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The greatest philosophical conundrum to face modern thinkers has been that of determining meaning in a world that is seemingly indifferent to our existence and sufferings. In previous centuries, we had less information on the state of the cosmos and could place ourselves in a world that was structured logically and had a place for us in it, from which we could derive our meaning.

Now we are aware of certain disconcerting facts that undermine our previous confidence. The Milky Way is on a collision course with another galaxy, and we have only to wonder if our descendants will have made it long enough to survive only to eventually perish by the inevitable heat death of the universe, or if they will have destroyed themselves long before. Seems pretty bleak. But the Catholic intellectual tradition (CIT) has mustered some voices to the aid of the meaning-seeking descendants of apes in their quest to overcome the gloom. They don't speak with one voice and emphasize different components, but the fault line that runs through them is mainly consistent. To live a meaningful and purposeful life requires a relationship with other human beings and with God.

Looking from outside, the actor Peter Sellers led a life of unique ability and undeniable success. No one could equal his gift for imitation and few will ever be as triumphant in their line of work. And yet his inner life was small and chockablock with failed relationships. For all of his talent and success, he was incapable of creating a life full of meaning.

Charles Taylor would suggest this is because Sellers was looking for meaning and purpose in what other people could give him—applause and recognition—rather than sharing experiences and emotions. Taylor identifies three malaises that afflict the modern world: individualism, instrumental reason, and the political fallout from these ways of thinking. His belief is that the social benefits of the Enlightenment come with a cost and a cost that is coming due. Precisely, the focus on the rights of the individual and the wish to maximize efficiency at any price may have created a situation in which individuals end up deracinated and isolated. Taylor is glad that we can plot our own courses, act in good faith, and are encouraged to live authentically. But he worries the authentic life that many people aspire to can be degrading.

To address this, Taylor distinguishes between higher and lower forms of authenticity and explains that what he sees as desirably authentic requires a dialogue between people and the maintenance of relationships. This is what people like Sellers miss out on. Many people want to find themselves but don't realize that what they are looking for isn't their actual self, but a better version of it. They run about and always find the bad, old version because they didn't know where to find the good version. The only means by which we can find this better self is in a dialogic

relationship with others. Essentially, Taylor hopes that we will avoid the solipsism that might drink from the same well as individualism and that in avoiding that we will live authentic lives of meaning and purpose.

To further explore Taylor's philosophy, let's take the well-known case of Ebenezer Scrooge. His chief sin was not merely greed; it was a cold heart. A greedy man will at least make himself comfortable, entertain others, and may even give to charity, if only out of self-aggrandizement, though often enough in earnest. (Let's not oversimplify the human heart.) Scrooge ignored the conditions around him and lived in a self-imposed squalor, refusing to alleviate the suffering of others and imposing it upon himself through extreme austerity. Scrooge was a man of the world and a brother to none before he was haunted. He became a man of God once the scales were removed from his eyes by the ghosts and he lived with charity and fraternity in his heart.

Dorothy Day would recognize the hardness of that unreformed man and would be all too familiar with the poverty revealed by the Ghosts. In her writings Day's chief goal is to impress upon us the need to consider the plight of the poor. In "The Faces of Poverty" she explains why it is necessary to keep poverty in mind, for it is too easy for those of us who live in comfortable circumstances to forget and oversimplify the problems of those in poverty. I would say that the heart of her message is not just a call for social consideration, but a proposal that a life of meaning must be preoccupied with the fortune of our fellow men. For her, the source of this meaning is an obligation to our fellow men as brothers and sisters in Christ and that ignoring the pains of poverty is an affront to God. The relationships through which we gain meaning must not be limited to our friends and family; they must include a purposeful attempt to engage with the whole of humanity.

These lessons are also reflected in Pope Benedict XVI's "Charity in Truth." While the piece is in many ways a list of diagnoses, it also includes several prescriptions for our ills. For one thing, it recommends that people must be given the chance to support themselves and live in communion with one another. This is, of course, a call back to the spring of the Catholic intellectual tradition and the New Testament. The Pope reminds us that the fundamental interconnectedness of all people is at the heart of the message of Jesus. Of course, we can't solve all problems and will ultimately fail. That is where the message of redemption comes into play. It is the balm that soothes our wounds when everything falls apart, and it is what keeps out the infection of nihilism. The Catholic perspective is that through our efforts and faith we become closer to God, which is the supreme goal.

The Anglo-Saxon poem "The Wanderer" grapples with the same nihilism that threatens us. It tells the tale of an old retainer whose lord is dead and whose people have vanished. The warrior tells of his loss and how it felt all meaning was stripped from him. Ultimately, he says that the quest for meaning in this world is folly and if you want it, look for it in the next. This is mostly true; how can he find much meaning in relationships if everyone he knows is gone? But then, he

had meaning and one can say he still does. Pain is proof, isn't it? The meaning in his life was wrapped up in (ignoring the material items important to a Dark Ages-warrior) kinship and devotion.

This is a primitive version of what these CIT writers are trying to explain. We are defined by our relationships to other human beings, and in the Catholic view, this defines our relationship with God. Even the hermit is defined in this way, if only because of the absence of others. Charles Taylor might say that meaning is a phenomenon that must be expressed and observed in conversation. Our more theological writers would likely agree and add that the meaning observed in these interactions is strongly bound up in justice and are a simulacrum of our relationship with God. All agree that purpose must be found in tending the garden and harvesting meaning from a life of quality relationships.

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Modern-Day Fantasy: The Progressive Role of the Active Female

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*Abstract. Compared to other genres of literature, modern-day fantasy is often disregarded as Eurocentric and homogeneous. In this article, I argue such critiques fail to take stock of the influential and progressive role women have played within modern-day fantasy since its creation by J.R.R. Tolkien. This article primarily focuses on modern-day fantasy works from three decades that coincide with a wave of feminism, beginning with Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1950s and continuing with J.K. Rowling's early nineties and aughts *Harry Potter* series as well as Leigh Bardugo's mid-2010's duology, *Six of Crows*. This article discusses the direct correlation between each wave of feminism and the author's work and examines the active female role, in which the heroine makes her own decisions, relies on herself and overcomes the restrictions placed on her by a male dominated society. Theorist Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she recognizes the distinction between the portrayal of the active male and passive female in the media, is the basis for my argument. It is expanded upon, however, through the analysis of the character arcs of heroines such as Tolkien's Éowyn, Rowling's Hermione Granger and Bardugo's Inej Gafa. By completing internal and external journeys as well as redefining the stereotypical part of the princess, the heroines in these stories prove to be vital to the plot of their respective works, while simultaneously deconstructing the damsel in distress role previously used to formulate female characters.*

