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Editor’s Note

In a time where social distancing is enforced, quarantine is ongoing, and gatherings are strictly prohibited, finding a way to connect and communicate with one another is more important than ever. The 2020-2021 school year has arguably been one of the most unique and unprecedented that Pepperdine University has ever experienced. Not only Pepperdine University, but colleges across the world, had to adjust to life during a pandemic, and furthermore, how higher education instruction would be shaped and adjusted to fit new boundaries and safety protocols and restrictions. One of Pepperdine’s priorities through this time has remained to keep students connected with the community they’ve built at Pepperdine. Connection in this unique period of time means a lot of different things to different people. There’s the struggle of trying to recreate life via Zoom rooms and chat boxes. There’s important events held entirely online, such as ceremonies, music festivals, Greek life recruitment, and church services. There’s the distinct feeling of missing those friends that you would talk to because you shared a major and had them in every single class, and Zoom school doesn’t allow for that same kind of leisurely and natural connection. Pepperdine students, faculty, and staff alike have all tried their best to maintain the connection that makes Pepperdine’s community so strong, especially in these difficult times.

In the pieces presented in this year’s Journal, our student contributors have examined some of the ways they have experienced connection in the world around them, in the material studied in the classes, and in their personal experiences. We invite you to learn more about the way that students have experienced and worked to maintain connection in these difficult times.

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Allyship Project:
The Importance of Religious Diversity

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Allyship Project: The Importance of Religious Diversity

History and Oppression of Religions Minorities in the U.S.

The United States is a Christian dominated country with significant privileges for those who follow the Christian faith. However, there are many other religions and people of different faiths in the United States. People of other faiths experience lives of marginalization and oppression because they are not seen as the “norm.” This oppression is rooted historically and systemically in the United States. For this paper, there will be a focus on the background and history of Jews and Muslims in the United States. Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are similar in their Abrahamic origin: “One can argue that no one of this three-Judaism, Christianity, Islam – can properly be understood without the others” (Burrell, 2002). All three of these religions can be traced back to the ancient figure of Abraham. While these faiths have many differences, there is room for spiritual companionship between members of these religions.

People of the Islamic and Jewish faith in America have historically been marginalized and oppressed in the United States. It is no secret that America was historically founded by distinctive biblical values. “In God we trust” is on the currency, the national anthem says, “under God,” and there are multiple other examples of the United States valuing Christian principles. It’s also no secret that the United States has always attracted a diverse group of immigrants bringing a plethora of different religions. This means that religious diversity has always been a part of the American narrative: “From the beginning, this country has been an experiment in religious pluralism” (Ammerman, 2006). Whether the experiment was successful or not is an entirely different question. While the United States today is more tolerant of diverse religions, this was not always the case.
Throughout the 17th and 19th centuries, waves of Jewish immigrants came to America to make their home. However, like many immigrants, they were met with challenges to make a life in the United States. “Jews, like other immigrant groups, increasingly needed to prove their loyalty and ‘Americanize’” (Batnitzky, 2011). The Jews that immigrated here had to change to be accepted by the general American public. After World War I, colleges and schools started using quotas to restrict Jewish admission. Even if a Jew was admitted to a school, employers would deny them jobs. This led to an immigration restriction of Jewish people in 1923. Events like these occurred all the way up until World War II. After the horrific events of the Holocaust, antisemitism in the United States began to decline. However, the roots of antisemitism still oppress Jews in America to this day.

Recently the term “new anti-Semitism” was created to focus on the opposition to the creation of a Jewish homeland in the State of Israel. This form of anti-Semitism is used to attack Jews more broadly. Instances of open antisemitism (for example verbal assault), anti-Zionism, and not perceiving anti-Semitism as a relevant issue are all ways anti-Semitism manifests itself in the United States today (Arnold, 2015). Not perceiving anti-Semitism as a current issue has led to instances of mockery since the “issue” doesn’t seem to be a problem for some. Another contributor towards anti-Semitism, new or historic, is ignorance. There is an important distinction between the religious and ethnic part of being Jewish. There are three main sects of Judaism: conservative, orthodox, and reform. “All Judaists— those who practice the religion, Judaism—are Jews, but not all Jews are Judaists” (Neusner, 2003). To be put simply, a Jewish person doesn’t have to practice Judaism, attend synagogue, or read the Torah to be a Jew. The reason this distinction is important is that there is confusion between a religion and an entire ethnic group. “When people confuse an ethnic group with a religious community, then they will
take random, individual opinion as a definitive fact for the beliefs of the faith.” (Neusner, 2003).
The ignorance toward this distinction has created a climate of misunderstanding. Because this ignorance is alive in the United States, we must move toward social change and understanding.

Muslims in America have also experienced challenges of oppression in the United States. The term Islamophobia is described as: “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslim” (Bleich, 2012). This phobia has gripped Western society over the past couple of decades. Islamophobia is a system of both racial and religious intolerance. Muslims are also not the only group targeted by Islamophobia. Sikhs, Hindus, Arab people, and more all suffer the consequences of Islamophobia. Although there was a spike of Islamophobia after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, fear of Islam has deep historical roots in the West and the United States. Islam has been a rival of Christianity ever since its emergence in the early 600s. The feud between these two religions historically has been a fight and back and forth for dominance. Holy wars and crusades in the name of God were used on both sides to establish dominance. This history of fighting and fear still plays a factor in modern relations with Islamic countries. The Christian world sees Islam as an enemy to be defeated, and now, many independent Islam nations are thriving. “Islamic societies gained their independence one by one, became economically self-sufficient and even became a threat to the West at some points (consider the oil embargo of the 1970s and today’s developing Muslim countries), and they started to put effort into regaining their identity which helps to feed the West’s fear” (Sunar, 2017). America has long seen Islamic nations and Muslim people as the “other.” In other terms, seeing Muslim people as different is a way to exclude them from the public sphere. The fear of Islam is deeply rooted in America because of the long historic feud between Christianity and Islam and the idea of an entire group being outsiders.
Although the historical implications of Christianity and Islam are present, the effects of 9/11 brought immense consequences for Muslims in America. 9/11 has become a defining event for the United States. In particular, it created a narrative that saw Islam through a lens of violence, pain, and terror. Although this event sparked hysteria and fear in the hearts of many Americans, the effects on the Muslim American community were detrimental and psychologically scarring. Because of the radical terrorist connection to Islam, an entire community of peaceful people were defined as dangerous: “Islamophobic ideologists and their backers impress the idea that all Muslims are terrorists and that therefore the U.S. should wage war with 1.6 billion Muslims” (Sunar, 2017). This rhetoric was damaging to Muslim Americans because they felt the need to hide from the public, they avoided attending a mosque, and they concealed parts of their identities. Although they hid, Muslims were still met with bias and discrimination. “The unprecedented severity of the backlash and the harsh rhetoric directed against Islam and Muslims made many of the participants feel like social outcasts” (Peek, 2011). Muslims in America felt they had to choose between practicing Islam and being an American.

While being Muslim brought unwarranted verbal and physical discrimination, Muslims banded together to change the narrative: “The wave of hostility that was unleashed after the 9/11 attacks may have victimized Muslims, but they did not become passive victims. Instead, they actively struggled to reclaim their faith and to assert their positions in the American social landscape” (Peek, 2011). The fear and frustration with these discriminatory actions led many Muslim Americans to defend their identity and their religion. While their efforts have brought some change and acceptance, Islamophobia is still present.

The histories of Judaism and Islam in America are histories of oppression and marginalization. Even though the United States is more tolerant, there is still a need for social
change. Hate crimes, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism are still alive. Supporting Islam and Judaism centers are needed to create more diverse, tolerant, and accepting religious culture. Feeding into the narrative of Christian dominance will create divisions in the United States: “Religious exclusivism, despite all its talk of one God, divides humanity into the believers and non-believers, with the latter and all their spiritual and religious traditions made unholy. This exclusive and social division sows the seed of violence” (Frawley, 2002). Religious exclusivism divides people because it believes there is one path to salvation and you’re either in or out. A more inclusive posture would recognize religious truths in all religions, while still following a specific faith. Supporting Mosques, Synagogues, and faith centers of any kind is a way to embrace religious inclusiveness. Supporting means seeking out dialogue and learning someone else’s story: “Stories, then, provide us both with the common elements that allow us to make connections with each other and the unique identities that keep us anchored in the midst of our diversity” (Ammerman, 2006). Because of the history of oppressed religious minorities in America, there is still room for social change. Advocating for Jews, Muslims, and followers of all faiths is needed to seek social change and justice.

**Current Social Justice Organizations**

I connected with both a Mosque and a Synagogue to talk about how they engage in social justice. In the middle of the semester, I visited The Islamic Center of Conjo Valley and spoke with Iman Muhammed Shoyab Mehtar and a volunteer named Aisha Basha. An Iman is the leader of the mosque. He leads prayer, reads from the Quran, and preaches messages to members of the mosque. When asked about social justice, the Iman spoke about the false picture of Islam the media in America creates. “The reality is Muslims are not committing violence and are educating more than any group out there.” Correcting this false narrative is what he sees as his
mission and definition of social justice. When asked about how non-Muslims could support, he said that he would tell people to have more open conversations about different religions. This is how he advocates for change. He expressed it is important to allow yourself to explore other faiths and see what they are all about, without giving up your core beliefs. This is the kind of boldness we need to coexist in different beliefs and religions. This is what religious inclusiveness looks like in practice.

My conversation with the Iman was much longer than my conversation with Aisha, but her perspective was interesting as well. She defined social justice as understanding each other’s differences, and that connecting with people that are different is transformative. She helps with volunteer projects at the Islamic Center and spoke to connecting with students coming to volunteer. She described these experiences as ways the Islamic Center advocates for social justice. When asked about what non-Muslims can do, she reiterated the power of connecting. “I believe when we strive to understand each other, we become allies.”

The synagogue I connected with was Congregation Schaarai Zedek, located in Tampa, Florida. This congregation practices reform Judaism which is the most progressive out of the 3 sects. I virtually connected with Debbie Orkin Steinfeld and Rabbi Joel Simon. Rabbi Joel Simon described social justice like this: “As Jews, we were once exiles in Egypt, denied entry to America, and victims of the Holocaust. Social justice is remembering our past in order to advocate for our values in the future.” The rabbi emphasized the importance of justice in Judaism. Tikkun Olam is a Hebrew concept in Judaism meaning: “to repair the world.” The Rabbi said Schaarai Zedek advocates for social justice by being welcoming and inclusive while still practicing Judaism. He also spoke about the congregation’s social action committee which seeks to more broadly serve the community. When asked if someone not part of their group
could join, he emphasized that anyone can get involved in this service and it is a way for people to build relationships with each other as well as serving the community.

Debbie is a long-time member of the synagogue and has served on the board and serval different committees. When talking about social justice, she expressed some concern over some phrases she hears from the perspective of being a Jewish woman. “The phrase ‘jewed them down,’ is upsetting to me. Many innocent stereotypes of Jews can be taken the wrong way, as anti-Semitism is still a large problem in today’s society.” To Debbie, correcting these incorrect stereotypes is an important step in seeking social justice. In order to seek social justice, Debbie is focused on connecting the community of Judaism. She argued that advocating for reform Judaism bridges the gap of cultural and religious Jews. When asked what a person not from the Jewish faith could do to be an ally, she said that not reinforcing the seemingly harmless Jewish stereotypes is a way to support the Jewish community.

