarded as a distinct tradition that cannot be combined into one faith. Moreover, Christianity is a monotheistic religion that claims absolute and exclusive truth in all domains of existence.

On the other hand, the sense of multiple religions that Joe has done can be seen as a resistance strategy of his Christian identity. In line with Roberts (2010), it states that necessity breeds creativity as disempowerment experiences lead to new uses of religious and spiritual resources. The masking of one tradition in the guise of another can be a resistance strategy (Roberts, 2010, p. 44). The sense of double religion was experienced by

Joe, a Native American who placed his identity more inclined to Native American tradition.

Moreover, multiple religious belonging is experienced by Native Americans as a colonized subject and Christian as the colonizer also implicitly experiences it. It is due to the effects of colonization between Native Americans and Christianity. Joe is not the only one who more relays on Native American tradition and Linda, a white Christian woman raised by Betty Wishkob in Chippewa Family. She is involved in Native American tradition, which is known as “sweat lodge”.

My real family came to my rescue, got me on my feet again, she went on. And Geraldine too, of course. Also, Doe Lafournais put me through their sweat lodge. That ceremony was so powerful. Her voice was wistful. And so hot! Randal gave me a feast. His aunts dressed me in a new ribbon dress they made. I started healing and felt even better. (Edrich, 2012, p. 81)

Multiple religious belonging was experienced by Native American as colonized and Christian, one of is Linda. The mixing practice and faith between colonizer and colonized influence each other. In line with Werbner's (2001) statement, in colonial encounters, the colonized people are not the only ones subjected to colonizer ways. Nevertheless, they are also transformed into colonized people (p. 136). Examined from this point of view, the effect of colonization ruined the values of colonial authority. The authority that was previously the full right of the colonizer has turned into a boomerang for them.

Moreover, the colonizer's authority indicates that Native American knowledge, which most colonialists are called backward or

seen to challenge scientific truth and its benefits, is questioned or considered a myth. The paradigm has been refuted. In this respect, it does not mean to abate science, which is promoted as objective, quantifiable, and the foundation of “real” knowledge creation. However, a science which is exalted by colonizer sometimes does not work properly.

### **Spiritual Hybridity of Native American**

The elements of religious belief depicted in the novel can become the basis of liberating postcolonial space. Brooks (2003) explains that Native Americans continue to struggle for self-determination through Christianity, either in assimilation or hybridity. It is in this way as an act of self-determination and an expression of sovereignty (p. 55-56). It is in line with Gonzales (2002) who argues that native spiritual hybridity may be viewed not as a casual or mechanical blending but as a tactic of native resistance (p. 122). By doing Spiritual hybridity, Native American protects their continuance of indigenous faith practices. They are not entirely under the control of Christianity, represented as European hegemony in the Native American community.

Joe and his friends, Randal and Cappy, carry out the ritual of Native Americans, which is called “sweat lodge”. This ritual is intended for prayer and healing. It looks easy for them to perform it. Joe showed continuous effort to maintain his religion, although this ceremony is not part of his religion as Christian.

On ceremony nights they'd leave a feast put up neatly in two big plastic coolers alongside the garage. Farther back, nearly in the woods, the sweat-lodge dome of bent and lashed-together saplings, covered by army-surplus tarps, humidly waited, gathering mosquitoes. Cappy had already

made the fire. The rocks, the grandfathers, were superheating in the middle. Our job was to keep that fire going, hand in the sacred pipes and the medicines, bring the rocks to the door on long-handled shovels, close and open the flaps. We'd also throw tobacco into our fire when someone in the lodge yelled for it, to mark some special prayer or request. On crisp nights it was a good job— we'd sit talking around that fire, staying warm. Sometimes we'd secretly roast a hot dog or marshmallow on a stick even though the fire was sacred and one time Randall had caught us. He'd claimed we'd taken the sacredness out of the fire with our hot dogs (Edrich, 2012, p. 22)

The faith of Joe towards Christianity is uncertain because his attitude is more inclined to Native American religion. Despite the dominance of Christianity in the Native American community, it cannot guarantee its followers always to obey the rules that have been given. This improbability also shows that there is no superior culture unexceptionally for Christianity too. It is only the sense of belonging of one identity to other cultures. Besides, the spiritual hybridity that was performed by Joe is to change and remove all hierarchical strata. Hybridity intervenes in exercising authority, not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity, but to represent the unpredictability of its presence (Bhabha, 2012, p. 163). It happens because all have blended into the new one, Bhabha named the third space.

Moreover, Spiritual hybridity is a form of the third space which arises because of a mixture of religious beliefs committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. In that space, it gives meaning and cultural identity that always contains traces of other meanings and identities and has colonial or postcolonial

provenance (Aschorft, 2007, p. 54). Spiritual hybridity refers to the meanings and identities of Native Americans, in which all cultural statements and systems are reconstructed within.

“What about the church?” said Edward. “Would it help if Clemence took her to church?” You know what I think about it. “I don't think Geraldine would find comfort there, after all these years”.

We all knew that my mother had stopped going to Church after she returned from boarding school. She never said why. (Edrich, 2012, p. 47)

It is in line with the explanation of the third space, which mentions that the emergence of the third space can reconstruct the system and the cultural statement. For Christianity, the Church helps human beings perform their great life-task, which must realize some individual, personal ideal (Fairchild, 1896, p. 221). He also adds that Church is one of the holy places used for ritual practices and mediates the relationship between individuals and God, and offers peacefulness for Christians (Fairchild, 1896, p. 222). However, Joe's mother Geraldine, a Native American who has been baptized as a Christian, did not find comfort there. This realization is contrary to what Christians believe generally. The cultural statement about the Church has been shifted and reconstructed. The change occurred due to hybridization so that it was possible to bring up a new meaning to how Church functions. Besides, this can also shift the paradigm of Christianity that the Church is not the only holy place that can provide human spirituality. It was proven by what happened to Joe's mother, Geraldine.

On the one hand, the sacred place of Native Americans, called *The Round House* gives the peace needed by human beings. The feeling which everybody can feel it although

they are not holding the tradition of Native Americans as their faith. "But when I reached the roundhouse, the sun fell like a warm hand on my shoulders. The place seemed peaceful. There was no door." (Edrich, 2012, p. 36). What was going on Joe's feeling about who is a Christian can be related to the term of third space since the cultural statement of the Church is shifted. It is in line with Bhabha who explains that the intervention of the third space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference are not fixed, destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated and stable (Bhabha, 2012, p. 54). The sacred place of Native Americans, which was initially mocked by Christians at the beginning of his arrival in the Native American society, is not useful. Instead, it becomes a place that gives comfort to them.

Furthermore, the process of hybridity in Native Americans is paradigmatic of all Native American resistance to dominating discourse in which that is part of the natural form of colonial discourse. Following Bhabha who states:

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative as well as a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal so that other denied knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition (Bhabha, 2012, p. 162)

It shows that Native Americans free themselves from Christian hegemony by involving themselves through hybridization of Christian culture. Instead, the more dominant authority is split and bringing up new space for

Native Americans to reverse the effect of the hegemony.

Therefore, religions are sometimes used to differ and divide individuals and groups based on their backgrounds and religious heritage (Kim-Prieto, 2016, p. 260). This assumption gives rise to the concept of a binary system among the people, which causes a recognition that leads to superiority and inferiority about each of their religions' identity, and it happened to Native American religion and Christianity. Christianity looks more convinced rather than Native American religion because of the historical background and historical record of Christianity. As Bhabha puts that colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce (Bhabha, 2012, p. 122). In the name of history, Christianity would be able to achieve a hegemonic hold over Native Americans. It then caused hybridization among both of them in which Native American adopts Christianity. Native Americans develop new venues in order not to overcome the tribal authority with Christianity and new ways to articulate the spiritual values of their traditions. They can trace the values of their ceremonial.

The Roundhouse had been used for ceremonies. People pretended it was a social dance hall or brought their Bibles for gatherings. In those days the headlights of the priest's car coming down the long road glared in the southern window. By the time the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived, the water drums and eagle feathers and the medicine bags and birchbark scrolls and sacred pipes were in a couple of motorboats halfway across the lake. The Bible was out and people were reading aloud from Ecclesiastes. Why that part of the Bible? I'd once asked Mooshum. Chapter 1, verse 4, he said. One generation passeth away,

and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. We think that way too. Sometimes we square-danced, said Mooshum... (Edrich, 2012, p. 36)

The situation portrayed above is Native Americans prohibited from worshipping or performing a ceremonial for their ancestral in pre-1978. They are forcibly removed from their aboriginal homeland, and their ceremonies are not permitted, and the people were forced to adopt various subterfuges so that ceremonial life could continue (Deliora, 1991, p. 1). In the same way, he added that the adoption was mentioned, such as elaborating Native American old belief with Christianity ultimately can be taken as a hybridizing of their spiritual. It provides the terrain for elaborating selfhood strategies – singular or communal – that initiate Native American spiritual identity signs. Those all have been done by Joe's grandfather, Moshum, to maintain Native American tradition. Spiritual hybridity is a process to estrange Christian identity any immediate access to the spirit of Native Americans.

Besides, Moshum told to Joes as a form of camouflage that results from the mimicry process in Native American society. They read the Bible loudly where the snippets of the verse have similarities with Native American beliefs. The verse reads, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). The message of snippets of the verse, according to Pingleton, is life should be enjoyed whether it is good or not, and the only one which cannot be controlled and compared by people is the power of nature (Pingleton, 2017, p. 60). It is similar to most Native Americans' belief that nature is the most powerful and part of Native American spirituality.

The Postcolonial studies further discuss spiritual hybridity influences caused by cultural hybridity and mimicry. One of the most apparent mimicries done by Native Americans is embracing Christianity. This kind of process cannot be achieved if there is no cultural hybridity that happened before. Furthermore, the process of mimicry will never bring equality because it is only an imitation that cannot entirely the same as what was imitated. Bhabha states that colonial mimicry desires a reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of almost identical difference, but not quite (Bhabha, 2012, p. 122). Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.

Moreover, the process of mimicry gives space for Native Americans to create a camouflage, which is the function is not only to harmonize beliefs among Native Americans with Christianity but also against dogmas that Christians spread to Native Americans. Following Bhabha, he explains that camouflage is the effect of mimicry, whereas it is harmonizing with the background and against it (Bhabha, 2012, p. 172). Besides, Native Americans, as the mimic man, claimed a certain identification with Christianity, which would not be a fixed and standalone identity because mimicry only exists by relating Native Americans to the original—Christianity. The mimic man only acted out a performance of repeating, duplicating, or mocking. So, the results of imitation never become a new identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Spiritual hybridity is represented as a new phenomenon for Native Americans after the arrival of Europeans. The representation of the



spiritual hybridity of Native Americans shows that the probability of a mixed-faith between Christianity and Native American religion. Moreover, the spiritual hybridity representation of Native Americans not only maintains their culture but also goes against the dogma and the hegemony of Christianity. Their disempowering experiences influence them to practice spiritual hybridity as they have long lived under the colonizing Christian tradition. Besides, spiritual hybridity, as a form of third space occurs due to a mixture of religious beliefs, is committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. The experiences of disempowerment lead Native Americans to create new uses of religion and spirituality. The masking of one tradition in the guise of another can be a resistance strategy. In short, spiritual hybridity can be concluded as a new pattern of the struggle and resistance of Native Americans to fight for their tradition.

Furthermore, the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans as a form of their self-defense protects their continuance of indigenous faith practices, which have been passed down by their ancestors. They are not entirely under the control of Christianity, which is represented as European hegemony, because they can change and remove all hierarchical strata and social stigma that has been experienced by Native Americans. It happened due to all have blended into the new existing one spiritual hybridity.

## REFERENCES

- Althusser, Louis. G. M. Goshgarian, Etienne Balibar, Jacques Bidet. (2014). *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Verso Press.
- Aschorft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. (2007). *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London & New York.
- Axtell, James. (1986). *THE INVASION WITHIN: The Contest of Culture in Colonial North America*. Oxford University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. New York Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1991). "The Third Space: Interview with K. Bhabha" in Jonathan Rutherford (ed), *Identity, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Brooks, Joanna. (2003). *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford University Press.
- Cornille, Cathrine. (2002). "Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging." *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Deloira, Vine. (1991). *Sacred Land and Religious Freedom*. *NARF Legal review*, 16(2), 1-15.
- Edrich, Luis. (2012). *The Round House*. Harper Collins.
- Fairchild, E. (1896). "The Function of the Church." *American Journal of Sociology*, 2(2), 220-233. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/2761665](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2761665).
- Gonzales, Yolanda. (2002). "Indianizing Catholicism: Chicana/India/Mexicana Indigenous Spiritual Practices in Our Image." *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*. ed. Norma & Olga. University of Illinois Press.
- Gray, Richard. (1982). "Christianity, Colonialism, and Communications in Subsaharan Africa." *Journal of Black Studies*, 13(1), 59-72.

- Kim-Prieto, Chu. (2016). *Religion and Spirituality Across Cultures*. Springer Netherlands.
- Loomba, Ania. (2005). *Colonialism/Post-colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Martin, Joel. W (1999). *Native American Religion*. New York; Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Pingelton, Timothy J. (2017). *Reading and Interpreting the Works of Ernest Hemingway*. Enslow Pub Inc.
- Roberts, M. (2010). "Religious Belonging and the Multiple." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 26(1), 43-62. DOI: 10.2979/fsr.2010.26.1.43.
- Rowe, J. C. (2000). *Post-Nationalist American Studies*. University of California Press.
- Stayers, R. (2009). *Postcolonial Theory and the Study of Christian History*. *Church History*, 78(4), 849-854. Retrieved April 2, 2019, from [www.jstor.org/stable/20618795](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20618795)
- Sommers, Shirley M and Harushimana, Immaculee. (2016). *African Immigrants' Experiences in American Schools: Complicating the Race Discourse (Race and Education in the Twenty-First Century)*. Lexington Books.
- Tore, Miguel A. De La. (2009). *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Vernon, Irene S. (1999). "The Claiming of Christ: Native American Postcolonial Discourses." Oxford University Press. *MELUS*, 24(2), 75-88.
- Werbner, P. (2001). "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested Postcolonial Purifications." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 7(1), 133-152. Retrieved January 15, 2020 from [www.jstor.org/stable/2660840](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2660840)

---

## THE PARADOX BEHIND THE EXISTENCE OF GAY CONVERSION THERAPY AS DEPICTED IN GARRARD CONLEY'S MEMOIR *BOY ERASED*

---

**Sekar Yolanda Azza**

e-mail: [sekaryolandaazza@gmail.com](mailto:sekaryolandaazza@gmail.com)

---

### ABSTRACT

The issues of minorities still become an interesting topic to be discussed since practically the laws sometimes cannot protect the rights of the minorities. Homosexuals are one of the minority groups in the United States struggling with homophobia. The existence of gay conversion therapy is a paradox in the multicultural country. This research is conducted to examine how the portrayal of homophobia in gay conversion therapy and how the paradox of multiculturalism depicted in Conley's memoir entitled *Boy Erased*. The primary data of this research are the dialog and narration in the memoir published in 2016, which contains the irony behind the existence of gay conversion therapy. The secondary data are taken from articles and current news that relates to the issues. The post-nationalism approach, homophobia theory, and multiculturalism theory are used to analyze the data. The study found institutionalized homophobia at Love in Action (LIA) as the gay conversion therapy institution. The reasons behind the existence of gay conversion therapy are the paradox of toleration, lack of equal recognition, and the inability to provide positive accommodation for homosexuals. The existence of gay conversion therapy proved that the struggles of homosexuals in the United States still need to be overcome.

