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Note from the Editor

Who better to present research and commentaries on legacies than students? We are, after all, the legacies of the many anthropologists who have come before. More directly, we are the product of our own determination combined with the guidance of our mentors. Students who have had close
working relationships with their mentors author the articles here, and the attention paid to the works shines through in their quality. While the articles that make up this journal all deal with the concept of traces, tidemarks, and legacies, the journal itself is a tidemark of sorts. This edition marks the transition from NASA’s second e-Journal editor to our third. This journal is one of the organization’s newest endeavors, so seeing it continue is a pleasure for all involved. The true force behind this journal is the incredible group of authors and reviewers who have worked to produce and improve upon this fine collection of articles.

Finally, I would like to welcome the 2011-2013 editor of Student Anthropologist, Jessica Hardin. I look forward to seeing the journal grow during her editorship. If you are interested in getting involved in the next issue, the Call for Papers and Reviewers can be found at the end of the journal.

Happy reading,

Sarah Taylor
Editor, “Student Anthropologist”

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Commentary:
La La Land: Meeting the Demands of a Hybrid Market with an Endless Supply of Hummers

C.F. Dyson
Department of Anthropology

Imagine what would happen if the auto industry insisted on producing gas-guzzling Hummers while the public demanded hybrid and electric cars. The industry clearly would not last long. Not so in anthropology. Many of us, recent graduates and soon-to-be-graduates, have spent an average of a decade learning to make Hummers — to become tenure-track anthropology professors. As we enter the job market we are discovering to our dismay that for every available tenure-track job there are hundreds of candidates, all trained in the same fine art of making something of limited relevance for this time and place.

We may be disappointed, but if there is any outrage, it is a quiet one. Since we don’t know how to make anything other than Hummers, we wait nicely and hopefully for that Hummer job. With kindness and persistence we chase CV-enhancing accomplishments — another conference paper, a new service position with one of our anthropology organizations, one more journal submission, another adjunct teaching assignment. Late at night, worrying about how to pay our bills, we add our names to one more job board, apply for one more post-doc position, and wait for increasingly rare announcements for permanent academic teaching positions. Hard work has got to pay off eventually, right? Not if the world has changed, and you and your mentors haven’t noticed.

A soon-to-be-minted Ph.D. in anthropology recently expressed to her advisor her desire to land a teaching job at a community college. The advisor let her know of his disappointment. In this fine Ph.D. anthropology program she had been trained to take a tenure-track position in another fine university. Living in his own tenured La La Land, this professor failed to see that the job market he entered after he earned his own Ph.D. 30+ years ago no longer exists. Even the job market of seven years ago, when I began my Ph.D., has changed.

How can this disappointed anthropology professor ignore these new realities? Could it be tenure-related myopia? While the car dealer gets instant feedback when the public’s wants and needs change, the tenured professor is unaffected by the ups and downs of the market.

Professors and mentors may not have to worry about the market, but they should. Mentoring for the present is the ethical thing to do. Mentoring for the present means making anthropology urgent, as important in the public’s life as education, jobs, and health care. An anthropology that is urgent and relevant has no time to waste over the removal of the world science from a certain AAA statement. An action-oriented anthropology does not have to worry about the public’s perception because when our actions are relevant to a wider audience, recognition is a matter of course. An applied anthropology that interacts with all manner of people is anthropology’s equivalent of the primary care physician — an indispensable generalist often mocked by specialists who cater to elite patients only.

Where do we begin, then, to find our way out of La La Land? Tenured professors in anthropology departments must ask: “What am I doing to ensure that my work is relevant to a wide audience?”
More importantly: “What am I doing to mentor my students for the present?” Recent graduates must be enlisted to bring us the market reality from outside our protected walls. Students and teachers must engage in discussions on how we are going to respond to potential new markets, and examine our curricula to determine where it is and is not responding to them. Students must be encouraged to contemplate new and unexpected applications of anthropology, and be trained to communicate about these applications to a non-academic audience. This would make us a discipline that matters, even after the last Hummer is gone.

But talk is cheap and there is much to do. Let’s get to work! 🌋

C.F. Dyson is a pseudonym for a recent Ph.D. from a fine anthropology department in a fine US university.

Research Articles:

Uncovering *Ardipithecus Ramidus*

Kristopher Jordan Krohn
Mesa Community College/ Arizona State University

8 million years ago a tremendous even occurred; a new branch of primates split off from the chimpanzee family tree, creating the first hominid. At least, that is the current accept theory of how the first hominid came to be, but without physical evidence to support this claim it cannot be set in stone. When first discovered *Ardipithecus Ramidus* was thought to be the last common ancestor between chimps and humans. With recent analysis of the femur, skull, teeth, and other long bones this speculation has been disproven, but so much more information has been gained about the human ancestor. *Ardipithecus Ramidus* is an amazing find because of the techniques used to excavate the fossil, the way the species walked, ate, the shape of the skull, and sexual dimorphism.

In paleoanthropology field methods rarely delineate from archaeological field methods, but the main differences lie in extracting the fossils themselves. When excavating an archaeological site the artifacts are very young relative to a paleoanthropological site. Because of age, when extracting fossilized bones and other materials special techniques are used to ensure that no specimen is damaged. One of the major differences between paleoanthropological excavation and archaeological excavation is the tools used to unearth artifacts. In archaeology the primary tool is a trowel, but when excavating *Ardipithecus* hand and feed the primary tools were a dental pick and porcupine quill probe (White 77). Furthermore, because the sediment encased the bones the researchers, “dampened the encasing sediment to prevent desiccation and further disintegration of the fossils,” (White 77). In other words, the water rehydrates the bone soil allowing for the movement of the fossil without losing any piece of bone. In addition, the bones had to be strengthened and placed in plaster cases and placed in aluminum foil (White 77). Also when Ardi
was first discovered her teeth were scattered over the excavation area and were in poor condition
(Suwa 4). To ensure that nothing was destroyed the team, “stabilized [each tooth] in the field, transported [it] within its encasing sediment via plaster jacket, and later extracted from matrix under a binocular microscope” (Suwa 4). By doing this the team successfully retrieved all of the teeth that were found in excavation without destroying any material. Once in the lab more specialized methods had to be used. In the case of Ardi “acetone was applied with brushes and hypodermic needles to resofen and remove small patches of consolidating-hardened encasing,” (White 77). This is done so that the fossils can be extracted from the casing and then strengthened. The excavation techniques used on the Ardipithecus Ramidus fossil were revolutionary but the way the species walked is more astonishing.

