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**“THE GRITTIENESS OF BEING HUMAN”: INDIVIDUALIZING  
SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS IN ADICHIE’S NOVELS”**

**by**

**Madison Behrend Vaughn**

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## Abstract

Critics of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels identify her as a nationalist author, as representing the voices on the periphery, and as advocating for multiple voices and perspectives. Critics have also largely dismissed sexual experience as a factor in her representations and have regarded her graphic descriptions of intimacy as mere entertainment or as a means to provoke criticism. I will argue that Adichie does include many instances of sexual intimacy in her novels, not as an escape from the tough subjects that she details, but to express the effects of public problems on individuals. Ultimately, the complexity of sexual experience in her novels demonstrates that sexual intimacy for women can exist outside of the expectation of motherhood. In this project, I will analyze the abundant descriptions of sexual experience in Adichie's novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* to determine the parallels between intimate moments and public turmoil. I will contrast Adichie's novels with other depictions of female protagonists and their relationships to sexual experience, particularly by Igbo-Nigerian women authors. Adichie's work stands out from other accounts because of the variety of sexual experiences, ranging from uplift to caution to fantasy fulfillment, and the noticeable rift between motherhood and intimacy not typical in depictions of Igbo-Nigerian women. I have found these unique representations of female sexual experience defy stereotypical representations, which Adichie identifies as an important practice for better understanding of individual variation within a culture. Adichie, while addressing an international audience, directs the representation of sexual experience to fellow Nigerian women as a means of empowering them to have varied sexual experiences outside of expected motherhood roles.

“The Grittiness of Being Human”: Individualizing Sexual Expectations in Adichie’s Novels

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie appreciates “the grittiness of being human” (“African Authenticity” 50). Characters “who have sex and eat food and laugh... who are fierce consumers of life” (51) become essential to her complex nationalist, feminist, and overall empowering literature. Adichie unflinchingly depicts the most intimate parts of human life because, for her, that is the most honest representation of both human struggle and pleasure. Her novels, and the many storytellers among her characters, tell varied stories of Nigerian experience in the contemporary world. Adichie particularly focuses on intimate, domestic moments in the context of large cultural changes and expectations for women, Africans, and other groups typically marginalized from the literary mainstream. These intimate moments often take the form of graphic sexual encounters, ranging from pleasurable to uncomfortable to nonconsensual.

While often sexually graphic depictions are viewed through the lens of escapist entertainment, Adichie’s depictions of sexual encounters—and particularly the female experience with sexual experience—echo the public problems that her characters face, actually amplifying them rather than distracting from them. Her depictions of sexual experience occur in many places, both expected—gender dynamics, coming-of-age stories, and fantasy fulfillment—and unexpected—political discourse, race relations, and depictions of war. Adichie largely separates sexual experience from discussion of motherhood possibilities in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, although typical Igbo-Nigerian perspectives would inextricably link the two practices in discussions of female sexual experience. However, Adichie defies this relationship and offers many other possibilities for female sexual experience. I will argue that Adichie does include many instances of sexual experience in her novels, not to escape from the tough subjects she details, but to express the effects of larger problems on individuals. Ultimately, Adichie

explores the liberatory potential of delinking the expectation of motherhood from female sexual experience, while acknowledging the obstacles to liberation. By emphasizing this paradox, she insists on a reimagining of cultural practices, valuing the plurality of voices to reflect the complexity and diversity of any one culture's experience.

### Igbo Sexual Expectations and Adichie's Response

The tradition of other Igbo women authors, such as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa, links female sexual experience with reproduction in accordance with cultural expectations. These female authors emphasize the societal norms that prevented women from having sex for any other reason but marital responsibility and reproduction. In Nwapa's novel, *Efuru*, her protagonist wants her husband to have opportunities for bearing children even if they do not belong to her. She desperately continues to have sex with him, but decides, "if he wants to marry a wife I shall only be too happy. In fact, I have been thinking of it for some time for I have not had a second baby" (Nwapa 50). Because she has not given her husband another child and fulfilled her responsibility through sex, she must invite a different woman to her husband's bed. Emecheta explains this cultural expectation in *The Joys of Motherhood*, noting, "a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (Emecheta 62). Even though Emecheta does not shy away from chronicling sexual experience, she always emphasizes the link to reproduction in her character Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego's husband "demanded his marital right" and "she bore it," only comforted by the thought that if "this man made her pregnant, would that not be an untold joy to her people?" (Emecheta 44). Her sexual experience with this man makes her miserable, but she maintains that a child would be worth it. Similarly, this novel shows women who enjoy sex, but do not find satisfaction in marriage without the added bonus of the resulting

child. In fact, Nnu Ego's first husband sends her back to her father when she cannot bear him a child.

Despite the cultural expectation for women to be mothers, and for that to be the only reason for them to have sex, Igbo traditions are not necessarily to blame for the systematic oppression of women that occurred post-colonization. For example, although Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru* stresses the importance of women bearing children and the significant pressure for them to do so, Hogan argues the novel is an essentially feminist text. He considers the following to be Nwapa's goals in writing the novel: "(i) that the novel presents a view of patriarchy... as a structure of practical domination found in all cultures; and (ii) that the novel articulates an analysis of Igbo tradition which reveals... [a] strong tradition of women's solidarity and autonomy... that can serve as a foil to patriarchy" (Hogan 47). In other words, the push for tradition in *Efuru* does not suggest that women remain in solely domestic positions and have childbearing and mothering as the only valuable role. The Igbo tradition actually encouraged women to enter the public sphere, in a domain set aside for them. In addition to holding many positions that men did, "women had political organizations, sometimes called 'mikiri'... in which all women could come together to air grievances and seek retribution" when wronged by their husbands (Hogan 48). In the wake of British colonialism, "Igbo women were systematically deprived of all forms of autonomy. They lost their livelihood, their cultural practices" and the systems which protected their public existence (Hogan 47). Yet, even though Nwapa argues for a return to female power in Igbo tradition, she continues to associate women with motherhood and sex with reproduction only. Adichie actively pushes for similar female empowerment in the public sphere, but she goes further in saying their sexual experiences and choices must echo this power shift.

Adichie includes several instances in which the traditional link between women, reproduction, and marriage are exalted, but she emphasizes her female protagonists' discomfort with the tradition as they attempt to subvert expectations. When *Americanah's* Ifemelu returns to Nigeria after living in the United States, she notices a trend in every conversation she has with her old female friends: "it surprised her how quickly, during reunions with old friends, the subject of marriage came up, a waspish tone in the voices of the unmarried, a smugness in those of the married. Ifemelu wanted to talk about the past...but marriage was always the preferred topic" (*Americanah* 490). Ifemelu's friends make the assumption that everyone concerns themselves with marriage and children because it is the social norm, but Adichie describes Ifemelu feeling uncomfortable and uninterested with that discussion. Considering this environment obsessed with marriage, Ifemelu writes in a magazine article about these women she grew up with. Even the women who are unmarried and have no children "live lives they can't afford...like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists" (*Americanah* 521). Ifemelu clearly defines the woman's sexual role in this culture as one of submission. The women she describes define success as the happiness and wealth of the man that they sleep with, and this does not mesh with Ifemelu's sexual experience or her career goals.

