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Fido and His Feelings

Some say that a dog is a man's best friend, and for some, this is entirely true. But scientists and dog lovers alike have begun to wonder whether a dog, through only body language, vocalizations, and eye contact, can truly provide the kind of emotional connection that a human friend can. Many dog lovers would argue in favor of this, but the subject begs the question of whether or not dogs are simply being anthropomorphized by canine-obsessed owners. Although some owners would passionately assert that Fido certainly loves them and is part of the family (much like a child), the question remains whether a dog reciprocates this ardent infatuation or is simply doing his best to communicate his desire for another bowl of kibble. The complicated science of human-canine social interaction is vital to understanding a canine's intentions. Through the use of body language, vocalizations, and eye contact, dogs communicate and process emotion, and are not simply displaying instinctual behaviors.

Much can be learned about canine social behavior from the study of nonverbal human interaction, both body language and eye contact, which communicates emotions in a way that speaking cannot achieve. The subtle cues that are given through the placement and demeanor of a person's body are large indicators of that person's emotional climate. Shifting, for example, to a stance with arms crossed and feet planted firmly, "indicates anxiety which is either driven by a lack of trust in the other person or an internal discomfort and sense of vulnerability" (Arm Body Language). This simple change in stance has the ability to communicate what words do not always achieve; that there has been a minute change in an individual's emotion that is too subtle to be conveyed through conversation. While each body position may indicate different emotions in different social circumstances, body language, along with the context of the situation, can communicate emotion that would not have been perceived through the spo-

ken word. By conveying these small changes in emotion, “nonverbal communication forms a social language that is in many ways richer and more fundamental” than conversing in spoken language (Mlodinow). The complexities of human emotion cannot be communicated through the limited vocabulary of languages, and body language has the ability to express nuance, thus being an informative mode of communication between two attentive beings. For instance, when two people are engaged in a conversation and one of them avoids making eye contact with the other, it is communicated that the individual is feeling uncomfortable or evasive, information that may not have been available through the carefully edited words that were exchanged. Additionally, eye contact, another important form of non-verbal communication, can indicate the relationship between two communicating individuals. Psychologists have begun to collect data to determine the significance of eye contact in determining social status, and have concluded that people “automatically adjust the amount of time [they] spend looking into another’s eyes as a function of [their] relative social position” (Mlodinow). Leonard Mlodinow of Psychology Today describes this statistic:

For example, if, no matter who is talking, you spend the same amount of time looking away, your ratio would be 1.0. But if you tend to look away more often while you are speaking than when you are listening, your ratio will be less than 1.0... That quotient... is a revealing statistic. It is called the ‘visual dominance ratio.’ It reflects your position on the social dominance hierarchy relative to your conversation partner. A visual dominance ratio near 1.0, or larger, is characteristic of people with relatively high social dominance.

This discovery implies that eye contact and nonverbal communication not only communicate emotion, but also are a guide to deciphering the relationship between the two conversing individuals. The significance of degree of eye contact cannot be overstated; it is a nonverbal form of body language communication that is capable of conveying much more than words could ever achieve, and even has the ability to indicate the dominant and submissive parties in a conversation. Nonverbal modes of communication between humans, while complex and some-

times largely unnoticed, are a fundamental form of communication between people, as well as between humans and animals, and assist in communicating the fine distinctions of human emotion that cannot be expressed in words. Much like humans, canines rely heavily on body language to communicate their emotions across the species barrier.

Dogs communicate their emotions mainly through body language, and each part of their body can give clues as to what emotion is present. A dog's ears, while varying in size and shape between breeds (poodles have soft, floppy ears, while Yorkshire terriers have pricked ears that hold their shape), can be extremely expressive and can show an attentive human what the dog is feeling. If a dog's ears are flat against the sides of his head, "he's signaling that he's frightened or feeling submissive" (ASPCA). When a dog is alert, he will raise his ears higher on his head and point them toward his area of interest. A relaxed dog will have soft, relaxed ears, mirroring his relaxed emotions. Reading the body language cues of a dog's ears can be informative, and a dog's human companion may, with time, begin to anticipate a dog's actions and emotions based on the shape of the ears and the tension with which they are held. The mouth is another region that can be immensely expressive and indicative of a dog's emotions. A mouth that is relaxed is likely to belong to a relaxed dog, while a tense grin is a sign of submission. In this case, dogs will "pull their lips up vertically and display their front teeth," which is often misinterpreted as aggression (ASPCA). However, aggression is displayed when a dog "retracts his lips to expose his teeth," warning the threatening party to not come any closer (ASPCA). These small adjustments to the facial features of a dog are highly informative and speak even louder than a bark. To a watchful person, they signal the presence of clear emotions and communicate the feelings of the dog in any situation. Knowledge of this body language communication can assist in preventing outbreaks of violence between dogs, or can save a human from interacting negatively with an aggressive animal. Another major means of communication is a dog's tail, which can communicate a variety of emotions. While commonly interpreted as joy, a wagging tail can indicate aggression, and "a dog who isn't wagging his tail can still be friendly," despite common thought otherwise (ASPCA). Generally, a happy dog

will “wag [his tail] gently from side to side,” and a scared dog will hold his tail up against his stomach (ASPCA). The motion and rigidity of the tail communicates a variety of emotions, and can help clue an owner in to what their companion may be feeling. The body language of dogs helps communicate with both strangers and owners, as the interpretation of signals from all areas of the body help promote positive interactions between dogs and humans by providing information about the dog’s emotions. Each emotion that a dog feels corresponds to a specific body posture and overall appearance of the dog.

A dog communicates emotion with his entire body, and each emotion is linked to a different set of expressions and postures. When a dog is feeling happy, he will look distinctly different from when he is feeling scared or anxious. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals states that when a dog is content:

His muscles are relaxed, his tail and ears are held in their natural positions, and he looks neither large nor small for his physique. He might wag his tail from side to side or in a circular motion. His facial expression is neutral or he appears happy—the muscles in his face are relaxed, his mouth is closed or slightly opened, and he might be panting with a regular tempo. The corners of his mouth (called the commissure) might be turned upwards slightly, as though he’s smiling (ASPCA).

This relaxed posture indicates that a dog is feeling true emotion, as it expresses a relaxed demeanor much like that of a relaxed human, and is not displayed solely for the obtainment of food or praise. The communication of emotion through total body posture and demeanor is important, as it can clue humans and other dogs into what the dog in question is feeling, and is a critical signal in understanding that dogs do feel emotions, and respond to them much like humans do. Contrasting with contentment, fear is expressed in a series of postures and mannerisms that indicate a desire to hide. When scared, a dog will make “his body...hunched, with his tail held low or tucked” up against his belly (ASPCA). This hunched and fearful stance speaks louder than any words exchanged between humans, as it communicates a visceral feeling that anyone who has ever experienced fear can relate to. The desire to contract the body into a

smaller stance when afraid is a natural response to intense emotion, and a dog's displaying of this body language is understood well by any onlooker and warns them that the dog is intensely afraid of something nearby. Other emotions, such as playful and excited, are expressed similarly through body language. A playful dog will exhibit "jerky and bouncy" behaviors, and an excited dog will appear "natural in size, but his weight might be centered over his rear legs as he prepares to move" (ASPCA). As a dog's emotion is easily understood through the expression of body language, it is effectively communicated to other dogs and humans alike through specific body postures and changes in overall demeanor. The total-body communication of dogs is a powerful tool, as it enables them to communicate emotions across the species barrier.

Some canine behaviorists, however, view dogs' communication style with humans as having no emotional significance. These behaviorists take an impartial and detached approach that looks only at physical behavior and pays little attention to where the behavior may be coming from, whether emotional or otherwise. In doing so, these behaviorists rule out any opportunity to understand the canine psyche, and turn their backs on an exciting new wave of discoveries about the bonding experience between two communicating beings not belonging to the same species. This approach looks at a canine's body language and defines it as an "unemotional state of being" (Milani). This method of behavioral analysis ignores the physiological evidence of present hormones or the emotional implications of eye contact and total-body communication. Some scientists assert that canine postures commonly interpreted as emotion are in reality no more than a product of natural selection. Celia Haddon of the Daily Mail reports that Veterinary scientist Dr. Susan Hazel claims:

Those sad eyes, wrinkled brows, and averted eyes are not signs of shame. The owners are just failing to read signs of distress and anxiety from being chastised. A dog's ability to look apologetic for an angry owner is actually evidence of how they have adapted to living with humans over thousands of years. In other words, dogs know to keep their meal ticket happy (Haddon).

This analysis of canine body language that is typically read as guilt is characteristic of some-

one who believes dogs are not capable of communicating complex emotions. Hazel ignores the fact that dogs routinely display numerous body postures in response to human emotion, and modify their responses based on their own personalities and the person and emotion being presented. This flexible and very individual response to human emotion is in no way merely communicating instinct, as it is a much too intricate and delicate an interaction to be blamed on pure evolution. The way that dogs read and reciprocate body language signs--such as that of displaying shame in response to an angry owner--is indicative of their sensitivity to emotional communication and is a clear marker of the communication abilities of the canine brain.

While the opinion that dogs do not respond to pure emotion is understandable, it overlooks the large amount of data present that supports the existence of more intricate emotions in dogs. Dogs' neurological similarity to other mammals that experience emotion suggests that they feel complex emotions as well. Scientists have "claimed that other mammals with whom dogs share the same neural bases for emotion do experience guilt, pride, shame, and other complex emotions, [so] there's no reason why dogs cannot" (Bekoff 86). The belief that dogs are unable to communicate and process emotions is overshadowed by the overwhelming presence of new research proving the existence of canine emotions. For example, a recent study led by neuroscientist Attila Andics researching neural responses to human and canine vocal cues in dogs supports the claim that dogs process and communicate emotion. In the study, dogs' brains were scanned as they listened to a variety of sounds; human vocalizations, canine vocalizations, and neutral environment sounds. The data suggests that emotion and auditory sensitive regions in the brain are present in both dogs and humans and that "these regions all responded stronger to more positive vocalizations" (Andics). The fact that canines possess a structure similar to humans that processes emotional undertones in vocal cues is indicative of the presence of emotional communication in the canine psyche and presents evidence in favor of emotionally laden communication between dogs and humans. The way that dogs communicate through body language in response to both humans and canines is proof that their mind encompasses emotion when communicating through body language and vocalizations, and that

these reactions are not simple instincts performed to obtain a food reward.

Through a complex system of body language, eye contact, and vocalizations, dogs are capable of processing and expressing intricate and evolved emotions that differ from simple instinctual responses. Human body language is a subtle yet powerful process that allows the communication of underlying emotions between the interacting individuals. Dogs use similar means of body language, as each part of their body can help indicate the particular emotion they are feeling. A dog's overall posture and demeanor also communicates the presence of and discrete changes in emotions. Some animal behaviorists believe that all canine reactions are rooted in instinct and reflex, but a large body of research in brain activity proves that this is not the case. As dogs are important companions in current society, it is useful to understand how their minds work in order to improve the relationship between dogs and humans. Many dogs are abused or neglected simply because people view them as objects instead of emotional beings. If people truly understand that dogs are worth more than a few hundred dollars and a bowl of kibble, then the lives of those neglected canine companions can be changed for the better. Dogs are emotionally attached companions; they depend on humans for food, love, and shelter, and so they form bonds with these "owners" that make them become part of the family. It is as if they are children; they are messy, frustrating, adorable, and ultimately loveable to the point that nothing and no one can replace them.

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The Plight of the 'Ungrateful' Alcoholics

"I realized after all these years, I am not upset to be an alcoholic, I am a grateful alcoholic." Those were the words of one of the nearly twenty speakers at the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting I attended, and they struck quite the chord with me, shifting my entire plan for this paper. Alcoholics Anonymous, AA for short, is a nonprofit organization that seeks to assist those who look for help with their addictions, it is specifically designed for alcohol, but in reality they accept anybody with a similar problem. Addiction can come in many forms and for any number of reasons, and I attended an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting to gain knowledge on the topic and look for general trends, while also investigating if AA is truly efficacious for all addicts and what, outside of the program, can be done for those AA does not work for.

As I first sat down at the meeting, explaining my reason for being there to a regular member of this group, someone nearby interjected that, "You'll be disappointed by this meeting. Everyone here is pretty stable." At first I didn't quite understand what he meant. The room fit my stereotypical perception of what it should be – probably twenty by thirty feet or so, with tables in the middle ringed by chairs. There was very little in the way of decorations on the nearly pure white walls, the only thing standing out being the posters of the Twelve Steps and Traditions, along with a long saying about alcoholism. My preconceived understanding of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at that time was that each one was very serious, with a diverse cast, most of which would remain silent while others who have been in the program for a longer time proselytize in a fairly religious manner for the remainder of the session until the younger, charismatic, group leader calls for discussion to come to a close. I was expecting to walk in to a near-silent room with little in the way of jokes and laughing – maybe there a sense of relief or perhaps satisfaction in one's own accomplishments in abstinence. There would be people of almost any age range, from some being in their late teens, to some being elderly, with the elderly or middle aged serving as mentors of a sort for their younger compatriots. I knew that some of these preconceptions would obviously prove to be false, but what I did not see coming was that nearly all of my expectations were to be shattered by this meeting.

I showed up to the meeting around twenty minutes early so I could meet with the leader before everybody else came in. As soon as I walked in and sat down I was greeted in an extremely friendly and relaxed manner by the first person I saw, who I then proceeded to explain my purpose at the meeting to. He was probably in his late thirties, but balding and with a tired look. Despite his obvious weariness, he had a very kind face about him, and explained to me the basics of how Alcoholics Anonymous works in fairly simple terms. I wish I could say that the first thing I noticed was that everybody instantly recognized that I was new, and welcomed me to the meeting, but I have to admit that that had hardly registered at the time. The very first thing I noticed destroyed my original expectation of diversity. The first person I met was probably in his late thirties, but every single person that greeted me afterward must have been over fifty years old, some even reaching their seventies and eighties. Their surprise at seeing a nineteen year old among them was patently obvious. Even through this surprise, not one of them, even those who did not know my purpose there, questioned why someone my age was attending an AA meeting. They simply accepted that I was a part of the meeting from that point on.

With my expectation of diversity in the meeting crushed, I was beginning to question what else I could have been wrong about -- I was not expecting to be proven wrong again almost instantaneously. Ten minutes before the meeting started, the leader for that day came in. The man was in his late fifties to mid-sixties, a Vietnam veteran and ex-biker. It was plain to tell just by looking at him that he had been through quite a bit in his life. My notion that the leader would be young and charismatic was not only out the window at that point, but I questioned why I even thought that in the first place. The man, Bruce Hosmer, gave me quite the life story during our interview after the meeting. He had started drinking and smoking at a young age, quickly moving in to harder drugs after his stint in Vietnam. Mr. Hosmer did not even think he needed help until he was thrown from his motorcycle nearly thirty years ago. He was pronounced dead on arrival to the hospital that night, and said to me that he had an out of body experience in which he realized how low he had sunken in his life. When he was revived by medical staff, he knew he had to change, and from that day on stayed sober. He led quite an eventful life to get up to this point, where he now helps others manage their addictions, and I was quite surprised he made it out of any of that quite so intact.

As the meeting time drew closer, the room slowly filled, but never quite reached half capacity, as it was a meeting at eight thirty in the morning on a Sunday. I had expected people to solemnly walk in, but it was as if they were one big family, everybody knew each other and laughed together. According to an article by Anna Deeds, both a licensed

counselor and a recovering addict herself who has attended many meetings, sessions she attended always began with the proctor having hit the table to get everybody to quiet down and take their seats. They would then proceed to begin the group process of saying the first four lines of the Serenity Prayer, and which led in to the readings of the Twelve Steps, from which the term “12-Step Program” is derived, and Twelve Traditions. They would then ask for new attendees to introduce themselves and if anybody present felt the desire to drink. This would all followed by a celebration of anybody’s duration without drinking or having abused any substance, known as ‘Clean Time’. From the get-go, this meeting was dissimilar to Deeds’ description. Someone other than the chairman was the one to quiet the group down and begin all of the activities, I actually assumed that person was the leader, since Hosmer didn’t really have much presence at first, until I was told otherwise after it was all over. On top of this discrepancy, the Serenity Prayer was skipped entirely in the opening. I was very surprised to find out that this part would be skipped, as I had taken the organization to be very religious, focusing almost exclusively on God. From there, nobody was asked whether or not they wanted to drink, and there was no mention of this concept of clean time. There were similarities between the idealized perspective and my experience though, as there was a reading of the Twelve Traditions of and Twelve Steps, albeit in a rushed and quiet manner, and the asking of any newcomers to announce their presence. This is where similarities in the opening of meetings end.

Within the first ten minutes, this meeting had already broken a good deal of the generalizations made by Deeds, but from that point onward, it actually remained mostly faithful to the formula. There are many types of Alcoholics Anonymous assemblies, such as, “[s]peaker meetings,” which involve a guest member of the organization to expose their tale of addiction and salvation to inspire others, and “discussion meetings,” in which particular topics are discussed by each member for a few minutes a piece. There are also open or closed meetings, open being available to anyone interested, such as family and friends of an addict, and closed being available only to addicts themselves (Deeds). The meeting I attended seemed to be open, as they let an expressed non-alcoholic attend, as well as a cross between the discussion and speaker meeting formats. The topic appeared to be talking about recent events in their lives, as well as their stories of addiction and overcoming it.

Most every single person in the room said their peace, myself included, breaking yet another preconception I had that most people would stay silent. Many of the stories they told were heartbreaking, such as the man who, after becoming sober, stayed so-

ber for around ten years through his seven week old daughter dying in her sleep, going through cancer, and now fighting leukemia. This man had pretty much everything life can throw at someone thrown at him, and he actually managed to stay sober through all of it. He decided to clean up his act while he was serving in the Navy, more specifically while he was in a drunken fistfight in the Navy. He was actually too drunk to really fight back, and realized he had a problem when he, and I quote, “broke the guy’s fist with [his] face.” He sobered up and faced so much tragedy while keeping a positive outlook on life, finishing his story with the lasting words, “if I wanted to be miserable, I am uniquely qualified. But I’m not.” Not everybody in the program has such an exciting or saddening story, but every one of their lives was deeply impacted by drinking, and then again by Alcoholics Anonymous. After hearing everyone’s stories, I began to realize what the man had said to me at the beginning really meant – everybody that attends this particular meeting has learned how to deal with problems in life, they are all well-adjusted. Eventually, as we ran out of participants to speak, the meeting winded down to an end, and, just as Ms. Deeds describes in her article, “[m]ost meetings close with members forming a circle and reciting... the Serenity Prayer” (Deeds).

Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935. In recent years, the ideas it teaches, cutting off all alcohol cold turkey forever and admitting that you are completely powerless to do this yourself, have come under intense scrutiny by modern scientists and psychologists. Admittedly, the program had a very noticeable impact on all of these members’ lives, which is undeniable, but all of them are long time attendees who have a very firm belief in everything the program teaches. There is no telling how many people have come to these meetings before and then never come back. Hosmer even admitted when asked if he sees many attendees slip back into their old habits, “maybe one in seven people actually stay sober from day one, and if they go out and drink again, maybe one in three comes back.” With the fact that the Twelve Steps only truly work for a small minority of those who try it, it is not surprising that there are claims that the program lacks efficacy for those who do not subscribe to its ideals. I also asked Hosmer if he believed that AA works for everyone, and his response was that it should, but it requires a moment of clarity, which is a realization they need help, and that, “what a person would probably need [for this moment of clarity] is a good amount of desperation. They need to sink low enough that they know they need help.” This is quite the logical conclusion, that misery breeds a desire for something bigger than themselves. The Twelve Steps require that you acknowledge you need a higher power, and that higher power can only really be found, according to this commonly held feeling, when one simply cannot get any lower,

Hosmer's case being one of the most extreme examples. I had actually subscribed to this theory, but now I realize, in the very astute words of researchers paraphrased in Gabrielle Glaser's article, that "[it is] akin to offering antidepressants only to those who have attempted suicide, or prescribing insulin only after a patient has lapsed into a diabetic coma" and his quoting of Dr. Mark Willenbring that, "'You might as well tell a guy who weighs 250 pounds and has untreated hypertension and cholesterol of 300, 'Don't exercise, keep eating fast food, and we'll give you a triple bypass when you have a heart attack,'" to show off the illogical nature of this assertion. For the Alcoholics Anonymous program to actually work, one must realize they need help – but not everybody wants to, or can, realize that. To suggest that in order to receive help they must risk their life, or subscribe to the idea that the only thing that can give them back their life is a higher power is ridiculous.

The human will is quite a remarkable tool, and should not be underestimated or made interchangeable with the idea of a higher power. Willpower works both for and against the healing process, as one's will to use can overpower a weaker will to seek treatment. There are, however, treatments like Self Management and Recovery Training, also known as SMART Recovery, which affirm the individual's power over their addiction, in an entirely non-spiritual manner (Lloyd). The finding of inner strength can be even more empowering than the belief in a higher power, as strength can lead to an increased better ability to fight one's faults and addictions, while reliance on something above oneself can harm one's ability to function alone. SMART Recovery is an excellent example of something outside of Alcoholics Anonymous that can be done to help a suffering addict who cannot complete the program. Often times it is easy to forget that AA is simply of one many options that can help deal with dangerous addictions, because it "inscrib[ed] itself on the national consciousness and crowding out dozens of newer methods that have since been shown to work better" (Glaser). There are many much more highly rated forms of treatment, such as medications which can help treat the symptoms of withdrawal, or serve as a much less dangerous substitute. When asked what ways the average person can help an addict, Hosmer actually responded that, "without the program, there are fewer tools, but just make sure you don't enable them. Don't bail them out of jail, don't loan them money. Also, ask for help from anybody in NA or AA, ask for help with an intervention." Though he does think that Alcoholics Anonymous is the best bet when it comes to coping with addiction, he had to admit that there were definitely other ways. The people of America have, "turned a blind eye to addiction," with the government's responses involving turning addiction into a criminal offense proving to be "ineffective...

prohibitively expensive... and can make matters worse.” What is needed is treatment, with the advanced medicines available today due to modern advances in psychology and biology (Lloyd). Nothing can truly be done for those suffering, according to Lloyd, unless we as a people decide to do away with archaic methods of treatment that do not fix the problem for the majority of people. I am inclined to side with him, as problems like this are only growing with time.

With all of this mention of programs to cope with addiction, the best, and by far most proven, method would be prevention. Prevention is the one way to stop the problem of addiction at its root. A key part of this would be the knowledge of who is more vulnerable to addiction than others. There is no concrete evidence on who is truly more susceptible, and according to Mr. Hosmer, when I asked him whether he noticed any specific kind of person who is more likely than others to become an addict, he said, “I made it happen in my life, but it can happen to anybody, some people are predisposed, some people are brought into it by family.” In slight disagreement with this opinion comes the article *Drug Addiction, Unmasked*, which states that though there are any number of factors that can come together to make someone an addict, those that are generally more likely to be addicted include, but are not limited to the children of current drug abusers, young white males, people with higher IQs, and those that suffer with depression or other mental illnesses (Bushak). All of these types of people find it easier to obtain drugs and come up with valid excuses for themselves to use. Many of these cases, especially in the case of those with mental illness and children of addicts, are easily found in databases based on mental health records, and arrest records of parents. These two types can be more easily monitored than many others, and should problems arise, can receive specialized attention. According to the article *Understanding Drug Abuse and Addiction*, “[d]rug addiction is a preventable disease... prevention programs involving families, schools, communities, and the media are effective in reducing drug abuse.” Programs to help deal with addiction are definitely a plus any way you look at it, but prevention is almost more necessary than that, as over time it can remove the need for coping programs.

Often times we forget as a society that alcoholics and other addicts can be in an immense amount of pain. It is easy to write off their suffering as being caused by their irresponsible actions that led them to their plight, but it is plain to see once you have talked to them that they need help, regardless of if it is their fault that they became addicts in the first place. Prevention is the best method for stopping the addiction problem, but without effective policies of this in place, it will continue, and methods of coping must be employed. Most addicts do not attend meetings, because they do not realize that

they have a truly serious problem or do not subscribe to the only place they might turn to in desperation, Alcoholics Anonymous. While this program has been proven to work for some, it does not work for many. There are many programs out there that actually can help those that AA is ineffective for, like medication and visits with medical professionals. The suffering of ‘ungrateful’ alcoholics, people that don’t accept their addiction for what it is or where it has brought them in life, is easily shrugged off, but they are some of the most in need of our help. Addicts across the country, and the world, every day try to better themselves, but it is a difficult and constantly ongoing process. In the great words of a speaker from that fateful Sunday’s meeting, they must, “keep picking all the pieces of this broken mirror called life up off the floor every morning,” and every time they do, they can, “get a little bit better of a picture.”

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Trans

Nowadays, everyone seems to know the term “transgender”—it is everywhere. From celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner to everyday people like Jazz Jennings featured on the reality TV show *I Am Jazz*. There is no specific race, age, religion, or sex that transgender people belong to. There are those who openly transition, such as the ones you see on TV and are open about their transition. And then there are those who “stealth” transition, or live otherwise normal lives while transitioning behind closed doors without revealing their status to the rest of the world. Whatever the preference, the term has found its way into the limelight and the reception has been mixed. But through all of the hatred and backlash, there exists a community that has banded together to not only support and uplift one another but to try and make a change in this unforgiving and unaccommodating world. A community that has stood up for its own to show the world that this isn’t a choice but merely regular, everyday people simply trying to live their lives and play the hand they were dealt.

The transitioning process would appear to be 100% physical but it is also very much, if not just as much, a mental process as well. The toll it takes on an individual to make themselves vulnerable to rejection, hatred, and downright humiliation is certainly no easy feat. This along with the process of sorting these difficult feelings out in the first place could be enough to lead many transgender persons to attempt suicide or worse. According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 41% of all transgender individuals have attempted suicide compared to just 4.6% of the general population. Those numbers are staggering. Further

are those who fall victim to violence, hate crimes, or are made homeless because of rejection by family members. Last year alone, hate crimes against transgender individuals rose by 13% (Ennis, Dawn). Depression and anxiety are high within the community and these only address a minute part of this alternative lifestyle.

Once an individual has determined they are or may be transgender, they must obtain a psych evaluation to determine if they are or aren't a good candidate to start medically transitioning. According to the WPATH Standards of Care, this part of the process is deemed necessary. It can be a lengthy process but necessary in order to determine if an individual is mentally capable of moving onto the next step, which in many cases leads to physical changes that are irreversible. After receiving clearance to start hormone use, many feel they are finally on the path to becoming the person they always wanted to be. Though this part of the transition can be extremely exciting, it can also be extremely grueling to those around them who may not yet be prepared for imminent transformation. It can strain or even break apart existing relationships. The reality of a loved one physically transitioning before their eyes is far more of a shock than someone simply stating they wish to make the change.

Testosterone and estrogen are the drugs of choice for transmen and women. If an adolescent is identifying as transgender there is an option to start on hormone blockers at a young age in order to stall puberty and determine when and if the child will be ready to begin hormone replacement therapy at some point. As seen on the TV show *I Am Jazz*, Jazz Jennings was implanted with a hormone blocker in order to stop male puberty from occurring. There are two forms of hormone blockers: injection and implant form. Injections are approximately \$1,200 a month while implants can range anywhere from \$4,500 to \$18,000 (Boghani, Priyanka). If a child or adult is deemed ready to begin hormone replacement therapy, those costs can vary as well. Estrogen comes in pill form and can be as little as \$4 up to \$30 a month and for testosterone anywhere from as little as \$20 to as much as \$200 per vial and then of course the associated costs for syringes (Boghani, Priyanka).

For many, the transition does not simply stop once hormones are introduced and the

body takes on physical changes. For some who have already experienced puberty, their body has taken on permanent physical changes that can only be undone through surgery. And there is also a matter of genitalia that to them, does not belong there. Nowadays, there are numerous options to have surgical procedures done; both medically necessary and cosmetic in nature in order to obtain a better overall appearance as the gender they desire. For a female-to-male the procedure(s) can cost upwards of \$50,000, while male-to-female procedure(s) can cost anywhere from \$7,000 to \$24,000 (Toro, Ross). Hundreds of these types of procedures are performed each year and the numbers are growing. Additionally, the amount of surgeons available are also increasing as more and more are helping the community seek out and obtain proper and affordable medical procedures.

These necessary and life-changing procedures can be quite hefty in cost, especially if an individual is not able to get their procedures covered or if they find they are in need of more than one procedure. It wasn't until recently that a few health insurance companies started recognizing the medical necessity and instituted new policies that are covering the cost of these procedures in addition to the cost of hormones. Sadly though, even if an individual has insurance that explicitly covers the cost of sex reassignment surgery does not mean they will necessarily be approved for it (James, Andrea). Additionally, many providers require a lengthy list of requirements in order to proceed with a claim ("Gender Reassignment Surgery."). Despite some forward movement in equal health rights, many health insurance providers continue to draw the line at trans related issues. Though there is some recourse as individuals can now take it to court in order to seek a judge's approval to overturn the initial rejection.

After observing the tremendous costs an individual can incur by simply transitioning, the amount of transgendered persons in poverty is staggering. "MAP and CAP report that trans people are nearly four times more likely to have a yearly household income below \$10,000" (Kellaway, Mitch). Further, this average increases if the individual is a minority. Many factors may contribute to this disproportion. Discrimination in the workplace and healthcare, the inability to obtain proper legal documentation, etc. and lack of legal protection on all fronts

are by far the largest culprits (Kellaway, Mitch). Not only do trans people have a laundry list of individual hurdles to get over, they must also face all of the roadblocks society has put into place as well. For many of these individuals, it's an extremely difficult and expensive proposition just to live a life of happiness and what they feel is normalcy.

Though these initial steps may seem easy in terms of being able to find the right place to begin the transition process, many find themselves unable to seek out or obtain the proper medical attention needed. The very medical practitioners they turn to for advice and support mock their transition as some sort of medical freak show. Thus, they rely on finding medication and surgeries on the black market putting themselves at further risk of possible harm caused by an unsupervised medical procedure or medication use (O'Keefe, Dr. Tracie, D.C.H.). Support, acceptance, and reform seem to be the only ways of protecting these individuals from harm caused not only by themselves but from the rest of the world. Many shows like *I Am Cait* and *I Am Jazz* have opened the eyes and hearts of many people across the globe so they are able to see firsthand what a transgendered person experiences on a daily basis. This also sheds light on the fact that these individuals know from the time they are very young, before most kids can really discern gender differences inferring that this is in fact something an individual is born with.

Even through all of the exposure the community is getting in order to educate those who are otherwise in the dark about the subject, there is still so much discrimination and hatred. In fact, in some instances it is getting worse almost as a sort of retaliation against all of the new attention and acceptance the issue has garnered. Many religious schools are filing claims in order to continue their discrimination against the LGBT community. Under Title IX, no educational institution is allowed to discriminate against an LGBT student if they are receiving some form of federal funding (Ring, Trudy). However, religious institutions can and have filed claims to be exempt from this. What's more disturbing is these claims have actually been granted. Unfortunately, religion and culture may continue to trump any forward mobility gained by individual reason and acceptance when it comes to the LGBT community.

Beyond the continuous discrimination, fighting for rights that may not be granted anytime in the near future, and a plethora of other equally challenging problems another huge issue trans people face is romance. Relationships can be that elephant in the room sort of subject. Many people feel that gender and sexual orientation sort of go hand in hand but it's just not the case. Some men may transition to become women and still be attracted to and date women, just as some women may transition to be men and still be attracted to and date men. Some may even start out as men who date women and transition to women who date men (Kaplan, A.B.). There truly are no boundaries when it comes to sexual orientation, as gender and sexual orientation are separate. In addition to a shift in sexual orientation, many find the physical and medical transformation leaves them with infertility. This can be another hard conversation and place a barrier between current and future partners.

There are so many issues surrounding the transgender community to actually list them all and even more sub-issues surrounding the original issue. Fact is transitioning is an extremely difficult process, nothing about it would be considered easy. For starters, there is no limit to the actual process itself. Some may choose to make very few changes, while others go all the way and make every physical change possible in order to integrate into their new lives. No matter how far or not one is willing to go with it—it's all a matter of personal preference. And despite many roadblocks, many face this challenge day in and day out without the world knowing exactly what they are going through; simply judging through a looking glass without knowing exactly what it entails. Everyone is guilty of doing this in some form or another, it's a matter of how people manage the knowledge they take in on a daily basis and how they use that for good or for bad.

Personally, I was inspired to write this research paper on transgender individuals simply because I feel as though I do not know enough about them, that the world does not know enough about them. There is so much to know and so many issues to comb through that it's actually difficult to keep them all straight. My best friend is trans and even I had not known the entirety of the issues surrounding what a trans person experiences day in and day out. I've

certainly had a front row seat through his struggles and have helped him to his feet when he was knocked down but until writing this paper, I did not know the full extent of what it truly takes to make this transition possible. It is a level of vulnerability and humiliation that I cannot even fathom and to know that my best friend experiences these challenges on a daily basis is heart wrenching and eye opening. Though many people don't see this as a courageous journey, I certainly do and I always will.

Furthermore, living what society deems as a normal life, I see the other side of the coin. I read the comments posted on articles, the statements made by political leaders, and the propaganda posted by religious individuals. Some think it is heartwarming to see a person finally happy and living the lives they had always dreamed of but most don't share this happiness. Most make vile, hateful remarks that would make anyone cringe regardless of which opinion you favor. To know the brutality many would inflict upon my friend simply because of what he is makes me ashamed of human nature. This paper was a way to educate myself and surmise just why someone would or wouldn't *choose* this life. But I know for a fact that no one in their right mind would actually choose this life.

The exact risks of taking hormones isn't known yet so therefore trans people who take hormones may be putting themselves and their longevity at risk for any number of unknown health defects. It's been stated that hormone replacement therapy and extraction of sex organs can lead to infertility. The level of discrimination faced, the expense and extreme pain associated with multiple surgical procedures, etc. are all a testament to exactly what these people are willing to do for what they feel inside is right. That takes a lot of courage in the face of opposition, courage I know most people don't possess, myself included. As my friend stated, he would rather live a short happy life in the gender he felt he was meant to be rather than live a long life being miserable in the gender he wasn't. His strength, his courage, and his journey will forever resonate in my mind and my heart.

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Lighting Up Language: The Illuminated Manuscript Goes Viral

The headlines are bleak: public libraries are shuttering their doors and shredding books for a profit; the last brick and mortar bookseller is unplugging the cappuccino machine, declaring bankruptcy and calling it a day. Yes, the printed book is dead, or at least on a respirator, facing certain extinction. By many bibliophiles' estimates, these are dark times: written language has become all flash and no substance, and the reading experience is cold and impersonal. The culprit behind this literary doomsday is, of course, the digitalization of literature, commonly referred to as E-literature, where, through the simple act of swiping on our electronic screens, "our hands become brooms, sweeping away the alphabetic dust before us" (Piper 18). Fortunately, these dire proclamations are not indicative of reality. E-literature's rise to prominence reflects not a diminishment of written language as a communication form but the expansion and glorification of it. This homage is long overdue – five hundred years overdue, in fact – harkening back to medieval times when text was so revered it was burnished in gold. In fact, as mechanisms of personal and cultural expression, today's vibrant, technology-driven E-literature is a surprising ode to illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages.

One of the more obvious similarities between modern day E-literature and medieval illuminated manuscripts as a means of communication is the calculated use of visual stimuli. The purpose of employing such artistry to words in both mediums is to capture the hearts and minds of readers and thus facilitate widespread dissemination of the particular messages being presented for consideration. This device, an indirect and subliminal form of language manipulation, is intrinsic to digital media, which frequently embellishes its text with vibrant colors, photographs, illustrations and hyperlinks for the purpose of attracting and retaining readership and, ultimately, influencing that readership's thoughts, decisions and pocketbooks. This particular form of mind control, however, was already being practiced on medieval readers over five hundred years ago through the process of illumination, from the Latin *illuminare*, meaning "to enlighten" or "light up" (Brown 69). It was the illuminator's task to grab the reader's attention and hold it (Rudy & Wasserman, 2015). This task – no small feat – was achieved through exhaustive embel-

ishment of the text, which was frequently but not always religious in nature. The typical manuscript was adorned in silver and gold; vivid, exotic colours in vermillion, saffron and aquamarine; and highly intricate illustrations of Divine entities, lay people, elements of nature, mythical creatures, and other subjects, that sometimes took years to complete (Brown 69, 71). The motivation behind this laborious and prohibitively expensive process (depending on the level of embellishment and detail, a medieval manuscript “could cost as much as a house in today’s dollars”) was to attract potential converts to the messages being disseminated (Rudy & Wasserman, 2015). To understand the irresistible “eye candy” appeal and sumptuousness of medieval illumination, one need only look to the frontispiece of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (see fig. 1). Clearly, the efforts behind today’s E-Literature to visually ensnare readers finds its roots in the exhaustive measures undertaken by medieval scribes and illuminators to achieve the same purpose.



Fig. 1. Anonymous Master of Catherine the Cleves, The Netherlands. Catherine of Cleves Praying to the Virgin and Child. 1440. The Morgan Library and Museum. *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Web. 3 Oct. 2015.