Keywords: feminism, fantasy literature, gender, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, Leigh Bardugo

Introduction

Fantasy literature has traditionally split the roles of its characters "between [the] active/male and passive/female" (Mulvey 62). Conversely, modern-day fantasy, established in the 1950s, depicts women in active roles.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who published his three-volume *The Lord of the Rings* between 1954 and 1955 and is credited as the father of modern-day fantasy, first sought to move past the constraint that earlier fantasy literature had placed upon female characters. Tolkien is often dismissed as a traditionalist that exhibits little focus on underrepresented groups, meaning that critics tend to point to the lack of diversity among his fictional characters, particularly to his lack of female characters. Yet the idea that Tolkien was not progressive is a product of twenty-first century detractors comparing *The Lord of the Rings* to the contemporary standards of representation. Although Tolkien had already published *The Hobbit* in 1937, critics consider his later epic to be

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Clare Callahan for her mentorship during this intellectual journey and my parents, Nancy and Al Turello, for always supporting me in my educational pursuits.

the foundation for modern-day fantasy as it surpasses a children's tale, focusing instead on adult concerns like corruption and suppression.

One such development is Tolkien's inclusion of powerful female characters, one of whom entered an active role. According to author Nick Bentley, "fiction of the 1950s attempted to articulate empowering discourses for marginalized groups that were not being adequately represented in contemporary intellectual and theoretical discourses" (81). This notion is present in *The Lord of the Rings* as Tolkien's heroine, Éowyn, a "shieldmaiden" who rides into battle, does not fill the passive damsel in distress role so common in medieval fantasy stories, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of King Arthur in *The History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136) and Chaucer's "Clerks Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400). Instead, Éowyn relies on her own skill on the battlefield. While the inclusion of a single active female may seem anti-feminist from a contemporary viewpoint, Éowyn was a progressive character for the 1950s society in which Tolkien lived, which pushed a "domestic ideology" onto women (Neuhaus 529). Often, "discussion of the interwar and postwar periods occurs in terms of their relative lack of feminist activity or analysis, as compared with these other times" (Caine 10). This analysis, however, fails to account for the progressive changes occurring in literature, changes that Tolkien's legendarium exhibits. Novels such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Six of Crows*, when situated within the patriarchal culture in which they were produced, have pioneered an important shift in the representation of gender in fantasy literature.

While J.R.R. Tolkien and his beloved male protagonists, including Frodo Baggins and Gandalf the Grey, are notable figures of pop culture, his female characters, though lesser known, are essential to the plot. Unlike previous fantasy classics like *Beowulf* (c. 1000) and *One Thousand and One Nights* (n.d.), in which female characters functioned as prizes to be won by the heroic male, Tolkien deviates from objectifying women in this way and instead depicts their abilities to wield knowledge, love, and sacrifice to influence the outcome of events. Although critics have pointed to Tolkien's fault of including only one female character in *Lord of the Rings* who has a complete character arc, such criticism overlooks the vital contributions of every female character within his legendarium. It is not only the heroine Éowyn, for example, but also the half-elf Arwen and the all-knowing royal Galadriel who demonstrate the importance with which Tolkien regarded women during a time when women were still oppressed

A modern fantasy story that rivals *The Lord of the Rings* in notability, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* reshaped the genre, as she expanded Tolkien's depiction of women by placing her primary female characters, rather than only one, in active roles. Furthermore, Rowling widened the genre's audience. Tolkien's earlier book, *The Hobbit*, focuses more on adventure than advancing real-life commentary, but *Harry Potter* appeals to adults as well as children and young-adults by attending to difficult and mature topics, including sexism and gender inequity. In this way, Rowling's work shapes the perception that younger people have of gender roles through her positive portals of complex and powerful female characters. Published roughly half a century

after *Lord of the Rings*, the cultural and societal differences between Tolkien and Rowling's historical moments are evident in these texts.

Coinciding with third-wave feminism, which sought to advance the ideals of second-wave feminism by questioning what defines femininity, Rowling writes about women who emphasized intersectionality (Drucker). Yet Rowling also lays bare the still prevalent discrimination against women, as her novels primarily feature men in leading roles such as the Minister of Magic and Headmaster of Hogwarts, while most subservient roles like secretaries are occupied by women. In spite of the increasingly progressive ideas about gender that informs Rowling's writing, she nevertheless reverts to some harmful stereotypes within her story that align more so with second-wave feminism of the 1960s. Her infrequent gender biases create a narrative conflict that the emergence of more recent modern-day fantasy novels has begun to resolve. On the whole, however, Rowling's female characters surpass Tolkien's in depth as they affect more of the story than just plot advancement.

A direct response to the current fourth-wave feminist movement that began in 2012 and considers "technological mobilization, intersectionality, empowerment, social activism and denunciation of sexual violence" crucial, Leigh Bardugo's Young Adult (YA) fantasy duology, *Six of Crows*, not only includes women within her world, as Tolkien and Rowling have done, but makes them and women's issues more broad focal points of her novels (Cabrera, et al. 418). These novels are written in the point of view of six separate characters, two of whom are female. Although the female perspectives represent a minority in these novels, the heroines exceed and deconstruct popular gender expectations. Members of an otherwise male-centric gang, the novel's two heroines, Inej and Nina, are uniquely vulnerable as a direct result of their gender, such as both being sold into prostitution. Through her work, Bardugo depicts women's ongoing struggle against sexualization and gender violence as they attempt to navigate a male dominated society.

Modern-day fantasy is a controversial genre. Besides its debated literary merit, the genre has been subject to the criticism that it lacks feminist qualities. For example, Melissa Hatcher McCrory notes that many "feminist critics . . . have been even harsher in their dealings with Tolkien" since his legendarium lacks robust representation of strong female characters (44). However, such criticism, I argue, has failed to examine these stories as products of the societies in which they were written, and to which they nevertheless pose significant challenges. It is erroneous to dismiss any of these three works as insufficiently feminist, a criticism that subjects fantasy literature to standards to which more established genres have not been subject. For instance, scholars have consistently and generously read canonical novels such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in the context of the harsh realities of the United Kingdom's Regency era, during which female choice was not valued and "women . . . saw their own hopes for even minor improvements in the education and social treatment of women disappointed" (Mellor 42-43). Scholars have praised Austen for her progressive representation of Lizzy Bennet's female

individuality despite her still conforming to societal norms of the time, such as her insistence that women are equal to men despite her marriage to Mr. Darcy, in which she loses her rights. It is also fallacious to ignore the conclusion these three works serve to enlighten: progress is not linear. Therefore, by analyzing *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Six of Crows* in the context of the societies in which they were written, as opposed to judging them against an ever-changing set of credentials, these works' feminist qualities can be uncovered and understood.

Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

Published between the years 1954 and 1956, Tolkien's legendarium reflected a society struggling to rebuild after two catastrophic World Wars. The period of the wars saw a "redefinition of gender that occurred in many Western countries" (Higonnet 1). When the men left to fight, the women stepped up and filled vacant jobs.

Although women could help on the homefront, their role in society is still considered traditional. This view fails to acknowledge that even during this seemingly traditional time, women's roles were progressing. Nick Bentley, author of *Radical Fictions: The English Novel in the 1950s*, suggests that "The fifties are consequently recycled in our popular imagination with conservative myths of order, social stability, moral decent and restraint - the period before the experimentation, liberation and decadence of the 1960s" (11). In other words, despite society collectively viewing the 1950s as a conservative time, there were still advances being made by women, regardless if they received recognition or not. Therefore, it is unquestionable that Tolkien drew influence from the postwar society in his great epic as his females struggle between conforming to conventional ideals and rising above them.

Tolkien is heavily praised for his creation, and yet, he is often condemned for his inadequate inclusion of commanding female characters. As Hatcher claims, however, "modern criticism has misread the role of women in Tolkien's epic" (44). Throughout the complex work, there are only a handful of female characters, none of which feature in the male-centric Fellowship. Yet, Hatcher argues, "we as readers in the 21st century, should not judge Tolkien by our modern feminist standards" (44). Rather, when analyzing *The Lord of the Rings*, the representation of female characters should be judged against 1950s society, in which women, although still confined by traditional ways, were beginning to grapple with society's expectations.

Departing from the passive roles of women, Éowyn, the White Lady of Rohan, completes her own character arc. Although Éowyn is the only female who fulfills the requirements of the heroic character arc by setting a goal and struggling before achieving it, her in-depth characterization reflects the 1950s developing idea that women more generally are complex beings with objectives. Furthermore, Éowyn manages to inaugurate this role for women who are determined to fight at the same time her feelings for the heir of Isildur, Aragorn, are a prominent feature of her character arc. Her narrative thus contrasts with the half elf, Arwen Undómíel, who, in falling for the heroic Aragorn, allows her affection to leave her in a passive role. The

dissimilarity is most pronounced when “Arwen waits at Rivendell for his [Aragorn’s] return from the war of the Ring,” while “Éowyn rides to battle with him” (Hatcher 46). At first glance, that Tolkien pits Arwen against Éowyn, who resists the traditional role of a woman who passively waits for a lover’s return, might seem anti-feminist. However, Arwen’s choice to value love and devote herself to Aragorn above all else is an active one. In a society beginning to give women a choice between the household, the work force or both, Arwen’s decision to love and marry Aragorn, which results in her forfeiting her immortality, is an example of a female exercising her right to choose her own fate. On the other hand, Éowyn determines that before marrying, she must fight against evil. During the Battle of the Pelennor Fields in *The Return of the King*, when attacked by one of the Dark Lord Sauron’s ring-servants, a Nazgûl, Éowyn, “with her last strength . . . drove her sword between crown and mantle, as the great shoulders bowed before her” (Tolkien 824). In this scene, Éowyn’s character arc reaches its climax as her goal of helping to destroy evil occurs, thus showing the audience that a female can be as powerful and necessary in places previously deemed only fit for men.

Tolkien also demonstrates how female power can operate just as meaningfully out of public view. The female counterpart to the Great Wizard Gandalf, one of the greatest Elves in Middle-Earth, Galadriel, uses her foresight abilities and her superior knowledge to guide the Fellowship on their journey. Unlike Éowyn who is present throughout the story and partakes in battle, Galadriel is “textual[ly] absent [in order] to be effective” (Carter 71). Only appearing a handful of times throughout the legendarium, most of the aid provided by Galadriel occurs behind the scenes. For instance, it is revealed to the reader when the Great Wizard returns as Gandalf the White, that he was saved by the giant eagle Gwaihir, sent to rescue him on behalf of Galadriel. In contrast, Gandalf’s role within Tolkien’s world is to prompt the adventure of heroes by presenting a threat that needs to be addressed. He then travels with the heroes for a brief time before disappearing, only to return during the climax of the story. Gandalf’s off-screen presence thus acts in a different way than Galadriel’s. Whereas the memory of Gandalf’s sacrifice motivates members of the party to persevere through their journey, Galadriel manipulates the plot so that the heroes have a better chance of succeeding. Gandalf can be credited with affecting the outcome of the quest; however, Galadriel’s veiled work presents a challenge to reading Gandalf as the dominant actor. As Susan Carter notes, “only after Galadriel has gone, and upon reflection, we might wonder how much of the action was her responsibility, and to what extent she, even more than Gandalf, held pre-knowledge” (Carter 73). While Gandalf works to motivate the Fellowship and understands the necessity of his self-sacrifice in fighting the Balrog, Galadriel’s foresight provides her with the knowledge of what must happen on Frodo’s journey, which surpasses Gandalf’s abilities. She is the guardian of the Fellowship as she intervenes throughout the story from offstage, such as when she sends the imperative message to Aragorn that they must take the Path of the Dead, which enables him to gain the assistance of the army of the dead, a necessary component in defeating the Dark Lord Sauron.

Through the characterization of Galadriel, Tolkien presents women as having an omniscience that trumps men's onstage agency. While Galadriel's position may be reflective of the 1940s in which women aided the men at war from an offstage position without which they could not have been successful, her character also resembles women in a restrictive post-war society. Since women were not permitted advancements and were denied acknowledgement for the minimal progress they had made, Tolkien's inclusion of the mysterious Galadriel demonstrates that women have power, while simultaneously exploring where that power resides. In this regard, Tolkien imagines women's power and influence in its concealed form, which ultimately impacted the next wave of feminism.