Adichie foregrounds sexual experiences for all of her characters because she believes it more accurately reflects reality and does not continue to propagate the above stereotypes about women and sex. Adichie's explanation for her decision to focus on sex in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is worth quoting again: "I was determined to make my novel about what I like to think of as the grittiness of being human—a book about relationships...about people who have sex and eat food



and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life” (“African Authenticity” 50-51). Her focus on active roles in intimate relationships demonstrates the importance of sex in her novels and its influence on her greater arguments. Adichie also insists on offering multiple varied sexual experiences, contributing to her dislike of stereotypes and “single stories.” In her TedX Talk, Adichie considers “how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story” (“The Danger”). If only one version of a story exists, an audience is bound to take that story for the truth. If female sexuality is only reported in relation to motherhood, women’s varied experiences with sex for pleasure, for gain, and as an expression of some larger experience would not be represented.

Adichie explores relationships at differing levels of sexual freedom in her novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, both novels of drastic life changes and frequent extra-marital sex. *Half of a Yellow Sun* follows two adult relationships and the budding sexuality of a young houseboy, Ugwu, as the Biafran war takes hold of western Nigeria in the late 1960s. The first crucial relationship is between Olanna and Odenigbo, who are intellectuals teaching at the university in Nsukka. The two endure loss of jobs, descent into poverty, and affairs resulting in illegitimate children, among other things, as the war takes over their lives. Ugwu’s plotline likewise reveals the author’s complex view of sexual experience. Ugwu is enlisted into the army, quickly coming of age and experiencing particularly gritty sexual encounters and battles. The final sexual relationship is between Kainene, Olanna’s twin and a wealthy Nigerian woman heading her father’s business, and Richard, a white British man studying Igbo anthropology and looking to find a community in Biafra. This couple faces less poverty, but their interracial relationship and insistence on remaining in Biafra complicate their lives as the novel progresses.

Sex and intimate relationships frequently occur, and each encounter differs due to effects of wartime changes and complications.

Adichie's later novel, *Americanah*, explores complex and varied sexual experiences as the characters struggle with the dichotomy between tradition and modernity as national identity both changes and resists change. The novel occurs in a more modern Nigeria and shifts to the United States of America. Adichie documents the relationship of Ifemelu and Obinze as Ifemelu is accepted to a university overseas and Obinze is forced to stay behind in Nigeria. Over the course of many years, Ifemelu encounters racial tensions and discrimination in America, which finds representation in her negative sexual experiences that fail to live up to the fantasy of her first love, Obinze. Obinze cannot realize his dream of studying abroad and eventually marries a woman who does not interest him. Like *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* employs sexuality as an individual and private expression of the life changes and complications the characters endure. Using sexuality as more than a tool for reproduction, Adichie links sexual experience with struggle and with change to emphasize the variety of experiences with both.

Critics of Adichie's work continue to examine her representation of multiple voices within a national identity and the abundance of graphic sexual encounters. Charles E. Nnolim claims that she actually "compels criticism" with her world "of robust life-style, robust sexuality, and robust human relationships" (Nnolim 146). While Nnolim also finds that Adichie's women characters "shared complete equality with their male counterparts" (146), he does not consider sexual descriptions as part of that equality but rather a reflection of contemporary Nigerian writing practices separate from her argument. Critics such as Egbunike and Ganapathy note Adichie's use of multiple periphery voices in creating a national identity, but they also exclude varied instances of sexual intimacy from the larger argument for equality and representation.

However, several critics have addressed Adichie's liberal use of sexuality as a story-telling tactic. Zoë Norridge argues that, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, "sex and violence are intricately interwoven and that the examination of sexual pleasure... forms both a language and strategy with which to explore and contest violence against women" (Norridge 18). Eromosele describes sex as a unifying characteristic "in a world of characters from very diverse ethnicities" (Eromosele 103). Both critics identify metaphorical connections between sex and violence in Adichie's works that further her argument for equality. I acknowledge the importance and validity of both Norridge's and Eromosele's metaphorical connections. I will argue further that sex serves many purposes in Adichie's novels and that these varied purposes allow her to detach the expectation of motherhood from women's sexual experience and give validity to other sexual experiences for women, while acknowledging the roadblocks to full potential liberation of female sexual experience.

#### Complexity: Many Purposes for Sexual Experience

Sexual experience in Adichie's novels is complex; it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss all possible implications of sexual experiences in Adichie's worldview or even in her narrative realities. Sex often appears in unexpected conversations and contexts, while remaining absent from discussions of motherhood, reproduction, and other predictable circumstances. In one instance of the complexity of sexual experience, Obinze's mother, a professional Igbo woman, argues "nature is unfair to women" because "if there are any consequences, one person carries it alone" (*Americanah* 87). In this instance, the "consequence" represents a child to an unprepared young couple. Obinze's mother explains to a young Ifemelu that the society she finds herself in will not expect anything of Obinze if she bears his child. Ifemelu literally must "carry"

the result of accidental pregnancy, proving that the culture links reproductive sex inextricably with the woman. Adichie makes her readers analyze this practice, deeming it “unfair.” Also, by pointing out that “both parties are responsible” (87), she assures her readers that men should also bear some responsibility for the reproductive aspects of sexual experience. Adichie both acknowledges the link between reproduction and sex as essential, while critiquing the expectations of women in sexual reproduction. Obinze’s mother brings up sex at an expected time and discusses it in terms of Western ideals of equal partnership, but she does not separate sex for pleasure from the traditional ideas of reproduction, not fully allowing sexual experience to fulfill its emancipatory potential.

Adichie’s focus on sexual experience seems fitting for discussing this global dichotomy of tradition and modernity because it is of common concern to diverse types of people; she particularly utilizes sexual experience in this way in *Half of a Yellow Sun* to connect very different characters. Eromosele, in an article examining sexuality in three of Adichie’s works, asserts that “sexual content in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a deliberate attempt to underscore the humanity of the characters” (Eromoele 104). The Biafran war brings profound, mostly negative, changes to each relationship and individual, and sex seems to emphasize and echo the impact for each character. Because of this link between sexual experience and public reality, Eromosele notices several metaphorical purposes for the sexual descriptions in the novel. These symbolic functions include the following: “a relationship in which the woman takes the lead[,]... a settlement for substitutes, a temporary filling of the space[, and]... oppression and exploitation” (105). The metaphors outlined by Eromosele served as a guide for my argument that Adichie uses sex to navigate and make sense of public issues and social changes. However, Eromosele

does not delve into sex in relation to motherhood, and why Adichie might be utilizing sex for so many other purposes.