**Keywords:** *gay conversion therapy; homophobia; homosexuality; multiculturalism*

### Article information

*Received: 12 August, 2020*

*Revised: 26 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 09 September, 2020*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62749>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62749>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

### INTRODUCTION

The United States is primarily known as the champion of democracy and the guardian of democracy. *Declaration of Independence* promised to protect all men's rights to get the freedom of life and pursuit of happiness regardless of their race, sex, gender, job, and

ethnicity in the United States (Jacobs, 2004). A democratic system provided the citizens to get equal opportunity and provide equal rights for all citizens. A democratic system should also accommodate the rights based on society agreements and individual responsibility to respect other people or group's rights.

The dynamic form of society is a challenge for the United States to implement the policy related to the rights of the minorities. The diverse perspectives on religion, morals, beliefs, and cultures have been used to justify oppression and diminished the rights of minorities (Robinson, 2009). As the target of the political situation from both conservatism and liberalism, it is not easy for minorities to speak up. Creating large crowds or mass movements is one of the powerful strategies to get their rights, as the 1960’s Civil Rights movement that has inspired the emergence of homosexual movement.

The Stonewall Uprising created progressive change for the homosexual movement. Homophobia was culpable in this movement to spread irrational fear and hatred toward homosexuals. In recent years, homophobia is not only about physical harassment, but also verbal abuse, such as jokes and negative comments on social media. Those homophobias not only contribute to physical violence, but also result in depression and suicide cases.

After the legalization of same-sex marriage law for all fifty states of the United States in 2015, homosexuality still becomes controversial, and gay conversion therapy still exists. “Conversion therapy is treatment grounded in the belief that being homosexual is abnormal. It is intended to change the sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of homosexual people” (Mallory, Brown, & Conron, 2019). Conservative religions commonly established this therapy. In other words, the existence of conversion therapy explains that Americans are mentally not ready yet to accept the legalization of same-sex marriage law.

Historically, gay conversion therapy is also known as reparative therapy or sexual reorientation. This therapy is not a new phenomenon in the United States. Academic literature documented that therapy has been used since early 1980 (Mallory, Brown, & Conron, 2019). In the same way, the existence of gay conversion therapy is fully supported by conservatism. Homosexual clients who are seeking treatment to change their sexual orientation mostly suffering homophobic. The other factor that drives homosexual to be submitted into this therapy is families who do not support the ‘coming out’ process. The existence of gay conversion therapy proves that same-sex marriage law is not the ending of discrimination towards homosexuals.

The problems inside gay conversion therapy pushed the homosexual movement to persuade the government to ban this therapy. While some people and institutions agree to ban this therapy, conservatism prefers to rely on their Biblical values. The survey from Ipsos/Reuters in June 2019 reported that 52% of the United States adults support banning gay conversion therapy. Moreover, 18% of them stand to disagree with banning gay conversion therapy, and the other 30% argue they do not have a specific argument about this therapy (Mallory, Brown, & Conron, 2019).

To ban all gay conversion therapy was not easy for the government to do since Christianity was the biggest religion in the United States. Nonetheless, the opportunity to ban all forms of gay conversion therapy remains. Until June 2019, the United States only banned conversion therapy in 18 states. *The New York Times* argues, “Between 2012 and 2018, 14 states and Washington, D.C., passed laws prohibiting conversion therapy for minors.” (Gold, 2019). Recently, New York and the

District of Columbia also join other states to banish conversion therapy in the United States. Gay conversion therapy still operated in more than half of the states in the United States. Some people continue to believe this therapy immensely able to change sexual orientation from homosexual to be heterosexual. Conversion therapy is needed to be discussed due to its complexity, and it cannot be seen from just one perspective.

Arkansas is one of the states that still legalized gay conversion therapy until 2019. This phenomenon illustrates in Garrard Conley's memoir entitled *Boy Erased* published in 2016. As a non-fictional literary work, this memoir was chosen to portray this issue because of the closeness to reality. Conley's debut memoir, *Boy Erased*, exclusively demonstrates his anxiety after coming out as a homosexual in a conservative family. Living in the small town of Arkansas as the son of a Baptist pastor, Conley was living in rigid rules of Christianity or the Southern Bible Belt. His conservative family forced Conley to break homosexuality prejudice (Conley, 2016).

Soon after Conley's parents found out their son's sexual orientation, his father intimidated Conley to join with gay conversion therapy, namely *Love in Action* (LIA) at Memphis in 2004. LIA is one of gay conversion therapy in the United States that promised to prevent and cure homosexuality. At first, Conley showed an uncomfortable feeling to be homosexuals and tried to cure his homosexuality through gay conversion therapy. Conley was also praying and questioning his faith over God when the treatment started to screw up his life (Conley, 2016).

Garrard Conley's memoir *Boy Erased* achieved a good response from the readers. The reader's enthusiasm brings this book into New York Best Seller in 2016 and movie adaptation with the same title in 2018. As the conversion gay therapy survivor and lecturer, Conley actively shared his experience through digital media and seminars. This memoir contains his hope to banish gay conversion therapy after the legalization of same-sex marriage law. Furthermore, *Boy Erased* was born as one of the tools and medium to examines gay conversion therapies' policy in the United States. The memoir of Garrard Conley successfully brings the issues of gay conversion therapy to the public.

Since gay conversion therapy still becomes debatable issues, this research aimed to examine how the portrayal of homophobia in the gay conversion therapy and how the paradox of multiculturalism depicted in this memoir. Queer theory, as the paradigm, would be the border to counter perspective of sexual orientation. This qualitative research also applied the post-nationalism approach to see the United States as a whole rather than a single entity. As a minority and marginalized group, homosexual people also has contributed to American cultures.

Furthermore, homophobia in the gay conversion therapy can be seen by homophobia theory. The next theory is multiculturalism, and this theory helps to see the issue of American society about gay conversion therapy that still exists. By these theories, American gay conversion therapy can be examined clearly.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Homophobia Inside The Gay Conversion Therapy**

Being a homosexual is not accessible if there is homophobia in society. The complexity of the power relations between the mainstream or majority and minority brings homosexuals into the marginalized group. It cannot be denied that the conservative perspective towards homosexuality led to the homophobia that justifies the discriminations. As an impact, gay conversion therapy was created to fulfill heterosexism’s ego in society. Gay conversion therapy under conservatism spread the dogma that homosexuality is a life choice rather than various types of sexual orientations (Thumma, 1991).

Institutional homophobia theory by Blumenfeld was used to examine homophobia in the gay conversion therapy. Institutional homophobia refers to how government, military, religion, and other institutions discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation. The collective homophobia by gay conversion therapy as the institution proved that discrimination towards homosexuals is legal in some States (Blumenfeld, 1992).

The homophobic attitude by gay conversion therapy has interconnected with the Church’s view about homosexuality. This memoir implies that Conley was learning a homophobic attitude since he was a child.

The rest of my bigotry I learned from pantomime: limp wrists and exaggerated sashays from mocking church members; phrases that lifted out of natural speech into show-tune lilt—“Oh, you shouldn’t have”; church petitions that had to be signed in order to keep our country safe from “perverts.” (Conley, 2016).

The sentence exposes the image of homosexuality rooted in Conley’s mind, along with his skeptic attitude. Hence, the ambiance of institutional homophobia fulfills his mind when he joined gay conversion therapy.

When Conley first arrived in the groups, the therapist clearly said, “The first thing you have to do is recognize how you’ve become dependent on sex, on things that are not from God” (Conley, 2016). John Smid, as the principal therapist at LIA, suggests the conservative dogma in that sentence. The negative ambiance from him leads to institutional homophobia and persuades homosexuals to think they are abnormal and full of sin.

The attitude of gay conversion therapy’s client is controlled by those twelve-step programs. The negative image of homosexuality vividly shaped in gay conversion therapy. “You’re using sexual sin to fill a God-shaped void in your life” (Conley, 2016). This judgemental word was coming from Smid’s mouth during the first session. Rather than build empathy, this institution spread the fear of homosexuals’ mind.

At the moment, it seemed as if everything about me was inappropriate as if I might be banned from the premises simply because I was already too dirty. His tone suggested that I was desperately trying to hide an extensive sinful past. (Conley, 2016).

Conley’s mental condition could be traced through these sentences as personal homophobia, while the trigger of personal homophobia is institutional homophobia. It can be seen when he said dirty and sinfulness inside him because of homosexuality. The religious value inside gay conversion therapy has made Conley into the depression.

For the first time, Conley did not feel anything wrong with gay conversion therapy because he grew up with a Bible belt. Then as time flies, he got another view about this institution “LIA had taken a more extreme stance against the secular world than any of the churches I'd grown up in, though the counselor's way of thinking was not unfamiliar to me” (Conley, 2016). The programs of LIA as gay conversion therapy seems not fully moved based on Biblical values. Here Conley explained the walls of LIA that empty from anything because the therapist presumes the image or icon could trigger secular thought. On the other hand, art, such as classical music by Beethoven and Bach, cannot be heard at LIA because they are not Christian. Likewise, popular literature, such as Harry Potter, cannot be read at this institution due to their fear of secularism.

Rather than supplied professional therapists who offer empathy, LIA was focused on killing same-sex desire within the harassment.

At the moment, it seemed as if everything about me was inappropriate as if I might be banned from the premises simply because I was already too dirty. His tone suggested that I was desperately trying to hide an extensive sinful past. (Conley, 2016).

During the programs, Conley started to feel more uncomfortable within himself. Besides his personal homophobia, LIA was adding some reason for Conley to hate himself. The paranoid comes when LIA's employee asks him about his boyfriend. "Smid had told the man that it would be better for him to kill himself than to live as a homosexual" (Conley, 2016). Another verbal abuse from LIA happened when Smid argues that being homosexuals is the worst, and it might be a

trigger for homosexual's minds to commit suicide.

In the middle of the programs, some rules were trying to destroy Conley's confidence from being himself. Conley has lost himself during LIA's program, which claimed he could cure his homosexuality. “Every night, I was to focus exclusively on my sinfulness” (Conley, 2016). This program is called Moral Inventory (MI), and the clients should trace back their sin to find the reason for their homosexuality. This therapy has a purpose to emphasized the shameful sin in the clients' life and brushed the sin away. Through this program, Conley got a harrowing accident in his life. “I was rereading the page quickly, scanning to see if I'd written anything too embarrassing to share in front of our group, but, really, all of it was embarrassing” (Conley, 2016). How LIA pushed someone who has homophobia inside his mind to speak in front of many people may occur in their psychology. Therefore, it would be a traumatic experience in their life when they are not comfortable with themselves.

The night before the MI program started, Conley firmly pressed his memory to find his sin about being a homosexual. “Perhaps part of the reason I couldn't sleep well at night was that I'd never, before this moment, truly emptied myself of all sin.” (Conley, 2016). Conley cannot remember his same-sex attraction. Due to the condition of his environment that lives in a conservative family, he felt a lack of experience in same-sex attraction.

I kept my MI folded beneath my right thigh, dreading the moment when I would have to stand in front of this group and share my shame. I was especially worried about sharing this story with J, who seemed to have developed a great deal of

respect for me in only a few days. (Conley, 2016).

The implication of the MI program that asks the clients to announce their sin in front of many people might be a boomerang for the clients. However, this program was too vulgar to expose someone's secret in front of other people. This program is ineffective since Conley still cannot control his homophobia when he began to confess his sexual orientation.

Another harassment in LIA as gay conversion therapy portrayed in *Boy Erased* was when homosexuals should pretend to be masculine. Further, masculinity becomes a measuring element to detect homosexuality inside someone's body. "It's important to get in touch with this part of yourself," Cosby said. "This masculine part that's been missing for so long." (Conley, 2016). Here, Cosby tried to convince LIA's clients to remember their childhood moments with their father. Another statement from Cosby also persuades LIA's clients to increase their masculinity as the indicator of heterosexuality. "Masculine meant strong. Masculine meant straight." (Conley, 2016). Moreover, Cosby claimed the father is the key to masculine-affirming for the son. Conley's childhood memory came to his mind when he did not like to play a ball with his father, and he was never like playing sport.

Nevertheless, Michael W. Ross' research conducted in 1975 reported no relations between masculinity and homosexuality. While masculine is a gender expression, homosexuality is a sexual orientation. Ross has deconstructed the previous researches by Hewitt (1961) and Morgenthaler (1970), who said homosexuality was dominated by a feminine attitude (Ross, 1975). On the other hand, APA is also running a campaign to raise

society's awareness of the differences between masculinity as social construction and homosexuality (American Psychological Association, 2008). Although some research argues that masculinity and homosexuality were not correlating, LIA still used that perspective to cure their clients. "The best I could do at this point was to copy everything down, write it in sloppy print, make myself appear as masculine as possible on paper and in person." (Conley, 2016). It can be seen how Conley enforced his self to become someone else based on society's measurement of heterosexuality.

Conley had therapy to switch his sexual orientation in nineteen years old. Most of LIA's clients grew up in conservative families and desperately sought treatment to change their sexual orientation. Besides MI, LIA also provides other programs called F.I. (False Images).

I can no longer remember which story he found, but I can remember the way he ripped the pages out of my notebook, wadded them into a dense ball, and said, in a voice free of emotion, "False Image," as if that was all they were. (Conley, 2016).

There was a limited space for Conley to express his feeling at LIA, even it was just a daily notebook. This program aims to erase and eliminate the thought of same-sex desire from daily stuff such as clothing, appearances, jewelry, and belongings that indicated homosexuality. Journaling was considering F.I. activities that were not allowed at LIA.

Another program at LIA is called Genograms. This program asks the clients to expose their family's sin, starting from the grandfather until themselves. "A genogram shows hereditary patterns and sinful behaviors in our families. It doesn't trace our genealogy



so much as the history behind our present sinful behavior.” (Conley, 2016). When Conley failed to mention it, he decided to ask his mother. “I don’t understand any of this,” she said. “Why do they need to know so much about our family? What does our family have to do with sexual feelings?” (Conley, 2016). Based on his mother’s response towards Genogram, it can be seen that this program was highly illogical. Again, this kind of program could lead someone’s emotion to hate their family. Moreover, the doctrine over homosexuality as a hereditary sin was not relatable with APA’s statement that argues homosexuality as part of sexual orientation (American Psychological Association, 2008).