The definition of social justice varied among the people I spoke too. Some focused inwardly, some focused outwardly, but no one argued that social justice has been achieved. Along with this, there was an emphasis in all of the answers on the importance of community and relationship building. Looking through the issues of social justice through a faith lens adds another layer of complexity, as many faiths are called to give back to their community. Jews and Muslims in America educate, give, and serve others despite the oppression and marginalization they face. As a Christian interacting with these different faiths, these interactions have showed that there is a lot of work to be done in order to create social change for members of oppressed faiths, and that a way to effectively start this change is through creating meaningful relationships with people of different faiths.
Cycle of Liberation

Harro’s cycle of liberation is a useful tool that offers practical solutions and pathways for social change. It moves people from being contributors of social oppression, to be a part of liberation and justice. The first phases of this cycle are the waking up and getting ready phase. With the goal of creating social change for religious minorities, this phase recognizes the privilege of being a Christian, the oppression of people who aren’t Christian, as well as gaining new worldviews based on other people’s perspectives.

Next is the reaching out phase. This is an important part of the cycle because it involves seeking experiences outside of the norm. In order to reach out to oppressed minorities, I would start by volunteering alongside them. The Islamic Center of Southern California distributes food to local families in need every Saturday morning. This would be a way for me to serve the community of Los Angeles as well as getting to know Muslims in my community. Another way I can reach out would be through my own campus of Pepperdine. Although Pepperdine is a predominantly Christian campus, there are still students that practice different faiths on the campus. Rabbi Ari Schwarzberg leads a club convocation called Jewish Culture. This convo is open for all students to join. Being a part of this convo would allow me to learn and experience things that aren’t familiar as well as connect with people who are different from me.

Building community is the next step in this cycle. Using the opportunities I’ve listed above, they would allow me to start dialogue with people who are different from me and people who are like me. Bringing some friends to the club convo, or the Islamic Center of California would create more of a community. Becoming a part of the Islamic Center’s interfaith partnership would be a way to transition from reaching out to truly building community. The Islamic center’s interfaith partnership seeks to understand and initiate dialogue between
Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Addressing our differences, challenging assumptions, and minimizing barriers are all ways to spread from a community of similar people to a community of diversity.

The next step is coalescing and creating change. This is the phase where plans for change are organized and acted upon. After being a part of the interfaith partnership at the Islamic center, I could form a plan to start an Interfaith council at Pepperdine. This would be a way to use my privilege as a Christian to seek out change and allyship across all faiths. Being transformed myself, I could direct my efforts to transform my community at Pepperdine. The last step focuses on maintaining and strengthening change. This would mean opening up doors to everyone for a Pepperdine interfaith council, as well as planning for students coming and leaving. By showing the benefits of an interfaith council on a Christian campus, the council could grow and strengthen even after the people that started it leave the Pepperdine community. This is a practical way for me to practice religious inclusivity as well as seek justice for people of oppressed faiths. The most important thing to remember throughout this cycle is to listen. By taking the time to intently listen to someone who is different and less privileged, connection across all cultures, identities, and religions is possible.
References


Faith in Film as Depicted by
the Final Scenes of *Life of Pi*

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Faith in Film as Depicted by the Final Scenes of Life of Pi

Introduction

Rarely does a film come along which perfectly blends intensity with levity, hope with sorrow and spirituality with reality. Life of Pi is one such film: the story of a boy and a tiger stuck on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean can simply be viewed for entertainment, but on closer inspection it also has a lot to say about life, spirituality, and human suffering. It is a deeply touching film with an air of timelessness, but what makes this true? To best understand the film and its meaning one should look to the film’s final moments, where the main character Pi offers his own thoughts on his journey and defends it against a world which struggles to believe it. This scene ultimately concludes that when faced between the ugliness of the world and a still tragic but inspiring story, people will choose the inspiring story. This essay will examine how the film uses patterns of anomaly and repetition in tandem with Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm in its final scene to effectively establish narrative rationality in communicating its final, faith-based moral to the audience.

This essay seeks to highlight the effectiveness of Life of Pi as a story of hope and inspiration amidst seemingly overwhelming suffering and tragedy. It might just so happen that the world needs stories like this now more than ever: during a year of quarantine in which many may be struggling with their faith and considering themselves trapped in their own personal “lifeboat”, the tale of a boy surviving in his own lifeboat against the odds can serve as inspiration and encouragement to any who view it.
Literature Review: Faith and Film

Before delving into *Life of Pi*, it may be helpful to consider the thoughts of other communication scholars in regards to the relationship between faith and film; afterall, *Life of Pi* ultimately serves to deliver a message about faith and its presence in the world. In her 2017 article “Film as medium for meaning making: A practical theological reflection”, Anita Cloete likens film and faith together, stating that “Both religion and film as part of culture reflect the values, dreams and hopes of societies.” She delves deeper, identifying the concept of meaning making as an essential component of the relationship between the two: “The content of film and what the producers have in mind, however, is only one side of the coin, while what the audience makes of it is the other side.” She ultimately argues that any religious experiences felt by viewers are a result of their own attempts to create meanings out of what they have viewed (Cloete, 2017).

In her 2019 work *Interdisciplinary reflections on the interplay between religion, film and youth*, Cloete hones in on the topic further, this time examining young viewers’ thoughts and relationships with explicitly religious films: “[...] one of the significant findings was that it is not religious films that are their [young film viewers’] favourites, but rather films with no explicit religious themes or focus. Personal stories are the most important lens used to engage with film and construct meaning.” Cloete furthers this train of thought, positing that “Engagement with film assists them [young viewers] to navigate difficulties they experience, while their contexts and especially religious backgrounds play an important role in the interpretation process.” Essentially, she argues that young viewers are more likely to gain (potentially religious) meaning from a film more focused on personal struggles than a film directly about religion (Cloete, 2019).
In her 2006 book *Religion and film: An introduction*, Melanie Wright echoes Cloete’s idea that a religious experience is not entirely generated by the film itself, but rather in its resonation with whomever views it: “The determining factor in what makes a religious film does not, then, rest with narrative or stylistic elements of the film text itself. Rather, ‘religious film’ is better understood as a process, a function of a dynamic exchange between screen images and sound, and viewer activity and perception” (Wright, 2006). These texts all seem to agree that the relationship between film and faith is a two-way street: the film will only take on as much religious meaning as the viewer attempts to make out of it.

While the relationship between film and faith has been well explored, this essay seeks to submit its analysis of *Life of Pi* into the ever-ongoing discussion of communication scholars.

**Method: Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm**

Walter Fisher developed the idea of the narrative paradigm with the concept of rhetorical exigence in mind. Rhetorical exigence is defined as “an issue, problem, or situation that causes or prompts someone to write or speak” (Nordquist, 2020). In the case of Fisher’s narrative paradigm, he argues that humanity’s utmost basic response to a rhetorical exigency is to tell a story. The narrative paradigm “[…] insists that human connection should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories […].” So, which stories win out in this competition and stick around in the public eye? Fisher argues that the stories which win out are those which possess narrative rationality. He states that stories are rational “[…] they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements” (Fisher, 1984).
So what are narrative probability and fidelity, the two elements which give a story rationality? Mark Stoner and Sally Perkins’ *Making Sense of Messages: A Critical Apprenticeship in Rhetorical Criticism* defines narrative probability in terms of narrative coherence: does the story being told “hang together”? Is its plot sensible and free of contradictions? Such issues are concerns of narrative probability. Narrative fidelity is defined in terms of narrative correspondence: is the logic of the story sound? Is what it is trying to say relevant or important? Such issues are concerns of narrative fidelity (Stoner & Perkins, 2005).

The following analysis will explain how *Life of Pi* uses rhetorical patterns of anomaly and repetition to establish narrative rationality for the film.

**Analysis: The Narrative Paradigm and Rhetorical Patterns in *Life of Pi***

The final scenes begin with a scene of Pi and Richard Parker finally reaching the Mexican coast. Despite the film tirelessly setting up the friendship of Pi and Richard Parker, the first pattern of anomaly appears as Richard Parker leaves Pi without saying goodbye (Magee, 2012, p. 66). Earlier on in the film, Pi tries to befriend Richard Parker but his father chastises him and tells him that he cannot befriend a wild animal as they have no soul and will therefore see people as food instead of a friend. The entire arc of the film seems to go against Pi’s father’s advice, as Pi and Richard Parker appear to become friends throughout the story. However, the pattern of anomaly comes into play as the audience’s expectation of a meaningful goodbye from Richard Parker is quickly subverted, as the tiger leaves without so much as a second glance. While at first appearing to be a contradiction in the rules established by the film, this still helps establish narrative probability: the characters live in the real world, where not everything works
like it does in a movie, and this is an idea which many audience members can connect to. Next examined was a pattern of repetition which helps establish narrative fidelity by adding relevance to the film’s message: the recurring theme of spirituality, represented through language, character action, and imagery. The theme of spirituality repeats as Pi goes on to explain that even though Richard Parker left him without saying goodbye, he still believes that he has a soul and emotions (Stoner & Perkins, 2005).

The next anomaly to pattern is observed in the film’s visual presentation as the severely malnourished Pi is brought to a hospital. There he is interviewed by Chiba and Okamoto, two Japanese businessmen representing the company of the ship Pi was on which sank and left him stranded at sea. The film has been filled with vibrant colors up to this point, from the array of colors of India, to the intense blues, oranges and blacks of the Pacific Ocean to the warm, inviting browns of present day Pi’s home. However, for the first time the film’s color palette becomes an all-encompassing white as Pi enters the hospital and talks to the two businessmen. The visual coherence of the film is almost contradicted, but this color change is done to highlight the draining intensity of the scene and therefore contributes to narrative probability.

The dialogue that unfolds in the hospital is decidedly very important to the film’s final moral, but has also been identified through analysis as a rhetorical situation. The scene is marked by a rhetorical exigence: a ship from Chiba and Okamoto’s company has sank, and they need to figure out what happened from Pi (Bitzer, 1968, p. 6). Seeing as Chiba and Okamoto are seeking information from Pi, it can be inferred that they are capable of being influenced by his words and becoming “capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce.” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). Finally, Pi’s encounter with the two businessmen is filled with
constraints: Pi’s two differing stories serves as the artistic proofs of the situation while Chiba, Okamoto, and the two’s doubts of Pi’s initial story serve as inartistic proofs which affect the outcome of the scene’s discourse (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8).

The film once again contradicts its inspirational tone, but in a way which makes sense and further builds narrative fidelity through the second story which Pi tells Chiba and Okamoto. After he tells the two the story the film has told the audience, the two businessmen fail to believe the story and ask Pi to tell them “a story we can all believe” (Magee, 2012, p. 69). Whereas Pi’s first story and the story of the film were filled with strife but still possessed optimistic and redeeming qualities, the second, more realistic story that he tells is uncharacteristically dark and cruel in tone compared to the rest of the film, possessing no redeeming qualities. Instead of a story of fantastical survival alongside a tiger, Pi tells a story of escaping with a wounded Buddhist sailor, his mother, and a murderous cook who ended up killing everybody on the boat except for Pi, who killed the cook himself (Magee, 2012, pp. 70-71).

Pi’s second narrative also seems to challenge narrative fidelity in that its main characters are the cook, the sailor, and his own mother (Stoner & Perkins, 2005). While all three characters were real people Pi interacted with on the ship, none of them had any significant amounts of screen time or lines of dialogue; even Pi’s mother, while getting a little more focus than the cook and sailor, barely has any lines in the film. To see these three characters suddenly thrust into the spotlight despite having so little screen time almost goes against logic, but that’s just what the filmmakers want: they want this moment to feel contradictory in tone from the rest of the film to really highlight the differences between Pi’s two stories.
As Pi tells his stories to Chiba and Okamoto, a pattern of sequencing is observed. The film really follows two narratives: the story of Pi surviving at sea with Richard Parker, and the story of Pi in the present day talking about his life with an author intending to make a novel out of it. The two stories often flash back and forth between each other, but in this final scene the switching between times increases in frequency to the point where lines are occasionally overlapping and interweaving with each other to make one through line of dialogue. This definitely bolsters both narrative probability and fidelity, as the dialogue is woven together in a way that keeps the story understandable and makes the film’s progression still seem logical despite hopping between two different times.