Additional evidence of language-communication manipulation can be found in the font or lettering choice employed by both E-literature and medieval manuscripts. Hitler himself understood the connotations of fonts (albeit erroneously) when he banned the use of Blackletter throughout Germany for supposedly having “Jewish connections” (“Blackletter and the Nazis,” n.d.). The calligraphy of Blackletter – heavy, cramped, dark letters that boldly ran across the white parchment – originated in medieval times and was used extensively in religious texts to assert the Church’s dominance and broadcast “hesitancy to alter anything associated with religious tradition” (“From Blackletter,” 2013). It was purposely made difficult to read to prevent laypeople from understanding it. As medieval Christianity took a more humanistic turn, a new lettering type – Roman – gradually entered the scene. Roman was finer-lined, less exclusive, easier to comprehend and for the first time allowed the average medieval citizen to read and, more importantly, interpret religious texts for themselves (“From Blackletter,” 2013). Such attention to the connotations of fonts is clearly evident in today’s digital media, where thousands of fonts currently exist and many more enter the digital landscape daily. With a few clicks of a

button, proponents of E-literature may choose the font with which they most identify, thereby self-connecting more intimately with the material before them. While the content of words may be paramount to the messages underlying them, additional cultural meaning is clearly to be found in the way written language is chosen to be presented.

E-literature and illuminated manuscripts have yet another common weapon in their arsenal: dynamism, or images and/or text that imply movement. The digital landscape of today is an especially vibrant, multi-media affair, simultaneously engulfing audiences in a swirling sea of text, hypertext, videos, photographs, colourful graphics and sometimes music, all intended to stir readers' emotions and senses. Whether the end result translates to sensory overload or pure unadulterated symphony is in the eyes of the beholder. A prime example of a dynamic, multi-media piece is the highly regarded "Snowfall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek" by The New York Times writer John Branch (see Snowfall: Avalanche at Tunnel Creek).

The dynamism so abundantly featured in this interactive article, which recounts the harrowing, windswept tale of sixteen skiers trapped in a Washington avalanche, can be traced back to illuminated manuscripts produced centuries ago, although medieval scribes were obviously hindered in their relatively limited technological capabilities. In the "Image of Garden of Pleasure" taken from *Le Roman de la Rose* (the medieval equivalent of a romance novel), a rather comely prince in a blue robe is featured twice within the same illustration, once entering the garden through a gate by himself and a second time strolling the gardens alongside his lover (see fig. 2).

Clearly, the illuminator responsible for this particular vignette wished to portray not a still snapshot but a moving picture narrative in the vein of "Snowfall." He or she (illuminators were often female) likely also wished to communicate folly, and whimsy, and love, and transit those sentiments to the reader, who presumably welcomed the gesture during



Fig. 2. de Lorris, Guillaume and de Meun, Jean. Garden of Pleasure. 1490. British Library. British Library Online Gallery: Illuminating the Renaissance. Web. 17 Oct. 2015.

an age that also wrestled with less-romantic entanglements such as plague, pestilence and famine. By augmenting text with dynamic elements, both E-literature and illuminated manuscripts successfully manipulate and facilitate the communication of human emotion within their intended audiences.

Another example of medieval poetry in motion can be found in the volvelle, which incorporated revolving (moveable) wheels of parchment within a manuscript or book-mark, over which the reader had command. The volvelle typically bore “information of a computational, astronomical or astrological character” (Brown 125). The idea behind the volvelle was for medieval citizens to actively engage with the scientific and natural world around them, a relatively new phenomenon in a society that previously hinged on strident religious dogma (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Astronomical volvelle, English. c. 1386.
The J. Paul Getty Museum. Decoding the Medieval Volvelle. Web. 18 Oct. 2015.

Undoubtedly, like modern day creators of digital media who incorporate “swipe” and “delete” functions, medieval illuminators yearned for their illustrations to “move” as a means of stirring readers’ emotions, dreams, fears and passions, to get them thinking about the larger world outside of themselves, and to incite them toward action. No longer would the average medieval reader be relegated to passive observer but an active, willing participant of society with a voice – a voice that had previously been tightly controlled by religious authorities. Although the technology available to medieval scribes was deficient in many ways, they worked with what they had to surprising effect, thus inciting medieval laity to assume a more proactive, personal role in society. Indeed, the creators of E-literature are indebted to early medieval efforts to associate text with movement as a “cause and effect.”

Although readers of both E-literature and illuminated manuscripts spend varying degrees of private time with their respective mediums, often a reader’s preferences, prejudices, and longings are revealed by the manner in which they read. Using a device she developed called the “densitometer,” Senior Medieval Historian Kathryn Rudy of the University of St. Andrews measures centuries-old human grime deposited within the

parchment pages of medieval manuscripts. Depending upon the level of grime exhibited, Ms. Rudy can gauge a manuscript owner's interest in various topics, which were likely to be discussed and thus communicated within that owner's broader social circle (Rudy & Wasserman, 2015). For instance, one manuscript owner, a young medieval girl, obsessively kissed the illustrations wherever King Philip the Fair (who was considered quite the ladies' man at the time) appeared (Rudy & Wasserman, 2015). These "fly on the wall" perspectives reveal private details as to how medieval readers engaged with written language and confirm that, across the ages, human beings communicate with similar passions, egos, and emotions. Likewise, software embedded into digital readers reveal similar clues about the private lives of modern readers and how they engage with written language. In the manner of Big Brother, companies like Amazon.com carefully track individual reading style and preferences, such as topics of interest, the number of books read, and the number of seconds spent on each page. Apparently, readers of digital literature, like readers of illuminated manuscripts, have specific ways of engaging with the written language that are reflective of their varying personalities and preferences.

In contrast to the private nature of reading, creators of E-literature and illuminated manuscripts often choose to publicly communicate their belief systems or nuances of their personalities. One of the more curious aspects of illuminated manuscripts is the incorporation of marginalia: miniaturized images, typically of a bizarre or vulgar nature, that appear within the margins of the manuscript, usually having no bearing to the "page's main program" (Oatman-Stanford). Medieval marginalia include all manner of subversive, illustrated commentary:

Imagery depicting everything from scatological humor to mythological beasts to sexually explicit satire . . . Though the purpose of specific images is still hotly debated, scholars conjecture that marginalia allowed [illuminators] to . . . poke fun at the religious establishment, or to make pop-cultural references medieval readers could relate to. (Oatman-Stanford)

Such marginalia (which include, among other images, puzzling depictions of a nun picking penises off a penis tree, headless zombie-like figures crossing a tight wire, and an ogre shooting arrows into another mythical creature's rear end) offer fodder for social commentary (see fig. 4). Surprisingly, few fans of Monty Python are aware that the comedy troop's bawdy antics evolved from direct references to medieval marginalia (Oatman-Stanford). The true significance of marginalia, however, lies not in its lurid humor but of the "glimpse [viewers receive] of the medieval mindset . . . their sense of humanity and their fear[s] and fascination with the unknown" (Oatman-Stanford).

Following in the footsteps of medieval marginalia, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, a web-based art group from Seoul, South Korea, creates highly animated digital literature synchronized to jazz music. Coupling stimulating graphics with large, pulsating blocks of text, Heavy Industries' work is widely considered to be subversive, humorous and reflective of the fears and concerns of everyday citizens in the manner of medieval marginalia. It is also evidence that today's digital literature frequently elevates itself into an art form (see yhchang.com/DAKOTA and yhchang.com/SUPER_SMILE). According to Dr. Jessica Pressman, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University, this revelation should come as no surprise, since "when humans create . . . any kind of [new] reading or writing technology, they find ways to use it for artistic purposes" (Pressman, 2015). Indeed, Heavy Industries' brazen and often shocking political-social commentary mirrors that found in medieval marginalia.

Despite superficial differences in appearance, E-literature is essentially a reincarnation of the medieval illuminated manuscript in its underlying artistry and visual appeal, inherent dynamism, and, most importantly, through its innovative facilitation of interpersonal and cultural exchange. All dire prognostications of the death of the Book occasioned by an alleged digital tsunami are shortsighted. Throughout history, from the discovery of papyrus to the invention of the printing press, written language has assumed various physical manifestations that are reflective of mankind's continually evolving technology. To fetish-size the printed page – in other words, to objectify the book as a concrete form – is the surest way to facilitate its demise. Reader preferences are varied, after all. For some individuals, print books will always be favoured; for others, text is best delivered through a sleek new iPad. Still others will feel most comfortable with a combination of print and pixel. There is room after all, for both "TV dinners and seven-course gourmet meals" in our literary universe (Rudy & Wasserman, 2015). For these reasons, the further evolvement and proliferation of E-literature should be embraced, not shunned or feared. Given the aforementioned, it is easy to imagine a more forward-thinking medieval illuminator, frustrated and beleaguered by the artistic shackles imposed upon him by limited medieval technology. Undoubtedly, he would marvel at a digitalized, textual performance of his blue-robed prince strolling with his sweetheart through a garden. He would rejoice at the sight of his reincarnated manuscript, appearing online in technicolor by the British Library and going viral across the Web to the delight of multitudes. Certainly, such giddy exuberance would be cause for celebration, not the sound of a death knell.

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Goin' Down To *South Park*

"It was a warm summer morning when Scrotie McBoogerballs awoke to find his"... *[reads silently]* "Ew. He took a..." *[stunned]* "What? Oh. OH! Oh my God! He then grabbed his dog's" *[stifles a gag but can't hold it in, and barfs]* "Ehohoh, oh my God! Walking out of his house he spotted the bloodiest pus-covered" *[tries not to barf again, but can't hold it in]* "Nooo! Nooo!" *[reads some more, but then coughs, then barfs]* "Noho! Nooo!" *[Sharon then falls unconscious and rolls on her back]*

That was an excerpt taken from an episode titled "The Tale of Scrotie McBoogerballs" from the Emmy Award winning show and savior of Comedy Central, *South Park*. This is a bit of an exaggeration, yet still a representation, of the reaction people have while viewing an episode of one of my favorite animated TV series. The depravity of creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker knows no end. From 4th graders giving hand jobs to K-9's, Tom Cruise and John Travolta refusing to come out of the closet, the Crack Baby Athletic Association, depictions of the prophet Mohammad of Islam, or a statue of the Virgin Mary bleeding from its anus, there's no group of people *South Park* won't try to offend. With that being said, *South Park* is more than a crude, obscene, shock value comedy cartoon show. It is cognitively demanding of its viewers while providing thought provoking insight through critical examination of relevant social issues. *South Park* fiercely debates the issue of the meanings of words and the effect those perceived meanings have in personal communication. The show also demands, as a prerequisite to viewing, that the audience must be well versed in any number of a wide range of topics

in order to understand the entirety of an episode's content. *South Park* not only challenges its viewer's abilities to follow along, but also, traditional societal beliefs and the institutions that disseminate those views. This show deals with things that matter and we should all take note.

To begin, I want to acknowledge that *South Park* does contain content that is disagreeable to many, if not all, standards of appropriate forms of entertainment. However, it is through the use of these crude jokes that *South Park* articulates sophisticated, well thought out arguments. One such debate occurs in the episode titled "The F Word". Named for its heavy use of the word "fag," the episode wrestles with how society reacts to words and how the meanings of words change as society changes. In his article, "Contentious Language: South Park and the Transformation of Meaning," Mark Schulzke, Ph. D., assistant professor in the Department of Politics at the University of York, discusses how *South Park* often integrates the idea that the meanings of words are disputable when he states,

the contestation of meaning in 'The F Word' parallels the work of scholars who have attempted to change linguistic conventions using traditional forms of organizing and rational argumentation. The result is a series of remarkably sophisticated arguments for redefining the word fag to overcome its current use as a derogatory name for homosexuals. (24)

This is a hefty, philosophical debate over how the changing of the meanings of words should be handled in society, and of all places, it takes place in this foul-mouthed cartoon. The show's use of the word "fag" causes some to cringe, while others laugh at every utterance of it; however, it's through the abundant use of this controversial word that an intelligent argument is constructed. Even though *South Park* contains offensive language that holds up obscene jokes, it's through these distasteful words that the show often expresses thoughtful ideas, as is the case in "The F Word."

As Schulzke states, the episode makes a series of arguments for redefining the word "fag." The contestation of words' meanings is simply illustrated when the South Park Elementary holds an emergency assembly where the Mayor of South Park and school faculty confront

the students about a sign in town being spray painted with the words “GET OUT FAGS.” For context, the boys are using the word “fag” in this episode to describe Harley Davidson riders that have been showing up with their obnoxiously loud engines and ruining the town’s peace and quiet. After the boys proudly claim responsibility for the sign and assert that it wasn’t about gay people, school counselor Mr. Mackey expresses confusion stating, “You just admitted to spray-painting that they should get out of town!” Stan then asks, “Dude, why would we want gay people to get out of town?” Being the first to identify the misunderstanding, Cartman promptly explains, “Oh, they think we meant gay fags.” Kyle expresses his disappointment, “Ohh. Hey that’s not very nice, Mayor. Just because a person is gay doesn’t mean he’s a fag” (“The F Word”). So on one side, you have the adults seeing the word’s meaning as fixed and therefore an attack on homosexuals. On the other, you have the boys who have not intended to use the word in its pejorative sense but in a way that is absent of any homophobic connotations. The boys do not see homosexuality as deviant so they do not use the word to disparage homosexuals. This has been happening for decades with the word “fag.” I’m straight and I’ve been called a “fag” countless times. I’ve called other people “fags” before but it was never with sexual orientation in mind. Generally speaking, it’s not used to belittle homosexuals anymore. So if the word’s defined meaning is different from its commonly used intended meaning, what actions does society take in dealing with this word? Is the word’s meaning defined by the majority of people who use it or is it owned by the minority for whom the word has been used to harm? *South Park* asks these questions and proposes how we should deal with them.

“The F Word,” scene by scene, articulates its case for changing the meaning of the word “fag.” This linguistic transformation follows the scholarly work of German-American philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse. From his book *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse claims, “a word’s meaning is determined by its use, so the meaning can be intentionally changed by adopting new uses” (qtd. in Schulzke 25). In “The F Word,” this idea is perfectly depicted through the speech of stereotypically flamboyant South Park resident, Big Gay Al:

Fellow Homosexuals, I believe we have an opportunity here to

take a big step forward for our kind. We must acknowledge that the words “fag” and “faggot” are never going to disappear. They are simply too much fun for everyone to say. But we must realize we are no longer the most hated people on the planet and help the children change the meaning of the word to describe those annoying, loud, faggot Harley Riders!

Here the show simultaneously states that the meanings of words can be redefined if enough people seek their change and implies the stance that the LGBT community should take in response to this episode. In classic *South Park* fashion, the episode culminates in a ridiculous final scene where the boys are to state their case to dictionary officials and Dictionary Head Editor Mr. Emmanuel Lewis on a nationally televised town rally. Before they can begin, Harley riders attempt to disrupt the event by driving through the crowd, damaging property, doing burn outs, and then dragging Mr. Emmanuel Lewis on the street by chaining him to the back of a bike while he yells out, “What nefariousness is this? Ahgh! You obdurate beasts!” Cornered, the boys explain to the Harley riders that their attempt to crash the rally only further proves in everyone’s minds that they are “total fags.” Eventually, after a group of men threatens them with loaded shotguns as Big Gay Al demands, “You faggots get the hell out of our town,” the Harley riders give up and leave. The episode ends with the new definition that reads as: “Fag n.

1. An extremely annoying, inconsiderate person most commonly associated with Harley riders.
2. A person who owns or frequently rides a Harley” (“The F Word”).

With this scene, as viewers experience the show’s characters redefine a word, *South Park* takes an intellectual stance on the transformation of meaning and makes a real-world effort to redefine “fag.” Creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker constructed “The F Word” with the intention of spreading this idea and gaining enough support to possibly seek some sort of majority agreement that “fag” is not derogatory to homosexuals. Even though Stone and Parker’s intentions were noble and many from the LGBT community echoed the sentiment from Big Gay Al’s speech, some saw the episode’s copious use of “fag” as harmful.

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) is a media force that fights for LGBT acceptance in news, entertainment, and Latino media. GLAAD Director of Entertainment Media Taj Paxton and Director of Communication Rich Ferraro issued a response to the episode on GLAAD's homepage where they state,

Though this seems to represent a well-intentioned effort by the creators of *South Park* to delegitimize a vulgar anti-gay slur, the fact is that the word is and remains a hateful slur that is often part of the harassment, bullying and violence that gay people, and gay youth in particular, experience on a daily basis in this country. It is an epithet that has real consequences for real people's lives.

Understandably, this is a completely valid concern for them to have. The feelings of the LGBT community, as being victims of that word, need to be respected. This opposition goes to the heart of Schulzke's argument and the essence of what the episode is arguing. On one hand, *South Park* is proposing that the meanings of words are not fixed, while GLAAD infers that meanings are fixed and therefore the episode is offensive. For some, "fag" will always be a painful reminder for those who personally experienced degradation through the use of that word—there's no changing that. However, I believe that in order to prevent future homosexuals from experiencing harm from this word, it would be extremely beneficial to reach some sort of national consensus or even an official change in the word's definition. *South Park* fights for LGBT acceptance more effectively by attempting to delegitimize "fag" than GLAAD does by trying to censor its use.

The "F" word is not the only word *South Park* uses profusely in order to express smart ideas. The use of the "N" word forty-two times in the episode titled "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" demonstrates the show's ability to take on offensive language and articulate an informed argument. Having analyzed the episode and found it to be in promotion of correction and change, Nicole Binder, author of "The Portrayal of White Anxiety in *South Park*'s 'With Apologies to Jesse Jackson,'" writes, "this episode contains scenes in which the dominant culture is highlighted only to be undermined as white guilt and white anger are problematized,

pushed to the brink in ironic and exaggerated ways, and shown to be dysfunctional approaches to issues of race” (62). Binder contends that in the several scenes of racial discourse that take place in this particular episode, *South Park* depicts different characters approaching these instances through the sentiments of “white guilt” or “white anger” as ineffective through the use of satire and irony. In this episode, Stone and Parker’s heavy use of the “N” word is not about changing its meaning but about calling attention to society’s subvert racism and then, through satire and irony, showing how white people engage in dysfunctional racial discourse with black people. Again, this is some intellectual heavy lifting that will be going on in this episode. All the nuances of this episode will not be fully understood if you’re uninitiated and uninformed.

This episode starts with Randy Marsh, Stan’s dad, appearing on the game show “The Wheel of Fortune.” Randy is asked to solve the puzzle for N_GGERS and given the phrase “people who annoy you” as a clue. Immediately, this illustrates America’s subvert racism as everyone in *South Park* and in real life all have only one word in mind. After hesitating until the point where he is about to run out of time, Randy, thinking he’s going to win money for answering with what he thinks can be the only answer, excitedly shouts out, “Niggers!” (“With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”). The next day at school, Stan approaches Token, the only African-American 4th-grader in South Park, insisting that his dad’s outburst was made out of ignorance rather than bigotry, stating, “Listen, Token, my dad isn’t a racist. He’s just stupid, all right? He just blurted out the ‘N’ word and it’s no big deal, okay?” Token disagrees, “Ah, well, actually it is kind of a big deal, Stan. It may be a mistake, but you don’t understand how it feels when that word comes up” (“With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”). *South Park* creates this scene to be a microcosm of one way white people approach race issues and the misunderstanding that takes place between white and black people. Stan, representing the white community, attempts to downplay this issue of race by refusing to accept the issue is even about race or that race plays a smaller role than it actually does. On top of that, Stan also makes the mistake of stating he knows how Token, representing black people, should feel about the situation. *South Park* is claiming with this dialogue that whites don’t understand and will never understand the

effect the “N” word has had on African-Americans and the overall black experience of being subject to lifelong racial inequality. The dialogue between Stan and Token and the sentiments that dialogue represents create the foundation for the episode. Oh, in case you were wondering, the answer to the puzzle was “naggers.”

In the next scene, Randy is shown on his knees literally kissing the ass of Reverend Jesse Jackson in an attempt to make up for having said the “N” word on national television. Binder analyzes this scene through notions of white guilt and white anger. Referencing Gail Griffin, author of “Speaking of Whiteness: Disrupting White Innocence”, Binder writes, “Griffin notes that white guilt can be characterized by whites who seek forgiveness in order to lose a ‘painful racial consciousness’” (53). Randy, out of white guilt, apologizes in order to make himself feel better. Whether made selfishly to avoid public scrutiny or made out of sincerity to make up for pain mistakenly caused, Randy’s apology will prove to be ineffective. *South Park* is basically suggesting that apologizing for racial inequality and racial hate-speech will not move the bar on racial tensions and is ultimately pointless.

Binder then moves on to breaking down the kiss ass scene through the lens of white anger stating, “The fact that Randy is forced to ‘kiss ass’ in order to be forgiven may appeal to angry whites who believe that they are unfairly victimized by attempts to remedy inequality in society” (54). However, this is also a mistaken approach in dealing with racial discourse. It is Randy’s incorrect assumption that apologizing to Jesse Jackson, a prominent member of the African-American community, will equate to him being pardoned for his blunder by the entire African-American community. Jesse Jackson is not representative of all black people. This is illustrated in the show, when *South Park* depicts Jackson in a satirical way as an opportunist seizing the chance to snap a photo of his ass getting kissed by Randy. Jackson is portrayed as being more interested in raising himself up rather than solving racial inequality, thus sculpting him as completely unrepresentative of the African-American community. In this scene, *South Park* points out the folly in this emotional approach to racial issues and contends that this type of attitude towards racial discourse will be unproductive.

“With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” concludes with Randy, finding himself being discriminated against for being the “nigger guy,” gets Congress to pass a bill making it illegal for anyone to say “nigger guy” (“With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”). Again, *South Park* brilliantly employs satire and irony to demonstrate how white privilege gives unequal access to institutional power between white and black people. This episode takes an abundant use of the “N” word and with every scene, makes an intelligent statement about racial discourse.

It’s easy to understand why people would object to the airing of this episode due to its copious use of the “N” word. The airing of the episode gained national media attention. Fortunately, there were some in the African-American community that supported creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker in what they were trying to accomplish with the episode. Co-founders of the organization AbolishTheNWord, Kovon and Jill Flowers, in a statement to CNN, claim, “This show, in its own comedic way, is helping to educate people about the power of this word and how it feels to have hate language directed at you.” So while some feel that the word is derogatory by definition and, regardless of how it is used, should be censored, I feel it is through the removal of censorship and the examination of the word and its effects that we can be made aware of the harmful effects of hate-speech. By dragging the word out of the shadows and displaying it before all to have it dissected and reduced, society can move forward in its dealings with the word in a more informed manner. The hope is that in using it the way it is used on *South Park* that people will be less inclined to use it for hate-speech and will altogether rethink partaking in hate-speech.

While I’ve been discussing a lot of the more highbrow aspects of *South Park*, there was another element of “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” that made that specific episode so great. The episode was based off the real life meltdown of Michael Richards, the actor who played Kramer on *Seinfeld*. During one of his stand-up comedy performances, Richards shouts out the “N” word at audience members that were allegedly making noise during his set and demanded for them to leave. He received massive public backlash for the event and accompanied Reverend Jesse Jackson on a national tour apologizing to the African-American community. In other

words, he followed Jackson around everywhere, “kissing his ass.” Having knowledge of this event will make the viewing of “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” a much fuller, rewarding experience. *South Park* does this with almost every single episode. American pop culture and current events are woven into the fabric of each episode by whatever may be culturally relevant when that episode is created. As a viewer, you are rewarded for being tuned in to current events and cultural trends. Out of touch viewers will be lost with what’s going on in the world of *South Park*.

South Park is cognitively challenging. To fully understand and enjoy an episode of *South Park*, viewers must be able to “fill in,” a process of comprehending events without the help of the immediate context as described by author Steven Johnson. Johnson, a science author and media theorist, is discussing the complexity within *The Simpsons* in his book *Everything Bad Is Good For You* when he states, “The show gets funnier the more you study it—precisely because the jokes point outside the immediate context of the episode, and because the creators refuse to supply flashing arrows to translate the gags for the uninitiated” (87). This can be seen in *South Park*’s controversial episode titled “Trapped in the Closet.” In one scene that is particularly uproarious, actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta have locked themselves in a closet and are refusing to come out. This is only funny if you understand the phrase “hiding in the closet” as a homosexual who hasn’t self-identified yet. This piece of cultural knowledge is needed along with the cultural capital to know that there is a whirlwind of rumors claiming that Cruise and Travolta are closeted homosexuals. You would know this if you’ve ever had to wait in line at the grocery store in the past 10 years. Often, headlines exclaiming something about Cruise and Travolta’s homosexuality are plastered front page over the tabloids that line the check-out aisles in grocery stores. It is through Johnson’s “filling in” that the viewer is forced to think outside the immediate context of the shows contents to put together the correct pieces in order to achieve understanding. Having this cultural awareness will allow you to place these two pieces of information together and when presented with the scene, you will no doubt, laugh your ass off.

One last piece to the “Trapped in the Closet” scene with Cruise and Travolta is the addition of R Kelly singing to them from outside the closet, trying to get them to come out. If in tune with all things current, the viewer would be aware of R Kelly’s series of music videos that came out before this *South Park* episode. Kelly titled this musical work as “Trapped in the Closet” and it consisted of 22 chapters. Kelly’s songs gained a lot of national attention. How Kelly took one song and drew it out over 22 chapters was very unusual, especially in mainstream music. With this, and a vague remembrance of how that song went, the viewer is able to “fill in” once again. In the scene, Kelly begins singing to the actors through the door, “I’ve been asked to come up here, get you both out of the closet. Man, this is some crazy shit. Why won’t you both just come out the closet?” This then initiates a back and forth between the actors and Kelly which closely resembles Kelly’s original music, “We’re not comin’ out the closet, so you can just go away.” Kelly sings back, “But everyone wants you out the closet.” In tune, Cruise and Travolta, “That doesn’t matter ‘cause we’re gonna stay.” And Kelly ends in the same manner as most of the chapters of “Trapped in the Closet” did, “Now I’m startin’ to get angry, so I pull out my gun!” (“Trapped in the Closet”). So just in this one scene that lasts maybe one minute, the viewer has to be an informed person able to recall and connect to the scene multiple pieces of information from different sources. As a viewer, if you are unable to “fill in” and pull together information from several and sometimes obscure sources, you won’t enjoy *South Park* and that’s probably the reason, besides the offensive content, that people don’t watch the show. It’s quick with the references and not all people are able to pull this information in a manner that results in them enjoying the show.

In conclusion, *South Park* is a totally immature, fart-joke, ass of a show. However, looking past *South Park*’s obscene and asinine dialogue, it becomes evident that there is a great deal of inventive and thoughtful rationale expressed within the show’s toilet humor content. Whether debating the meanings of words and the effects they have on people or being cognitively demanding of its viewers, requiring them to be versed in all things relevant, *South Park* far exceeds what most assume about the show. There is an argument to be made that, due to

the demanding nature of the show's format, *South Park's* viewer audience is far more informed than the majority, if not all, other groups of people who watch TV. *South Park*—truly a cartoon apart.

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Crossing the Rainbow Bridge:

A Semiotic Analysis of Native American Women in Film

I. The Forgotten Ear of Corn

“I was suicidal when I was younger – desperate, frantic to get help,” confesses Lea Fast Horse, a Rosebud Sioux, in award-winning documentary *The Canary Effect*. Like so many other Native American youths, she found the conditions of modern reservation life too difficult to cope with. When she reached out for help, she went to the best she could find; the man she was seeing was named Employee of the Month and was a certified psychologist. During their appointment, the psychologist told her about a seminar he was presenting at and asked Lea if she would be interested in joining him. “I was like wow! He’s gonna help me!” she ecstatically and eagerly agreed. “Maybe he wants me to sit in on his seminar and I can really learn something from it!” This kindness, however, quickly took an unexpected turn, “After I agreed to go, he’s like, ‘I’m gonna get a room for the two of us. Don’t tell anyone about it... We won’t let nobody know. I’ll just go to the seminar, come back, and I’ll see you,’” Lea pauses for a breath, her face a perfect portrait of disbelief and revulsion. As she continues, her voice wavers with ascending fire, “I don’t know *what* in the world that I’ve told that man to make think that I wanted to fuck him other than spill my heart out and ask for help! I don’t know how he felt that was going to help me, but that’s what he offered!”

Native American women suffer some of the worst conditions in America today; according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 34.1% of Native American women are victims of rape. In comparison, only 17.6% of women of all ethnicities are raped, nearly half of

what Native women face. Furthermore, according to U.S. economics expert Mike Sharpe, 86% of these rapes are perpetrated by men of non-Native ethnicities and the state of reservations as sovereign from the United States government prevents prosecution of the rapists.

Throughout film history, indigenous women have been reduced to exotic beauties or seductresses, dehumanizing them and giving them the image of nothing more than a sex object. One of the most harmful and persistent stereotypes of Native women today is the image of the Indian Princess, a hypersexualized beauty who exists primarily as a romantic interest for the non-Native male protagonist and is willing to leave her “savage” culture behind to be with him. While these stereotypes in film may not seem harmful to real people, statistics prove that Native women are fetishized by non-Native men who are influenced by what they’ve seen in the media.

Ever since the birth of film in the early 1900s, Native American women have captured the imaginations of filmmakers. Most commonly, they are portrayed as little more than variations on the hollow fragment of the Indian Princess. While early representations of this stereotype depict an exotic seductress, our modern image is that of a romanticized environmentalist who is at one with nature, reflecting the increasing idealism in American culture. Despite this shift, the core aspects of the stereotype have remained stagnant and unrepresentative of reality up until modern times.

II. The Origins of the Buffalo Dance

In 1492, Columbus set foot upon the island of Hispaniola, modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic. When he arrived, he met a group of Indians known as the Tainos/Arawaks. Columbus was so impressed by these people that he wrote of them, “They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features.... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance.... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want” (Morrissey). These gentle natives, according to Columbus, were the most generous, peaceful

people in the world; they did not even have a word for “war” in their language (Thomas 5). However, these peace-loving Arawaks were plagued by their enemy that they called the Caribs. The Caribs were a vicious, bloodthirsty people without morality who hunted and ate the guileless Arawaks for sport. Columbus’s careful records of these interactions gave birth to the images of both the Noble Redman and the Savage Indian. These distinct groups were created in order to dehumanize the Native enemies; the image of the subhuman savage justified reason to enslave them. When Columbus wrote to Queen Isabela, she forbade any friendly Indians to be taken as slaves, but allowed Columbus to capture the “barbaric people – enemies of the Christian” (Thomas 9). However, archaeological and historical evidence has proven the tales of the peaceful Arawak and the cannibalistic Carib to be entirely fictionalized accounts on Columbus’s part. Ever since Columbus first separated Native Americans into these two groups of Good Indians vs. Bad Indians, this stereotype has persisted until today, over 500 years later. In film, these stereotypes have been used in a similar way; depicting Indians as inherently “bad” and “savage” gives an excuse for our modern transgressions against these people. One of the ways this imagery affects Native Americans is through its portrayal of women; the beautiful, peace-loving princess fighting against her savage upbringing.

III. The Maid of the Mist



Winonah outstretches her arms in agony after she discovers Harry has left her. With no purpose to live other than a white man, she shortly thereafter throws herself from the top cliff.

The Heart of an Indian Maid is a short film from 1911, released less than a decade after modern film as we know it was invented. The story follows Harry Mar-

well, a bison hunter. One day, while he is out hunting, he is attacked by a group of savage Indians; they beat him and leave him for dead. However, Winonah, the beautiful daughter of the Indian Chief, sees Harry and instantly falls in love. She rescues him from the side of the road and brings him back to her village. The other Indians react with an instinctual violence,

but Winonah protects her beloved from harm. She marries Harry, despite her tribe's wish for her to marry Black Bison, a strong Indian man. Eventually, Harry escapes and returns to his home. When Winonah finds out she has been forsaken, she flings herself from a cliff, ending her life "in the hope of meeting again in the Happy Camping Ground."

In this film, we see the stereotype of the Indian Princess, as Winonah's only purpose for existing is to be a love interest for Harry. While we see some of Harry's backstory and learn about his profession and family life, Winonah is reduced to a hollow romantic interest with no other feelings or aspirations beyond Harry, so much so that she kills herself upon finding out that Harry has left her, keeping in mind that she fell instantly in love with the man only a few days prior. Another aspect of the Indian Princess played out by the film is that Winonah rebels against the rest of her people or the "bad Indians;" while the rest of her tribe are bloodthirsty savages, calling for Harry's death without any transgression on his part, she plays the voice of reason, stopping them and also by helping him after the others hurt him. These stereotypes of Native women, present only a short while after the invention of film itself, were only exacerbated as time went on.

IV. The Ghost of the White Deer

During the 1950s, America was facing some of the most terrifying threats they had ever seen. The Cold War and the atomic bomb were a constant risk and, as a result, there was an irrational phobia against communism with the Red Scare. Native tribes were badly affected by this, as life on reservations is a form of what Karl Marx refers to as "primitive communism" (Morgan). This shift in American culture is reflected in perhaps the most offensive and dehumanizing portrayal of Native women in film in Disney's *Peter Pan*, the age-old tale of the boy who would never grow up. Beautiful, charming, and proud, Princess Tiger Lily, like Winonah, embodies the trope of the Good Indian/Indian Princess, while the rest of her tribe are the bad, evil savages. This is most apparent in the scene after Tiger Lily's rescue from Captain Hook. Reunited with her people, the Blackfoot, her father, the chief, honors Peter for saving her and makes him an honorary chief while speaking in a sluggish pidgin-English. The group then

smokes tobacco out of a pipe and the chief tells Peter, "Teach 'em, pale-skinned brother, all about Red Man!" The group begins to sing a song called "What Made the Red Man Red?" in response to questions the Lost Boys ask about how the Indians got their reddish skin tone and why they use words such as "how" and "ugh." The song states that the reason they have red skin is because an "Injun" from long ago kissed a fair maid, began to blush, and they've "all been blushin' since." This song erases the brutalities perpetrated against the Native community, as the very term "redskin" likely alludes to the bloodied skins and scalps that Americans turned in to the government for bounties in the mid-1800s. Throughout the song, the entire cast dances around in an "Indian" manner and lets out the stereotypical Indian war whoop. During the festivities, Tiger Lily seduces Peter literally with an enchanting, exotic table dance and nuzzles Peter's nose with her own (an "Eskimo kiss"), angering Wendy. Having been ordered around by a haggardly, stringent Native woman (a "squaw") the whole night, she storms out upon seeing this. Wendy's entire treatment of the night is noteworthy. By angrily leaving before the festivities are over, frowning disapprovingly at the dancers, mocking their language, and refusing to partake in their traditions and customs, she is making the point that these festivities are too barbaric for a civilized person such as herself to partake in. As the mother-figure and voice of reason for the entire film, Wendy's behavior tells us as the viewers that we are superior to these savage people and this uncivilized way of life.



*Tiger Lily stands next to Big Chief as he honors Peter for rescuing his daughter.
Tiger Lily's European features and pale skin distinguish her from her father.*

From this scene, we can see Tiger

Lily's only role in the movie is to act as a seductress and to cause

conflict in the relationship of the proper white couple, Peter and Wendy. She is objectified and sexualized because of her race. Her role is made abundantly clear by the fact that she communicates in the scene entirely through body language; in fact, the *only* word she ever utters during the entirety of the 80-minute film is "help!" before she is rescued by Peter from the evil Captain Hook. The only way Tiger Lily can be this love interest to Peter is, again like Winonah, by including the stereotype of the Good Indian vs. the Bad Indians. These "bad" Indians threaten to literally burn the Lost Boys and Darling brothers, possessing a rage and instability that is so typically shown of Native people. Tiger Lily shows stark contrast to these barbaric savages through her demeanor, which is much more dignified and refined than her counterparts. This chiaroscuro effect is exemplified by how Tiger Lily is Anglicized. Her face appears as though she is of Anglo-American descent, rather than of her Algonquin tribe, and her skin tone is dramatically lighter than her counterparts. The Chief and his people appear like caricatures; some of them look more like animals than humans with their broad, clownish noses and bright red, leathery skin. The old squaw who orders Wendy around acts as a foil to Tiger Lily; where Tiger Lily is beautiful and respectable, the unnamed squaw is brutish and short-tempered.

V. The Daughter of the Sun

With the coming of *Pocahontas* in 1995 along with the rise of the Millennial Generation (aka the “Peter Pan generation”) and a rising sense of idealism and nostalgia, we finally see Native women beginning to tell their own stories. As opposed to Tiger Lily and Winonah, who were merely background characters, *Pocahontas* is, in part, told through the eyes of Pocahontas herself. We see Pocahontas’s perspective when the colonialists come to invade the land and through her unlikely romance with explorer John Smith, a hunky English Captain who has proudly killed many “savages.” Although the story is told from the perspective of Pocahontas herself, the filmmakers hide behind a façade of progressiveness as her character still falls victim to many of the Indian Princess clichés. In the scene where the two meet for the first time, Pocahontas is stalking John Smith through a waterfall. John, sensing danger, pulls out his gun and aims, expecting to see a violent savage, but is shocked to see, instead, a beautiful woman. Pocahontas’s appearance entices John Smith, so he puts his gun down. The two begin to talk and Pocahontas teaches him how to appreciate the magic of nature through the song “Colors of the Wind.”

One of the most defining features of Pocahontas is that she is a woman, not a girl; while many of the other Disney princesses appear young and childlike, Pocahontas is one of the few who is very much a mature woman, resulting in her often being compared to a Barbie doll (Ono 31). She, again, is sexualized for being “exotic.” Like the previous examples, Pocahontas also falls into the Good Indian vs. the Bad Indian trope. She is starkly different from the rest of her people. Her appearance again is more European than the rest, perhaps a result of her figure being directly modeled off of Caucasian American supermodel Christy Turlington (Ross 205). Not only is her skin tone a few shades lighter than the rest of her people, but her way of dressing is more immodest, as well. Her actions also widen the divide; by simply meeting John Smith, she is rebelling against the orders of her father and her people, something that would have been virtually unheard of in Native cultures, erasing her own cultural heritage and making

her more palatable for Western audiences (Pewewardy). She further insults the integrity of her own people by choosing John Smith, the white settler, over Kokuum, a man in her own tribe, again promoting the superiority of the white culture.