From *Half of a Yellow Sun* to *Americanah*, Adichie complicates sexual experience by following its trajectory from traditional Igbo conventions to sexual freedom. This trajectory is due in part to the second novel's physical move West and the temporal shift to decades later. The sexual expectations and views in *Americanah* reflect the assimilation into American culture by a young Nigerian woman. Distinguishing between the sexual culture of America and African countries, a first generation African-American woman complains, "Oh, oh, oh these people... when a girl is thirteen already she knows all the positions. Never in Afrique!" (*Americanah* 126). According to this perspective of an individual on the periphery of American culture, American girls have considerably more freedom in sexuality and sexual practices. This representative of her own African culture considers the behavior promiscuous, suggesting a difference in perceptions even between modern versions of these cultures. When Ifemelu first arrives in America, she is given what is called the "welcome talk" (171), which warns her of the perceived American cultural tendency towards public intimacy: "And do not be shocked by the indiscriminate touching of American couples. Standing in line at the cafeteria, the girl will touch the boy's arm and the boy will put his arm around her shoulder and they will rub shoulders and back and rub rub rub, but please do not imitate this behavior" (172). Ifemelu encounters discussions of sexual experience in so many aspects of her life because that is reflective of Western culture at the time, but the culture that she comes from sees this sexual experience as a contamination by modern, Western influence. The breaking of traditional Igbo ideas of sex for reproduction only occurs partly because of the literal split from that culture. So, the sexual liberation of Adichie's characters is, at once, freedom from patriarchal expectations and

assimilation to modern ideas that distance one from their original culture. Adichie clearly demonstrates the complexity of sexual experience and critiques the need for a singular, traditional sexual expectation for an entire group.

Similarly, the presence of sexual experiences outside of strictly reproductive purposes in *Half of a Yellow Sun* might occur because of the severing of many regular beliefs in the midst of war; to a lesser extent, each character in this novel experiences a cultural change and a change in expectations. The most closely related example of cultural shifting comes in the characters of Richard and Kainene. Richard describes his anxiety in their first sexual encounter: "his naked body was pressed to hers and yet he was limp. He explored the angles of her collarbones and her hips, all the time willing his body and his mind to work better together, willing his desire to bypass his anxiety. But he did not become hard. He could feel the flaccid weight between his legs" (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 79). Richard represents Western culture as a British man trying to immerse himself in the new Biafra, while Kainene attempts to break from the traditional role of a woman in a wealthy family in Nigeria: to marry for connections and to make children. Richard's performance anxiety might stem from this cultural incongruence and the fact that both are trying to move away from the traditional ideals of their own respective nations. Richard criticizes the behaviors of other Western people in Nigeria because of the absence of passion and the meaninglessness of the oft-repeated illicit affairs: "all they did, as far as he was concerned, was have sex with one another's wives and husbands, illicit couplings that were more a way of passing heat-blanced time in the tropics than they were genuine expressions of passion" (*Half* 296). He attempts to break out of this promiscuity, but also remain comfortable with sex in a way traditional Igbo culture discouraged. By complicating the break between cultural tradition and sexually positive experiences, Adichie argues that a reimagining, rather than a complete cultural

split, would better acknowledge the variety of sexual experience rather than making one experience the only ideal. Sex becomes more complicated through its divorce from tradition but its resistance to modernity, acknowledging the paradoxical coexistence of both together in an individual.

### Uplift: Valuable Sexual Experiences

The sexual experiences Adichie details often tie into the idea of nation represented in the individual, which suggests Adichie's constant focus on sexuality has positive influence and general implications for the large-scale issues of war and politics. Many critics argue for Adichie's responsibility and success in building a collective nationality for Nigeria. Ganapathy notices "[*Half of a Yellow Sun*'s] acknowledgment of the legitimacy of peripheral positions of belonging in the nation, which broadens the parameters of authorship, signals the possibility of creating a democratic realm of participation and, therefore, the potential rehabilitation of the state along more inclusive lines" (Ganapathy 89). Her description confirms critical opinion that Adichie's writing has nationalistic ambitions. However, Ganapathy's brief discussion of sexual intrusions in narrative adds nuance to nationalism, showing that a peripheral view can highlight discrepancies in a collective body. She quotes Ugwu, who believes Olanna will seduce his master and "come in to intrude and disrupt their lives" (*Half* 26). Her presence, which Ugwu sees as particularly sexual, threatens his sense of order, as the war will do to each character later on. Through hints in individual reactions, Adichie points to problems in seeing one nation in a single way. So, although her novel has a nationalistic ending, she continues to advocate for single stories within that national identity. Adichie's use of sexual tropes and imagery helps prevent the

national scale from eclipsing individual experience, empowering individuals to accept the validity of their own sexual experiences.

The shift from Nigeria to the U.S.A. in her more recent novel, *Americanah*, complicates the idea of a collective nationality further and explores race relations at the personal and national levels. Adichie highlights the novelty of race relations and tensions that Ifemelu experiences in her move to the United States: “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters” (*Americanah* 359). Adichie’s character separates intimate and public perceptions of race, but the clear distinction of black and white definitely complicates the intimate relationships. Intimate moments protect individual relations between people of differing races; however, society continues to consider interracial relationships unnatural in the culture. Adichie’s further exploration of sex and relationships between those of different races can delve further into racial difference—or lack of—than looking at the big-picture cultural norms can do.

Ifemelu even argues that racial tensions between black and white Americans could be solved with intimate relationships between the races, furthering the idea that sex in Adichie’s novels helps navigate public issues. Ifemelu writes in her blog that “the simplest solution to the problem of race in America [is] romantic love. Not friendship. Not the safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable[;]...however, because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved” (*Americanah* 367). Here, Adichie distinguishes female perspectives on sexual experience, taking



into account contexts and different functions of sex, which suggests the moments of intimacy in her novels are varied in meaning and weight in larger arguments. She holds up romantic love as the solution to the large-scale cultural problem of racial tensions. The clear link between sexual relationships and race demonstrates just how Adichie uses personal roadblocks to represent issues that plague an entire country. Her character's pessimism about the inability to solve America's racial discrimination comes from a place of having society shut down a personal, interracial relationship. The personal and the public intersect in many varied ways, and Ifemelu connects sex with this new problem she faces in America because it is the lens that she experiences it through. Her continued faith in relationships to potentially solve public problems demonstrates Adichie's goal of uplifting individual sexual experiences.

