

Romance Studies 13th Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium
Panels, Abstracts and Bios
March 24, 2023

Challenges and Opportunities for Healing in Global Health Perspectives

(Moderator: Hélié Vigor)

(Respondents: Marcos Canteli Vigón, Emma Howell)

Peter Caragol

Breast Cancer Treatment in Spain: Problematizing Screening Practices and Global Health Inequities

Abstract: Breast cancer is one of the most common cancer types across the world, with over 2 million individuals diagnosed each year. With the prevalence of this disease, there are a plethora of detection practices in place for women and female-identifying people, prevailing cultural attitudes, and social stigma towards the condition across Western society that warrant critical analysis. In Spain, there is a nationalized healthcare system which guarantees medical services to all citizens, and provides breast cancer screenings (largely mammograms) for all beginning at age 50. There are debates as to whether this age ought to be lowered, however it is instead necessary to scrutinize the shortcomings of these detection practices across the Spanish population and the adverse effects they may have. It is also essential to deconstruct popular attitudes relating to breast cancer within Spain through a critical and feminist lens, especially relating to the “pink consumerism” of the pink ribbon movement. Health inequities abound on the matter of breast cancer, despite a national healthcare system; Spaniards of a lower socioeconomic standing find themselves at higher risk of exposure to carcinogens, victims of structural violence through the stigma surrounding the health concept of “lifestyle choices,” and lacking equal access to health resources and education in comparison to their wealthier counterparts.

Bio: Peter is a junior from Boca Raton, Florida studying Public Policy and Spanish. On campus, he is involved in the Duke Presidential Ambassadors club, the Duke Catholic Center, and community service projects in the Durham community through the Partnership for Service. Recently, he had the opportunity to apply and further his studies of the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures through the Duke in Madrid Advanced program in Fall 2022, an opportunity that coupled with his internship at an immigration law non-profit group in Miami through Duke Engage this past summer, has reaffirmed his passion for Romance studies. After graduation, Peter hopes to attend law school and continue to help underrepresented and marginalized groups through a career in the legal field.

Phelan Mahoney

Narrative Medicine: The Importance of a Humane and Personal Approach to Medicine

Abstract: Contemporary medicine puts significant emphasis on increased technology to treat and cure patients. However, a skilled medical practitioner recognizes that optimal treatment consists of more than a one-size-fits-all, impersonal approach. This presentation will explore this idea, known as “narrative medicine,” and analyze examples in the context of selected French texts. It will examine the connections between the psychological and personal experiences of a patient and the treatment of his or her physical disease and draw on those connections to illustrate the value of narrative medicine. This presentation will showcase the importance of the humane and personal side of medicine and its implications on better treating a patient and express why narrative medicine will always serve an integral role in a patient’s medical care regardless of improvements in technology or pharmaceuticals. This presentation is adapted from Phelan’s work in his Fall 2022 Medicine & Health in French Literature class.

Bio: Phelan is a freshman from Denver, Colorado interested in math, science, and languages. A passionate language-learner, he is studying French, Spanish, Italian, and Latin at Duke. He intends to major in Romance studies with a Latin minor and is considering a second minor in math, economics, or something science related.

Camille Krejdovsky

Dance as a Medium for Exploring the Experience of Refugees

Abstract: Recognizing that the challenges faced by refugees are more than legal, the theme of World Refugee Week 2022 was “healing”. In collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency, the week focused on the capacity of art, creativity, and community as healing agents, highlighting the desire to support refugees in a holistic way. Dance responds to this challenge, as a means of cultivating direct healing, as well as a means of creating visibility around

the refugee experience. It is also unique in that it allows for creative expression without the need for words, something that is particularly important for those displaced from their home culture and language. It supports those in refugee camps as well as those in host countries, through local initiatives as well as on the largest stages of the world. Its use carries particular importance in France, where dance is intimately linked to the nation's history and identity, but it also embodies a universality that spans countries and cultures. This presentation will explore various dance initiatives linked to the refugee experience, as well as highlight the effectiveness of dance as a medium for overcoming trauma. In the midst of the global refugee crisis, dance is a tool to help move towards the high goal of healing.

