

# AP/HUMA 3000 Level

## Major Research Essay 2015-2016 Summer

Assigned Session 7 May 31, 2016

Proposal: DUE Session 14 June 23 (eCopy due BEFORE class)

Final Essay: DUE Session 23 July 26 (eCopy due BEFORE class)

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**Summary:** The Major Research Essay assignment for HUMA 3xxx asks you to design and undertake original research with a classmate “research subject” that combines textual analysis of a cultural text (or object) from the mid-1990s to early 2000s (i.e., 1995 to 2005) with ethnography. Assignment objectives are three-fold:

- 1) to investigate the relationship between memory, girlhood (or boyhood) in a particular time and place with a visual or material cultural artifact
- 2) to build on the textual analysis skills learned in the first half of the course, with visual research ethnographic methods, learned in the second half; and
- 3) to experience collaborative approaches to research from the perspectives of both “researcher” and “research subject”

**Directions:** You will collaborate with two of your fellow classmates on two different projects. With one project you take on the role of “researcher”, with the other, you are the “research subject.” **As the “researcher”** you have a conversation with a fellow student about a cultural text/object that was meaningful to them as a child growing up in the mid-1990s-2000s. You are responsible for the project’s overall design, selecting visual fieldwork methodologies, completing the LA&PS ethics review protocol, conducting historical research on the mid-1990s-2000s, girlhood (or boyhood) and the cultural text/object, and finally, writing and submitting the essay with relevant appendices. While this is *your* research project (you write the paper on your own), the selection of the cultural text/object, and research question is something that your “research subject” wants to explore about their memory of their girlhood (or boyhood).

**As a “research subject”** you select a cultural text (or object) you remember from your own girlhood (or boyhood) in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. You collaborate with your “researcher” to design a research question around that text/object that considers girlhood (or boyhood), the historical moment and geographic place of your childhood experience (for example, did you grow up in Scarborough or Karachi?). Together, you and your “researcher” decide which HUME 3xxx visual ethnographic research methods will be most useful, and finally, you will meet once or twice with your “researcher”.

**“Researchers’” Technical Essay Writing Requirements:** Write up your research into a well-considered, cogent 10 (ten) page paper with a complete Works Cited and Appendices (Appendices include documentation of the cultural object, any fieldwork material generated in the process of your conversation(s) with your “research subject” (such as the conversation transcript); original graded copy of your approved Research Ethics Form 2 and *unsigned* Informed Consent Form (ICF), and original graded research proposal.

Readings: Explicit, well considered, and well-integrated use of assigned course readings is essential and will positively affect your grade.

MLA Formatting: Essay pages should have no less than 3.17 cm margins, be double-spaced, in 12 pt font (Times or Times New Roman) or 11 pt font (Helvetica or Arial), use 100% MLA formatting, including complete and accurate in-text citations and a Works Cited listing all

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sources. Inaccurate or inconsistent formatting WILL lower your grade. See The Purdue OWL for MLA formatting, available at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. Please review several times to correct grammatical/spelling errors.

Protect your work: It's your responsibility to make a copy of your assignment and store it in a secure place.

Academic Honesty: As always, plagiarism (including unauthorized collaboration) is a serious offence, so be sure to follow "researcher" and "research subject" roles outlined above and to properly attribute each and every use of all materials!

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**Major Research Essay 2015-2016 Summer**

**Proposal: DUE Session 14 June 23 (eCopy due BEFORE class)**

- 1) The Major Research Project assignment for HUMA 3xxx asks you to build on the textual analysis skills learned in Units 1 and 2 by having a conversation with a fellow student about a cultural text/object meaningful to them. As Penny Tinkler argues in "Picture Me As a Young Woman," "There are limits to what can be deduced from the material and visual evidence of a photo collection, and though interviews with compilers can be helpful, memories are complex cultural constructions that do not simply provide a window on the past" (262). For these reasons Tinkler finds that individual memory *in combination with* material/ visual evidence gives more insight into past girlhoods or boyhoods than either method has on its own. Tinkler is one of several readings assigned for Week 7 that models how to use visual research methods to conduct research with a human subject.