The walking style of Ardipithecus Ramidus is considered to be a revolutionary theory that sparked controversy. According to Owen Lovejoy Ardi, “was already well-adapted to bipedality... [But] must have retained generalized above-branch quadrupedality”. In other words, Ar. Ramidus—according to Lovejoy—would walk on all fours while in a tree—arboreal climbing— and walk almost effortlessly while in the woodlands below, terrestrial bipedality. The term for this type of bipedality is facultative bipedality. According to E.E. Sarmiento, Ardipithecus Ramidus’, “radius...indicates limited climbing and suspensory abilities,” (Sarmiento 101). What indicates this is that the radius is short when compared to the Great Apes’ which suggest that Ar. Ramidus had shorter arms than apes today (Sarmiento 101). Because of this shortness Ardipithecus Ramidus would have not been able to hold themselves up on a branch for very long or find a branch that was strong enough to hold its hypothesized weight of 50kg. After reexamination of re-creation of the pelvis they concluded that, “the lower part of Ardi’s hip was powerfully primitive, adapted for climbing. In contrast...the ilium was surprisingly broad,” (Neimark 50). Modern day humans have a broad ilium in order for the pelvis to sit high enough to hold all of the upper body weight, meaning that Ar. Ramidus could have possibly been bipedal at times. Lovejoy believes that without Ardipithecus Ramidus’ bipedality Lucy and A. Afarensis would have never had the near perfect bipedality it had (Neimark 50). But not everyone agrees with Lovejoy. William Jungers, a paleoanthropologist at Stony Brook University New York, believes that Ardi was not bipedal. After examining the remains himself he concluded that, “Ardi was at best a facultative biped,” (Neimark 53). This means that if Ar. Ramidus could walk on two legs it would have been very inefficient, like a gibbon or chimpanzee (Neimark 53). Furthermore, the wrist joint of Ardi was that of a, “palmigrade quadruped,” (Sarmiento 102). This infers that Ardi did not walk on two legs but was on all fours for a majority of the period, which would mean that she would be bipedal while in the trees. Furthermore, because of the weight of Ardipithecus and the thickness of the radius quadrupedality would be nearly impossible in the trees of the Africa savanna, suggesting that Ardi was on all fours while on the ground, not while in the trees (Sarmiento 103). This shows that Ardipithecus Ramidus was in fact not a true biped. Although Ardi’s walking style is a controversial issue, its diet is widely accepted.

By examining the fossilized teeth of Ardipithecus Ramidus one can tell about the species. For instance, Ar. Ramidus were a species of omnivores. Ardi’s teeth show no sign of specialization meaning that the specimen did not have the molar structure of Pan who used the molars to eat ripe fruit (White 79). Surprisingly, Ardipithecus, “molar surface area and proportions are closely approximated by those of baboons,” (Sarmiento 104). This is notable because the weight of Ardipithecus estimated at 50kg is greater than that of a baboon and double some (Sarmiento 104). Baboons today are omnivores and eat primarily vegetation and small animals, which could easily
have been the diet of Ardipithecus. Furthermore, Ar. Ramidus’ teeth did not have, “large incisors of Pango,” (White 79). Meaning that, it is possible that Ardi did not need to bite off pieces of meat using only her teeth. Moreover, Ardipithecus Ramidus had small maxillary canines while retaining large mandibular canines, which resembles those of a female ape (White 80). These two factors could expose parts of Ar. Ramidus life that researchers could have never speculated. One of these factors is the possibility that Ardipithecus did not compete over females; meaning that the species could have been monogamous. To support this, Gen Suwa stated that, “Ar. ramidus suggests that sexual selection played a primary role in canine reduction.” (Suwa “Paleobiological” 69). This would mean that the species chose mates rather than breed with the alpha male. This would be a pivotal role in human evolution to have a monogamous ancestor, suggesting that monogamy was a natural process and that sexual selection played a bigger role then once thought. Tim White speculates that this is, “most likely associated with weak male-male agonism,” (White 85). In layman terms, reduced canines correlates with how territorial males can be, and since Ar. Ramidus had small canines, it is believed that males did were not territorial and did not compete for females. The second possibility to why the canines are small is the use of stone tools. Cutting and ripping are the main functions of the canine teeth, and with the introduction of stone tools this use disappears. But Ardipithecus was not bipedal 100% of the time nor did she have the brain capacity to make tools. To support this, the wrist joint of Ardi was that of a, “palmigrade quadruped,” (Sarmiento 102). This infers that Ardi did not walk on two legs but was on all fours for a majority of the period, making tool use impossible. This is also supported by the ape-like wrist of Ar. Ramidus. One of the most outstanding features of Ardipithecus Ramidus is the shape and angle of the skull.

The skull of Ardi, also known as ARA-VP-6/500, is small and slightly angled. Gen Suwa believes that as a whole the skull, “resembles Sahelanthropus,” (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e3). Sahelanthropus is current the oldest known hominid living somewhere between 6 and 7 million years ago and may or may not be in the ape line. Ape-like features are to be expected considering the way Ar. Ramidus walked. While excavating the skull the team saw that pieces were, “scattered around the excavation area...excessive fragmentation and/or damage to the temporal and occipital portions.” (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e2) Because of the frailty of the pieces many were made into casts on the scene before transport even took place, and during reconstruction major pieces were either left out or molded. Nine years after Ardipithecus was first announced microCT scans of the original fossils were taken so that a digital reconstruction could take place and it made it easier to align pieces. The skull itself has a wide and short base, which is something, not indicated by ape morphology and suggests that the cranial base adjusted as evolution occurred (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e3). The cranial vault of the skull could only hold a brain approximately 300-350 cm³ (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68). To put it in today’s perspective, Ardipithecus had the brain size of a “bonobo and female chimpanzees and smaller than Australopithecus.” (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68) Along with this, the reconstructed skull shows that there are no large cheekbones like that of the later hominids, suggesting that there was no heavy amount of chewing done by the species (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68). On the skull there are no visible large zygomatic arches suggesting that strong lower jaw muscles were not needed. Using facial topography, researchers found that, “it had a small but projecting muzzle,” (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e3). While this is more primitive than Lucy, the closest hominid fossil in age, it is common with Miocene Apes, i.e. Kenyapithecus (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e3). The supraorbital torus is one of the few places in the skull that does not show ape-like qualities. Ardi’s torus is, “vertically 6 mm thick at about mid-orbital position” (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68e5). This is an interesting feature because this...
location is usually the thinnest part of an ape’s skull, and Ar. Ramidus has slight concavity behind
the torus, which is uncharacteristic of Pan and Gorilla (Suwa “The Ardipithecus 68c.5). Because of
other features pointing to an ape-like ancestor this shows progress in branching off from the line
and evolution. Basically, Ardipithecus Ramidus has a skull that is primitive when compared to
Australopithecus but more developed and complex than bonobos today. The overall structure of
the skull shows features characteristic of both Australopithecus and Sahelanthropus. Specialization
was not found in Ar. Ramidus like the skull of Sahelanthropus but unlike the skull of Lucy.
Although the skull still leaves many questions unanswered sexual dimorphism in Ardipithecus
Ramidus may not be evident.

Sexual dimorphism in Ar. Ramidus is a slightly greater than what is seen in Homo sapiens today.
According to Tim White, Ardi, “functionally important sex-related dimorphism is not apparent.”
(White 79) The main fossil was determined to be a female based on canine lengths and the small
size of the skull (White 79). If there is any form of sexual dimorphism this should be true. In
Homo sapiens the canine tooth is the more dimorphic tooth, and in other hominids this pattern is
followed (Suwa “Paleobiological” 96). But in Ardipithecus canine teeth show almost no difference
in structure and between males and females still largely resemble that of female apes (Suwa
“Paleobiological” 94). If the theory of monogamy is accepted than this feature is acceptable
because without male competition there is no need for large canines. Another clue White used to
look at sexual dimorphism was the size of the femur. Humeri were recovered from at least 7
individuals and the lengths were unexpected (White 80). According to White the lengths of the
Humeri resulted in a monomorphic species instead of a dimorphic. White’s data concluded that
Ar. Ramidus, “exhibited minimal skeletal body dimorphism,” (White 80). This conclusion is wide
accepted and support in the in paleoanthropological world. The question it leaves is “Why did
dimorphism evolve with the later hominids?” All in all, sexual dimorphism was almost nonexistent
in Ardipithecus Ramidus.