Throughout this scene (along with the rest of the film), Pocahontas only refers to her tribe as “my people,” rather than by their cultural name of Powhatan, erasing her culture and generalizing them as just “Native Americans,” even though there were millions of different Native groups, all unique and complex in their own way. Her historical context is also erased, as the film is not historically accurate; the real Pocahontas was a prepubescent girl at the time of her meeting with John Smith and she died of disease that was brought by the Europeans at the age of 22 (Coward). Pocahontas’s mere legacy in our culture is because she is supposedly a heroine of a white European man who transcended the boundaries of savagery. Furthermore, showing the war of the two sides (the Indians vs. the Jamestown colony) as both equally wrong erases the genocide perpetrated by the invading colonists. This commodifies and waters down our past transgressions as we “transform a historical abomination into kid’s candy – genocide into contemporary romance” (Ono 35).



Pocahontas dances with wind, emphasizing her overly

The other stereotype that Pocahontas falls into is that of the Noble Savage, the peaceful environmentalist. The entirety of the song “Colors of the Wind” perpetrates this, as Pocahontas sings, “But I know every rock and tree and creature / Has a life, has a spirit, has a name,” while cuddling a baby bear after taking it from its mother and engaging the wind as a dance partner. Pocahontas is so in touch with nature, in fact, that every time she appears to John Smith, a flurry of magical leaves dances around her with the wind. She also has the power to literally light trees and rocks aglow with energy just by magically caress-

ing them. This mythological goddess perpetrates the idea of the Vanishing American – that modern Indians do not exist today and are a thing of the past.

While this portrayal of Pocahontas attempts to redefine the image of the Indian woman, Disney has simply traded in one offensive stereotype for another. “Disney has created a marketable ‘New Age’ Pocahontas to embody our millennial dreams for wholeness and harmony, while banishing our nightmares of savagery and emptiness,” says Dr. Cornel Pewewardy, a Portland State University Professor and Director of Indigenous Nations Studies. “It is too bad that these portrayals do not reflect real American Indian women of today...who describe how Indian women have assumed, and continue to take on, great authority and status within Indian family structures.” By whitewashing the character, we idealize her for our own needs. Although the Noble Savage is not as directly offensive as some past images of Native women, such as Tiger Lily from *Peter Pan*, she is still not a complex, real human being, which can lead to dehumanization and generalizations about all Native women. “We imbue in her all of the wrong notions of what we want to see in a mythical princess,” says Melinda Micco, a Seminole film historian. “She becomes the embodiment, not of Native society. She becomes an embodiment of American society, of American desire” (*Reel Injun*).

VI. The Piqued Buffalo-Wife

In 2006, Yellow Thunder Woman and Robin Davey, members of the band The Bastard Fairies, were sick of the real stories of indigenous people not being told, so they took on the task of doing it themselves. The result was *The Canary Effect*, a multi-award winning independent documentary that analyzes the effects the backwards policies of the United States government have had on Native people and how they are coping today. Although she only appears for about two minutes of the film that lasts for over an hour, one of the most memorable people interviewed is Lea Fast Horse. In arguably the most compelling scene of the entire film, we are shown how suicide and depression have affected the lives of indigenous youths on reservations.

We are told the story of ten young boys who took part in a suicide pact. They drew numbers and took turns hanging themselves, one by one. Then we are shown Lea. “You see a lot of kids running around with rope burns from trying to hang themselves,” she cries, overwhelmed by the severity of the topic as she struggles to force words through her tears. “It’s hard with all that stuff just stuffed in you and kept there, pushed in you and pushed in you and hate and anger, constantly! All your life raised that way and to turn around and see these beautiful little children. You don’t want to touch any of it...It’s like poison. It kills me...When you have that little baby, you don’t expect it to grow up to be...ya know.” Through this impassioned monologue, she talks about how she is scared for her own children and feels empathy especially because she knows how these kids feel. Here we finally see the picture of a *real* Native woman. Lea Fast Horse is not a commodity, she is not sexualized, and she is not idealized. She does not appear only for a man to fall in love with, she does not disown her people in some way, and she does not magically float in the wind because of her strong bond with nature. She has her own hopes, her own fears, and her own experiences; she is simply a human being with complex feelings and experiences that are not being told or listened to.

VII. The Rainbow’s End

While many other races have undergone radical changes in the way they are portrayed, the Native woman continues to lag behind. From Winonah to Tiger Lily to Pocahontas, filmmakers have struggled to create complex, three-dimensional Native women. When real Native women, such as Lea Fast Horse, are portrayed, they do not gain popular recognition. These unattainable standards set add to the skyrocketing rates of rape, suicide, and depression they face today. Native women are simply people like everyone else and they deserve their own realistic characters that do not dehumanize or romanticize them. In a culture that is obsessed with humanizing the most evil of villains, such as Maleficent from her eponymous film, zombies/the literal dead in *Warm Bodies*, and even Hitler in the film *Downfall*, how is it that Native American women, a *real* group of people has kept the same dehumanizing portrait for centuries?

VIII. Epilogue: How Coyote Brought Fire To The People

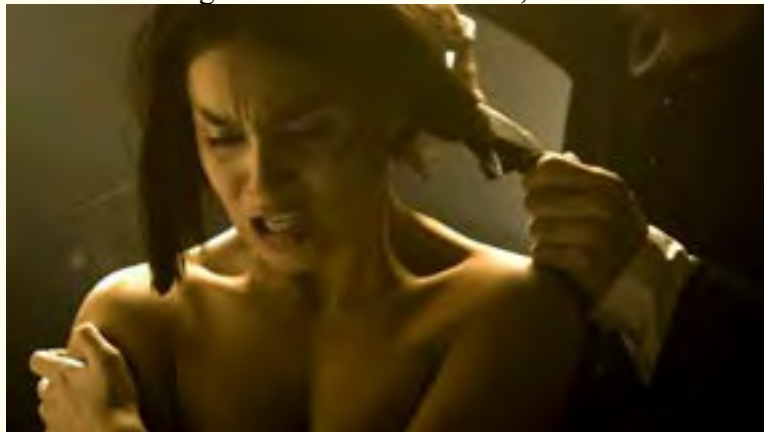


Since *Pocahontas* released 20 years ago, there has been no female Native figure that has saturated pop culture on the same scale to rival her. Any attempt to give them a less negative image with *Pocahontas* has since disappeared from popular media as Native women's voices have become absent or mocked in recent years. In 2014, Rooney Mara, a Caucasian actress, was cast to play Tiger Lily in *Pan* in order to give the character new life. The director said the intention was to create natives of Neverland and that his vision of Neverland natives were white. This argument falls short when you realize that Tiger Lily's father is still played by an aboriginal man, again promoting the idea that the romantic interest, even when portraying an Indian character, must still abide by European beauty standards, while her undesirable family remains "Native" looking (ICTMN Staff). The very next year, around a dozen Navajo actors and actresses walked off the set of Adam Sander's film *The Ridiculous Six* in protest of offensive and degrading jokes; some Indian women in the film were to be named things such as "Beaver's Breath" and "Never-Wears-Bra" and yet another woman was depicted as urinating while smoking from a pipe (Schilling). When Allison Young, a Dartmouth film student and Navajo woman, expressed her concern for the distasteful jokes, she says, "The producers just told us, 'If you guys are so sensitive, you should leave'" (qtd. in Schilling). Adam Sandler continues to insist that the movie is "pro-Indian." Yet another event in 2015 that sparked controversy within the Native community was when Dylan O'Brien, the leading actor in *The Maze Runner*, bragged about how he and the other actors looted Navajo land after they were told "Don't take anything and respect the grounds," by the Navajo who lived there (Phillip). Of all of these controversies, no real consequences occurred to any of the producers or actors involved.

Rooney Mara portrays Tiger Lily in the 2015 film Pan. As seen, Mara, a Caucasian woman, portrays the traditionally Algonquin character.

Despite all of this, independent studios becoming increasingly more common and native directors, writers, and producers are beginning to make their own films. In 2013, Jeff Barnaby of the Listuguj tribe directed and wrote *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. The film takes place in the 1970s during the height of the infamous Indian boarding schools, which ripped indigenous children as young as three away from their families, destroyed their culture, and killed approximately half of the children who attended these schools (*The Canary Effect*). The movie follows Aila, a young Mi'kmaq girl on the fictional Red Crow Reservation, who begins

to sell drugs to support herself after a series of freak accidents leaves her without a family; her younger brother is accidentally run over with a car and killed by her drunken mother, who hangs herself the next morning, then her father is blamed for her mother's death and sent to prison. Through this, Aila must fight against the government agent to keep herself out of the violent, abusive boarding school system. In one of the most poignant films in the scene, Aila is finally taken by the agent to the boarding school and we watch as she is stripped, as her hair is cut, and as she is forced into "proper" European-style clothing. She is sent to a prison-like isolation chamber, where she collapses and falls asleep. While she is sleeping, she has a dream where her dead brother leads her through the woods and motions her to look at something in front of him. As she walks closer, she sees that he is showing her a large pit full of hundreds of corpses of Indian children who died at the school before her. She awakens, sees her dead brother standing in front of the cell door, and watches him disintegrate into the light.



Aila's hair is cut off by the nuns at the boarding school. Here we see her strong-willed character in a moment of vulnerability.

In this film, we see Aila's character revolutionize the way Indian women are portrayed. First, this film does not hide the atrocities

committed against indigenous people and how this affects them today. We see not only an accurate view of how the boarding schools functioned, but we also see a literal monument to the death and decimation they have caused; we can see and feel Aila's anguish for the destruction of her culture as her long braids are hacked off by the Christian nuns who shun her for being "savage." The reservation itself is also true to life as the challenges Aila must face -- the addiction, the violence, the abuse, the extreme poverty, etc. -- mirror what reservation life is like in real life. Native culture is preserved as others treat her as a head-of-the-house figure, for many were matriarchal societies. Aila's rich backstory helps us understand why she is the way she is and through this, it does not glorify or sexualize her. Though she herself is spiritual, her beliefs are true to her people and not caricatured in a romanticized way. Throughout the

film, she sees and talks to visions of her dead mother and brother, turning to them for advice when she is lost. She also is seen using nature, especially the woods and trees, as a source of comfort and guidance and she loves to listen to the mythological stories her grandmother tells her. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, though an empowering tale of an intricate Native woman, was not wildly popular at the box office despite its shining reviews and multiple awards. By making more informed decisions as consumers in what we choose to see, we can have the power to force filmmakers to change the way offensive stereotypes penetrate modern society.

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Final Draft

The Plight of the Woman Warrior

Bodies of men were strewn everywhere. The sound of cannon fire filled the smoke covered battlefield. The Patriots had all but surrendered to the British when a large crack and a flash of fire startled the Red Coats. A figure had rallied the Patriots. Molly Pitcher had refilled the Rebel's last cannon and was firing on the British. Under her lead, the charge of the Patriots defeated the British but when the men went looking for her after the battle she was back at home finishing her knitting. This is not a true story but one of many myths that were born from the American Revolution. This propaganda story is crucial because it maps out the "ideal" heroine story. Like the story of Judith, Molly Pitcher's tale was a heroic moment where a woman took charge in a time of desperation only to return to her role as a woman. This classifies as a myth, not only because there is no historical proof, but because of the story in between the lines. Judith is a story about defeating villains for God's chosen but is also a story of a woman overcoming obstacles set for her by society. Men are externally encouraged to be brave, assertive, and violent resulting in stories glorifying the masculine archetype of a hero. Women are encouraged to internalize passivity and practice obedience resulting in the damsel in distress archetype in these male dominated tales. Women must build up the "confidence" to develop a new identity to become a hero. The patriarchal ideas of gender roles in society prevent women from asserting their physical presence in a heroic fashion. Only under extreme circumstances is a woman allowed to rise to the status of heroine.

Israel depended on well-defined and uncontested roles for each gender in order to keep the threads of the social fabric tight. In this patriarchal society, like most, the men were the warriors while the women remained docile. Men were dominant and head strong while women were obedient and soft spoken. If either chose to step out of the strict roles defined for them, it was believed that the very foundations of the society would fall apart. In his essay “Ludic History in the Book of Judith: The Reinvention of Israelite Identity”, Philip F. Esler expands on the internalization of gender norms, arguing that, “Gender is closely connected with honor and shame, especially to the extent that is necessary for women to remain under the authority of men in their lives... for the men to reserve their honor”. If a man’s honor depended on the helplessness and obedience of the women in his life, the women would not try to break away from their pre-existing social status in fear of effecting his status in society. With this notion, women could not actively participate in behaviors that were designated “heroic”, such as warfare, because they fell under the acceptable characteristics of masculinity. The subservient role of women during war time did not change. “As an Israelite woman, Judith was expected to conform to local conventions which required her to remain in the domestic sphere and leave it to Israelite males to wage war against Holofernes” (Esler). Only when Israel seems lost, with the men unwilling to defend it, is Judith allowed to break from her role of woman and given the chance to attempt something only a man would be qualified to do: take physical action while doing it in a way society would accept.

Society’s emphasis on a female’s sexuality and virtue makes women unqualified to be considered anything but inferior objects of possession. Along with the ideals of an obedient domestic, women also had to fit into the role of a pure and virtuous maiden while being sexualized by men. A woman’s virginity was her most valuable asset due to the fact that it was

priceless. In her essay “Media Images of Women during War: Vehicles of Patriarchy’s Agenda”, Chetty Adhis claims “The objectification of women as sexual commodities and the projection of the stereotype that women are manipulative and untrustworthy – using sex as a weapon – while men are in need of sex – represents this as normative male behavior.” When a woman does use her sexuality, as Judith did in the book of the Bible named after her, she is at risk of being classified as a seductress and is socially exiled by the community. In contrast, a man’s need for sex is seen as acceptable and will not be counted negatively towards him. A woman’s virtue is what the society has deemed the measurement of her value. Judith must declare that she is still virtuous before being celebrated for killing Holofernes by saying, “‘I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me.’ All the people were greatly astonished,” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Judith, 13:16-17). Not only must the women commit an act that can be considered heroic but she must maintain her virtue because society tells her to. Women must go above and beyond to receive the same recognition a man would get for simply doing the heroic deed. By placing such a significant emphasis on the sexuality of women, society can use it against her when she attempts to be defined by something other than her virtue. To use a societal norm against a person can be best described as a tool of hegemony. Hegemony benefits the ruling class by preventing anyone from attempting social mobility by shaping cultural norms. In patriarchal societies, the tool of hegemony is used to keep women in their subordinate places by defining them by their sexuality. By placing such an emphasis on virtue, women will not try to break from their subservient roles in fear of being rejected by society. In doing so women will stay in the role of domestic instead of pushing the boundaries of doing something considered masculine, such as warfare. Women

will participate in wartime only as manipulative propaganda of stereotypical damsels in need of rescuing.

In times of war, women are objectified to create emotional reactions directed towards men. A poster for recruitment of American troops to fight in World War II will have one of two things: the personification of America as a woman being attacked or a scared woman cowering over a child being attacked. The portrayal of women as “casualties of war” is not without purpose. “The use of sexist, patriarchal images in war propaganda is meant to reinforce expectations and beliefs” (Adhis). By seeing these images society becomes classical conditioned to believe women are not capable of fighting and are weaklings that depend on men for protection. To use women as propaganda for war is nothing new; for example Judith cries out, “O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon, to whom you gave a sword to take revenge on those strangers who had torn off a virgin’s clothing to defile her, and exposed her thighs to put her to shame, and polluted her womb to disgrace her; for you said, ‘It shall not be done’ – yet they did it” (Judith 9:2). This ideal portrays women as weak, defenseless, and in need of someone (male) to defend them. Not only does this reinforce the idea that woman cannot excel out of their dependent role but it leads to further segregation between the genders. To “be like a woman” becomes an insult as Esler writes, “Manhood, and more specifically, male honour entail the capacity to exert violence, while women are regarded as those who succumb the violence, so that the ineffective soldiers are labelled as women”. (Esler). The word “woman” becomes an insult and something to strive not to be. This renders it nearly impossible for a woman to enter the army, navy, or any military service without automatically being labeled as good as the worst male soldier by her male peers. By using women as objects and insults, women cannot be looked

upon as warriors or heroes because there is a stereotype of weakness applied. A weakness that can only be overcome when there is no male presences.

Only during the times where the foundation of the community, the influence of the men, are at risk is the woman given the opportunity to save them. After war, conditions change so that “taking action” in fact reinforces patriarchy instead of threatening it. The men return home and to work so the women remove themselves from the workplace and go back to the home. To return to the home shows that the position women filled during war time was only a temporary position of a man. This further hinders the chance for heroism by continuing the dependence of men for the opportunity to become a heroine. The first act of “in your face” heroism in the Bible is made by Zipporah, “On the way, at a place where they spend the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’ feet with it and said, “Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” So he let him alone,” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Exodus 4:24-25). The call for the woman is unexpected, such as Zipporah’s rescue of Moses or Jael’s murder of Sisera in Judges. There is not a strong male presence in that very moment so the woman must step up. If there are males present, they are unconscious. Judith can only defeat Holofernes once he is passed out drunk, “But Judith was left alone on the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was dead drunk,” (Judith 13:2). This portrays woman as not being equal to men on the “battlefield”. A man would never attack an enemy who is unconscious because that would be considered dishonorable. A man’s bravado must be encouraged by a defeat of an equal competitor. However, a woman’s mode of disposal is the use of deception, much like how poison is considered “the women’s weapon”. Only within certain circumstances would women be allowed to commit heroic acts, but they are not subject to the rewards they’ve earned.

Once a woman achieves a position of power status the elevation of status is short lived. In times of war, women fill the positions left by men when they go to fight. Women must step up, a heroic act itself, but in doing so they experience a new kind of freedom. However, once the men return the woman give up their new position of power and return to the domestic sphere. With their restoration the threat to the patriarchy vanishes along with the women's chances of being in positions of power. The final verses of Judith read, "After this they all returned home to their own inheritances. Judith went to Bethulia, and remained on her estate," (Judith 16:21). If all progress that was made by the absence of men is erased as soon as they return, the only thing that has changed is women's knowledge of what having power feels like. Judith is a hero, but because she is a woman she is not allowed to reap the same benefits as a male hero. In contrast to Judith's return to her life before the war David, who is one of the most famous heroes of the Old Testament, receives a kingdom, wealth, fame, etc. In detailing David's rewards the Bible describes, "David then perceived that the Lord has established him king over Israel... David took more concubines and wives; more sons and daughters were born to David," (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Samuel 2, 5:12-13). Not only is David rewarded with treasure and status but God secures his lineage by giving him children to pass down his legacy. Judith remains a childless widow until her death. The difference between their rewards exemplifies that men are to be celebrated forever for their deeds while women are swept under the rug. By not honoring women for their heroics during war time, society is successful for discouraging future Judiths from heroism.

Like Molly Pitcher, Judith was a story told to motivate women to be heroic at the right time in the "right way". The very foundations of the society must be at risk for a woman to be allowed to do something outside of what was acceptable for her to do. After accomplishing the

task the woman must go back to her subservient role in a hegemonic society. Society expects women to hear these stories and be inspired in the same way. Women want to hear the stories but with endings that match David's. Women want to hear stories where the woman fights for her country because she is strong and unwilling to live under male rule. In a violent world dominated by men, there's no wonder women hear so few stories they can completely believe. The world is more progressive than biblical times or the revolution era, but the idea of a female heroine is still abstract. Anyone who does not identify as those who reap the most benefit from our patriarchal world, such as the LGBTQ community or men who do not fit "what a man ought to be", is abused. However, women receive the most immediate and most common mistreatment from this system. When a strong woman does appear she is attacked mercilessly, for example Hillary Clinton during the election or Carrie Fischer in the new Star Wars movie. Despite these strong female icons one individual cannot change the entire societal role of a gender. Several acts over time can change women's positions slightly but not completely. The power of stories like Molly Pitcher and Judith is in their ability to inspire more women to take control and challenge societal norms, but the endings must be changed. Instead of giving the power back to men, women of today's age question why they aren't given the same power in the first place?

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Masculinity and American Advertising

In a culture that pressures its men to conform to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, “real men don’t cry” or “don’t be a pussy” are both detrimental phrases that American men hear on a regular basis. Hegemonic masculinity, in summary, is the ultimate patriarchal concept that teaches men to hide their emotions, look down on women, and to believe violence is acceptable. Hegemonic masculinity represents what American culture idealizes as a “real” man and feeds into hyper-masculinity, which is displayed in American advertising. The language used in American advertising that shapes definitions of gender in American society specifically pressures men to conform to the patriarchal concept of hegemonic masculinity which is harmful to the well-being of American society and its men.

The concept of masculinity presented in American society, and through American advertising, teaches men to suppress their emotions, a concept I like to call emotional constipation. American culture idealizes hegemonic masculinity which perpetuates the ideal male as a heterosexual hyper-masculine figure with little respect for those of different genders or sexual orientation. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as “the culturally dominant ideal that men are dominant over women, who are to be subordinate” (Lookholder 7). Notice the definition specifically speaks of the gender dynamics required for the hegemonic masculine ideal: the women must be seen and treated as subordinate to the men. What Lookholder did not discuss in her definition of hegemonic masculinity was that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender/sexual, queer, intersexual, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community are also seen and treated as lesser than the heterosexual male. Really, to conform to hegemonic masculinity is to conform to the idea that the heteronormative male is superior to all people who are not that. Hegemonic masculinity also encourages stupid and often violent behavior in men as a way to assert male dominance and to prove time and time again to others that they are *the* man. This continual assertion of dominance is associated with hyper-masculinity. Living a life that attempts to conform to hegemonic masculinity and hyper-masculinity, as a male, is to live a life that is a continual battle of proving “manliness.” Michael Kimmel, an internationally recognized author, researcher, and lecturer on men and concepts of masculinity, interviewed young men about what it means to be a man in each of the 50 states in the United States as well as in 15 other countries for his book *"Bro's before Ho's": The Guy Code* (2008). When he asked his interviewees what comes to mind when they hear someone say “Be a man!” this was the result:

Here's what guys say, summarized into a set of current epigrams...1. 'Boys Don't Cry' 2. 'It's Better to Be Mad than Sad' 3. 'Don't Get Mad- Get Even' 4. 'Take It Like a Man' 5. 'Just Do It' or 'Ride or Die' 7. 'Size Matters' 8. 'I Don't Stop to Ask for Directions' 9. 'Nice Guys Finish Last' 10. 'It's All Good'. The unifying emotional subtext of all these aphorisms involves never showing emotions or admitting to weakness (Kimmel 470).

Notice the prevalence of emotional suppression, with the exception of anger, of course. Anger is one of the only emotions men are encouraged to express because anger is a violent emotion and frequently expresses itself towards others in a violent fashion, which would provide more opportunities for men to prove themselves as men in American society. Another common theme in these phrases is the encouragement of acting before thinking, which again is likely to result in rash and violent behavior, and the discouragement of receiving or asking for help from other

people. Encouragement of thoughtless behavior with phrases like “just do it” also encourage men to complete stupid or rash actions (e.g., licking a frozen telephone pole, drinking ridiculous amounts of alcohol, consuming illegal substances, and other risky activities) without thinking of the consequences of those actions (e.g., injury, illness, death, hurt relationships, etc.). And when a man is faced with the consequences of these actions he is to “take it like a man,” unless of course those questions would suggest he is inferior to a woman or someone of equal or lesser status in the eyes of hegemonic masculinity. Men are also taught through phrases like “Size Matters” that physical appearance and brute strength/athleticism is everything, which already isolates whole groups of men who have body types and mindsets to be artists, musicians, writers, scientists, doctors, or any other profession where brute strength or athleticism is not necessarily a required factor. In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, physical strength, which is also heavily associated with violence and violent behaviors, is everything to the “real” man. A team of researchers defined hyper-masculinity in advertising as any advertisement that contains or promotes one or more of the following components: “Danger is exciting. Toughness is a form of emotional self-control. Violence is manly. It’s fine to be callous about women and sex” (Bahadur). This concept is often reflected in American advertisements with advertisements like Bushmaster Firearms’ “Consider Your Man Card Reissued” advertisement shown on the following page. The advertisement features a huge automatic rifle next to the words “Consider Your Man Card Reissued”.



This advertisement suggests that a man's sense of who he is as a man and what his "real" man status is in American culture is centered around violence and the idea that to be *the* man you must have the biggest gun. This concept by default tells men that they cannot really be happy unless they are taking that happiness by force by bending others to their will through threat of violence. This ideal carried out in the real world leads to a string of unhealthy relationships with friends, family, and significant others and almost guarantees violence in these relationships. Social/relational health is an important aspect of one's overall health, thus, the concept of emotional repression and anger that is represented in American culture and advertising is unhealthy for America's men. Emotional suppression also often leads to violent and dangerous behavior, especially towards women.

The image of the emotionally repressed man promoted by American advertisements and by American culture teaches men that it is okay to violently abuse women, treat women as sex objects, and to see women as subservient and inferior. Men are taught, time and time again, through American culture and through American advertising, that not only is the violent abuse and domination of women acceptable, it is desirable and a way to show others who *the* man is. This is often reflected in America's advertising as shown below and on the following page:





In the page above, one of the advertisements shown are a *Dolce & Gabbana* advertisement, a clothing company, which features a shirtless man pinning down a woman in a bathing suit and high-heels while leaning over her next to a pool surrounded by other strong and shirtless men. The uncomfortable yet docile facial expression of the woman with the determined gaze of the man pinning her down would lead us as an audience to believe that the man/men are about to rape the woman, and that this is okay and “classy.” This advertisement from a classy high-end clothing company would suggest to men that part of success and living the “good life,” factors that are key in presenting a hyper-masculine persona, means being able to take part in sexual activities with a woman’s body regardless of her consent wherever you see fit. It is also noticeable in this advertisement that the woman is made to be docile and subservient to the men who are overpowering her. While it is clear that she is uncomfortable (because who would be comfortable in heels while holding that position?), nothing about this image tells the audience something is wrong or is pleading for help. The woman is also made to look innocent and weak,

discusses how hyper-masculine advertisements are targeted at America's most vulnerable male audience: "Moreover, hyper-masculine imagery was predominantly aimed at two audiences: younger men (adolescents and men in their early 20s) and older working-class men without college educations. These two groups were, in many ways, the most easily influenced" (O'Malley). Targeting younger men and uneducated working class men with hyper-masculine results in more violent crime and sexual assaults because the message these advertisements are telling these men is that not only is violence against women necessary to achieve the status and power both groups crave so much, but it is actually what the face of status and power looks like. The ideal of the "macho" emotionally repressed man in American advertising promotes gender inequality and violence against woman. This dangerous ideal also feeds into widespread homophobia.

Part of "being a man" in American society promotes homophobia and homophobic violence. In a written interview about masculinity and American advertising, Mark Gokel, a young homosexual male in his 20s, covers a aspect that homophobia plays in his life: "Needless to say, society is always attempting to find a way to convince me that the way I view my sexual identity or masculinity is wrong, simply because it does not line up with their version of the truth" (Gokel). Hegemonic masculinity and the concept of hyper-masculinity teaches men to fear men like Gokel who hold a lifestyle and sexual orientation that is different from their own. Men are taught that anything that is different from their own stance in life is wrong and is to be hated. These concepts also promote homophobia by creating and feeding off of the heteronormative fear of being perceived as homosexual: 'That's so gay' has become a free-floating put-down meaning bad, dumb, stupid, wrong. It's the generic bad thing" (Kimmel 472-473). American men are being taught to police each other into hegemonic masculinity, hyper-masculinity, and

implying the man looming over her is in complete control, this is done through the way her body is positioned in that uncomfortable fashion that gives her little control over her body. Next you will see a *Johnny Farah* advertisement, a company that makes bags, belts, and accessories, that features a man whose physical features are covered by belts aggressively pulling a belt that is looped around a woman's neck while pushing the woman away from where he is pulling with his hand on her back. The woman's face is obscured by an upside-down purse, her arms are thrust backwards suggesting a violent and aggressive action that is causing her pain. Again, in this advertisement we see a company showing a man violently dominating/attacking a woman in order to sell clothing, or in this particular case, clothing accessories. Next, there is shown an advertisement from *University Row Manhattan*, a suiting company, which features a well-dressed man sitting on top of a cage containing a woman dressed in a short tight dress with tiger print. This advertisement suggests that the woman's status in society and in a relationship is that of an animal, and that to be a *real* man and to be the successful man requires one to degrade the women in your life like animals. In the final advertisement shown, an advertisement for *Duncan Quinn*, a high-end men's clothing company, a woman is shown unconscious and in her bra and underwear on the hood of a car. A man is shown standing there smiling at the camera pulling some kind of noose that is wrapped around the unconscious woman's neck, suggesting that he suffocated and raped or will soon rape this woman. This advertisement is going down the same route as *Dolce & Gabbana*, *Johnny Farah*, and *University Row Manhattan* in using the violent abuse, and sexual assault of a woman to suggest wealth and power in one's life. These advertisements suggest to men that wealth and status involve the physical and sexual abuse and degradation of women, and that these crimes against women and society as a whole are acceptable and okay. Harris O'Malley, known on his personal online blog as Doctor NerdLove,

discusses how hyper-masculine advertisements are targeted at America's most vulnerable male audience: "Moreover, hyper-masculine imagery was predominantly aimed at two audiences: younger men (adolescents and men in their early 20s) and older working-class men without college educations. These two groups were, in many ways, the most easily influenced" (O'Malley). Targeting younger men and uneducated working class men with hyper-masculine results in more violent crime and sexual assaults because the message these advertisements are telling these men is that not only is violence against women necessary to achieve the status and power both groups crave so much, but it is actually what the face of status and power looks like. The ideal of the "macho" emotionally repressed man in American advertising promotes gender inequality and violence against woman. This dangerous ideal also feeds into widespread homophobia.

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emotional suppression with phrases like ‘That’s so gay’, ‘Fag’, or ‘Pussy’ that would suggest being a person of a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual or that being a female is shameful, inferior, and embarrassing. When people mean to say words that communicate a meaning of bad or stupid, they instead interchanged them with words that equate being of the LGBTQIA community or being female with being stupid and inferior. Concepts of American masculinity promote homophobia, by using the heteronormative fear of being interpreted as homosexual to turn homosexuality into an inferior status to heterosexual men.

The language used in American advertising that shapes definitions of gender in American society specifically pressure men to conform to hyper-masculine concepts, which are harmful to American society. Hyper-masculinity is dangerous to men because it teaches men that it is not only acceptable but also desirable to be emotionally repressed, abuse women, be homophobic, and act violently. Women and members of the LGBTQIA community are a large portion of American society, which means hyper-masculinity is not only harmful to men but to the whole of American society. America would be a much stronger and peaceful nation if American culture would teach their men to be emotionally competent, to value women, and to accept people of different gender identities.

Word Count: 2214

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NOTE: I had problems finding the original posting of the offensive ads, as most of them were taken down by the companies posting them as controversy grew, so I cited articles that featured the advertisements I analyzed.

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8 April 2017

Look Around, Look Around

For the first time in half a century “there are two cast recordings in the top 20 of the Billboard 200 Chart” (Caulifield). These two shows are the recently released *Dear Evan Hansen*, and *Hamilton an American Musical*, which has been on the list almost since its release. Today, it is rare for even one musical cast recording to have the broad appeal to make it onto the top of any list. Musical theatre is not considered a popular form of entertainment, but rather a highly specialized genre of music that only the wealthy can enjoy. In this environment, it is strange that a musical like *Hamilton* would have such a strong impact with so many people. Telling the story of first Treasury Secretary and virtually unknown Founding Father, Alexander Hamilton, as a musical may seem like an odd choice to say the least. Throw in the fact that the musical’s style is hip-hop and other modern genres, and the idea sounds like complete lunacy. However, looking back, there is no better medium of storytelling more effective than a musical to tell Hamilton’s story. Musical theatre was founded by immigrants and people from diverse backgrounds. It drove music trends for the entire country. This is because musicals spoke to people. They were hopeful, optimistic, and entirely American. They preached that anyone could work hard and fulfill their dreams, no matter how humble their beginnings. Alexander Hamilton was a poor immigrant who came up from nothing to create the foundations of America, fulfilling the American dream. Creator of *Hamilton an American Musical*, Lin-Manuel Miranda, wanted tell Hamilton’s story in a way relevant to modern viewers, and he succeeded. Not only is the musical

the perfect way to tell Alexander Hamilton's story, but through its celebration of modern music, diversity, and classical musical themes, *Hamilton an American Musical* itself is the perfect American musical.

Both Hamilton the show and the character are very conscious of being watched. Throughout the story, Alexander Hamilton wonders what his legacy will be, or whether he'll even be remembered at all. One of his first lines in the show is "Don't be shocked when your history book mentions me" (Miranda "My Shot"). He already expects to accomplish something great enough to be remembered. One of the main ideas of the show is how these characters will be viewed by history. Washington tells Hamilton that "History has its eyes on [us]" (Miranda "History Has its Eyes on You"). They both know that no matter what they do, history will judge them for it. The early founders of musical theatre did not have as much pressure on them as the Founding Fathers, but they still knew that their work would be watched. In fact, the presence or absence of an audience meant their success or failure as artists. Just like Alexander Hamilton, if they were successful, their accomplishments would last long enough to be remembered as history. The question, "But when you're gone, who/Remembers your name?/Who keeps your flame?/Who tells your story?" is asked many times throughout the show, but doesn't get an answer until the end (Miranda "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story"). Alexander Hamilton created his legacy, but it was his wife, Eliza, who preserves it. At the end of the show, she is the one telling his story, hoping that people will listen and remember him. Her dream comes true; in the last moments before the musical ends, she sees the audience, who are all there solely to hear Hamilton's story. She succeeded in preserving Hamilton's legacy, but it is Lin-Manuel Miranda, who took his story to the stage, and by using a beloved art form, as well as contemporary music, encouraged people to watch his story, fulfilling Hamilton's dream.

Like any groundbreaking musical, *Hamilton* uses new genres of music to tell a story in its own way, and in doing so, brings the entire genre a step forward. It is a show “that grows out of tradition and grows radically away from it at the same time” (Viertel 16). No other genre contains music as varied as classical like *Les Misérables*, rock like *RENT*, and hip-hop and rap found in *Hamilton*. This is because musical theatre adapts to include new music genres. This transition isn’t always smooth. When *Hair*, the first rock & roll musical came out, many questioned whether “rock belong[s] on Broadway,” but now rock shows like *RENT*, *Next to Normal*, and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* are an accepted part of musical theatre (Miranda qtd. in Binelli). This process now repeats itself with rap. *Hamilton* is not the first rap musical, but it is the one that proves that “rap is a great way to tell a theatrical story” (Viertel 15-16). Rap as a genre is made to tell stories quickly and efficiently. It can share a lot of information without losing any energy or emotional impact. These are essential qualities when chronicling a life as complex and intense as Hamilton’s. This music makes *Hamilton* “a musical that changes the way that Broadway sounds” and continues the long tradition of expanding musical theatre (Miranda and McCarter 10). Rap, like rock, is the music genre of the current generation of average American people, and by including it in the story of the founding of the United States, *Hamilton* also includes them.

Despite its unusual music style, *Hamilton* has the structure of a traditional musical. The musical theatre format is a tried and true method of story telling. One of the most noticeable aspects of this format is what is referred to as the “song plot,” which is “a graph on which the songs in a musical can be laid out.” (Viertel 12). The “song plot” includes an establishing number that introduces the characters, an “I Want” song, in which the hero tells the audience what will be driving them for the rest of the show, and sometimes “a love letter to New York”

like “N.Y.C.” from *Annie* (Miranda and McCarter 42). Most successful shows follow this format even though it might not be obvious to the audience. *Hamilton* tells a story that inspires and entertains using the musical format. It has everything a Broadway audience expects: an establishing number, an “I Want” song in “My Shot,” and even the famous New York song in “The Schuyler Sisters.” These are all staples of musical theatre that audiences have come to expect. Even though it uses modern music to tell its story, *Hamilton* still abides by the format. It “has grafted fresh branches onto a stable trunk, not hacked into the tree” (Solomon). *Hamilton* is not trying to deconstruct the musical format; it’s merely updating it with modern music.

The musical is an art form that is entirely American and *Hamilton* pays respect to classical American musicals by referencing them. *Hamilton* uses “America’s own fine form” to tell the story of one of America’s founders (Gopnik). Miranda isn’t defying decades of musical theatre tradition; he’s building on it. In the song “My Shot,” Hamilton says that he is “Only nineteen, but [his] mind is older” (Miranda “My Shot”). This is a reference to the *RENT* line, “I’m nineteen, but I’m old for my age” (Larson “Light My Candle”). Similarly, Hamilton’s line in “The Adams Administration,” “Sit down John!” is a reference to the song “Sit Down John” from the musical *1776*, which is about John Adams’ experience getting the Constitution ratified (Miranda “The Adams Administration”). Even the idea of the main character’s story being told by their enemy has been used in shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita* (Solomon). These references to past musicals demonstrate that while *Hamilton* is revolutionizing the art form, it still respects and pays homage to its past.