**Write a proposal** (a full four pages) that outlines a substantial but focused research study that could be written up in 10 pages. Your proposal will clearly define the object of your research, and your proposed theoretical and methodological research plan. Consider the type of research you will do when you undertake the project (i.e., textual analysis, tertiary research, collaborative ethnography that will draw specific kinds of visual research approaches. In other words, what methodological approaches will you use and why?) and consequently, the type of essay you intend to write. Explain your interest in your chosen subject in terms of your personal interest as well as your research subject's interest, and course material.

Remember that the four pages of your proposal could be the first four pages of your final essay. This means that the work you do now will really pay off over the coming weeks.

**Preliminary bibliography:** Aim for a range of sources:

- Scholarly entries (published since 2000) on the 1990s and early-2000s and place of your subject's girlhood or boyhood
- Non-scholarly entries on visual artifact (cultural text/ object selected by your research subject)
- Course readings that will help create your theoretical frame work
- Course readings that will help you create your methodological framework

Explain what sources you plan to use and why you are using them in your proposal.

## RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

July 26, 2016

### **Childhood, Ethnic Representation and Growing Up in Toronto During the 1990s-2000s**

Through the act of relating, all children experience alterity. At a young age, adolescents can become fully aware of their differences through the positioning and navigation of socially constructed categories like race, ethnicity, nationality and gender. There is a complex connection between identity, historical placement, physical setting and a subject. The purpose of this research is to determine how children experience their dissimilarities and the results of those relations. In order to draw conclusions, I have studied the significance of a material artifact from my research subject's childhood and done additional research.

Sturkin and Cartwright argue in, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* that “through looking, and through touching and hearing as a means of navigating space organized around the sense of sight, we negotiate our social relationships and meanings” (11). It is through the act of relating that we determine our individual positions. As they explain, “representation”, “refers to the use of language and images to create meaning about the world around us”. It is through representation that we come to understand our distinctness. As Garabedian explains, “identity is inherent to alterity: the ‘I’ cannot be conceived of without the other” (607). The necessity to seek representation is mixed up in the desire to establish an ethnic identity.

For many years, statistical categories such as nationality, gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, age and ethnicity have been used to define identity. At times,

powerful institutions determined where and how you fit into each group; this affected your social status and the differences, could regulate the extent of your influence on others. To this day, these socially constructed classifications contribute to one's reality. The main areas of research within this essay are closely tied to ethnicity, nationality and gender.

The extraction of adult-memory is a huge component of my research on alterity, childhood and representation. Memory plays as a substitute for past events in order to document my subject's experiences regarding "otherness". My research subject is, Emily. Emily was born on March 20, 1994 and raised in Toronto, Canada. She is now 22 years old and currently a 4<sup>th</sup> year student at York University; she still resides at her family home in the city. Through the re-calling of past events and associations, Emily has provided information on how children come to recognize diversity.

The material artifact that was studied for this research was a "Kokeshi doll". A Kokeshi Doll is a wooden artifact that originates from Japan (see figure 1a). Emily has fond memories of one of these dolls that she played with during her youth. Culturally the Kokeshi Doll had a direct correlation with childhood. Ironically, the doll was historically perceived as a protector of children and a carrier of the adolescent's soul when transitioning into adulthood (Wordpress). When the word "Kokeshi" is broken down, "Ko" literally translates into "child". The doll (figure 1a) was particular appealing to Emily because of its short hair and unique qualities in contrast to the other dolls (figure 1b).

As a result from working directly with Emily I have been able to answer a variety of questions in order to develop a collaborative ethnography. There were two meetings.