Ar. Ramidus was an intriguing find. Firstly, the methods used to extract the delicate fossils were
essential to the research. By making microCT scans and doing everything possible to keep the
pieces intact Tim White and his crew implemented ultimately saved the data. The locomotion of
the species is still being debated today, but the evidence supports that Ardi was a quadped most of
the time, even the structure of the wrist supports this. Ar. Ramidus dentition was an informative
piece of the fossil record. Not only did it show little dimorphism between the sexes, it also showed
that there was little or no male-male competition and revealed that even though Ardi was an
omnivore that the diet was primarily fruit. By looking at the shape of the skull, the possibility of a
close ape ancestor was lost. Because of concavity behind the supraorbital torus and the thickness
of the torus, it shows that the skull may have features like an ape but is not directly related to the
species. Lastly, and possibly one of the most important conclusions from the fossils is that there
was little sexual dimorphism. The canines in both sexes resembled female apes and the humeri
lengths are about even. The overall conclusion is that Ardipithecus Ramidus was in fact a hominid
from 4.4 million years ago that was monogamous and virtually monomorphic.

Kristopher is an Anthropology major attending Mesa Community College and Arizona State
University. He was born and raised in Mesa, Arizona and intends to finish his Bachelors’ degree at
ASU. In the future, he would like to focus on Medical Anthropology, helping those in less
Fortunate countries. Ultimately, his goal is to attend medical school and be a part of the Doctors Without Borders Program.

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Female Genital Cutting: Drawing Lines in the Ambiguous Divide Between Anthropology and Activism

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Anthropology as a discipline has become increasingly focused on public engagement and activism (see Goodale 2006). Nancy Scheper-Hughes famously called for a new form of “militant anthropology” that is politically committed, morally engaged and opposed to cultural relativism as moral relativism (1995:410,415). Less dramatically, Setha M. Low and Sally Engle Merry have argued for public engagement as an important component of an anthropological practice that respects the rights and dignity of all humans (2010:S204). As noted by Low and Merry, however, progressive human rights discourses hold some similarity to the “civilizing processes” of colonialism and the desire of anthropologists to avoid colonialist critiques can lead to self-censorship (2010:S213).

The theme of this year’s journal is “Traces, Tidemarks, and Legacies.” Cultural relativism is a legacy of anthropology that continues to impact the ways in which anthropologists conduct and think about fieldwork. Moreover, traces of cultural relativism potentially conflict with an activist approach to anthropology and its own legacy. Can a line be drawn in the sand between activism and relativism? What implications would this tidemark have for fieldwork? These issues of activism and cultural relativism were at the forefront of my mind when I embarked on my master’s degree fieldwork in the summer of 2010.
My fieldwork centered on the controversial practice of female genital cutting (FGC) among African immigrant populations living in London, England. In particular, my research examined how discourses of female genital cutting were constructed among women from FGC practicing communities and at a London-based NGO. In his W.H.R. Rivers prize essay, Daniel Gordon argues that the potential medical complications of female genital cutting challenge the validity of even considering the practice through the lens of cultural relativism (1991:4). Gordon’s prize-winning student essay is two decades old, but the topic of FGC continues to be seen by many anthropology students and others as the prima facie example of the limits of cultural relativism (Ntarangwi 2007:96). Nonetheless, even the “militant anthropologist” Nancy Scheper-Hughes contends that the issue of FGC is best left to be argued out by women from societies where it is practiced and not by anthropologists (1991:26). Female genital cutting is thus a topic where the tidemark between activism and relativism is particularly volatile. Would an activist approach against FGC improve my research or best serve my informants?

Some of my informants were deeply opposed to female genital cutting, while others regarded the practice positively. Indeed, FGC is not perpetrated by one group against another as a form of intentional harm, but rather, it may mark the passage into adulthood and group membership (Njambi 2004:295). It is mothers and grandmothers who often promote the practice’s continuation (Ahmadu 2000:306-307). To advocate against FGC in my research would mean advocating against the values and beliefs of some of my informants. Based on this concern, I decided to avoid an activist approach to my fieldwork and instead took a stance that could be labelled as modified cultural relativism (see Brown 2008) or liberal pluralism (see Shweder 2009). This stance was culturally relativist in that the primary aim of my research was to understand the social and cultural context of FGC in London, while avoiding value judgments against my informants. However, this stance of relativism should not be confused with promoting the practice (Gosselin 2000:47; Boddy 1991:16).

I posit that this culturally relativist stance allowed me to critically examine the discourses surrounding female genital cutting I encountered in a way that may not have been possible, had I decided to incorporate activism into my research. Community advocacy at the London-based NGO where I conducted my fieldwork was intended to educate members of FGC practicing communities about the physical, psychological and religious implications of the practice. In general, the NGO volunteers and employees saw community members as lacking sufficient knowledge about FGC. The NGO’s advocacy acted to transform the practice in the minds of community members from the colloquially popular term “female circumcision” to the more politically and morally charged term “female genital mutilation.” If I had conducted my fieldwork in the NGO as an activist, rather than as an observer, I believe that it would have been more challenging for me to critically explore the usage and effects of this terminology by the NGO, community members and myself. An activist approach may therefore not always be appropriate, even for research topics that seem to lend themselves to activism. Fears of unreflective activism can be a major concern, particularly for less experienced anthropology students.

Despite my best efforts to retain this relativism in the field, at one point, I was called upon to “take a stand” and discuss my personal opinions about female genital cutting. I attended a leadership-training day for female volunteers at the NGO aged nineteen to twenty-five from FGC practicing communities in London. In one group exercise, everyone was asked to stand on a line ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” depending on each individual’s opinion about a
particular issue. The first issue raised was, ‘Should female genital mutilation be illegal in all countries?’ All of the volunteers participating in the event crammed together along the strongly agree end of the line. So many people strongly agreed that FGC should be illegal in all countries that many of the girls ended up spilling over into the neutral section of the line.

I felt conflicted on where to stand, being of the opinion that criminal legislation against the practice is generally ineffective, but not wanting to stand alone on the disagree end of the line and potentially alienate everyone I hoped to engage with that day. I hesitantly stood the closest of anyone to disagree, but still very much in the neutral section of the line. I was called upon to explain why I did not agree, and I discussed my concern that making FGC illegal could push the practice further underground and so unnecessarily increase risk, especially if parents felt unable to bring their daughters for medical attention if required for fear of legal retribution.

One of the volunteers then turned to me and asked suddenly, ‘I want to know, are you opposed to it being illegal because you don’t think it’s serious enough?’ Her fellow volunteers nodded in agreement. Unsure of how best to answer the question, I reiterated my previously stated concerns and this seemed to settle the issue of my rather aberrant opinion to everyone’s satisfaction. Later in the day, I conducted a focus group with a few of the NGO’s volunteers and this incident proved to be a fruitful point for further discussion.

