

## Undergraduate Research Symposium May 19, 2017 Mary Gates Hall

### Online Proceedings

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#### SESSION 2D

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#### THE HEALTH OF THE PUBLIC

*Session Moderator: Clarence Spigner, Health Services*

**MGH 234**

*3:30 PM to 5:15 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

#### **Language Shapes the Perception of Beauty in Asymmetrical Breasts**

*Jayden Requena, Sophomore, Communication, Shoreline Community College*

*Mentor: Brooke Zimmers, Communication Studies, Shoreline Community College*

My research examines the language that ascribes, or labels, the “beauty” of women’s breasts. All women live in a paradoxical world where they must constantly strive for what society defines as “normal” rather than natural. Language used to communicate breast health and breast symmetry demonstrates how negative connotations shape a person’s perception of their avowed, or self-declared, beauty. By researching different evolutionary theories proposed by anthropologists, I analyze communication concepts such as Social Construction Theory, Sapir Wharf Hypothesis, and Reflected Appraisal to understand how a women’s breast identity affects them. The research suggests that women who are born with, or become asymmetrical after a mastectomy, are given few options to embrace their natural self and few words to avow a positive identity. Research shows that the media have a strong influence on how people define beauty standards. Nearly all women have different sized breasts and those with a noticeable difference feel ashamed to talk about it; the language used to describe this situation creates a reality where the only imaginable option to “fix” this “problem” is to undergo reconstructive surgery. This presentation implies that if the language used to describe asymmetry changes, society can create a new climate of acceptance rather than reinforcing an impossible image of natural breasts. Positive language used to discuss asymmetry allows for positive conversation to generate new fashion possibilities where women can transform their wardrobe to fit their natural breasts rather than the other way around.