Rowling and *Harry Potter*

The sexism and domestic hardships that J.K. Rowling experienced, such as being left a poor, single mother in the early 1990s, translates into her seven-book series, *Harry Potter*. After her divorce, Rowling, raising a young daughter alone, relied on welfare and battled depression while writing the first *Harry Potter* novel. (Gillett). These difficulties were compounded by the fact that Rowling also faced discrimination from her publishers as a result of her sex. At the time, the middle-grade fantasy genre was targeted at young boys, who, the publishers believed, would not be inclined to pick up a fantastical story written by a female. Afraid the series would not sell, Rowling's publishers required her to use initials rather than her name "in order to disguise her gender in a bid to appeal to a wider audience" (Barns). Although she complied, the publication of the *Harry Potter* series has reshaped a generation's perception of female roles in both society and literature.

Nevertheless, literary critics and the public alike have criticized the *Harry Potter* series for reinforcing gender inequality through harmful stereotypes. Elizabeth Heilman acknowledges that although *Harry Potter* features "multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive representations of gender," the series relies on too many gender stereotypes to be considered a feminist work (140). Written in the third person with a limited viewpoint that focuses on Harry Potter, "the boy who lived," it is questionable as to why Rowling chose a male protagonist instead of a female when almost every fantasy book at the time did the same. Yet critics like Heilman fail to acknowledge the inevitable misogyny each person internalizes as a result of societal teachings. Focusing on Rowling's minimal shortcomings regarding gender portrayal is a failure to criticize the integration of male chauvinism by which each person is affected. The notion that her novels are inherently anti-feminist serves as a discredit to the boundaries Rowling pushed regarding the expectations set for women in the western society of the 1990s and early aughts. These decades saw the rise of third-wave feminism; yet progress the progress women had achieved suffered as they were also commercially sexualized and frequently faced hostility in their attempts to bridge the wide gender gaps in education and the workplace. Rowling's women, particularly Harry's best friend Hermione Granger and his love interest Ginny Weasley, reject the stereotypes surrounding

beauty and love that drove sexualization and repudiate the notion that without either, women cannot be successful.

In this way, Hermione and Ginny exemplify the way in which Rowling satirizes the stereotypical character qualities associated with gender. Often, when writing women, fantasy authors rely on what is called “the princess dramatic persona,” which sees female characters comply with a sexist arc in which the “princess” waits for the male hero to rescue her (Lin 86). Rowling both nods to and disrupts this arc in having Hermione refute the beauty of a princess and Ginny reject the helpless damsel ideology.

Hermione’s appearance undergoes a transformation that alludes to but also critically deviates from the transformation narrative of a familiar archetype, Cinderella. When she is first introduced, Hermione is described as having “a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth” (*Sorcerer* 105). Her description does not equate to that of other heroines who, despite their heroics, still aspire to beauty standards, as is evident in even Tolkien’s traditionally beautiful Éowyn and Galadriel. In a sense, Rowling parallels young Hermione to “pre-ball” Cinderella as both are considered “outcasts” from the stereotypical beauty standards that have been used to define womanhood. Ming Hsun Lin argues that Rowling carries the “obvious similarities [that] exist between Hermione and Cinderella” into the fourth book, *The Goblet of Fire*, as “both girls’ appearances change so drastically that their acquaintances do not recognize them” (Lin 90). In the classic fairytale, Cinderella, with the assistance of her fairy godmother, becomes so beautiful that she captures the prince’s attention. While there is no “royalty” in *The Goblet of Fire*, Hermione attends the Yule Ball with the famous Quidditch athlete, Viktor Krum. Whereas Hermione had captured Krum’s attention before her transformation, the change in her outward appearance is still notable, as the rest of the school, including her best friends Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, fail to recognize her upon her arrival to the ball. During the ball, Ron becomes jealous of Krum as he spends the night as Hermione’s date. His rejection of Krum combined with snarky remarks leave Hermione disappointed, alluding to the idea that happiness and beauty do not equate.

Despite the initial similarities between the two, Rowling chooses to enact a different ending to the Cinderella trope. At the end of Cinderella’s tale, despite turning back to her former self for a brief period of time, the prince discovers who she is and they marry, her outward appearance returning to the beauty she exhibited during the royal ball. On the other hand, at the conclusion of the Yule Ball, Hermione sheds the beautiful exterior she had for the night and once she returns to her former self, remains as such. Unlike Cinderella, Hermione’s “refusal to expend effort on her appearance can be feminist recognition that beauty cannot guarantee happiness as it does for the fairy tale princess,” as is evident by Ron’s treatment of her throughout the ball (Lin 90). Instead, Rowling is progressive in her depiction of Hermione as, like many women during Rowling’s time, she claimed ownership of her looks instead of allowing men and society to define her beauty.

Whereas Hermione's restoration to her unmanipulated beauty exposes traditional beauty standards as oppressive, Ginny shatters the equally oppressive expectations of the love story. Although Ginny's transition into a young woman mirrors "the emblematic glass symbol" from the Cinderella story as it leads to her capturing the attention of the male hero, "there is no direct link between the conquests Harry makes through the series and his marriage to Ginny" (Lin 86). Despite being introduced in the first book, it is not until the second book, *The Chamber of Secrets*, that Ginny comes to play a vital role. Throughout the novel, the threat of an unknown attacker looms over Hogwarts. Students, mainly muggle-born, or people born to non-magical parents, begin to fall victim to the mysterious attacker as one by one, they start to become petrified in a coma-like state. Even while fear spreads through the school, purebloods such as the Weasley's do not fear paralysis as their group has not yet been targeted. However, while eavesdropping on a conversation between faculty members, Harry and Ron learn that Ron's little sister Ginny has been the first student to be taken into the Chamber of Secrets. Upon hearing that "her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever," Harry decides to rescue Ginny (293). Although both Harry and Ron enter the Chamber intending to save her, due to their backfired magic, the path becomes blocked for Ron. Continuing the quest, Harry proceeds to rescue and revive Ginny, narrowly escaping from the grips of evil, echoing a hero and damsel plot device of older stories. Yet the similarities between the two plots ends here, as Harry's rescue of Ginny ultimately has no impact on their future relationship.