As noted by Michael Brown, it would be impossible to conduct fieldwork if anthropologists voiced dismay at every practice they disagreed with (2008:367). It can be difficult to determine when activism is appropriate and useful, and when it may actually hinder research. The tidemark between activism and relativism is continuously reshaped by decisions made in the field. The act of making those decisions is valuable and has the potential to enrich research.

Mary-Anne Decatur is a MPhil/PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Her current research examines the effects of local and international health campaigns in Tanzania designed to promote male circumcision while eradicating female genital cutting. How have these campaigns altered local perceptions of health risks, particularly risk of HIV infection? Moreover, how do these campaigns impact local understandings of identity and social belonging in communities that have traditionally practiced both male and female genital cutting as part of initiation ceremonies?

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The Effect of Masculinity on Sexual Health Practices among College-Age Students in the United States

Peter Graffy
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Abstract: My study investigates the realm of masculinity and its effect on our health system, specifically contraception. The purpose of this investigation is to examine the range of effects which masculinity produces in our society by way of shaping American sexual health practices. I conducted my fieldwork research in the environment veritably deemed the most sexual and “genderized”: college campus. The college is located in a small Midwest town of 8000 where most of my research occurred outside a downtown bar, Roscoe’s. I distributed contraception in the form of condoms to gauge the responses of my peers when it came to sexual health. I argue that masculinity has a significant impact through the social power which it wields over the American system of sexual health.

Condoms have been proven to be the most reliable method of protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies for the sexually active (Stone et al. 1999; CDC 1998). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated that condom failure can be limited to only two breakages per 100 condoms, and that many failures should simply be attributed to user error. The CDC prescribes that, in order to avoid becoming infected with an STI, the most
effective form of protection is a condom used correctly (Stone et al. 1999; Macaluso et al. 1999; CDC 1998). Efforts to hinder the spread of STIs in the United States utilize condoms as the primary prescribed tool in the defense of individuals’ sexual health.

The spreading of the HIV/AIDS virus across the world remains a looming portent of the consequences of neglecting to adequately be protected from the transmission of this deadly virus. In the North America there were roughly 1.4 million people living with HIV, along with 25,000 AIDS related deaths in 2008 (UNAIDS 2009). With infection rates of .4% among all adults in North America, HIV/AIDS becomes a very real reminder of what can result from unsafe sex practices. Similar to any other STI, HIV/AIDS can be mostly avoided with the proper negotiation of condom usage, demonstrating efficacy rates ranging between 60 and 96 percent (Davis & Weller 1999). Nevertheless, due to lack of effective prevention and treatment programs, many researchers believe that, in order to solve this problem, a more productive approach would be to address the culturally defined gender roles rather than focusing only on enforcing contraceptive usage (Parker et al. 2000).

Since STI infection rates are relatively high in North America despite our easy access to contraception, experts have begun to turn their attention to the study of how cultural constructions of gender must be analyzed to understand risky sexual practices (Parker et al. 2000). One of the main underlying American ideologies relates to the “genderization” of objects and ideas, with masculinity permeating the realms of power and femininity being associated with fragility and incompetence. We can look at certain concepts, objects, or people and can subconsciously formulate expectations, which further reinforce the gender dynamics that run our society. We are constantly reinscribing gendered social norms. This dichotomous gendered structure has infiltrated our system of sexual health, creating an unstable framework that compels many to operate within strict gender norms and to a paradigm that leaves women many times feeling not only vulnerable but insufficient.

Dominant American culture has set up a series of binary oppositions to differentiate between masculine and feminine with little overlap between the two. These oppositions relate to nearly every aspect of American life where masculinity and femininity are juxtaposed: hard versus soft, penetrative versus penetrable, rough versus smooth, strong versus weak. As such, due to the value that American culture has placed on masculine ideals such as strength and penetrativeness; feminine characteristics have become devalued as negative. Thus, sexuality for males is mainly validated by actively trying not to be feminine; to be masculine, one cannot perform feminine characteristics. Hence, observable characteristics for the effects of sexuality on sexual health can, in some cases, be inextricably linked to the demonstration of some gender identity. In other words, based on the desire to correctly perform a gender, people tend to overemphasize certain aspects of masculinity or femininity, which can contribute to changing ideas on sexual health.

While sexual behavior relative to gender identity influence has been researched before among non-college and non-American populations (e.g. Brown et al. 2005; Mthembu et al. 2007; Pulerwitz et al. 2006), few studies have been done to analyze the effect of socially constructed values of sexuality on the use of contraception within an American college campus. In this case, specifically the bounds of hegemonic masculinity were analyzed to determine its effect on sexual health of the campus affected.
In addition, men are assumed to have a stronger sexual drive than females and subsequently may be freed from social constraints to satisfy this drive (Goldman & Goldberg 1974; Asencio 1999). Because of this drive to reinscribe stereotypical masculine behavior, it is clear that certain characteristics of masculinity would play a greater role in the negotiation of sexual health practices. Thus, I set out to delve deeply into expressions of masculinity on my college campus to better understand how nearly every facet of our sexual lives has been shaped by this gender identity.

Methods and Hypotheses
In this study, I utilized several techniques of ethnographic inquiry: interviews, statistical analysis, and participant observation. Using these methods, I search for the answers to these main research questions:

1. How influential are peers, specifically males, to the attainment of sexual wellbeing for other males?
2. In what ways do genders interact to influence sexual health and how are these interactions linked to one another?
3. How do social constructions of masculinity play a part in the justification of unsafe sexual practices among college-aged populations?
4. In what ways do women adapt to masculine behavior regarding the negotiation of sexual health practices?

I developed an ethnographic research study to dissect the many parts of masculinity and to selectively target college-aged students between the ages of 18 and 22. I administered my study outside of the most popular local dance bar notorious for being the platform for one-night stands. The basic premise of my project was to hand out free condoms in person, along with some information regarding HIV/AIDS during the main bar time (between 11:45 and 1:20). I stood out in the parking lot for around two hours with a big sign that declared “FREE CONDOMS” and a bright orange bucket full of two hundred assorted varieties of condoms. For the duration of this research study, the analytical methods that I utilized included observation and inquiry, with the results of the study being examined through statistical and theoretical analysis linked to existing applicable literature.

I never yelled at or harassed people leaving the bar; if they wanted to approach me I let them, but I never moved to attract people. My big sign brought about quite a bit of attention, mostly from friends, but also from a large segment of the population I had never seen before. Two hundred Premium lubricated latex condoms were in my bright orange bowl starting at midnight on Saturday, March 6th; 4 were left by 1:30am.

As anthropologists R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (2005) note, hegemonic masculinity embodies the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men. As such, masculinity’s effect on sexual health is directly correlated from this ideology of male dominance. Thus, in order to better comprehend the socially constructed American paradigm of sexual health, my research was based on my ethnographic observation of college-aged students entering and leaving the bar.
Based on previous knowledge and experiences, I hypothesized that the binds of masculinity would affect both men and women equally when it came to sexual health. Furthermore, I believed that the information gathered from this study would clearly demonstrate how the dominant ideals of masculinity manifest themselves in the American model of sexual health on college campuses.

**Results**

My presence definitely caused quite a stir though I never tried to draw attention to myself vocally. I usually never even had to ask any questions for the takers as they were quite willing to tell me anything that I did not expect. As time went on I began to see a trend: roughly 90% to 95% of the condom takers were female; either within groups of other girls or by themselves, they came in droves. Though I did not keep an exact count of how many females approached me, it was obvious they were the majority of the takers from my bowl. The overall demographic of takers consisted of the following in succeeding order from highest to lowest: individual women, groups of women, individual male-female couples, individual males, and groups of males. Furthermore, these women were extremely excited to see me and hear why I had decided to spend my Saturday night giving out condoms.