Bio: Camille is a sophomore from the Bay Area majoring in French and Biology. She is a member of the student ballet company Devils en Pointe and is passionate about making dance education accessible for historically marginalized groups. Learning about the issues facing refugees worldwide in Professor Reisinger's course titled Global Displacement: Voix Francophones, she became interested in the ways in which dance might be applied in this context. In the future, she aspires to attend medical school and is interested in exploring art as a therapeutic tool in her career.

Situating Planning and Policy: Evolving Subjectivities, Expanding Localities

(Moderator: Leonardo Bacarreza)

(Respondents: Lisa Merschel, Sandy Valnes Quammen)

Audrey Costley

Linguistic Policy and Planning in Francophone Louisiana : An analysis of the state and outlook of French in Louisiana

Abstract: Many are aware that Louisiana was once part of the French Empire in the Americas, but how can we see this francophone heritage today? Beyond the facade of the Mardi Gras festivals and the French Quarter in New Orleans, to what extent does the state actually reflect a francophone history in the present day? This presentation is a part of Audrey's research for her senior honors thesis. It explores the impact of linguistic policy and planning on the use of Louisiana French and Creole historically. Particularly, how implicit and explicit policies repressed the French language in the past. It will also analyze present day movements and systems to revitalize and promote the French Language in Louisiana. Beginning in the 1960s, there was a shift in the public consciousness towards a greater value of minority languages and cultural groups, leading to policy to protect against language loss. How effective have these policies been and what is the future outlook on francophone Louisiana?

Bio: Audrey is a senior from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She is completing a double major in Public Policy and French with a minor in Linguistics. She loves learning new languages and cultures and hopes to expand her linguistic knowledge! She has studied abroad in France through Duke in both Paris and in Aix-en-Provence, and has grown a lot through these experiences with diverse language and culture. On campus, she is involved in a Bass Connections team researching multilingualism, music, and the brain. In her free time, she enjoys spending time outdoors and likes backpacking and camping with friends.

Daniel Sutton

Language and the Gendered Self: Addressing Grammatical Gender in the Italian Language

Abstract: Increased language and gender research have broadened and extended conversations about gender identities and pronouns. As these conversations make their way into more academic circles it is becoming increasingly important for educators of Romance languages to take into account the ways that their current instructional resources and practices represent gender and reinforce social gender binaries. The Italian language makes this pursuit towards a more inclusive language difficult grammatically, structurally, and due to resistance from the L1 speakers themselves. This thesis is a response to such resistance because the dynamic nature of language means that it must be readily applicable to the culture in which it is used. Language education is the first step in addressing these linguistic issues. This research is an examination of works in these fields to discover the best methods for creating a gender inclusive pedagogy in Italian classrooms in the United States. It takes into account the role of linguistic ideologies and brings together research of gender just pedagogies and critical race pedagogy to create a new pedagogical method for creating more welcoming second language learning environments.

Bio: Daniel is a senior majoring in Linguistics and Italian Studies with a minor in Sexuality Studies. Daniel is a member of Duke's Hoof 'n' Horn and Something Borrowed Something Blue in addition to being a Duke Presidential Ambassador. Daniel spent the fall and spring semester of his junior year studying in Italy where he furthered his language education and developed a deeper understanding of Italian Sociolinguistics. Daniel has a passion for language learning and hopes to continue doing language anthropology research after graduating.

Thuan Tran

The Present and Future of Urban Design Policies in Latin America

Abstract: As population grows rapidly and the world moves to utilize resources in more sustainable ways, mobility and smart urban design become central to how society is organized. This presentation looks at urban design policies in multiple Latin American states and discuss the future of this vitally important topic in urbanizing Latin American cities. It will also dissect the importance of smart urban design in building communities and erasing socioeconomic inequities.

Bio: Thuan is a senior majoring in Political Science at Duke University. Thuan plans on working in the international development space after he graduates. Thuan's academic interests are studying inequality and policies that would help break down socioeconomic barriers around the globe, but specifically in Southeast Asia, where he is from. Outside of academics, Thuan enjoys watching and playing tennis, singing in Duke Chorale and a cappella, as well as watching TV.