Hamilton does not only borrow from musical theatre’s format; it also borrows from its spirit. Musical theatre, like America, is a melting pot of many different cultures and ideas. Early musical theatre fostered a world where race and ethnicity didn’t matter nearly as much as talent.

It encouraged “leaping across borders and boundaries” and gave “everyone permission to visit each other’s lands and see what they were doing” (*Broadway the American Musical*). Anyone could make it big on Broadway. Fanny Brice was born to immigrant parents, but went on to become one of the most beloved stars of her time, even inspiring the musical *Funny Girl* about her life. Al Jolson was a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe who has been said to have done more for musical theatre than any other performer (*Broadway the American Musical*). Other major players like the Gershwins were also children of immigrants. Little did they know that they were founding the art form that would eventually be used to tell the story of one of the most important immigrants in American history. *Hamilton* doesn’t shy away from this idea of inclusion and diversity. Not only is Hamilton constantly referred to as an immigrant, but so is Lafayette in the line, “An immigrant you know and love who’s unafraid to step in” (Miranda “Guns and Ships”). The show mentions and celebrates the contributions immigrants like Hamilton and Lafayette made to the founding of the United States. In fact, the line “Immigrants/We get the job done” earns a massive applause from the audience almost every performance (Miranda “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)”). *Hamilton* celebrates the idea that the United States was built on; immigrants and diversity makes America better as a country. Similar to how immigrants and minorities included themselves in early musical theatre, *Hamilton*’s colorblind casting gives African Americans and Latinos a place in the founding of the United States. It takes “America’s open-ended and universally available narrative” to the stage (Gopnik). *Hamilton* doesn’t exclude anyone from American history, just as it doesn’t exclude anyone from the process of making a musical. Miranda himself said, “A bunch of people from a bunch of backgrounds had to come together to make it work” (Miranda and McCarter 11). *Hamilton* uses diversity to make its story accessible to everyone.

Another theme in the show, and in musicals in general, is self-invention. In the very first lines of the show, Burr asks how “a bastard, orphan, son of a whore” could “Grow up to be a hero and a scholar” (Miranda “Alexander Hamilton”). These lines are essential because they make the audience understand exactly how humble Hamilton’s beginnings are and how the odds are stacked against him. This makes his later accomplishments even more impressive. The poverty to riches story is a staple in traditional musical theatre. Ever since early Broadway, one narrative has always dominated the stage: characters coming up from humble beginnings to make something of themselves. Through musical theatre, “America fell in love with Cinderella stories” (*Broadway the American Musical*). Whether or not it’s realistic, there is nothing more American than self-invention. Of course Alexander Hamilton, a poor orphan whose signature theme is “rise up,” would be the perfect subject of a musical (Miranda “My Shot”). Hamilton, like the early musical theatre songwriters, achieved the American dream on his own talent and hard work. Hamilton himself says in the song “Hurricane” that it’s not luck, but his own skill that saves him: “And when my prayers to God were met with indifference/I picked up a pen, I wrote my own deliverance” (Miranda “Hurricane”). He is literally writing for his life, just like the early musical theatre writers. Both attempted to leave their mark on the world. Even in his last moments, Hamilton is still grateful for the opportunity his adopted country gave him: “America, you great unfinished symphony/You sent for me/ You let me make a difference/A place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints and rise up” (Miranda “The World Was Wide Enough”). He, like the founders of musical theatre, came up from nothing to create something new, groundbreaking, and ultimately American.

In order for characters and people to defy their humble upbringings and make something of themselves, they first have to reinvent themselves. Many musicals deal with the theme of

reinvention. In the show *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean transforms himself from a criminal to an honest man and good father. Elphaba in *Wicked* tries to change herself to be what the Wizard of Oz wants her to be, but when that doesn't work, she instead takes ownership of her role as the Wicked Witch of the West. This is exactly what Hamilton does. He transforms himself from a poor orphan into the person his country needs him to be. In many ways, "his own story parallels America's (Solomon). Hamilton's rebirth mirrors America's as a nation. The musical *Hamilton* doesn't simply dance around this idea either; it faces it head on with the lines, "I'm just like my country/I'm young, scrappy, and hungry" (Miranda "My Shot"). Hamilton's transformation from a poor immigrant to Founding Father matches the colonies' growth to become an independent nation. The musical establishes America as a place anyone can reinvent themselves. In the opening song the ensemble sings, "In New York you can be a new man" (Miranda "Alexander Hamilton"). This might seem like an exaggeration, but in early musical theatre, New York was the place people went to start a new life. They could use their talents to dazzle audiences and become stars. They, like Hamilton, couldn't achieve their dreams without reinventing themselves.

As unlikely as it might seem, the musical is the perfect way to tell Alexander Hamilton's story, and the resulting show, *Hamilton* is the perfect American musical. It follows in a long tradition of unlikely shows that combine classical elements and innovation to make something new and beautiful. *Hamilton* is a success because it uses new music to tell its story, while never straying from what made musicals great in the first place. Musicals represent everything America strives to be. They preach hope: "our culture is a culture of optimism and what the musical sells is optimism" (*Broadway the American Musical*). This is what keeps them relevant. In a time where negativity and pessimism are everywhere, shows like *Hamilton* remind viewers to see the

good as well as the bad. Hamilton's story doesn't end with him dying. His goal was that he would be remembered and that his legacy would go on. So, even though the audience is mourning his death, the very fact that they are watching his story means that his life's ambition succeeded. Hamilton's life serves as an inspiration of what is possible. The characters in the show are aware that they live in remarkable times and celebrate it with the lyric, "Look around, look around at how/Lucky we are to be alive right now" (Miranda "The Schuyler Sisters"). This hopeful spirit in the face of the bleak chances of the revolution easily translates not only to modern musicals like *Hamilton* that need a tremendous amount of luck to succeed, but also to modern life. *Hamilton*, like generations of musicals before it, reveals what is good in the world and reminds us how lucky we are to be alive.

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English 1A

1 December 2016

Deforestation and the Impact on Wildlife Biodiversity

Nearly thirty thousand species go extinct each year (Arrandale). To put that number in perspective, this means that approximately one hundred fifty to two hundred species goes extinct every single day (Arrandale). Deforestation, which is referred to as the cutting down of forests and trees for non-forest use, is one of the leading causes of extinction for wildlife, especially in the Amazon (Lindsey). Many people view the act of deforestation as something that simply yields profit and provides vital natural resources for humans. While this is true, a vast majority of these individuals do not take in to consideration what deforestation means not only for humans and the environment, but for wildlife biodiversity in tropical regions. In general, the importance of biodiversity and the extent to which humans depend on it is not typically recognized or even acknowledged. If society begins taking action now, damages done to wildlife populations can be repaired. There are a multitude of ways deforestation can be limited, and alternative methods considered, in order to increase productivity of necessary natural resources for society, as well as saving wildlife biodiversity in the process. The amount of deforestation that occurs should be reduced and alternative methods sought out as it negatively impacts the biodiversity within wildlife in tropical forests by causing thousands of species to go extinct each year, which disrupts the critical balance and productivity of ecological systems.

Deforestation has taken place throughout history; however, this issue became particularly prevalent in the mid-20th century when the demand for agricultural land became increasingly

high. Today, deforestation is widely used for “agricultural expansion, wood extraction (e.g., logging or wood harvest for domestic fuel or charcoal), and infrastructure expansion such as road building and urbanization” (Lindsey). Take note that all of these reasons are based off human necessity and an increase in population. The population is growing at such an alarming rate, resulting in the need for more space to farm and create buildings. Although deforestation provides a wide variety of resources essential to everyday life, the negative impacts of deforestation on wildlife biodiversity are becoming much more prevalent in tropical forests. The destruction of forests throughout the Amazon poses great risks for wildlife and their survival, by causing unnecessary changes to ecological systems and limiting the amount of roles these species play in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Few people realize that a biologically diverse world is required to properly carry out various functions and aspects of life. Environmentalists are finally becoming aware of the rate to which our forests are being cut down, and how detrimental it may prove to be. Environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund have worked very hard at bringing awareness to the monumental decline in biodiversity as a result of deforestation (Karaim). Additionally, there are a number of laws and regulations in place to help endangered species recover, and to limit the amount of deforestation taking place throughout the world. The Endangered Species Act of 1973, intended to recover endangered species in the United States, has proved completely unsuccessful in doing this (Cooper). Similarly, although previously being effective in banning deforestation in the Amazon, Brazil’s Forest Code of 1965 has recently been reformed, which provides farmers with more areas to cut down trees, consequently hurting wildlife in the process (“Untangling Brazil's Controversial New Forest Code”). If the Amazon is destroyed by deforestation and eventually ceases to exist, the earth will begin to experience significant changes in functionality due to the

loss of wildlife biodiversity. Efforts to fight deforestation have been implemented, but the problem still persists today, and will continue to have a lasting negative effect on wildlife biodiversity. However, if action is taken soon, biodiversity can be replenished and damages to forests repaired.

Tens of thousands of species go extinct each year, which is proving to be destructive to wildlife biodiversity in tropical forests, as well as negatively affecting the lives of humans (Arrandale). The rate at which species are going extinct is alarming. Thomas E. Lovejoy, a scientist who coined the term biological diversity, states, “Each species is a small piece of [the global threat] but it all adds up. . . we’re in the first stages of a mass extinction” (qtd. in Karaim). The last time Earth experienced a mass extinction was 65 million years ago; therefore, scientists are not aware of how Earth will function without certain species that carry out essential services for our every day lives (Karaim). The level of biodiversity each year is tracked by the World Wildlife Fund, and their findings in 2012 concluded that “biodiversity has declined globally by around 30 percent between 1970 and 2008. The loss has been worst in the tropics, the richest storehouse of life on the planet, where it has fallen 60 percent” (Karaim). This means that well over half of the biodiversity in tropical regions has diminished in 38 years. At this rate, there is no possibility of recovering unless action is taken right away. A species that has been particularly affected by habitat loss as a result of deforestation is tigers. This endangered species “[has] lost 93 percent of their natural range. Their population has fallen between 3,200 and 3,500 in the wild” (Karaim). The number of tigers in the wild has reduced significantly as the need for land is at an all time high due to the increase in our world’s population. Humans are jeopardizing the lives of thousands of species every year simply because the need for the natural resources and land provided by deforestation outweighs the lives of wildlife. Corporations that

rely on deforestation to make revenue turn a blind eye to the problem that is taking place as a result of their carelessness, refusing to take responsibility for the atrocities. In their eyes, nothing can be done. This attitude is the reason why extinction rates are increasing at such a substantial rate, causing biodiversity to diminish substantially. Tropical rain forests are especially important in maintaining wildlife biodiversity as “their terrestrial and aquatic habitats hold more than half of the world’s known species” (Arrandale). Apes all throughout Africa have found themselves facing the same problems as tigers; a loss in habitat could result in near extinction for these creatures. A survey regarding habitats conducted in Africa “found that in the past two decades habitat has shrunk by more than 50 percent for the Cross River and eastern gorillas and 31 percent for western gorillas . . . Deforestation and overhunting threatens the apes” (Karaim). Deforestation is not worth the loss of innumerable helpless lives crucial to the efficiency and productivity of ecosystems. While trees and the land they inhabit provide a plethora of important resources, there is a significant number of ways in which these resources can be accounted for in more efficient, nearly harmless ways, while still maintaining biodiversity.

Biodiversity is necessary in providing a balance in the ecosystems of wildlife in tropical forests. Each species has their own unique role in the environment they inhabit. Many of these roles may go unnoticed by society; however, the role of each species is important in maintaining balance in the ecosystem. This balance must be preserved in order to have each ecosystem function properly, as “the extinction of any one species can set off a chain reaction that affects many other species, particularly if the loss occurs near the bottom of the food chain” (“Extinction and Endangered Species”). If a species becomes extinct, this disrupts the balance in nature, and could potentially lead to unfavorable consequences for the species themselves, as well as humans. Although not in the Amazon, a study done by Oregon State University explains how

the restoration of the gray wolf population has resulted in the recovery of trees at Yellowstone National Park: “The ongoing reduction in elk herbivory has thus been helping to recover and sustain these plant communities in northern Yellowstone, thereby improving important food-web and habitat support for numerous terrestrial and aquatic organisms” (Houtman). In other words, the reintroduction of gray wolves in to this region means there are more wolves, and therefore more elk being preyed on. This results in a decreased population of elk to graze on trees. In turn, trees in Yellowstone Nation Park have been recovering. Many would not think that a recovering wolf population could benefit trees, but this is how the entire ecosystem works. Ecosystems are carefully woven together, and the extinction of a certain species affects countless other animals immediately, or in some cases, down the road.

There have been a number of attempts to put an end to deforestation in the hopes that wildlife biodiversity can be saved and replenished. Specifically, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was a form of legislation passed in order to protect endangered and threatened species in the United States. After looking in to this law and how it has fared in recovering endangered species, it becomes clear that this act has done virtually nothing to assist in the well-being and safety of species in danger of extinction. In the span of over 30 years, “less than 1 percent of listed species have recovered under the law” (Cooper). There has been much controversy over this act, “pitting environmentalists against property-rights advocates in a protracted debate over the ESA’s economic costs and environmental benefits” (Cooper). Since no significant changes to the law have been made for over 20 years, Congress is conveying the message that they view property rights for businesses to be more important and valuable than wildlife’s right to life and the right to live peacefully. Furthermore, Brazil’s Forest Code of 1965, which proved very effective in banning deforestation in certain areas of the Amazon, has recently been reformed.

The reformation of this law “reduces the area to be reforested from 500,000 km² to 210,000 km². . . some worry that the amnesty provided for illegal deforestation may set a dangerous precedent, creating the expectation of impunity for future deforestation” (“Untangling Brazil’s Controversial New Forest Code”). This means that a greater amount of land is susceptible to deforestation than before with no form of punishment. The power has been given to landowners who make profit off of the land they gain from deforestation; these corporations have no incentive to halt deforestation. An incentive is exactly what these landowners who feed off the revenue of deforestation and agricultural land need in order to stop the diminishing of wildlife biodiversity in tropical forests.

There are numerous ways in which alternative methods to deforestation can be implemented and wildlife biodiversity replenished. As the negative influences on wildlife biodiversity due to deforestation worsens, people are attempting to put a stop to it. Some corporations that rely on deforestation for their ability to function and be successful believe there is simply no other option; however, this is not the case. A few businesses are coming to this realization: “Many big companies have learned that incorporating conservation into their business plans can reduce costs” (Strom). There is much more money to be made by investing in environmentally beneficial services than resorting to deforestation. Also, the amount of species and ecosystems that are being destroyed as a result of deforestation will cost society much more than the money made from resources and land gained from cutting down forests (Wolman). In 1997, a study was done by a team of scientists led by Robert Costanza which “estimated the value of all the ecosystems and natural capital on the planet. The very rough figure: \$33 trillion a year” (Wolman). This shocking number proves just how important ecosystems are to our economy, and how essential it is that society maintain them to their full extent. When extinction

of a particular species occurs, the only solution is for humans to pay for these very expensive resources on their own. These costs would eventually add up and could potentially lead to an immense amount of debt. This debt would be more expensive for corporations than utilizing alternative methods to deforestation (Wolman). There are ways in which corporations can actually make more money by being environmentally conscientious: "Once the spectrum of nature's needs and human activities are analyzed together, planners can make development decisions that minimize environmental costs while maximizing investment" (Wolman). Governments worldwide have begun offering incentives to farmers and landowners for implementing ecosystem conservation efforts (Strom). A few of these conservation efforts include recycling paper, wood, and plastics, as well as participating in eco-forestry, which is the act of cutting down trees without affecting the surrounding ecosystems and environment (Wolman). If this trend continues, wildlife biodiversity will be able to bounce back considerably, and the idea of a mass extinction will forever be a reality of the past.

On the other hand, many do not view the extinction of animals as a concern for humans, as it is thought that there is no direct consequence to humanity if wildlife biodiversity diminishes. Patrick Moore, Chairman and Chief Scientist of Greenspirit Enterprises, asserts, "Humans have caused species extinction ever since they migrated from Africa to new environments where indigenous species could not cope with human predation" (qtd. in Karaim). Moore, among other scientists, believe that the extinction of species has been going on for centuries, and there is nothing uncommon about this phenomenon. They claim that it is simply the circle of life and cannot be altered. While extinction has occurred throughout history, and the circle of life will always be a reality, Mikael Fortelius, professor of evolutionary paleontology at University of Helsinki, Finland, explains, "If species were going extinct at the rate they've

always done, we wouldn't have to worry, but they're going extinct at a thousand times that, so, yeah, we should be worried. It's not a huge difference in kind, but it's a huge difference in degree" (qtd. in Karaim). Conservation biologist Stuart Pimm of Duke University adds, "one third to one half of all species on Earth are predicted to be extinguished in the next century" (qtd. in Arrandale). The rate at which species are going extinct is completely unsustainable. Also, these aforementioned mass extinctions were all a result of natural occurrences unrelated to humans: "Unlike previous mass extinctions. . .the current extinction does not appear to be associated with a cataclysmic physical event. Rather, the heightened extinction rate has coincided with the success and spread of human beings" ("Extinction and Endangered Species"). The circle of life that biologists who see no threat to wildlife are referring to is extinction by certain physical events, such as a meteor strike which is thought to have caused extinction of dinosaurs, and does not account for human beings causing the extinctions by deforestation, which is what is happening in the Amazon and forests throughout the world ("Extinction and Endangered Species"). There is no denying that the amount of wildlife biodiversity being lost each and every day is unlike any other period in history, and it simply cannot be ignored. The only option to save wildlife biodiversity and the tropical forests throughout the world before it is too late is to speak out.

Deforestation is an issue caused mainly due to the rapid increase in population of the world. This drastic increase in population calls for more space for land use, as well as a growing demand for natural resources and raw materials. Many view deforestation as a necessity by clearing land for farming, buildings, and infrastructures. However, the impacts of deforestation on wildlife is concerning. The only way to ensure wildlife biodiversity is maintained in tropical forests is to limit the amount of deforestation occurring in these regions. Also, the government

should seek out alternate ways of gaining land and resources, and put an end to deforestation by offering incentives to large corporations, resulting in a replenishing of wildlife populations in danger of extinction. Oscar Venter of University of Northern British Columbia explains, “What can happen in the near-term is to encourage major policy mechanisms to actually speak to wilderness values and wilderness protection . . . Speak to your local officials, make sure you can set values on wilderness preservation that can occur through actual policy, where we set targets for wilderness protection areas” (qtd. in Kauffman). Society as a whole must voice their opinions on this issue and participate in environmentally friendly acts in order to make a real change. It is important that each person who feels strongly about the negative impacts of deforestation should speak out, specifically to local government officials. By recycling and purchasing recycled products, buying meat that has not been produced on deforested land, supporting environmentalist groups who speak out against deforestation, and simply spreading awareness, real changes can be made, and wildlife can bounce back. If action is not taken soon, humanity will begin to feel the effects of an immense loss of biodiversity, and this loss in biodiversity cannot be reversed. On the other hand, there is a bright future ahead for wildlife biodiversity in the tropical forests, and the environment as a whole, if deforestation is limited and damages are repaired.

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The Industry That is “The Leading Cause of Everything” – and What to Do About It

I. Introduction

Imagine the following scenario. You are a sow – a fully grown female pig on what is officially called a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation – more commonly known as a factory farm. You are trapped in a metal cage so small and tight you can not even turn around, and can only barely lie down. Your entire body is covered in your own feces and urine, as well as festering open sores, tumors, and lesions. You have been in this cage your entire life. Already you have been forcefully artificially impregnated and made to carry and give birth to too many litters of piglets to count. Though your species is considered to be one of the most intelligent and sensitive on the planet, you have been relegated to this wretched existence. You have no opportunity to roam around, foraging and exploring things with your hyper-sensitive snout as is your natural desire. You will never see sunlight, never breathe anything but the putrid, ammonia-filled air of the inside of the warehouse, and never even *move*. And why have you been condemned to such an existence? What did you do? What heinous, unspeakable crime did you commit? Nothing. You were born, you are alive, you exist for one purpose, and one purpose only: to be the ham on some little kid’s ham-and-cheese sandwich. Or to be a few slices of pepperoni on some Little Caesar’s pizza that someone takes a bite out of and discards at a party.

Or to be a couple strips of bacon, dispersed around the breakfast table by a smiling mom on a Saturday morning, the family happily chattering as they chew on your burnt stomach flesh, their two animal shelter-adopted family dogs sitting with tails wagging and mouths open by their side, hoping for a taste. Actually, this is all rather your secondary purpose. In fact, your *true* reason for existing, the reason you have known nothing but unimaginable suffering your entire life, is ultimately to bring money to those who have put you in this situation.

There are approximately 68 million pigs, just like the one described above, at the moment you are reading this in the United States alone (*PETA.org*). These are joined by millions and millions of cows, chickens, turkeys, sheep, ducks and even horses, all in fundamentally identical situations. Collectively, this industry and practice that breeds, raises, and kills animals for the purpose of human consumption is known as animal agriculture. It is one of the largest and most powerful industries on the planet, and it is a problem. As you can probably already tell, there is a powerful case that can be made questioning the ethics of such an institution. In addition to the moral/ethical problem, animal agriculture, and by extension animal product consumption, can be criticized from three other major perspectives. Two of these are: from the realm of health (animal products are *far* worse for you than you probably think), and from the realm of economics (let's just say that animal agriculture impacts the economy greatly, and it is not in a good way). While these three subjects are extremely important, I simply do not have time or space to cover all of them here. Instead, I have decided to focus this essay on a fourth problem, a fourth realm of concern that can be raised against animal agriculture and animal product consumption. This is the realm of the environment. Looking through the lens of an environmentalist, we will see that to say that animal agriculture is responsible for a large portion of environmental degradation is a

huge understatement. Put bluntly, animal agriculture is killing the planet, and that is what this essay is going to focus on.

Animal agriculture is an enormous, far-reaching problem facing the world today. Simply focusing on its environmental effects, throughout this paper we will see that it is the leading cause of most of the planet's woes. This includes intense consumption leading to depletion of resources such as fresh water, fossil fuels and land. The last of these leads to destruction of natural habitats such as grasslands and rainforests, causing rapid species extinction. Animal agriculture also drives climate change by emitting powerful greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, as well as releasing other noxious gases and chemicals that pollute the air, oceans and land. It is a problem that is rooted in the long human (especially American) culture of eating meat, which is only getting worse as the world population and global appetite increases. It is exacerbated by most people's ignorance of the problem, cultural taboos against and individual resistance to suggestions of personal change, and negative stereotyping of those who do fight for the cause. All this is perpetuated by the animal agriculture industry, which wields incredible power as it works to keep consumers in the dark and dictates public policy. To begin to solve this expansive problem, we must drastically increase awareness of it in the form of a PSA ad campaign and the expository labelling of every animal product. This must be coupled with strict government regulations and the removal of existing subsidization that will end up driving these industries out of business.

II. The Problem

The first major negative effect of animal agriculture as it relates to the environment is its huge resource consumption. According to *PETA*'s website, it takes 2,400 gallons of water to produce a single pound of beef. The eye-opening documentary *Cowspiracy* cites a similar number, claiming 2,500 gallons/pound. This exact number varies somewhat as it is a worldwide average and must be estimated, but it always falls in the range of around 440 gallons all the way up to 8,000. The cattle industry itself admits 614 gallons ("Cattlemen and the Environment"). No matter which number you use, it is still an extraordinary amount of water. Consuming a single quarter-pound burger uses as much water as two months of showering (*Cowspiracy*)! Other animal products are not much better; according to Mat McDermott of *TreeHugger*, it takes an estimated 815 gallons of water to produce a pound of chicken, 1630 gallons for a pound of pork, 573 for a pound of eggs and 896 for a pound of cheese. Comparing these to some popular plant foods, it requires 403 gallons of water to produce a pound of rice, 154 gallons to make a pound of wheat bread, 107 gallons for a pound of corn, and a mere thirty gallons for a pound of potatoes. Most fruits and vegetables require under 100 gallons. Some raise the argument that animal products contain much more protein so this isn't a fair assessment. Nonetheless, if we measure as gallons of water per gram of protein, beef weighs in at 29.6 gal/g. Compare that to a protein-rich plant source like legumes, which require only 5 gal/g (Mekonnen and Hoekstra 29). According to *Cowspiracy*, animal agriculture consumes 1/3 of the planet's fresh water. In the United States, about 5% of all water consumed is from domestic use. This is the water we see every day. It is all the water from sinks, showers, sprinkler systems, toilets, washing machines and the like. However, a whopping 55% of water consumed in the US is from animal agriculture. Why on earth does it take so much water to make meat? Well, first of all, you have to grow the food that the animals are going to eat. Focusing on beef production, a single cow eats about 27.5

pounds of food per day, and will eat about 13,908 pounds in its sixteen-month lifetime (Rasby). Most of this feed is genetically-modified corn or soybeans. In addition to this, the cow will need to drink, and water is used to clean its filthy stall and assist in the slaughter and other procedures – however, these are relatively insignificant. The vast majority of water required to make a pound of beef is expended from growing the food the cow will eat. All this food must be grown somewhere, which brings us to our next point about land use.

According to *TIME* senior editor Bryan Walsh, about 40% of the earth's ice-free land surface is used for agriculture. A vast majority of this – 30% of the earth's ice-free land surface, including half of the contiguous United States (“The Facts”) – is used to support livestock. “You may think you live on a planet,” Walsh remarks, “but really you live on a gigantic farm, one occasionally broken up by cities, forests and the oceans.” Considering that the global population is growing by 228,000 every day (“The Facts”) and the global consumption of meat per capita is also ever growing, this farmland must continue to expand and expand. Already a vast portion of America's grasslands have been demolished and replaced by miles and miles of corn or grazing cattle. This takes a big toll on natural habitats – killing the animals that should be living there and screwing up the ecosystem. The land ends up becoming depleted of nutrients and turning into a useless desert in a process known as desertification. Growing all these crops also consumes a huge amount of fossil fuel, as it is a key ingredient in synthetic fertilizer (Weeks), tying into global warming. Furthermore, toxic runoff from pesticides and animal waste from all this land makes its way into the ocean, polluting and killing abundant life there, as we will get into a bit more in the next paragraph. However, what is happening to the planet's rainforests is even more alarming. Many people are familiar with the Amazon rainforest in South America, the earth's largest rainforest. Spanning 22 million square miles, it has been dubbed “the planet's

lungs” as it is the world’s largest “carbon sink” – abundant photosynthesizing plants take in CO₂ (a greenhouse gas) and replace it with oxygen. Moreover, it is a place of incredible biological beauty and diversity: an estimated 10% of the planets’ species live in the Amazon, including thousands of distinct plants, insects, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles (“Amazon Rainforest”). However, this amazing place is in grave danger. According to *Cowspiracy*, one acre of rainforest –much of this the Amazon-- is cleared away *every single second*. Every second that goes by, a football field-sized lot of the rainforest ceases to exist. If that isn’t shocking enough, *Cowspiracy* claims that approximately 100 species are lost *every day* due to this destruction. Every day that goes by, that’s 100 unique plants, animals, or insects that go extinct and are gone forever. And what’s the leading cause of this incredible devastation? Animal agriculture, which is responsible for an estimated 91%. This land is used to either graze cattle or grow soybeans that will be fed to cattle, and once it is done doing that, the land will be desertified, leaving an arid, uninhabitable wasteland where a lush paradise once stood.

The intense consumption of water and land by animal agriculture is important. Given that global freshwater scarcity is a real challenge and a billion people live today without access to freshwater, how this precious resource is consumed is something we should care about. Furthermore, how we grow so much food and then just feed it to farm animals is ridiculous. As only one calorie out of every ten calories an animal consumes will become available to humans as edible meat, this is a vastly inefficient process. If we just fed that food directly to people instead of to an animal first, we would retain all those nutrients that will otherwise be lost. Though the current population of the planet is 7.5 billion, *we are already growing enough food to feed 10 billion people* (“The Facts”). Yet, millions of people die of starvation each year. Esteemed sustainability researcher and author Dr. Richard Oppenlander draws attention to this

problem, noting, “82% of the world’s starving children live in countries where food is fed to animals that are then killed and eaten by more well-off individuals in developed countries like the US, UK and in Europe.” He continues, “In 2011, there was a record harvest of grain globally, with over 2.5 billion tons, but half of that was fed to animals in the meat and dairy industries. . . So clearly the difficulty is not *how* we can produce enough food to feed the hungry, but *where* all the food is going.” He gives an example of the African country Ethiopia. There, he says,

Over 60% of their population is considered hungry or starving, and yet they have 50 million cattle in that country (one of the largest herds in the world), unnecessarily consuming their food, land and water. More than 2/3 of Ethiopia’s topsoil has been lost due to raising cattle. Many countries elsewhere in Africa and in the Amazonian region raise cattle inefficiently at the expense of their soil, localized climate, and other resources while producing a fraction of the food they could if converting to plant-based foods.

As a solution, Oppenlander proposes,

Ethiopia could [instead] grow teff, an ancient and quite nutritious grain. Seventy percent of all their cattle are raised pastorally in the highlands of that country where less than 100 pounds of meat and a few gallons of milk are produced per acre of land used. If this land were used for the growing of teff, Ethiopians could produce over 2,000 pounds of food per one acre with no water irrigation. The end product could provide a much greater amount of much needed nutrients and even stimulate improved economics with business opportunities to sell teff (as well as many other types of produce) to other countries. Therefore, conversion to plant based food systems for local regions in developing countries would feed more people more nutritiously with more efficient use of their

resources, improve long term soil fertility, create economic opportunities, all of which would provide a path toward breaking the poverty and hunger cycle.

To me, this is a no-brainer. It is a clear example of how, from a perspective of living on a planet with limited resources to go around, raising animals to kill and eat them just makes no sense.

The second major concern over animal agriculture as it relates to the environmental realm is pollution and climate change. Animal agriculture is the leading cause of greenhouse gas emissions – 18% worldwide according to a widely cited figure by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (this number was later amended to 14.5%). However, another estimate, referenced in *Cowspiracy* from a *United Nations Worldwatch* report, claims that the number is actually a whopping 51%. Some controversy has arisen over the discrepancy between these studies, but whichever number you go with, it is still more than *all transportation combined*. As much pollution is produced by every single car, truck, ship, train and airplane in the world, these only account for 13% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, drive global warming by increasing the heat-trapping ability of the earth's atmosphere. When the atmosphere increases in temperature, the whole ecosystem gets thrown out of whack. According to Sierra Club Deputy Executive Director Bruce Hamilton, who is interviewed in *Cowspiracy*, a mere two degree increase in average annual global temperature (which we are rapidly approaching and on track to far exceed), will result in rising sea levels that could wipe out coastal communities and island nations and cause widespread drought, famine and massive species extinction. Hamilton predicts that this will lead to "climate wars," where countries that run out of resources will invade neighboring ones, and all kinds of chaos would ensue. This is why greenhouse gases are so important. Why does animal agriculture produce so much of it? Well, carbon dioxide is released whenever fossil fuels are burned (which is why

transportation vehicles release it – they use fossil fuel-burning engines). Fossil fuels are the major ingredient in synthetic fertilizer, which is used on all those millions of acres of feed crops. This also releases nitrous oxide to the atmosphere, “a greenhouse gas with 296 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide, and which stays in the atmosphere for 150 years (“The Facts”). Furthermore, the vehicles used for cutting down forests and clearing land for crops, as mentioned before, burn fossil fuel. In addition to this, cows produce large amounts of methane, another powerful greenhouse gas, from their digestive processes – 150 billion gallons per day in total (“The Facts”). Yes, as chuckle-inducing as it may be, cow farts are literally causing global warming. Speaking of digestive processes, the solid waste produced by farmed animals is quite a dilemma as well. According to *CQ Researcher* environmental writer Jennifer Weeks, one 1400-pound dairy cow produces approximately 120 pounds of manure per day. So that “single dairy cow produces more than 20 tons of manure annually, and a hog can produce more than two tons.” Overall, “according to the Sierra Club, livestock operations generate *500 million tons* of animal waste a year” (emphasis added). That’s *a lot* of you-know-what. What do animal farmers do with all of this? Weeks explains that they “wash manure out of barns and store it in tanks or ‘lagoons’ until it can be applied to nearby farms as fertilizer.” These so-called lagoons look like giant brown lakes. While it is sitting there, this “stored, liquified manure can leak or be washed away by big storms, contaminating nearby waters with bacteria, hormones, nutrients, antibiotics and toxic chemicals.” Yikes. *PETA.com* asserts that “runoff from factory farms and livestock grazing is one of the leading causes of pollution in our rivers and lakes.” It adds that

Factory farms frequently dodge water pollution limits by spraying liquid manure into the air, creating mists that are carried away by the wind. People who live nearby are forced to inhale the toxins and pathogens from the sprayed manure. A report by the California

State Senate noted, “Studies have shown that [animal waste] lagoons emit toxic airborne chemicals that can cause inflammatory, immune, irritation and neurochemical problems in humans.”

This air pollution “can contain up to 160 separate chemical substances” (Weeks). Furthermore, when this manure is applied to crop fields as fertilizer, it is often applied faster than the plants can make use of it, which can result in nitrogen poisoning. Besides the ever-present possibility of runoff (which will eventually make its way into the ocean, killing millions of sea creatures), nitrogen poisoning, an overabundance of nitrogen in the soil, will lead to unsafe soil and unsafe crops. This excess nitrogen, as well all the other unfavorable substances present, can also sink and contaminate groundwater supplies (Weeks; *PETA.org*) These are just some of the consequences that result from raising animals to feed an entire nation.

III. How Did We Get Here?

So far in this essay we have only begun to touch upon the rampant environmental impacts of meat and dairy consumption. As mentioned earlier, there are three other major realms of concern related to this topic: health, ethical and economical, which we simply do not have time to get into here. As I peel back the layers on the incredible harm that the animal agriculture industry creates, I can’t help but wondering, “how did we get here? Why, if eating meat is so awful, does nearly everyone do it?” The origins of how this mess arose is a complex one, and it is an interplay of many different psychological, sociological, biological and historical forces, among other things, that led us to where we are today. Like the harmful effects themselves, it is a

question that is far too extensive to tackle in an essay of this length, and has been brilliantly investigated by a number of authors already. So, without getting into too much depth, I have pinpointed two areas of discussion that I believe are largely responsible for explaining why this massive problem exists today. The first is this: we as humans, and especially Americans, have a long-ingrained culture of eating meat that is very difficult to change. The typical American consumes, on average, 209 pounds of meat per year (“The Facts”). This is more than double the global average of 91.1 pounds (World Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030. An FAO Perspective 3.3.1), and it is increasing. This number is 75 pounds higher than it was a century ago (Bernard), and is projected to keep increasing – to 219 pounds by 2025 (Badau). We, as a society, *love* meat. I believe it ties in with our consumerist and materialist culture. As humans, we are still consuming meat as we have been from ancient times, and this part of the diet has become ingrained. This continues despite the fact that with a booming population and a deteriorating natural environment, eating this stuff is becoming increasingly less and less viable or logical. For thousands of years up until less than 100 years ago, animals used for meat and dairy grazed on small, family-owned, open-air farms. Today, this is overwhelmingly not the case. In the introduction of his acclaimed book *Meatonomics: How the Rigged Economics of Meat and Dairy Make You Consume Too Much—and How to Eat Better, Live Longer, and Spend Smarter*, author David Simon tells readers to “forget about that bucolic *American Gothic* picture of the gentleman farmer. . . the ‘pasture spring’ and ‘little calf . . . standing by the mother’ that Robert Frost saw on his family farm a century ago are lost artifacts—relics of an obsolete way of life. . . . We wouldn’t know it from the peaceful, pastoral logos of the dairies and meat packers whose products we consume, . . . but today, 99 percent of the farm animals raised in the United States live in steel and concrete factories with no resemblance to a traditional farm” (xxi—xxii). These

are called Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) – more commonly referred to as factory farms. Raising millions of animals in these extremely cramped and unsanitary conditions has become necessary to meet America's insatiable appetite for meat and dairy, as there is simply not enough farmland anymore to raise them the traditional way. Those cows that you see out grazing as you drive through the country – those are the lucky 1%. As teased in the introduction, there is an overwhelmingly powerful moral/ethical case that can be raised against the practice of factory farming, in addition to the environmental concerns. Unfortunately, most Americans are ignorant of these problems (or they chose to ignore them). People like eating meat, and because the negative effects of doing so seem distant and abstract, even if they are somewhat aware of them it is easy to just not think about them. "Out of sight, out of mind" is an expression that describes this perfectly. Also, many who *are* aware of the problem are afraid to speak out about it. This is for a few reasons, but one is that there seems to be a cultural taboo in America against asking someone else to change their behavior. The honest reality is that the best and easiest thing anyone can do about the problem is to stop consuming animal products, but this is difficult to say. People do not like being told what to eat. It seems there are some things in this country that fall under the category of "personal choice" – no one is allowed to tell you how to believe or behave in this area. Among things like religious or political views and gender/sexuality, diet seems to be one of them. Another reason (or possibly excuse) for continuing to eat meat is that people who *do* speak out, like PETA activists, do not always represent the cause well. They can easily come across as fanatical, and some of them are. This, coupled with most people's preexisting resistance to the message they are offering, reinforces negative stereotypes that many gladly embrace. Personally, I was one of these people. I ate meat, dairy and eggs my whole life up until about a year ago, and I have a friend who is a lifelong

vegetarian. As a child, he was quite skinny and short, had poor balance and broke fingernails easily. He had the impression of being undernourished, and I always credited this to his vegetarianism. “Of course he isn’t growing or putting on weight,” I thought, “because he isn’t eating meat! How can he possibly be getting enough protein?” I remember thinking how strange it seemed when he explained to me that he got his protein from eggs and tofu. (Nowadays, he looks just fine and is taller than me). I still don’t know the true cause of why he was how he was --- perhaps genetics, or maybe he really *wasn’t* getting enough protein or some other nutrient – but the point is that he was the only vegetarian I knew, so I readily attributed his qualities to this particular dietary choice. For a long time, I thought abstaining from meat was like a death wish, and I think many people have similar perceptions. And veganism, which abstains not only from meat but from *all* animal products including dairy and eggs, seems even crazier.