On the other hand, an observation I made was that the male population coming out of the bar made sure to choose their path far from my contraception outpost, eyes averted from mine, making a wide arc around me. This was, by far, the most astonishing result from that night: the overall lack of males that took advantage of my free offering showed how lethargically conditioned men have become when it comes to publicly displaying sexual health preoccupation. But, not all males displayed this obvious disdain and I did have the opportunity chat with a few males, sober and drunk alike, about sex and protection. From these observations, I offer explanations of the ways constructions of masculinity had influenced the actions of these people.

**Discussion and Analysis**

The focus of this study was to examine the effect of dominant cultural constructions of masculinity on sexual health and its practice among college-aged populations in America. With limited current research on gender identity and its effects for both non-college or non-American populations, this study is essential in learning how the many facets of our culture have been shaped by masculinity (Macaluso 1999; Pulerwitz 2006). The present study found that specifically masculine behavior contributes to influencing our sexual health model in America. From these results, I was able to answer my questions laid out in the methods section.

**Fraternal Influences on Using Contraception**

It has been well established that friends have a large impact on students’ sexual behavior and that fraternal influences have the greatest effect on individuals as to this behavior (Schulz 1977). Since the ideals of masculinity denigrate the use of contraception as weak or unmanly, male peers influence one another to conform to this ideological construction by neglecting to use condoms (Whitehead 1997). In an effort to prove one’s masculinity, the public avoidance of taking free contraception resulted in the social strengthening of the males’ masculinities. This concept was shown in my study where the males that did approach me tended to be alone, almost covering their face and sneaking off with a handful if they were bold enough to even make it across the parking lot. Groups of males hardly were part of my demographic for takers that night; they would see me and either laugh about it with their buddies or pretend like I was not there.
Fraternal influence is so strong that rarely are men able to feel comfortable acting how they feel when they are constantly being pressured into the guidelines of masculinity. Regardless of whether an individual wanted to be responsible, the effect peers on him discouraged him from taking condoms in a public place. As an example, one white male approximately came up to me and agreed to take a condom but followed it with a playful slap on the arm and stated, “but it’s not like I use condoms anyway, right bud?!” I was stunned. Immediately, I wondered if I had said something misleading that would help him reach that conclusion, but then I realized that by me being myself (male) gave him the opportunity to practice his masculinity. At the very least, he wanted to both flaunt his masculine power as well as gain acceptance by convincing me that he was a “true man.” Behavior like this simply reinscribes social ideals related to maleness and machismo, ultimately ending with potentially dangerous consequences if his and other male’s unsafe-sex practices continue.

This arrives at a paradox: men have been conditioned to be unconditioned when it comes to sexual wellbeing. Disregarding abstinence, using a condom is the best known form of preventing HIV/AIDS or any other STD, yet to feel empowered and masculine the males I observed intentionally avoided a great opportunity to obtain free contraception (Stone et al. 1999; CDC 1998). The masculine archetype that dictates male pleasure trumping safe-sex practices overrode many males leaving the bar that Saturday night with girls. In order to show off their masculinity, men demonstrate their sovereignty over sex protection believing that their muscles and their manliness will be all the protection they need.

Negotiating Condom Use: When is it Appropriate?
Apart from my research study of observing the handing out of free condoms, I also prompted some male bar-goers—drunk and sober—with questions regarding the use of contraceptives. I found a few sober people that held interesting and oppositional ideas to the social norms on sex along with a few perspectives that reinscribed them. In quick conversation, I directly asked five separate people whether they would have protected sex with an extremely attractive person of the other sex even if they did not require it. One respondent offered the idea about how looks influence the decision and that “if she looks like a whore then I would use one, but otherwise I don’t think I would.” This reflects Tony Whitehead’s findings (1997) that males prefer to use contraceptives when a woman appears to be “fast” or a “freak.” This suggests that a hierarchy may exist within the male mind as to whether correctly performing masculinity is worth the increased risk of an STI.

As one respondent answered, “I would for sure have [unprotected] sex with the girl. The worst thing would be to get AIDS. After that, getting her pregnant [would be the worst]. Getting a girl pregnant would suck; I’d feel terrible.” Here, I got my first glimpse of the fear of unwanted pregnancy, but, I noted that it came after contracting an STI such as AIDS. Among college students, though unwanted pregnancy is a very real product of unprotected sex, it consistently ranked behind the contraction of an STI. A respondent clarified this saying, “we’re two years away from finishing college and moving on in life, the last thing you’d want is an STD,” going on to state, “you can always get an abortion or something, an STD will stay with you forever.” From the responses I obtained, college-aged males were far more eager to accept an unwanted pregnancy than contract an STI by believing pregnancy could be more temporary if eliminated.

It seems that relying on intuition is the first line of defense for some men, maybe even the only line sometimes. A common thread that my research produced was this male hesitancy when it came to
perceived “fast” or forward women, believing that the more forward a woman was, the greater the need was for contraception. A lot of males said that they could “tell if a girl was a whore by looking at her and by how she acts.” From there, males could decide whether or not to use contraceptives. Though many males believed that looks can have some merit as to whether a female is infected, AIDS and STDs never discriminate based on class, age, looks, or personality.

Here arises the question, why are STIs and unwanted pregnancies not considered unmanly or emasculating? Since sexual conquest remains such a large part of proving one’s masculinity, though stigmatized by society the attainment of either of these consequences is public verification of masculinity for the male responsible. Our society has constructed a cultural safety net for male masculinity, ready to catch a male who suffers the consequences of his irresponsibility.

Is Masculinity a Justification or are Justifications Shaped by Masculinity?
Since masculinity is a social construction and manifests itself in different ways in different societies, the manner in which it permeates a culture is relative to that culture specifically and attaches itself at the roots. From there, it is capable of altering all the leaves and branches that make up the rest of the culture without many people even recognizing a difference. This, I believe, is what I witnessed on the Saturday night at that bar: many internal justifications within the minds of countless males pressured by their peers to neglect safe-sex options. The real question remains, is it directly the pressure to fit in that affected these males or were the justifications being made to have unprotected sex a byproduct of masculinity’s hold on our culture?

For instance, one person noted the relative geographical safety from STDs in a small town in America in contrast to Africa or Southern Asia where the AIDS rate is much higher (UNAIDS 2009). The respondent felt that, “AIDS is not here and our STD rate is really not that high.” This also exemplifies how we take so many things for granted here in America. We must question: because it is impossible to know who is infected simply by looking at them, why do males feel justified in using geography as a reason for not having protected sex? Here, I argue, it is both. To better understand this concept, one must also view American constructions of sexual pleasure contiguously with masculinity.

Sexual pleasure has been proven to be a main focal point for the majority of sexually active males, many of whom believe their pleasure trumps all else in sex (Whitehead 1997). Even our concepts of sex are entirely socially constructed. It has been engrained in our culture that sex without a condom is much more pleasurable than with one, so, this becomes another way to justify having unprotected sex. In our male-centered, hegemonic, patriarchal society, sex has been construed by the dominant culture to be purely for male enjoyment and that women are merely objects to facilitate this pleasure. All males that I interviewed agreed that sexual intercourse without a condom is a much more pleasurable experience than if they were wearing one. Because males have the belief that their pleasure is superior to the female, he is able to justify his validation of masculinity by sexual conquest, as well as satisfy social constructions of sex and pleasure, all by neglecting to use a condom.