The first meeting with Emily was to give a brief overview of what I expected from her. In order to prompt a discussion, Emily was asked to list three things that she remembered about the Kokeshi doll. In the initial setting, Emily informed me that she still had the Kokeshi dolls and the other toys from her girlhood. From the information that she provided, we developed a visual method, a photo-elicitation, in which Emily was asked to take three photographs: the first of the Kokeshi doll that she preferred by itself; the second was of the preferred doll with the other three Kokeshi dolls; the last photo was of the preferred doll amongst other toys that she had as a young girl. The visual and tactile methods were used to initiate a discussion and to engage with Emily's adult-memory. This ethnography has been used as evidence for my research on children's alterity.

My discussions with Emily alongside tertiary research, has been helpful in order to draw conclusions about children and their ethnic identity. With that being said, being adhered to just one subject has provided it's limitations. In future research, in order to achieve a greater understanding of children's awareness of difference, I would study multiple subjects. The dependency on adult-memory also has its setbacks. Remembering events and feelings from many years prior, is often muddled with present perceptions; how Emily remembers the significance of the Kokeshi doll relies heavily on her current context and therefore cannot be a completely accurate description of childhood difference. Many of the additional sources that I sought out during the initial stages of this research, were not as helpful once I continued to develop a thesis.

What I had originally predicted was that Emily's attraction to the Kokeshi doll was due to the fact that she felt like an outsider because of her Japanese ethnicity and Canadian nationality. I had imagined that her feelings of "otherness" were in contrast to

the dominance of Eurocentric ideologies and culture within Canada during that time. Through my research, I had discovered that the relationship between Emily's alterity and the doll was far more complex. Emily's identity was frequently grouped in with the other Chinese-Canadian students in her school but she knew that her background was different. A child's navigation of difference is not an offset of a binary as I had formerly hypothesized; the experience of difference is a fluid process. How Emily came to understand her difference was based on subjective yet situational encounters with her environment. Some of the external factors that shaped her experiences were: where Emily grew up, the time-period, her physical differences from the majority and globalization.

Emily was caught in between her Canadian nationality, Japanese ethnicity and the controlling assumptions that others made about her experiences. In school, her Euro-Canadian peers lumped Emily's familial history in with the Chinese-Canadian students. As Emily explained in the discussion,

“There were a lot of East Asian kids in my school but I still felt a bit disconnected. They were mostly Chinese and this was back when everyone called any East Asian person Chinese...I felt weird because I was Japanese and not Chinese so I felt like I didn't even fit in properly there” (Angliss).

Emily understood that her position was neither here nor there. Her particular standpoint in place, time and history was subjective and personal. When aspects of her identity were being overwhelmed by dominant ideologies, she sought a varied presentation in order to make her individualized perspective, visible.

Emily is fourth-generation Japanese-Canadian. Emily refers to the specificity of her national and ethnic background as “Nikkei”. The term refers to those whose familial

background originates from Japan but they themselves are born in another country. Due to the modernization of infrastructures and rise of industrialization in the late 1800s, there was a large pattern of emigration from all over the world to North America. Emily's great-grand parents were part of this moving population. According to a 2001 census, Japanese-Canadians make up about 85,000 of Canada's entire population (Statistics Canada). This is contrasted to the majority of the population whom originate from European countries such as Scotland, Britain, France or Ireland. When asked about whether she thought Canada was predominantly white and based on Eurocentric values, Emily responded, "yeah, definitely" (Angliss). Japanese-Canadians are still considered Ethnic and Racial minorities.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, immigration patterns were going through an overhaul. According to Collections Canada, over 70,000 people moved into Toronto in 1998 (23). Similar numbers were accounted for in 1997 and 1999 and a majority of these transnational immigrants were from the Republic of China (Collections Canada 23). As Peter and Eva Li explain in *University-Educated Immigrants From China To Canada: Rising Number And Discounted Value*, until the mid-1990s many people emigrated from Hong Kong, China to Canada (3). The immigration numbers from Hong Kong peaked in 1994 at 44,000. This was largely due to the changing market and globalization (Li 4). In 1998, Hong Kong went from being a British Colony to reestablishing as a communist state within China. Canada opened up its doors to migration in the 1990s in order to expand its market and gain human capital (Li 5). Every year from 1994 onwards, there was an increase in migration from main land China averaging thirty to forty thousand each year until the mid-2000s. By 2001, there were more Chinese-Canadians than there