Shortly afterward, Conley knows that his therapy cannot be done in two weeks. The therapist said he should stay at LIA for approximately months or years to cure his sexual orientation.

Most patients needed at least three months’ residency, usually longer. In many cases, college students like me dropped out of school for at least a year in order to create distance from unhealthy influences. Many stayed even longer. In fact, most of the staff members were former patients who’d been with LIA at least two years, choosing to remain inside the facility rather than reintegrate into their old lives. (Conley, 2016).

Through his memoir, Conley points out that his parents should pay \$1,500 as the cost of the therapy in two weeks at LIA. This amount of money was not worthy since the therapists were not professional. It is seen when Cosby was not a certified psychologist, doctors, or even someone who understands religious values, but he works as the therapist at LIA.

He had never experienced same-sex attraction (SSA), as LIA labeled it. He’d never been through LIA’s program himself since his only major impediment

in life had been alcoholism, and LIA had hired him as a counselor because they believed his extensive A.A. experience was the only prerequisite for curing any and all forms of addiction. (Conley, 2016). The same case also happens when another therapist at LIA was the marriage counselor. This ironic was proving the harmful situation at gay conversion therapy, such as LIA. Henceforth, the institutional homophobia through LIA’s policy and programs lead Conley to be far from his God.

“Are you still praying?” His crow’s-feet winked from the corners of his eyes. “All the time,” I lied. The truth was, I hadn’t tried praying for two days, not since my mother and I visited the Peabody when I had felt, for a moment, what it might be like to live another life (Conley, 2016).

This quotation portrayed rejection from Conley when he was trying to reconstruct his sexual orientation, but he got nothing supported system even from his religion. Briefly, institutional homophobia from that therapy destroyed his faith.

The mental problems because of institutional homophobia proved that suicide cases happened often. Some of the clients tried to commit suicide several times. “This was T’s seventh suicide attempt since coming to the program. He’d tried pills, knives, whatever he could find.” (Conley, 2016). The situation declared something wrong inside LIA. The verbal violence was damaging their clients’ mental. In 2004, “Various bloggers have since approximated the number of suicides resulting from LIA’s treatment as anywhere from twenty to thirty cases, though figures like these are impossible to pin down.” (Conley, 2016). That was not a small number for suicide cases at LIA. The controversy still evolved until

Conley decided to walk out of gay conversion therapy.

June 16, 2004, becomes the final day of Conley's treatment at LIA. He took this sudden decision after Smid pushed him to explain his relationship with his father as part of LIA's program. "You've been hiding what you really feel all week long," he said. "You're angry, but you're not showing it. You're keeping all of it hidden away, but we can see it" (Conley, 2016). This accident happened when Smid and other therapists provoked Conley's feelings to explode hate towards his father. "I wanted to tell the group that there were things I'd never understand about my father. There were things that could never be translated into words. But I loved him." (Conley, 2016). Regarding the sentence, this program tried to let hatred growing up between him and his father. Hence, he decided to brutally scream at that moment and ask his mother to pick him up.

In brief, based on *Boy Erased*, the portrayal of LIA as gay conversion therapy indicates an institutional homophobic attitude. There are so many peculiar programs that do not relate to clients' efforts to switch sexual orientation. The instructor or therapist who works under LIA also did not certify in the specific interconnection fields within sexual orientation. Furthermore, this memoir did not portray physical harassment inside LIA at that time, but there were verbal abuses that hurt the client's mind. According to the data, the suicide case in LIA cannot be considered as an ordinary case. Institutional homophobia unconsciously also affects Conley's faith in his religion. The illogical programs and rules that dictate someone to be heterosexual with verbal abuse is not an ideal institution for the rights of homosexuals in the U.S.

## **Gay Conversion Therapy as The Paradox of Multiculturalism**

The harassment inside gay conversion therapy in the United States did not only happen on Conley. *The Williams Institutes* in 2018 estimates 698,000 homosexuals around 18-59 years old have participated as the clients of gay conversion therapy (Mallory, Brown, & Conron, 2019). Since gay conversion therapy under a religious system had seen homosexuality as both sinner and gender disorder, they argue that gender can be change or fluid (Robison & Spivey, 2007). Whereas homosexuality is a sexual orientation, and it is different from gender. The misconception between gender and sexual orientation justifies gay conversion therapy to change the client's attitude to be more masculine and feminine to prevent and cure homosexuals.

In 2018, *The New York Times* reported ex-client of gay conversion therapy had a traumatic experience. As the Southern Baptist missionaries and bisexual, the unnamed clients joined gay conversion therapy in the 2000s. Being rejected for over two years because of bisexuality painfully drained her/his emotions (Brinton, 2018). *The Guardian* in 2018 also mentioned Mathew Shurka's story, who joined gay conversion therapy when he was 16. Born as a secular Jewish son, his father has spent \$35,000 for five years of gay conversion therapy. He also confirmed that he suffered from depression and tried to commit suicide (Ramaswamy, 2018).

Besides them, there are any other ex-client of gay conversion therapy in the United States. Through *Time*, James Guay explained the practice of gay conversion therapy when he was 16 years old. As a homosexual who was raised in a conservative Christian family, it

was not easy to struggle with his homosexuality. He left the therapy when he was 20 years old and looking for a certified psychologist to cure his memory about gay conversion therapy (Guay, 2014). At first, some people said gay conversion therapy could treat them to be heterosexual, but it turns out otherwise. *Time* announced the founder of gay conversion therapy in South Carolina apologizes to homosexuals and his ex-clients. McKrae Game claimed himself as homosexual in 2019. He admitted this therapy was harmful, and all the advertisements were fake (Gajanan, 2019).

Before McKrae Game publicly declared his homosexuality, the director of Love in Action (LIA) also married his same-sex partner in 2014. Similar to Game, John Smid also points out that gay conversion therapy was not working on his sexuality (Phillips, 2014). Considering those example cases of ex-clients and ex-director of gay conversion therapy in the United States, this therapy should be banned and banished as soon as possible in all States. The physical harassment and verbal abuse towards homosexuals were not proving that the United States protects all men's rights, as written in the *Declaration of Independence*. As a democratic country, the lawmaker absolutely should hear both majority and minority voices before legalizing the rules. However, the existence of gay conversion therapy was not in line with the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015.

The legalization of same-sex marriage has proved the United States as a democratic country that promised to protect all men's rights to be equal regardless of their sexuality. Ironically, this law is problematic since gay conversion therapy still exists in 32 States. This condition shows that Americans are

not ready to provide homosexuals' rights. Equal rights are relating to minorities' problems. Henceforth, Will Kymlicka formed three types of minorities. The first types are national minorities, poly-ethnic minorities, and new social movement minorities. Homosexuality movement was included in the new social movement. As a multicultural country, Kymlicka mentions that the United States should have toleration, equal recognition, and positive accommodation towards minorities. Multiculturalism is not only about a country that has multicultural diversity, but also about how society interprets diversity as an abundance rather than a threat.

Based on the gay conversion therapy phenomenon, the Americans' toleration of homosexuality is the only paradox. The number of people who support equal rights for homosexuals is contra with the social condition. Previously, *GLAAD* and *Harris Poll* recorded 80% heterosexuals in 2018 supports and tolerated the rights of LGBTIQ (The Harris Poll, 2019). Unfortunately, the number of heterosexuals who support LGBTIQ did not eliminate the oppression. *The Trevor Project* also claimed that 67% of teenagers were persuading to join gay conversion therapy (Paley, 2019). The number of toleration is not automatically erased the stigma of homosexuality as a mental illness that needs to be cured. Hence, the toleration in the United States should continuously be checked, criticized, and questioned to fully and completely protect the rights of the homosexuals.

Nowadays, gay conversion therapy in the United States is mostly standing under a conservative religion. Most of them are under Christianity conservative, including Love in Action (LIA). It was not only Conley who

attempted to commit suicide. *The Trevor Project* also mentioned that 42% of teenagers who had experienced gay conversion therapy were committing suicide (Paley, 2019). Regarding the data, if equal recognition is well served in the United States, the number of suicide cases among homosexuals will decrease. The legalization of same-sex marriage and provide same-sex partners' rights was not enough to stop the discrimination over homosexuals. According to Kymlicka, the second indication of multiculturalism is equal recognition. Similar to toleration, equal recognition must be actively done by the government but also by all society. Henceforth, the United States still lacks equal recognition towards homosexuals based on the gay conversion therapy phenomenon and the number of suicide cases.

Positive accommodation also crucial since the United States consists of a population with different backgrounds of identity. To adequately serve Americans, regardless of their sexuality with positive accommodation, the United States must eliminate harassment in the institutions. It means that the ineffective gay conversion therapy programs and the unlicensed therapists should be checked and evaluated. Suppose the government still cannot banish the practice of gay conversion therapy in entire states. In that case, the government should provide favorable facilities and infrastructure to eliminate mental depression and discrimination towards homosexuals. However, the existence of gay conversion therapy will always exist since society is still glorifying heterosexism.

To understand cultural diversity, the United States should see the diverse as an absolute power, rather than its weakness. It would be easy if the citizen can practice the

meaning of democracy in their daily life. Democracy could lead the United States to be a tremendous multicultural country. Multiculturalism believes that "individuals have legitimate interests in their culture, language, and identity and that public institutions must fairly take those interests into account" (Kymlicka, 2018). In other words, the majority who have more privilege to create the policies should take care of the minority rights. Besides the rights, the citizen also should realize their responsibilities not to disturb someone's rights. The challenge for the United States is protecting equal rights for minorities in the agile and flexible social conditions.

Another problem for the existence of gay conversion therapy is support from the government. The ambiance of the current political situation in the United States also impacted homosexuals' mental health. *The Trevor Project* in 2019 reported that 76% of homosexuals teenagers are afraid of discrimination under Trump's regime (Paley, 2019). Ironically, After Trump used homosexuals to gain a number of votes during the campaign trail, he asks his vice president to attend one of the gay conversion therapy anniversary parties in 2019 (NRB, 2019). On the other hand, it shows homosexuals as the minorities are regularly being targeted in the political situation. The policies to protect homosexuals in the United States is mostly about rules under the paper that justify gay conversion therapy as a treatment to cure.

Moreover, multiculturalism under democracy is supposed to protect the human rights of the homosexuals. Under the name of humanity, the debatable perspective about homosexuality cannot justify discrimination. The society also could not push and provoke

homosexuals to cure their sexual orientation since the programs disobeyed the rights of the homosexuals. Thus, multiculturalism and homosexuals groups should be two-way mutual supports to provide a healthy environment for Americans. Although the United States already declared a national day for homosexuals, such as National LGBT History in October and National LGBT Pride in June (Blumenfeld W. J., 2010), the existence of gay conversion therapy is vital to be erased to protect the rights of the homosexuals. Through toleration, equal recognition, and positive accommodation, gay conversion therapy can be banned and banished in the entire States.

Will Kymlicka's theory of multiculturalism shows that gay conversion therapy is the paradox of multiculturalism. The data shows that gay conversion therapy exists because of not enough toleration, recognition, and positive accommodation for homosexuals in the United States. The discourse about equal rights for homosexuals still needs extra attention since the United States consists of diverse cultures. However, cultural diversity in the United States does not prove the ideal implementation of multiculturalism. According to the existence of gay conversion therapy, multiculturalism in the United States still needs to be reviewed. Equal rights for all citizens should be protected, or the risk of being discriminated against will always haunt minorities in the United States.

## CONCLUSION

Life as homosexuals forced Conley to experience various oppressions in his life. Homophobia unconsciously attacks Conley's mental health. The binary terms of normal and abnormal about sexual orientation

automatically decreasing his self-confidence. As the religious son who is afraid of God's punishment, he decided to repress his desire to same-sex, and it impacts his mental. The negative image of homosexuality also impacts his perspective on homosexuals. Henceforth, he rejected the fact that he is homosexual and pretends to be heterosexual, who has a beautiful girlfriend.

The existence of gay conversion therapy vividly portrayed institutional homophobia since this therapy was mostly born under a conservative Christian institution. Verbal abuse was extremely thick in this therapy. Conley disclosed three programs, such as False Image (F.I.), Moral Inventory (MI), and Genogram from a total of twelve programs inside *Boy Erased*. Because of those programs, Conley, who has personal homophobia, get more depression. Rather than healing, this therapy showed ineffective therapy under unlicensed psychologists or someone who is not professional on the homosexuality issue. Those illogical programs indicated LIA as one of gay conversion therapy that is incompatible with handling the problems faced by homosexuals. Furthermore, the verbal abuse that destroyed the client's mental health through gay conversion therapy was causing suicide cases.

Gay conversion therapy, still existed after all States legalized same-sex marriage law in 2015. Unfortunately, same-sex marriage did not prove that all Americans ready to accepts homosexuality as a sexual orientation. The factors that caused gay conversion therapy as the paradox of multiculturalism is the lack of toleration, lack of equal recognition, and the inability to provide positive accommodation for homosexuals. The number of toleration of 2018 is on 80% for the past three years.

However, 67% of teenagers were persuaded to join gay conversion therapy. The existence of gay conversion therapy in 32 States until June 2019 proved that homosexuals' struggle in the United States is not over yet. According to multiculturalism theory, the data in *Boy Erased*, and social condition, gay conversion therapy shows that the United States is not the ideal multicultural country for homosexuals.

Based on history, gay conversion therapy was born because some conservative people did not agree with APA's decision to declassify homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses. The target of gay conversion therapy is mostly teenagers which mentally not stable yet. Moreover, this research elaborates on the connection between the historical context of homosexuality and Garrard Conley's memoir about homosexuality and gay conversion therapy in the United States. The relations among the data are causal, which means the historical context of these issues continues to impact today's condition in the United States. The data of various homophobic attitudes are interchangeable since the root of the problem is the oppression towards homosexuals.

The Revolution Industry 4.0 and globalization expose an excellent chance for the homosexual movement to promote the negative effect of gay conversion therapy both under certified psychologists and under religious groups. Thus, the increasing number of liberal people in the United States could both be a boomerang and an advantage. It is such a dilemma for The United States when gay conversion therapy is banned in the whole States, but the homophobic attitude is still on the root. The United States must review the legacy of discrimination and oppression experienced by homosexuals to get a better

environment. This memoir shows that the existence of gay conversion therapy after the legalization of same-sex marriage is a paradox of multiculturalism in the United States of America.

## REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms / Seventh Edition*. Boston: Earl McPeck Publisher.
- American Psychological Association. (2008). *Answers To Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Blumenfeld, W. J. (1992). *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Brinton, S. (2018, January 24). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/opinion/gay-conversion-therapy-torture.html>
- Conley, G. (2016). *Boy Erased: A Memoir*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Gold, M. (2019, January 21). *New York Passes a Ban on 'Conversion Therapy' After Years-Long Efforts*. New York, New York, United States of America.
- Jacobs, L. R. (2004). "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality." *The American Political Science Association*, 4.
- Mallory, C., Brown, T. N., & Conron, K. J. (2019). *Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth Update*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.
- Paley, A. (2019). *The Trevor National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2019*. California: The Trevor Project.
- Philips, B. (2014, November 17). *Memphis Flyer*. Retrieved from <https://www.memphisflyer.com/MemphisGaydar/archives/2014/11/17/former-ex-gay-leader-marries-his-same-sex-partner>

- Ramaswamy, C. (2018, August 08). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/08/i-still-have-flashbacks-the-global-epidemic-of-lgbt-conversion-therapy>
- Robinson, M. (2009). "Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and International Human Rights Law." *International Commission of Jurists*, 5.
- Robison, C. M., & Spivey, S. E. (2007). "The Politics of Masculinity and the Ex-Gay Movement." *Gender and Society*, 21(5), 650-675.
- Stack, L. (2016, November 30). *Mike Pence and 'Conversion Therapy': A History*. New York, New York, The United States of America.
- Stewart, C. (2001). *Contemporary Legal Issues; Homosexuality and the Law; A Dictionary*. California: ABC-CLIO, Inc.
- Stone, J. (2014, November 20). *John Smid: Former leader of U.S.' Gay Cure' Group Has Just Married a Man*. The United Kingdom.
- The Harris Poll. (2019). *Accelerating Acceptance; Executive Summary*. California: GLAAD.
- Thumma, S. (1991). "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical." *Sociological Analysis*, 52(4), *Religious Movements and Social Movements*, Oxford University Press, 333-347.
- Tocqueville, A. d. (2000). *Democracy in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

**RESHAPING THE HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY OF MIDDLE-AGED GAY MEN IN AMERICA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF IDENTITY PROCESS ON ANDREW SEAN GREER'S *LESS***

---

**Fairuz Su'da**

e-mail: fzsuda@gmail.com

**Muh Arif Rokhman**

Universitas Gadjah Mada  
e-mail: arokhman@ugm.ac.id

---

**ABSTRACT**

The detrimental effects caused by the LGBT victimization in America are directly felt by middle-aged homosexuals nowadays and is internalized into their identity, creating problems that continuously affect them even after LGBT acceptance in the United States. The shift of homosexual identity in middle-aged American homosexuals is thus inevitable in order to regain their identity balance. Andrew Sean Greer's *Less* depicts this issue through the internal conflicts of Arthur Less — a character struggling to accept his identity as an aging homosexual man. Arthur's process in assimilating new experiences around him and accommodating his conception about his homosexual identity become the highlights of this study. The writer utilizes Susan Krauss Whitbourne's Identity Process Theory that deals with identity assimilation, identity accommodation, and identity balance. The result shows that past LGBT victimization has caused (1) HIV/AIDS trauma, (2) hyper-sexualized image, (3) cynicism towards marriage, and (4) internalized homonegativity, all of which creating the balance disruption on identity. When identity assimilation fails and identity accommodation occurs, middle-aged American homosexuals are encouraged to acknowledge that (1) homosexual identity exists beyond stereotyped sexual context, (2) there are no standardized attitudes that they must adopt, and (3) they are allowed to desire the same sense of comfort and intimacy through committed relationship or marriage, like their heterosexual counterparts.

**Keywords:** *homosexual identity; identity process; LGBT victimization; middle-aged homosexuals*

**Article information**

*Received: 13 August, 2020*

*Revised: 27 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 10 September, 2020*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62750>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62750>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---



## INTRODUCTION

The LGBT community has come a long way to claim their rights in the USA, with rapid advancements and continuous efforts towards freedom and equality. The most recent and significant triumph that they have attained was marked on 26 June 2015 when The Supreme Court officially declared same-sex marriage as constitutional right in all states. The declaration allows Americans to get married, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation (Chappell, 2015). With this attainable law that defends their right to be with whomever they want, the LGBT community has been liberated and finally given a chance to embrace their sexuality.

However, before all their efforts could come to fruition, the years of systemic discrimination and oppression that the LGBT community faced had contributed to forming their identity. The gender discrimination and oppression are especially prevalent in LGBT people who had acknowledged their sexuality or were even remotely aware of its existence during the trying times of their community. As the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies explains it, individuals who passed milestones of 'coming out' and had self-identified as LGBT would find that the stage in which they came out would undoubtedly influence their life experiences (2001). LGBT people who belong in the age range of middle adulthood as per the time this study is written had grown up and transitioned into adults in much less supportive environments. Before they could experience the effect of gay rights advancement, they have witnessed a multitude of unfortunate phenomena, such as how homosexuality was regarded as a mental illness, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the

gatekeeping of marriages for same-sex couples.

Seeing as they were the ones who got to experience first hand the struggle of being denied rights, this had caused them to understand the grave situation that the LGBT people were once involved. With that realization, the presumption and belief came with it as to how their sexuality was perceived by society, thus causing them to carry certain attitudes regarding their sexuality. The long-term detrimental effects, caused by the continuous negative treatment from the society, are directly felt by the aforementioned cohort of LGBT people in many forms of concerns and anxieties, to the extent of internalized homophobia, internalized heterosexism, and overall internalized homonegativity (Institute of Medicine of the Nat. Academies, 2001).

This adopted mindset is gradually being undone with the progression of LGBT activism. According to Kertzner, their experience is indeed a crucial aspect that could determine how homosexuals perceive their homosexual identity as a central and significant principle throughout their lifespan (2007). Moreover, aside from the known period of decline, the midlife of adults is considered as another phase of growth as well (Institute of Medicine of the Nat. Academies, 2001). For that reason, the shift of sexual identity in the current middle-aged group of the LGBT community is inevitable. They are bound to undergo another set of developmental phases during their midlife on account of facing new experiences that are not in line with what they are used to in the wake of LGBT progressiveness.

This process of identity shift is necessary to discuss as there is a significant change in the sexual identity that transpires in accordance with the shifting life course. As a result, there is a need for adjusting with the new milieu, whether it is to assimilate the initial identity or accommodate it so that it conforms to the current state of affairs. Therefore, the focus of this study is the process of identity shift that the middle-aged LGBT people are experiencing. The writer limits the formal object to the middle-aged LGBT cohort who self-identified as gay. This particular issue is portrayed through a literary work as the material object, a 2017 American novel titled *Less* by Andrew Sean Greer under the publisher Little, Brown and Company. *Less* tells a story about Arthur Less, an American gay author in his forties who — amidst his worries about his nonexistent love life and mediocre career as a writer — is trying to escape from his impending fifty-year-old birthday. Arthur's journey is filled with endless contemplation and internal turmoil about his views on relationship, career, age, and principally his own sexuality.

This is where the issue of this study underlies: the shift of perspectives that Arthur Less goes through as a middle-aged American gay man which ultimately causes a change in his sexual identity. The objectives of this study include (1) dissecting Arthur's process in assimilating to the new experience and predicaments as a middle-aged American gay men and (2) analyzing his steps in reshaping his homosexual identity in order to regain his identity balance. The writer expects that it will ultimately provide answers to explain the dilemmas that middle-aged American gay men face concerning their sexuality and to elaborate the process of reshaping their homosexual identity.

One theory in particular that deals with the chosen object formal of this study is Susan Krauss Whitbourne's Identity Process Theory. Whitbourne's approach in examining identity process is specialized for the phase of adult development. It involves "a state of equilibrium," a cycle of continuous linear transition of initial identity — identity assimilation — new experiences — identity accommodation — new identity which occurs in no certain milestone of an individual's life course. The principal tenet of this theory is that at some point of their lives, adults would face new experiences that would alter their stance regarding an aspect of their identity, prompting a change for their initial identity to accommodate better with the current experiences. This Identity Process Theory is fitting for the topic of this study as it would be the suitable tool in analyzing the process of middle-aged American gay men in the face of new environment that treats their sexual identity, unlike the way they had been accustomed before.

## DISCUSSION

### Identity, Sexual Identity and Homosexual Identity

Identity is comprised of multiple qualities such as personality, belief, ideology, and even physical looks or appearance of an individual. Erikson and Marcia affirmed that it also includes gender, race, ethnicity, social class, spirituality, and sexuality (Dillon, et al., 2011). In theory, Fearon (1999) conceptualizes the qualities of identity into double senses of "personal" and "societal". By the same token, sexual identity shares the same conception of personal sense and societal sense, with the addition of sexual orientation that encompasses them.

In differentiating ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘sexual identity’, Fish and Russell (2016) clarify that sexual orientation refers to the dimension of sexuality, related to an individual’s patterns of romantic or sexual feelings towards others, typically based on gender. On the other hand, sexual identity is formed through a person’s acknowledgment and internalization concerning their sexual orientation. This would suggest that while sexual orientation is beyond our conscious choice, sexual identity is partly conscious because of our voluntary choices in adopting certain stances and attitudes as a group member of certain sexual orientation.

In the case of homosexual identity, Erikson states it as a matter of great importance in both adolescence and adulthood because the formation of sexual identity is significant to the developmental task of adult individuation. The reason is that homosexual youths, prior to the LGBT acceptance, ought to face a much difficult time during their coming of age times, with the constant stigmatization of homosexuality that was yet to be overcome (Kertzner, 2007).

### **LGBT Victimitizations as Contributing Factors that Shaped the Initial Homosexual Identity**

In the early 2000s, same-sex couples in the United States have been granted the right to get married and the right to receive state benefits for insurance, taxation, inheritance, workers compensation, and medical coverage. The climate has allowed homosexual youths to embrace their coming-of-age and coming-out process. It is because the law is equipped to protect their safety and wellbeing. The media thus have countless gay representations plastered on it in different forms. Moreover,

homosexual public figures who proudly assert their homosexuality as part of their identities become successful role models for their audience, who still bears doubts inside. This idolization gradually influences them with confidence to accept who they are. The current younger generation of homosexual community is fortunate that the progressive climate the United States has preserved. However, the same obviously cannot be said for the older cohort of middle-aged homosexuals who had faced a string of bigotry because of their sexuality.

Kertzner (2007) states that the pre-existing stigma causes increased anxiety disorder rates in gay men. The consequence from that would be a disrupt in the formation of sexual identity, seeing that individuals with a higher level of distress are more likely to be affected by the societal antigay attitudes. It could further harm them through the materialization of internalized homophobia and overall internalized homonegativity in self. As a long-term effect, there are subsets of homosexuals who face hardships in asserting a positive homosexual identity throughout their adulthood up until their midlife because of the lasting impact of the past LGBT victimization. This is made worse when this particular cohort of middle-aged gay men struggle as their sensitivity caused by past stigma is now augmented by their aging process. For that reason, before stepping further into the shifting process of middle-aged homosexual identity, it is vital to first assess the sources of their initial stance that were mainly caused by the victimization in America prior to the LGBT acceptance.

- The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic

From 1979 – 1981, rare types of pneumonia and cancer caused by severe immune deficiency were found in Los Angeles and New York, particularly in homosexual men. This symptom had become the reason for the disease's initially coined term of GRID (gay-related immune deficiency) (Centers for Disease Control, *A Cluster of Kaposi's Sarcoma*, 1982). With the major fraction of the carriers' being homosexual men, this incident has definitely shaped their personal, social, psychological, and community lives throughout their life course and later into their late adulthood years. Consequently, the cohort of homosexual men affected by this dire situation were mostly those in their teenage and adult years in the 1980s during the HIV/AIDS emergence in the west, which were the gay male *baby boomers* group born between the year 1946-1965.

Kertzner (2007) considers that the gay male *baby boomers* or the current generation of middle-aged gay men in the United States have developed sensitization to mortality resulting from the impact of living with HIV and surviving the AIDS bereavements. The syndrome caused by the multiple loss of the HIV epidemic had strongly influenced the homosexual identity of gay men in the United States, especially those who had acknowledged their sexual identity in the 1980s during the epidemic's peak. When the HIV epidemic and all its stigmas occurred, they had lost a catalyst of homosexual self-acceptance during their young adulthood (Kertzner, 2007). It denies them the liberty to truly explore a part of their identity and pushing premature mortality that made it impossible for them to live to the fullest measure. The harmful impact of these

tremendous losses could even end in various self-harming behaviors. They include risks apparent once the involved gay men have reached their mid-life such as depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol addiction, sexual risk-taking, partner violence, and inability to form a positive plan for their future (Cox, 2006).

- Hyper-Masculine Image of Men

The glorified persona of model masculinity comes to cause a dilemma in the midst of the life circumstances of homosexual men, for the obvious reason that homosexuality contradicts with certain codes that masculinity requires. The palpable distinction of masculinity ideology in gay men leaves them with insecurity, inadequacy, and inferiority (Sanchez, et al., 2009). This fear of being perceived as gay came from the depths of masculinity that disapproves of any man who appears as frail and untough, thus scaring them further from the possibility of being emasculated by other men (Kimmel, 1994). The fear molded into a feeling of shame and transformed into an exaggerated form of masculine behaviors in order to conceal that part of the identity that various social agencies might not agree with. This exaggerated form of masculinity is referred to as the hyper-masculinity, a tool used as a defense against threats of humiliation in the eyes of other men (Siddhanta, 2015).

In the gay visual culture, the presence of hyper-masculine aesthetics is the result of the pressured expectation of homosexual men to behave like the heterosexual counterpart. Pollack (Wierzalis, 2006) states that the typical desirable men would appear in the media as strong, aggressive, sexually skillful, athletic, confident, and youthful. Struggling

with the inability to embody those traits, it birthed the visual manifestation of the ‘macho’—despite being gay—men with the tough-looking unemotional exterior, disputing the notion of inferior gay men and challenging the idea of superior heterosexual men. This portrayal was an attempt to fit in with heterosexual men, honing the ability to be “straight-acting” and “not to arouse the assumption of ‘gayness’ from strangers” (Sanchez, et al., 2009, p. 78). The pressure to adhere to the masculine ideals to be accepted would cause detrimental effects of restricting their emotional expression and being concerned about appearing too feminine to other people. The overcompensation could end up creating an internalized homophobia or homonegativity within themselves and leave them with intense discomfort with effeminate gay men, transforming the fears that they initially felt into an internalized shame regarding their own sexuality and project it onto other gay men whom they demean (Sanchez, et al., 2009).

- **Heteronormative Institution of Marriage**

Marriage is a “hegemonic form of heterosexuality”, in which the relationships contained within put up with the existing gender power dynamics that support masculine superiority and heterosexual desire (Wolkomir, 2009, p. 494). In this sense, marriage can be considered heteronormative, as it relates exclusively to a world view that prefers the heterosexual orientation and regards it as the ‘normal’ one. Since heterosexuality holds the reign as the ‘default’, it is put in the position of dominance and superiority, leaving the same-sex couples invisible and excluded from the hegemonic description of a family.