Adaptations in Femininity as a Result
At the other end of the spectrum, the women I encountered during my project represented active participants in the quest for proper sexual health, taking the initiative to gain sexual autonomy and obtain protection. Overall, they tended to be more interested than the males in why I was out there
than the males, showing curiosity in my choice of major and the implications of my project. As was stated, around 90% to 95% of the takers of protection were females and not a single one of them showed any embarrassment for their choice to protect themselves. Many of the female responses ranged from “wow, you’re really awesome for doing this” to “that’s really righteous; good for you.” All showed appreciation towards me for making this option of sexual health available so they could take the initiative for protection. Females responded in this way due to opinions on male accountability for contraception, reflecting that they felt men were “sly” or devious, trying to con women into having sexual intercourse without a condom. In this way, because our paradigm of masculinity encourages neglecting to use condoms for increased pleasure and conquest, women have adapted to take a greater responsibility in their sexual health. Femininity has adapted to masculinity’s pressure on males. This is often how males are portrayed by our culture: hypersexual heterosexuals that feel compelled to validate their masculinity. And because this image of hypersexuality is reinforced in our mainstream society, men feel pressured to conform to its ideals. Therefore, women felt that my presence with, essentially protection from males, gave them more autonomy to make the decision themselves because men cannot be held reliable due to their ulterior motives.

**Conclusion**

In retrospect, my results surprised me quite a bit, though as I analyzed the results a bit further I began to understand the deeper concepts relating gender and sexuality. The questions I set out to answer related to American dominant constructions of masculinity and their effect on sexual health. I investigated how the genders interact to shape this model and how specifically femininity has adapted to these ideals of masculinity. From this ethnographic study I conclude that masculinity negatively affects our system of sexual health because it compels males to publicly denigrate the use of contraception based on masculine ideals. Together, masculinity and femininity play equal and opposite roles in the negotiation of contraception as gender roles adapt to one another in order to fulfill dominant cultural values to correctly perform gender. Due to males being construed as overly sexual beings, our conceptions of masculinity now encompass negative ideals that endanger both males and females.

The lackadaisical nature that we have instilled in males has resulted in the transmission of dangerous sexual diseases when they could otherwise be avoided. Our cultural mindset of gender has permitted masculinity to run and hump unprotected and without bounds. The spread of HIV/AIDS can be ended once we alter the roots of our socially constructed tree. Ultimately, gender equality will make the difference between female dependence on males and their sexual health sovereignty. I believe that empowering women of all ages comes with the proper supplication of contraception, giving women options to make their own decisions without reliance on males.

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What Are Friends For?: Surveying the Impact of Social Networks on West African Female Immigrant Livelihood in the United States

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Introduction
Unlike the hustle and bustle on New York streets appearing loosely around 8AM each morning, the Ghanaian workday starts promptly at sunrise. Urban traders, market consumers, and everyone in between meander the streets of Accra, Ghana ready to make transactions. In West Africa, women play a key participatory role in urban market activities. They act as traders, producers, consumers, entrepreneurs, financiers, and much more. It became clear in my interaction with West Africans and in my library-based research that finances were not typically shared between working married couples. Accordingly, women maintain unique practices that affect the way in which they spend money. “Women’s enterprise and household occupations and responsibilities...
are closely related and intertwined. Therefore, their demand for financial services is distinctly different from the male market segment” (Heidhues and Schrieder 34). Due to certain market and logistical constraints, women must rely on informal financial services in order to finance urgent consumption needs, business demands, and family-related necessities (Heidhues and Schrieder 22).

In West Africa, as in the rest of the informal sector worldwide, women are vastly over-represented. Existing data support the claim that most economically active women in the developing world work in the informal sector (Chen 2). In the West African countries of Benin and Mali alone, the informal sector is responsible for more than 95 percent of working women who participate in non-agricultural economic activity (Chen 3). In the face of longtime contact with capitalistic forces, the West African informal system has not contracted but rather expanded its operations. Market traders in West Africa are among the most dynamic and autonomous in the world (Clark xviii). The nature of their economic autonomy—that is, the informal ways in which West African traders share and save money—will be of primary focus here.

Despite the presence of formal banks, a lack of collateral has led most traders to develop sophisticated informal finance structures (Ayittey 97). Clifford Geertz is often credited as the first anthropologist to recognize an informal money-sharing method that is used all around, but bearing specific importance in West Africa. Geertz has employed the term “rotating savings and credit association” (ROSCA) to define the multitude of informal money-sharing schemes similar to George Ayittey’s “family pot” (Geertz 241). Across West Africa, these schemes hold different names: in Senegal, they are referred to as les tontines; in Ghana, susu; in Nigeria, csusu; and in Benin, ndjonu (Ardener 206). In much of West Africa, the ROSCA is a gendered phenomenon. For instance, in places such as Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Ghana, women dominate ROSCAs. Often times, women lack collateral or the credit history that men have, so they turn to informal microfinancial schemes such as ROSCAs (Ardener 2). In Ghana, for instance, susu associations are not necessarily arranged in autonomous groups, though they may be. Instead, they are more often associations of women who are of the same industry who contribute to a lump sum. Contributions and loans are managed by a “susu collector.” While the contributors tend to be female, susu collectors tend to be male (Bortei-Doku and Aryeetey 78). Women’s motives for savings may be incredibly diverse, ranging from business needs to urgent personal needs (Peebles 228).

Strong social networks in West Africa are indicative of communalistic and largely co-dependent social relations. In their study on social networks in Ghana, Drs. Udry and Conley found that important aspects of life such as political influence and access to land rely almost exclusively on the extent of individuals’ social networks (Conley and Udry 2). In the markets, social networks become an important tool for market women to profit from each others’ resources.

My fieldwork for this aspect of the research was focused in Accra, Ghana. In the fall of 2011, I was funded for a short exploratory trip, where I was able to carry out some basic ethnographic research on market women and their livelihood practices. My methodology was primarily comprised of participant-observation and informal interviews with the local Gã population. I focused my efforts on Makola Market, the largest and oldest market in Accra. My guide informed me that it was very much frequented by the local population rather than being targeted to more of a transient tourist/visitor population. I entered the market as a consumer and an observer, beraing in mind...
inquiring related to the arrangement of the stalls, the women’s money-sharing practices, and their social interaction with one another (particularly those in the same industry). Between my brief interaction with the female vendors and follow-up conversations with other Ghanaians, I was able to extract several important details about West African female livelihood in and around Accra.

In recent decades, immigration out of Sub-Saharan Africa has been at an all-time high. Sub-Saharan Africans are moving into places such as the South of France, all of Spain, the UK, and the United States. They are settling in cities such as Paris, Marseille, London, Madrid, Barcelona, and New York City. The motivation for such an exodus is not singular. Africans comprise the majority of immigrants to Western Europe today, a trend which has burgeoned to remarkable levels in recent years (Council of Europe: Parliamentary Assembly 1).