The next pattern of repetition is observed in the dialogue between Pi and the author, as Pi asks the author a series of questions about the story. The author functions in the film as a stand-in for the audience, listening and asking questions of Pi when appropriate, so to have Pi ask questions of the author can be interpreted as Pi asking questions directly to the audience, which adding relevance (AKA narrative fidelity) to the film by attempting to question the viewer themselves rather than just being a contained story. After telling the author about the two stories he told to Chiba and Okamoto, Pi asks the author and therefore the audience: “I've told you two stories about what happened out on the ocean. Neither explains what caused the sinking of the ship, and no one can prove which story is true and which is not. In both stories, the ship sinks, my family dies, and I suffer. [...] So which story do you prefer?” (Magee, 2012, p. 72) Later, when the author asserts that he thinks Pi’s story has a happy ending, Pi responds with “Well, that’s up to you. The story is yours now” (Magee, 2012, p. 73). This is said to the author and the audience, who now have the ability to spread the story as much or as little as they care to. As
evidenced by the quotes above, the pattern of repetition shows itself through the film’s continued practice of putting questions to the audience itself; famed critic Roger Ebert himself even echoes this, saying in his review of the movie that “what it finally amounts to is left for every viewer to decide” (Ebert, 2012).

The fidelity-bolstering pattern of repetition of spirituality as a theme re-emerges when the author answers Pi’s question regarding which story he liked better, telling Pi he liked the story of Richard Parker more. Pi, in line with the film’s repetitious spiritual theme, responds with “Thank you. And so it goes with God” (Magee, 2012, p. 73). This pattern of repetition continues into one of the film’s final shots, where the author reads the official report on the shipwreck published by Chiba and Okamoto’s company. It is revealed that the two ultimately decided to believe Pi’s original story and publish it as the official report, once again hitting on the theme of spirituality, belief, and faith versus the mundane world and generating fidelity: the wording of Pi’s responses and the result of the situation carry heavy spiritual tones with them, adding a sense of importance to the scene. In this way it could be argued that the film is attempting to give Pi a prophetic voice (Vail, 2006, p. 54).

The final pattern of relationship becomes observable through the juxtaposition of the film’s treatment of Pi’s two different stories. The “Richard Parker” narrative, despite still containing hardships for Pi, is presented in a more optimistic and inspiring light, while the “truthful” narrative Pi tells Chiba and Okamoto is marked with a sudden absence of vibrant color, focus on characters who have received little screen time, and sullen reactions from every character that hears it. In creating this relationship between the two stories where one is supported by the film and the other is presented as disheartening, *Life of Pi* does everything it
can to give viewers the tools to make meaning out of it, with the hope that said meaning will be one of faith; in this way it is attempting to gain relevance and narrative fidelity, and as the film has been doing this throughout its runtime it helps keep the story together to add narrative probability.

**Conclusion**

Largely through its use of patterns of repetition and anomaly—while also engaging patterns of omission, sequencing and relationship—*Life of Pi* develops narrative probability and narrative fidelity by effectively presenting and juxtaposing the two parallel stories told by Pi, guiding its characters and audience alike to a satisfying, meaningful conclusion—especially in a year as remarkable as this one. As men and women struggle all around the globe struggle with feelings of loneliness amidst a year of pandemic and turmoil, many people most likely feel trapped in their own metaphorical lifeboats. However, Pi’s story of not only surviving in isolation but strengthening himself through it may be just what the world needs right now. Roger Ebert perhaps sums the film up best when he starts his review with the following statement: "Ang Lee's 'Life of Pi' is a miraculous achievement of storytelling and a landmark of visual mastery. [...] It is also a moving spiritual achievement, a movie whose title could have been shortened to 'life'" (Ebert, 2012).
References


https://doi-org.lib.pepperdine.edu/10.1111/j.1467-9418.2007.00359_1.x


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eEXqF6g9Y&ab_channel=YouTubeMovies
# Appendix A

Rhetorical Analysis Notes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Notes</th>
<th>Commentary About Analysis Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Anomaly to Pattern</strong>: After the film sets up an arc of Richard Parker and Pi miraculously befriending each other, Richard Parker leaves Pi without so much as a glance.</td>
<td><strong>1. At the beginning of the film, Pi’s father tells him to never trust a wild animal, they’re not your friend at the end of the day. The film spends the bulk of its run time debunking this advice, as Pi and Richard Parker actually become close companions due to the hardships they both face. However, at the end the rug of niceness is pulled from under the viewer and we see that Pi’s dad was right: the second he is free, Richard Parker leaves and doesn’t look back. This is done to inject a sense of realism into the film: while miraculous things do happen in this story, we still live in reality.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Pattern of Repetition</strong>: Language of spirituality used again as Pi still expresses love for Richard Parker and continues to believe he has a soul.</td>
<td><strong>2. While Pi’s father is shown to be right in his advice that RP wasn’t truly Pi’s friend, Pi’s sense of spirituality is a driving force in this film and his father’s advice still won’t stop him from injecting it into the situation. Pi still believes that RP had a soul and felt emotions in his own way, and refuses to believe that he was staring at nothing but his own reflection in the tiger’s eyes. Given that RP is heavily used to symbolize God/the fear of God throughout the film, by having Pi reaffirm him having a soul Pi is almost defending the sanctity of his journey.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Anomaly to Pattern</strong>: The film’s usual color scheme is interrupted by the hospital scene which is very whited out.</td>
<td><strong>3. <em>Life of Pi</em> is a beautiful film to look at. From the vibrant colors of India at the beginning, the intense blues, oranges and blacks of the ocean in the middle, and the warm brownish colors from the safety of Pi’s home in the future, this film is certainly very colorful. However, there is one exception to this: the hospital scene, where Pi is interrogated by the businessmen Chiba and</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Bonus → EXIGENCE!

#### 4. Anomaly to Pattern: The story Pi tells to Chiba and Okamoto breaks the mold tone-wise of everything the film has presented so far.

Pi’s “truthful” narrative is in response to an exigence, that exigence being Chiba and Okamoto’s company seeking to gain Pi’s knowledge about why their company’s ship sank.

#### 5. Pattern of Omission: The Buddhist sailor, the cook, and (to a lesser extent) Pi’s mother are presented as central characters of Pi’s “truthful” story, despite having little to no presence in the film prior.

The sailor and the cook that Pi mentions in his story are real characters that he met on the ship, but both only had about 20-30 seconds of screen-time, each. First-time viewers might not even remember who Pi is talking about. In the scope of the narrative, these are characters we have spent barely any time with, so to believe that this is the true narrative of the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern of Sequencing</th>
<th>Film is already subconsciously viewed as unpleasant by the audience.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>6. The film has flashed back and forth between present and past Pi throughout the movie in order to tell a cohesive story, but in these last few scenes the switches begin more and more frequently, occasionally overlapping each other and weaving together to make one continuous line of dialogue at some point. This is the end of the movie, so it makes sense thematically for it to be the moment where the past and the present collide to reveal one final lesson of the story.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Pattern of Repetition</th>
<th>Putting questions to the audience.</th>
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<td>7. Especially at the end of the film, Pi asks a handful of important questions to the author, who represents the viewer as it is also his first time hearing this story as well. Therefore it could be implied that Pi’s questions are for the audience itself as well as the author. He asks which story we prefer. When the author asserts that he thinks Pi’s story has a happy ending, Pi says “Well, that’s up to you. The story is yours now”. This is for the author and the viewer, as the story is now part of the viewer and they can choose to share it however they want with whoever they want.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern of Repetition</th>
<th>Language/theme of spirituality is continued as the author chooses the story of Richard Parker over the “truthful” story.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. The author chooses the story that is fantastical but meaningful over the story that is realistic but filled with darkness. Rather tellingly, Pi responds to the author’s choice with “Thank you. And so it goes with God.” This is the film’s final moral about faith, and ultimately reaffirms the film’s theme of spirituality.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Pattern of Repetition</th>
<th>The faith theme returns again when it is revealed which of Pi’s two stories Chiba and Okamoto decided to publish in the official report of the accident.</th>
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<tr>
<td>9. One of the film’s last shots is the author reading over the official report published by the Japanese company. It is revealed that they chose the story of Richard Parker over the</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
10. **Patterns of Relationship**: Pi’s tiger story presented in a positive light vs. his “truthful” story presented in a negative light.

10. While one story certainly is more fantastical than the other, the film does everything it can to get us to root for one story more than the other. From the sudden absence of vibrant color, the focus on characters with little screen time, and the actual content of the story and the way the characters are shown reacting to it, it seems apparent that we are not supposed to like this version of the story. This is opposed to the Richard Parker story, which is still filled with hardship but is shown to have a more optimistic, inspiring tone to it. While you may agree with the ultimate decision the film makes, it still pulls a ton of cards to guide its audience to that decision.
Excerpt from Life of Pi script (1:43:50-1:58:26 in the film):

Pi leans over the side of the lifeboat. He falls overboard. We follow him underwater, his feet - hit a sandy bottom.

**ADULT PI (V.O.)**

By the time we reached the Mexican shore, I was afraid to let go of the boat. My strength was gone. I was so weak. I was afraid that in two feet of water, so close to deliverance, I would drown. I struggled to shore and fell upon the sand. It was warm and soft, like pressing my face against the cheek of God. And somewhere two eyes were smiling at having me there.

An empty coastline, nothing but sand, rocks and jungle. Pi struggles to bring the lifeboat ashore. Richard Parker is hiding under the tarp, nowhere to be seen. Pi pulls the painter line until the boat is on the beach, then collapses on the sand.

**EXT. THE MEXICAN COAST/THE JUNGLE - DAY**

Pi collapses on the beach. He hears Richard Parker coming a moment before he sees him; Pi turns, looking up as the tiger jumps over the boy, stretching in the air above him and landing in the water ahead of him.

**ADULT PI (V.O.)**

I was so spent I couldn't move. And so Richard Parker went ahead of me.

Richard Parker walks along the beach, his gait clumsy and uncoordinated from so much time spent at sea.

**ADULT PI (V.O.)**

He stretched his legs and walked along the shore.

Richard Parker stops, staring ahead into the forest, his back to the boy. Pi watches the tiger from behind, Richard Parker's ribs gently rising and falling as he smells the jungle air.
ADULT PI (V.O.)
At the edge of the jungle, he
stopped. I was certain he was going
to look back at me, flatten his
ears to his head, growl - that he'd
bring our relationship to an end in
some way. But he just stared ahead
into the jungle.

178 INT. PI'S HOME, DINING ROOM, MONTREAL - SUNSET

On Adult Pi alone:

ADULT PI
And then Richard Parker, my fierce
companion, the terrible one who
kept me alive, disappeared forever
from my life.

181 EXT. THE MEXICAN COAST/THE JUNGLE - DAY

Pi lies on the sand a few yards from the water. A group of
six MEXICAN LOCALS hurry down the beach to him.

ADULT PI
After a few hours, a member of my
own species found me. He left and
returned with a group who carried
me away.

Pi sobs uncontrollably as they carry him to safety.

ADULT PI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I wept like a child, not because I
was overwhelmed at having survived,
although I was. I was weeping
because Richard Parker left me
so... unceremoniously. It broke my
heart.