Another reason for why this gargantuan problem continues, in addition to the societal and psychological reasons described above, is corporate power and influence. Essentially, the animal agriculture industry spends billions of dollars to promote the consumption of their products. They perpetuate stereotypes and consumer ignorance, spread misinformation about the healthfulness of their products, and dictate government policies regarding it. In the introduction of *Meatonomics*, Simon summarizes this with the following:

The animal food sector wields . . . considerable economic clout to exert enormous influence over lawmaking at both the state and federal levels. In the past several decades, animal food producers have convinced lawmakers to adopt a broad range of legislation—including some so over the top that it can only be called shocking—to protect the industry and ensure its profitability. For example, it’s illegal to “defame” animal foods in thirteen states, and as Oprah Winfrey learned firsthand from a tangle with

Texas beef producers, the industry does not hesitate to sue those who say unkind things about its products. (xvii)

This incident that Simon mentions is discussed in *Cowspiracy*, where Howard Lyman, who was a cattle rancher for forty-five years, is interviewed. Now an environmental and vegan activist and author, Lyman shares how he went on the Oprah Winfrey Show and “spoke the truth about the cattle industry.” Consequently, he was slammed with massive lawsuits. He says, “It took five years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to . . . extricat[e] myself from the suits from the cattle industry.” Though this was about twenty years ago, “you can go there and tell the truth today, and you [would still] be guilty. Because, if you cause a disruption in the profits of the animal industry, you are guilty under the Patriot Act” (*Cowspiracy*). Simon continues,

Further, because undercover investigations at factory farms invariably yield graphic images of unsafe and inhumane conditions, the industry has sought—with surprising success . . .—to stop the flow of these shocking images by criminalizing the exposés.

Then there’s the federal food bureaucracy. Meat and dairy producers have conquered the two main US agencies that oversee them—the USDA and the . . . FDA—through a process economists call “regulatory capture.” This influence makes the USDA so bipolar, it’s a befuddling exercise to figure out the agency’s message or mission. . . . As for the FDA, it regularly ignores scientific research and public opinion to side with industry. (xvii-xviii)

Cowspiracy also discusses how in Brazil, the cattle industry has *killed* numerous activists who spoke out against the terrible Amazon deforestation ---1,100 in the last twenty years.

Unsurprisingly, many are now afraid to say anything, lest “their head be next on the chopping

block.” This is all just a glimpse into how much power the animal agriculture industry wields, and how ruthless it can be to ensure that the word of what is going on does not get out.

IV. What Can Be Done?

Now that the scope of animal agriculture’s negative impact on the environment has come into focus, the question is now, what can we do about it? I think raising public awareness of the issue is the most obvious and immediate thing that can be done. The word *is* getting out, albeit slowly. There have been several great documentaries made – *Cowspiracy* for one, as well as its successor *What the Health*, released this year, which focuses on the health side of the animal product consumption equation – as well as others such as *Food Inc*, *Forks Over Knives*, and *Earthlings* (which focuses on the graphic animal welfare side). Amazing books have been published: *Meatonomics*, *Comfortably Unaware* and *Food Choice and Sustainability* by Oppenlander, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, and *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Foer, to name a few. While these have all helped to raise awareness somewhat, it has not been enough. Given the degree of the problem, there should be *so* many more books written and documentaries released, and the ones that exist should be better known. Neither have other attempts at solving the problem helped much, such as “activists” standing naked in the streets holding signs and yelling or breaking into and releasing stampedes of minks from fur farms, or a proposal by “environmentalist” Allan Savory in a TED talk that we should graze *more* cattle to combat desertification. No, we need something drastic but rational. My idea is two-pronged. I would like to target both the societal/psychological forces and the economic/political forces. Toward the

former, I think a massive PSA ad campaign should be launched to combat all the advertisements of the meat and dairy industry and to open the public's eyes. This would be sticky considering the US Meat Disparagement Act mentioned earlier, and would probably require crowdsourcing (unless someone like Bill Gates could be persuaded to fund it, which wouldn't be entirely out of the realm of possibility). PETA has a multitude of graphic and eye-opening videos on their website and YouTube channel, and if these and their ilk could somehow be shown on TV and on smartphone/computer ads, despite the likely legal and financial barriers, I think it would work wonders. Toward the same end, I would like to see an expository labelling of every animal product on the market. Again, we must ignore for the moment financial and legal barriers, because the industry's grip on governmental agencies would keep this from happening at the present time. Ideally, I would like every animal product to be labelled with all the resources that went into making it. (The same could be done with non-animal products as well, to compare!) For example, the front of a package of ground beef at the grocery store would read the following. "Environmental Cost of this Product:" followed by two columns, titled "Resources Consumed" and "Waste Created." The first would list, with small visual graphics, the amount of resources such as water, grain, acres of land, fossil fuels, and antibiotics that went into making that beef. Everything we talked about above would go on it, as well as factoring in the energy/resources it took to transport it, make the plastic, etc. The second column would list all the byproducts that were produced in making that beef, including greenhouse gases, other chemical pollutants, and excrements. But why stop there? The label could then go into all the effects that these things will have, instead of merely listing them. It could mention, using statistical estimations, how much cropland will be ruined, how many wild land animals and fish will die, how many people will contract diseases, how many industrial workers will be injured, how many species will go

extinct, and how much suffering that cow went through, all for that single pound of beef. My bet is, if anything remotely like this ever happened, the average consumer would be a lot less likely to buy that pound of beef. So they move on to the ham, and the numbers aren't much better. They then look at the sliced chicken breast – only a small improvement. Then, in desperation, they grab a pack of tempeh (a vegan meat alternative made with whole soybeans), and, relieved to see much friendlier numbers, toss it into the cart. If such labelling happened, public awareness would be awakened to incredible levels. My second line of attack would be on the government. Assuming I had complete control over both houses of Congress, the executive branch, and relevant federal agencies for a day, I would terminate the subsidies that the government currently gives to the meat and dairy industries. (As Simon talks about, these industries are actually able to make a profit selling their wares at less than the cost it took to produce them because the government gives them massive handouts, costing US taxpayers *\$414 billion a year*). This would raise the prices of animal products to what their free market value should be, which is much higher than they artificially are today. Coupling this with strict laws that will force factory farms to treat their animals humanely, which would greatly decrease output and raise prices even more, and my first proposals, I would be surprised if there is any meat left on the market at all.

Now, my above ideas seem pretty farfetched, if not downright impossible with today's current political and capitalistic climate. For these to be viable options, we have to start small with individuals raising awareness and doing their part. To halt climate change and prevent the destruction of life as we know it on this planet, the United Nations admits that a global shift toward a vegan diet is necessary. (*PETA.org*) While such large-scale change seems intimidating, every individual person can make a difference. According to *Cowspiracy: The Facts*, “a person who follows a vegan diet produces the equivalent of 50% less carbon dioxide, uses 1/11th the oil,

1/13th the water, and 1/18th the land compared to a meat-lover for their food.” In just one day, “a person who eats a vegan diet saves 1,100 gallons of water, 45 pounds of grain, 30 sq ft of forested land, 20 lbs CO₂ equivalent, and one animal’s life.” Even not going completely vegan but reducing one’s consumption of meat and dairy products can make a big difference. If a single person goes vegan and then shares the information they have learned with others, leading them to go vegan as well, the impact will add up and the word will spread. My question to you, the reader, is, what will *you* do with this information? As Howard Lyman bluntly asserts in *Cowspiracy*, “You can’t call yourself an environmentalist and eat meat. Period.” People do not like to hear this. However, if you care about the environment, animals, or the future of the human race and our planet, it is clear you have a choice to make. I feel like in this area, the slightly audacious maxim “if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem” applies quite accurately. Now that you know, what will you do?

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11 February 2019

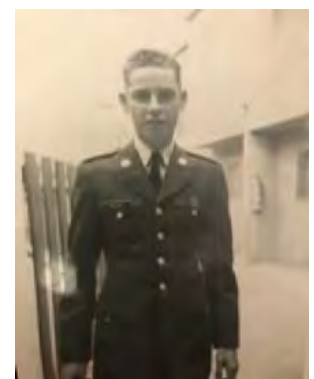
Paint it Black

A fresh trace of marijuana smoke lingers in the tiny living room where Bob Russell relaxes, conquering the pleasing aroma of apple cinnamon streaming from the candle lit in the open entryway. He pulls out another small nugget of weed from a pill bottle and packs it into his brand-new, shiny, black vaporizer he got for Christmas. *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.*, his favorite old-school TV show, is blaring on the sixty-inch flat-screen television set that dominates the room. After taking a couple hits, he leans back, content in his coffee-colored, leather recliner chair. His hazel eyes are glassy underneath his rimless spectacles and a satisfying grin appears after smoke steadily trickles out his nose and mouth. He sets the electric vaporizer on the glossy, dark wood end-table beneath a vibrant Tiffany lamp. The vaporizer is an everyday fixture, always near and ready for him to sip off it freely.

For Bob, a seventy-two-year-old retiree currently residing in Banning, California, who also happens to be my dad, smoking pot several times a day is a daily ritual. It seems odd that someone his age smokes it since the stereotype of the typical pot-smoker does not include retired old men. Rather, hippies with tied-dyed shirts waving the peace sign, rebellious teenagers, thirty-year-old burn-outs living in mom's basement, and old dead-heads with scraggly beards come to mind. Bob, on the other hand, is old and clean-cut. I do not mean old as in elderly and feeble. I mean he is not young and vigorous. He has a full head of neatly trimmed greyish-white hair, while wrinkles are prominent around his eyes and along his tanned forehead. Levi jeans and

pocketed t-shirts are his frequent attire, whereas knee-length shorts and sandals are go-to garments for warm weather. He is the antithesis of society's idea of what the traditional pot smoker looks like. However, he is part of a growing number of people who rely on it for therapeutic purposes. This group of smokers are both old and young and do not fit any mold pertaining to labels. The ailment Bob is trying to relieve is post-traumatic stress disorder, known as PTSD, caused by The Vietnam War.

Bob was born 1946 and grew up impoverished in the San Fernando Valley part of Los Angeles during the fifties and sixties. L.A in this era conjures visions of palm trees, sandy beaches, red convertible Mustangs, blondes in capri pants and tan surfer-boys. *Fun, Fun, Fun* by The Beach Boys was a mainstay on the radio, while *Gilligan's Island* and *Bewitched* dominated the tube. Happy times was the theme of the era, but not everyone was basking in sunshine and bliss. Minorities and poor white folks like Bob lived in the shadows, unseen and unheard. He was the middle child of four other siblings and his mom struggled to raise them on her own, moving often through various parts of the valley. Incidentally, he bounced from school to school and at the age of sixteen he dropped out.



In December 1964, at the impressionable age of eighteen, Bob enlisted in the United States Army. He was a lanky, funny, goofy-looking blonde-haired kid. He says, half-jokingly, "I volunteered for the draft. I wasn't an enlistee. I was a draftee." His smile fades as he thinks for a moment and says, "Me and my buddy Paul were in the buddy system. Paul didn't pass the physical, so I was left by myself." He shrugs and gloomily adds, "I wanted some adventure. I never thought about

Vietnam and didn't know a whole lot about it when I signed up." I wonder as Bob utters those troubling words if, at the impulsive and free-wheeling age of eighteen, a person could soundly make such a serious decision for themselves and is it fair to ask them to risk their lives for their country when they only have a vague knowledge of world affairs, at best?

He clutches his Kindle tablet and shows me his favorite book on Vietnam, ...*And a Hard Rain Fell* by John Ketwig. He quickly pulls up a page and reads me a passage that he says perfectly expresses how he feels. Talking about Vietnam is "like squeezing pus out of an infected wound," he says somberly (Ketwig 411). While contemplating this phrase, I imagine the erupting ooze of an engorged, blistering sore and the agony of extracting its gooey, putrid innards. What would that feel like? For a veteran like Bob, that analogy rightly describes the tedious and tormenting process of bringing to surface the horrific memories of war.

Vietnam in the sixties was Los Angeles's opposite. War was already ravaging the small country by the time Bob arrived in Nha Trang, a tiny coastal village on Vietnam's south-eastern shore. His company was the 281st Assault Helicopter Company in support of Fifth Special



Forces, also known as Hell from Above. As he recalls Vietnam's landscape, I can feebly hear Creedence Clearwater's *Fortunate Son* strumming in my head like an unrelenting war anthem on repeat, echoed by an eerie phantom. Like war ballads affixed to the brain, Vietnam sticks in Bob's head like a glob of fresh dog shit would stick to his shoe. With a concentrated glare, he recalls arriving in Nha

Trang. "When I got there, I was surprised by the heat and the smell." He gazes at the ceiling and breathes in as if the pungent stench suddenly invaded the room. "It was a unique smell like... I don't know, raw fish." His expression quickly turns to disgust. "Vietnam was a cesspool, littered

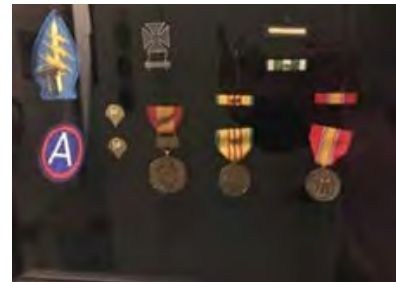
with poor children and adults.” Obviously, time has not altered his adverse opinions of the place and memories of it are still potent.

While I am sitting in the small living room, occasionally I glance at the television and this time *WKRP Cincinnati* is on the giant screen. The distraction is welcoming as Bob chuckles at one of the show’s jokes. His experience of war and the gory details, I think, are not necessary for me to know. There have been more than enough harrowing portrayals of it in film, music, and literature, all trying to accurately recreate its chaos and destruction. Movies such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Forrest Gump* are notable films but lack absolute truth. Dad would say many times while I was growing up that nothing comes close to a precise depiction.

Bob spent nine months in what is widely known as “The Bush”. *Nine months*. I wonder, “what *is* nine months compared to a lifetime?” It is a moment, a barely visible second in the long reach of time, yet within that flash, the psychological damage done to him is profound and shocking. Vietnam’s memory is intrusive and vile, like termites feasting on the rotten wood pillars holding a home together, while the nightmares triggered by them are raw and vicious, like a pack of hungry wolves devouring prey, screeching their existence and demanding recognition. As I reflect further on the unjust and lopsided nine months to lifetime ratio, his unsettling words come crushing back to my mind again, “I wanted an adventure.” I imagine there were many boys like him with narrow world-views, immature, and changed by an appalling war for the rest of their lives.

Reclining in his easy chair, an obscure pain in Bob’s frail eyes is visible as he talks of The Army discharging him. That is when the memory of Vietnam becomes an otherworldly form; it is a savage apparition gnawing and grinding along the brittle cracks in his soul. He looks

at his Kindle, still grasping it and solemnly says, “I was glad I was going home. Glad I survived. It’s surreal. Every minute you’re surviving. Every time you go on a mission, you don’t know if you’ll be alive the next minute. I went to a lot of memorials.” He pauses a few seconds and says, “There’s a superstition about leaving ‘Nam. We don’t tell anyone.” He goes on to explain it is because “soldiers do not want to jinx things.” Bob’s eyes light up as he discusses his journey back to the states: “On the flight home a stewardess kissed every single soldier as a ‘thank you’.” He quietly continues, “I met a guy there and sat with him at the bar for a couple hours at LAX.” It is difficult to fathom why he did not excitedly run to his family and friends when he touched ground in L.A. After giving it some thought, though, I understood he probably needed to adjust from dodging bullets and sleeping with rats the size of house cats to suddenly being safe in the quiet, placid landscape of Los Angeles. Like he said, “It was surreal.” After returning to his home he mentioned he tossed his uniform and medals in the garbage, saying simply, “I didn’t have a use for them.” But I suspect the reason is far more complex. Only recently did he petition the Government to replace them, claiming them as lost.



The Vietnam era was rife with mistakes. Support for soldiers readjusting to life after the war was non-existent and the Government was ignorant of PTSD, which was then known as the gently labeled, “battle fatigue”. In retrospect, the Government’s errors in its treatment of Vietnam veterans is shocking. More importantly, it was the down-trodden and the country’s most vulnerable who were most affected by the draft and cast aside when they came home. They had backgrounds, not unlike Bob’s: impoverished, blue-collar, high school drop-outs and following the military’s promise of a better future. As baffling as the Government’s conduct was at the time, society’s behavior was far worse and much more destructive. When Bob returned home,

aside from his family's jubilant reception, there were no salutes, no 'thank-you' s', and no homecoming parades, like in World War II; the only parades that greeted him were the anti-war protests. People, it seemed, turned a cold shoulder to the war and the men fighting it. At times they would shout or say crude things, causing him to feel shame and guilt. "It felt like I did something bad," he says, choking back tears. Consequently, these elements helped form a whirling PTSD cyclone that would rage within him for fifty years.

The American Psychiatric Association describes post-traumatic stress disorder as "a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape, or other violent personal assault." That is the fancy definition. Symptoms include involuntary memories, nightmares, detachment, vivid flashbacks, and sometimes amnesia. According to the U.S Dept. of Veterans Affairs, about 30% of Vietnam veterans experience PTSD sometime in their life. However, that statistic is questionable, given the many veterans that probably endure it in silence. Only in 1980 did the APA recognize it as an actual mental disorder due to the heavy influx of mentally scarred veterans from Vietnam.

Bob rests his conjoined hands on his chest. He says, his voice cracking, "My first-year home, I didn't do too well. I got heavy into drugs. Cocaine, Quaaludes and amphetamines." He looks away silently, absorbed in thought, then continues, "I got into a serious car accident that year when I was high and split my head open." Some of the glass lodged in his forehead came to the surface only a couple years ago. He also grudgingly tolerated absurd questions from people, like "did he kill anyone?" or "did he see anyone get killed?" He quickly learned, though he left Vietnam, there would be no escape.

After fifty-four years, Bob's nightmares and flashbacks have subsided some. They no

longer haunt him weekly. Only once-in-a-while, mostly after watching films or shows depicting war. Last month, while his wife Melodie was doing dishes, pans were clanking noisily and Bob awoke startled from his nap, thinking it was gunfire. During another recent episode, he was yelling loudly in his sleep to his sergeant. His temperament, though, is where PTSD clammers from the dark troughs and displays itself in plain sight. He is numb and seemingly aloof to anyone who does not know or understand his past. PTSD has burrowed itself into his brain a long time ago and these days it is familiarity, like having Stockholm syndrome with an abusive caretaker.

While driving home on the 10 freeway, I thought of the length of time Bob has been living with PTSD. Fifty-four years. That is an extraordinary amount of time for a terrible memory to be plaguing his subconscious. I can only imagine how intense the experience must have been. While still pondering the injustice, “Paint it Black” by The Rolling Stones shouts on my iPod. This time I am not tapping my fingers on the steering wheel or humming to the jam like I normally do. As the song roars through my car speakers, I recall dad playing it on an old record player we had when I was young. He explained to me then that the song was about Vietnam, possibly coming home from it. A couple lyrics protrude from mere background noise: “It’s not easy facing up when your whole world is black,” Mick Jagger bellows; “No colors anymore, I want them to turn black.”

On the one hand, Bob’s tale sounds all too common, a cliché that fills many movies and TV shows: a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed kid with high ideals joins the military only to end up in a war and is changed by it forever. And yet, people do not write their war stories trying to entertain. They write to heal. Vietnam is a cautionary tale, a goddamned ugly, foul tale. Lessons and warnings still occupy living rooms, shrieking at people to heed them. I know *I* have learned

something. The other week while picking my daughter up from her high school, a couple military guys were talking to her. They were out recruiting. When she got in the car, I glared at her and said, “No. Don’t even think about it.”



Figure 1. the 281st assault helicopter company, fifth special forces badge.



Figure 2. Nha Trang, Vietnam.



Figure 3. Aftermath, by the Rolling Stones, featuring "Paint it Black."



Figure 4. The PTSD ribbon.

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A Hopeful Tomorrow

For about sixty years, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has been conducting research on the change in climate. Among many of their discoveries they have found that “the planet’s average surface temperature has risen about 2.0 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by the increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere” (Shaftel). This is one concerning discovery out of the many made by the scientists of the environment, but in the interest of cleaning up the damage humans have done to the Earth, scientists and engineers have continuously worked towards finding cleaner sources of energy, and have arrived at one solution: solar. Solar energy has become wildly popular in the last decade because of its ability to run completely clean with no harmful emissions, and its ability to function on a smaller scale, in residential or business settings. While solar does not produce as much energy as nuclear energy does, solar is a completely safe alternative that costs a great deal less. Unfortunately, solar energy has been disputed for years because of its lower output, and its effect to the coal and nuclear industries and power utility companies. Solar energy is a viable alternative energy source to that of fossil fuels and nuclear energy because solar energy will begin to serve the general public more readily by lowering energy costs, reducing emissions

contributing to climate change, and will compliment future growth in cleaner energy technologies.

For as long as human civilization has existed, there has existed a fascination with the sun, and its apparent powers. In 1839, solar power was discovered and harnessed by French scientist Alexandre-Edmond Becquerel, who created the first primitive solar cell, producing the first solar-made electricity. Solar energy was not truly understood at this point in time, but the technology was on its way to its full potential, and in 1954, the first solar panels were produced by scientists at Bell Labs. However, throughout the history of solar, Amory Lovins, an American physicist and authority on energy at the Rocky Mountain Institute, found that societies around the world have “repeatedly invented and refined solar energy, only to have it scuttled, even forgotten, as discoveries of apparently cheap new fuels – coal, oil, gas, nuclear – distracted customers, diverted providers, and befuddled policy makers” (Begos). Although the possibility of solar disappearing again hardly seems possible today, it is clear that there are individuals and industries that make it their goal to prevent solar spreading any farther than it has. This has been an issue in recent years, especially in the United States with its change in administration to a party that does not particularly have the condition of the environment in mind. However, this unfortunate but small setback in the United States has not made any other countries question their goals. In recent times, both India and France have committed “more than US\$2 billion to fund solar energy projects in developing countries” (Kumar). Not only have these countries begun to self-improve, but they have also begun funding assistance in other countries, laying a good foundation for peaceful and progressive endeavors. This

type of behavior influences other countries of power, and will assist in spreading a positive agenda for solar use.

Although there have been other energy sources that have proven their usefulness, converting to solar may give more advantages than nuclear or non-clean running energies. Nuclear energy is the most productive energy source in existence, and one nuclear power plant produces the energy equal to a large solar farm. However, the use of nuclear energy can result in massive accidents that can ruin local communities and eco-systems. One example of an unfortunate disaster is the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, where several environmental influences caused the nuclear cores to melt, leaking radioactive material into the nearby area, especially into the ocean. However, this case and many other similar cases have not fully influenced countries to permanently move away from nuclear energy and on to cleaner sources. This is most likely due to it being the most productive energy source currently in use. However, the risks nuclear energy provides are too great to the well being of communities and the eco-systems of the world. The legislative director of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Anna Aurilio, stated that “nuclear energy is too expensive, it’s unsafe, and we don’t have a good solution for handling high-level waste” (qtd. in Weeks). The idea of money also comes into play when energy is a concern. Although jobs are at risk with the reduction of nuclear usage, the financial well being of the communities that rely on nuclear energy should not be ignored. Unlike nuclear energy, which is an extremely high maintenance energy resource, solar is very low maintenance, and also completely safe in use. If one nuclear power plant has a meltdown, no matter how small, that power plant will permanently be shut down, vastly reducing the amount of energy originally supplied in that area. As solar has no

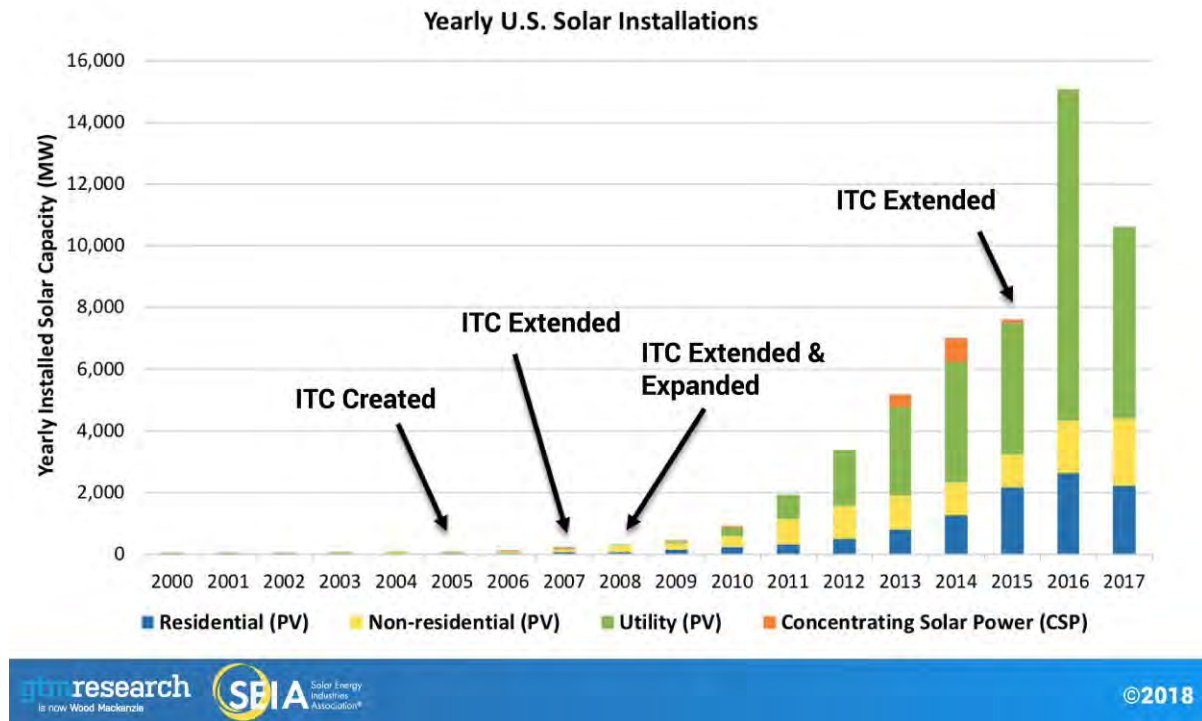
risk, and harnesses the ability to run on a small scale, there are many parts of a community that could be able to function even if the power grid fails. Beside the use of nuclear energy, the usefulness of fossil fuels is also called into question.

Another of the major sources of energy around the world is the use of fossil fuels, especially coal and oil. The coal industry is currently one of the largest contributors to energy in the United States, even larger than nuclear energy contributions. Oil is one of the most used substances when cars come into play. These two energy sources are burned to supply a large amount of energy. However, there is the side effect of carbon emissions, or greenhouse gases. These emissions have highly contributed to growing climate change, with predictions like global sea levels rising and shrinking ice sheets becoming more worrisome with every new survey. In 2017, the United States electricity generation was mostly provided by fossil fuels totaling at 62.7% of the total energy production, 30.1% of that total being generated by coal burning (“What is U.S. Electricity Generation by Energy Source”). This is an extremely high percentage of the United State’s energy production for energies that are carbon emitting. As the world has become more industrialized, it has only seemed practical to find the cheapest sources of energy so as to supply the necessary amount. However, it is unfortunate that the “Trump administration has opted for a resurgence of coal and other carbon fuels, not an emphasis on alternative energy” (Alster). The fact that cleaner energies are being threatened in the United States is highly unfavorable, and it is deplorable that the current administration does not hold the same support for cleaning up the environment that the previous did. Luckily, for the most part, a very large amount of support has been given to solar energy, and enough so that it has been able to survive and thrive in the private sector. If given lasting support by

the government, solar energy will be able to thrive so much more in government and the private sector, causing more people to adopt the clean technology.

Solar energy has existed for over a century now, but it may never have grown to where it is now if it weren't for the growth of industry assisted by government programs and private firm interests. For decades, the solar industry failed to become commercial, but when the governments of Japan and Germany decided to support the solar industry, it finally had the chance to take off. Japan and Germany do not have naturally high amounts of sunlight, but "their lack of alternative fuel sources has created a dependence on expensive external sources of energy and therefore motivated them to develop less expensive, local, and renewable-energy alternatives" (Bradford). These solar programs, with "various types of subsidies to stimulate robust domestic solar-energy industries, now account for 69 percent of the world market for PV" (Bradford). In the United States in 2005, the Solar Investment Tax Credit (ITC) was created to provide incentive, stability, and growth to the solar industry. Since 2006, "solar has experienced an annual growth Rate of 59%" ("Solar Industry Research Data"). This has offered solar companies an opportunity to expand their projects. One example is Abengoa Solar's Solana Generating Station, the "world's largest parabolic trough solar CSP power plant" that is "able to store 6 [hours] worth of solar thermal energy and boosting plant capacity to 41%" (Fraas). This single power plant has shown the potential of solar farms, and if the government continues to grant subsidies to projects in the solar sector, more farms of this size or even larger can be constructed. Solar energy will continue to grow in residential and business areas, but projects like the Solana Generating Station will be able to contend with nuclear power plants when the technology is improved and the output is increased. If the output

increases, solar farms will become more competitive and cause more coal power plants to be decommissioned. The graph below shows the growth of the solar industry in residential, non-residential, and utility settings since the ITC was created.



Yearly U.S. Solar Installations. “Solar Industry Research Data.” *Solar Energy Industries Association*. 2018.

Although growth in the solar industry was slow at first, it began to increase rapidly in 2011. The ITC provided the incentive to purchase solar panels, for residential and non-residential areas, but the growth has been even more prominent on a utility size scale. This is most likely due to the fact that the ITC gave utility companies an opportunity to purchase a cheap energy source that would not cost a great deal to maintain, leading towards a larger output of energy. These large solar power plants present a stable source

of energy, and if something on such a large scale can work, smaller solar projects for houses and businesses will be supported by the people.

As it was stated before, solar energy is not the most productive energy source in comparison to some of its competitors. In the United States, in utility-scale facilities, solar energy only provided for 1.3% of total energy output in 2017 (“What is U.S. Electricity Generation by Energy Source”). This is a very small amount on a large scale, providing for the whole country. However, solar was not specifically designed to provide for large portions of a country, like coal and nuclear are designed. Solar is a unique energy source, an absolutely wonderful discovery, in the way that it was almost designed for the individual. Because of the growing popularity of solar energy, “solar panel prices fell sharply after 2011” and “in addition, a 30 percent federal solar tax credit, along with some similar state and local programs, lets people deduct a portion of the total purchase of installation cost directly from their tax bill” (Begos). These two examples show why solar has become so popular, not only with some utility companies, but with average individuals. Solar panels were mass-produced for practical reasons, and since the price dropped, more individuals found it to their advantage to install them on their own houses. This allows for a cut to the monthly electric bill, and in some cases full independence from the power grid. A country’s citizens are more likely to adopt a new idea or technology if the government shows clear support for what it is promoting. Although the current presidential administration does not hold these same ideals, rebates on solar systems is a positive incentive so that more people may convert their homes to solar electric systems. This not only allows for the individual to save money, but for the individual to become involved in cleaning up the environment. These incentives to go

solar will most likely remain in place, although there are some who would wish to see these “charitable” advantages go away.

Although solar has made great strides in environmental cleanliness, there are those in the United States that have concerns about growth of solar energy. The popular opinion of the nonexistence of global warming and climate change has been reduced, although there are some that still believe. Fox News is one source that may not ignore the existence of global warming, but may be a source that under exaggerates what has happened and what will be predicted to happen. Fox news quoted a “latest study [that] uses a new method to determine that the actual likely range of warming would be narrower: between 4 – 6.1 Degrees Fahrenheit. The study finds just a 1% chance of an increase over 8.1 degrees Fahrenheit” (Lott). This study seems to look proper, but when compared against a study from NASA, quoting a study done by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “forecasts a temperature rise of 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century” and the IPCC “predicts that increases in global mean temperature of less than 1.8 to 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit above 1990 levels will produce beneficial impacts in some regions and harmful ones in others” (Shaftel). The IPCC is built of scientists from around the world, and NASA is globally recognized for its research and achievements. While the source quoted by Fox News could be possible, a report coming from two recognized scientific organizations is trustworthier.

There is also the advantage from solar of the ability to be independent of the grid, and to support a house or business with solar panels. This point is disputed by many because “the ability of homeowners and business to generate their own solar power will cut into utility companies’ revenue and strain their ability to maintain the electrical grid

and build new power plants” (Begos). This issue will not only affect revenue, but could cause the loss of jobs. Due to growth in other energy industries, “a total of 68,000 people worked in coal mining in 2015, a drop of 19 percent from the year before, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics” (Mantel). However, the “solar industry now employs over 260,000 workers nationwide” (Alster). It is possible there will be a loss in jobs in the power utility companies and the coal industry, but being a solar worker is a job that cannot be outsourced, due to its on-site requirements. As more private or government funded solar projects begin, more jobs will be provided. As for the revenue lost due to independence from the grid, this very well is possible, but the cost of electric utilities especially in condensed areas are extremely expensive. In some cases, solar may not provide enough energy to allow an off the grid lifestyle, but it is possible that revenue will be lost. If solar is used in more areas, the risk of a blackout will be reduced, and may keep more areas functional.

The effects of unclean energies and power sources have been made clear from the global temperature rise, shrinking ice sheets, and the sea level rising. Solar and other alternatives energies are the clear answers to this rising issue. Not only will it be saving the environment, but also help the people who accept it financially. If the human race continues to shy away from the positive change that has been offered, conditions will continue to grow worse in the coming decades. The fossil fuels we use and take for granted will not last forever, so moving towards a source that will not run out will enable the world to keep running as it has been. Nuclear power plants provide the greatest amount of energy any source can provide, but the meltdowns that will affect the eco-system cannot possibly be allowed to happen if they can be prevented. Solar has existed

for a very long time, and after all the support it has been given from around the globe, the idea of it being suppressed once more does not seem possible. If governments are willing and continue to support this clean energy source, the industry will continue to grow and more projects will be started worldwide. With all of these advantages being presented together, there seems to be large opportunities on the horizon for the human race, and if we embrace these opportunities, we can begin to be fully responsible for the beautiful Earth we live on.

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The Children of an Adult World

A popular saying in the law enforcement world is an adult crime deserves an adult punishment, which is a large reason why juveniles who commit heinous crimes are legally permitted to be tried in adult court and transferred into adult prisons. This system is facilitated by what are known as transfer laws. On the surface, they seem to be a simple solution, but once scrutinized, it is clear that attempting to solve the issue in such a way is akin to slapping a bandage over a bullet wound. As said by attorney Malcom Young, the purpose of transfer laws is to punish minors who commit heinous crimes more severely than their peers who are put into juvenile court, but ironically, “children in adult court are penalized more severely than are adults in adult criminal court.” Overall, adult court is a difficult place for juveniles to testify in, and racial biases can make a child more likely to end up in prison before they have even stepped into their hearing. In addition, adult prison conditions are unfavorable towards youth, exposing them to dangerous conditions that only serve to give rise to or worsen deep-seated psychological conditions. What’s more, the process of trying and sentencing juveniles as adults does not reduce juvenile crime, making the entire system pointless to begin with.

Minors who are put through adult court to reach a conclusion on their case often find that the system itself is stacked against them. Surprisingly, the United States has no minimum age requirement for testifying in front of court. This means that in extreme circumstances, there is no

law in place to stop a kindergartener from stepping onto the podium and being expected to convince an entire courtroom of their innocence. As stated by Martin Gardner, a professor at the University of Nebraska School of Law, the reason for such a lax approach to child testimonies is the assumption that “children are no less competent than adults” while testifying. The glaring problem with this way of thinking is that it puts children who have not even finished their primary and secondary education on equal grounds with adults who are well past college-age and may even have a degree in law. Malcom Young, an experienced attorney involved in numerous cases of minors testifying in an adult court setting, states that “children love to talk to the police,” because “they feel protected,” by them. Furthermore, younger juveniles may have little to no knowledge of the Miranda Rights or their right to a lawyer while being examined by law enforcement. Because of this, it is no surprise that children often overshare to the police and can easily be fooled by loaded questions, unintentionally incriminating themselves. Younger children also have less developed storytelling skills than mature adults, causing them to sometimes forget what they have already mentioned to the police. Once they return to be questioned in subsequent sessions, certain details about their story may change. The police use the inconsistencies to prove that the child is lying, rather than understanding that the inconsistencies in a child’s story are indicative of their underdeveloped brains. The adult court system is made for adults, not children, and therefore does not know how to properly accommodate the needs and mentality of children in order to provide a fair trial. It is unfair to expect them to be tried as adults because of this. Moreover, youths, especially teenagers, are still developing their social skills, and may perform poorly while testifying in court as a result. Such was the case with Latasha Armstead, a thirteen year old involved with an older male in a homicide, who attorney Malcom Young

reported to have performed successfully in her direct testimony. However, when it came time to speak in front of the jury, and be cross-examined, her confusion and nervousness led her to contradict herself on numerous occasions and be perceived as guilty. The jury and prosecutors interpreted the holes in her story as proof of a failing alibi, rather than a symptom of the natural difficulty that many teenagers her age have with public speaking, especially in such stressful circumstances. “When adults testify,” Young writes, “the witness stand is a fairly powerful revelation of character. When children testify, the witness stand is a place where truth is concealed or distorted.”