The constraint that the gay community felt regarding the same-sex marriage issue left a significant impact because marriage was traditionally considered as one of the major milestones in an individual’s life. When forbade from having the option and liberty to get married, their possibilities of experiencing the traditional milestones of parenthood were taken from them. By removing the opportunity for homosexual men to build their own household by getting married, it leaves them with the limited option of fulfilling their sexual desires as their next available milestone (Carpenter, 2010). As soon as they passed one of the major turning point in their lives—the coming out phase by coming to terms and acknowledging their sexual orientation—the self-identified gay men would continuously assess their newly found and embraced sexual identity. In an urban society, Carpenter attests that they would inevitably find other same-sex-centered institutions that would cater to them (2010). Casual sex and/or non-monogamous relationships would be treated as an alternative to marriage institutions that gay men could not obtain. Green even emphasizes that the unavailability and impossibility of marriage would develop and result in “navigational reference points” that serve as the sexual trajectories and enacted “sexual scripts” (Carpenter, 2010, p. 167). Consequently, society saw their sexual histories and development as disordered, all because of the missing milestone of marriage and parenthood.

### **The Maintenance of the Current Homosexual Identity and the Acceptance of the New One**

Newton and Stewart state that the typical notions of adulthood are “a flat and stable landscape with respect to personality” and that

an individual's life experience loses its impact on their personality once they reach maturity (2012, p. 211). In actuality, because identity is less of a personality trait and more of a social construct shaped by interactions from social roles and group memberships, there will be many phases of identity development that recurs throughout the course of a person's life. Compared to the heterosexual identity that remains more or less the same and socially and culturally unchanging throughout the life course, the existential meaning of homosexual identity has gradually been altered in the life of the middle-aged cohort (Kertzner, 2007).

By implementing the aforementioned concept, this study's analysis covers how the process of identity shift in homosexual men in America transpires, depicted through the main character in the novel —Arthur Less—, as he faces his inner turmoil about turning fifty. It will be sorted into two sections: (1) the multiple changes in Arthur's life experiences that cause a disruption in his identity balance, particularly one that is related to his homosexuality, and (2) the resolution of Arthur's dilemma and how the identity assimilation that he faces throughout the narrative eventually reshapes his previous homosexual identity.

- Identity Assimilation Caused by the Disruption of Identity Balance in Middle-Aged American Gay Men

In Greer's *Less*, the main character Arthur Less is introduced from the very beginning as a figure who is feeling all sorts of insecurity and anxiety which are all prompted by his impending fifty-year-old birthday. His worries are tangled with various aspects in his life, such as his concern with his physical appearance, financial security, the constant

dilemma about relationships and marriage, fear of being alone, and the trepidation of him turning into a “bad gay” (Greer, 2017, p.145), which are all ultimately rooted from his age and homosexual identity. The clash between their current identity and ongoing life experience creates a disruption in his identity balance, coercing him to adapt and adjust his identity to reach the state of equilibrium — particularly in this case, the state of equilibrium between his current circumstances in his midlife and his homosexual identity.

The disruptions of identity balance which transpire in Arthur's self are categorized into five points: (1) the aging process —the principal facet and source of his insecurities in his approaching midlife—, (2) grief and trauma of HIV/AIDS epidemic —a lasting impact that left gay male *baby boomers* in distress after having lost so many members of their community—, (3) hyper-sexualized image of gay men —something that is developed as a form of retaliation from the hyper-masculine ideals that society had used to impose on gay men for years—, (4) legalization of same-sex marriage —a supposedly-celebratory acquiescence that a fraction of middle-aged gay men still sees with cynicism because of the heteronormativity that used to associate it with—, and (5) internalized homonegativity —negative attitudes that gay men themselves have towards homosexuality for they had been exposed to discrimination for so long.

1. The Aging Process

Arthur's doubts about his identity root from his age, making him question himself more often and more irrationally about things that normally are not heeded by him, including his career, physical appearance, finance and

sexual life. He feels incredibly pressured by another writer's fame and reputation, continuously comparing their status despite the fact that their works do not even share the resemblance of genre whatsoever. These accumulated worries about his career and reputation in the literary world eventually branched out to another aspect of his life, which is the financial security. The mediocrity of his career is summed up by Arthur himself, describing the life of a writer as a quilt that is "warm enough, though it never quite cover the toes" (Greer, 2017, p. 30). Aside from it, Arthur also struggles with another aspect of himself, which is his physical appearance. In one particular scene, he feels shame because he imagines that a group of random teenagers see him nearly naked while swimming, and "in his mind he sees the horror of his middle-aged body and cannot bear the judgment" (Greer, 2017, p. 91).

Arthur's problems originated from his nearing midlife created an issue of self-esteem related to his career, physical appearance, and finance, but also another significant part of his identity, which is his sexual orientation. He holds certain principles that are related to how he carries himself as a gay man. When his midlife is approaching, they are being reevaluated, seeing that they no longer fit his current life experiences. These include his trauma of HIV/AIDS epidemic, his sexual behavior, and his stance and attitudes regarding marriage.

## 2. Bereavement and Trauma of HIV/AIDS Epidemic

According to Paul, et al., with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the urban gay male culture has undergone significant changes that transformed it from

one that rejoiced in youth, freedom, and pleasure into one that is associated with illness, death, and loss (1995). Life post-AIDS has created such a dramatic change that it does not only affect the lives of gay men in the beginning and during the peak of the epidemic, but it is something that still follows them until this day. In Greer's *Less*, Arthur Less was born in 1965 (Greer, 2017), thus making him a young man in his early 20s when the epidemic hit its peak in the United States during 1987-1996. There was not much that is described in the narration regarding his view of thoughts and opinions about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Still, a certain passage of a brief flashback in the novel deftly portrays his fear of that phase of time in his life: "Arthur Less at twenty-one: thin and boyish, not a muscle on him, his blond hair bleached white, his toes painted red, sitting on a beach on a beautiful day in San Francisco, in the awful year of 1987, and terrified, terrified, terrified. AIDS is unstoppable" (Greer, 2017, p. 69-70).

The shared experiences of loss among the older gay men might result in a complicated issue of bereavement, anger, depression, and even survivor's guilt (Wierzalis, 2006, p. 103). Arthur himself faces a dilemma of the absence of mentors and role models in his life. He has no clue how a gay man his age is supposed to act, despite the obvious fact that there is no such thing as standardized rules of how a homosexual must carry themselves. Arthur expresses this frustration by exaggerating how he feels like the only gay man in his midlife (Greer, 2017). Cox states that such emotion is a reasonable thing to occur among survivors, and in some worse and more severe cases, other self-destructive behaviors would strike as well (2006). Odets elaborates further that, at times, these phenomena caused by anxieties would end up in therapy sessions, and the

aforementioned self-destructive behaviors include, but not limited to, substance abuse, self-generated financial problems, difficulty planning for the future, and avoidance of life-sustaining relationships (Cox, 2006).

### 3. Hyper-Sexualized Image of Gay Men

Wierzalis states that physical attractiveness and sexual activity become two primary purposes that gay men tend to exploit, especially that they are no longer pressured to hide behind a shroud of hyper-masculinity (97). The impact of having a standpoint like that leaves a detrimental effect. They will later struggle with a loss of social valuation when their physical attractiveness and sexual activity change as time goes by. It becomes a problem of self-esteem because by assigning so much worth to two aspects that will be most negatively affected by the aging process, middle-aged gay men will find themselves dealing with disappointment at the end (Wierzalis, 2006). Depicted in *Less*, as Arthur soaks in the bathtub of his hotel room, contemplating the course of his life, he is overwhelmed with a sense of displeasure towards his own body, envisioning the past about the fit body of his much younger self (Greer, 2017).

The newly acquired freedom among gay men to have sexual activity was meant as a celebration, yet it slowly took control. The sexual behaviors that occurred in excess among gay men distinctively start to border on the stereotypical image of a hyper-sexualized gay man (Yeagley, et al., 2014). When recounting when he and Freddy Pelu were still together, Arthur had regretted their decision to part ways, yet he justifies himself by internally convincing himself that Freddy was just “a diversion; a pastime; a hobby” (Greer, 2017, p.

14). He then proceeds to list a rather extended list of his sexual conquests with other different men in meticulous detail. He describes how he “of course had other, more serious lovers in the years he saw Freddy ... There were more; many, many more” (Greer, 2017, p. 14), as if trying to convince himself that Freddy's place is no more special than other men that he had been involved with.

### 4. Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage

The absence of adult life markers in the form of marriage and/or parenthood in the life of gay men eliminates the possibility of acquiring conventional social reference points for aging. As a consequence, their life configuration could undergo a sense of uncertain aging experience during their middle to later life course (Kertzner, 2007). Things have significantly changed nowadays. A cultural shift has been made with the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States. However, by the time it was legalized, the cohorts of current middle-aged gay men have already assigned marriage as a heteronormative institution, and claimed a rather negative impression. At one point in the novel, Arthur ponders whether old homosexuals will be doomed to have the same dull fate as heterosexuals in wedlock, making it clear about his stance regarding marriage:

How are they meant to do it? ... Do you marry and adopt a child? In a couple, do you each take a lover, like matching nightstands by the bed, so that sex will not vanish entirely? Or do you let sex vanish entirely, as heterosexuals do? Do you experience the relief of letting go of all that vanity, anxiety, desire, and pain? (Greer, 2017, p. 34)

Arthur attempts to reject the possibility of him reconsidering other stances aside from his current one by projecting the negative qualities



of marriage. The same feeling of contempt against marriage is also shared by Arthur's peers, who way later into the story refers to other married homosexuals as "weak" (Greer, 2017, p. 188).

On another occasion, during downtime in his second list of Mexico City itinerary, Arthur reminisced when he and Robert were still an item. Arthur lost the ring that Robert gave him on their fifth anniversary while grocery shopping. A group of men who had helped him find it instantly assumed it as a wedding ring, noting that "it was long before the days of gay marriage" (Greer, 2017, p. 58). Arthur had been startled with how solidary they had been, internally comparing how easy the lives of those straight men must be, envying them for it, but in the same breath had marveled how included he felt during that brief moment. He has a set and fixed perspective of how the life course of heterosexuals in wedlock transpires overtime.

This viewpoint would lead to the next problem that middle-aged gay men face during their midlife, which is a constant feeling of loneliness. Arthur never fails to express this numerous times throughout the narration, how his aging has put him in an impasse, as he feels the conflicting presence of his refusal for commitment ever since he was young and the desire for comfort and intimacy in his midlife. Arthur's dilemma between being attached to an intimate partner and feeling isolated is an effect that is caused by a developmental issue, in which his new life circumstances as a middle-aged gay man demands him to adjust. Regardless of what some fraction of gay men think of marriage, Pope and Schulz state that the need to experience both physical and emotional intimacy among gay men in their middle to late life still exists. Therefore, the

presence of consistency and comfort for them is an important and validating aspect, especially for the older cohort of middle-aged gay men who had undergone rejection on many other social dimensions (Wierzalis, et al., 2006).

## 5. Internalized Homonegativity

The intensified ill-treatments and various forms of oppression towards the LGBT community have created an environment that predominantly treats heterosexuality as the norm and instigates a long history of prejudice and discrimination towards the sexual minority. When exposed to such conduct constantly for a long time, it could cause a thought process which is called *internalized homonegativity*, in which the people within the LGBT community itself start to internalize the negative messages that they received consistently from the society surrounding them (Berg, et al., 2016). In *Less*, this issue is raised when Arthur is among the chosen writers to be finalists for a "mysterious gay literary world" prize ceremony for his third book, *Dark Matter* (Greer, 2017, p. 87). One of the prize committee, Finley Dwyer, opened the event with a short speech about his hope from the gay literary world —particularly from the soon-to-be-announced winners of the award;he goes into details about the expectations that he has from gay writers to represent their community in an encouraging manner and positive light,and not succumb to heterosexist mindsets:

"I admit I will be disappointed tonight if we reward the assimilationists, the ones who write the way straight people write, who hold up heterosexuals as war heroes, who make gay characters suffer, who set their characters adrift in a nostalgic past that ignores our present oppression; I say we purge ourselves of these people, who

would have us vanish into the bookstore, the assimilationists, who are, at their core, ashamed of who they are, who we are, who *you* are!" (Greer, 2017, p. 88)

Arthur never bothered to camouflage his gayness to other people, shown through his unguarded answer to a stranger's question about him being a queer (Greer, 2017, p. 70). However, Berg, et al. argue that the internalized homonegativity not only has to do with personal, subjective, and irrational fears, but also the wider societal factors (2016). It means that no matter how unaffected an individual is, the gradual exposure to the victimizations of the gay community in so many aspects could still affect them to a certain extent. This statement is supported by what Finley says afterward, confirming that it was never Arthur's fault from the start, stating that "[Arthur] writes what [he] is compelled to. As [gay men] all do" (Greer, 2017, p. 144). If never addressed, internalized homonegativity could result in a psychological dilemma between a gay man's homosexual identity and their projected negative beliefs, which can generate strings of guilt, shame, low self-esteem, and other emotional predicaments in self (Berg, et al., 2016).

- Identity Accommodation through Self-Doubts and Unfavorable Changes in Homosexual Identity

When all of the identity assimilations above eventually lead to the acceptance that the current identity Arthur holds as a homosexual man no longer fits him, self-doubts proceed to emerge. The individuals are then bound to engage in an evaluative process, reassessing whether they are the cause of their own shortcomings (Whitbourne, 1986). The act of self-doubting can help prove the current identity of the involved individual to be false.

Therefore, there will be a need to regain the state of equilibrium through making the necessary changes in self.

Arthur's time, which is well spent traveling across the world with the initial intention of running away from his problems, has gained him opportunities to confront and reflect on himself. Not only through self-reflection, the interactions and exchanges that he had made with his peers and outsiders alike has helped him in reaffirming his mistake in denying himself from growing and developing a more suitable point of views in his midlife as a gay man. Aside from Finley Dwyer, there are also Bastian the business student whom he had brief trysts during his stay in Berlin, Javier the Spaniard he met in Paris who helped him realize his desire to settle down in his midlife with a significant other, and Zohra the middle-aged lesbian he met in Morocco who reproached him for hisself-pitying attitude:

"A white middle-aged American man walking around with his white middle-aged American sorrows?" ... "Arthur. Sorry to tell you this. It's a little hard to feel sorry for a guy like that." ... "Even gay."... Like a wintertime swimmer too numb to feel cold, Arthur Less is too sad to feel pity ... Around the world his pity flies, its wingspan as wide as an albatross's. But he can no more feel sorry for ... a gorgon of Caucasian male ego ... than Arthur Less can feel sorry for himself. (Greer, 2017, p. 170-94)

Arthur began to realize that dissonance that he feels ever since he is stepping into his midlife is only felt because he never bothers to readjust himself into a new skin that suits him more. This situation is in accordance to what Braithwaite states that the fear of aging feels like a threat only if the involved individual lets it grow and dominate their point of view (2002). Instead of denying its existence,

Arthur needs to come to terms with it and lessen its power over him in the process.