Sub-Saharan African immigrants have settled all over the United States, but the most salient populations can be found in places like the Northeast and the West Coast. Roughly half of all Sub-Saharan African immigrants to the United States reside in New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Minneapolis. Experts note that a large amount of Africans who immigrate to the United States come from urban environments, which is further motivation for them to settle in metropolitan areas. Not only this, but of course the availability of jobs is higher in cities, in addition to the frequency of social support programs and fellow African immigrants (Ball 1).

My fieldwork for this aspect of the research was based in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, where West Africans have made a major mark in pockets of Washington culture. West Africans are very prominent, inhabiting areas such as Adams-Morgan. While I had limited time in D.C., I was able to interview several West African immigrant students, as well as observe many immigrant workers. For the purpose of this paper, I was most interested in their livelihood practices in West Africa and upon entering the United States. I also probed their knowledge of West African informal financial practices, asking them if they utilized those microfinancial schemes to help finance their work in the United States. Additionally, social networks were an important puzzle piece in understanding their economic activity as immigrants. Who did they rely on? Did they have family or friends here who helped them? Many of the answers varied according to whom they knew, what they did for a living, and many other factors.

Methodology
To carry out this research, I utilized an integrative methodology in pursuing both extensive library-based research and small-scale fieldwork activity. Two separate fieldwork opportunities presented themselves to me, in Ghana and Washington, D.C., respectively. I carried out informal interviews, which produced several case studies (two of which are included in this paper). I was also able to rely upon participant-observation. Scarcely has research been done on the West African immigration population, as it relates to money-sharing practices and social networking. This research is innovative and asks needed questions that are at the forefront of discussions on development, gender roles, and African immigration.

Case Studies and Discussion
According to Robert T. Herman and Robert L. Smith in their book *Immigrant, Inc.: Why Immigrant Entrepreneurs are Driving the New Economy (and how they will save the American worker)*, most immigrants do not come to the United States today looking to start an independent business. As previously discussed, entrepreneurship in West Africa is very common and
businesses face fewer regulations than in the United States. As one Ghanaian told me while I was in Accra, “All you need to do is buy a stall, and you’ve got a business.” Herman and Smith note, “Some came to take a job, and a few came to join family already here, but most came to earn an advanced degree” (Herman and Smith 13). In Ghana, the vast majority of people I spoke with who were ages 18-25 said that they wanted to come to the United States (specifically) for a university education. Still, there are many in the United States today who work in businesses and hold other meaningful non-academic employment.

The following two case studies describe two women that I was fortunate enough to meet and interview at the Howard University Graduate School during my time in D.C. Both were female West Africans who had come to the United States within the past 10 years. The first woman I interviewed was a Nigerian-born, middle-aged PhD candidate in the Department of African Studies. For confidentiality reasons, I will refer to her as Adwana. Adwana’s family in Nigeria had a strong background in retail. Her father owned a small textile shop for which Adwana’s mother was the de facto owner. Her mother and father divided the profits from that particular shop, but her father owned several others. Management of the shop left Adwana’s mother with, in her words, a “sense of worth.” Adwana described her mother’s involvement in an esusu group. Members were all women of the same industry, and being a part of the group allowed them to buy textiles in bulk—a much cheaper and more savvy alternative to buying independently. According to Adwana’s description of the esusu group structure, anthropologists would certainly classify it as a ROSCA. She told me that women contributed to a lump sum, which was circulated to each one of the group members on a monthly basis. Adwana herself mentioned the fact that trust and good faith were of the utmost importance in terms of repaying loans. The women were responsible only to each other, which promoted a sense of group solidarity.

Adwana delineated the differences she saw between the business culture in West Africa and the United States, specifically as it relates to immigrants. In West Africa, she said, there is a support structure. She told me how her mother worked in conjunction with her father. They were business partners, sharing profit and making decisions as a unit. She also relied heavily on her social network and women in her same industry. In the United States, she said, there is much more of an individualistic culture. Starting a business is a “capital-intensive venture,” she said, which can pose a striking challenge to immigrants. She also highlighted the complex bureaucratic process through which businesses are established, not to mention the legal underpinnings of business regulations. Adwana herself is a university student, soon to be a hooded scholar with immense potential in both academia and the job market at-large. Apart from her background in business with her parents, Adwana is clearly chasing a different dream. She said that she was educated in the UK before coming to the United States for graduate school. When asked how she was financing her school here in the United States, she said that she relied almost exclusively on her savings. Said savings were the result of esusu membership. Like her mother, she too had participated in an esusu group while in Nigeria. Adwana told me that every member had a different reason for being part of the group, but her mission was clear: save for school. Unlike that of her mother, the esusu group of which Adwana was a part communicated impersonally (via email). She was working at a bank at the time, and one of her co-workers invited her to join. When asked whether or not her co-worker was considered a friend, Adwana replied definitively, “In Nigeria, it’s hard to say that a co-worker is not a friend.” It is evident that in Nigerian business culture, social networks and economic activity ostensibly overlap. They work in tandem, supporting each other. While Adwana was receiving
financial benefits from her membership in the esusu group, she was receiving invaluable social benefits as well.

Adwana’s description of her life in the United States, however, is starkly different. Fulfilling her dream of an American university education, Adwana does not depend upon her social network. She told me that she did not have family nearby in the United States, nor did she rely on anyone when coming to the United States. It was clear that the self-motivated, individualistic foundation of American society was a rather drastic shift from that of Nigerian society. As a Howard student, she is not part of an esusu group and she does not have co-workers to depend upon socially. She is economically self-sufficient as a graduate student, and thus it seems as though her social life has become indirectly linked if not altogether irrelevant to her livelihood. Upon entering the United States, if not enrolling in school or starting a business, West Africans practices plenty of other jobs. During my time in D.C., the immigrants I interacted with were domestic servants, part-time retail workers, waiters/waitresses, among other things. Some West Africans face difficulties in finding transferable skills upon entering the American job market, because they are accustomed to occupations that may be agricultural or domestic in nature. While this may not apply to those who come from urban environments, some immigrants do experience this as being an obstacle (Heidhues and Schrieder 34).

In studying immigration, social networking becomes of peak importance. While social networks are by no means uniquely West African, they are certainly a rich part of the West African immigrant experience. That is, West Africans depend upon their social networks regularly for a host of different resources, some of them social, some of them economic, some of them political, etc. Upon immigrating to the United States, the cultural landscape with respect to social networks changes remarkably. Adwana’s impression of a highly individualistic culture in America is supported by anthropologists who study immigration. One anthropologist criticizes other immigration studies which imply that the immigrant experience is the same across the United States (Foner 5). Even if of the same cultural background, immigrants will have distinct experiences due to the environment in which they settle. Cities like New York City, for instance, may be individualistic to the extreme due to the expansive population and confined space. Researchers have found that social networks actually improve efficiency in job turnover rates. That is, when immigrants rely on their social networks (i.e. family, friends who already live in the United States), they find jobs and housing that much more quickly. In fact, relying on a local perspective, immigrants who depend upon their social networks for jobs and housing tend to find more reliable employment with less effort. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, immigrants actually increase the supply of job opportunities (Light et al. 4).