Saludos y Despedidas: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Greeting and Farewell Practices in the Spanish-Speaking World

(Moderator: Rebecca Ewing)

(Respondents: Mattia Begali, Joan Munné)

Group Presentation by Athena Yeung, Lydia Cox, Teddy Hur

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic impacted numerous dimensions of people's lives around the globe. This presentation explores the impact that the pandemic had on greeting and farewell practices in Spanish-speaking countries as well as the social and cultural shifts associated with these changes. Information inputs include primary experiences shared via Boomalang conversations and responses to a class survey regarding the influence of the pandemic on daily life. This evidence was used to analyze the dramatic cultural changes present in Spanish-speaking countries. The conclusions are tied to theoretical frameworks to gain a more holistic understanding of the connection of socialization to society. Ultimately, this report allows the audience to understand how physical interactions have an influence on social and cultural life in the Spanish-speaking world and beyond.

Bios: **Athena Yeung** is a freshman from Hillsborough, California, and enjoyed the Spanish 303 course. She is pursuing a double major in Biology and Economics. Beyond Spanish, Athena is fluent in Mandarin in Cantonese and has enjoyed applying her language skills to volunteering in healthcare settings and communicating with the diverse communities of Durham and the Bay Area. Outside of academics, she is involved with undergraduate research in biology, club tennis, Camp Kesem and Blue Devils vs. Cancer. Athena is excited to continue learning Spanish and practicing her language skills throughout her time at Duke and beyond.

Lydia Cox is a sophomore from Charleston, South Carolina majoring in Biology with a minor in Chemistry. She enjoys a wide range of biology topics and is passionate about science literacy and education. She is a writer and editor for Vertices, Duke's undergraduate science magazine, and is involved with biology research in the Duke greenhouses. Lydia enjoys learning Spanish and hopes to become fluent in order to better communicate with a broad range of individuals about science, culture, and whatever exciting things come her way!

Teddy Hur is a sophomore from Irvine, California, but his family currently resides in Washington Heights in New York City. He is majoring in Public Policy and aspires to go to law school one day (if he can get in!). He will be studying abroad via Duke-In-Madrid's advanced Spanish program next semester and is beyond excited to both see and live in Europe for the first time in his life!

Visions of Excess in Modern French Literature and the Arts

(Moderator: Anne-Gaëlle Saliot)

(Respondents: Kate Driscoll, Elvira Vilches)

Gwyneth Bernier

Des péchés de Flaubert aux tournesols de Van Gogh : les caractéristiques d'une obsession partagée chez deux titans artistiques (From Flaubert's Sins to Van Gogh's Sunflowers: The Hallmarks of a Shared Obsession in Two Artistic Titans)

Abstract: Despite using different mediums, the respective works of 18th century French writer Gustave Flaubert and 19th century French-Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh had much in common. Both visionaries suffered from frontal lobe epilepsy and tonic-clonic seizures and hallucinations, which resulted in many shared obsessive tendencies in their work and a focus on existentialism. This chapter of my larger thesis, « L'œuvre de ma vie » : Une exploration neuro-génétique de La Tentation de Saint Antoine, that explores the neurological implications of the evolution Flaubert's greatest work, La Tentation de Saint Antoine, specifically analyzes why the surreal images that emerged from Flaubert's pen bear a striking resemblance to those that emerged from Van Gogh's paintbrush. It analyzes major recurring themes--such as death--in the work of both creatives and hypothesizes that these men might have felt the need to obsessively redo their work because of a shared obsessive goal to refine their artistic styles.

Bio: Gwyneth is a senior at Duke University pursuing a major in International Comparative Studies and minor in French. She has a particular research focus in law, human rights, and forced migration in the francophone regions of Africa.