The difference of the younger and older cohorts of gay men can be seen by how the younger generations of gay men are more prone to live openly and pursue intimacy, where as their older counterparts have always feared of doing so (Wierzalis, et al., 2006). Arthur's escapades have granted him the revelation that seeking comfort and forging relationships are perfectly normal things to do. Such things are never limited to a group with certain sexual orientation. Although having a life partner to share intimacy with on physical, emotional, and spiritual level can further help develop new experiences that encourage greater self-acceptance of being a homosexual man.

What is more, according to Wierzalis, et al. (2006), once the involved individuals could get past their convictions about their current identity, then come to terms with their new identity, middle-aged gay men can truly live up to their highest potential. They will face new opportunities for a better quality of life. At the same time, they undergo their aging process because they are more sensible and understanding about their own sexual behavior, intimacy, and relationships, without having to worry anymore about their past struggles, stigma, and shame in their youth.

## CONCLUSION

Homosexual identity exists beyond its stereotyped sexual contexts. By recognizing this fact, the cohort of middle-aged gay men in America can retain a more wholesome and sustainable gay culture. The older cohort of gay men who had come out in their adolescence or youth when the gay discrimination was still rampant in the United

States might have a greater forte in overcoming the past stigma and ill-treatment from society. Still, it is indisputable that the dissonance that they feel from the disruption of their identity balance can be considered an opportunity to recover from the past wounds and embrace a much healthier homosexual identity that fits the current climate and circumstances their life better. Thus, by strengthening the resolve to reevaluate and develop their identity as homosexuals adjusting to the positive impacts of gay acceptance in America, it would improve the quality of life for older generations of gay men entering their midlife and later adult years.

## REFERENCES

- Berg, Rigmor C., Heather M. Munthe-Kaas, & Michael W. Ross. (2016). "Internalized Homonegativity: A Systematic Mapping Review of Empirical Research." *Journal of Homosexuality*, 63(4), 541-558. DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2015.1083788.
- Braithwaite, Valerie. (2002). "Reducing Ageism." *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice against Older Persons* (Todd D. Nelson, Ed.), 311-337. The MIT Press.
- Carpenter, Laura M. (2010). "Gendered Sexuality over the Life Course: A Conceptual Framework." *Sociological Perspectives*, 53(2), 155-178. DOI: 10.1525/sop.2010.53.2.155.
- Centers for Disease Control. (1982) "A Cluster of Kaposi's Sarcoma and Pneumocystis carinii Pneumonia among Homosexual Male Residents of Los Angeles and Range Counties, California." *MMWR Weekly*, 31(23), 305-307. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwr.html/00001114.htm>
- Chappell, Bill. (2015, June 26). "Supreme Court Declare Same-Sex Marriage Legal in All 50 States." *NPR*. Retrieved from [www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-)

- way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages. Accessed 31 January 2020.
- Cox, Spencer. (2006). *The Legacy of the Past: Gay Men in Mid-Life and the Impact of HIV/AIDS*. The Medius Institute for Gay Men's Health.
- Dillon, Frank R., Roger L. Worthington, and Bonnie Moradi. (2011). "Sexual Identity as a Universal Process." *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, vol. 1: Structures and Processes, edited by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, Vivian L. Vignoles. Springer, 649-670.
- Fearon, James D. (1999). *What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?*. Stanford University.
- Fish, Jessica N. and Stephen T. Russell. (2016). "Sexual Attraction, Behavior, and Identity." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies*, edited by Abbie E. Goldberg. SAGE Publications, Inc., 1037-1041.
- Greer, Andrew Sean. (2017). *Less*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. (2001). *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*. The National Academies Press.
- Kertzner, Robert M. (2007). "Developmental Issues in Lesbian and Gay Adulthood." *The Health of Sexual Minorities*, edited by Meyer I.H., Northridge M.E., Springer, 48-64.
- Kimmel, Michael S. (1994). "Masculinity as Homophobia." *Theorizing Masculinities: Research on Men and Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. SAGE Publications, 119-141.
- Newton, Nicky J. and Abigail J. Stewart. (2012). "Personality Development in Adulthood." *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Adulthood and Aging*, edited by Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Martin J. Sliwinski. Wiley-Blackwell, 211-235.
- Paul, Jay P. Robert B. Hays, and Thomas J. Coates. (1995). "The Impact of the HIV Epidemic on U.S. Gay Male Communities." *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan*, edited by Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson. Oxford University Press, 347-397.
- Sanchez, Francisco J., et al. (2009). "Reported Effects of Masculine Ideals on Gay Men." *Psychol Men Masc.*, 10(1), 73-87. *National Institute of Health*, DOI: 10.1037/a0013513.
- Siddhanta, Ankita and Singh SK. (2015). "Shaping of Hypermasculinity and its Influences on Sexual Behaviour: A Study of Youth in Slum Communities of Mumbai, India." *Journal of AIDS & Clinical Research*, 6(8), 2015, 1-9. *International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India*, DOI: 10.4172/2155-6113.1000489.
- Whitbourne, Susan Krauss. (1986). *The Me I Know: A Study of Adult Identity*. Springer-Verlag.
- Wierzalis, Edward A. (2006). "Gay Men and Aging: Sex and Intimacy." *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging: Research and Clinical Perspectives*, edited by Douglas Kimmel, Tara Rose, and Steven David. Columbia University Press, 91-109.
- Wolkomir, Michelle. (2009). "Making Heteronormative Reconciliations: The Story of Romantic Love, Sexuality, and Gender in Mixed-Orientation Marriages." *Heteronormativity and Sexualities*, 23(4), 494-519, *JSTOR*, DOI: 10.1177/0891243209340033.
- Yeagley, Emily, Andrew Hickok, and Jose A. Bauermeister. (2014). "Hypersexual Behavior and HIV Sex Risk among Gay and Bisexual Men." *J. Sex Res.*, 51(8), 2014, 882-892. *National Institute of Health*, DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2013.818615.

---

## THE FRAMING OF WOMEN'S IDEAL BODY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY IN INSTAGRAM ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIE HOUTS (@JOOLEELOREN)

---

**Ni Wayan Eka Jayanti**

e-mail: [eka.jayanti.n@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:eka.jayanti.n@mail.ugm.ac.id)

**Ida Rochani Adi**

Universitas Gadjah Mada  
e-mail: [idaadi@ugm.ac.id](mailto:idaadi@ugm.ac.id)

---

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to learn about the framing of women's ideal body in Julie Houts' illustrations and the factors that shape the frames. Conducted within American Studies, this study borrows Entman's framing theory. This study applies qualitative and inductive methods to interpret the data. This study found that the framing highlights how women's ideal body is limited to one body type. A thin, youthful appearance is often considered the ideal appearance for women. Tan skin is another aspect regarded as the ideal appearance for women. Thinness, youthful appearance, and tan skin are desired because they signify health, reflecting society's obsession with health. The obsession with health often renders health a matter of appearance and gives power to those who look "healthy." The benefits of having the ideal body often outweigh the risks women may bear from pursuing the ideal body. As women's ideal body is limited to a thin, youthful appearance with tan skin, discrimination often occurs against women who do not match the ideal. Circumstances in society and the perception of women's bodies become the factors that shape what is considered the ideal body.

**Keywords:** *framing; health; tan skin; thinness; women's ideal body; youthfulness*

### Article information

*Received: 17 August, 2020*

*Revised: 31 August, 2020*

*Accepted: 14 September, 2020*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i2.62751>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/62751>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

### INTRODUCTION

Many people today use social media to express their opinion. In particular, Instagram is a favorite of many people who want to share their thoughts in photographs or illustrations. Julie Houts, a Brooklyn-based illustrator, is

one of many people who choose Instagram as a place to share her thoughts. Known as @jooleeloren on Instagram, Houts has about 200 thousand followers. Formerly a womenswear designer, she now draws illustrations for many brands and magazines, such as On Pedder, Bergdorf Goodman, and

*The New Yorker*. She also published two illustration books, *Literally Me* (2017) and *Thank You for Being a Friend* (2020). Houts' drawing style and humorous illustrations are two factors that draw the researcher's interest. In the comments for Houts' illustrations, the researcher found that many women are interested in Houts' illustrations due to their relatability. Many women write comments pointing out how the stories in Houts' illustrations remind them of their personal experiences. Indeed, many of Houts' capture American women's experiences in daily life. The content of Houts' illustrations gives a meaningful insight into the lives of American women. Houts' illustrations capture a wide range of women's experiences, but this study focuses on illustrations that address women's ideal body. This study aims to learn about the framing of women's ideal body in Julie Houts' illustrations. This study also aims to learn about the factors that shape the way women's ideal body is framed.

In analyzing the framing of women's ideal body, this study applies the qualitative method. In qualitative research, researchers are to "explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal backgrounds, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES) that shape their interpretations formed during a study" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 260). This study also applies an inductive method, which means the researcher needs to look for patterns from the "bottom up" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 257). Then, these patterns are developed into a set of themes. American Studies, as an interdisciplinary study, often borrow methods and theories from other disciplines. This study borrows the framing theory by Robert M. Entman, which originates from the communication field. In addition to that, this

study focuses on the textual dimension of the illustrations. Hence, this study examines the text meanings (Gray, 2017) while also taking the time and place elements of the text into consideration.

Entman (1993, p. 52) stated that to frame means to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." Per Entman's theory, this study starts with identifying the frames. Then, identifying and examining the highlighted elements. The highlighted elements are examined to learn about the problems and their causes, the evaluations of the problems, and/or the solutions. This study uses two types of data: primary data and secondary data. The primary data for this study consists of illustrations Houts posted on her Instagram account (@jooleeloren). They also include both drawing/image and text in Houts' illustrations. Secondary data for this study are collected from both library and internet sources (such as essays, books, magazines, papers). The data that has been collected and the highlighted elements are interpreted. The interpretation process also takes into account the elements of time and place of the text. Lastly, the results of the interpretation are organized into a general description. The description explains the framing of women's ideal body in Houts' illustrations and factors that shape the framing.

Julie Houts and her illustrations are discussed in many online articles. Tiffany Wood's article entitled *Julie Houts is Basically Illustrating Your Life* (2017) addressed Houts' former job as a womenswear designer and her creative process. Bridget Barnett's article

entitled *10 Questions with Julie Houts* (2019), discussed Houts' daily life and inspiration. In addition to that, the article discussed people's impression of Houts' illustrations. Karin Eldor's article entitled *How Instagram Illustrator Julie Houts Went from Side Hustle to Full-Time Creative* (2018) discussed Houts' past career in the fashion industry and her advice for freelance workers. Eldor's article also addressed the challenges in opening a business and the appeal of Houts' illustrations.

Meanwhile, the framing of American women has been discussed in prior studies. Laura L. Behling in *Fisher's Bodies: Automobile Advertisements and the Framing of Modern American Female Identity* (1997) examined images of American women in automobile advertisements. To be exact, Behling analyzed advertisements by Fisher Body Corporation. The advertisements are from magazines published between 1923 and 1934. The study revealed that these advertisements tend to reinforce traditional feminine womanhood (Behling, 1997). Michael Sheehy and Hong Ji in *Framing the Ideal Woman in Esquire's "Women We Love," 1987-2006* (2011), examined women featured in *Esquire's* regular feature "Women We Love." Specifically, Sheehy and Ji focus on investigating the featured women's occupations and images. Their findings revealed that these women's occupations become less diverse, while their images become traditional (Sheehy and Ji, 2011). Marian McPherson in *Framing of African-American Women in Mainstream and Black Women's Magazine* (2015) examined articles from two magazines, *Glamour* and *Essence*, published from 2009 to 2014. The results of McPherson's study revealed that the perception of African-American women become more varied but still show influences

of black women stereotypes (McPherson, 2015). Nurlita Hapsari in *Framing Women Politician in Democratic Environment: A Study of Megawati Soekarnoputri and Hillary Clinton* (2017) focused on an Indonesian female politician (Megawati Soekarnoputri) and an American female politician (Hillary Clinton). To be specific, Hapsari examined the media framing of these politicians during the presidential campaign. Hapsari also analyzed its implication on gender conception in Indonesia and America. Data for this study are from Indonesian and American online news sources (*Detik, Liputan6, Tempo, The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, and The Wall Street Journal*). Hapsari's study revealed that Indonesian and American media often highlight Megawati's and Clinton's appearance and family relations instead of work plans or political views (Hapsari, 2017).

While prior studies focus on the framing of American women, none of them discussed the framing of women's ideal body in Instagram illustrations. Behling examined advertisements, while McPherson, as well as Sheehy and Ji, investigated magazines. Hapsari analyzed online news. Another difference is that this study concerns American women in general. This study does not focus on a particular female politician or women of a specific race or a certain period. This study focuses on women's ideal body in American society and the factors that shape the perception of women's ideal body.

## DISCUSSION

This study found that the framing in Houts' illustrations highlights how women's ideal body must be thin and youthful. In addition to that, tan skin is considered another

standard of women's ideal body. The three aspects that comprise women's ideal body are discussed one by one. In terms of thinness, there is a clear preference for women with thin bodies. The preference for thin women over fat women is prevalent in advertisements. In advertisements, thin women tend to appear more frequently than fat women. The preference for thin women is evident in Figure 1.



Figure 1. A Depiction of Thin Women in an Advertisement for On Pedder. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2019, February 28). For @onpedder ss19 [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BubYTphnYbO/>

The illustration in Figure 1. is for the luxury brand On Pedder. There are six women in Figure 1., but they have a similar body type. These women evidently have thin arms and slim waist. The clothes they are wearing further accentuate their thin bodies. These women also have defined jaws and cheekbones. From the way Figure 1. depicts women in the same thin, slim body, it is clear that there is a preference for women with thin bodies.

Advertisements also tend to depict thin women positively. Thin women are portrayed to look attractive and fashionable. In Figure 1., all of the women look very attractive. They also wear stylish clothes that accentuate their thin bodies. Overall, the way Figure 1 portrays thin women is very flattering. The positive depiction of thin women and their frequent appearance in advertisements send a message that thin women are treated favorably. The

absence of fat women in advertisements shows that they are still underrepresented in the media. Prior studies have analyzed the lack of fat women in media. White et al (1999) found that women on television programs are portrayed with slimmer bodies, in less diverse body types than men. Greenberg et al. (2003), who also examined television programs, found that thin bodies are more prevalent among women. In addition to that, thin women tend to be portrayed more positively than fat women (Greenberg et al., 2003). These studies support the findings that thin women are preferred over fat women, particularly in media. These studies also support the findings that thin women are portrayed with positive characteristics.