174 INT. PI'S HOME - DINING ROOM - MONTREAL - NEAR SUNSET

It is near sunset, the light from the windows casting the room
in a golden hue - the same lighting we have just seen as Pi
was leaving the island.
ADULT PI
You know, my father was right.
Richard Parker never saw me as his friend. After all we'd been through, he didn't even look back. But I have to believe that there was more in his eyes than my own reflection staring back at me. I know I felt it - even if I can't prove it. I just wish...
(Beat. He sighs.)
You know, I've left so much behind. My family, the zoo, Anandi, India - I suppose in the end the whole of life becomes an act of letting go. But what always hurts the most is not taking the moment to say goodbye. I was never able to thank my father for all I learned from him, to tell him that without his lessons I would never have survived...
And I know he's a tiger, but I wish I'd said: 'It's over. We've survived. Thank you for saving my life. I love you, Richard Parker. You will always be with me. May God be with you.'

The Writer shakes his head, astonished.

WRITER
I don't know what to say.

ADULT PI
Hard to believe, isn't it?

A pause as the writer decides how to respond.

WRITER
It is a lot to take in, to figure out what it all means.

ADULT PI
If it happened, it happened. Why should it have to mean anything?

WRITER
Well, some of it is pretty incredible.

Pi nods - a half-smile - then rises, crossing to the bookshelf.

ADULT PI
I was the only one who survived the shipwreck, so the Japanese shipping company sent two men to talk to me in the Mexican hospital where I was recovering. I still have a copy of their report.

Pi takes a tattered notebook out of the bookcase.

ADULT PI (CONT'D)
They had insurance claims to settle, and they wanted to find out why the ship sank. They didn't believe me either.

Pi hands the notebook to the Writer. On top, there is a newspaper article with the headline "BOY RESCUED: 227 DAYS IN THE PACIFIC." The Writer unclips the article, revealing the insurance report beneath. We hear Okamoto's first line over the report.

OKAMOTO
Thousands of meerkats? On a floating carnivorous island? And no one has ever seen it?

YOUNG PI
Yes. Just like I told you.

CHIBA
Bananas don't float.

OKAMOTO
(In Japanese:)
Why are you talking about bananas?

CHIBA
You said the orangutan floated to
you on a bundle of bananas. But bananas don't float.

**OKAMOTO**
(In Japanese:)
Are you sure about that?

**YOUNG PI**
Of course they do. Try it for yourself.

---

**OKAMOTO**
In any case, we are not here to talk about bananas or meerkats.

**YOUNG PI**
I've just told you a long story. I'm very tired.

**OKAMOTO**
We're here because a Japanese cargo ship sank in the Pacific.

**YOUNG PI**
Something I never forget. I lost my whole family.

Pause.

**OKAMOTO**
(In Japanese:)
Get him some water.

(In English:)
We don't mean to push you. And you have our deepest sympathies. But we've come a long way. And we're no closer to understanding why the ship sank.

**YOUNG PI**
Because I don't know. I was asleep. Something woke me up. It may have been an explosion; I can't be sure. And then the ship sank. What else do you want from me?

**CHIBA (OFF)**
A story that won't make us look
like fools.

**OKAMOTO**

We need a simpler story for our report. One our company can understand. A story we can all believe.

(Chiba gives Pi a glass of water.)

**YOUNG PI**

So... a story without things you never seen before.

**OKAMOTO**

That's right.

70.

**YOUNG PI**

Without surprises. Without animals or islands.

**OKAMOTO**

Yes. The truth.

B175  INT. PI'S HOME, MONTREAL - DAY

**WRITER**

So what did you do?

**ADULT PI**

I told him another story. Four of us survived...

**YOUNG PI (V.O. - OVERLAPPING)**

Four of us survived...

C175  INT. INFIRMARY, MEXICO, 1978 - DAY

**YOUNG PI**

...The cook and the sailor were already onboard. The cook threw me a lifebuoy and pulled me aboard. Mother held onto some bananas and made it to the lifeboat. The cook, the cook was a disgusting man. He
ate a rat. We had food enough for weeks, but he found the rat in the first few days - and he killed it, and dried it in the sun and ate it. He was such a brute, that man. But he was resourceful. It was his idea to build the raft to catch fish. We would have died in those first few days without him. The sailor was the same man who brought rice with gravy, the Buddhist. We didn't understand much of what he said, only that he was suffering. I can still hear him - the happy Buddhist who only ate rice with gravy. He had broken his leg horribly in the fall. We tried to set it as best we could, but the leg became infected and the cook told us we had to do something or he'd die. The cook said he'd do it, but mother and I had to hold the man down. And I believed him - we needed to do it.

(MORE)

71.

YOUNG PI (CONT'D)

So... I kept saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry", but he just kept looking at me, his eyes so... I'll never understand the point of that man's suffering. We didn't save him, of course. He died. The morning after, the cook caught his first dorado, and I didn't understand what he'd done at first, but Mother did, and I'd never seen her so angry. 'Stop whining and be happy,' he said. "We need more food or we'll die. That was the whole point.' 'What was the point?' Mother asked. "You let that poor boy die in order to get bait? You monster!' The cook got furious. He started towards her with his fists raised, and Mother slapped him hard, right across the face. I was stunned. I thought he was going to kill her right then. But he didn't. The cook didn't stop at bait either, no. The sailor, he
went the same way the rat went -
the cook was a resourceful man. It
was a week later that he... Because
of me. Because I couldn't hold onto
a stupid turtle. It slipped out of
my hands and swam away and the cook
came up and punched me on the side
of the head and my teeth clacked
and I saw stars. I thought he was
going to hit me again, but then
Mother started pounding on him with
her fists and screaming, "MONSTER!
MONSTER!" She yelled at me to go to
the raft - "Nee poda!" I thought
she was coming with me or I'd never
have... I don't know why I didn't
make her go first. I think about
that every day. I jumped over and
turned back just as the knife came
out. There wasn't anything I could
do; I couldn't look away... He
threw her body overboard. Then the
sharks came. I saw what they... I
saw. The next day I killed him. He
didn't even fight back. He knew he
had gone too far, even by his
standards. He'd left the knife out
on the bench. And I did to him what
he did to the sailor. He was such
an evil man, but worse still, he
brought the evil out in me.

(MORE)

72.

YOUNG PI (CONT'D)

I have to live with that. I was
alone in a lifeboat, drifting
across the Pacific Ocean. And I
survived.

176  INT. PI'S HOME - DINING ROOM - MONTREAL - SUNSET  176

ADULT PI

After that, no more questions. The
investigators didn't seem to like
the story, exactly - but they
thanked me, they wished me well,
and they left.
Pause. The Writer speaks his thoughts aloud as the realization strikes.

**WRITER**
So... the stories... Both the zebra and the sailor broke their leg. And the hyena killed the zebra and the orangutan. So... the hyena is the cook. And the sailor is the zebra, mother is the orangutan... and you're... the tiger.

**ADULT PI**
Can I ask you something?

**WRITER**
Of course.

**ADULT PI**
I've told you two stories about what happened out on the ocean. Neither explains what caused the sinking of the ship, and no one can prove which story is true and which is not. In both stories, the ship sinks, my family dies, and I suffer.

**WRITER**
True.

**ADULT PI**
So which story do you prefer?

**WRITER**
The story with the tiger. That's the better story.

73.

**ADULT PI**
(Heartfelt:)
Thank you. And so it goes with God.

**WRITER**
(Pause. He looks up.)
Mamaji was right. It is an amazing story. Will you really let me write
it?

**ADULT PI**
Of course. Isn't that why Mamaji
sent you here, after all?

They hear a car pulling into the alleyway alongside the
house.

**ADULT PI (CONT'D)**
My wife is here. Would you like to
stay for dinner? She's an
incredible cook.

**WRITER**
I didn't know you had a wife.

**ADULT PI**
And a cat, and two children.

**WRITER**
So your story does have a happy
ending.

**ADULT PI**
Well, that's up to you. The story's
yours now.

The Writer smiles. Outside, car doors slam; we hear voices as
Pi's wife and children cross around to the front. Pi rises
and moves to the door. The Writer glances one final time at
the report. He flips the page and hesitates, reading the last
few lines aloud.

**WRITER**
(Reading:)
"Mr. Patel's is an astounding story
of courage and endurance
unparalleled in the history of
shipwrecks. Very few castaways can
claim to have survived so long at
sea, and none in the company of...
(He looks up at Pi)
...an adult Bengal tiger."
Religion in Crisis:
Exploring Muslim Refugee Coping Strategies

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Pepperdine University
Religion in Crisis:
Exploring Muslim Refugee Coping Strategies

Introduction

The UN refugee agency finds that there are around 26 million refugees spread throughout the world today. Furthermore, 67% of forcibly displaced individuals are coming from five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (Refugee Statistics, n.d.). Syria and Afghanistan are both predominantly Muslim countries, and the majority of refugees coming from Myanmar are Rohingya Muslims fleeing genocide. This means that a significant portion of today’s refugee population is either practicing or ethnically Muslim. The refugee experience provokes significant stress and resource loss, and refugees must utilize a range of coping strategies in order to regain their mental and emotional well-being. A crucial avenue through which one develops coping tactics is through their religious beliefs or other ideological/value systems (Moons et al., 2019). Religion is a resource that informs both one’s general perspective on life and the development of coping strategies, and through studying an individual religion we can begin to describe and understand the coping strategies of its adherents. Muslims draw upon a wide variety of religious coping resources provided by the Qur’an and other Islamic teachings and practices, and Muslim refugees use these this unique arsenal of techniques to survive and thrive in their host countries. This is important because these unique religious coping strategies may reveal broader religious and cultural truths which, when exposed, can guide more effective communication between host country support programs and their refugees. The research proposal aims to explore and describe the unique coping strategies that individuals develop and use throughout the Muslim refugee experience, in the interest of facilitating better relations between refugees and their host countries.
Refugee Programs and Religious Coping

Several recent studies over refugee programs cite a need for more culturally-informed methods and employees in order to adequately connect with and administer to refugees. A United States Domestic Violence support program finds that cultural nuances in the perception of domestic violence victim’s needs led to a diminished ability to communicate with and assist refugee women (Wachter et al., 2019). A study on a program addressing the mental health needs of refugee youth suggests that intervention strategies and tools developed in Western cultures may be entirely culturally inappropriate for use with refugee youth (Forrest-Bank et al., 2019). Overall, research is showing the importance of an enhanced understanding of the cultural assumptions that refugees hold when coping with a variety of stressors. Key informants of one another, religion and culture are intertwined. In research, religion has been established as a fundamental infrastructure that manifests through cultural expression (Udoh, et al., 2020). It has also been observed that religion both determines and is determined by culture, articulating a need for religious understanding in order to fully grasp culture (Beyers, 2017). Thus, to provide this much-needed cultural reformation within refugee programs, it is important to study how religion, as a concept tangential to culture, informs the refugee experience and coping strategies.

Interestingly, previous research has shown that Islam’s influence on a Muslim’s coping strategies may be even stronger than that of other faiths on their adherents (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020; Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2012), and yet relatively little research has been done on the unique aspects of Muslim religious coping strategies. Even less has been done on the religious coping strategies of Muslim refugees. The present study aims to utilize the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) as a backdrop from which to explore and describe the unique origins
and expressions of religious coping strategies, both positive and negative, that individuals develop and use throughout the Muslim refugee experience, in the interest of facilitating better relations between refugees and the programs that support them.

**Conservation of Resources Theory**

**Resources, Personal Traits, and Religious Beliefs**

COR is a stress model that focuses on how individuals utilize their existing resources to react to the stress of resource loss and gain. It begins with the basic idea that individuals seek to obtain, retain, foster, and protect the things that they have and are important to them. It then expands into a series of four principles and three corollaries connected with those principles. The four main principles assert that resource loss is more impactful than resource gain, resources must be invested in order to protect against, recover from, and reverse resource loss, resource gain is more impactful in the context of resource loss, and individuals enter a defensive and often aggressive state when their resources are exhausted. (Hobfoll et. al, 2018). In this model, stress is defined as a reaction to an environment in which there is a threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss of resources, or a lack of resource gain following a period of investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1989).