Ethan Chen

Animal Magnetism in 19th Century French Literature

Abstract: Franz Anton Mesmer's animal magnetism (also known as Mesmerism) was rejected in the 18th century by the Parisian scientific community as a pseudoscience. Nevertheless, the idea continued to gain widespread popularity, making its way into texts by some of the most prominent authors of the 19th century: Guy de Maupassant, Honoré de Balzac, and Edgar Allan Poe. This presentation examines the literary appeal of animal magnetism due to its supernatural nature and explores how the aforementioned authors approached this idea, drawing parallels between animal magnetism and religion, as well as love. The presentation also reflects on the scientific validity of animal magnetism as a precursor of hypnotherapy. The literary perspectives provided by 19th century authors allow us to better understand animal magnetism as a miraculous phenomenon that should be considered outside the context of rational scientific thinking.

Bio: Ethan is a freshman majoring in Mathematics and Computer Science. He was introduced to Romance Studies research during his first semester at Duke in French 89S, with a particular focus on 19th century and early 20th century French literature. Born in Taiwan and raised in Vancouver, Canada, Ethan speaks English, Mandarin, and French. Outside of the classroom, Ethan is part of the Duke Club Table Tennis team and also enjoys playing the flute and piano.

Stephen Atkinson

Decadent Discipline in Early 20th Century French Literature

Abstract: This project, currently in progress as an honors thesis in French, surveys the afterlives of Decadence from the fin de siècle to early 20th century French literature. This presentation explains the seemingly paradoxical concept of decadent discipline, analyzing the ways in which a subject position associated with decadence intersects with self-discipline in works of fiction both vindicating and critiquing decadence. The literature under consideration ranges from the Decadent movement itself, such as J.K. Huysmans' *A rebours* (1884) and Jean Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901), to André Gide's *L'Immoraliste* (1902), Marcel Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921), and Jean Cocteau's *Le Livre Blanc* (1930). Nietzsche's understanding of decadence, at the intersection of aesthetic, medical, and moral discourses, will guide the analysis alongside Foucault's concepts of aesthetic existence and the care of the self.

Bio: Stephen is a senior majoring in French and History. His academic interests include 19th century French and English literature, continental philosophy, and the history of religion and sexuality. Outside of class, Stephen is the booking manager at Duke Coffeehouse, a student-run music venue hosting local and international artists.

Engineering in Francophone Countries

(Moderator: Deb Reisinger)

(Respondent: Laura Florand)

Group Presentation by Emily Yagoda, Lizzy Jones, Marie Lowry, Roxana Haas

Abstract: This presentation is the culmination of a semester of research into the engineering field in Francophone countries, including education systems, employment opportunities, and workplace cultures. While education systems are standardized within countries and regions, there are differences between countries such as accessibility of an engineering degree, level of specialization, and degree of application of coursework (labs, internships, etc). Gender barriers also play an important role in determining workplace culture in engineering positions: only 26.1 percent of engineers in France are female-identifying, compared to 20.4% of engineers in the United States. Finally, we will discuss the results of a series of interviews about experiences in the engineering field between francophone countries and the United States.

Bios: **Emily Yagoda** is a second-year Biomedical and Mechanical Engineering Student at Duke University, located in Durham, North Carolina. After obtaining her degree, she is looking to serve in the Peace Corps or work abroad in the realm of Foreign service. Self-taught, she enjoys reading and learning new languages that allow her to connect with people across borders and cultural boundaries. Outside of her studies, Emily enjoys traveling with the debate team and helping out with the school softball team.

Lizzy Jones is a sophomore at Duke majoring in mechanical engineering and physics. She joined the French in Engineering project to combine her passions for STEM and French, and to explore how the field of engineering varies between cultures. She began learning French in high school and continued to learn as she traveled through francophone countries on her gap year. She plans to study engineering abroad in France, and she is also interested in pursuing higher education/career opportunities in a francophone country after graduating. Outside of academics, she participates in club soccer and club running, and she enjoys spending time with friends and family.

Marie Lowry is a sophomore studying electrical and computer engineering along with computer science. She hopes to concentrate her studies in computer engineering and digital systems. Marie has experience working as a teaching assistant for the course Computational Methods in Engineering, where she guides students through introductory programming labs in Python. She also works as a VR Tour Guide at the Duke Co-Lab Multimedia Project Studio, troubleshooting hardware and software errors with the VR equipment. She plans to work at Stryker this summer as an electrical engineering intern in the medical instruments division. Passionate about learning languages, Marie is excited to share what she learned last semester with a larger audience.