Thin bodies are highly desirable today. Thin bodies are also associated with positive attributes. According to Gracia-Arnaiz (2010, p. 221), thin bodies are considered indicators of “good health, self-discipline, and social distinction.” While thin bodies are associated with good health, fat bodies are often associated with illness. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases stated that excess weight potentially increases the risk of obesity-related diseases (diabetes, strokes, heart disease, kidney disease, cancer, osteoarthritis, fatty liver disease, sleep apnea, high blood pressure). Fat people are often associated with negative characteristics, such as laziness and lacking willpower (Teachman and Brownell, 2001).

Unlike thin bodies, fat bodies today are undesirable and have a negative image in society. However, when food was scarce, many people favored fat bodies. The scarcity of food made the ability to store fat from a limited amount of food is essential for survival (Eknoyan, 2006). Eknoyan (2006) asserted



that at the time, fat bodies mean power, influence, wealth, prosperity, health, and strength. In contrast, thin bodies mean poverty, hunger, and illness (Gracia-Arnaiz, 2010, p. 220). Today, fatness is considered a behavioral problem (Foster et al., 2003). Physical inactivity, overeating, and a high-fat diet are considered the primary causes of weight gain (Foster et al., 2003). The perception that fatness is a behavioral problem makes people see their weight as individual responsibility. The possession of a fat body is considered a failure in managing one's lifestyle.

However, regardless of their weight, women tend to feel dissatisfied with their bodies. When women appear to have thin bodies after participating in weight loss activities, their negative perception of their bodies remains. Figure 2. illustrates this dissatisfaction.

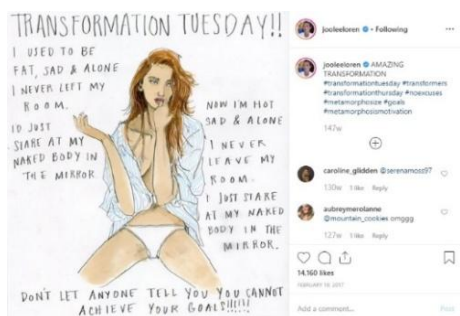


Figure 2. A Woman's Dissatisfaction of Her Bodies Post Weight Loss. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2017, February 10). AMAZING TRANSFORMATION #transformationtuesday #transformers #transformationtuesday #noexcuses #metamorphosize #goals #metamorphosismotivation [Photograph]. Instagram. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BQTqhp\\_B\\_Vj/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BQTqhp_B_Vj/)

Figure 2. shows a woman wearing an unbuttoned shirt, which reveals her slim body. However, it turns out that she does not have a slim body in the past. The text in Figure 2. reveals that she was fat. The text also shows how she feels "sad and alone" when she was fat (Houts, 2017). She admits that she only stays in her room during those times to stare at her naked body. The negative feeling of her

body, interestingly, remains after she loses weight and becomes slim. She still feels "sad and alone" and keeps watching her naked body in her room (Houts, 2017). From her feeling and behavior after weight loss, having a thin body does not seem to erase her dissatisfaction and anxiety from having a fat body. It seems that no matter her weight, she will always feel bad about her body. Although the illustration is titled "Transformation Tuesday," almost there is no change in her.

Women's dissatisfaction with their bodies, regardless of their weight, reflects Neighbors and Sobal's study. Neighbors and Sobal (2007) found that women show a greater dissatisfaction about their body weight and shape than men. They want to be slimmer and lighter even though most of them have a normal weight (Neighbors and Sobal, 2007). According to McCaulay et al. (1998), women tend to see themselves to be larger or heavier than their actual weight. In addition to that, the ideal female body is becoming thinner while women are becoming larger and heavier (Spitzer et al., 1999). Women's perception of their bodies and the gap between women's bodies and the ideal body shape women's body dissatisfaction. They become a harsh judge of their weight and feel dissatisfied with their bodies more frequently.

There is an increasing attempt to normalize fatness. It is evident from how fat women promote confidence in their fat bodies by wearing clothes typically designed to accentuate thin bodies, such as a mini dress or bikini. Their sense of confidence in their clothing style sends a message that having a fat body is not shameful. Their attitude and their clothing style show that women should not conceal their fat bodies. It is because fatness is normal. Although the attempts to

normalize fatness is increasing, it is clear that fat women largely remain invisible. It shows that the thin ideal is still prevalent in society, and a fat body is still considered a “deviation” from the ideal.

Women can also develop a negative perception of their bodies due to a comparison with female models. A comparison with female models often makes women perceive themselves to be less attractive. It can also make them feel dissatisfied with their bodies. Similarly, Richins (1991) reported that women express less satisfaction with their appearance after exposure to images of attractive models. This way, it is clear that exposure to images that show the ideal body causes women to develop a negative perception of their bodies. The higher the frequency of exposure, the less attractive and less satisfied they feel with their bodies.

Franzoi and Klaiber (2007) found that, while people often compare themselves to others with similar bodies, women often compare themselves to attractive models. In particular, in terms of weight and sexual attractiveness (Franzoi and Klaiber, 2007). For women, their appearance is an essential aspect of their lives. Women learn to value their appearance. They also invest more in their appearance. The importance of their appearance makes it crucial for women to achieve the beauty ideal. Models, who represent the beauty ideal, make the perfect standard for evaluation. By comparing themselves to models, women can find out if they achieve the ideal.

In addition to thin bodies, a youthful appearance is considered an aspect that makes women’s ideal body. The clear preference for youthful appearance often results in the

invisibility and exclusion of older women. The invisibility and exclusion that older women experience are evident in Figure 3.



Figure 3. A Woman’s Obsession with Female Celebrities’ Youthful Appearance. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2018, November 15). *VIBES* [Photograph]. Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqLR7KmnroZ/>

Figure 3. illustrates a young woman called Sophie, who seems to obsess over young Jane Birkin and Joni Mitchell. Figure 3. also elaborates how Sophie loves to collect and post every single photograph of young Jane Birkin and Joni Mitchell. Sophie even emphasizes that she is collecting pictures of the younger version of these celebrities only, not their older selves. It is apparent from the way Sophie always add “young” to these celebrities’ names. She always says “young Jane Birkin” or “Joni Mitchell young” (Houts, 2018). In addition to that, when mentioning how she has posted every single picture of Jane Birkin, she emphasizes that she posted photographs of young Jane Birkin and not old Jane Birkin. The young woman’s preference for the younger version of female celebrities reflects society’s preference for younger women. Her preference for young women also reveals how women become invisible as they age. Sophie’s refusal to post pictures of older women seems to create a message that women are no longer become a person’s priority as they are getting older. It reflects Hurd Clarke and Griffin's finding that older women after age 50 often become invisible (2008, p. 669). In particular, as potential employees or

romantic partners (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008). The perception that considers women's aging bodies a "deviation" from the beauty ideal causes older women's invisibility in society (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008, p. 669).

Older women are not the only ones who experience age discrimination. Age discrimination also occurs in older men. Roscigno et al. (2007) found that older women and men are more vulnerable to demotion, dismissal, and harassment. They may also be denied a promotion or rejected when looking for a job (Roscigno et al., 2007). It is interesting that older men are often told to be too experienced for a job (McMullin and Berger, 2006). However, older women are discriminated against due to their appearance. In research by Roscigno et al. (2007), older women are discriminated against in their workplace because their image or appearance does not fit the company profile. Likely, this difference is caused by the different perceptions of women's and men's bodies. Women's bodies tend to be viewed in terms of their beauty, while men's bodies of their functionality (Franzoi, 1995). While women focus on body parts that reflect beauty (such as the face, lips, chest, legs, or buttocks), men focus on health, agility, reflexes, strength, or coordination (Franzoi, 1995, p. 418). People may internalize these perceptions, which then shape their different treatment towards older women and men.

Today, older people tend to receive unfavorable treatment. People often consider old age as being unproductive, frail, senile, and sick (Minichiello, 2000; Palmore, 1978, p. 214). People also perceive older people as of lower status (Cuddy and Fiske, 2002, p. 17). Society today tend to perceive older people as

unimportant and insignificant. However, older people in the past were highly respected individuals. Nelson (2005, p. 208) stated that in prehistoric and agrarian societies, in particular, older people were regarded as teachers. Nelson also stated that they were considered guardians of the traditions and history of their people (2005, p. 208). Older people had extensive experiences, which explains the respect their people had for them (Nelson, 2005, p. 208). It contrasts with the situation today, in which older people often lose their jobs and access to vital resources.

Women often perceive the process of aging as something they must avoid. Women fear looking old as it can deprive them of vital resources. This fear stands out even more when considering that older women often get unfair treatment due to their aging appearance. The fear of looking old then drives women to preserve their youthful appearance or conceal their age using anti-aging products. However, this study found that aging is inevitable and anti-aging products are hardly effective in stopping the aging process. Figure 4. captures this reality.



Figure 4. An Older Woman Questioning Beauty Products She Used in Her Youth. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2018, December 6). *Young, dumb, and full of even more dumb* [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BrBSw93Htg2/>

Figure 4. illustrates an older woman expressing her regret about numerous products she used in her youth. Figure 4 does not

explicitly address aging, but the drawing of an older woman and the text about her appearance maintenance points to aging. She says how she has spent an enormous amount of time and money in her 20s and 30s to maintain her appearance. She feels bad about her appearance, which explains her investment in appearance. However, now that she has aged, she regrets spending so much time and money on appearance. The story about her appearance maintenance and the image of present her, which emphasizes her aged appearance, seem to capture the reality of aging and anti-aging products. Figure 4. does not mention anti-aging products, but it is clear that she aims to look young even when she has aged. Thus, it is highly likely that she also uses anti-aging products. By doing appearance maintenance from an early age, the woman hopes to preserve her youthful appearance. Despite her effort, she cannot avoid the process of aging, which explains her regret and the drawing of her older self. Women cannot prevent aging despite the meticulous appearance maintenance they do since their youth.

The use of anti-aging products to avoid aging implies that women believe they can control aging if they use certain products. It reflects the belief in the United States, which considers aging a sickness that they can treat and cure (Calasanti and Slevin, 2006, p. 16). However, because people believe that they can control aging and have the means to do it, they become more pressured to avoid looking old (Calasanti, 2007). For women, this pressure drives them to maintain their youthful appearance since they are still very young. It makes women engage in a lifelong pursuit of the ideal appearance, marked by anxiety and never-ending consumption to maintain their appearance.

This study also found that the framing highlights tan skin as an aspect of women's ideal body. In particular, the framing highlights how women purposely tan their skin despite knowing the health risks of tanning. Overexposure to UV light can result in sunburn, premature skin aging (Fisher et al., 2002), and skin cancer (Garone et al., 2015). However, these health risks do not discourage women from tanning their skin. In Figure 5., a woman with sunburn all over her body is looking at another woman with tan skin. The sunburnt woman is looking at the tan woman with longing on her eyes, implying that she desires tan skin. She experiences the side-effect of tanning but still wants tan skin. Her desire for tan skin is so powerful that she disregards the side-effect she received from tanning. Seeing her behavior, it is clear that the danger of tanning does not deter her from pursuing tan skin. It reflects Poorsattar and Hornung's study (2007) that a recent history of sunburn makes current tanners change their behavior. Family history of skin cancer (Knight et al., 2002; Poorsattar and Hornung, 2007) also fail to alter their behavior.



Figure 5. A Woman with Mild Sunburn Comparing Herself to a Woman with Tan Skin. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2016, May 18). *Only two kinds* ✨☐ .Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BFg8xWbpwI4/>

This study found that the desire to have an attractive appearance tends to be the factor that motivates women to tan their skin despite the risks. The tan woman in Figure 5. looks

confident and attractive. The tan woman does not hesitate to flaunt her body by wearing a bikini that covers very little. The attractiveness of tan skin likely explains the sunburnt woman's desire for tan skin. The sunburnt woman believes that the possession of tan skin makes her look attractive. Indeed, prior research (Knight et al., 2002; Poorsattar and Hornung, 2007) revealed that tanners' primary motivation to tan their skin is indeed related to appearance. Considering the primary motivation for tanning, it is clear that the reward of tanning (the possession of an attractive appearance) outweighs the health risks of tanning. It explains why women want to have tan skin despite experiencing the danger of tanning.

In addition to that, tan skin is associated with positive characteristics. Health, vitality, youthfulness, and beauty are some positive characteristics that people associate with tan skin (Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko, 2009, p. 758). According to Gillen and Bernstein (2015), many people also believe that people with tan skin possess enhanced social skills. Those with tan skin are also believed to excel in jobs where social skill is necessary (Gillen and Bernstein, 2015). Today, many people, especially women, prefer tan skin. However, people in the past favored pale skin as it symbolized the absence of manual labor (Gillen and Bernstein, 2015; Keesling and Friedman, 1978). The introduction of heliotherapy to America in 1914 is often considered the reason for people's interest in tan skin (Keesling and Friedman, 1978). It is said that heliotherapy shaped the perception of tan skin as an indicator of good health and pale skin of poor health (Keesling and Friedman, 1978). The Industrial Revolution and the influence of Coco Chanel are also considered

the factors that change people's perception of tan skin (Keesling and Friedman, 1978).

While American women usually favor tan skin, Asian women tend to favor fair skin. Asian women often associate fair skin with a happy love life or marriage, enhanced self-esteem or confidence, and career success (Cuny and Opaswongkarn, 2017; Hussein, 2010). Asian women often use skin-whitening products to get fair and bright skin. However, these products can be dangerous for the safety of the skin. They can cause skin problems such as skin atrophy, acne vulgaris, or redness (Yusuf et al., 2019, p. 354). While American and Asian women have a different skin color preference, they behave similarly in pursuing their preferred skin color. Both tanning and skin bleaching can be dangerous for the skin, but these women often ignore this danger to get their desired skin color. Their behavior shows how appealing the benefits of having desirable skin color are. Women, in particular, perceive appearance as an essential aspect of their lives. The importance of their appearance explains women's willingness to engage in risky appearance-altering practices.

Women's ideal body highlighted by the framing is consistently associated with health. According to Cheek (2008, p. 974), Western societies today perceive health as something "sacred." The association between women's ideal body and health reflects the holiness of health in Western societies. Many people today want to be healthy. In addition to that, the definition of health has developed to encapsulate physical, mental, and social problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." People's understanding of health

becomes more complex and holistic. Health no longer means the absence of illness. Today, being healthy means being “physically whole and vigorous” and “happy and socially content” (Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 196). Because of that, clean eating or applying skin-nourishing oil can be as essential as prescriptions for medicine for health. The industry encourages people’s obsession with health by promoting organic foods, green products, or workout plans. When people spend their time and money maintaining their health, it is considered their display of obedience to their duties and obligations as citizens (Ayo, 2012, p. 101). In addition to that, health is considered an indicator of a person’s qualities. “Unhealthy” people are perceived as “morally flawed and irresponsible” (Preston, 2015, p. 22). Today, health is considered to be a personal responsibility. “Unhealthy” people are perceived to have failed in maintaining their health and lifestyle. Their failure to maintain their health and lifestyle means that they have failed to fulfill their responsibility. In contrast, “healthy” people are often perceived as role models (Crawford, 1980).