After well placed hints of admiration between two friends, their romantic relationship only forms four books later in *The Half-Blood Prince*, after Ginny is responsible for the win of their underdog Quidditch team. Harry, who has been internally wrestling with his feelings for Ginny, is so elated, that he kisses her, which leads to their dating. However, upon breaking up because of the role Harry must play in defeating Voldemort, Ginny once again demonstrates a lack of correlation between Harry's heroism and her love for him in the final book. Here, Rowling breaks the societal idea that women are weak creatures in need of defending as Ginny, only sixteen and not permitted to fight by her mother, disobeys and joins the fight against evil in the Battle of Hogwarts, the dramatic conclusion to the end of the series. Although it may be expected that at some point during the battle that Harry will once again save Ginny from imminent danger, Rowling deviates from the princess pattern. Instead, both become heroes in their own right as they fight against Voldemort and his supporters, the Death Eater, their paths never crossing throughout the war. And, as Harry fights without Ginny directly by his side, he never doubts her abilities to protect herself, instead only focusing on his love for her and sadness that he may not see her again as a result of his own fate.

Through Ginny's independence, Rowling conveys that women do not need to rely on men, an idea that the pervasive princess arc, internalized starting in childhood, has prevented many men and women from realizing, starting in childhood.

Bardugo and *Six of Crows*

While Leigh Bardugo's *Grishaverse* was introduced in her 2012 novel *Shadow and Bone*, it did not gain acclaimed prominence until the publication of her 2015 novel *Six of Crows*. Set in the same universe but detailing the lives of different characters, *Six of Crows* and its sequel, *Crooked Kingdom*, explore real-world problems such as opposition to diversity. Contrasting Tolkien and Rowling before her, Bardugo writes through the eyes of not just one, but two female characters, enabling her readers to experience their hardships firsthand and not through the perspective of an observer. During the time Bardugo was writing, postfeminism, which "assumes that any choice a woman makes is a feminist choice," was emerging as a dominant feminist discourse in Western society, as is reflective in her novels (Brown). Through the exploration of the differing racial identity and the shared trauma of the two girls, Bardugo successfully writes two powerful heroines while simultaneously depicting the unique obstacles of abuse and injustice they must face as women.

Set in a fictionalized Amsterdam, *Six of Crows* begins in the trade capital of Bardugo's world, Ketterdam. The story details the lives of six criminals and outcasts: one who has singlehandedly restored the reputation of the now feared criminal group, the Dregs; another with a serious gambling problem working to pay off his debts; an ex-military man; a runaway pursued by his father; a girl sold into slavery; and another looking to avenge her people. Offered riches beyond measure, the unlikely gang takes on a mission to infiltrate the Ice Court, home to the *drüskelle*, a military group, where they must free a captive. Along the way, the crew, already hardened by street life, is exposed to perils they never imagined as they uncover secrets that threaten their world.

In her duology, Bardugo pieces together tragic backgrounds for her two heroines, Inej Ghafa and Nina Zenik, both of which have resulted in sexual trauma. Belonging to subjugated ethnic groups, Inej is kidnapped and taken from her home while Nina, although eventually ending up captured, initially leaves her homeland as a *solider*. Inej is a Suli, a group of nomadic people from the fictitious country Ravka. A central theme of the duology, Inej is taken unwillingly and sold into prostitution, a market sector in Ketterdam that heavily relies on the appeal of foreign girls. Even though Bardugo provides this background in part as a political comment about discrimination based on race and religion, the violence Inej experiences is also gender-based. In 2016, the same year the sequel *Crooked Kingdom* was released, the International Labour Office estimated that 4.8 million people, 99% of which were females, were victims of forced sexual exploitation that year. Bardugo explores the idea of women being seen as sexual objects in today's world through the tragedy bestowed upon Inej.

That the blatant racial hatred that the other female protagonist, Nina, faces ultimately also becomes a comment on her gender suggests that the inequality between men and women, especially in regard to sexuality, is persistent. As a Grisha, a group of people classified as "the elite of Ravka...[who] manipulate matter at its fundamental levels," a magical ability that allows

each Grisha to have power over one type of element such as metal and to therefore control it, Nina is hunted and despised by the drüskelle. According to the drüskelle, the Grisha's existence is offensive as they come from "a land of blasphemers and barbarism" and thus, in the eyes of the warriors, need to be exterminated (*Crows* 234). By focusing on Nina and her personal experience of being captured by the drüskelle, Bardugo is once again making a commentary on the subservient role society expects of women. Although the Grisha practice gender equity, the drüskelle are all men. By showing the hatred the drüskelle have for the Grisha from Nina's point of view, Bardugo uses the racial tensions between the two to ultimately reflect the power men think they have over women. Once she is captured, Nina is forced inside a cage aboard a ship where "she'd been one of a group of prisoners – filthy and frightened" facing inevitable execution (*Crows* 233). When describing the commander, Bardugo writes, "like all of them, he was tall, but wore a tidy beard and his long blond hair showed grey at the temples" (*Crows* 111). Emphasizing Nina's and the commander's vastly different physiognomy, Bardugo links racialization and racial violence with sex and gender-based violence, resonating our contemporary emphasis on an intersectionalism that argues that discrimination based on race perpetuates discrimination based on gender, class, and sexual orientation, and vice versa. However, rather than allowing her to remain in a submissive position, Bardugo creates a powerful intersectional heroine that mirrors today's feminist aspirations and social climate as she eventually breaks free from drüskelle control.

While the abuse suffered by Inej and Nina is used as a plot device by Bardugo, it is also a commentary on the prevalence of sexual assault in today's society. Women today are still at an unnervingly high risk of experiencing sexual abuse. According to the NSVRC, one in five women will be raped at some point in their lives, with 81% reporting they experienced either short-term or long-term PTSD as a result. Bardugo does not shy away from detailing the effects of the heroines' traumas. Although Inej is free by the time *Six of Crows* begins, the aftereffects of her abuse continue to loom over her. Not only does the person who bought her initial freedom, Tante Heleen, continue to threaten Inej's liberty, but Inej must serve the gang who bought her "freedom," the Dregs, until her debt is paid off. However, Inej is not free as the readers and other characters are led to believe. While working for the gang turns out to be a better alternative to prostitution, Inej has only been transferred from one slavery to another.

Throughout all of this, Inej has also not had the proper time to cope with the traumatic experience she endured. In "What is Trauma?" Karen McClintock defines trauma as "a life-threatening experience that overwhelms our ability to use ordinary, cognitive, emotional, and physical coping strategies" (14). Since Inej is never given the time to heal after her trauma, she suffers from PTSD symptoms like intrusive thoughts and intense distress when faced with symbols that trigger her trauma. Thus, Bardugo is questioning the possibility of freedom and whether or not women will ever escape the confinements placed on them by society.