Because of the individuality of sexual experience and its connection to larger issues, Adichie breaks apart stereotypes of groups by empowering the individual; this is particularly evident in her subversion of gendered expectations, connected to the association of sex and motherhood. Through the female protagonist of *Olanna* in particular, Adichie characterizes a woman who acknowledges the stereotypes associated with female sexuality and marriage expectations and fears what will happen if she adopts them:

Still, when Olanna lay in bed with Odenigbo, legs intertwined, it would strike her how her life in Nsukka felt like being immersed in a mesh of soft feathers, even on the days when Odenigbo locked himself in the study for hours. Each time he suggested they get married, she said no. They were too happy, precariously so, and she wanted to guard that bond; she feared that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership. (*Half* 65)

Olanna experiences pleasure in the sexual bond she has with Odenigbo, so she worries the expectations of marriage and motherhood will diminish her power and comfort in the bond. This directly challenges the stereotype of a woman's role being reproduction and domestic care. As the beautiful daughter of a wealthy man, Olanna would have been aware of this stereotypical expectation and was often pressured by her father to marry and to reproduce for his benefit. Her sister, Kainene, expresses her gratitude that she does not suffer the same expectation: "'The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait'" (*Half* 44). Kainene's assessment of her role demonstrates the pervasiveness of the motherhood and marriage expectation that both sisters fight against in their strong, extramarital relationships.

Similarly, *Americanah* explores the submissive sexuality and motherhood expectations' effects on the women of Nigeria and America from varied perspectives, sometimes flipping the expectation and sometimes falling prey to it. The women in this novel discuss the expectations for female partners in the actual sexual encounter, which promotes the expectation that woman are not meant to enjoy sex but to use it as a means of reproduction and of pleasing a husband. Ifemelu is educated in this expectation from before her first sexual experience. After she meets Obinze, "she told Aunty Uju that she had met the love of her life, and Aunty Uju told her to let him kiss and touch but not to let him put it inside" (*Americanah* 65). She is to use her sexuality as power, but to be submissive in other ways. The pressure to observe this expectation even came through in playing with her peers: "she and her friends sometimes enacted the stories... the man would grab the woman, the woman would fight weakly, then collapse against him with shrill moans—and they would all burst out laughing" (*Americanah* 69). Roles were clearly laid out for Ifemelu, but she seems to break through and change in her shift to America.

In contrast to those who follow cultural expectations, Adichie's female protagonists can have empowered and pleasurable sexual relationships, and, in fact, most gratifying sexual experiences that Adichie describes come from the perspective of a woman narrator. After Olanna tells Odenigbo about her affair with Richard, he cannot be angry with Olanna. Olanna recalls that "his defenselessness moved her. She knelt down before him and unbuttoned his shirt to suck the soft-firm flesh of his belly. She felt his intake of breath when she touched his trousers' zipper. In her mouth, he was swollen stiff. The faint ache in her lower jaw, the pressure of his widespread hands on her head, excited her" (*Half* 308). This particular sexual experience begins with Odenigbo in the submissive position, which is typically perceived to be the feminine role. Olanna feels empowered in this situation and exerts her power over Odenigbo, proving that he does not have control over his feelings for her. However, the moment does not merely represent a grab for power in the relationship; Olanna also enjoys the experience and is excited by the prospect of sex. Additionally, Olanna does not seize control of the situation because she expects to gain something from it. In some cases, a woman might traditionally orchestrate sex for reproductive purposes, but Olanna's power grab begins an experience that is, for both parties, a form of reconnecting in their relationship.

Perhaps the most interesting denial of the sex and motherhood connection for the purposes of female empowerment comes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, in which "Baby" is not the product of Odenigbo and Olanna's sex and she remains unconnected to their sexual experiences. When Odenigbo's mother comes for a visit, Ugwu notices the door to the bedroom open earlier than usual, and "it was Amala who walked out of the room... her wrapper was loose around her chest... Amala, common quiet ordinary Amala, had slept in Master's bedroom!... Mama's medicine had done this, he was sure" (*Half* 270). Odenigbo's mother orchestrates the sexual

encounter between him and Amala for the sole purpose of getting her a grandchild. "Mama" makes her intentions clear in her sincere dislike for Olanna. She reasons that "she is just a woman who is living with a man who has not paid her bride price" (265), so she has no ownership of Odenigbo's house or kinship with his family. She enlists Amala to give him a child so Odenigbo will be forced to marry someone and have his mother's idea of a proper family. By showing the sex scene through Ugwu's eyes, Adichie connects the encounter to traditional values because he sees "Mama's medicine" as the cause. When Olanna learns Amala did become pregnant as a result of the affair, Odenigbo also says "Mama planned this from the beginning" (289). Amala dies in childbirth and Olanna decides "'We'll keep her'... She startled herself by how clearly she had articulated the desire to keep the baby and how right it felt" (314). Although Olanna is able to keep the child and raise her as her own, she continues to call her simply "Baby." Olanna associates Baby with reproduction and motherhood, but the sexual connection she has with Odenigbo and the relationship they share will always be separate from her motherhood. The separation of motherhood and sexual experience empowers Olanna to continue her successful sexual relationship, while exploring and enjoying her role as a mother without the two complicating each other.

#### Caution: Unhealthy Sexual Experiences and Repercussions

Adichie does not depict all uses of sexual experience outside of tradition as healthy or liberating. In particular, when sexual experience is used as a means of exerting power, it has the opposite effect. In both novels, the change in traditional views on women's sexual experience is represented in the constant presence of sexual language in discussions of public issues. A discussion of political corruption in *Americanah* includes many sexual metaphors and explicit

references to sex as a means of gaining power, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the intimate act of sex and the public government practices. Auntie Uju explains her high rank and power in the presence of other women because she understands “we live in a lick-ass economy...the problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won’t lick anybody’s ass, or they don’t know which ass to lick...I’m lucky to be licking the right ass...I was attracted to his power” (*Americanah* 93). The explicit sexual imagery shows that Auntie Uju does not differentiate between her sleeping with someone and a politician flattering or bribing a higher-up to benefit their respective ranks. Adichie strengthens the link between sexual metaphor and actual actions by suggesting sex is literally a means of gaining power, keeping it, and enjoying it. Auntie Uju considers her gossip the ‘real’ story about the political figures in magazines, and each of them has some sex scandal that she can name: “the man who had sex with a top general to get an oil bloc, the military administrator whose children were fathered by somebody else, [and] the foreign prostitutes flown in weekly for the Head of State” (*Americanah* 96). Clearly, sex remains present in the public sphere; the intimate act becomes common knowledge and a commodity used for power grabbing. Sexual experience greatly influences government figures and the structure as a whole, speaking to both the corruption and the negative side effects of the growing practice of sex without marriage or motherhood.