COR theory defines resources as items that are valued and can be invested in hopes of gaining further resources. The four types of resources include 1) objects, such as homes or other assets; 2) personal traits and characteristics either physical or psychological, such as optimism or hope; 3) conditions, such as marriage; and 4) energies, such as money or time. This study focuses on the second category, personal traits. Personal traits are considered resources to the extent that they generally aid in providing support to alleviate stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Religious beliefs are a form of personal trait that can be employed to gain resources. For example, trust in
God during a crisis may build previously lost resources such as optimism or hope. According to the inclusion of personal traits as resources, then, religious beliefs are considered resources that can be invested to pursue resource gain. Thus, as personal traits with potential for investment towards resource gains, religious beliefs will be studied as a form of resource subject to the principles of COR theory as outlined below.

**Resource Investment Principle**

COR Theory presents a series of principles aimed at describing the stress processes surrounding resource loss and gain. This analysis will focus on the Resource Investment Principle, which states that resource loss can be remedied through resource investment. This can be direct, such as investing cash to purchase a new home after a fire, or indirect, such as increasing language skills to regain communicative ability in a new country (Hobfoll et. al, 2018). Religious beliefs as a resource will be mobilized by those experiencing resource loss (in the form of a loss of homeland, loss of communication capabilities, loss of family members, and loss of identity among various other forms of loss experienced by refugees) in an attempt to stimulate resource gain.

**Trauma, Loss and the Primacy of Loss Principle**

The Primacy of Loss Principle of COR theory argues that resource loss is much more salient than resource gain (Hobfoll et. al, 2018). Furthermore, the theory explains that resource loss tends to result in resource spirals. Resource spirals refer to the process in which those who have lost significant resources continue to sustain further loss of resources with increasing impact and momentum. These resource spirals are often prompted by some sort of loss or traumatic event, that then sets off a reaction of increasingly resource-draining events (Hobfoll,
1998). Depending on their individual conditions, refugees often experience increased amounts of trauma, which can result in this spiraling loss of resources.

The prevalence of trauma within refugees of all ethnic and religious backgrounds is well documented. A recent study on the comparative prevalence of different types of trauma among Yazidi, Muslim, and Christian refugees finds that 100% of the 150 refugees interviewed sustained exposure to at least one traumatic event, (with or without developing PTSD) (Richa et al., 2020), and another study on Kosovar refugees finds that upwards of 90% of those surveyed had experienced at least 10 traumatic events (Ai et al., 2002). The high percentage of refugees experiencing multiple traumatic events may reflect resource spirals spurred by an initial loss of resources. Further perpetuating the resource spiral, an increased prevalence of traumatic events in the lives of refugees can translate into increased rates of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A study of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon shows that around 17-24% of refugees included in the study met the criteria for PTSD, while a study of refugees in Africa sees a higher level of PTSD at an approximate 79% of refugees receiving a probable diagnosis (Barbieri et al., 2019; Valliéres et al., 2019). Additionally, loss can happen through negative communicative experiences in host countries. Racism, scapegoating, and language barriers are significant causes for “personal trait” resource loss (Renner et al., 2020). According to the Resource Investment Principle explored in the previous paragraph, COR argues that in order to recover from these spiralling losses, individuals will engage their remaining resources, including religious beliefs, in order to recover.

**Pursuit of New Resources**

According to COR, when a loss of resources occurs, individuals will use their remaining resources to offset this loss. It states that individuals will try to invest their resources either to
replace the resources lost, or to symbolically replace them if literal replacement is not possible. However, the investment of these resources can create additional stress if the individual is unable to gain more benefits than expenditures in the use of these resources (Hobfoll, 1989). In the refugee context, religious faith is a resource that can be used to try to offset loss. The study of gains and expenditures in the use of religious coping, therefore, can give us important insight into how adherence to an individual religion (such as Islam) lends itself to both effective and ineffective strategies for resource investment with the goal of resource gain. COR asserts that individuals who have more resources are likely to continue to gain more when compared with others who have less resources (Hobfoll, 2018). Therefore, refugees who utilize their religious beliefs in a way that increases their "personal traits" category of resources will regain resources such as satisfaction with life or optimism more quickly. For this reason, it is important to study how systematic expressions of religion present a variety of coping strategies. Whether and to what degree these strategies lead to resource gain can be important indicators both for refugees themselves and for those organizing community outreach and social programs geared towards refugees.

Case Study: Syrian Refugees

An on-going civil war within Syria has led to the displacement of millions of Syrian citizens both internally and externally. Most Syrian refugees are now living in Syria’s neighboring countries, specifically Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt (UNHCR, 2020). Syrian refugees continue to constitute one of the largest groups of displaced people worldwide. In 2016, six of every ten Syrians had been forcibly displaced from their homes, and many still remain away from their native country and homes today (UNHCR, 2020). This initial loss, manifesting in the form of a loss of home and homeland, can quickly spiral into further loss
within refugee host countries. Outside of their home countries, refugees are often marginalized and dehumanized throughout their communications with host communities, leading to sustained resource loss in the form of personal traits such as identity or communicative ability. Syrians, settling across many different countries, have experienced this loss in a variety of ways depending on their location. A study of Syrians living in Lebanon finds that many individuals routinely deal with pervasive public stigma as many Jordanians believe Syrians to be taking jobs from the native community. To deal with this, many refugees engage in forms of identity-suppression such as attempting to change their accents or other characteristics (Thorliefsson, 2014). Mirroring the findings of this study, Syrian refugees living in Germany also describe experiencing racist comments combined with a loss of ability to find work (Renner et al., 2020). Additionally, a 2018 study of Syrian refugees living in Toronto, Canada finds that the main concerns of Syrian refugees living in Canada include a lack of English skills, high cost of housing, difficulties continuing education, and barriers to finding employment. Thus, Syrian refugees are documented to be experiencing resource loss through loss of identity, communicative ability, housing, educational opportunity, employment, and income (list not exhaustive). According to COR theory, individuals will cope with this loss by deploying their remaining resources. Syrian refugees largely identify the Islamic faith as being the primary way with which they cope against this resource loss, citing acceptance, community, and wise money management as examples of resources they gain by relying on their Muslim faith. (Qasim & Hynie, 2018). These findings regarding the Syrian refugee experience suggest that refugees need to be prepared to deal with resource loss beyond that which occurs before and during the migration process. They must additionally be prepared to deal with a loss of personal trait resources, such as identity or confidence in the face of racist attitudes and language barriers.
within their new countries of residence. Issues such as racism and scapegoating for economic problems may be common themes regardless of host country location, and a component of resource spirals within the refugee experience. Finally, Islam provides a variety of both positive and negative coping strategies available for those dealing with these challenges.

**Religious Coping Strategies**

**Definition**

Religious belief systems have been established in the previous sections as resources that can be utilized to spur resource gain. Religious coping, therefore, is the process of engaging those resources in pursuit of gains. More specifically, religious-spiritual coping is defined by Ai et al. (2003) as a “process that people engage in to attain significance in stressful circumstances”. An alternative definition is “ways of understanding and dealing with negative life events that are related to the sacred” (Pargament & Raiya, as cited via Qasim & Hynie, 2018, p.14) An indicator of the employment of this process, research has shown that religion/spirituality is an important social determinant of health (Moons et. al, 2019). At the core of this statement is the manifestation of versatile coping strategies through a religious lens. Religious coping techniques can present themselves in a variety of ways depending on religion, demographics, and other factors. Examples of religious-spiritual coping strategies among female Muslim refugees include trusting Allah to solve problems, relying on prayer and other religious practices, and an underlying fear of persecution that limits external religious practice (Shaw et al., 2019).

Similarly, Taufik and Ibrahim (2020) describe sense of control, building self-esteem, and giving meaning to disaster impact as key coping themes arising from their study on Muslim refugees coping strategies. The various methods of engaging religious beliefs as coping strategies can be described as either positive or negative, which will be discussed further in the following sections.
Positive religious coping refers to religious coping strategies that demonstrate a secure relationship with God, and a belief in a higher meaning to cope with a stressful incident (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). Positive religious coping strategies are more likely to lead to resource gain than negative religious coping strategies. Thus, positive coping strategies are generally considered to be efficient methods to employ when faced with resource loss, due to the high likelihood of resource gain. Supporting this, research generally shows a link between positive religious coping and increased well-being. In a multinational study on Muslim religious coping, Abu-Raiya et al. (2020) find that positive religious coping strategies correlate with a higher satisfaction with life. A separate study by Abu-Raiya et al. (2019) comes to the same conclusion. Furthermore, they note that post-traumatic growth and positive spiritual growth show a high correlation with positive religious coping strategies as well. A study by Ai et al. (2003) on Muslim refugee religious coping strategies reveals that optimism levels are predicted directly by positive religious-spiritual coping, and that optimism levels have a positive association with hope. Remembering that satisfaction with life, religious beliefs, optimism, and hope can be considered resources through COR theory’s inclusion of “personal traits” as such, these studies provide sufficient evidence that positive religious coping can help to stimulate resource gain. Diving into which specific techniques can be considered positive, Taufik & Ibrahim (2020) find that Muslim refugees who maintained a stronger relationship with Allah gave more positive meaning to disaster and loss within the context of a large 7.7 earthquake in Central Sulawesi. The presence of a strong and secure relationship in combination with the bestowal of positive meaning to the destructive earthquake demonstrates one way in which positive Muslim religious coping is successfully utilized to initiate resource gain. Positive religious coping can also include
those strategies that encourage other positive coping methods. Çetin (2019) found that Muslim religious participation had a positive connection with social inclusion and well-being, suggesting that commonplace Muslim practices such as regularly attending a Mosque lead to a smoother adaptation process for refugees in new host countries. These studies provide strong evidence that positive religious coping strategies within the Muslim faith enhance well-being and resource gain for Muslim refugees across many contexts.

**Negative Religious Coping**

In contrast with the positive religious coping strategies found in the paragraph above, negative religious coping strategies are those which promote an “ominous” view of the world, and in which the religious person struggles to find and preserve significance in life (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). In the context of COR theory, these techniques represent a mobilization of religious beliefs resources that ultimately fails to initiate resource gain, at times even resulting in further loss. Exploring common forms of negative religious coping, then, may help refugee support programs to identify factors in resource loss spirals within refugee communities. An example of negative coping could include the belief that one’s sufferings are a form of punishment. While research shows that positive religious coping tends to preserve well-being in times of need, it shows that negative religious coping can have negative effects on one’s physical and mental health. In a study on the religious coping strategies employed by Jews and Muslims in Israel, Abu-Raiya et al. (2020) found that in both groups, negative religious coping is associated with a greater likelihood for depression symptoms and a lower satisfaction in life. The connection between negative religious coping and diminished mental health in Muslim communities is echoed in a study by Ai et al. (2003) which shows a link between negative religious coping and a loss of hope. Within the healthcare setting, Moons et al. (2010) find that religious congenital
heart disease patients tend to have higher satisfaction with life, but lower levels of physical/mental health and more anxiety than their nonreligious counterparts. The causality of this relationship is undetermined, but the authors hypothesize that perhaps those with poorer health are more likely to seek refuge in religion than those with satisfactory health. It is possible that negative religious coping strategies also play a role in the large number of unhealthy religious patients. Identifying unique manifestations of negative coping strategies stemming from religious belief is equally important as identifying positive strategies, because it helps to show which methods are ineffective for provoking resource gain.