The reader is given a glimpse into the sexual trauma the girls face as, during the beginning of *Six of Crows*, Nina is still serving one of the Houses responsible for prostitution. The silky garments and sensual demeanor she must use when with her customers, however, is a disguise, as Nina, at this point in her story, is working undercover for the Dregs and is not being forced into sex work, but rather uses her powers of healing to help others. Still, the dress she wears and the unwarranted flirtatious fashion in which Nina is addressed by certain patrons provides a glimpse into the abuse other girls like Inej are forced to endure. Once both Nina and Inej leave their respective Houses, Bardugo does not allow this memory to fade. Instead, she highlights the presence these Houses have and even though they are abusive places, their abuse is endorsed by society. While the Houses exist in a harsher part of the city, they are still permitted to run freely, advertise and serve clients of high status, like the many Councilmen of the city, who have the power to shut them down. However, because they are profitable and enjoyable for the rich, the Houses are left to operate without restrictions or regard for the girls forced into servitude. As a result, Bardugo successfully alludes to the blind eye that society continues to turn to blatant sexual abuse.

Even when Nina and Inej are removed from the Houses, they cannot escape its presence and effect on their lives, demonstrating the harmfulness of false freedom. During their mission, Inej and Nina must dress the part of the prostitutes they once were in order to sneak into the Ice Court, which has invited the Houses to bring prostitutes from Ketterdam for the drüskelle celebration. While in the garments, Inej notes that the men view them “not [as] people, not even really girls, just lovely objects to be collected” (*Crows* 209). During this instance, Inej’s PTSD resurfaces, as she is reminded of the negative feelings associated with being trapped by Tante Heleen. However, while past trauma influences their characters, Bardugo refuses to let it define them.

In the sequel, Inej is being held as a hostage. While her inner dialogue runs through her predicament, Inej affirms that “she would not quiver like a rabbit in a snare” (*Kingdom* 42). In this situation, the reader sees the mental progress that she has made as she no longer fears being trapped, even as her physical circumstances recalls her past enslavement. By making Inej and Nina independent and powerful women who struggle in a male dominated society, Bardugo comments on the strength of women, despite society’s tendency to dismiss them and their trauma.

Although women may be granted freedom of the mind by overcoming such traumas, the same cannot be said for their bodies in the current social climate. Even in the age of the Me-too movement, allegations of sexual assault are ridiculed and discharged, aimed at discrediting the woman “ruining” the man’s life. Therefore, by suggesting that women’s minds may become free but their bodies will always be subjected to vulnerability, Bardugo’s characters depict the inescapable challenge women must face.

Conclusion

The progression of the female character within the modern-day fantasy genre is intertwined with socio-historical shifts, as evident in *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Six of Crows*. Tolkien set a precedent for other fantasy writers when he portrayed women as having, and making, independent choices, whether their choices adopted traditional or progressive values notwithstanding. During the 1950s, Tolkien saw how the World Wars drastically changed women's social and economic roles, as they began to enter positions that would have previously been inaccessible to them. While the representation of women in his legendarium is limited, the characters set the foundation upon which future writers would build. Rowling's unparalleled series, *Harry Potter*, draws on this tradition while distinctly being a product of the late twentieth century as her female characters, specifically Hermione and Ginny, are more essential to the advancement of the plot while simultaneously defying sexist narrative arcs. Within the story than Tolkien's women. By parodying the princess dramatic persona, Rowling demonstrates that womanhood is more complex than and cannot be measured against the standards of beauty and romance popular media perpetuate. Evidentially impacted by the fourth wave of feminism, Bardugo's contemporary YA fantasy, *Six of Crows* features female characters who represent, to date, some of the most progressive thinking on gender roles in fantasy literature. They refuse to identify as victims of gender violence and instead demonstrate the ways in which women continue to powerfully contest harmful norms in a male-dominated society. Her characters experience sexual abuse and trauma, a subject that has gained more attention than ever as a result of the Me-too Movement. Nonetheless, the Me-too Movement has become a new source of backlash as people hesitant of the movement begin to question the validity of victims, therefore demonstrating the importance of spreading awareness about sexual trauma through media such as modern-day fantasy literature (Gutiérrez Almazor et al. 1).

The progressiveness in which modern-day fantasy authors write female characters is often tarnished by needless criticism. The failure to analyze a work in comparison to the time period in which it was produced ultimately disregards the lack of linearity in progress narratives that these texts reveal. While women began to enter the labor union during Tolkien's time, for example, they were also set back once the wars ended and the men resumed working. Although Rowling herself is a female writing amidst third wave feminism, her internalized misogyny made apparent within her novels reflects the inevitable contradictions of gender roles, despite advancements. Bardugo explores heavy but realistic topics women deal with every day, including sexual abuse, and yet, mirroring the women of today, her characters remain trapped, despite their promised "freedom."

The lack of linearity we must face in reading Tolkien, Rowling and Bardugo raises the question for critics of modern-day fantasy as to who gets to decide what is and is not feminist, thus demonstrating that although they are flawed, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Six of Crows* are all essential novels that exemplify feminist characteristics.

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The Expression of the Hijab in American Sports Culture

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Abstract: Many sports in the West, specifically in American culture, permit religious symbols and practices. Yet Muslim women have been subject to discrimination, bigotry, and disrespect for wearing or wanting to wear a hijab. This study uses philosophical theory, data, and cultural information to explore the stigma behind Muslim women in America and their participation in the sporting activities that are held here. This piece explains how the hijab's true meaning is dismantled through American culture and the religious meaning behind it, argues why it should be allowed in sporting events, and suggests ways to prevent discrimination against Muslim women who just want to play the sports they love.

Keywords: Religious freedom, diversity, Islam, Muslims, women, sports

Introduction

Picture this: it is a crisp fall day, and your soccer team is getting ready for its state championship game. Right before the game begins, your coach gathers your team into a huddle to begin a prayer. No one questions it; everyone follows suit because in your household, praying before anything is normal. After this prayer session, the game begins, but is quickly halted after one of the refs asks a Muslim girl from the opposing team to remove her headscarf. He says it violates conduct and is a distraction to himself and other players.

How is this okay? How is it possible that a whole team can vocally express their faith, but this Muslim girl cannot even do it silently? For many years, this has been the harsh reality for many Muslim women, and as a result, this topic has become even more complicated to navigate. The focus on gender equality, religious tolerance, and cultural awareness have changed minds and made the world more respectful, empathetic, and understanding.