Roxana Haas is in her second year studying Electrical & Computer Engineering at Duke. She is very interested in using her engineering degree abroad, and combining her curiosity for other cultures and countries with her passion for science. She is considering working for the Foreign Service after college as an engineer, to combine her love of travel and languages with her education here at Duke, and experience in STEM. She learned French in early elementary school and has loved speaking it ever since. Speaking French has opened many opportunities for her, and she is grateful to keep practicing the language. Outside of school, she likes to spend time with friends, and family.

Circulations and Negotiations of Cultural Memory

(Moderator: Helen Solterer)

(Respondents: Joseph Mulligan, Saskia Ziolkowski)

Andres Cordoba

Objects and Memorials as Variable Fixing Points in Memory

Abstract: Throughout the course of our daily life, we encounter all sorts of objects and special places we term memorials. These markers make impressions on our memory and influence our day-to-day life. But what makes them so important? In Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's book, *Daughters of the Stone*, a stone carries through and secures the life of the family across multiple generations. Despite mystical properties attributed to it, an outsider cannot recognize its significance without context. However, the spiritual significance it plays on their memory and connections with each other is clear. On our own campus at Duke, we can find some spiritual solace at The Mosaic

Interreligious Space, a special room set aside for prayer and worship and named after the beautiful interfaith mosaic on its principal wall. This marker provides many with spiritual solace and comfort, but in a notably different way. Using the concept of a fixed point from nonlinear dynamics, I use these two examples to characterize the forms and definition of a memorial, and look forward, with a third type of point to explain how we can redefine our relationship to a shifting view of the past in the present day.

Bio: Andres is a junior from Ames, Iowa majoring in Biophysics and Chemistry with a potential minor in History. At Duke, Andres is a proud member of the Duke University Marching Band and a member of Duke's Quiz Bowl team. Despite his primary interest in STEM, he refuses to restrict his learning and explores all that Trinity has to offer. Last Fall, Andres was enthralled in his explorations of society in *Race and Memory in the Americas* with Professor Sarah Quesada and reveled in unexpected connections he made that he looks forward to share. After Duke, Andres hopes to pursue graduate study before joining academia as a professor in biochemistry.

Dani Rubio

Absence and Erasure: The Impact of Change on Memorialization

Abstract: The process of memorialization involves remembering, honoring, and paying tribute to the past, and can take many different forms, including physical memorials and art. However, it often involves debates and controversies surrounding what should be remembered and how it should be remembered. The removal of the Robert E. Lee statue from Duke University's campus and the edits made to the poem "1968" by Jose Emilio Pacheco are both powerful examples demonstrating such complexities. In this case, the removal of the statue raises important questions about history and representation, while the edits to the poem highlight the power of literature as a memorial. Both events demonstrate the importance of engaging with the past and the role that memorialization plays in shaping our collective memory.

Bio: Dani is a senior studying Earth & Climate Sciences with a minor in Global Health. With her academic background, she is currently working in a lab researching the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities. In the past she has also worked with various Education nonprofits in Durham serving First Generation Students and as a Wellness Intern at the Duke Student Wellness Center.

Meghna Parameswaran

Beyond the Tangible: Memorials as Sites of Cultural Exchange

Abstract: What constitutes a memorial? Can memorials breach or transcend colonial, imperial, neoliberal, patriarchal, and heteronormative hegemonies to address the generational toll of oppressive systems? How does this ability vary for different memorials, based on different techniques of expression, representation, and storytelling? These are the questions I attempted to answer through my comparative ethnographic and rhetorical analyses of the "We Are All Related" mural, which was created in 2018 by the Duke University project course "Farmworkers in North Carolina" (instructed by Professor Charles D. Thompson Jr. and local Durham artist Cornelio Campos), and Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's *Daughters of the Stone*. Both pieces act as memorials that illustrate the experiences of communities of color and legacies of violent institutions across the Americas. Based on my investigation, I conclude that memorials are intentional sites of cultural exchange that enable the emotions, experiences, identities, and histories they immortalize to extend beyond their physical medium. They create unique spaces for audience engagement, interaction, and reflection, facilitating community and generating networks of cultural consciousness that resist hegemony.