**Muslim Basis for Coping Techniques**

**Qur’an Memorization, Recitation, and Listening**

The unique coping experience inherent to practicers of Islam stems from the religion’s unique cultural background, practices, and sources of teaching. One unique aspect of the Muslim faith in regard to religious coping may include beliefs surrounding the causes of events which result in loss or trauma. According to Taghiabad et al. (2015), the Qur’an suggests that anxiety stems from religious missteps including negligence to the remembrance of Allah, obedience to Satan, lust, a lack of belief in Allah, and impurity due to sin. Reference verses for this assertion include Fatih verses 4 and 26, and Tawbah verse 26. Understanding whether a refugee sees their circumstances as random chance or a punishment for their or others’ mistakes provides important insights into categorizing their outlook as encouraging positive or negative religious coping techniques. While it will certainly vary by individual, these particular verses seem to lay the groundwork for possible negative coping strategies, as refugees may begin to believe that they are at fault for what has happened to them, resulting in loss of confidence or identity. In addition to the unique perspective nurtured by the Qur’an, traditional memorization and recitation of the
Muslim Holy Book has been shown to serve as a catalyst for religious coping and resource gain. A 2015 study shows that memorizers of the Qur’an have lower levels of anxiety, sleeplessness, and depression, and higher levels of physical health and social functioning than non-memorizers (Taghiabad et al., 2015). Additionally, a systematic literature review conducted in 2019 shows that listening to recitations of the Qur’an leads to improved clinical outcomes in many studies of ICU patients, possibly due to the melodic voice in which recitations are typically given. Music therapy is largely proven to be effective, and the “musical” qualities of Qur’anic recitations may mimic music therapy’s stress-reducing properties (Mat-Nor et al., 2019). Interestingly, the Brethren of Purity, a controversial secret society of Muslim philosophers in the 8th or 10th century, wrote extensively on the therapeutic benefit of music therapy and Qur’an recitation. Although this teaching would not be considered mainstream Islam, it serves to show that this practice as a positive coping strategy been acknowledged as effective for quite some time (El-Bizri & Wright, 2010). The unique memorization, recitation, and listening experiences associated with the Qur’an suggest that this deeply traditional Muslim practice provides distinct and effective positive religious coping resources that may be exclusive to faith practices associated with Muslim the Holy Book.

**Salah Prayer & Ablution**

Salah is the second pillar of the Muslim faith, and involves prayer undertaken at five prescribed times throughout the day. Before praying or engaging in any other act of worship, one must first perform physical cleansing and spiritual preparation. This practice, roughly translated as “ablution”, helps the individual to put away their stress to focus on the act of submission to Allah (Ahmed Sayeed & Prakash, 2013). The act of ablution within itself can be used as a coping mechanism, allowing the individual to cleanse away stress to focus instead upon his or her
relationship with Allah (Abdel-Khalek, 2011; Ahmed Sayeed & Prakash, 2013). After this process has occurred, one can proceed with prayer or any other act of worship. Salah prayer is distinct from prayer practices employed by other major religions, as other prayer traditions do not typically specify a necessary amount or time for prayer. Salah, additionally, is not only a time of prayer but is an act of submission to Allah which includes a specified physical expression and mindfulness (Ahmed Sayeed & Prakash, 2013). Some integral mental components of mindful Salah prayer include the individual imagining that Allah is in front of him, and having thoughts of talking with Him. Studies have found that the practice of mindful Salah prayer focused on visualizing and speaking with Allah leads to a higher level of mental health than those who do not practice mindful Salah prayer (Ijaz et al., 2013). Physically, full expression of Salah prayer may include the use of most of the muscles and joints in the body as the practitioner completes the physical portion of the prayer. During this process, the head is at one point placed lower than the heart, leading to a blood rush that can increase cognitive functions such as memory and concentration (Sayeed & Prakash, 2013). Salah prayer and the practice of ablution before acts of worship are unique from prayer practices of the other major faiths, and combined with the unique teachings and reading/listening practices connected with the Qur’an, provide a reasonable basis for a hypothesis that Muslim religious practices lead to the development of a distinct stress-coping experience.

Rationale

Muslim refugees are a strikingly large group. Large percentages of refugees worldwide come from areas such as the Central African Republic, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and South Sudan, many of whom’s population base is largely Muslim (Refugee Statistics, n.d.). Additionally, many of these groups are experiencing large amounts of resource loss through loss of homes, income,
and family members, and loss of identity due to racism and marginalization within their host countries. Refugees may utilize their religious beliefs to cope with the high frequency of trauma and stress associated with the refugee experience. Religious resource investment is an important vehicle through which many Muslim refugees are able to obtain resources such as mental health improvements, optimism, and positive well-being. That said, religious coping comes in both positive and negative varieties. Currently, refugee support programs largely operate based on an assumption that refugees will deal with stress in similar ways to citizens of their host countries, and the ineffectiveness of this strategy has led to a call for cultural reform in a variety of programs. By exploring the lived experiences of Muslim culture and the practices that inform Muslim coping strategies, researchers can gain a better idea of the challenges Muslim refugees will face and the ways in which they will deal with these challenges when adapting to their home cultures. This is valuable information for public policy makers and refugee outreach programs seeking to incorporate such insights into more effective connections with those they seek to support. The positive strategies can be distinguished from the negative ones using COR theory, with positive strategies including those which lead to the gain of new resources or preservation of current resources, while negative strategies include those which lead to a further loss of resources. This information is valuable in its ability to give policy-makers, non-profits, and other program leaders a fuller view of the needs and strengths of Muslim refugees. The author seeks to describe and analyze the religious coping strategies of Muslim refugees through an interpretive study in order to gather information that can be used to improve refugee outreach programs through a reformed understanding of refugee coping.
Methodology

Interpretive Approach

I will be conducting my research using the interpretive approach, and this research proposal highlights the research perspective and methodology I plan to use for this investigation. The interpretive approach aims to gather a comprehensive description of the intersubjective reality of a particular cultural community’s lived experience. It focuses on and seeks to define the distinctive methods of communication, interaction, and valuation within a large national culture. Rather than encouraging comparison with other cultural groups, this approach highlights the nuances of its subject group by garnering a holistic view of what it is like to be an insider within the given community. The ultimate goal of this approach is to gain a sense of what it feels like to be an insider existing and interacting within the target culture. Rather than focusing on quantitative data, the interpretive approach values long descriptions, stories, deep meanings, and the exposure of cultural subtleties as they relate to the experience of the whole. This approach operates excellently in conjunction with qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups, case studies, and semi-structured interviews. These options tend to generate and highlight the integrated experiences and feelings sought out by the interpretive approach.

Data Collection

In order to gather descriptions and stories regarding the religious coping strategies of Muslim refugees, a series of semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Semi-structured interviews typically begin with open-ended questions which can be followed up with clarifying questions to further explore important topics or confirm understanding. Advantages of this method of data collection include that conversation can feel more natural, and that it is easier to gain fuller descriptions and stories by tailoring follow-up questions to the individual participants.
These interviews will be conducted with Muslim refugees recruited for the study through the Columbus Children’s Hospital Global Patient Services Department. Global Patient Services participates in a variety of community outreach programs in order to communicate and bond with local immigrants and refugees in the area so that they will feel comfortable using the local healthcare systems, and because of this, the Global Patient Services Department is in contact with many members of the target community. Additionally, many patients at the hospital travel there from different areas inside and outside of the country, so participants from a variety of areas can be recruited to participate in the study. The interviews will be conducted in the participants’ native languages in order to minimize misunderstandings and encourage the fullest descriptions possible.

Following the interviews, the author will analyze the interview transcripts to identify the major themes present throughout the discourse. Research questions the author aims to explore using these major themes include the following:

RQ1: What are the lived and existential experiences of Muslim refugees?

RQ2: What are the unique coping strategies that Muslim refugees utilize to offset resource loss?

RQ3: How are religious coping strategies helpful (or unhelpful) for coping with life stressors and negotiating identity and quality of life among Muslim refugees?

RQ4: How can communication between host country leaders and Muslim refugees be improved using a fuller understanding of the Muslim refugee perspective?

Analysis will seek to emphasize a fuller view of the Muslim refugee experience and highlight the unique aspects of Islam that lead to the coping strategies present within the participants.
Conclusion

To conclude, while studies surrounding the field of Muslim refugee religious coping can be pieced together for a brief description of the workings of Islam in connection with the refugee condition, at present there has been little research into generating a deep understanding of how Islam is used as a resource to deal with stressors in the refugee context. This study will shed light on the specific ways that Islam uniquely equips its adherents with religious coping strategies that can be used to pursue resource gain in any instance of stress. The significance of this research lies in its ability to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a refugee psyche informed by Islam as an ideological background, and therefore could be monumental in not only understanding the lived experiences of this expansive demographic, but also in identifying settings and programs in which host countries can invest to facilitate better lives for Muslim refugees worldwide.
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Appendix

Interview Guide

(Questions Adapted from study by Counted, 2019)

1. Tell me about yourself.

Prompts:
(a) Past experiences
(b) Family background/history of relationship with parents
(c) Religious background/self-identified level of religiosity
(d) Has being in (host country) affected your relationships?
(e) How?

2. Tell me about your experience living in (host country) as a (origin country) refugee.

Prompts:
(a) Why?
(b) Past experiences
(c) Perceptions
(d) Did [X] affect that decision?
(e) How?

3. Tell me about the difficulties you face as a refugee living in (host country)

Prompts:
(a) How do you cope with these difficulties/what is your coping mechanism?
(b) Why?
(c) Past experiences
(d) Did [X] affect that decision?
(e) How?
4. Does your relationship with Allah help you deal with the challenges you face in (host country)?

Prompts:

(a) If yes, how?

(b) If no, why?

(c) Give examples

(d) How?

5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me before we end the interview?

Prompts:

(a) Positive or negative experiences

(b) Emotions or feeling
Intercultural Conflict Analysis:
Lessons from ‘The Big Sick’

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Intercultural Conflict Analysis:
Lessons from The Big Sick

Throughout my study of intercultural communication, I’ve been constantly reminded that globalization has massively increased the complexity of our world. Access to technology has aided international travel, business, and urbanization. But perhaps one of the most significant changes we’ve experienced due to globalization is intercultural integration. Rising immigration has altered our professional, familial, and romantic relationships, making intercultural communication, and the potential for conflict, the new norm. This reality is put on full display in the critically acclaimed 2017 comedy-drama film, The Big Sick, directed by Michael Showalter. Written by Emily Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani, it tells a semi-autobiographical story of Gordon and Nanjiani’s romance and the intercultural conflict they and their families had to cope with as a result. Kumail Nanjiani plays a dramatized version of himself as an Uber driver, aspiring comedian, and the son of devoutly Muslim Pakistani immigrants. It also stars Zoe Kazan as a fictional version of Nanjiani’s wife Emily, Holly Hunter as Emily’s mother Beth, Ray Romano as Emily’s father Terry, Zenobia Shroff as Kumail’s mother Sharmeen, and Anupam Kher as Kumail’s father Azmat.

The main characters in the film essentially represent two distinct cultures. First, Emily and her parents seem to represent the dominant white American culture. Emily is presumably Beth and Terry’s only child, she attends graduate school far from her parents, and there is no mention of any religious affiliation among them. Their family identity is individualistic and
egalitarian, while their communication style tends to be candid and practical. I felt familiar with these characters’ perspectives while watching the film because I share many similar identity features with them. However, Kumail and his family represent an entirely different culture, as Pakistani immigrants with deep ties to the Islamic faith. Their identity is collectivistic and hierarchical, while their communication tends to be somewhat indirect and formal. Kumail visits his brother, sister-in-law, and parents quite often, and they all retain a strong sense of personal obligation to one another. Respect for tradition is a crucial part of their cultural dynamic, exemplified in their commitment to arranged marriage. They also experience a certain level of marginalization as immigrants and members of minority ethnic and religious identities in the United States. I was not familiar with Pakistani culture prior to watching *The Big Sick*, so these characters’ stories presented an opportunity to study communication from a fresh perspective. But it was the many conflicts depicted in the film that offered me an entirely new lens through which to consider the impact of culture on personal connection.