were of the Japanese (Statistics Canada). These patterns may have been responsible for Emily's position in her school. Although her family's residence in Canada was multi-generational, Emily soon found herself being associated with the increasing East-Asian population in Toronto that consisted of first and second generation Chinese-Canadians.

Edward Said and Stuart Hall have studied the constructions of cultural identity. Said argued in *Orientalism*, "Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality" (206). Although Canada prides itself on its multi-cultural "essence" the cultural and social ideologies are still rooted in white supremacy. Based on Emily's outward appearance, she was categorized as the ethnic other despite her Canadian nationality. As a young girl, Emily was conscious of how her physical differences were interpreted, "I remember whenever a teacher read a story about a princess with black hair I would hope they wouldn't add anything about "big round eyes" or anything like that so I could just imagine being that princess. I really liked snow white because I could pretend she looked like me" (Angliss). Migrants, like visible minorities are on the offset of a constructed binary and continue to be marginalized. In Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" he explains how experiences of otherness become conflated,

"Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of 'cultural identity'. In the perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture...It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which

are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning.” (Hall 226)

The complexity of cultural identity, or in Emily’s case, the relationship between her Ethnicity and Nationality was an ever-changing process yet, her history and experiences were conflated by stereotypes and controlling images of East-Asians. Parameshwaran Meenakshi and Per Engzell have provided evidence of the intricacies related to self-identification, “questions on birth country are no longer sufficient to identify ethnic minority groups in the population” (400). For children like Emily, her place of birth or rather her nationality, was not enough to sum up her cultural identity. “Ethnicity, appropriately understood, is a multidimensional concept spanning components such as a shared geographical origin, history, language, cultural traditions, diet, attire or religion” (Parameshwaran et. al 400). It was through the act of relating and a multitude of factors that summarized Emily’s feelings.

Emily sought validation in representation. The Kokeshi doll became an object that Emily used to validate her social position based on gender and ethnicity. Emily was attracted to the Japanese origins of the doll, “if it was Japanese I definitely felt more of a connection because it was something that was mine in some way” (Angliss). In Geerlings et. al’s study, “Changes In Ethnic Self-Identification And Heritage Language Preference In Adolescence” they argue, “people desire to socially validate how they see themselves. Individuals display identity cues or lay claim to an identity by using a particular dialect or language so that others recognize and validate their identity” (504). They apply this theory to first and second-generation North American children. Emily saw herself in relation to others. She was unable to speak Japanese in order to feel a sense of

community. Instead, she turned to Japanese artifacts and culture in order to establish a preferred identity in her Canadian surroundings. Language like visual artifacts is arbitrary, but we inflict our own codes and meaning onto words. As a first or second-generation citizen in Canada, sharing a language that is not the dominant means of communication like English can be a place of power and unity. Language was used as a tool by the children in Geerlings et. al's experiments just as the Kokeshi doll was used by Emily to signify her desired image.

Even at a young age, Emily was able to understand her unique situation. She was made the "other", amongst "others". In other words, Emily was grouped in with the Chinese immigrants who were inherently marginalized because of the perception of East-Asian populations. It was during her youth that Chinese immigrants went from representing only a fraction of the Eastern population in Canada to representing the majority. In addition, factors like language or cultural differences placed them outside of what was idealized as the "Canadian Identity". Garabedian explains that, "Identity is *always already* plural, a multitude of identities. Each of us constitutes a 'multi-culture': we are all shaped by many cultures, and we embody a co-existence of many cultures at once" (609). Emily's identity was and is infinitude of factors but she felt that those around her, simplified the complexity. Stuart Hall explains, "we should think...of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). While Emily, may have been seen as different from her Euro-Canadian peers, she was also seen and could see herself as unlike the Chinese students in her school.