In sports, however, there have been many restrictions on who can/cannot play, what is allowed in gameplay, what religious beliefs are socially acceptable, and more. For Muslim women, specifically, the wearing of the hijab has been frowned upon in the world of American sports. In many countries and cultures, the hijab is understood to be a symbol of beauty, expression, peace, and grace. Yet too often in the world of sports, people view the hijab as a restrictive mechanism, one that might get in the way of proper and fair gameplay. As a means of religious expression, it is important that the hijab is allowed in all sporting activities. Although some see athletics and religion as separate entities, and although there is a common misconception of the true meaning of the hijab in American culture, I believe the hijab is a form

¹ A special thank you to professor Kilgallen, for pushing me beyond my limits. This piece has helped me find a joy in writing, and I am so grateful to be able to share it with all of you.

of religious expression for Muslim women; it is important that they are able to live their faith, while also being able to play the sport they love.

The intersection of sports and religion has existed since the first civilization. Scientists argue that primitive humans have been playing sports for centuries, when belief systems were embedded in society. These primitive humans revolved their physical activity around their religious beliefs, and evidently these two entities were bound to clash to some degree. As humanity advanced and society became more inclusive, it became clear that religion and sports have significant overlap. If the expression of religion represented ideals about Christianity and pushed for an extremely American nationalistic agenda, it was supported in sports. In other words, the expression of Islam on major sport platforms (up until recently) was a big no-no.

Twentieth century America was a prosperous time in the world of sports: baseball dominated the nation, and Americans of all ages were eager to come together to experience the familial aspect of the fanbase. On the other hand, this was a complicated time for men and women of color, Muslims, and more. Basically, anything that did not fit the white, Christian, male stereotype of the era was seen as lesser than. Nowadays, this idea has been completely transformed (to a certain extent) as more Muslim women (and women in general) participate in sports. As religious tolerance grows and more people become inclusive of other differences, it is more accepted for women to play sports with their hijab, but some argue that it promotes the wrong message.

Many non-Muslims, according to “National Geographic,” say the hijab “is a political statement,” one that might contradict its true meaning; when in reality, it is a symbol of “modesty: that will make for greater purity” (Qur’an), allowing Muslim women to wear the badge of their faith proudly and openly wherever they may be, whether it be at the grocery store or on the soccer field. While it is evident that Muslim women are being included more in American society, it does not necessarily prove that their participation in sports is not affected by the hijab or their personal (and religious) decision to wear it.

The Cultural Divide of the Hijab

For many years, the stigma behind Muslim-Americans has been relevant, but these feelings were of course intensified during this current century as the war on terror began to dominate politics. Because of the political intensity, the identity of Islam has been masked, with many Muslims feeling lost, useless, and unable to fit into modern American society. Much of the negative connotation that comes with the hijab is a direct result of this cultural divide, as many Americans feel it oppresses women, leaving them misunderstood from its true meaning (Droogsma).

This idea is seen in drastic numbers with respect to sports; as more Muslim women join sports, the cultural divide between Americans and those of Islamic faith has increased, and many Americans are clearly not in favor of allowing the hijab in sports. According to a survey from TyIt, 34.4 percent of participants believed that hijabs should be banned from sports, as they “are a

symbol of oppression,” and although 65.6 percent believed hijabs should be allowed in sports, this does not eliminate the other vast groups of people who believe it should be banned. The recurring problem seen over time with respect to this issue is the cultural aspect: many people see the hijab as an automatic gateway to oppression, although the Qur’an and those of Islamic faith say differently.

Of course, there are potential safety concerns in physical activity with someone having anything on their head (including helmets, which have caused numerous injuries over the years), but most people, as shown, do not see safety as the number one cause for banning the hijab. It is clear that it is a means of misunderstanding and lack of inclusivity of Muslims in American culture and one that prohibits this example of religious freedom and self-expression.

Fashion Expression in Sports and Religion

Clothing, uniforms, garments, headpieces, and more, are major components of expression in the worlds of religion and sports. The idea of fashion, in and of itself, has been a means of representing identity for centuries, and this is no different in today’s time period. Items that were used long ago still have the same relevancy in today’s society, whether they are used in sport, religion, or everyday life. Although such items like a soccer uniform and a winter scarf are extremely different, their innate ability is to express and relay some sort of message to others. A soccer uniform might be tight fitted in order to help an athlete move easier, whereas a winter scarf is big and fluffy in order to keep a person’s neck warm in the cold. This simplistic idea can be transferred to the hijab as well, for it is an article of clothing used to express one’s faith.

Of course, the feelings that come with the hijab in American culture affect those who wear it proudly every day, even if clothing items give insight to one’s identity and self-expression (Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd). Sports, however, should be an open playing field where athletes from all over can wear whatever they want while being able to play the game they love. “It is at the intersection of fashion, sports and self-expression that a great story can be shared,” according to Madison Hager of “The Intersection of Sports & Fashion: A Platform for Expression.” This, unfortunately, has not been the case for many Muslim women across the United States as their hijab has been prohibited from many sport games.

This is a problem, but the root of it lies in the cultural atmosphere in this country, and the only way to fix this is to be more inclusive of those who are different. According to Kristen Cook, writer of *Uncovering the Evolution of Hijabs in Women’s Sports*, many schools are becoming inclusive of the hijab in sports by encouraging athletes to wear it, even if they are not necessarily Muslim; this helps to break the barrier set by American culture that puts the hijab in a separate category from sports. Even though the role of the hijab is symbolically religious, this project set forth by these schools shows that any article of clothing can be present in sport games, especially if there is religious meaning behind it.

Religious Dimensions

The hijab is a part of the ethical dimension of religion, the one that focuses on behavior in the living world. The ethical dimension uses the idea of ritual and worship in order to promote religious beliefs and practices.

Religious aspects, like the hijab, are inevitably a part of the moral code, or ethics, of that particular religion. For Christianity, many Americans (and even those across the globe) are more open to seeing its religious symbols, whether it be a cross around someone's neck or rosary beads hanging in someone's car; Islam does not receive this luxury. For Islam, it is required for Muslim women to wear the hijab because it is a symbol of purity, as spoken about in the Qur'an; this is an ethical rule that they must follow.