The adult justice system is also stacked against specific groups of juveniles, most notably minorities. For example, Jeff Armour and Sarah Hammond, members of the National Conference of State Legislatures, report that racial minorities, including African-Americans, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans, “comprise a combined one-third of the nation’s youth population,” but are disproportionately represented in adult prisons, with “three out of four of the 4,100 new admissions to adult prisons [being] minority youth,” (2012). Race should have no effect on how likely it is for a person to be incarcerated, but according to these statistics, justice is not blind. It seems that the United States justice system and law enforcement exhibit racial bias; otherwise, the percentage of minority youth in adult prisons compared to white youth would reflect the percentage of minority youth living in the United States more closely. In addition, there are significantly more African-American youths sentenced to life without parole sentences in every state compared to their white peers. California and Connecticut have the highest ratios, with approximately eighteen times more African-American youth serving life without parole, and the nationwide average is eleven African-American youths to every white

youth (“Ratio of Black to White Youth Serving Life Without Parole Sentences,”). Life without parole is no light punishment, and is only brought upon a person who the court believes has committed a heinous crime. It is odd that African-American youths are represented so disproportionately, indicating that courts may be less lenient on African-Americans than they are on whites, even if they are minors. The fact that the United States justice system is more willing to place African-American children into jail for the rest of the lives they have just begun than they are for white youths reflects poorly on the country who champions equality and justice. For offenders who are able to leave prison later in life, they will find that jobs are difficult to come by, and society largely rejects them. This negative treatment is especially harmful to youth, who would already be disadvantaged in the workforce compared to their peers due to a lack of education and career experience in prison.

Adult prisons are not tailored for juveniles in the way that youth detention centers are, making way for a host of new problems for those who are sentenced to serve time within them. The conditions of these establishments can be so perilous that their negative side effects outweigh any sort of rehabilitative effects in the long run. An alarming statistic brought forth by criminal law professionals Jennifer M. O’Connor and Lucinda Kinau Treat is that both physical and sexual assaults against juveniles are committed far more frequently in adult prisons. While “37% of juveniles are victims of violence in juvenile training schools...46% of juveniles are victims of violence in adult facilities,” a rate that should not be overlooked. Furthermore, one-third of juveniles in adult prisons are assaulted with a weapon while in confinement, versus one-fourth of juveniles in youth prisons, and “beatings by staff are twice as likely,” (O’Connor and Kinau Treat). Based on this information, it is clear that adult prisons are markedly more

dangerous for juveniles and pose a host of risks for their safety. Despite the fact that they are criminals, they are still impressionable children, and the excessive violence directed toward them can further distort their moral compass. In other cases, they may grow to be more violent as a defense mechanism to survive in their threatening conditions, which is not ideal for people that the prison system is attempting to rehabilitate into society once released. Physical assaults are not the only risk that children in adult prisons must face, as “sexual assault is five times more likely,” for juveniles in adult prisons than if they were placed into a prison tailored to their age group (O’Connor and Kinau Treat). Sadly, the less-developed younger inmates can prove to be easier targets for adult predators who wish to take advantage of them. Sexual assault has proven to cut deep psychological scars in its victims, and young people are the most prone to being overtaken by the trauma. They may develop PTSD, severe phobias, or violent defense mechanisms as a result of such assaults, which they will carry with them long past the day they step foot out of their prison cells. The fact that such children are legally trapped in such hellish circumstances with virtually no support groups only magnifies their psychological trauma and makes it harder to overcome. In the long run, these prisoners end up more broken, world-loathing, and violent than if they were simply tried at their appropriate age and sent to an appropriate correctional facility to find them the help they need to readjust into society upon release.

Supporters of the current transfer laws argue that the system helps reduce youth crime. For one, the threat of adult punishment is believed to scare youth enough to prevent them from considering illegal activity. However, many juveniles do not realize that it is possible for them to be tried as adults for their crimes in the first place. A study conducted in Atlanta, Georgia by a

local District Attorney office found that “Only 30.3% [of study participants] knew before they committed the crime that juveniles could be tried as adults,” (Redding and Fuller). Since a majority of youths are unaware of the existence of transfer laws in general, the threat of adult punishment had absolutely no effect on their decision to commit a crime. Thus, the laws themselves are not as effective in deterring juvenile crime as initially assumed. The other component to the deterrence argument is that serving harsher prison sentences will discourage released offenders from committing future crimes. The evidence speaks to the contrary, with studies which have found that the process is less effective in reducing crime than sending minors to prisons among similarly-aged youth. Richard E. Redding, a professor of law at Villanova University School of Law, reports that there are “higher recidivism [repeat offending] rates among juveniles tried and sentenced as adults when compared to those tried as juveniles.” With this in mind, transfer laws are rather counterintuitive. The purpose of jail is to protect society and provide enough punishment or rehabilitate their prisoners enough that they do not commit future offenses. If juveniles sent to adult prisons end up reoffending more often than their juvenile prison counterparts, they should not be sent to adult prison to begin with so that youth crime can be limited to the fullest extent. Of course, people who commit heinous crimes should not go unpunished and allowed to continue illegal activities, but there are alternatives to adult sentencing that are more effective. After all, the juveniles that society would want reoffending the least of all would be the ones who have had severe charges put against them. For example, Mark W. Lipsey, a member of the Peabody Research Institute of Vanderbilt University, found while researching the effectiveness of differing punishment and rehabilitation programs for juveniles that while discipline and deterrence-based programs correlated to a rise in recidivism,

surveillance, restorative programs, counselling, skill-building, and a mixture of all the other methods were found to decrease the rate of recidivism. The most effective methods appear to have been counselling and skill-building, with the former reducing reoffending rates by approximately thirteen percent, and the latter by twelve. This research indicates that there are better options for reducing youth crime than detention in adult prisons. Children and teenagers, whose brains are still developing and able to change, are more impressionable and thus easier to influence. If enough effort and resources are dedicated to rehabilitating criminal youth through counselling and skill-building programs, a decent amount of them may be able to reacclimate into society without adverse effects. Such programs would also be beneficial for society as a whole, especially ones that help build skills for minors to dedicate their time to. Fewer teenagers would be serving jail time, separating them from the workforce, and more will have learned skills that allow them to thrive in potential careers. Furthermore, without the stain of adult jail time on their record, the juveniles would have more career options in the future, which is not only beneficial for the child, but for the economy in general. On the flip side, well-funded counselling programs could aid in reducing the negative impacts of the mental illnesses that many convicted youths suffer from, and provide others with a healthy outlet to express their emotions. Family counselling programs would help discover dysfunction within a child's home life and provide methods to improve it. In the case of juvenile offenders, harsher punishment is not always the right answer, and alternative routes can often prove to be much more useful to both the offender themselves and the rest of society.

The manner in which it is best to punish children who have committed crimes that many adult criminals would not even consider thinking of is a rather contentious issue, with numerous

arguments in support of subjecting these minors to the same punishments as they would receive if they were adults. However, the system in which children are given such punishments is deeply flawed. Courts treat testifying children as young as ten much the same as they would treat a middle-aged man, and the stress that these circumstances place on their shoulders can grow to be too much for a minor to cope with. Racial biases give minorities a disadvantage in whether or not they will be sent to a juvenile prison, or receive the harsher sentence of serving time in an adult facility. The prisons themselves are full of dangers for incarcerated youth, and once released, the juveniles can find themselves with deeper, fresher psychological scars than before, which in turn leads to mental unease and an even higher recidivism rate than their peers released from juvenile penitentiaries. The children thrust into these adult worlds are broken, and the justice system is in dire need of a way to fix them, whether that be through new programs or severe alterations to those that already exist.

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16 December 2019

Hamilton Fails the Revolution

In 1970 at the height of the Black Panther party and a critical moment in black liberation Gil Scott-Heron released a spoken word piece and song called, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”. I would like to extend the metaphor he set in place way back then to include: The revolution will not be seen on Broadway. Lin-Manuel Miranda in a valiant and honest effort attempted to have modern American engage with its’ history in a way that acknowledges the efforts of Black and Brown people in the making of America with *Hamilton*. However, the musical fails to accurately portray the lives of people in power and constantly makes false comparisons of the politicians of Hamilton’s times to those of modern Black and Brown Folks. Because of consumeristic, capitalistic and neoliberal tendencies of those who ingested and praised this media, it was and is not the revolution it pretends to be. *Hamilton* reflects back to us the lack of movement in America around Black and People of Color Liberation.

Hamilton is a People of Color musical for white people. While it might seem with the abundance of Black people and People of Color on the stage of *Hamilton* that this music was made for those same kinds of people, the reality is that the audiences are vastly white. A Black blogger at NPR reported, “This is of course an unscientific study, based on me craning my neck and looking around the room, but three other folks who've seen the show recently tell me the audience was overwhelmingly white when they went, too. Yesterday, I asked folks on Twitter who've seen the show to share their experience, and many of them told me the same thing.”

(Demby) Historically, Black and Brown people have been excluded from theaters and so, unsurprisingly, the audience of *Hamilton* is majority white. Up until 1921, Black people were not allowed to sit in the orchestra section of Broadway shows. According to Janice Simpson in from Playbill, “[Shuffle Along, 1921] had the distinction of being the first Broadway show that allowed African Americans to sit downstairs in the orchestra section.” (Simpson) While segregation might seem a relic of the past, 1921 is now only 98 years ago. There are still individuals alive who experienced such discrimination and the generational trauma is passed on as evidence by The Broadway League’s, "The Demographics of the Broadway Audience, 2014-2015" table produced eldo.co.

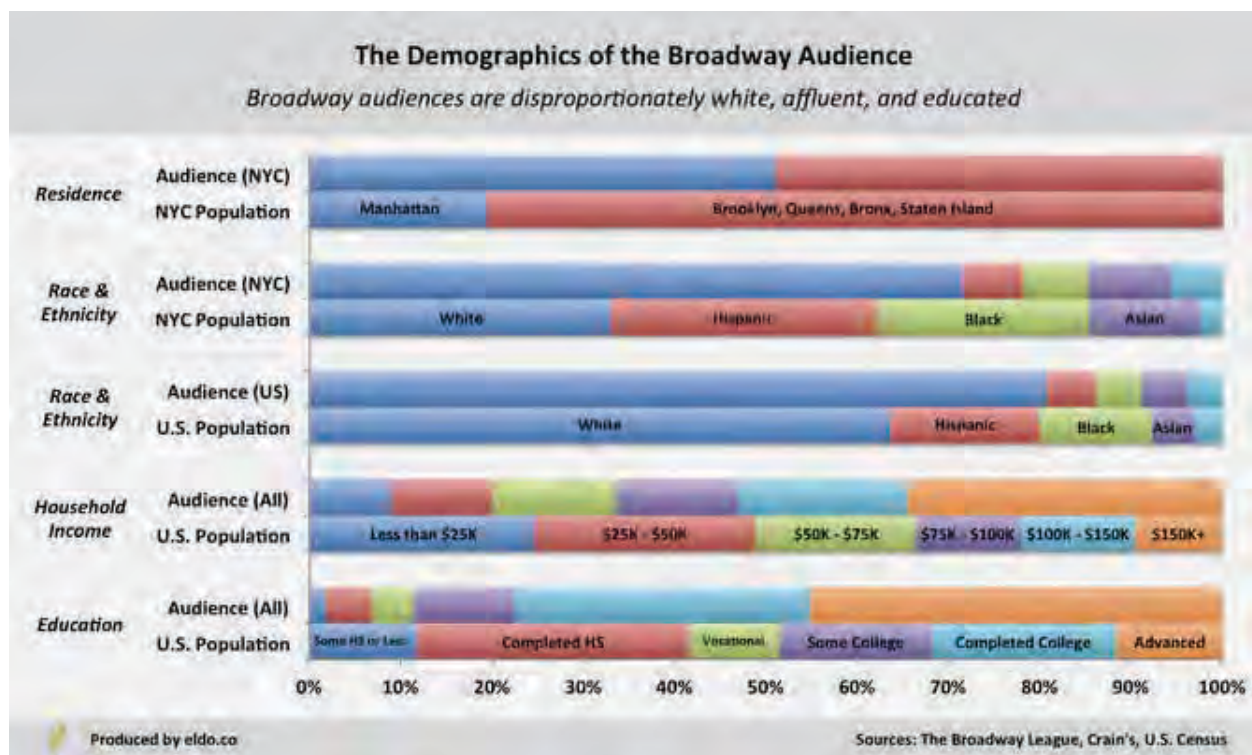


Table 1

Table 1 demonstrates the lack of black and brown poor people who are coming to Broadway theaters. Yet, the people on the stage of *Hamilton* are singing about coming from those kinds of disadvantages. In the opening lines of *Hamilton* Aaron Burr sings:

AARON BURR. How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a
 Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten
 Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor
 Grow up to be a hero and a scholar? (*Hamilton*)

When the Black actor who is playing Burr sings that into the audience, he is singing it to people who have zero understanding of the struggle experienced by that level of disadvantage. Viewing the whole exchange, it seems like Miranda is turning the trauma and pain of Black and Brown individuals into trauma porn and further sensationalizing the harsh realities as a way to gain understanding from a largely white audience.

Furthermore, by performing Hip Hop and Rap inspired musical numbers for a majority white audience Miranda is Minstrelizing his show. On top of that, many of the themes throughout the play and “let’s all get along” mentality of the musical lends itself to allowing rap to be easily consumable for white neoliberal sensibilities. Rap and Hip Hop are creations bore by Black people from their struggles and traumas and artistic pursuits. It was meant as a tool of decolonization and paradoxically it is being utilized to celebrate colonizers. Larry Dang in his article, “White Alexander Hamilton and Whitewashed Hamilton: The Problematics of Post-Raciality In *Hamilton*, An American Musical” encapsulates it perfectly when he says:

[The producers of *Hamilton*] inadvertently played into the use of rap by privileged Americans to feel like they are the suffering — poor Americans in the colonies hurt at the hands of a tyrannical Britain and the orphan Hamilton who rose to fame from nothingness: ‘I am not throwing away my shot/ Hey yo, I’m just like my country/ I’m young, scrappy and hungry’ (Miranda as Alexander Hamilton in ‘My Shot’). Not only does the narrative of suffering whitewash the racism and colonialism in the American

Revolution...it also provides fuel for the white audience to further embrace their momentary engagement with a historically black style of music as an expression of their suffering. (Dang)

It is true that the individuals who colonized the Americans were cut off from resources and taxed extraordinarily, but that does negate the fact that millions were killed, and the legacy of colonization has killed so many more. By watching *Hamilton*, the white viewer is absolved of their ancestors' transgressions against Indigenous and Black people because Miranda absolves Hamilton of his guilt in the colonization of America. Miranda whitewashes Hip-Hop to allow the white listener to absorb the information he is displaying on stage, however, he forgot that Hip-Hop is a result of the struggles of Black people. Without the heroic and tremendous efforts of Black artists, and Black artist America would not be what it is today.

Why are talking about the Schuyler sisters when we should be talking about Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth? Moreover, why choose Hamilton as the person you want Black People and People of Color to celebrate? Miranda has chosen historical individuals who were the captors, enslavers, rapists and brutalizers to be portrayed by the same people they would have victimized. That is irresponsible and uncomfortable. He has done this to give Black People and People of Color some sort of ownership over their history, but he forgets that we have our own hero's that have not been celebrated like they should. Fellow essayist Patricia Herrera of the University of Richmond concurs, worrying that her 10-year-old daughter, who idolizes Angelica Schuyler, might not be able to differentiate between the 18th-century slaveowner and the Black actress portraying her. Herrera ponders, "Does the hip-hop soundscape of *Hamilton* effectively drown out the violence and trauma – and sounds – of slavery that people who looked like the actors in the play might actually have experienced at the time of the nation's birth?" (Herrera)

Isn't a bit of predicament bondage the actors are in by accepting roles in *Hamilton*. They want to see themselves and people like themselves represented on Broadway stages, because historically Black and Brown people are underrepresented on Broadway. Yet, they are portraying their slave masters. They are portraying those who would have shot them dead if they had set foot in this theater if they were still alive. Patricia Herrera's daughter now looks up to a slaveowner and associates this black person with this slave owner. It is not only ahistorical but deeply disgusting to have descendants of chattel slavery become their slave masters for the entertainment of a majority white audience. In a talk produced by the United States National Archives and uploaded on to YouTube, the panelists (Renee Romano, Robert S. Danforth, Joseph Adelman, Claire Bond Potter, Brian Herrera, and Mike O'Malley) talk frankly about how *Hamilton* frames history.

During the Q and A portion they are answering questions from the audience:

Audience Member....How do we think about the political aspects of democracy and anti-democratic or centralized kinds of ideas when you're trying to change the casting to change the idea of the revolution at the same time dealing with the historical truths of what some of these guys got up to?

Mike O'Malley....It is an extraordinary piece of historical sleight of hand to make Hamilton into a hero of the common people. Like that is just unbelievable really.

Claire Bond Potter.Or into an immigrant.

Mike O'Malley.Or into an immigrant really. (US National Archives)

Hamilton was not an immigrant, especially not in the modern way we define immigrant today, even if he was born in the Caribbean. He was a descendant of colonizers and Miranda chooses as a Puerto Rican to portray him and make a "islander immigrant" Hamilton's story, however again

he is just portraying someone who colonized his people. Not only is Hamilton a recent descendant of people who colonized the Americas, but he is also a descendant of the people who were the perpetrators of mass genocide of the indigenous people, cultures and languages of the land he was born to. In the quote from the US National Archive the panelist laugh at the idea that Hamilton was a champion for the “common people” because as soon as he had upward momentum he was not continually beaten, raped or tortured like the Indigenous people and Black enslaved people he was surrounded by. Instead he became an elitist and championed for himself and other white men.

When I was in high school, I tried to convince the director of the performing arts program to put on *The Color Purple* and I was shot down. The following year I tried to convince her to put on *Hairspray*. I was shot down again. They explained not enough of the black students would want to participate. I sulked away and gave up trying to participate in the musical program because I couldn't see myself portraying whiteness on stage ever. Now in my adulthood I can see the reality of the situations which is that that my premier richy rich high school in Sherman oaks with a black population of less than 1% would never and has never admitted enough black students to ever have a cast big enough to support musicals like that. My adult self is saddened by this reality and frustrated with the administrations of so many institutions who don't see there historically racist ways. *Hamilton* gives white people a false sense of having done something...having done enough to change the systems that show me oppression daily just by viewing a musical. They see Black and Brown people dancing on stages never meant for those Black and Brown people singing about how the people who enslaved them are no different than themselves and those white people feel a sense of kinship and unity with the people they continue to oppress. They enter the theater and pay these performers to make them feel better

about who they are, but the musical has not actually changed anything about those people who are oppressing the very people who are on stage. Effective, long term, and meaningful change takes systemic change and that is not going to happen in a theater. That happens when you tear down the oppressive institutions: the prison industrial complex, the war industrial complex, gentrification, redlining, food insecurity, housing insecurity, health insecurity and the like.

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6 December 2019

The Coddling of the American Mind

On May 12, 2018, two students attending Bowdoin College faced impeachment proceedings. What heinous crime did they commit? Plagiarism, gun threats, or sexual assault? Nope. They attended a party where some guests wore tiny sombreros. Two weeks ago, a group of students threw a birthday party for their friend. The email invitation read: “the theme is tequila, so do with that what you may. We’re not saying it’s a fiesta, but we’re also not not saying that :)” (“Political correctness devours...”). The invitation advertised food, music, and “other things that are conducive to a fun night”. Those “other things included the miniature sombreros, several inches in diameter”(“Political correctness devours...”). And when photos of attendees wearing those mini-sombreros showed up on social media, students and administrators went ballistic. College administrators sent multiple schoolwide emails notifying the students about an investigation into a possible “act of ethnic stereotyping” (“Political correctness devours...”). Within days, the Bowdoin student government unanimously adopted a statement of solidarity to “[stand] by all students who were injured and affected by the incident,” and recommend that administrators “create a space for those students who have been or feel specifically targeted” (“Political correctness devours...”).

At first glance, what may have seemed like a seemingly innocent festivity has nuanced the line between intent and impact of a controversial movement called “political correctness”.

Some who responded to this incident with outrage and anger argued that the two students lacked “basic empathy” (“Political correctness devours...”) and displayed a “cultural insensitivity to certain ethnicities” (“Political correctness devours...”). On the other hand, others claimed that the punishment went too far, considering the party was well-intended and aimed to celebrate a friends’ birthday. This kind of public outrage was not limited to Bowdoin College, however. For the past decade, universities across America have been caught in a heated dilemma surrounding the issue of political correctness. Political correctness, sometimes abbreviated as “PC”, is a “movement that refers to statement or policy that goes to great lengths to avoid offending any historically marginalized group” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses...”). Public speakers were disinvited from voicing their opinions at universities. Professors were treading cautiously on the emotional eggshells of students. Conservative students whose political views oppose that of the liberal universities’ are becoming increasingly reluctant to voice their opinions out of fear of retribution. The resurgence of political correctness have forced universities to consider the need to balance free speech and academic diversity with the need to make all students feel welcome. Excessive political correctness in the form of disinvitations, trigger warnings, and microaggressions proves detrimental for students’ education and mental health because it limits intellectual diversity and inhibits free speech which ultimately leads to a culture of oversensitivity and intolerance.

It is no surprise that students are becoming increasingly sensitive to controversial ideas that cause discomfort. According to Jean Twenge, an expert in the study of generational differences, the United States has seen a “national rise in adolescents born between 1995 and 2012 anxiety, depression, and suicide due to frequent use of smartphones” (qtd. in Lukainoff and Haidt 160,. These mental illnesses cause changes in cognition, including a tendency to see the

world as more dangerous than it really is. In addition, the implementation of “zero tolerance” policies following shooting incidents in public schools, have led parents and school administrators to impose stricter safety policies. Both of these factors has pushed paranoid and overprotective parenting, which has led children to become psychologically less resilient and more fragile. Lukainoff and Haidt describe this shift in parenting as “safetyism”, “a culture in which safety has become a sacred value, which means people become unwilling to make trade-offs demanded by other practical and moral concerns”(Lukainoff and Haidt 30). As a result of rising rates of adolescent anxiety and depression and parents’ coddling, students are more desirous of protection offered by campuses. The most significant factor is arguably “the steady rise in affective (or emotional) polarization since the 1980s, which has led to rising hate crimes and harassment on campuses” (Lukainoff and Haidt 141). As Democrats increasingly demonize Republicans and vice versa, bitter, partisan feelings increase the tension and fear felt by either party. Social media has allowed students to respond to these controversial topics by providing a platform where people can express solidarity and public outrage about controversial events. As a result of social media’s prevalence, students can be easily provoked by public sentiment and group loyalties. The practice of turning towards social media for expressing your views creates implicit and unconscious biases which distorts students’ ability to form their own judgement on issues. Combined, all of these factors contribute to a culture of intolerance and hypersensitivity that plagues college campuses across America. Intolerance for opposing viewpoints have manifested mainly in the forms of disinvitations, trigger warnings, and microaggressions.

The disinvitations of public speakers at commencement addresses have raised serious questions regarding our immutable right to free speech. Consider the disinvitation of Christine Lagarde, former director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Lagarde declined to speak

at Smith college after “students accused IMF policies of perpetuating oppression in the world” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses: ...”). After much discussion, faculty members signed a statement supporting the choice of Lagarde as their commencement speaker in which the faculty stated that, “The commencement invitation is not an endorsement of all views or policies of the institution he or she leads” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses: ...”). Furthermore, according to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), “during the first six years of the 21st century, colleges in the United States experienced a combined average of 7.5 disinvitation attempts per year. Since 2012, by contrast, disinvitations have averaged nearly twenty-five per year, half of which succeeded to prevent the speaker from speaking” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses...”). The worrying trend of speakers declining to speak or students petitioning to disinvite the speaker from universities raises a serious question— if students dismiss any opposing idea that offends or discomforts them, how does that reflect colleges’ value of fostering diverse ideas? By allowing students’ to disinvite speakers, universities are contributing to a “culture of censorship that allows students to be entitled to their opinions” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses: ...”). College campuses, if anything, should act as forums where students can question established policies, challenge accepted practices, and engage in robust debate. Disinviting speakers prevents students from acknowledging opposing perspectives and cultivates a homogeneous culture of thinking. When the ideas and speech of the other side is seen not just as wrong, but hostile towards innocent victims, it is hard to imagine the kind of respect and mutual understanding that are necessary to foster an inclusive environment. In addition, by censoring opposing views, students develop a bigoted and intolerant mindset that leads to a culture of fear and intimidation. It has become so evident that merely voicing an unpopular opinion can cause backlash with a certain community

or create “serious difficulty with campus discipline” (“Political Correctness on College Campuses: ...”). Instead, universities should endorse and adopt the renewed Chicago Statement of 2015. This policy “comprises a commitment to free speech and academic freedom updated for our age of disinivitations, speaker shoutdowns, and restrictive speech codes” (Lukainoff and Haidt 255). By publicly endorsing this policy, universities would ensure that their policies are consistent with the First Amendment, which avoids the possibility of colleges losing a First Amendment lawsuit. In addition, universities should impose disciplinary sanctions on those on campus who infringe the rights of others to free expression, which would strongly discourage students from dismissing people from speaking on the basis that their opinions cause them emotional offense. Still, the ramifications of disinivitations extend beyond the reaches of college campuses. The insular attitudes that students develop towards opposing ideas will have broader repercussions as students graduate and become participants in the workforce and politics of our country. If students graduate believing that they can learn nothing from people who they disagree with, then universities will have done them a great academic disservice. Endorsing these policies would help universities to create an educational community in which students and faculty can enjoy the freedom to defend their views, air their disagreements, explore competing perspectives, seek knowledge, and passionately pursue the truth.

In addition to disinivitations, trigger warnings have contributed to the culture of hypersensitivity and intolerance that is becoming increasingly characteristic of college campuses. Trigger warnings, according to Lukainoff, are “statements to alert students if they might encounter material that could “trigger” memories of past abuse or emotional trauma” (Lukainoff and Haidt). Jeannie Suk’s *New Yorker* essay describes the common difficulties faced by professors when teaching sensitive topics such as rape law. She recalls that “her [law] students

have pressured her to avoid teaching rape law in order to protect their classmates from potential distress” (qtd. in Lukainoff and Haidt). While supporters of trigger warnings are valid in arguing that universities must be sensitive to the emotional needs of students, avoiding important subjects such as rape law prevent students from learning challenging issues that we face today.

Additionally, according to Richard McNally, director of clinical training in Harvard’s Department of Psychology, ““Trigger warnings are counter-therapeutic because they encourage avoidance of reminders of trauma, and avoidance maintains PTSD. Students should be treated with cognitive-behavioral therapies that will involve gradual, systematic exposure to traumatic memories until their capacity to trigger distress diminishes””(qtd. In Lukainoff and Haidt 29).

For students who truly suffer from trauma or PTSD, appropriate treatment is necessary.

However, well-intentioned professors and students who work to avoid reminders of those painful experiences are hindering the person’s recovery. Hence, trigger warnings encourage people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences in daily life that they need in order to become mentally sound and healthy. Instead, universities should explicitly discourage the practice of trigger warnings. In doing so, universities would support the faculty against student request for trigger warnings. Under this policy, professors would still be free to use trigger warnings if necessary, but by clearly opposing the practice, universities would allow professors to nurture a culture of open-mindedness that would encourage intellectual diversity. Still, there remains a deeper issue with trigger warnings. Teaching students that their emotions could be used as a justification for dismissing opposing ideas is fundamentally flawed. “The thin argument ““I’m offended”” becomes an unbeatable trump card”(Lukainoff and Haidt) as subjective feelings become a reasonable basis for avoiding “triggering” academic material. The ambivalent academic policy regarding emotional distress extends to government laws regarding

harassment. If emotions can be accepted as evidence of harassment or offense in administrative hearings, then how do we trust the validity of those emotional reasonings and to what extent are those feelings applicable? Instead, universities should base harassment laws on objectively offensive behavior in which one student interferes with another student's access to education. By publicly discouraging trigger warnings and basing harassment on objective evidence, universities would challenge students to engage in an environment of diverse ideas instead of coddling them to think in a hypersensitive, intolerant mentality.

Unlike trigger warnings and disinvitations, microaggressions often go unnoticed because they are “‘brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights toward people of color’” (qtd in Lukainoff and Haidt 40). Due to its ambiguous nature, microaggressions are often self-interpreted and based on emotional offense rather than definitive, tangible evidence. Derald Wing Sue, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College who popularized the term “microaggression”, noted examples of such acts which included, “a white person asking an Asian American to teach her words in their ‘native language’, a white person telling an African American that they ‘don’t act black’, and strangers asking people of color ‘Where are you really from?’” (qtd. In Lukainoff and Haidt 41). Sue further explains that the person of color could *choose* to interpret the statement in a way that makes them feel insulted or marginalized, but the examples do not necessarily imply that the speaker holds these negative stereotypes. The fundamental issue underlying this issue is that the colored person *assumes* that the speaker holds negative stereotypes towards various groups; in other words, they *assume* the worst about them. Surely people make legitimate racist or sexist remarks, and “one certainly *could* interpret these everyday questions and comments as subtle displays of exclusion and

bigotry”(Lukainoff and Haidt 41). However, should universities teach students to interpret these same comments as acts of aggression? Would not it be more reasonable for students to assume a more charitable interpretation warranted by facts? This approach, according to Lukainoff and Haidt, might say, “I’m guessing you didn’t mean any harm when you said that. But you should know that some people interpret that to mean...”(Lukanioff and Haidt 42). This would help students respond in a more constructive manner when they are offended by microaggressions and would help other students realize their personal biases and become more thoughtful of their own speech. Assuming a charitable view of others holds important implications for the future of universities—as campuses become increasingly diverse and continue to accept international students, cultural misunderstandings resulting from various stereotypes and subtle social cues are inevitable. Given this reality, it is unjust to treat students as if they were bigots when they harbor no prejudiced intent. Using the solution proposed earlier, it helps students be receptive to valuable feedback prevents them from fostering feelings of victimization, anger, and hopelessness. Another solution to this involves encouraging politeness and empathy without framing issues as microaggressions, which in turn would help students discuss and acknowledge the many stereotypes and racial biases that they hold civil debate. Engaging in vigorous debate teaches students to avoid ad hominem arguments that directly attack people rather than their ideas, tests their individual biases by engaging with ideas that challenge the campus consensus, and holds each student accountable for using evidence to substantiate their assertion rather than using emotional reasoning. Lastly, because P.C. culture is a campus-wide phenomenon, it is imperative that students take initiative to realize and overcome their own implicit biases. In support of this, Roth, president of Wesleyan University states, ““We can’t just rely on championing free speech as if it’s an open market and everybody will show up. We have to

overcome implicit bias by actively seeking people with different points of view” (qtd. in Mangan). Implementing these solutions would in turn help foster an inclusive and tolerant campus environment, allowing students’ minds to be more open to different ideas and beliefs.

Indeed, political correctness on college campuses has gone too far, institutionalizing a culture of fear and intolerance by allowing trigger warnings, disinvitations, and oversensitivity to microaggressions to run rampant. Universities should oppose excessive political correctness by trying to raise consciousness about the need to balance free speech and intellectual diversity with the need to make all students feel welcome. Doing so would require universities to publicly oppose the practice of trigger warnings, officially adopt the Chicago Statement of 2015, and facilitate a healthy environment in which students could engage in open debate. It is imperative that students take the initiative to engage in a community where they can hold each other accountable for using evidence to substantiate their assertions by using critical thinking instead of emotional reasoning. By ensuring students’ right to free speech and promoting diversity of ideas, universities would be preparing their students to be seekers of truth and sustainers of a democracy in an increasingly diverse society.

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February 27, 2016

My Pursuit of Sanity

When I was twenty-six, I had an epiphany: people are awful. I intensely hated my two bartending jobs, I foolishly purchased and poured an insane amount of my inheritance into a broken down, beat to hell, rusted out, ice cream truck that I remodeled but wasn't getting me anywhere and I hated my out-of-work, good-for-nothing, deadbeat boyfriend. I needed to make a major life change. Otherwise, I would surely lose what little sanity I had left.

My revelation happened while in the dregs of Hollywood at a show called "Metal School." I was initially excited about the show, and had begun the day with drinking and schmoozing at the upscale, glamorous, rooftop pool of the W Hotel. Not my usual day. Not my typical venue. But was I glad enough to be there, elated even to be at such a fancy pants hotel. Walking in, alone, I knew I didn't belong. What a pretentious joke. People living beyond their means, giving the illusion of grandeur to entice and impress others just like them. All of us judging and hating one another equally for reasons I'll never be able to understand. All of us wanting acceptance, recognition, praise, and receiving only glares of hate and disapproval. That evening, when the concert commenced, the small dank, crowded, smoky room boomed with 80's hair band metal rock. Men stepped straight out of the 80's and onto the stage. The crowd cheered as if these were actual rock gods and not "Joe Shmoe and Billy Bob Noname." Then the show began.

The exact moment I found clarity, I can't be certain. But I do remember these same aforementioned long haired men wearing bright tights that clung to their grotesquely out of shape bodies and silk scarves that begged to be freed from their life spent around the necks of their wrinkly gobble necks. The awful men asked women from the audience to come on stage,

with promises of brief stardom and fame. These beautiful women approached the stage, stars in their eyes as the rowdy crowd cheered and whistled. The band members berated the women, asking them to expose their breasts and asking them various degrading double entendre questions. If they didn't satisfy their inglorious requests, or if they somehow disappointed the band or the crowd, the band humiliated them, which, unfortunately, the women had already done to themselves. At some point during this parade of degradation of countless women, I slowly began to contemplate: "What the hell am I doing here? How did I get here? Who was I here for? Myself? How do I get out of here?" It was as though I was meant to be there to receive a divination of what my life was going to look like if I continued on this way.

I began to cry and shrink inside myself, ignoring the fact that I was in public. The feelings overpowered me and I couldn't keep them from escaping me. They were flooding out without consideration of who would see or what people must think of this girl, crying uncontrollably in the middle of a public bar, like a baby bird, abandoned for the first time in her nest and left alone. Until this moment, I had been ignoring the blatant, *screaming* feelings and clear-cut signs that I was not happy with every aspect of my current life. And in a flash, it all switched, like a light bulb bursting from a surge. Everything was overt and obvious and overwhelming.

After this realization, I began to unravel. I kicked my wastrel of a boyfriend out, I inadvertently got fired from both of my jobs, and moved back home to live in my parent's fifth wheel trailer parked below their house. While living there, I realized through a series of events that I am bipolar. Many things lead up to this discovery, and, although it happened gradually, it is by far the single most significant event that has ever happened in my life. While it is common for women to be diagnosed in their mid-20's, it took a long time to realize that this was why I was behaving the way I was. There they were, all the telltale signs of a mental disorder. I was drinking excessively, rarely eating and never sleeping. When I was manic, my misconception was that everything was blissfully sublime. I was productive for weeks, months even.

Up for hours, sometimes days, working tirelessly, believing I was making breakthroughs on how to change my life and cast away the shackles of my past. Yet I was blind to the obvious reality that people could barely stand to be around me. I would talk irrationally about things no one cared about, under the delusion that my audience was captivated and enthralled. I weighed next to nothing, forgetting to eat, too busy to be bothered by regular meals, the majority of my nutritional intake, sipped from the spout of a whiskey bottle. Not needing sleep, I could listen and connect to the message in music, as though I was hearing the words for the first time, and understanding them in a new way. I had time to read and write, I could research and could do all the things I'd always wanted to do. Except sleep. It's remarkable how little food and sleep a person needs to function. For a while anyway. All the while I was alone. Perilously alone. These manic episodes would last for weeks, turn into months, until I would slip into the other side of bipolar disorder. When I was low, my states of depression were despairing and heart wrenching, and I was inconsolable for long stretches of time. Too long. During these times, the sleep was not a problem. It was all there was. Sleep, drink. Sleep, drink. Cry. Cry. Cry. Weep. Weep. Weep. It was all there was. It seemed it was all there would ever be. I was locked away in a cave, surrounded by empty bottles and tears and my thoughts that I wanted to escape. No memory remained of that short time ago of the mania, when I had hope and happiness and a hint of optimism.

If it hadn't been for my mother, I don't know that I would have found the surface. I've seen psychiatrists since I was thirteen, a spirited youth you might say. Not one, but many different psychologists and psychiatrists, all desperately attempting to find a route to my evil. All failing. At twenty-six, I had a regular psychologist, not so much a person, but a pen and prescription pad essentially. We went to him together, my mom and I, and I would shade the truth with what I thought he needed to hear to get us through the grueling hour and he put little effort into what was actually swirling around in my psyche. My mom did some independent research and identified some undeniable characteristics that explained everything. We took this

newfound information to my psychologist and, God bless her heart, my *mother* diagnosed me as bipolar. The evidence was irrefutable. Through trial and error, quite a long exhausting era of pain, and what my psychologist called cocktails of prescriptions, I am now stably medicated and able to live a “sane” life.