Anthropologists have longtime viewed voluntary organizations as mediators between immigrants and their new environments. Essentially, they are a way of reproducing certain home-based cultural patterns in a new urban context in a way that helps immigrants ease into the cultural orientation process of being in the United States (Foner 162). It was not until I interviewed Omorosa (confidence maintained), however, that social networks were explicitly mentioned as having been a part of the West African immigrant narrative. Omorosa is a relatively more mature Master’s student in Howard’s Department of African Studies. She had come to the United States somewhat more recently than Adwana, but has established a social life here in ways very different than those of Adwana. Omorosa listed about 6-8 organizations in which she either holds a leadership position or is simply a member. Most of these organizations were specific to immigrants from Nigeria, her
country of origin. Some of them were specific to her tribal heritage, and others were open to all Nigerian immigrants. It was not far into our conversation that I realized how much of Omorosa's social life was derived from her membership in these organizations. When asked what she received from these organizations, Omorosa said that it is a source of social support. Members in these organizations carry out community service projects together, fund young scholars as a group, and share knowledge with one another. She implied that they were mostly female in membership, and that there were some unofficial economic aspects of their organization. Membership is voluntary, but there are clearly some expectations and obligations to being a member, even if informally recognized. The Nigerian women joining these organizations give resources, information, insights, and also receive the same from other members. Either way, some West African female immigrants find that voluntary organizations, whether they are catered to certain tribal, ethnic, or national affiliations, are a source of social (and sometimes economic) support during their transition to the United States.

Conclusions
This article has discussed the livelihood practices of female entrepreneurs in West Africa and how they relate to their livelihood practices upon entering the United States as immigrants. In West Africa, these livelihood practices allow these women to be financially independent. At the same time, their work is often supported by a healthy network of family, friends, industry partners, etc. As in the case of Adwana’s father’s business, her mother was the de facto manager and operator, but she shared her profits with her husband. Adwana told me that despite the fact that her mother was a working, financially independent woman, “the man still determines the success of the woman’s business.” Time and time again, evidence has shown that, as least in Sub-Saharan Africa, working women’s income funnels into several places: her husband/family, her business, and herself (Heidhues and Schrieder 34). When asked to explain further, Adwana told me her father’s emotional support for his wife played a large role in business operations, insinuating that any domestic conflict would be reflected in the way a woman runs her business.

In my experience both in Ghana and in Washington, D.C., I have been able to compare the lived experiences of West African females and make several preliminary conclusions. First, it is necessary to note that there is no defined, requisite piece of the West African female immigrant experience, at least with respect to livelihood practices. An important aspect of the West African female immigrant narrative is reconciling the relative financial independence of her past and the livelihood practice she will face in her future. The interplay between West African women’s social networks and their livelihood practices upon coming to the United States is malleable, complementing and feeding one another. For instance, students such as Adwana do not depend upon their social networks upon coming to the United States because of their savings, as well as the mere nature of independent student life. It was clear in the case of Adwana that her non-reliance on a social network in the United States is diametrically opposed with her dependence upon her social network while in Nigeria. In Nigeria, she was part of an esusu group which supported her not only in financial terms, but it also represented an avenue for her to expand her social life. Most student immigrants seem to follow a similar pattern, relying on savings, scholarships, or part-time work in order to finance their transition into the American school system. Their social network, as a result, is often defined by their school environment and/or their community involvement. For some immigrants, social support organizations are a central source of social networking.
Many immigrants rely on existing social support systems, being immediate or extended family members, friends/acquaintances, friends of friends, etc. Livelihood practices are similarly very diverse among West African female immigrants. Student life is common, but paid domestic work, retail and service work, and much more were frequent as sources of revenue for West Africans. Without a larger sample size, it is difficult to make comprehensive, holistic, or conclusive statements about West African female immigrants’ experiences. It is unreasonable and irresponsible as a researcher to draw conclusions beyond one’s scope, thus I cannot fairly estimate the conditions of immigrants in New York City, Los Angeles, or any other major city in the United States known to have significant populations of West African immigrants.

I would like to emphasize the ongoing nature of this research. The issue of West African immigration is certainly topical around the Western hemisphere, and only becoming more so. Microfinance and group-based lending initiatives have become a central part of the global conversation on development in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a young ethnographic researcher, I am ardent about the prospect of this research. Not only does it have implications for economic development, but also for gender studies, women’s rights, and social justice. The future of this research truly lies in more of a comparative look at immigration, expanding to multiple cities in West Africa and multiple cities in the United States. Additionally, I would like to expand the scope of this project to include a much larger immigrant and native population. While patterns may have been initially unclear and only preliminary conclusions made, this research has excellent prospects as an innovative way of understanding the relationship between the social and economic, the past and the present, the professional and the personal, and the public and the private.

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Conley, Timothy and Christopher Udry
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Call for Papers:

What is the e-Journal
We seek scholarly submissions from undergraduate and graduate students worldwide about the application of anthropological theories and methods outside of academia or across disciplines for the purpose of exploring, problematizing, or addressing social problems. These submissions should contain original research. Scholarly articles should be under 4,000 words in length and will be subject to a peer review process. We also welcome innovative commentary submissions to the e-Journal. Commentaries are opinion or avant-garde pieces of work that are the original work of the authors. These submissions are to express the next generation of anthropologists’ ideas, goals and beliefs of the direction our discipline should head, be it locally, nationally or globally. We seek a plurality of voices on this issue and intend to raise awareness among fellow students as well as more established anthropologists about the direction our discipline is heading. Commentary submissions might include such mediums as written pieces (approx. 1,000 words in length), photo stories (10 photos + 1,000 words of commentary in length) and videos/YouTube© clips (10-minute maximum in duration + 1,000 words of commentary in length).
2011 e-Journal Theme: “Traces, Tidemarks, and Legacies”
Drawing on the theme designated for the 2011 AAA meetings, the e-Journal will speak to the notions of traces, tidemarks, and legacies. Submissions that address this theme, as discussed in the 2011 AAA Call for Papers, will be given preference.

Traces, tidemarks and legacies are words that evoke the shifting and changeable character of differences that nevertheless persist, perhaps in altered form, as differences. Traces leave hints and reminders of half-forgotten things, relations and thoughts. Tidemarks leave indicators of where things have got to so far: this might be a strongly guarded distinction or just a line in the sand that disappears or shifts location the next day. Legacies imply pasts (imagined, asserted or remembered) that become entangled with the present and potential future, both informing and perhaps defining new differences. The traces, tidemarks and legacies of past and possible future distinctions—partially remembered, partially re-created and partially invented (by anthropologists as much as by anybody else)—make the world a multiply occupied place. And it is this process of how differences are made, marked, removed, maintained and altered within that multiply occupied place that is the focus for the 2011 theme.

The topic is important now because we are living through a time when most distinctions—between disciplines, places, environments, peoples, objects, biological and non-biological entities, times, languages, beliefs, epistemologies and ontologies—have been thoroughly challenged, both intellectually and morally. Indeed, the distinction between the intellectual and the moral has itself been repeatedly questioned. Yet these challenges have not led to the disappearance or reduction of differences. Moreover, massively increased communication, interaction and the ability to blend entities that were never blended before has not led to the disappearance of differences, either. Nevertheless, something significant has happened; the meaning and location of differences, both intellectually and morally, have been rearranged. The 2011 theme invites participants to reflect on how all fields of anthropology, whose own locations have also been rearranged, are engaging with these shifting realities in which we live, within and across disciplines and regions.

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