Bio: Meghna is a second-year undergraduate majoring in International Comparative Studies (regionally concentrated in Latin America and the Caribbean) and minoring in Environmental Science and Policy. Merging these disciplines, she is passionate about employing anticolonial, community-led research and storytelling/reckoning as changemaking pathways to achieve equitable justice and sustainability and is currently a member of the Bass Connections project *Collecting Oral Histories of Environmental Racism and Injustice in the American South*. Outside of the academic realm, Meghna is Music Director of her a cappella group, Duke Lady Blue, enjoys dabbling in composition, and loves spending time in nature.

Subverting the Gender Binary in Socio-Cultural Practices: Between Oppression and Nonconformity

(Moderator: Sarah Quesada)

(Respondents: José María Rodríguez García, Harry Karahalios)

Justin Xavier

Foundational Legacies of Colonialism: Gendered Perspectives

Abstract: My paper Gender: It Blends & It Breaks explores the origination of modern gender roles in three distinct cultures that are connected through their common connection as Afro-diasporic communities that are impacted by an overlying European colonial culture. One specific piece of literature that divulges the anthropological phenomenon of the colonial effects on gender roles I seeked to explore is Daughters of the Stone by Dhalma Llanos-Figueroa. Through a close reading of Daughters of the Stone and a detailed understanding of historical context, I conduct a comparative analysis between Daughters of the Stone and an American art piece that attempts to create conversation about western gender definitions.

Bio: Justin is a sophomore who is majoring in Environmental Science & Policy and Economics. Justin's love for languages stems from his experience living in Colombia and teaching English to beginner learners for three months in 2021. At Duke, Justin is involved with Energy Club, Students of the Caribbean Association, and the 100BlackMen volunteer organization to improve university relations in Durham. Justin is looking forward to studying abroad in Madrid during his junior year.

Steven Powell

La amenaza del homosexual: the creation, oppression, and proliferation of the homosexual under the Franco regime in Spain

Abstract: Under the rule of Francisco Franco, the figure of the homosexual in Spain was created as a legal identity and punished in new manners. Investigating why the Franco regime gave special attention towards the definition, persecution, and punishment of the homosexual reveals the fears underpinning the regressive regime about the country's transition to modernity. Prior to Franco, there were no laws in Spain that criminalized being homosexual. Pulling from a Foucauldian analysis, Spanish anti-sodomy laws transitioned from criminalizing acts to criminalizing personhood. This new legally punishable category helped develop the modern recognizable character of the homosexual. The methods of punishment were simultaneously changing alongside the shifts of legal status which highlight fears of homosexuality's virality and association with leftist politics. Punishments started as fines and incarceration but escalated to labor camps and forced institutionalization under Franco's thumb. Rather than eradicating homosexuality in Spain, the increasingly punitive laws resulted in the creation of a politically active community of people who now united under the new identity of homosexual.

Bio: Steven is a fourth-year student at Duke majoring in Public Policy and International Comparative Studies focused on Latin America with a minor in Spanish. Following the completion of his senior year, Steven plans to spend time working abroad in Latin America and eventually attending law school focusing on international law. He is especially passionate about research and service focusing on equity and justice for vulnerable populations.

Laila Khan -Farooqi

France's Gender Binary: Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Nonconformity in 19th Century Literature and Art

Abstract: The beginning of the nineteenth century in France marked the widespread appearance of topics surrounding intersexuality and gender expression, influencing art, fiction, medicine, and even civil code. Sexuality was explored artistically and in detail, though perhaps not in the positive or romantic ways of the past. Through various works, like those of Théophile Gautier, Henri de Latouche, and Rachilde, perspectives on gender and their potential effects on French individuals began to take shape. Novels depicted characters who deviated from traditional gender norms in ways that seemed to oscillate between disdainful mockery and lustful fetishization. Medical journals contained images of intersex bodies, displaying people in humiliating positions that highlighted their anatomical differences. Paintings illustrating passion between androgynous figures placed emphasis on ambiguous gender expression and sexual characteristics. This presentation will investigate the impacts of the systematic dehumanization of those with bodies and gender identities labeled as "other," analyzing the use of language and art in establishing various perceptions surrounding intersexuality, femininity, and gender nonconformity.