For Emily, finding female representation was far more accessible than finding

Japanese. When asked whether she was conscious of choosing gendered toys she responded, “I think I did generally like girls more...My favourite characters were always girls but that was easier to find than Japanese things...But even in Japanese things, I still looked for girls and didn't care much about the boys” (Angliss). The Kokeshi doll resembled a girl and signified the Japanese context that Emily craved. Emily's relationship with the doll in itself was complex. While the wooden artifact was created in the likeness of [Japanese] femininity (i.e. flower in hair, kimono see fig. 1a) Emily also inflicted meaning on to it. Sturkin and Cartwright claim that, “The world is not simply reflected back to us through representations that stand in for things by copying their appearance. We construct the meaning of things through the process of representing them” (12). The doll's compelling nature was not merely due to its similarities with Emily, but it was intriguing because Emily was able to establish that it held some sort of importance. The power dynamics that Emily experienced as a child pushed her into the sidelines. Emily read the Kokeshi doll as a text. What did it say to her? “I am here and I exist”. Emily came to understand her alterity through the lack of representation that she encountered during her girlhood. The embodiment of Eastern-Asian identity in popular culture and day-to-day life rejected her Nekkei heritage. While Emily was attracted to toys that embodied femininity, she was more caught up in finding visual and material artifacts that represented her Japanese ethnicity.

Although there is not an indefinite truth to these research findings, we can still draw conclusions from Emily's experiences of difference in her childhood. Emily was incredibly conscious of how she was situated amongst Chinese-Canadian and Euro-Canadian population. At a young age, through the act of relating, Emily was able to

establish her own fluid cultural identity. Children contain the capacity to be fully aware of their placement in contrast to their surroundings. Emily's transition into adulthood, transpired during a large shift in migration patterns. Her specific vantage point gave her a personal perspective. If Emily had experienced her childhood 10 years earlier, in a small town within Alberta, her cultural identity may have been incredibly different. What has been reiterated over and over is that identity is a multiplicity of ever-changing factors; Emily's ethnic identity was not something that was concrete, but something that was a contrast to her surroundings. The Kokeshi doll could be seen as an act of resistance against the marginalization that Emily experienced. The means of opposition to dominant ideologies can occur in other areas with the use of any visual, material or auditory artifact. For some children, they may use language and for others like Emily they may use a doll.

Through this process, both Emily and I learned quite a bit about migration patterns during the 1990s and the historical meaning of the Kokeshi doll. Emily claims that despite being aware of the Kokeshi's Japanese origins, she was oblivious of the doll's documented significance in Japanese childhood. In the future, I would like to pursue a wider range of research subjects and other artifacts. I would still like to focus on adults who grew up during the 1990s and 2000s and within the cosmopolitan centers of Canada. When I had originally started this project, I thought that I would direct more attention to the gendered aspect of alterity. From the information that was collected, although finding female representation was important, it took the backseat to ethnic embodiment. Gendered representation, during this time period would be something that I would like to pursue in future research.

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## Childhood, Ethnic Representation and Growing Up in Toronto During the 1990s and 2000s

### Ethnography & Fieldwork

3 things that Emily remembers about the doll:

1. She was pretty and cute.
2. I remember taking her to show & tell in kindergarten (I got upset when people tried to take her head off because for some reason they thought it could come off).
3. She seemed left out because the only other Kokeshi dolls we had were the two in black who went together (the tiny one with long hair in the red kimono we got a lot later).

3 Photographs:



Figure 1a (Kokeshi doll by itself)



Figure 1b (Kokeshi doll amongst other Kokeshi dolls)



Figure 1c (Kokeshi dolls with other toys)