The first conflict occurs between Kumail and Emily, bringing their budding relationship to a screeching halt. To give context, out of obligation to his parents, Kumail endures an endless stream of arranged meetings, almost every time he visits his family, between him and suitable Pakistani bachelorettes. He keeps a “file” of headshots and descriptions that these women give him, and, after five months of dating, Emily discovers this in his apartment. At this point, Kumail admits that he hasn’t told his parents about their relationship, but Emily feels most betrayed by his decision to conceal this “file” from her. Kumail argues, “I’m fighting a 1,400-year-old culture! […] You know what we call arranged marriage in Pakistan? Marriage,” (*Big Sick* 32:40). He even shares that his cousin was kicked out of the family for pursuing a “love marriage.” This demonstrates how cultural differences in perceived responsibility toward
one’s family can affect the way people prioritize their commitments, potentially leading to disagreement. Ultimately, Emily can’t accept Kumail’s explanation, and the pair don’t get the chance to reconcile before their lives radically change.

The event that completely alters the course of the film occurs when Emily contracts a mysterious illness, and doctors must place her in a medically-induced coma. This puts Kumail and Emily’s parents directly into conflict. Beth and Terry are aware of Kumail and Emily’s history and start out openly hostile in their communication. When Kumail offers to stay and wait with them at the hospital, Beth responds: “You don’t have to worry about being committed to anything. You didn’t want to when she was awake. There’s no need to when she’s unconscious,” (Big Sick 49:30). And when the parents try to converse with Kumail, Terry starts by awkwardly asking him about his “stance” on 9/11. Kumail sarcastically responds, “It’s a tragedy. We lost 19 of our best guys,” (Big Sick 52:00). Beth and Terry’s initial attitude highlights their lack of cultural competency, treating Kumail as a sort of “other” instead of striving to meaningfully connect with him. In the midst of this tense environment with one set of parents, Kumail continues to face pressure from another.

While the Nanjiani family actively embraces their Pakistani identity, Kumail himself struggles to accept many of the implicit aspects of his culture. This is the third central conflict in The Big Sick. Unlike his parents, Kumail has adopted many aspects of the dominant culture’s worldview and approach to communication. As I mentioned, Kumail spends most of the film hiding his relationship with Emily, and her subsequent illness, from his parents. Eventually, after he misses an “appointment” with a prospective bachelorette, Kumail’s parents confront him about his evasive behavior, and he comes clean. They angrily remind him of all they sacrificed and that they’ve only asked for him to “be a good Muslim and marry a good Pakistani girl!” (Big
Sick 1:24:00). Kumail responds “Why did you bring me here if you wanted to not have an American life? [...] You don’t care what I think. You just want me to follow the rules. But the rules don’t make sense to me,” (Big Sick 1:24:30). He admits that he has doubts about his faith and can’t see himself going through with an arranged marriage. To this, his mother coldly replies, “You are not my son,” and his father says “You think the American dream is just about doing what you want and not thinking about other people? You’re wrong!” (Big Sick 1:25:40). To me, this scene captures many of the nuances of generational conflict that can occur within immigrant families, illustrating the clash between individualistic and collectivistic worldviews.

One interesting conflict that seems to be occurring beneath the surface is Kumail’s inability to perfectly align with either the dominant U.S. culture or his family’s Pakistani culture. For example, while performing a stand-up routine, Kumail gets heckled by an audience member ignorantly yelling “Go back to ISIS!” (Big Sick 1:00:30). This demonstrates that, regardless of Kumail’s ever-changing perception of himself, people will always make prejudiced assumptions about him based on his physical appearance. In another scene, after Emily’s parents begin opening up to Kumail, Terry frankly discusses how much he loves his wife and daughter and the shame he felt after once cheating on Beth. Kumail’s unwillingness to engage with this blunt conversation shows, in my opinion, his struggle to distance himself from a cultural upbringing that taught him to communicate more reservedly. So, does this story offer any kind of solution to intercultural conflict?

Perhaps my favorite part of The Big Sick is the clear message throughout the film that humor is often the most impactful way to bridge cultural divides. Kumail and Emily’s parents find common ground through their senses of humor. And, when Emily recovers, she and Kumail joke with one another as they try to reconcile. In another notable scene late in the film, Kumail
barges in on his family unexpectedly, though they ignore him. Because of their silent treatment, he presents written cue cards for them with comedic phrases like “You’re so much more handsome than your brother,” “Always with the comedy,” and one heartfelt message “It’s interesting how you can’t really kick someone out of your family because they’ll always be your family,” (Big Sick 1:45:30). And this tactic eventually seems to work. Near the end of the film, as Kumail prepares to move to New York City, his parents finally stop by to see him. The conversation is brief, and his father concludes with “It was nice to have you as a son. Goodbye forever,” then adds, “When you reach New York just text us and tell us that you’ve reached safely, okay?” (Big Sick 1:54:30). Watching The Big Sick taught me a lot about the complexity of intercultural communication, especially in the context of personal relationships. It’s difficult to accept that seemingly insurmountable differences can arise even with the people that we’re closest to. But navigating intercultural conflict is possible if we can tolerate a bit of ambiguity, elevated emotions, and occasional contradictions. So it’s our task to wade into those murky waters with empathy for ourselves and others, making space to laugh along the way.
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Let Social Justice Roll Down Like Waves:  
A Rhetorical Analysis of a Christian University’s Response to the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Let Social Justice Roll Down Like Waves: 
A Rhetorical Analysis of a Christian University's Response 
to the Black Lives Matter Movement

Introduction

From late May through July of 2020, the United States experienced a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, which was originally started in early 2012. The Black Lives Matter movement was founded out of a call for social justice and response to cases of police brutality against people of color, particularly Black Americans. The rhetorical artifact that I will be examining is Pepperdine University’s response to the Black Lives Matter movement as well as the general civil unrest that occurred across the country during this time, motivated by heightening racial tensions and a nationwide demand for justice. I will be particularly examining the University’s method of email communication in expressing to students the University’s stance and allyship during this incredibly important time to identify several patterns in the rhetorical artifact. Pepperdine University used repetition and sequencing, prophetic voice, and synecdochical gaze to communicate to their students that their first priority in light of the events was to uphold their Christian mission and act according to the Biblical values, and that their actions moving forward as well as their value of their students is derived from those Christian values.

Descriptive Analysis of the Artifact

The first digital communication from University administration that explicitly addressed the tragic death of George Floyd, a victim of police brutality, was posted in the form of an official statement from President Jim Gash on May 30, 2020. This statement was posted 5 days after the tragic incident, which took place on May 25, 2020. One of the most notable aspects of this statement was the distinct lack of language that explicitly stated “Black Lives Matter” in any way. Gash opened up the statement expressing his own emotions about the situation, which
included “anger, sadness, and disgust”, and expressed Pepperdine’s call to be a community that spreads love, justice, and human rights (Gash, 2020). The tone of the statement was very much prioritizing remaining in alignment with the University statement of purpose and mission, referencing Christianity and Jesus several times. Many students felt this statement was not explicit enough in condemning police brutality and the structures in place that allowed this tragedy to take place, for fear of alienating students, parents or donors who may feel differently.

The next method of communication came on June 1, two days after President Gash’s statement was released. This came in the form of an email, from Connie Horton, Vice President for Student Affairs. The most notable aspect of this email is that immediately, Horton stated explicitly that Black lives matter (Horton, 2020). This communication felt drastically different from Gash’s initial communication because of the way that Horton’s focus was on how the student body was processing the events occurring across the country and how she could be of better support to them. She was also very intentional in clearly stating that she was intent on providing support for students of color who might be facing hardships, as well as including University resources in the email for ways that students could receive counseling or other forms of assistance. The tone of Horton’s email felt explicitly outward focused, with additional care given to students and members of the Black community, rather than Gash’s statement which felt like an attempt to “save face” for the University and reestablish a pre-existing public appearance and image.

On the same day, June 1, Dean Feltner sent another email communication to students regarding the events that attempted to patch the two communications from Gash and Horton together. In his statement, he affirmed both support for the Black community and Black students at Pepperdine,
while also reiterating Pepperdine’s values and commitment to the Christian mission (Feltner, 2020). He did explicitly address Black students in his email, but was also intentional in opening and drawing back to the Christian mission, sharing a Bible verse to open the email.

Noticeable patterns in all of the communications from the University are use of non-alienating or overly strong language. All of the statements made returned to the University mission statement, which is for the spreading of love, justice and truth in alignment with Christ’s message. Another pattern is that all of the University’s communication affirmed agreement with Gash’s initial statement, in an attempt to show solidarity and agreement between all of administration. One of the strategies used most clearly was repetition in order to reinforce the values expressed in Gash’s statement. Sequencing was also used strategically for administration to speak after the initial statement and bolster it and show support, while also showing additional support for the Black community. Lastly, omission was used in the way that the perpetrator of the tragic violence himself, police officer Derek Chauvin, was never stated by name explicitly, and therefore the University never had to take a hard stance on the role he played in the situation.

**Literature Review**

The first piece of literature that I will be using to analyze Pepperdine’s reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement is “The ‘Integrative’ Rhetoric of Martin Luther King by Mark Vail. In this article, Vail explores Dr. King’s integrative rhetoric style through the methods of voice merging, dynamic spectacle, and prophetic voice.
Voice merging is defined as a practice where African American preachers “create their own identities not through original language but through identifying themselves with a hallowed tradition… and borrow homiletic material from many sources, including the sermons of their predecessors and peers” (Vail, 2006). Dr. King very strongly uses Biblical rhetorical devices in order to capture the hearts of his audience. This method also utilizes pathos, because people often feel an emotional response to religious calls. Some examples of Biblical rhetoric that Dr. King utilized are “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream” and “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together”, which are both references to Old Testament prophets Amos and Isaiah, respectively (Vail, 2006). By using language that is structured in a similar way to Old Testament prophets and Biblical calls, Dr. King was creating a level of familiarity with his audience. He knew that they would respond well to that style and content of literature and rhetoric.

Dr. King’s voice merging also increased his credibility because he was able to establish himself as a person of religious authority who was knowledgeable about Biblical facts. As Vail explains, “King constructs a prophetic persona for himself through his use of personal pronouns” (Vail, 2006). His use of language integrated himself with the prophets, which in turn indicates to the audience that he has the authority to serve as a mouthpiece or a messenger for God’s will and message. In the context of the “I Have a Dream” speech, this meant that the audience was prompted to conflate the Civil Rights Movement with God’s will, viewing Dr. King as a sort of prophet of this message.
Another one of Dr. King’s rhetorical strategies was use of the prophetic voice, which promotes a “sense of mission, a desire to bring the practice of the people into accord with a sacred principle, and an uncompromising, often excoriating stance toward a reluctant audience” (Vail, 2006). Much like the utility of voice merging, prophetic voice allows the rhetor to serve as a divine messenger who is speaking for another. “The prophet is called to reassert the terms of the covenant to a people who had fallen away, to restore a sense of duty and virtue amidst the decay of venality” (Vail, 2006). In the context of Dr. King’s speech, he is fighting an uphill battle to convey the message to a people who do not all agree with him. He concise and wise use of rhetorical strategy to use religion as a tool in order to declare authority and demand audience attention. The use of this prophetic voice added value to the already valuable content of his message, his speech, and his overall mission. Once again, this was a use of pathos in that he was speaking to a people who value and revere religious authority and in theory, were seeking to further God’s mission for the good of His people. This method also allowed Dr. King greater ethos, as he was communicating in a way that indicated his authority and credibility to speak on the matter.