I don’t dare go back to the days before medication for a paralyzing and crippling fear of it all unraveling. People diagnosed with bipolar disorder often do go off of their medication because they miss the natural high of when they are manic. I don’t miss the high. I fear the high. I fear the time in my life when I almost lost everything. It was so difficult, not only on me, but on everyone in my life. I almost lost everyone I love and I’ll never risk losing them again. I am rid of those that were detrimental to my growth and brought me nothing but sadness and grief. They’re gone. I’ve shaken them, like a dog shakes the rain from his back after a storm. I somehow managed to keep the people in my life that mean everything to me. I can’t lose them. There’s so much more to lose now.

That was almost five years ago. I am now working for the Arc of Ventura County, a day program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I have been there for over four years as the supervisor. I have an associates degree in Social and Behavioral Sciences, but I am back at Moorpark College, taking three more *transferable* classes so I can transfer to Channel Islands to further my career in psychology. I am fascinated with the field of psychology, not only because of the work I do with the special needs community, but largely because of my disorder. Some people say psychologists often have all the problems.

I am in a wonderful, loving relationship with an amazing and supportive man. Before this epiphany, my idea of “a man” was skewed. I can now clearly see the qualities that a man should possess and my boyfriend possesses them all. He’s kind and loving, he’s nurturing and selfless, he’s strong and gentle. Before this clarity, I didn’t see people for who they were, and often chose questionable characters as cronies. Those decisions may well be what ultimately lead me to where I am now. Each awful relationship, each destructive friendship, every person

I thought I desperately wanted to spend my time with, is now such a mind-boggling mystery to me. The people I surround myself with now are handpicked carefully, based on how much I can tolerate them, and the morals and values we both share. My parents nurtured me, embraced me in spite of my soul sucking sickness, and in essence nursed me back to health. They were there for me through the most difficult and most self-actualizing time of my life. I'll never be able to repay them. Without them, I don't know if I would have gotten through it.

Many of our lives change drastically throughout our lifespan. My life changed when I was twenty-six. I could have curled up and died, or continued on a self-destructive path. How we handle change is what defines us, what we do when that curve ball is thrown is what will determine how the game ends. I chose to push through in the face of adversity. I am not defined by my mental disorder. It is something that makes me who I am, but it is not all that I am. I don't tell many people that I am bipolar, not because I'm ashamed, but because I don't want it to define me. I am a woman of many things, and although it is a part of me, I don't want people to make excuses for me because of my disorder. We are people first. I am not my disorder. It is something I live with, but it is not my identity. I am so much more than that.

My only advice: don't lose whom you were in trying to find who you wish to become. Learn from everything you've done. It could be the key to your revelation. It's never too late to change, and you're never done growing and learning. Take in every experience, no matter how dark and depraved, and allow it to help you find your way.

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Nong Chai

We were out of cat food. Josephine meowed pleadingly as she looped around my ankles in an attempt to persuade me to lay down a fresh bowl. I walked upstairs, mindless, planning to ask my mom if she had stashed any. Josephine eagerly followed suit.

Walking up the stairs, I had a vague premonition that something was off. There is usually no evidence to make you feel this way, but some primal instinct deep in your gut tries to warn you. It's the sensation you get right before you hear bad news, or the deep, sullen feeling you wake up with before you head to school for an exam you didn't study for.

As I walked up those carpeted stairs, slowly trailing my fingertips along the wooden railing, there was nothing amiss. No primal instinct to prepare me for the threat coming my way. I heard the soft *thump, thump, thump* of Josephine running to beat me to the top of the stairs. I heard the digital *pew, pew, pew* of yet another round of some monster hunting game coming through the closed bedroom door of my older brother David's room. I continued down the hall with Josephine meowing hungrily at my feet, demanding to be fed that instant. I shushed her, and as I nonchalantly pushed open the door to my parents' room at the end of the hall, it didn't feel any different from any other day that I pushed open that exact same door in the exact same fashion. But in reality, that day was in fact very different from all the rest.

It was a quaint bedroom, not too big but not too small. Having recently moved to that house no more than half a year ago, there were still cardboard boxes against the empty, eggshell

walls, containing the decorations and memories that previously echoed our lives. Right between the room itself and the master bathroom was a small makeup area, a place my mom frequented. Below the mirror that stretched from one end of the wall to the next, it held her hundreds of creams, lotions, oils, and serums. There were also drawers upon drawers of old makeup products that my mom had always managed to acquire at a discount price. When I was younger, this place was my version of a Rite Aid makeup aisle.

There, standing near her beloved makeup area, I saw my mother on the phone. Her back was turned to me, and I saw her small, hunched over frame hiccuping and shivering with sobs. Her muffled whimpers reached my ears as I approached her, and I noticed her hand covering her mouth in an attempt to contain her weeping, but nothing could contain the overflow of tears rushing down her face. Her shoulder-length black hair fell forward as she swung her head low, and some strands stuck to her face, glued down by endless tears. Her dark eyes, the ones that I always pictured as joyful, encouraging, and strong, were clenched tightly shut, emphasizing the crow's feet and soft wrinkles that were stretched across her eyelids and temples like lightning. It was as if she thought that if she closed them tight enough, she could disappear altogether. Instantly, my heart sunk past the heels of my feet and seemed to fall all the way to the living room downstairs.

I didn't know what to do. I was lost as I listened to the muffled yet stern voice on the other end of the line. He was talking fast, almost like he was giving instructions. Even though the person on the other end couldn't see her, she only responded to the voice with frantic nods, as if uttering any words would have been pushed her over the edge. After what felt like an eternity, and when my mother had shed enough tears to thoroughly soak her blouse, the call ended, and she collapsed onto the bedroom floor. A complete wreck. She continuously repeated, "I knew it, I

knew this would happen” over and over again.

Inside me burned a flaming curiosity and a simultaneously chilling feeling: fear. There, kneeling on the pale green carpet below me, was my mother, so broken and so weak. Her cries were even louder now, and each crippling wail sliced through me like an icy blade.

I could tell she was struggling to tell me what was happening. She was torn between letting me in on something extremely important and equally devastating, and not wanting to say the words aloud. I realize now that the reason she struggled so much was because actually articulating those words meant that it would be real. And it couldn't have been real.

She took one last deep breath, and let it out shakily. She finally spoke under her breath, in her native Thai tongue, softly whispering the only thing that she physically and mentally could in a wavering, barely audible voice.

“Nong chai.”

Younger brother. This answered no questions. It only released an explosion of fireworks in my head, and question after question bounced around back and forth in my brain. Did something happen to one of my mom's brothers? They all lived in Thailand, and it could be a dangerous country. I had already lost one uncle in a car accident. Many others, citizens and tourists alike, had died from automobile accidents due to the treacherous roads. In addition, I know that some areas of the developing country were still recovering from a civil war.

It took a while for me to realize she was talking about *my* younger brother, and it was as if all the fireworks exploding in my head fizzled out into a deafening silence. “Your brother is in the hospital,” she whimpered, and for barely a second, she glanced up from the floor. And for the first time since walking into that bedroom on that Godforsaken day, I looked into her swollen, red, tired eyes and her piercing helplessness looked right back at me, and echoed within me.

Kenny was twelve years old. He was a popular, rowdy boy, and quite the ladies man at the local middle school. Many people often mistook us as twins, for, at the time, we both had very similar features. He had a round face topped off with a mess of fluffy black hair that he styled in a typical Justin Bieber fashion. His fair skin had a few dark freckles sprinkled irregularly across like constellations. Something that made him unique, different from me, David, and both my parents, were his eyes. They were a very unique color of brown with specks of blue and green in them. Although he never said it out loud, I know he was secretly very fond of them.

At the age of five, he had discovered his passion for motorcycle racing, introduced to him by my dad. I was also encouraged to try it out, but I was never good at it, and definitely no where near as good as Kenny. He not only loved it; he thrived at it. Even at his young age, he was already being sponsored by major motorcycle companies, such as Yamaha and Suzuki. He brought home first place trophies at least once a month. They littered his room on shelves and counters and decorated polished glass cases. In a few years, he planned on attending races in Europe, an honor only the best of the best were skilled enough to participate in. He even had his own Facebook fan page that still exists to this day. This was his future, his legacy, and ultimately, it became his end.

The date was March 1st of the year 2013. It was a late Friday night when Kenny and my dad packed up their things to leave for a racetrack in Bakersfield. It was another racing weekend, no different from any other. Winter was only just blossoming into spring, and I could tell it was still cold outside by the way he zipped up his token dark red hoodie. Just before he had to leave, my mom made him a strawberry smoothie, a drink he and I regularly enjoyed together. But it was time to leave, and as my dad rushed him out the door, he downed as much sweet, strawberry

goodness that he could, placed the half empty glass on the table, waved a lazy, rushed goodbye, and walked out the door.

That weekend, he had just beaten his fastest lap record and won the race, when his brakes malfunctioned. Although I didn't see the incident myself, my dad had an ever-growing collection of recordings from all my brother's races. This was the last one.

We all sat in a circle, and my dad warned me and David of its graphic contents, but I shook my head firmly. I had to see it. And so, right there in that hospital waiting room surrounded by my dad, brother, and many close family friends, we all watched the recording, focused yet dismal. In the background of the video, we heard the zooming of motorcycles coming closer and closer, taunting us like a far off thunderstorm, until it reached a crescendo and Kenny zipped across the screen. My dad's voice went from a joyful cheer to a panicked, "Oh shit," as my brother flew headfirst over the handlebars, and crashed onto the ground. The impact was so intense that it cracked his helmet all the way through to his skull. The recording fumbled and stopped, and just like that—instant coma.

The ironic thing is, the bike he was riding wasn't his. It was a motorcycle my dad had temporarily rented for him to ensure his safety.

That week, my parents were never home; they followed my brother around as he was moved around to different hospitals, sleeping on chairs outside his hospital room or next to his bed. My older brother and I went to school the very next day, where we had to push our little brother's fragile life to the back of our minds and instead focus on solving quadratic equations and analyzing Shakespeare. My dad would update his status on my brother's Facebook fan page. It was never good news.

It was March 11th 2018, a mere ten days after he had waved his last lazy goodbye, when

Kenny was declared brain dead.

I had initially discovered the news in the worst way imaginable; a Facebook post that my dad had posted onto his fanpage, in the middle of my Algebra II class. It was almost as if the world went grey, and voices and faces became blurred. No words can accurately describe the burst of emotions and thoughts exploding inside me, like an active volcano erupting simultaneously with an earthquake, as I ran in a crazed panic to the first person that I could find behind closed doors.

The unlucky winner was a school counselor, not a psychological counselor but one of the counselors that simply advised you on which classes to take or what colleges to apply to. She was a small, blonde lady, a little on the older side, and very kind. I had never seen her before in my life, and after that incident I never saw her again. I never even got her name as she silently wrapped her arms around me and held me tightly as I sobbed like a maniac into her shoulder, leaving trails of snot and wet stains all over my sleeves as I wiped them on my eyes and nose that seemed to become endless faucets.

My grandmother picked me and David up from school only minutes later. Incidentally, she was waiting right outside of the counselor room that I had ran to, pacing the floor with eyes that contained a knowing sadness in them. My brother stood there next to her, emotionless. He retained that same empty, emotionless exterior for quite a few years following that day.

An hour later, I sat next to the broken body of what was once my younger brother. I was wistfully playing with his toy motorcycles that surrounded him on the bed near his legs and arms. My grandmother approached me, put a hand on my shoulder, and said in a faltering voice, "Well, Kenny is going to be riding motorcycles in the sky now." It was said with such a heavy sorrow, but I instantly became angry at her. "No," I retorted, "he is NOT." I didn't have to look

at her to know how much those words hurt her. But still I continued, “He’s not dead, why are you all so STUPID?” and she wrapped her arms around me in a fruitless attempt to calm me.

After that I became angry at everyone around me. I tried to find someone to blame. I was angry at the doctors for saying he was dead when he wasn't. He was definitely alive and definitely fighting—why couldn't anyone see that? It felt too cruel to be true that the one thing he excelled at and enjoyed the most is what took away his life. Again and again I asked the nurses if they were sure, if there was absolutely no way, not even a sliver of a possibility that my brother could actually still be alive. But they always responded with the same pitiful response.

Most of all, I was angry at my brother, for leaving when so many jokes between us were still left uncracked, words left unsaid, video games left unplayed, and for our last goodbye to be meaningless and fleeting.

It was March 12th 2018; Kenny was pulled off life support. There, surrounded by dozens upon dozens of friends and family standing shoulder to shoulder in the too small hospital room, David’s hand on my shoulder, my dad’s hand stretched across Kenny’s chest, and my mom’s face burrowed into the hospital bed sheets, I stared intently on a scab located right over Kenny’s jugular vein. The scab pulsed vigorously, like the blood pumping beneath it knew, and was trying to jerk my brother awake. But it was a losing battle, and I watched as the scab went from a powerful pulse, to a straining few jumps, to a silent rest as his body finally gave up on him.

That was nearly five years ago. Over the course of that time my family has broken and healed again and again until we had found some sort of individual internal peace, even if it's just a little. I would be lying if I said we have all since completely healed from this incident. But even if there are some broken pieces still missing, one thing that can be certain is that we have grown from this. I now realize that time is precious, every single moment you spend with

someone could possibly be the last. It's easy to ignore that fact, and to assume you will see your friend tomorrow or your sister next holiday. It's easy to convince yourself that you have a lot of time to do something you want to. But that's not reality, and there will be no primal gut instinct to remind you of that fact. Don't leave arguments unresolved. Don't forget to laugh with friends and family. Don't neglect to tell someone, "I love you".

My brother was twelve years old. But I have to remember that I'm still alive.

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22 March 2017

Behind The Window

“I’ll need to take your shoelaces.” The intake procedure is familiar. They take your shoelaces, belt, the drawstring from your pants, hoodie, anything you can use to hang yourself with during your stay. It’s my second time. This time it’s the psych ward at the Northridge city hospital. The nurse in charge of my intake takes my cell phone and shoelaces and has me exit the nurses station and meet her at the station window. I go to the plexiglass window now separating us, and she gives me the number to my room. “If you need more bed linens or towels, just let one of us know.” I nod and head down the wide linoleum-floored hall to the right of the station, dotted with rooms on either side. Besides the linoleum squeaks every so often from my now ill-fitting sneakers, the hall is quiet. Arriving at my room, I’m relieved to find that I don’t have a roommate. I’m not in the best mood for making conversation and introductions.

Most people fear landing themselves in places like where I’d be staying for the next good two weeks or so. The thought of staying in a mental ward fills them with horror (fed by images and scenes from movies perhaps); but maybe it’s because most see it as a place where “crazies” and “lunatics” end up, and what could be more terrifying than having anything in common with them? Strangely, I never felt that fear, even the first time. Instead of fear, I felt a kind of relief. As I did then, I feel a similar relief come over me this time around.

Two identical beds stand against one side of the room I’d been assigned. To the right of each, stands a small nightstand in wood laminate with drawers. As they usually are in these

places, the furnishings are minimal and plain, only to serve the most basic of functions. The floor of the room is linoleum too, and a kind of sterile quality hangs about the space. I'm pleased to find there's a window. It has a kind of window seat extending out of the wall. I look out and I see the street outside. There's sidewalk and a tree now and again. Looking out of a window from a place like that feels different from looking out of any other window. You no longer feel like a part of the world that's outside. Behind the window is one world, and outside, another that suddenly feels remote, detached, and completely apart from the one inside.

I take a look at the bathroom in the corner of the room. Aside from the public restroom toilet and small sink, there's a small shower within the tiled walls and floor. Uncharacteristic of the space, I notice the faint worn decals of pineapples lining the tiles of the doorway. I take the bed near the window and begin to settle in.

I'm woken from a nap by what sounds like a one-way conversation. I get up and groggily peer out into the hall and realize my room is next to the pay phone. I decide to leave my room and make my way back up the hall to the rec room, across from the nurses station. The rec room also serves as a dining hall. In a corner there's a sort of kitchen with a fridge, sink, and cabinets(no oven of course). The fridge is stocked with bottled water and plain turkey sandwiches individually wrapped with packets of mayo and mustard in case we get hungry between meals. "They stock it with pudding too, but I've never seen any," Nicole¹ tells me. Nicole is a patient and showing me around. "I swear someone on our floor is hoarding them." The names of the people described in this essay have been changed to protect their personal identity.

Nicole looks about in her late teens. Her body is small and thin, even bony. She would look almost frail if it weren't for her eyes. They appear hardened and a touch cynical. Her hair is

dark, almost black, short, tied back in a low ponytail. She has freckles but pale skin, and her face looks too worn for someone her age. We go and sit at a table and indifferently watch the news on the TV hanging from the ceiling at one corner. At the table is Greg and Jeffrey. Greg is an older gentleman, maybe in his early sixties. He's got salt and pepper hair, wears funky glasses and has an earring. "So why are you in here?" He asks me. I shift uncomfortably and look down at the table, "I slit my wrists." "To kill yourself?" Greg asks astonished. "No, her cat got the wrong bag of cat mix," Jeffrey says turning away from the TV and rolling his eyes. I laugh. Jeffrey looks in his early thirties. He's slender and flamboyant, vibrant, despite looking like he needs a shave. He gets up from the table and heads over to the full length windows of the rec room facing another part of the hospital. Nicole gets up and joins him.

The funny thing about these places is nobody inquires about the things we normally do anywhere else. No 'what do you do for a living?' or 'Are you married? Kids?', 'Where do you go to school?' Nobody asks, nor does it seem important. The differences in age don't seem to matter either, interactions lacking in the stiff politeness one would have speaking to someone older or the shielding aloof manner an elder would show to a younger person. I hear Jeffrey and Nicole laughing impishly and look over at them. Jeffrey is using the curtains at one of the windows as if they were hanging on a stage and mimicking a striptease burlesque number, throwing his head back and comically kicking into the air. The windows face another wing of the hospital where you can see nurses and doctors weaving in and out of patient rooms. Two of the staff are standing and watching him, laughing. A doctor exiting a room looks over to see what the commotion is about and raises an eyebrow as he quickly continues to walk to his next charge. "Give them the shoulder!" Nicole shouts. I laugh with them.

Looking back, I ask myself how I could even begin to answer Greg's question. It wasn't a

simple yes or no—an answer that wasn't clear even to me. Was what I did really to end my life? Dealing with a chronic major depressive disorder that began to surface around the age of twelve, undiagnosed until the age of seventeen, I know what it's like dealing with the confines of a mind that won't do what you want it to do—so much more confining than being locked up in a hospital or mental ward could ever be. You can get out of these places, not your mind. In a drunken state, facing my mind's tyranny at the time, I only wanted relief, a pause, from this malady within me that wouldn't shake off, that I just couldn't “snap out of,” as some have asked me to do, as though I could snap the marrow out from my bones.

Early in the mornings at the ward the nurses come and check your vitals. You're free to go back to bed afterwards, but they encourage you to take part in activities on the schedule, especially the groups. They're tasked with doing rounds throughout the day to do checks, and you see them walk by your door, peer in and move on. The doors aren't allowed to be closed, and other patients aren't allowed in your room. I want breakfast the next morning and get out of bed. I check the schedule written on the whiteboard hanging next to the nurses station. Breakfast at 7:45. Hospital food is pretty gross; everything is a blander, water-downed version of itself. But you get used to it, and you can't complain, considering it's three meals a day, on the dot, that you don't have to cook yourself—though everyone agrees they can't wait to get out and have a decent cup of coffee. Medication is at 9:00 am, and we line up at the nurses station. Lunch is at noon. Patio break is at 2:00. Dinner at 5:00. Night meds at 9:00 pm, and we line up at the nurses station again. In between there are various groups, and in the evening there's visiting hours.

The patio area is reached by taking the fire escape stairwell down to the first floor. There's no smoking on the patio breaks as the hospital is a smoke-free campus. The nurses give out nicotine patches. On patio break, a nurse accompanies us, and we line up in front of the door

to the stairwell. The nurse does a headcount. We follow behind her. I see Jeffrey mimic pushing her down the stairs and laugh to myself. Outside there's a swimming pool with pool chairs on one side. I wonder why there's a swimming pool and what the nurse could possibly do if someone were to attempt to drown themselves. I sit off to the side away from the others under a tree in some shade; the sun looks glaring and feels imposing. My mind starts to wander and run over the events leading up to my arrival, and I must've looked troubled. "What are you doing all the way over there?" Surprised, I look up. Jeffrey motions over to me to come sit with them. The sun feels uncomfortable, but I decide it's better to be in company than alone with my thoughts. Laying out on the pool chairs, we take in the sun, in our sweatpants and ill-fitting shoes.

Jeffrey bursts into the rec room the next day with a nurse trailing after him. " *Who* let her up here?!" He demands. "She must've forced herself in," he says more to himself than the nurse. "She *had* a visitors pass, Jeffrey," the nurse answers pleadingly. "I told you not to tell her where I was." Flustered, the nurse implores with him, "But she's your only mother." "You can have her!" He answers, in his sassy, comical way, ignoring her. He lands himself in a chair across from me at the table and pulls out a pudding cup. He hands it to me with a smile. Vanilla. "Where did you find it?" I ask surprised, more by his gesture than his having found it. "There's a lady. I think she hoards them." He sprints up, "I'll get you a spoon." Nicole pops her head into the rec room and asks if we're going to group. Jeffrey is searching for a spoon through the cabinets with one of the other patients aiding him—she indicates they're high up, bringing a chair and stepping up on it to retrieve a box of plastic utensils. "I don't think they want to see you standing on a chair." Nicole says jokingly. "Where's the rope?!" Jeffrey yells. I decide I'll go to group that day.

In group, the group counselor passes out each of us a worksheet. "THINGS I FEEL

GOOD ABOUT” in large letters heads the page. Under it are numbered boxes: Box 1. My Biggest Success; Box 2. Something I’m Proud Of; Box 3. Compliments Received; Box 4. Something I Did To Help Someone; Box 5. Something I Enjoy Doing; Box 6. Something About Me I Like. On the back of the paper, she has us write, 7. Something People Would Be Surprised To Know About Me. After some time, she has us go around the room and share some of things we wrote in our boxes. Greg introduces himself. “Well, I backed up Neil Young in my crazy days. But I took a lot of drugs too.” He shares his experiences at Woodstock and says he’s obtained a doctorate. Nicole plays the bass and says she likes helping people and animals. “I really love everyone, I really do. And I love food.” Jeffrey shares that he’s a flight attendant and that he once revived a woman on a flight. He’s into new languages and cultures and used to be a competitive skater. “Lieutenant Dan was once on my flight!” he adds. “I know a Lieutenant Dan,” says Nicole matter-of-factly. Nancy, the patient who aided Jeffrey earlier with the spoons, says she used to be a bikini dancer, skipped three and half grades, and has a fiancé. “I once nursed eight malnourished puppies back to health,” she adds. I mention that I really care about animals too—not because they’re cute and fluffy or whatever but more because I hate unnecessary suffering. “Exactly,” says Nicole nodding.

In the rec room, there’s a couple of good-sized bookshelves with various books; some I recognize but most I’ve never heard of. Some of the compartments house board games and puzzles. A table near one of the shelves has baskets filled with mismatched crayons and coloring pages. Off to one corner is an old piano, out of tune with keys that stick. In the evening the bustle of the day calms down, and we sit around, chat, and watch the evening news and wait for night meds. Somehow the topic of Halloween comes up. “What are you gonna be this year?” Nicole asks Jeffrey. “Last year I was the Superstar Girl on SNL,” he says. “We were walking and I

tripped over a flowerbed, and I got up and was like, ‘Superstar!’” he says imitating Molly Shannon’s character in his theatrical way. “This year I’m gonna be the Progressive Lady. Discount!”

It would be Jeffrey’s day to check out not long after. Nicole followed shortly after, too. On check out day, she sat in the rec room with a paper bag of her things and waited for her taxi. The PA system calls her name. “Lord, take me to Jesus,” she says dryly as she gets up and gathered her things. We say our goodbyes, and I see her disappear into the nurses station. I was sad to see them go, but glad they were getting out. I did eventually get a roommate and would meet many other patients during my stay, young and old; some I’d get to know better—some of their stories so tragic—others just passing through. Even though it’s been four years, I still remember each of them and hope that wherever they are now, they’ve made peace with their struggles and are carrying on and making it work in the world outside. I am too.

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12 August 2019

Desperado

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses? Come down from your fences, open the gate. It may be rainin', but there's a rainbow above you. You better let somebody love you. Before it's too late...

—The Eagles, *Desperado*

The first time I heard this song, I clearly remember what I was doing. It was around midnight when I was casually browsing YouTube. Thanks to YouTube's autoplay feature, I had stumbled across a classic American song, Desperado by the Eagles. The first note struck me by complete surprise. A single word, like a rock thrown into a still pond, unsettled my fleeting thoughts and prompted me to take a moment's pause.

As I keenly listened to the lyrics of the song, I saw a story being shaped. The story of a lone, driven boy leaving everything behind him to throw himself into a world of self-indulgence. Slowly, as the boy's lifestyle and choices drove him into solitude and despair, he saw his worldly ambitions consume him, driving him to the edge of pain and hunger. Like the parable of the prodigal son from the Bible, this all-too-similar story of a person led astray by their desires resonated within me. And in that story, I saw myself.

It was the summer going into my junior year. I had just completed my sophomore year, earning a cumulative 4.7 GPA and near-perfect AP and SAT subject test scores. I had also signed myself up for a SAT prep class at a local prep academy in addition to participating in multiple volunteer/music/academic activities. Such was the norm for many ambitious students at this school, where the seemingly friendly and laid back attitudes of the students were belied by the fiercely competitive academic culture.

Waking up daily for “zero period classes”, you would reluctantly carry your feeble, emaciated body, the countless nights of stress forming dark streaks under your eyes as your weary feet trudged along the solid rock pavement. Even the slightest breeze would send your body stumbling along with the freshly cut grass back into the warm, inviting presence of the library. Upon reaching the threshold of the class, you would try, as discreetly as your feet would allow you, to slip into your uncomfortable seat. The chemistry teacher, who tries not to notice your painfully obvious entrance, waves you off to collect homework. Such was the morning routine of my chronically sleep-deprived life.

Occasionally, amidst all of the undulating murmur in the classroom, you would pick up the buzzword score-the magic word that would subsequently pique the criticism (or awe) of many in the room. “How’d you do on that test?” they would ask, the plain question drifting into the noisy classroom like a single faint note in a drowning sea of chords. Its weight was felt by every student at the school especially during finals season. The aftermath of the exams served as a testament to this. Students would rush over to their friends and teachers, comparing answers and discussing questions they were unsure of, the uneasiness still lingering in the thin air. Like those campfires where kids would listen in horror as they eagerly passed around ghost stories, I was gripped by this invisible force. Only now do I realize this pressure fueled my obsessive

desire to fiercely study not because I genuinely wanted to learn, but because I wanted to showcase my impressive trophy case of academic achievements to universities. During this uneasy time transitioning into a junior, I had already firmly established my existence as a lone wolf, enjoying comfort in the solitary absence of my peers. I became what psychologists coined the “obsessive perfectionist”. The perfectionist reigned full control over their future and others around them. I wasn’t always a hyper-competitive, frantic student; in fact, I was quite the opposite. The former self you would find was an extrovert: playful, assertive, never afraid to make mistakes and persevering to the end.

That changed however, once I began to compare myself to others. I saw countless resumes of outstanding students who got admitted — and rejected from the highly coveted ivy league universities. Those impeccable SAT scores, numerous awards proudly boasted by their parents, and extracurricular activities that distinguished the “well-rounded student” from your average nerd. What they had, I wanted. What they achieved, I desperately longed for. This shortsighted and foolishly optimistic thinking assured me that my future would fall perfectly in place like a carefully stacked array of tetris blocks. I would get into x university, precede to pursue y passion for the rest of my life, and land a great job at z company, became the resounding motto of my high school life.

Soon, my schedule became filled with activities. United Nations mock debate? Check. Performing at university’s philharmonic orchestra? Check. Playing in my high school’s tennis team and immediately after volunteering at a local hospital? You bet. This lifestyle seldom left me with any free time as I relentlessly chased an elusive dream- an idol I worshiped in hope of one day achieving the same success they had.

They would have never seen it coming. Rumors abound, as my friends wondered where I had gone. Overly ambitious, I took 5 AP courses in my junior year. Like a frantic Black Friday shopper salvaging as many products they could fit into their cart, I overloaded my life with courses. Exhaustion hit hard enough soon, and I started out with a C in my AP Literature class. I panicked. “It’s all over” I told myself, discouraged over the fact that my prospect at my dream school was over. As a last-ditch effort to redeem myself, I transferred to another high school and eventually dropped out.

The next two years went by in a blur. I became a hermit, secluding myself to my room, tortured by my lonely thoughts, struggling to cope with these foreign feelings of embarrassment, regret, anger, and sorrow. That night, I cried and cried and cried.

The reality slowly settled in. I had conceded my very life to the dedication of entering a prestigious university only to lose sight of who I was and why I was doing the things I was doing. “Why am I putting myself through all of this? To earn the approval of my friends and family? To satisfy my own ego? To get into my dream school? Such is the plight of many young adults transitioning into an important stage of their lives, and at the root of teenage angst lie these existential questions. And here I was amid all this crisis- torn, conflicted, and uncertain about whether I was doing the right things for the right purpose. Tears came flowing out of my eyes. It was such a cathartic moment. The combined feeling of regret, despair, and relief all came pouring forth as I kneeled in a dark and empty room praying to God about my past, a past I had solemnly vowed to forget ever since that day. I embraced my mother, who was also holding back tears, as I felt a palpable rush of warm relief.

I remember that day as an incredibly life-defining moment. I had a simple, yet profound epiphany: that I knew absolutely nothing about life. I was used to feeling smart and accepted,

believing that my future was in the firm grasp of my hand and that with the snap of my fingers, my future would materialize into the tangible fruits of my labor. At the same time, I struggled with another realization that was difficult for me to grasp. I felt... liberated. I felt like the shackles of college admissions had been released, and for the first time in a long time, I took a breath of fresh air. Weirdly enough, leaving school for years reignited my intellectual curiosity. It sparked a newfound sense of determination. More than necessity, I felt compelled to change my life. So now, more than ever, I know what I want to do.

It's time for me to spread my tattered wings, farther, further, out to the open sky....and begin anew, ending my aimless wandering.

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12 September 2019

My Fight for Education

My dad knows many languages but he is most fluent in yelling. It's mentally exhausting growing up in a toxic environment with an overly controlling father. My dad is strict about the most unnecessary things like connecting our phone screens to the T.V., for example. Why? Because it gives us a little bit of freedom and control, which are traits he hates with fiery passion. I was able to handle small restrictions like these, and I wanted to, because I wanted to live a life with less yelling and more peace. However, here is where my dad takes it too far. He has a notion ingrained in his brain that college is not a place for Muslim women. That might be the norm in Afghanistan's underdeveloped cities, but not here in America—the land of the free. I was born to a dictator. Not really, but it sure felt like it because I grew up with an astronomically strict dad. In fact, he is notorious in the Muslim community for his authoritarian parenting style. Although he has never laid a hand on me, I've been subjected to emotional abuse for the past five years. Now, I know this sounds like I had a very depressing upbringing, but besides the whole women-having-no-rights-especially-to-education part of it, I had a very fun childhood—one involving world travel, frequent outings, and happy family memories. Although I resent it, my father's strictness made me the strong, optimistic woman I am today.

It's 1988. My dad leaves Afghanistan and moves to Pakistan for two years where he meets my mom. He immigrates to the United States, but he brings something from Afghanistan

with him, something that customs can't confiscate: a misogynistic anti-female education mindset. Shortly afterwards, I am born.

As I progressed through my elementary and middle school years, my dad's condemnation of education steadily increased, and by the time I reached high school, it skyrocketed. High school is when students need to take their academics more seriously in preparation for college. Without my dad's support, each day was a struggle. You know those movie scenes when a teenager pretends to be asleep and then sneaks out through the window to attend a party she isn't allowed to go to? For me, that "party" is a volunteering opportunity or a scholarship award ceremony. Just like "Voldemort" is he who must not be named, *oops*, the word "college" was the word not to be named in my house or trouble would ensue. I have two younger brothers, and since they are male, they are showered with the freedoms that my mom, sisters, and I were barred from. It breaks my heart that my dad is invested in their education, but he couldn't care less about mine. *Why doesn't he care about MY happiness? Why is he opposed to MY success?* Of course, I love seeing my brothers thrive, but my dad's favoritism and misogyny is something that I have no tolerance for at all.

Ever since my childhood, my father has been instilling into my brain that I am forbidden to go to college. He believes in a notion that Muslim women shouldn't receive higher education or work and must become housewives immediately after high school. However, the more my dad prohibits it, the more I strive to further my education. From kindergarten till now, I have had a love for knowledge; thus, education is my top priority. While other parents encourage their children to excel in school, my father does the opposite. He instructs me to take the lowest classes and to not participate in any extracurricular activities. I know several students my age

whose parents beg or force them to pursue their college education, but they just don't care. If my dad was like this in some alternate universe, I would've dashed across the grassy field into college's arms with tears running down my face. Every time I left my room, my dad would know. He works from home and my room is next to his home office, which has a clear view of the stairs. I challenged myself throughout high school by enrolling in Advanced Placement and honors classes, participating in several clubs, performing community service, applying for scholarships, and so on. But, I did so secretly. While my peers would secretly do drugs or have boyfriends, I had to secretly be of service to my community, secretly win awards and scholarships, and secretly join school clubs, secretly take rigorous courses, and secretly study all so that I could secretly develop into my dad's kryptonite: a well-educated woman. No matter how many times my father lectures me and growls, "Only do the bare minimum or else," I can't be satisfied with anything knowing that I haven't tried my best. With this determination to go above and beyond, I have *never* received a grade lower than an A. That's something I'm proud of given that my home is a hothouse for anti-female education.

Now you might be wondering, if college was forbidden for me, then why am I currently in my second year of college? After my older sister graduated high school, we fought for this right. We knew the day would come in which we had to stand up to our dad, and we dreaded it, but it had to be done. We knew we couldn't get where we wanted if we didn't put our foot down and take a step forward first. Us "rebels" had to fight for what we believed in. Days of heated arguments, yelling, and tears followed. I typed a three-page persuasive letter sternly informing my dad that my sister and I will go to college whether he likes it or not. I gave him an ultimatum: "Give us your blessing and we will involve you in the process or say no and we will move out to

go to college, and our family of nine will be broken forever.” *Oh no! Independence! That’ll scare him.* My dad likes being the decision-maker, so even though I knew my sister and I were going to find a way to go to college regardless of his answer, I made it seem like he was the one giving permission for it to happen. *Smart.* He gave us the silent treatment for a couple of days. Then, the impossible happened: he said yes. But don’t be mistaken; the yes didn’t mean everything was rainbows and lollipops. We still didn’t have his support for working towards a career because “Muslim women shouldn’t work,” but I’ll fight that battle another time.

You might also be wondering if our situation was so bad, why didn’t we move out? Trust me, we considered it. But, moving out meant breaking apart our family and being shunned from my dad and his ten siblings for disobeying our father. Even my Islamic studies teacher offered us her home for shelter. That says a lot because my dad often used Islam to justify his ideology, but Islam actually supports women’s education and puts women on a pedestal. There’s even a saying that explains how God is first, then the prophets, then the mother, then the father. But, back in Afghanistan, several so-called religious men practice their own version of Islam and make up the idea that women have no right to education, and my dad is one of them. My sister and I had to decide between obeying our father’s wishes, which meant us being married off after high school or pursuing higher education and securing a better life for ourselves. Obviously, we chose the latter.

It’s difficult to have a father who doesn’t support my college education, but I’m doing the best that I can to pursue it. And each time my dad throws me an obstacle, I remind myself of my philosophy: *Stay positive. Work hard. Make it happen.* Because my dad would not support me

financially in college, I had to start at a community college before transferring and hope that financial aid and my new job as a Writing Center tutor will help me with finances.

An unknown author said, “Look for something positive in every day even if some days you have to look a little harder.” That’s what I did. I’ve endured many hardships throughout my upbringing because of my dad’s anti-female education ideology. It made daily life a struggle. I constantly felt frustrated, discouraged, scared, worried, and resentful. Over time, however, I learned the importance of hard work, optimism, and hope. With this mindset and God, I overcame the biggest barrier in my life. Now, I’m in college, and I’m ironically pursuing a career in the very field that had been my household taboo: education. When I finally graduate with my master's, I'll reminisce of my younger self crying under the covers with an educational dream. I'll put my hand on her shoulder and as we look into each other's tear-filled eyes, I'll whisper with a smile, "We did it.”

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Love, Hate and Nazis

Love has always been a productive muse for artists and authors. It comes in at a close second to the ponderings of hatred. And often times the two can be so closely related that they are almost inseparable, both having a very similar level of passion. Thoughts become confusing when passions run high. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T.S. Eliot and "Daddy" by Sylvia Plath are prime examples of the art that comes from the confusion in passion. If Eliot had lived for one more year he might just have been able to read Plath's poem and if he had, Eliot would surely have had some passion about it. Due to the diction, technical ability and the power of the subject matter, Eliot would have surely appreciated Plath's "Daddy".

Sylvia Plath faces a lot of heavy emotions in her poem "Daddy". The persona (seemingly autobiographical) is the daughter of a brute of a German man from some commonly named town in Poland that has been ravaged by the effects of war. Her tone throughout is that of a perpetually hurting victim of the Nazi presence in the world. On the surface it seems as though the poem is a literal relationship of the speaker to her father. Another way to view it is as an analogous comparison of Plath's view of her father to that of the Polish people's view of the Fuhrer, Hitler. She ties all the themes presented to her back round with the use of German words and terms, like "Ach, Du," "Ich," and "Luftwaffe" (15, 27, 42). The poem was written in 1966 when about that time the use of thought provoking German themes would have went over very well with most any reader and the same might have gone for Eliot as well.