However, patriarchal expectation that women will have sex only to have children also asserts its control over women’s bodies in *Americanah*, preventing sexual liberation for women like Obinze’s wife, Kosi. Kosi embodies what a wealthy man’s wife and a mother are expected to be, so much that Obinze cannot see her as a partner as he did Ifemelu. He is unsure how to react when “her insecurity, so great and so ordinary, silenced him. She was worried about a

housegirl whom it would never even occur to him to seduce. Lagos could do this to a woman married to a young and wealthy man" (*Americanah* 42). She expected infidelity of her husband because his role in sex was one of strength and hers of submission. There are no descriptions of her sexual pleasure or of the married couple's intimate relationships from her perspective. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria and her and Obinze begin their affair, he articulates the difference between these two women: "He should not compare, but he did. Ifemelu demanded of him... She expected to be satisfied, but Kosi did not. Kosi always met his touch with complaisance, and sometimes he would imagine her pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband" (*Americanah* 569). Kosi follows the stereotypical expectation for women in sexual situations. She seems much more focused on family and motherhood, rather than hers and Obinze's relationship. Adichie accredits her suspicions and submission to Lagos because of the unfair stereotypes and gendered expectations that shape her life and do not shape Ifemelu's.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* also demonstrates the function of metaphor in linking patriarchal government structures and sexual experience through the soldier's abuse of power to enact violence and sexual aggression in the Biafran War. The corruption allowed to soldiers on both sides is best demonstrated in Ugwu's indifferent rape of a girl, who was used by all soldiers present:

The bar girl was lying on her back on the floor, her wrapper bunched up at her waist, her shoulders held down by a soldier, her legs wide, wide ajar. She was sobbing... her blouse was still on. Between her legs, High-Tech was moving. His thrusts were jerky, his small buttocks darker-colored than his legs. The soldiers were cheering... On the floor, the girl was still. Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered

her. He did not look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or at anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax, the rush of fluids to the tips of himself: a self-loathing release... Finally he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate (*Half* 457-58)

Ugwu's detachment and lack of control in the war is represented in this moment, rape becoming a metaphor for battle. Adichie does not represent rape in the same way as other sexual experiences, but rather includes the vivid scene as a cautionary example and explicit critique of violence. The phallic description and female subjugation in this scene undermines Adichie's other empowering sexual experiences by emphasizing the power structures that favor male pleasure. The expectation that Ugwu will have sex with the girl, and that no consequences will come, speaks to the corruption of the soldiers, who hold the power over the citizens in war even when they feel powerless. Ugwu's power also comes from his gender position, which traditionally gives him dominance in sexual experiences. The graphic description of the rape puts the terrible deeds of the war on an intimate scale and cautions that not all sexual experiences deserve to be validated.

Adichie also introduces the systemic racism in America, which represents another means of exerting power over human bodies, through a sexual lens, indicating that the very large scale issue seeps into the most intimate parts of her character's lives. Getting to the heart of the racial tension in America, Adichie bluntly notes, "Many American Blacks have a white person in their ancestry, because white slave owners liked to go a-raping in the slave quarters at night" (*Americanah* 419). Here, Ifemelu associates sexual assault with race relations, directly. Her perspective as an outsider who would consider ancestry a part of racial identity, allows her to look at this blunt connection between sexual experience and racial tensions. Through the

African-American authorial perspective of Shan, Adichie states that “you can’t write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write about how people are really affected by race, it’ll be too obvious” (*Americanah* 417). Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant, is not familiar with this way of thinking, having just been introduced to the concept of race in America. By providing readers this lens, Adichie hints at her more subtle tactics of discussing race through intimate and unique experiences with the concept. Adichie again presents a cautionary example of sexual freedom taken to exploitative degrees, and suggests that America’s shameful past of slavery and sexual violence are factors that prevent sexual intimacy from fulfilling its potentially liberatory function.

In Adichie’s push for more sexual freedom and goals outside of motherhood for women, she also includes instances of extramarital sex that have negative connotations; these cases demonstrate how some men take advantage of gendered and racial power dynamics and attempt to keep subjects sexually submissive. Ifemelu’s first sexual experience in America can be considered sexual assault. Far from being a liberating experience with sexual freedom, she feels trapped not in the expectation of motherhood but in the expectation of submission. In an attempt to get a job, any job, she submits to a man wanting to use her lack of power and her desperation to his benefit. She described her helplessness in this encounter: “She was already here, already tainted... She did not want to be here, did not want his active finger between her legs, did not want his sigh moans in her ear, and yet she felt her body rousing to a sickening wetness” (*Americanah* 189). Her description might seem to corroborate the expectation that women will not enjoy sex except for the benefit of reproduction, but it is actually more telling of the destructive effects of gendered expectations of submission. The arbitrary expectation that a woman will submit and not enjoy gives this man the power to assault Ifemelu and allows him the assumption that paying her for it would make up for this experience. Ifemelu’s lack of control



and shame gets emphasized again when she is reunited with Obinze in Nigeria, and she remembers, "I took off my clothes and did what he asked me to do. I couldn't believe that I had got wet. I hated him. I hated myself...I felt like I had...betrayed myself...and you" (*Americanah* 542). Ifemelu's memory of the time does not emphasize her displeasure with sexual encounters in general; it rather focuses on the negative context of this particular encounter. This horrific description helps Adichie show the complexity of sexuality, its power dynamics, and how an intimate act can symbolize and highlight more global issues. In this case, those issues are rape culture and gender power dynamics.

#### Fantasies: Sexual Ideals vs. Realities

The varied examples of negative sexual experience highlights that Adichie does not shy away from graphic representations of the sexual intimacy in her novels in order to draw reader attention to the realities of sexual experience and shift focus from sexual experience as fantasy fulfillment. Olanna describes her and Richard's sex scene in great detail:

She kissed his lips. He pulled her forcefully close, and then, just as quickly, he let go and moved his face away. She could hear his rapid breathing. She unbuckled his trousers and moved back to pull them down and laughed because they got stuck at his shoes. She took her dress off. He was on top of her and the carpet pricked her naked back and she felt his mouth limply enclose her nipple... Everything changed when he was inside her. She raised her hips, moving with him, matching his thrusts, and it was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing herself with the loud, loud cries that burst out of her

mouth. Afterward, she felt filled with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace. (*Half* 293)

This scene represents a shift in the novel. Kainene and Olanna have been reconciling after growing apart since childhood. The twins' relationship will eventually become important as a coping mechanism for the extreme poverty and displacement as a result of the war, but this sexual experience with Richard will force the two apart. Olanna and Richard use each other to fulfill a part of themselves not satisfied in their other relationships, and, by granting themselves this fantasy, lose essential support in the reality of the novel.