Bio: Laila is a first-year undergraduate student from Aspen, Colorado pursuing a major in biology on the pre-med track. She hopes to continue studying literature through romance languages but is not yet sure how she will incorporate this into her undergraduate education. She has a passion for the health humanities and seeks to explore the interconnectedness of identity and medicine further, especially through the lens of gender. She interns for the orthopedic practice at her local hospital and is an editor for Duke Medical Ethics Journal.

Le Creuset de Cultures: The American Immigrant Experience through a Culinary Lens

(Moderator: Magda Silva)

(Respondents: Luciana Fellin, Melissa Simmermeyer)

Group Presentation by Jeremiah Hodges, Melanie Chen, Neha Vangipurapu

Abstract: One of the beauties of the American experience is that there is no true American experience: living in a country where people from all over the world are gathered results in an immense diversity of backgrounds that create a “melting pot” of culture. However, in a country where xenophobia and racism does exist, some identities are often privileged over others. Thus, navigating a multicultural identity can be difficult at times: how much of our culture do we keep, and how much do we “give up” to fit in with society? Specifically, children of immigrants often grapple with this tension: they don’t necessarily fit in with their parents’ cultures, but they also are not “American” enough to fit in with their peers in their communities. The result is a constant balancing act between two identities, and a struggle to maintain our connection with our home cultures. Immigrants have a unique experience with the cultivation and making of food. They’re tied to the cultural heritage and processes of their origins, while in a new environment which can have completely different tastes, ingredients and food preparation methods. Consequently, they have the difficult task of adapting their heritage with their new environment and reality. Food is often a source of integration for the “dual cultures” of immigrants: whether it be adding garam masala to tacos, adding zha cai to toast, or berbere to pasta sauce. In that process of coming to terms with our multicultural identities, food is at the center of how we understand who we are – what does food mean for a person with multicultural experiences? In what ways does food enlighten us on who we are, what we value, and how we see the world? With this project, we aim to explore our “hyphenated identities” (Indian American, Chinese American, and Ethiopian American) through a culinary lens, focusing on how food and food systems have allowed us to gain an appreciation and pride for our cultures of origin.

Bios: **Jeremiah Hodges** is a senior from Dallas, Texas who is double majoring in Computer Science and Statistics and minoring in French. On campus, he is involved with the Duke Ethiopian student association and Duke Africa. While at Duke, he studied abroad in France twice, spending time in Paris and Aix-en-Provence. He is interested in exploring the culture, food, and languages of societies all over the world. At varying degrees of fluency speaks Amharic, French, Spanish, and German. In his free time, he enjoys relaxing in the Duke Gardens and going to the gym. After graduation, he hopes to work in the tech industry.

Melanie Chen is a senior from Shenzhen, China who is double majoring in Statistics and Psychology and minoring in French. Her family moved to Canada where she completed high school and started learning French. On campus, she is involved in the leadership team of Duke BOW, and was previously an analyst in DIIG. Outside of class, she enjoys playing instruments, painting, and listening to various genres of music. Melanie looks forward to continuing her love for language learning and experiencing diverse cultures, hoping to one day work and live abroad. She speaks French, Mandarin, and Japanese.

Neha Vangipurapu is a senior majoring in Public Policy with minors in Psychology and French. At Duke, she is a 2022 Arete Fellow, 2021 Political Engagement Project Fellow, and a 2022 Philip R. Costanzo Teaching Fellow. She has conducted research in the Belief, Affect, and Behavior Lab under Dr. Patty van Capellan, and as a Bass Connections Fellow studying the 2008 financial crisis. Off campus, she has interned with a land justice organization in Cape Town, South Africa and is on the leadership team at the Community Empowerment Fund in Durham, NC. In her free time, Neha sings with Duke’s competitive South Asian acapella team, Deewana, and is the concertmaster of the Duke Symphony Orchestra. After graduation, she hopes to work in the nonprofit sector for a few years before attending law school.