Likewise, because the hijab is inevitably a symbol of Islam, it falls under the material dimension of religion as well. This dimension focuses on materialistic aspects of religion that aid in representing beliefs, rituals, worship, and practice. The physical components of one's faith, (in this case, the hijab), fall under this category and are resources that allow people to connect with their beliefs in a palpable way. The concept of free religion is specified in American culture, as it is a facet of the First Amendment. While it might be true that America stresses the importance of religious tolerance, it does so to a certain extent, as Muslim women are subject to discrimination in games and events. This is a direct result of American culture being misinformed and uneducated about the true meaning of the hijab.

The True Meaning of the Hijab and Philosophical Theories

Because many people in American society attach negativity with the hijab, it is important to understand the true meaning of it from a religious aspect and how it helps shape the identity of many Muslim women. The Qur'an describes the hijab as a form of modesty; it is something that allows Muslim women to feel pure, clean, and untainted. Sigmund Freud, the founder of modern psychology, explained religion in simple terms: "[religious people] place great emphasis on doing things in a patterned, ceremonial fashion; [they] also feel guilty unless they follow the rules of their rituals to perfection" (Pals 64). Here, Freud says that patterned behavior is almost innately necessary in religion because it causes people to feel some sort of guilt if they are not following the rules of their religion. This is the case with the hijab as it is a major asset to the rules and regulations that Muslim women must follow, according to the Qur'an. Freud goes on to discuss the ideas that relate to human behavior: he says, in basic terms, that following religion would ultimately provide a reward for accepting the societal expectations of the world. This idea, again, shows how the meaning of the hijab coincides with religious beliefs, and is not, as most Americans think, a subjectification or oppression of women. The true meaning has often been masked by cultural shift, change, and divide, and as more people become educated, this can be eliminated. Freud's interpretation of religion, along with the other people discussed in Pals'

novel, help educate those who are not confident in their knowledge about other cultures, religions, and beliefs.

Like Freud, many other philosophers had their own interpretations of religion that relate to the meaning of the hijab. Émile Durkheim, famous sociologist, explained religion as the establishment of values that help people show unity through a group, according to Pals. The monograph also explains Durkheim's intense feelings about religious symbols: they give people a sense of identity. Muslim women feel connected to their religion through their headscarf; the hijab gives Muslim women their identity, helping them to express who they are.

Freud's view, along with Durkheim's, demonstrates how important the hijab is on a social, religious, and personal scale; their inclusion in American sporting events is necessary, for it makes Muslim women who they are. The true meaning of the hijab is not only a symbol of modesty as the Qur'an explains, but also a symbol of identification; it connects Muslim women to their beliefs in a non-verbal way. When this idea is misconstrued, it leaves room for segregation, bigotry, and discrimination to occur against Muslims, particularly in sports, where many women are targeted for their headpieces.

Potential Solutions

In recent years, many efforts have been made in order to help Muslim women feel included in the world of sports. Because the hijab is a religious symbol, more people are becoming tolerant to allowing it in games, activities, and events. Although there has been some progress, this is still a major issue that affects Muslim women all over the United States.

In order to combat this issue, large corporations like Nike have designed a hijab that is fit for athletics, making it easier for Muslim women to practice their religion freely while eliminating the stigma behind the possible safety precautions of the hijab. Emily Dawling, author of the article, "The Sports Hijab Dividing Opinions," explores this invention on a larger scale and demonstrates how it gives Muslim women an even greater opportunity to be included in sporting events, saying, "little steps in improving access to sports for Muslim women...can only be a good thing." The inclusion of a sport-friendly hijab makes it easier for Muslim women to perform without the excuse of it being a safety hazard because with this specific hijab, *it is designed for athletics*. In Dawling's article, it is clear that there has, of course, been much backlash towards Nike for this invention:

Some say the brand is gaining limelight where other companies have been pioneering for years, and some say that by catering to the market for modest wear and modest fashion, the brand is normalizing, even supporting female oppression.

Yet the religious reasoning behind the hijab is not an oppression of women, as many in western culture believe; rather, it is a symbol of purity. Of course, numerous people feel indifferent on this subject, but the Qur'an explicitly states the true meaning of the hijab, with many women attesting to its validity, is a form of empowerment that helps Muslim women feel confident and

comfortable in their own skin. The veiling of the hijab is something sacred and personal to Muslim women, and with an invention like the sport-friendly hijab, it makes it easy for them to practice their faith while participating in American sports.

Zeina Nassar, a German boxer, proudly wears the sport-friendly hijab. This hijab is perfect for physical activity and prevents any safety hazards due its tight fitted material. Zeina, along with other popular Muslim athletes, such as figure skater Zahra Lari, runner Manai Rostom, weightlifter Amna Al Haddad, and fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad support the hijab promoted by Nike because it allows them along with other Muslim women to feel confident in their skin while playing their favorite sports; likewise, it allows them to express themselves through their religious beliefs.

To these athletes, this is a significant landmark in sport history because it eliminates the stigma behind the hijab and promotes inclusivity: "It means the world to have the leading sport brand in the world come up with a product like this," Rostom said. "It's not just speaking to athletes but speaking to the whole world that Nike supports all athletes to literally go out there and Just Do It" (Stanglin). Nike has taken great strides to eliminate the long-standing feelings towards Muslims and the hijab, and their work in regard to the sport-friendly hijab has made many Muslim women feel included in physical activity and in American sports.

Conclusion

Inclusion, acceptance, and tolerance are integral to a free society. As cultural norms change, the world learns to become more diverse, colorful, and fluid. Sporting events should be collective and inclusive ways to get physical exercise or be entertained. The hijab is a representation of religion and should not be prohibited when it comes to sports.

The major issue with the conflicted feelings about the hijab in sporting events is the fact that there is a lack of understanding in American culture; many Americans are uneducated on the true meaning of the hijab, making it easier to discriminate against and bully those who are Muslim. This is seen specifically in sports, with women being subjected to religious intolerance and bigotry. As people learn more about other nations and start to focus on the essence of human life, this barrier can easily be broken, and sporting activities will be a place of harmony for all walks of life. Both religion and athletics are major factors of societal structure and can work together when the barrier within culture is eliminated.

The beauty of sports is represented through skill, hard work, talent, and participation; it does not see the hijab. As famous Muslim athlete Amna Al Haddad said: "Sports can't tell whether you're Muslim, Jew, Christian, Arab, African American, Atheist or one's sexual orientation. It knows talent, whether you can perform or not. This is what makes sports beautiful" (Dawling).

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