The practice of using sex as an escape mechanism, rather than proving Adichie's use of sex to distract from her character's struggles in the world, actually illustrates the way said struggles permeate all aspects of life. Egbunike admires the "underlying human struggle" that Adichie so aptly portrays and that is "set against a series of cycles of power" (Egbunike 28). In what Egbunike calls "the intersection of the public and the private" (26), Adichie demonstrates the variety of sexual experiences from a people caught up in the same war. Olanna and Odenigbo descend into poverty as the Biafran war tears apart the country, and it becomes difficult for them to find moment of happiness and pleasure. Highlighting the human need to escape from the difficulties of life, especially in a war zone, Adichie describes this sexual encounter: "She liked the way he said that, in a free Biafra, and she stood up and squashed her lips against his... she moved back and pulled her dress over her head in one fluid gesture... She had no control over her own moans, over the raw primal pleasure she felt in wave after wave that ended with both of them leaning against the wall, gasping and giggling" (*Half* 354). Olanna's escapist experience explicitly associates the war with sexual experience because the phrase "in a free Biafra" fuels Olanna's passion. Since the scene occurs in an apartment complex where tenants share a

bathroom and the walls are thin, Adichie keeps the reader aware of their poverty, but Olanna and Odenigbo successfully forget about it for a time. So, Adichie does not use sex as an escape but demonstrates how and why her characters do in such an abysmal situation. Olanna and Odenigbo's escape reflects again Adichie's emphasis on characters that embrace the 'grittiness' of humanity.

In instances of graphic sexual activity throughout *Americanah*, Adichie focuses the growth of her characters and their long-distance relationship by tracking their sexual experiences in another situation that veers from the ideal. Ifemelu and Obinze's first sexual experience does not live up to her expectations. She describes it as "a slippery joining. It felt... like a weak copy, a floundering imitation of what she had imagined it would be" (*Americanah* 114). Ifemelu's sexual encounters rely mostly on expectation for the majority of the novel. She fuels her excitement with imagination, even in the case of a total stranger when she "imagine[s] what he would be like in bed: he would be a kind, attentive lover for whom emotional fulfillment was just as important as ejaculation, he would not judge her slack flesh, he would wake up even-tempered every morning" (*Americanah* 222). At this time, Ifemelu has a committed relationship, but the love story that is the focus of this novel, hers and Obinze's, exists mostly in memory. By focusing on imaginative expectations for sexual experience, Adichie keeps her readers aware of the distance between the two lovers. When they finally return to each other, the description of this sexual encounter also focuses on the memories: "she leaned in and kissed him, and at first he was slow in his response, and then he was pulling up her blouse, pushing down her bra cups to free her breasts... there was, also, a newness to their union; their bodies remembered and did not remember" (551). As individuals, the sexual connection lasted between them, but many cultural changes and psychical shifts complicated the relationship. Ifemelu and Obinze remain connected

over the years, and these sexual descriptions allow readers to track the relationship and keep it in mind through all the other major changes and social issues faced by these characters. The focus on the relationship pushes readers to understand the complications of liberation and sexual freedom when physical boundaries and cultural boundaries break apart said liberatory relationships. Obinze and Ifemelu's relationship, as a metaphor for attempting individuality and connection in a world that deals in categories, aids Adichie's complication of sexual experience.

Ifemelu and Obinze represent an example of a sexual relationship as a vehicle for change; however, in the case of Auntie Uju, Adichie employs pregnancy as the allegory for change. Adichie explicitly refers to "pregnancy as symbolic" (*Americanah* 102). For Ifemelu, her aunt's surprise pregnancy "marked the beginning of the end and made everything else seem rapid" (102). The symbolism not only blames an intimate experience for myriad life changes, it also employs pregnancy imagery in an unexpected context. Pregnancy becomes disassociated from sexual intimacy in another attempt to distance the two experiences of sex and motherhood. Additionally, the change apparently brought about by the pregnancy has nothing to do with a new child. The change comes in the family's drastic relocation: the move from Nigeria to America.

Fear and anxiety in new situations, related to the drastic changes that the characters undergo, such as the international move, also finds representation in new sexual experiences. In the case of one of Ifemelu's earlier sexual encounters, she remembers, "the trust, so sudden and yet so complete, and the intimacy, frightened her" (*Americanah* 73). Her fear seems to stem from the lack of familiarity with this type of intimacy. The fact that Obinze accepts the change into a serious, romantic relationship so readily and wholeheartedly also frightens her because she cannot allow herself to change that quickly. Adichie establishes a similar anxiety in the case of

Ifemelu's white American boyfriend, Curt. Ifemelu describes the typical sexual experience with Curt:

In bed, he was anxious... 'Do you enjoy me?' he asked often. And she said yes... but she sensed that he did not always believe her, or that his belief only lasted so long before he would need to hear the affirmation again. There was something in him, lighter than ego but darker than insecurity, that need constant buffering, polishing, waxing (257)

Although Curt's anxiety might be associated with all of his sexual partners, it is amplified with Ifemelu because it is a new experience. His conception of Ifemelu as particularly different from himself due to her race adds to his sense of newness and anxiety. Norridge notes that "sexual encounters can increase self-awareness and a sense of (imperfect) connection with other cultures" (Norridge 22). Because of Curt's sexual inexperience with people of Ifemelu's race and national background, he might experience this same "self-awareness" of "imperfect connection," leading to his anxiety in bed.

In a sexual experience between Olanna and Richard, however, fear of something outside of the sexual encounter finds expression in the text through particularly affectionate language in the moment. Richard has always feared he is not good enough for Kainene, and Olanna harbors anxiety that her love for Odenigbo might not have been well founded. After she and Richard sleep together, "she felt filled with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace" (*Half* 293). In their moment of intimacy, they could forget the fears and problems with their respective relationships and escape in the pleasurable experience. Outside of this one moment between them, Richard and Olanna express little affection for each other. In this instance, the sexual encounter does not reflect the external situation directly. Richard's fear manifests in the need to

escape an imperfect moment, and he utilizes sex and affectation for this purpose. His fantasy fulfillment reflects the human characteristics that become Adichie's focus in writing honest, real characters who react in a variety of ways to negative world experience.