The last rhetorical strategy of Dr. King’s that Vail outlines in his article is dynamic spectacle. “Thomas B. Farrell describes ‘spectacle’ contemporarily as a socially constructed event, with its origins grounded in the Aristotelian definition of the term as a ‘weak hybrid form of drama, a theatrical concoction that relied upon external factors (shock, sensation, and the passionate release) as a substitute for intrinsic aesthetic integrity”; it includes (but is not limited to) events ‘such as the televised rituals of conflict and social control’” (Vail, 2006). In other words,
dynamic spectacle is the social construction of an event that allows for a rhetorical response that fulfills a community’s need in regard to the event. Dynamic spectacle allows for the rhetors to present their ideologies in their rhetorical responses and construct a response that they find most fitting in regard to how they believe the situation should be handled. For example, “The March on Washington, as a dynamic spectacle, was most certainly a ‘coalescing event’ that ‘for a brief moment’ brought together rhetors holding different ideological interpretations of the civil rights movement.” Although Dr. King’s event was socially constructed due to much larger outside and systemic factors, it was still a socially constructed situation that required a rhetorical response. Dr. King, through his speech using the rhetorical strategies explained above, chose to respond in a way that promoted what he felt was the best ideology was to deal with the situation.

The next piece of literature that I will be reviewing is “Legitimizing the First Black Presidency: Cinematic History and Rhetorical Vision in Barack Obama’s 2008 Victory Speech” by Daniel J. DeVinney. In this article, DeVinney examines the modern visual theories of phantasmatic montage, synecdochical gaze, and frames of enargeia and energeia to analyze the ways that Barack Obama’s 2008 election night address legitimized the first Black presidency.

The first modern visual theory that Obama used in his speech was phantasmatic montage. Phantasia is a multisensory tool most associated with vision and the formation of mental images, and is foundational to visual rhetoric. It is also known as imagination (DeVinney, 2021).

According to DeVinney, “Obama used phantasia to produce mental images of important historical scenes and combined them into a larger montage that authorized his presidency”
The language Obama used was very vivid, descriptive, and referenced historical and social scenes that his audience would be able to visualize with ease. He painted scenes for his audience that encapsulated history that highlighted American perseverance. He was communicating to his audience that like many Americans in history, under his presidency, Americans would be able to overcome whichever hardships they faced. This relied primarily on pathos for the audience to be drawn to the emotional ties that an individual would have to nationalism and the American experience.

Another method that DeVinney identifies in Obama’s speech is synecdochical gaze. This is a narrative strategy in which the narrator constructs a perspective for their audience, which influences how the audience understands the events and actions within that story (DeVinney, 2021). “Seeing narratives through particular lenses are common practices in contemporary visual culture, even if these ways of looking are not made explicit. In speech, a synecdochical gaze tells a story from the perspective of a stan in for the audience. The audience is meant to adopt their gaze and see that history through those eyes. This perspective, like enthymematic reasoning, is unspoken, but influential on an audience’s understanding” (DeVinney, 2021). By using synecdochical gaze, the rhetor is placing themselves into a place of authority to determine the lens through which the audience should evaluate or experience the rhetorical situation. This is what Obama did with his use of the pronoun “we” in order to include himself as part of the same human experience as his audience. “Synecdochical witnessing became explicit when Obama moved from describing what Ann Nixon Cooper saw to ‘America, we have come so far. We have seen so much.’ Obama then asked his audience to take that gaze and imagine the next century: ‘But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves: If our children should live to
see the next century, if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?” (DeVinney, 2021)

The last rhetorical strategy that DeVinney considered in Obama’s address was the way he framed enargeia and energeia. According to DeVinney, “the terms enargeia and energeia are an important part of rhetorical vision and are intimately linked with the concept of phantasia. Enargeia with an alpha or ‘a’ is commonly translated as ‘vivid description,’ while energeia with an epsilon or ‘e’ has to do with ‘motion or activity’” (DeVinney, 2021). Both concepts exist to assist the audience in producing mental images. In Obama’s address, he used enargeia and energeia to create spots of bright and energetic moments for the audience to be able to picture themselves in. “Obama’s cinematic history was not merely a montage of static images but instead a lively and active display” (DeVinney, 2021). This is another example of how Obama used pathos in his speech by capturing the audience’s attention and causing them to feel personal investment in his election victory and time in office.

**Rhetorical Approach - Methodology**

There were several rhetorical methods and strategies that I evaluated in Pepperdine’s written statements and responses regarding the Black Lives Matter movement. Pepperdine administration used repetition, sequencing, prophetic voice, and synecdochical gaze in their rhetorical response to the Black Lives Matter movement.
Repetition and sequencing was used in the way that the emails consistently repeated Pepperdine’s mission and stance on the situation regarding Mr. George Floyd’s death and the response of the Black community. In his first statement, which was released on May 30, 2020, President Gash was quick to state “at the very heart of Pepperdine is love for all people.” (Gash, 2020) This is the first value that he presents as part of Pepperdine’s method to approaching the situation and the stance that Pepperdine as an institution would take towards the situation. At the end of his statement, Gash repeats this value of love again as he quotes Micah 6:8, which reads “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Gash, 2020) . In the next email communication sent by Dean Feltner on June 1, he repeats these values and reiterates the entire administration’s support for President Gash’s message, once again using repetition to reinforce that Pepperdine shares a united front and that at the heart of what is most important to Pepperdine is its core values. “Each of us is a child of God, made in his image, and we strongly affirm the value of all people” (Feltner, 2020) . The repeated inclusion of Christian values is addressed at the end of Dean Feltner’s email as he states, “As President Gash remarked, we know that God desires ‘peace and justice in our world’ and that our Pepperdine community cannot rest ‘until there is healing and deep appreciation for the value of all God’s beloved.’...May God embolden us to speak truth with love, and may he sustain us as we do the work of justice both at home and in the world” (Feltner, 2020) . This use of repetition is to ensure that the student body is clear that Pepperdine’s Christian mission is the driving force behind all of the stances that they take.

Pepperdine’s very strong affinity for Christian rhetoric and Biblical references were a type of prophetic voice that the administration utilized in order to decide how they would be
approaching the situation. In every communication from a member of Pepperdine administration, there was a Biblical reference of some sort. In President Gash’s statement, he very explicitly stated Pepperdine as a Christian university multiple times, even quoting a Bible verse at the end of his statement. “Our community includes thousands of faculty, staff, students, and alumni from every walk of life and with differing backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences—each one of them beloved. We believe God designed creation that way—with beautiful diversity. God created every person with equal value and dignity, and desires peace and justice in our world. As a Christian university, we are committed to being a light for justice, peace, and love, in our community, nation, and world” (Gash, 2020). As Vail stated in his article, this prophetic voice capitalizes on the use of “we” and Gash is intending to speak for the entire University in these statements that he is making (Vail, 2006). He is working as a mouthpiece for God’s mission and what would be considered a proper Christian response to the situation at hand. By doing this, he is attempting to solidify reassurance and communal agreement in the Pepperdine community, as well as using Biblical references and religious calls of authority to appeal to the audience’s pathos.

Furthermore, Dean Feltner uses prophetic in his email statement, issued June 1, 2020 to all students. He opened up the email with a tone often used by preachers at the beginning of a sermon. “Waves. I have come to relish the allegory provided by waves in my thirty plus years at Pepperdine. Created by our Lord in his design of the universe, waves are an enduring reminder of God’s steadfastness and presence. Their beauty lifts my spirit and their sound calms my soul” (Feltner, 2020). This style of speech very clearly mirrors the way that a preacher might begin a sermon, which Feltner is using to intend to communicate to the audience that he is of religious
and spiritual authority, and therefore is working as a mouthpiece for both God and the University. This is a similar method that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used in his “I have a dream” speech, as described by Vail.

Another rhetorical device that Pepperdine’s official statements used was synecdochical gaze. By explicitly stating that Pepperdine is a community with shared feelings towards the tragedy of George Floyd and the events that followed, Pepperdine administration was establishing a lens through which they wanted the entire community to view the situation, as well as their response to it. In Gash’s original statement, he states “We denounce the oppression of marginalized people and racism in all its forms. We stand for the tireless pursuit of justice for all, and the fight for radical and overdue change. We stand committed to upholding human rights for all people, and we affirm the values of racial equity, inclusion, and non-violence” (Gash, 2020). The repetitive use of “we” indicates that it is a shared experience that all of Pepperdine’s community agrees with. In his article, DeVinney describes how the rhetor creates a lens through which the audience views the rhetorical situation, and that is what the Pepperdine administration was effectively doing in using “we” language and integrating the Christian mission into every statement (DeVinney, 2021).

In Dr. Horton’s follow-up response to Jim Gash’s initial statement, which received flack for not being strong enough, she said, “Let there be no doubt that we believe black lives matter” (Horton, 2020). In her response, Dr. Horton was working to shift the synecdochical gaze from what people initially felt was a weak response, to reassuring students where the administration stood on the issue of Black Lives Matter specifically. Dr. Horton was refocusing and re-ensuring
to students that the administration was in support of Black Lives Matter. It was so crucial that she explicitly state this in her follow-up email to Gash’s statement because at this point, most of the student body widely felt that the administration and Gash in particular were not in support of the BLM movement, therefore she had to shift the public perception of the administration’s stance on the issue.

**Analysis**

In analysis, I believe rhetorically, Pepperdine had a semi-successful response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The rhetorical devices that were used were specifically chosen to be appropriate for this particular rhetorical situation, and allowed for Pepperdine to continue to be perceived in the way that it has been historically. Although there were students who did not feel that Pepperdine took a strong enough stance on such an important and crucial issue, the rhetorical strategies that Pepperdine used aligned with its mission and the tone that it, as an institution, chooses to emote. Pepperdine is known for its conservative politics and policies that align with the Christian mission, as well as with the politics of its donors.

Many students felt that Pepperdine’s response to such a heavy and important situation were weak, and lacked recognition of the weight of these issues in the real world. Students felt that Pepperdine was communicating that the Christian values and mission were more important than the lives and wellbeing of individual Black students in the Pepperdine community. This is why after Gash’s initial statement, Dr. Connie Horton released a statement with more explicit support of the Black community at Pepperdine. In the last statement received from administration, “A
Message from President Gash: Listening and Taking Action” (2020), he seemed to be taking action and repairing the lack of support shown in his initial response given a few days earlier.

The other priority of the Pepperdine administration was to appear as a united front who stood on the same page regarding this very important issue. This is why in their communications, administrators frequently referenced each others’ statements and showed explicit support for the other. The main priority of Pepperdine’s responses were to be united, and to back the Christian mission that Pepperdine stands for.

It is very clear that Pepperdine’s route and method of choice in addressing the Black Lives Matter movement and tragedy of the death of George Floyd was to function using religious authority and appeal. This was the method that most closely aligned with its Christian values and would please the donors and students that attend Pepperdine because of its religious foundation. Even in the statements in which Pepperdine showed support for the Black community and its Black students, it is clear that the priority of the University was with upholding Christian values first and foremost. Through the rhetorical methods I described above, Pepperdine was cementing its place as a Christian University before any other priorities or values were explicitly stated.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Pepperdine University’s response to the Black Lives Matter movement aligned very strongly with the image the University portrays and the values it claims to uphold. Each of Pepperdine’s responses, communicated to students after the tragic death of George Floyd took place, aligned with the Christian mission that Pepperdine prides itself upon upholding. Through
the rhetorical methods of repetition and sequencing, prophetic voice, synecdochical gaze, Pepperdine successfully communicated these values to its students.
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