The perception of health shape the way a person views themselves and other people. The framing in Houts’ illustrations highlights how women feel superior when they engage in practices that make them appear “healthy” (such as exercise or clean eating). They tend to brag about their healthy activities and belittle others who do not do the same. This behavior is evident in Figure 6., which illustrates a woman post-exercise. She explicitly says that she goes to the gym to “feel the awesome wave of smug superiority,” which allows her “to look down on virtually everyone & everything” (Houts, 2018). She does not go to the gym because she wants to lose weight,

enhance her strength, or get “mental clarity” (Houts, 2018).



Figure 6. A Woman Who Feels Superior After Exercising. Houts, J. [@jooleeloren]. (2018, November 4). *Idk just sad.....* [woman in lotus position emoji] [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpusmwGnFqx/>

Figure 6. then elaborates how she brags about her exercise to those she deems “unhealthy” because they cannot exercise like her. She also expresses her sadness at these “unhealthy” beings for their inability to commit to their health. Her behavior suggests that she exercise not because she wants to take care of her health but to feel superior. This way, women’s health practices seem to be more about appearance than a genuine attempt to maintain health. Preston (2015) also suggested a similar point, that health has become defined as “looking a particular way” (p. 134). Their obsession with healthy appearance erases the essence of healthy practices, which is to maintain physical, mental, and social well-being.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the framing of American women in Houts’ illustrations highlights women’s ideal body. Women’s ideal body comprises of a thin and youthful appearance and tan skin. The framing also highlights the way this ideal shapes women’s behavior and perception of their bodies. Unfortunately, women tend to put themselves at risk in pursuing this ideal. Appearance-altering

practices they are engaged in often endanger their health. It is ironic, considering the consistent association between women's ideal body and health. The ideal also shapes women's consumption of beauty products. In addition to that, the framing highlights the impact of limiting women's ideal body on one body type. Women who do not conform to the ideal tend to get unfavorable treatment from others. The pursuit of the ideal body also makes women develop a negative perception of their bodies. They often become dissatisfied and anxious with their bodies, even when their bodies already match the ideal. The possession of the ideal body comes with benefits, but it often crushes women's confidence in their bodies. The changing circumstances and the perception of women's bodies often shape women's ideal bodies to what it is today.

## REFERENCES

- Ayo, N. (2012). "Understanding Health Promotion in a Neoliberal Climate and the Making of Health Conscious Citizens." *Critical Public Health*, 22(1), 99-105. DOI:10.1080/09581596.2010.520692.
- Barnett, B. (2019, February 28). "10 Questions with Julie Houts." *On Pedder*. Retrieved from <https://www.onpedder.com/2019/02/10-questions-with-julie-houts/>.
- Behling, L. L. (1997). "Fisher's Bodies: Automobile Advertisements and the Framing of Modern American Female Identity." *The Centennial Review*, 41(3), 515-528. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23740669>.
- Calasanti, T. (2007). "Bodacious Berry, Potency Wood and the Aging Monster: Gender and Age Relations in Anti-Aging Ads." *Social Forces*, 86(1), 335-355. DOI: 10.1353/sof.2007.0091.
- Calasanti, T. M., & Slevin, K. F. (2001). *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging*. Altamira Press.
- Cheek, J. (2008). "Healthism: A New Conservatism?" *Qualitative Health Research*, 18(7), 974-982. DOI:10.1177/1049732308320444.
- Crawford, R. (1980). "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life." *International Journal of Health Services*, 10(3), 365-388. DOI:10.2190/3H2H-3XJN-3KAY-G9NY.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cuddy, A. J. C., and Fiske, S. T. (2002). "Doddering but Dear: Process, Content, and Function in Stereotyping of Older Persons." In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice against Older Persons*, 3-26. The MIT Press.
- Cuny, C., & Opaswongkarn, T. (2017). "Why do Young Thai Women Desire White Skin? Understanding Conscious and Nonconscious Motivations of Young Women in Bangkok." *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(5), 556-568. DOI: 10.1002/mar.21005.
- Eknoyan, G. (2006). "A History of Obesity, or How What Was Good Became Ugly and Then Bad." *Advances in Chronic Kidney Disease*, 13(4), 421-427. DOI:10.1053/j.ackd.2006.07.002.
- Eldor, K. (2018, February 2). "How Instagram Illustrator Julie Houtswent from Side Hustle to Full-Time Creative." *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karineldor/2018/02/02/how-instagram-illustrator-julie-houts-went-from-side-hustle-to-full-time-creative/?sh=61f9d3132e37>.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

- DOI:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.
- Fisher, G. J., Kang, S., Varani, J., Bata-Csorgo, Z., Wan, Y., Datta, S., & Voorhees, J. J. (2002). "Mechanism of Photoaging and Chronological Skin Aging." *Archives of Dermatology*, 138(11), 1462-1470. DOI:10.1001/archderm.138.11.1462.
- Fitzgerald, F. T. (1994). "The Tyranny of Health." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 331(3), 196-198. DOI: 10.1056/NEJM199407213310312.
- Foster, G. D., Wadden, T. A, Makris, A. P., Davidson, D., Sanderson, R. S., Allison D. B., & Kessler, A. (2003). "Primary Care Physicians' Attitudes about Obesity and Its Treatment." *Obesity Research*, 11(10), 1168-1177. DOI:10.1038/oby.2003.161.
- Franzoi, S. L. (1995). "The Body-As-Object versus the Body-As-Process: Gender Differences and Gender Considerations." *Sex Roles*, 33(5/6), 417-437. DOI:10.1007/BF01954577.
- Franzoi, S. L., & Klaiber, J. R. (2007). Body Use and Reference Group Impact: With Whom Do We Compare Our Bodies?" *Sex Roles*, 56, 205-214. DOI:10.1007/s11199-006-9162-4.
- Garone, M., Howard, J., & Fabrikant, J. (2015). "A Review of Common Tanning Methods." *The Journal of Clinical and Aesthetic Dermatology*, 8(2), 43-47. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4345932/>
- Gillen, M. M., & Bernstein, M. J. (2015). "Does Tanness Mean Goodness? Perceptions of Tan Skin in Hiring Decisions." *North American Journal of Psychology*, 17(1), 1-15.
- Gracia-Arnaiz, M. (2010). "Fat bodies and Thin Bodies. Cultural, Biomedical and Market Discourses on Obesity." *Appetite*, 55(2), 219-225. DOI:10.1016/j.appet.2010.06.002.
- Gray, J. (2017). "Text." In L. Oullette & J. Gray (Eds.), *Keywords for Media Studies* (ch. 65). New York UP.
- Greenberg, B. S., Eastin, M., Hofschire, L., Lachlan, K., & Brownell, K. D. (2003). "Portrayals of Overweight and Obese Individuals on Commercial Television." *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(8), 1342-1348. DOI:10.2105/AJPH.93.8.1342.
- Hapsari, N. (2017). "Framing Women Politician in Democratic Environment: A Study of Megawati Soekarnoputri and Hillary Clinton." *Rubikon*, 4(1), 11-29. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v4i1.47858>
- Hurd Clarke, L., & Griffin, M. (2008). "Visible and Invisible Ageing: Beauty Work as a response to Ageism." *Ageing & Society*, 28, 633-674. DOI:10.1017/S0144686X07007003.
- Hurd Clarke, L., & Korotchenko, A. (2009). "Older Women and suntanning: The Negotiation of Health and Appearance Risks." *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 31(5), 748-761. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-9566.2009.01175.x.
- Hussein, N. (2010). "Colour of Life Achievements: Historical and Media Influence of Identity Formation based on Skin Colour in South Asia." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(4), 403-424. DOI:10.1080/07256868.2010.491275.
- Keesling, B., & Friedman, H. S. (1978). "Psychosocial Factors in Sunbathing and Sunscreen Use." *Health Psychology*, 6(5), 477-493. DOI:10.1037/0278-6133.6.5.477.
- Knight, J. M., Kirincich, A. N., Farmer, E. R., & Hood, A. F. (2002). "Awareness of the Risks of Tanning Lamps Does Not Influence Behavior among College Students." *Archives of Dermatology*, 138(10), 1311-1315. DOI:10.1001/archderm.138.10.1311.



- McCaulay, M., Mintz, L., & Glenn, A. A. (1998). "Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Depression-Proneness: Closing the Gender Gap." *Sex Roles, 18*(7/8), 381-391. DOI:10.1007/BF00288390.
- McMullin, J. A., & Berger, E. D. (2006). "Gendered Ageism/Age(ed) Sexism: The Case of Unemployed Older Workers." In T. M. Calasanti & K. F. Slevin (Eds.), *Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*, 201-223. Routledge.
- McPherson, M. (2015). *Framing of African-American Women in Mainstream and Black Women's Magazine*. [Master thesis, University of Missouri]. MOspace Institutional Repository. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/10355/46591>
- Minichiello, V., Browne, J., & Kendig, H. (2000). "Perceptions and Consequences of Ageism: Views of Older People." *Aging and Society, 20*, 253-278. DOI:10.1017/S0144686X99007710.
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. (February 2015). *Health Risks of Being Overweight*. Retrieved from <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/health-risks-overweight#:~:text=Obesity%20increases%20the%20risk%20of,disease%20and%>
- Neighbors, L. A., & Sobal, J. (2007). "Prevalence and Magnitude of Body Weight and Shape Dissatisfaction among University Students." *Eating Behaviors, 8*, 429-439. DOI:10.1016/j.eatbeh.2007.03.003
- Nelson, T. D. (2005). "Ageism: Prejudice against Our Feared Future Self." *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(2), 207-221. DOI:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00402.x.
- Palmore, E. (1978). "Are the Aged a Minority Group?" *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, XXVI*(5), 214-216. DOI:10.1111/j.1532-5415.1978.tb01961.x.
- Poorsattar, S. P., & Hornung, R. L. (2007). "UV Light Abuse and High-Risk Tanning Behavior among Undergraduate College Students." *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, 56*(3), 375-379. DOI:10.1016/j.jaad.2006.08.064.
- Preston, S. L. (2015). *Bearing the Weight of Healthism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women's Health, Fitness, and Body Image in the Gym*. [Doctoral Dissertation, Arizona State University]. ASU Digital Repository. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2286/R.I.53811>
- Richins, M. L. (1991). "Social Comparison and the Idealized Images of Advertising." *Journal of Consumer Research, 18*(1), 71-83. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489486>
- Roscigno, V. J., Mong, S., Byron, R., & Tester, G. (2007). "Age Discrimination, Social Closure and Employment." *Social Forces, 86*(1), 313-334. DOI:10.1353/sof.2007.0109.
- Sheehy, M., & Ji, H. (2011). "Framing the Ideal Woman in Esquire's 'Women We Love,' 1987-2006." *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research, 12*(2), 1-17. Retrieved from [aejmcmagazine.arizona.edu/summer2011.html](http://aejmcmagazine.arizona.edu/summer2011.html).
- Spitzer, B. L., Henderson, K. A., & Zivian, M. T. (1999). "Gender Differences in Population versus Media Body Sizes: A Comparison over Four Decades." *Sex Roles, 40*(7/8), 545-565. DOI:10.1023/A:1018836029738.
- Teachman, B. A., & Brownell, K. D. (2001). "Implicit Anti-Fat Bias among Health Professionals: Is Anyone Immune?" *International Journal of Obesity, 25*, 1525-1531. DOI:10.1038/sj.ijo.0801745.
- White, S. E., Brown, N. J., & Ginsburg, S. L. (1999). "Diversity of Body Types in Network Television Programming: A Content Analysis." *Communication*

*Research Reports*, 16(4), 386-392.  
DOI:10.1080/08824099909388740.

Wood, T. (2017, May 2). "Julie Houts is Basically Illustrating Your Life." *Galore*. Retrieved from <https://galoremag.com/julie-houts-illustrator-jooleeloren/>

World Health Organization. *Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>

Yusuf, M. A., Mahmoud, N. D., Rirash, F. R., Stoff, B. K., Liu, Y., & McMichael, J. R. (2019). "Skin Lightening Practices, Beliefs, and Self-Reported Adverse Effects among Female Health Science Students in Borama, Somaliland: A Cross-Sectional Survey." *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*, 5(5), 349-355. DOI:10.1016/j.ijwd.2019.08.006.

## GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The editor of Rubikon Journal welcomes article submissions in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Articles have not been published or accepted for publication, or are being considered for publication elsewhere. In addition to the manuscript, a written statement should be attached which clarifies that the article is original and does not contain any elements of plagiarism.
2. Types of article suitable for publication include the following; research report (laboratory, field, archives), conceptual ideas, studies, theory applications.
3. Articles are written in Indonesian or English (preferable) using academic language along with standard academic writing structure and composition. Manuscripts are typed 1,15 spaced in a quarto paper size (A4), between 6000-7000 words in length including references, pictures, and tables.
4. Article should be in essay form which includes:
  - a. title (15-20 words),
  - b. author's name (without academic degree) with an e-mail address and institution's name,
  - c. abstract in English (150-200 words for each) which includes research problem, methods and result,
  - d. keyword in English (5-7 words),
  - e. author's personal information and e-mail address,
  - f. introduction (without subsection, 2-3 pages) which includes background, objectives, methods, and literature reviews/theoretical construct (if needed) of research. The introduction section ends with an emphasis on items to be discussed,
  - g. discussion,
  - h. conclusion, and
  - i. references.
5. Another suitable type of article is book review. Please note the following requirements for submitting book reviews:
  - a. book being reviewed should be newly published (within the last one year for books in Indonesian and two years for books in other foreign languages),
  - b. book reviews should be typed between 2000-4000 words in length including references, pictures, etc., and
  - c. a copy/scan of the book cover should be attached.
6. Reference list format is based APA (American Psychological Association) style. Reference list should appear at the end of the article and includes only literatures actually cited in the manuscripts. References are ordered alphabetically and chronologically. When writing a reference list, please use the following conventions;

Azhar & Matsumura, K. (2010). A study of 'Kenry' in Japanese and 'Hak' in Indonesian. *Jurnal Humaniora*, 22, 22-30.

Nur, T. (2008). *Verba dalam Bahasa Arab dan Bahasa Indonesia: Studi Gramatika Konstasif*. (Unpublished Dissertation). Universitas Gadjah Mada. Yogyakarta

Reid, A. (2011). *Menuju sejarah Sumatra: Antara Indonesia dan dunia*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor.

Zachareck, S. (2008). *Natural women*. The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/books/review/Zachareck>
7. The editor appreciates if authors excerpt information from subsequent published articles in Jurnal Rubikon.
8. Articles should be submitted in soft files using Microsoft Word application to [jurnal.rubikon@gmail.com](mailto:jurnal.rubikon@gmail.com)
9. Authors will be sent notification of receipt of manuscripts and editorial decisions (whether the articles are accepted or not) by e-mail. Manuscripts that are not published will not be returned to the authors.