Similarly attempting to escape through sexual fantasy, Ugwu's coming-of-age sexual experiences echo the sense of nationalism and ideals of a new and free Biafra: reality does not live up to either fantasy experience. Before the war, Ugwu often fantasizes about a girl from his village, Nnesinachi. He would look for "opportunities to find her bent over, fanning the firewood or chopping *ugu* leaves... her wrapper hanging low enough for him to see the tops of her breasts... those pointy breasts[.] He had wondered if they would feel mushy-soft or hard like the unripe fruit from the *ube* tree" (*Half* 9-10). Before he experiences the trauma of war, Ugwu's sexual encounters rely on this fantasy of Nnesinachi, and he is often disappointed. His fantastical expectations become an obstacle to the empowering potential of sexual intimacy. Ugwu has sex many times with a neighboring girl, Chinyere. In one instance with Chinyere, when "he saw the cone-shaped rise of her breasts as she pulled her blouse off, untied the wrapper around her waist, and lay on her back[.]... he imagined that she was Nnesinachi and that the taut legs encircling him were Nnesinachi's" (*Half* 161). Chinyere and Ugwu do not acknowledge their affair or even smile at each other aside from her visits to his room. The two do not seem to particularly enjoy each other, but she allows Ugwu to indulge in his fantasy. Ugwu does not get the chance to act on this sexual fantasy before the war, and, after he rapes a young woman, his sexuality is associated with trauma and shame. A future sexual encounter with Nnesinachi could not measure up to the fantasy of his childhood. Biafran independence suffers similarly dashed hopes and the people are certainly traumatized from the experience of war. By making Ugwu the figure of the soldier in this war, Adichie parallels his sexual fantasies with the ruined dream of a free Biafra.

### Conclusion

Viewing sexual encounters as actions for gaining comfort and power throughout her novels, Adichie touches on an important aspect of writing stories about Nigerian experience: representing the active role Nigerians must take in creating a new national identity. One of Adichie's key purposes in her writing is representing these active people, and she critiques literature about Africa in which "we do not see Africans who act, although there are many who do" ("African Authenticity" 45). Her focus on the intimate moments between two people, then, works as a means of giving those people a voice. Those not at the front of the action or political discourse can still be active in their personal life and can still express emotions relating to social problems in personal relationships. Adichie considers this passive version of Africa as an untrue stereotype, which her novels seek to correct. Adichie considers "how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story" ("The Danger"). She believes that if we hear only one kind of story about any group of people we significantly lower our chances for "a connection as human equals" because we form opinions based on too little evidence ("The Danger"). By focusing on individual intimacy, Adichie can get really specific in her characterization and tell a variety of stories. Sexual experience is the means that Adichie uses to connect her different readers and her different characters in a universal experience; it is one of the ways an individual can express their active role in the life and identity of their country. Adichie argues that "stereotypes straitjacket our ability to think in complex ways" ("African Authenticity" 43). So, if readers can notice relatable characteristics in characters distant from their own realities, the characters become more complex and human.

Sexual experience becomes the tool for making readers “think in complex ways” about the variety of individuals in a similar social situation. Since the marginalized subject is often underrepresented in public matters, delving into private moments of intimacy will uncover an underrepresented opinion and give it a voice in important public contexts. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, Adichie explores the social contexts that shape and change her individual characters from gender to nationality to race and beyond. The abundance of sexual encounters, emerging from different contexts and representing different emotions, demonstrates the variety of individual experience underneath the catchall labels. Sexual experience carries its own set of expectations, which Adichie also complicates through the disconnection of female sexuality and motherhood. While not discounting motherhood as an unworthy practice for women, she insists that sexual encounters can exist outside of the pursuit of children. Adichie, always concerned with individual experience over cultural expectations, implores her Igbo-Nigerian women readers to feel comfortable in their own sexual experiences. She encourages her entire audience to recognize individual experience within the complex and broad category of sex. She empowers her women readers to foreground their individual experiences and opinions, sexual or otherwise, to exert their power over social situations and to define their own expectations for their role in a culture. Sexual experience, in Adichie’s work, becomes more than a representation of individual pleasure. It becomes a tool for working through difficult social problems in relatable and manageable pieces. It becomes a human experience that connects people of different groups. It becomes, exactly as she intended it, an expression of “the grittiness of being human.”



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### Capstone Reflection

My Capstone project, compiling instances of sexual experience in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels and analyzing the results, was a culmination of research in African literature with a focus primarily in postcolonial lenses and feminist themes. I utilized skills built up over several years of English-Literature classes to complete the research process and to write the paper. The process for this project began over a year ago in a Nigerian literature course, when I read the majority of Adichie's works. The research and writing skills fostered by this project will translate to my future graduate school research. My analytical skills have already become useful in paralegal work for the law company I will be working for after graduation.

The Capstone project also helped me to foster a relationship with my project mentor, Dr. Graham. He directed me towards critical conversation in postcolonial literature and recommended novels and directions for my research. I learned many valuable lessons in writing and efficient research methods. Dr. Graham also offered resources for graduate programs and career paths and suggestions for how to market my skills in the job market. Within my major, working with Dr. Graham opened up several opportunities to present research and learn more about African literatures.

The project required critical thinking and extensive research experience and skills. Close reading and the related skills were particularly useful to my Capstone Project. To begin my research, I located and compiled examples from the two novels concerning sexual experiences. Then, I took each example and close read to identify interesting themes, word choices, differences from other examples, and etc. The research conducted through databases, which I worked with for each literature course that I took, played a small but important part in my



project. Critical conversation concerning Adichie is new but rapidly expanding, so it was important to read as much as possible to find a starting place for my argument.

Along with research on Adichie, I had to conduct some preliminary historical and anthropological studies on Nigerian-Igbo culture and the historical events of Adichie's novels. The interdisciplinary nature of my project impacted my sense of audience and the effects of Adichie's work on her global readership. The historical and social concerns that permeate her work have real effects and offer real arguments and solutions for the problems she identifies and criticizes. I did not conduct any market or demographic research because that is beyond the scope of my project, but I could see how demographics would influence the impact of the novels and the sexual experiences depicted within them. Because of my distance from African, specifically Igbo-Nigerian culture and historical background, the research was extensive and culminated several years of research and reading in African literature.

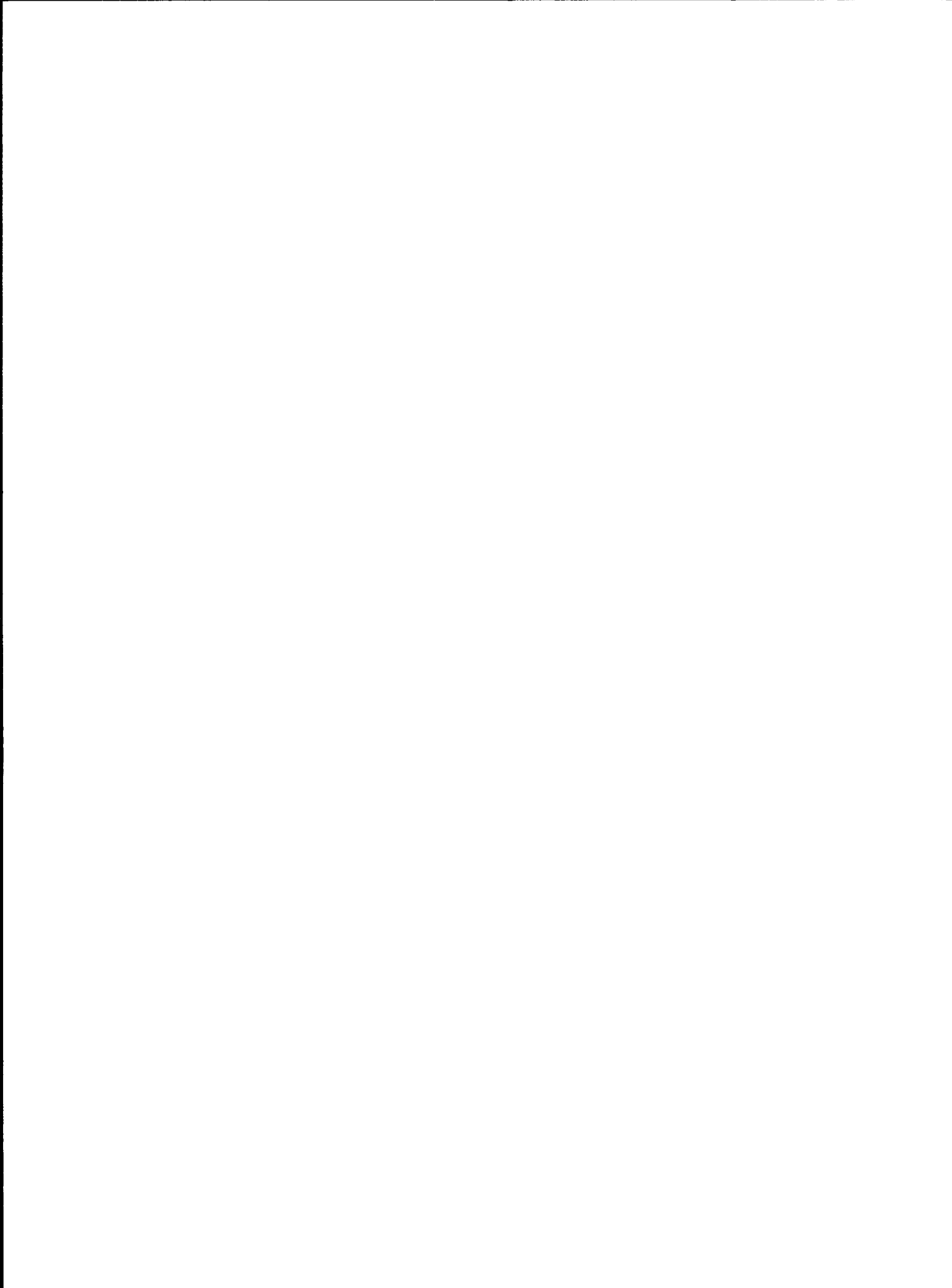
I enjoy focusing on African literature and authors like Adichie because of the unique perspective, with such a different background than my own. By engaging with the global community of literature, I hoped to examine alternate perspectives and important retellings of colonial history from the perspective of the marginalized. My ultimate goal is to help others access and understand the relevance of this literature in the context of our lives: how it fosters connecting and makes important voices that had been silenced. I hope to accomplish this through continued research in African literature and future teaching endeavors.

My Capstone Project, while preparing me for future endeavors and culminating my research in my department, presented some problems and challenges. The biggest challenge was balancing the research load for this project with the load of credits that required similar work. I headed off most of the problems with this by completing the reading of novels and research



articles over the summer, but there was always more research that could be done to better improve the final product. As I continued to take literature classes, I learned new skills that could potentially help with the Capstone and was constantly re-writing and re-thinking. The challenge here was knowing when to stop the planning and research process and begin writing with a specific thesis in mind. One major problem with my specific project was finding research that specifically pertained to sexual experience in Adichie's novels because the topic was so little explored. My advice, if someone had a similar problem with lack of research on their specific project, would be to compile research that could have explored that topic and did not. For example, many critics have written articles on Adichie, but they ignored or dismissed with a single comment the sexual expectations evident in her work. Sexual experience is often dismissed as escapist and purely for entertainment, but I believed Adichie had other purposes. I also found it useful to bring in other authors writing, or not writing, about Igbo-Nigerian women's sexual experiences for comparison when the critical conversation ran dry.

Other challenges occurred in the logistical processes of completing a Capstone project. I specifically struggled with the presentation because I was given so little time to talk about a project that culminated all of my undergraduate research. I presented at the Student Research Symposium, which was also challenging because of the differing disciplines and expectations of the audience. I believe this challenge was good for me because I had to step back from literary jargon and explain the value of my research to those unfamiliar with the process and perhaps unappreciative of why my results matter. If in a similar situation, I would advise researchers and presenters to consider beforehand that they might present to an audience with no knowledge of the project or the discipline. When I had to do this, I found I learned even more about my project and how the results could positively effect the women demographic in Adichie's readership.





I am most proud of the triumph in my Capstone process of finding a thesis statement in the research and literary examples that I had gathered. The challenge, for a while, had been compiling the research into a coherent narrative for the paper. Once I found the probable purpose of each example of sexual experience in Adichie's writing, to validate the variety of experiences, the link to expectations of motherhood became an easy thesis. I would recommend to others attempting similar projects to focus on the differences if a thesis is not immediately obvious. Because all of my examples were so different, I figured Adichie must have made them so.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the English language. It is a branch of linguistics which deals with the changes in the language over time. The study of the history of the English language is important for several reasons. First, it helps us to understand the development of the language and the factors which have influenced it. Second, it helps us to understand the relationship between the English language and other languages. Third, it helps us to understand the cultural and social context in which the language has developed.

The second part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the English language. It is a branch of linguistics which deals with the changes in the language over time. The study of the history of the English language is important for several reasons. First, it helps us to understand the development of the language and the factors which have influenced it. Second, it helps us to understand the relationship between the English language and other languages. Third, it helps us to understand the cultural and social context in which the language has developed.

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## Biography

Madison Behrend Vaughn is graduating with an Honors Bachelor of Arts in English—Literary Studies. She was voted Literary Student of the Year by the English Literature professors for the 2018-19 school year. She served as Chapter Historian for Utah State's branch of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honors Society. Her research on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was accepted into the 2019 International Sigma Tau Delta convention in St. Louis, MO, where she presented her research essay on an African Literature panel. In the last few years, she has worked as both an Undergraduate Teaching Fellow and a Writing Fellow. As a teaching fellow, she assisted a Shakespeare course by compiling comments, completing objective grading, and acting as a guest lecturer on two occasions. Her Honors Capstone Project is a culmination of her interests in feminist literature and postcolonial literature and her love of writing and research. Starting after graduation, she will start work as a Legal Assistant at a patent and trademark law firm, Legends Law, PLLC.