T.S. Eliot was no stranger to the idea of passion. In his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot evoked the well used theme of love in a slightly different light. The

persona is assumably Mr. Prufrock. Prufrock is torn at the idea of love, questioning many aspects repeatedly as the poem progresses. He begins by accepting and embracing the secrecy and ambiguity that goes along with the start and continuation of a relationship. Further on in the poem he ponders how to express love through words by asking “how should I begin?” (line 59). Eliot then ties the idea of love to that of time with imagery of aging. As the speaker sees himself aging he wonders “would it have been worth it, after all” (line 99). He ends up hinting at love being a dream, where once you are woken up from the dream by reality you end up drowning. Eliot couples the concept of questioning the aspects of love with the free form structure of the poem. The “stream of consciousness” feel puts light on the inward pondering of a man at the edge of confusion. The confusion found in the passion of love. This man is also pondering the struggle of how dedicating time may or may not be worth the trouble. This is the similar ground that love and hate have, and thus similar ground for these poems.

With his love song as an example, Eliot’s tone throughout the poem can really shed light on what Eliot’s personality very well may be. He can be seen as a man who loves the inner workings of the human mind shown by the speaker’s constant questioning and repetition of ideas. Also, Eliot’s poem shows how comfortable he is with the confusion that comes with passionate emotions. You see how emotion baffles Prufrock more than the future might, he is so sure of the future but not so sure of what road love will take. This sheds light on how Eliot feels about how the future in general is a more easily predictable aspect of life compared to that of love, or passion for that matter.

Passion is the common ground in both Eliot’s and Plath’s poems and both are very strong in this subject matter. Plath’s poem, as well as Eliot’s, is dipped heavily in the confusion hatred brings. Where the hatred present throughout is for someone who is supposed to be there for, protect and even love the speaker. And though she has love for him, holding on to this for the majority of her life, the confusion between the love and hate almost brings her to commit suicide to “get back, back, back to you” (line 59) as the speaker puts it. The confusion in this passionate state is definitely shown to be relatable to Eliot. At one point Prufrock is frightened

in having foreseen death “hold[ing] my coat, and snicker[ing]” (line 85) and he realizes that death is waiting for him if he follows loves certain path or not. Both speakers in the poems see how passion leads to death, either naturally or artificially, causing both to question what they have known before. Eliot and Plath both use death as a turning point in their poems that lead them to their conclusions. This similarity shows that Eliot would have enjoyed Plath’s poem.

Even though similarity in passion is reason enough Eliot to appreciate a kindred heart, technicality is similarly solid reason. Both poets use repetition in their poems to reiterate ideas, solidify imagery and to show importance. To really inlay her gypsy background, the speaker of “Daddy” associates it by repeating, “my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack” (line 39) because tarot cards are a tool for gypsy fortune telling. Eliot uses the same element to really push Prufrock’s indecision over love saying, “ ‘Do I dare?’ and ‘Do I dare?’ ”(line 38). Though Eliot uses the concept of repetition quite a bit more than Plath, the fact that she uses it in a similar fashion has got to win some points for her in Eliot’s book.

Another technical ability displayed in Plath’s poem is the concept of allusion. Where he deeply references the contents of specific literature Plath references the title of Hitler’s book by title alone. What she does instead throughout her poem is allude to physical places through the speaker,s travels of the German and Polish regions. Also, to enrich imagery of the Tyrol snow by comparing them to the “clear beer of Vienna” (line 36). Plath went one step past a simple allusion by using it for the purpose of imagery which Eliot did very little of in his poem. Eliot used allusion to bridge small thought processes of Prufrock together like being able to see how his story ends but that he isn’t a prophet like John the Baptist. Which this allusion ended up tying aging to death and death to the uncertainty of love. Eliot even opened his poem with a direct quote from Inferno, the first part of the Divine Comedy. Both poets have very solid technical ability that they use in similar fashions, Eliot would have greatly appreciated the similarities in these abilities.

Prufrock came to life with the words Eliot used to create him. With Eliot’s mix of high and low diction he created a character that is relatable with his sparse 5 dollar words

like “etherised” (line 3). He shows off a somewhat high vocabulary but pairs that with the everyday vernacular for a man of his time. Eliot’s sentence structure really shows the struggle within a man’s mind. Plath on the other hand did not use a lot of high diction. She did, however, use very well placed low diction. To express the frustration with things related to fuhrers and Germans one needs to use the German language and slang, which Plath did well despite the speaker referring to the German language as a trap of sorts for her tongue. Plath’s use of diction really paints a picture of how anger stunts your thoughts and can prevent functional expression. This can be seen by her brash, open ended references and metaphors. Things like “Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,” (line 8) make sense to the author in the moment but is left to more interpretation for the reader. Plath’s use of diction that holds a sense of acrimony ends up continuing the view that passion confuses the one inflicted by the emotions. Similar to Eliot, Plath created a character in the throes of confusion. This ability to create a character through diction would not have been overlooked by Eliot. He would have respected the ability she possessed and used.

The confusion in passion really ties these two poets together. They express strongly through their characters the effects of love and hate and the path that those emotions lead us on. Plath’s use of diction that is different but compliments that of Eliot’s, her similar technical expressions and the similar power of the subject matter really lead one to believe that if Eliot were to read Plath’s poem he would have respected and enjoyed it. He may have even had Prufrock write her a love poem.

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19 September 2015
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Prescribing To the Heights: Heathcliff in a System of Oppression

Many people may argue what the driving-force behind the plot of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is, for there are endless possibilities given the complexities of the characters and the situations they find themselves in. While reading this novel and studying Heathcliff's character, it had occurred to me that Heathcliff's role in the system of oppression he finds himself in is indeed a catalyst to the plot of *Wuthering Heights*. One may ask themselves: "why did Heathcliff become such an awful person?" One answer is that a passionate, burning love within him clouded any decency he may have had, thus leading him to become obsessed with the notion of revenge. However, I argue that Heathcliff's actions throughout the novel are more influenced by his adhesion to Paulo Freire's model of oppression, which is thoroughly explained in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. From Freire's perspective, Heathcliff's entire essence throughout the novel is simply representative of his adherence to the prescriptive model of oppression that he finds himself in – both as the oppressed as well as the oppressor.

Before diving into Heathcliff's relation to Freire's "prescriptive" model of oppression, let us examine the factor of dehumanization, which is a crucial cog in the overall "gear" of oppression, if you will. Freire wrote the following in the first chapter of his book: "Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (44). In other words, the process of dehumanizing an individual instills within them a warped view on how to become a "better" person, as well as a barrier to the prospect of becoming a self-actualized individual in the world. Freire also states that "self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion

the oppressors hold of them” (63). In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s youth is almost entirely characterized by his experiences of dehumanization within the Earnshaw household, and his ill-treatment in early life is his first immersion into the system of oppression.

Within the first few days of young Heathcliff’s residency at Wuthering Heights, he is referred to as a “gipsy brat” and a “dog”. Both Hindley and Cathy Earnshaw are almost disgusted by Heathcliff’s presence, and as Nelly Dean explains: “they entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room” (Bronte 52). Nelly Dean treats Heathcliff as an animal with no identity, thus referring to him as “it”. Hindley Earnshaw is perhaps the harshest to Heathcliff, calling him a “beggarly interloper” and an “imp of Satan”, wishing his horse would kick in his brains and end his life (Bronte 54). When Isabella Linton first encounters Heathcliff, she exclaims the following: “frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa” (Bronte 62). There are endless examples of people dehumanizing Heathcliff, attempting to convince him that he is truly sub human and animalistic. Hindley eventually lowers Heathcliff’s social status even more, and as Eagleton wrote in his Marxist criticism of *Wuthering Heights* – “he is reduced as Hindley’s laborer to a mere physical instrument...” (401). This act of lowering Heathcliff’s status in society is one of the first instances of dehumanization, which will inevitably place Heathcliff in a system of oppression. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire claims that dehumanization of the oppressed is what perpetuates the cycle oppression, and that “because it (dehumanization) is a distortion of becoming more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so” (44). This statement is upheld as a truth in *Wuthering Heights*, given Heathcliff’s oppressiveness in the latter part of the novel.

There is no doubting the fact that Heathcliff wished to seek revenge on those individuals who had dehumanized him. However, Heathcliff wreaks havoc on almost every main character in the novel, including those individuals who have truly never wronged him, such as Isabella, young Cathy, and his son Linton. This is where Heathcliff’s “prescription” to the system of oppression comes in. As Freire writes in his novel, “... almost always, during the

initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'" (45). Freire simply states that "the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor" (47). In following this model of oppression, Heathcliff prescribes himself to the ways of the oppressor because becoming the oppressor is the only way he knows how to become more fully human.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff's transformation from the oppressed to the oppressor aligns with Freire's description of the prescriptive quality of oppression. In attempting to seek revenge on Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton, Heathcliff takes extreme measures and does not give anyone any mercy. As Eagleton stated, "... there is freedom for Heathcliff neither within society nor outside it" (399). Facing this lack of freedom within the system of oppression, Heathcliff decides to advance his social status and in turn become oppressive. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire states that "it is not to become free that they (the oppressed) want agrarian reform, but in order to acquire land and thus become landowners – or more precisely, bosses over the other workers" (46). This is particularly true when analyzing Heathcliff's situation. Not only does he buy up residency at Wuthering Heights, but he also becomes an intimidating master to his servants and child alike. Also, Heathcliff does not seek freedom for himself; rather, he suppresses the freedom of others in his long-term act of vengeance. In his literary criticism, Eagleton states that Heathcliff "amasses a certain amount of cultural capital in his two years' absence in order to shackle others more effectively, buying up the expensive commodity of gentility in order punitively to re-enter the society from which he was punitively expelled" (399). Heathcliff's view on how to escape oppression is to be what the oppressed is *not*: the oppressor. He was culturally programmed within a system of oppression, and his upbringing is linked to how he reacts later in the novel. Eagleton points out that Heathcliff's "roughness and resilience link him culturally to Wuthering Heights" (403). The reason why Heathcliff is "culturally linked" to Wuthering Heights is because he inflicts the oppression he experienced within the household onto individuals who would later take up residency within the home, such as his son Linton.

An interesting detail to note in *Wuthering Heights* is Heathcliff's consciousness of himself playing the role of an oppressor, and in chapter eleven of the novel he gives insight into the reflection. When Catherine asks if Heathcliff plans on seeking revenge on her, he says "I seek no revenge on you... that's not the plan – the tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him, they crush those beneath them..." (Bronte 112). This understanding of oppression that Heathcliff displays matches with Freire's model of oppression. Freire states that the prescriptive model of oppression forms a climate that "creates in the oppressor a strongly possessive consciousness – possessive of the world and of men and women" (58). Once again, Freire's analysis of the oppressor is strongly supported by Heathcliff's actions in the novel, for he eventually becomes extremely possessive of Isabella, Linton, young Cathy, and eventually Nelly Dean, as expressed through his kidnapping of her.

Heathcliff's character in *Wuthering Heights* is the prime example of Freire's prescriptive model of oppression, which outlines that the oppressed follow in the footsteps of their oppressor because they were conditioned to maintain such a system of oppression. From his early youth until his death, Heathcliff finds himself trapped within an oppressive system that he can never break free from. The dehumanization he experiences in his formative years forever warps his image of what it is to become a greater man, and his burning love for Catherine, as fierce and uncontrollable as a wildfire, ultimately destroys him and any possibility he has to break free from the cycle of oppression. Any virtue that was once within Heathcliff has been shattered by the harsh realities of human society. The pressures that lower-class individuals face in societies all over the globe are brought to attention in *Wuthering Heights*, and we, the reader, receive more than a glimpse of the ill effects of such treatment. Perhaps Heathcliff would've turned out to be an honorable man had society not viewed him as a "lesser" individual. Had he received good-natured generosity and acceptance in society, perhaps he would have reflected these things onto other individuals. There is no rationalizing Heathcliff's brutality and harshness in *Wuthering Heights*, but let that not hinder us as individuals to examine the origins of oppressive behavior displayed by Heathcliff, and to strive to recognize and eventually break

free from the cycles of oppression that are found in every society on the planet.

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Legacies of Exile in Euripedes' Medea

"Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house..."

It is not beyond reason to construe the life of a woman in a traditional patriarchal society as a series of alienations or exiles. Whereas men move progressively towards more inclusion, individual responsibility, and personal recognition, a woman has historically found herself subject to enforced disenfranchisements, often orchestrated by the restrictive societal precepts which limn the roles of her gender. There is the exile from girlhood, which may begin with menstruation and the body's announcement of sexual maturity and fecundity. There is the exile from purity and innocence encountered in the loss of virginity, an irreversible and even physical breach of the purity of her "vessel," for which there is no analog in the male experience. Accompanying this is the oft-simultaneous exile from her family home and transplantation to her husband's, followed by the invasion and coopting of her own body which pregnancy represents and the subsequent turning over of her body to the nourishment of her children following childbirth. Even as her body is no longer her own, her individual identity is by stages gradually subsumed by the family, throughout which she is effectively barred from meaningful participation in the world outside the home. If furthermore she is made subservient to her husband, she finds herself largely divorced from her own personal agency and autonomy as an individual, and if ultimately she is one day rejected by her husband and cast out from her marriage, she endures a cataclysmic loss of identity unfathomable to a man unburdened by such

conditional dependency. It is in consequence of these circumstances and the singular history of the titular character that exile forms the defining metaphor for womanhood in Euripides' *Medea*.

For women of the Greek polis, and for most women of profoundly hegemonic societies, gender is an attribute which represents an intractable circumscription of options in life. In her essay the "Tragic Heroine: Medea and the Problem of Exile," Domnica Radulescu writes that, "Historical, legal, and anthropological studies [have shown] us that women in Greek society were, to begin with, marginal to social life and therefore 'exiled' from most of the life of the community outside the home." Specifically, the female role is defined and limited by her relationship and utility to men, a circumstance which gives her little latitude in determining her own course and largely relegates her at best to a subservient role, and just as often to the status of a pawn in the affairs of men. In marriage, women played a functional, political, and even a commercial role in cementing social bonds between families, but were seldom independent, fully-realized agents of their own destiny. As Dolores O'Higgins writes in her essay "Medea as Muse," "From a Greek perspective, a woman functioned as the currency of a marriage, a silent language of exchange between households." It cannot escape one's attention that Greek mythology and literature is replete with instances of women portrayed as little more than tokens of reward, to be valued and coveted for their beauty and physical allure and little else, and wherever women do in fact distinguish themselves outside of the trifling affairs of the domestic front it is in the service of a great male hero. Despite herself, the younger Medea falls into this latter category, exchanging dutiful allegiance to Jason for irremediable banishment from home and family. Still, the larger world of the politics of state, of warfare, and the various glories and recognitions found beyond the household lie largely off-limits and out of reach, and it is precisely this restriction against which Medea chafes. Since her earliest betrayal of her father's

household – the action which incurred her seminal and most formative exile, from her homeland – she has declared herself her own currency, though yet one that is still not capable of total sovereignty over her own affairs. She remains, after all, a woman. It is no accident then that her first entrance onto the stage has her stepping symbolically “out of the house” in deliberate and conspicuous fashion, while explicitly announcing as much to the chorus of Corinthian women awaiting her outside (213-214). It is an overture to the defiance and disruption of the order that is to follow.

When taken metaphorically, the theme of exile is even more profoundly evidenced in Medea’s story. Within the first lines of *Medea*, the play, the audience is presented with a summary narration via her nurse of the circumstances which have brought Medea, the woman, to her present situation and it is clear that she is a woman already twice exiled and poised on the brink of a third. She has endured estrangement from her father and family, encountered the hardships and alienation as an outsider amidst the Greeks, and now has lost her coveted place in the heart (and bed) of the man on whose behalf she ostensibly endured this arduous series of sacrifices. It is almost as though her life has somehow mirrored, in dark parody, an inverse arc of her husband Jason’s heroic saga. Whereas Jason’s undertakings make him a hero upon his return home, Medea’s own heroic efforts, without which Jason could not have succeeded, only result in suffering and punishment. Exiled from home, estranged from culture and family, then forced to flee Iolcus by her ill-conceived assassination of Jason’s uncle Pelias, her journey is a series of cataclysmic alienations which find her progressively distanced, stage by stage, from her original self, until she finds herself now half-assimilated within a foreign city with little identity but that which derives from her attachment to her husband. Now stripped even of that claim, she finds herself on the precipice of alienation from all that she has ever been. As Radulescu observes,

Medea has endured a “multi-dimensional exile from life in general. She is threatened by darkness and nothingness in all directions.” Ultimately, this exile from herself will take physical form, when she is finally transformed into something almost unrecognizably inhuman.

Though Medea is an outsider in Corinthian society, Euripedes gives her the voice of the Everywoman in pleading her case to the chorus, and in so doing he not only allows her to enlist their sympathies to her plight, but he universalizes the circumstances she describes to such an extent that the women cannot help but see their own experience directly reflected in her description: “Of all the creatures that have life and reason we women are the sorriest lot...” she begins her powerful review of the plight of womanhood (229-230). As observed by Aristide Tessedore in his essay “Euripide’s Medea and the Problem of Spiritedness,” “Although Medea speaks of her status as a foreigner, the speech itself as a whole does not emphasize foreignness but rather the solidarity of the female sex.” Medea taps into a latent dissatisfaction in the women of Corinth, in the process swaying them from a complaisant and passive bunch [“If your husband services a new bed that is his affair. Do not fret,” they counsel early on (154-156)] to ideological allies in her mission of vengeance [“It is right that your husband should pay, Medea.”(266)]. As an outsider Medea seemingly has a much more acute sense of the inequity of her situation, and of her vulnerability, than do the Corinthian women who initially endeavor to placate her:

“But the same story does not apply to you and me. You have this city and your father's home, enjoyment of life, and the companionship of friends, but, alone and without a city, I am abused by my husband, carried off as plunder from a foreign land, I have no mother, no brother, no relative to offer me a safe haven from this disaster.” (251-257)

An audience familiar with her history will find her lamentation both specious and ironic, as this plaintive bemoaning recalls her own historical crimes (Medea’s disingenuousness is self-serving

and will be addressed further), yet her outsider status seems to only make her situation resonate all the more with the chorus, for what Greek woman does not understand the experience of looking in on the world from the outside? In the aftermath of Medea's encounter with Creon, following which Medea reveals the vengeful and murderous intent behind her conciliatory tone, the chorus is so taken with Medea's boldness – "This is a contest for heroes," she declares (402), defying all traditional notions of propriety – that they envision her actions paving the way to an entirely new accounting of women: "New tales will give glory to my life; honor is coming to the female of the species; discordant rumors will let women go" (413-415). It is a cry of defiance on the part of womanhood at perhaps the greatest indignity of all: exile from history.

Thus, Medea is subtly playing two roles, and playing to two sympathies, in her speech to the chorus, which highlights the rhetorical brilliance she is able to employ elsewhere as well. In addition to the Everywoman, Medea implicitly and simultaneously posits herself as the avatar of a new species of woman, one who holds herself the equal, if not more than equal, of the men in her orbit. She glosses over her own complicity in her circumstances, portraying herself as the hapless victim of a male regime – a role readily identifiable to her listeners – then deftly rouses their passions and indignation with such stirring language that could only be uttered by one so prepossessed of her own worth and exceptionalism that convention surrenders to her assertion. As Melissa Mueller explores in her essay "The Language of Reciprocity in Euripides' Medea," Medea makes purposeful use of adapting her language and her voice throughout the play, and does so in many ways striking for a woman of her time. In Mueller's words, "To the chorus of Corinthian women, [Medea] presents herself as a woman like any other, but with fewer resources; to Jason in the agony she speaks as if man to man...Even when she addresses herself, in the great monologue, two distinct voices appear, that of the pitiful mother who loves her

children and, opposed to this, the voice of the heroic warrior who demands revenge.” Medea’s language is consistently in defiance of societal norms, and while her defiance is a quality which is at once perhaps unique to her own particular temperament, it is also likely partly the byproduct of her foreign origins and the residual disregard she maintains for the social conventions of her adopted society.

By Greek conventions, Medea is by no stretch of the imagination an equal partner to her husband, yet she speaks to him as one. “Medea’s words and actions in this play challenge the imbalanced reciprocity that is inscribed within the cultural institution of marriage,” writes Mueller, “It is precisely containment by a patriarchal system (and husband) that Medea seems to defy.” In fact Medea rebukes Jason so forcefully and with such contempt contained within her anger that he seems ill-equipped to match her. These are Medea’s heroic moments, prior to her transformation into the inhuman villainess witnessed in the final scenes. Despite the inherent disparities of power, Medea towers in her presence over all others in the play. Even when she tailors her dialogue with Creon to evince a more deferential tone, one senses immediately an affectation: that Medea is manipulating her own projection towards a calculated effect and aim. The questions must be asked: has Medea’s life as a perpetual outsider trained her to cultivate this facility with language? Is her guile a product of her constant need to adapt to foreign environments and to speak the language of her listener? If so, what does this imply for the female of the species at large, herself cast perpetually as an outsider, and saddled with a legacy of mythological aspersions of such a contriving and manipulating nature? It seems the character Medea at once confirms these defamations, while lending some insight to the circumstances from which they arise. As she herself remarks, with evident sarcasm, “And besides we are women, most helpless for the good, but skilled craftsmen of all that is evil” (406-408).

Euripedes' depiction is not that of a madwoman, however, but that of a woman driven to an act of madness by the injustice inflicted upon her. Medea is given ample opportunity for a full-throated defense of her position and for an extended elucidation of her plight, and she acquits herself eloquently and forcefully. Despite their initial apologetics, the chorus is consistently sympathetic to Medea throughout her expostulations of revenge – until, that is, she broaches the notion of harming her children. The chorus remains a reliable ally to that point, choosing to align with their gender and exhibiting consistent sympathy with Medea's grievances. Medea has made great sacrifices on behalf of her husband which no doubt resonate with these women. In fact, her union with Jason was predicated on her determination, youthfully smitten as she was, to align herself with the alluring stranger and assist him in the trials set by her own father (infuriatingly, Jason dismisses her agency even in this matter, giving credit instead to the “inescapable arrows” of love slung by the gods (526-530)). Even more boldly, she voluntarily absconds with her foreign lover in the aftermath of his success and thwarts her father's pursuit in the most dastardly manner possible, horrifically dismembering her younger brother and strewing his limbs upon the water. In so doing, Medea makes as dramatic a break from her life and from her former self as is possible (a most sensational instance of the motif of cleaving to a new husband!), irreversibly throwing her lot in with a band of foreign men from far abroad as she simultaneously obliterates any reasonable option for ever again returning home.

It warrants considering that this episode of Medea's story serves as a nod to the wariness with which Greek society regarded female eroticism. That she is exiled from home and family as a result of her pursuit of an erotic inclination is a cautionary parable in the consequences posed by the untempered female libido. Furthermore, that Medea begins her life with Jason on the basis of a betrayal (of her father and of her own people) can be seen in ironic terms when casting

backwards from her later predicament. But in attaching herself to Jason, Medea makes an investment which she subsequently backs up, as is her wont, with repeated violence. Each turn of violence deepens Medea's removal from her origins, while (at least in her mind) further cementing her bond to Jason and his indebtedness to her, for each constitutes a sacrifice and an emblem of her devotion to him far beyond what any normal woman might commit. Most significantly however, Medea now finds herself betrayed after having acquiesced to the role of dutiful wife and mother, and as an outsider having sought to conform to the normative roles of Corinthian society. "An outsider in particular must conform to the city," Medea reflects early in her opening monologue (221). In short, she has played by the rules. For this, if not for her other previous sacrifices, she expects the oaths binding herself and Jason to be honored. "Do you see what I suffer, though I bound him with mighty oaths, that perjurer, my husband?" she asks the assembled chorus of Corinthian women in aggrieved indignation (160-163).

For this transaction, Medea expects nothing less than absolute and enduring loyalty, of the kind she herself has proffered. This is the social contract between husband and wife in forging (or acquiescing to?) the bonds of marriage. Medea is adamant that she has played by the rules, kept her oaths in good faith, and regards the domestic covenant to which she has adhered as sacrosanct. When she is instead met with Jason's betrayal, it is a repudiation in her eyes of the entire patriarchal order, a lucid demonstration of the abject powerlessness and imparity women must endure. After all, "it is not possible to say no to one's husband" (236).

It is worth noting, as Pavlos Sfyroeras observes in his essay *The Ironies of Salvation: The Aigeus Scene in Euripides' Medea*, that previous accounts of the Medea story did not present Medea as the killer of her children, but rather it is the Corinthian people who strike them down. Medea's incarnation as the infanticidal instrument of her own children's murder is therefore an

invention of Euripedes which must be examined and accounted for. By implementing this change, Euripedes is doing more than introducing a stark act of horror for dramatic punctuation, he is both confronting the audience's deepest sense of vulnerability and cutting Medea's last tether to her own humanity. That a mother might strike down with her own hand her own vulnerable children uproots every notion of motherhood and strikes at the very foundation of society. In one swift allusion of violence (for the action takes place offstage) all that is taken for granted in the archetype of the docile, nurturing female is overhauled, all the security and comfort implicit in that image vanquished. Her power and vitality, long dismissed by a cavalier society preoccupied with the exploits of adventuring male heroes, is finally revealed in most terrible fashion. Medea in a single action lays waste to everything Jason, that embodiment of Greek masculinity, is and cares for. What is more, by destroying in one fell swoop the very incarnation of his lineage, his (male) children, Medea strikes the most fatal of blows to the patriarchal order itself. Creon, the king, has only just died at Medea's hand as well, unable to tear himself free of the poisoning clutches of his own child (1210-1218). Progeny have become a weapon against progenitor. Most interesting, however, is that in murdering her own children Medea has struck with poignant symbolism at the very bonds which tether her most directly to her own female identity. In this final act, she has cut herself loose entirely from the burdens of womanhood. Perhaps it is only coincidental that this final heinous deed takes place as Medea retreats once more into the house, the symbolic domicile of her status as a woman, wife, and mother, from which Medea emerges now transformed, as if some sinister gestation has come to final fruition. Is she transformed into a monster or an avenging goddess? Her final visage – a literal “demonization” – invokes a chilling sense of each (1315). In either case, she is exiled by her own hand, yet again – this time from humanity.

Euripedes' Medea is temperamentally indisposed to accept the determinations of fate with even a modicum of complacency. Instead she reflexively resorts to whatever means lie at her disposal to assert her agency, even if her actions invoke the utmost violence, and even if they are predictably self-destructive. Medea's experiences with exile have largely been the result of her own tendency towards uncompromising brinksmanship, taking a precarious situation and – rather than acquiesce – thrusting the sharpened end of a knife into the most proximate offender. She negotiates only to bring herself close enough to her adversaries to deliver the fatal blow. In this sense, Medea's physical banishments are self-wrought. It is as though she relishes taking preemptive initiative as a matter of wresting some sense of control from her antagonists, no matter the price she pays as a result. The reward is an exile self-imposed and accepted in defiance against the order which seeks to assert its own terms on her.

Medea, even more so than most women, has endured a lifetime strung out on a singular theme. Her years of effort to embrace a place of belonging alongside her husband, bound by unshakeable oaths, marked by sacrifice and suffering, are finally rewarded only with betrayal. It is fitting, perhaps, that her alliance with Jason was undertaken upon her own betrayal of kin and kingdom. Every turn since has furthered her distance from her ancestral home, and deepened her dependence on the man by her side. To Medea's thinking, this is a kindred bond, forged and strengthened by mutual striving and hardship. When it becomes clear that salvation for her husband lies in forsaking her for another woman, Medea endures the shattering realization that all notions of vanquishing the specter of a lifetime of exile have been a mirage. The crescendo of this betrayal sweeps away all remaining pretense and circumspection. The woman rebels. The demoness is unleashed. Exile becomes her.

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Toy Soldiers and Barbie Dolls:

An Analysis of Gender in Ernest Hemingway's "Soldier's Home"

War carves scars into the fabric of human history, and nowhere are its effects more poignantly depicted than in the solemn remains of battlefields left forgotten under refuse and shorelines. In Denmark and France, Norway and England, ruins of military defense structures from World War II stand scattered along the beaches. Photographer Marc Wilson traveled for four years to capture these buildings as they fade into obscurity. In one photo a trail of concrete ruins lay almost submerged under the tides, like the tail of some giant beast's skeleton that rests forgotten along the coastline. In the next, a lone pillbox juts diagonally out of the water as if taking the dying breath of a breaching whale. There is not much else aside from these lonely subjects in the photographs; yet there is a paradoxical sense of confinement in each of the vast and uncaring seascapes. The pale overcast lighting renders them almost grayscale, a captured moment in history, faded like a vintage daguerreotype. *The Last Stand* is Wilson's documentation on the fading relics of World War II, devoid of purpose and identity, save for the spirit of solitude that remains cloaked over those landscapes.

Ernest Hemingway encapsulates the same feeling of mental isolation in "Soldier's Home", an intimate short story he authored shortly after being wounded and sent back home from World War I. Based on his own traumatizing war experiences, it inspects the inner thoughts

of war veteran Harold Krebs as he struggles to reintegrate himself back into his hometown. Krebs is emotionally distant because of his war trauma and is especially fixated on the girls on the streets, but is unable to approach them. He tries to cling to the familiarity of idolizing women, but finds that his detachment, which helped him survive on the battlefield, pushes him away from meaningful relationships. His perception of women is stained by the fantasy that soldiers created in the war. Krebs returns from the war with post-traumatic stress disorder, his trauma manifesting itself in his objectification of women that he learned from being in a hypermasculine war environment. However, because mental illnesses at the time went unaddressed, it is unlikely he manages to recover.

War creates its own culture that forces soldiers to mold themselves into traditionally masculine ideals, and Krebs learned to objectify women from his time in its ranks. Though he is a part of the problem, he is also aware of the inherent hypocrisy in men's obsession with women; when considering his own relationship with girls, Krebs contemplates how men thought of women in the army: "First a fellow boasted how girls mean nothing to him... Then a fellow boasted that he could not get along without girls..." (3). In an environment that is discrete from normal society and especially sexually segregated, it's easy to forget what life outside the war was like. War creates inherently male dominated values due to its detachment from society and the humanizing values, such as emotions and interconnections, that are developed within it. This detachment makes it easy for men to fantasize and create their own ideals for women, to flanderize and put them on a pedestal. This was what men boast about when they say they "could not get along without girls." But to drift perilously in a state of nihilism on the battlefield is dangerous, to say the least. Thus, soldiers sent off to war need anchors that bring solace or remind them of their purpose; men are traditionally depicted as carrying the photo of a girl who

waits for them back home, affiliating the idea of “female” with that of something that is to be “protected”. Yet despite their importance in lending strength to soldier’s lives, women are simultaneously spurned as being unnecessary emotional tethers. Western masculinity values characteristics such as violence, independence, and stoicism. The abandonment of women cements men in their belief that they can be fully self reliant. Women then “mean nothing to him”, the rejection of primal want thus somehow elevating their status. Because of this mentality, Krebs does not know how to approach the subjects of his fantasies, caught between both sides of the argument. He admires girls, as he was taught that men should, yet knows that he does not need a girl to survive.

Unfortunately, while Krebs is able to point out the hypocrisy, he himself still falls into its pitfalls. For instance, Krebs routinely observes the girls of his hometown, describing his likes and dislikes as if checking off a list: “He liked the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He liked their silk stockings and flat shoes” (2). His routine is in fault part of his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and inability to reconnect with people emotionally. PTSD makes it difficult for people to deal with their emotions, and so they try to escape from it by avoiding them. The US Department of Veteran Affairs (USDVA) says that “those suffering with PTSD have a hard time feeling emotions. They may feel detached from others. This can cause problems in personal relationships.” But taking away emotion from humans makes it all too easy to view them as objects—each of Krebs’s descriptions is merely a superficial account of what physical attributes he likes in a woman. They are consistent with Hemingway’s famed minimalist writing style, which serves to emphasize the pragmatic tone. Short, efficient, and utterly detached, it serves as a stark reminder that the author, too, has had all too much personal experience in the fight against mental illness. Krebs’ objectification is further displayed when he says that “sooner

or later you always got one [a girl].... He learned that in the army” (3). Here he openly admits this is a mindset adopted from the military. Krebs’s use of the word “one” treats women as if they are objects without identity, and that the woman in question is just another blank individual in the sea of many. Moreover, he describes relationships as if they are trivial; the phrase “sooner or later” displays a kind of insouciance towards the value of women. It is as if they are things that someone can obtain without effort. To him, liking girls is simply a reaffirmation of what he considers normal in a man.

Resulting from this mentality, Krebs admits to himself that “he did not want them [the girls] themselves really.... He would like to have one of them. But it was not worth it” (3). Nearly all of the short story involves Krebs’ relationship with the females prevalent in his life. The young girls he watches are the most prominent. He uses their youth to try to maintain the memories of hometown’s status quo; Krebs wants to avoid accepting the change that occurred while he was away, and so observes the women that are a cross between who he was familiar with idealizing during the war and his those whom he remembers from childhood. The word “girl” that he uses to describe them not only draws attention to how he is older than them, but is also commonly used as a derogatory term to describe a frail thing, something that is small or innocent or weak. (Hemingway only uses the word “women” once: when describing the German women who were chained to machine guns. Only females who suffered through the atrocity of war are invested with the title of “woman”.) He might like the girls, might like how he is able to stay from afar and watch them, but ultimately he thinks they are “not worth it”. Krebs does not know how to accept the fact that women are more nuanced than the ideal images war conjured for him. He does not want a real lady, he merely wants the trophy wife image of one to prove that, as a man, he is capable of achieving that status. But because he finds communication too

difficult due to his mental state, he downgrades what he wants in order to cope with his struggles. He tells himself he does not really need women in order to feel content. By treating women as objects, he excuses himself of the necessity of developing himself emotionally and is left isolated from the rest of society.

This objectification bleeds into and disrupts Krebs' family life as well. The women in Krebs' life are the only ones who try to reach out him, yet his masculinity prevents him from reciprocating. When his sister, Helen, asks Krebs to be her boyfriend, he agrees with nonchalance and only replies with short, apathetic answers: "Sure. Sure. Uh, huh. Maybe" (4). When his mother asks if she is loved by Krebs, he responds with shocking indifference: "I don't love anybody" (5). Love and emotions are weaknesses in masculine culture, and emotions are associated with women, who are often depicted as being overcome by their feelings. The belief that emotional detachment, which overlaps with symptoms of PTSD, is an insignia of mental fortitude falsely glorifies very unhealthy coping mechanisms. With his sister, Krebs shows a disregard of relationships. With his mother, he admits that he does not feel emotions entirely. His mental state makes it very difficult for communication both ways. But Krebs' mother still tries to understand—she says, "I know the temptations you must have been exposed to. I know how weak men are. I know what your own dear grandfather, my own father, told us about the Civil War..." (5). In this moment, the mother is revealed to be the closest to understanding the Krebs' ordeals. Yet instead of celebrating this fact, Krebs does not respond to his mother. He sits in silence; perhaps he thinks that there is no way his mother could understand if she was not in the war, perhaps he is exasperated at the many times she has brought this up before, perhaps he cannot even parse through his own emotions on the matter. Regardless of what he thinks, he does not share his thoughts, which is again evidence of his PTSD wrought isolation. However, it is

interesting to note that her entreaties sound almost like accusations: the words “temptations” and “weak” contradict the kindness of her intent. Here Hemingway is projecting his criticism of war onto the mother, acknowledging that she knows more about the truth of war than Krebs gives her credit for. In this moment she is more than the one dimensional girl in the photographs. She represents the strength that women have emotionally and intellectually. By expressing her pain to Krebs, she is able to do what both Krebs and his father are incapable of doing: empathize. This empathy could have had the power to heal Krebs’ broken psyche by reaching past the stoic walls he had erected around him. But the moment passes, and Krebs denies her help by re-establishing the traditional gender status quo. He regrets opening up to his mother; “He couldn’t make her see it...He had only hurt her” (6). Krebs quickly regrets his words and thinks his mother needs protection from his flawed mental state, even though she has stated that she is aware of how war changes a man. Hemingway depicts the mother breaking down after she is rejected, highlighting just how severely Krebs’ illness has affected her but also making her fall into the same stereotypical role of the woman who is unable to control her emotions.

Despite the distancing Krebs puts between him and his family, he still has a support structure in his hometown. Were he to move to Kansas City, he would have no such backup. Trauma generally fades within weeks to months of the event, but PTSD is more prevalent in people’s lives. It doesn’t simply disappear without treatment. The USDVA recommends that “social support can make it [PTSD] less likely”, but after Krebs moves, his only form of support, his family, will be gone. Hemingway includes various signs that do not bode well for Krebs’ future. For starters, Krebs’ father is notably absent, only mentioned as a figure of importance by the mother. His behavior towards his son, as Krebs put it, was “noncommittal”, as if undertaking the traditional disappointed father role (2). Fathers in families are the patriarchal leaders, the

alpha males. The father is said to always demand “the car to be at his command”; the use of the word “command” demonstrates the oppressive nature of his presence (2). But while he is the only other male figure in the story, Krebs’ father never makes a physical appearance. The times he is referenced, however, he either influences the mother’s actions or has a part of control over Krebs’. This represents the now distinct lack of masculinity in Krebs’ life. The war had ironically unmanned him; despite being back in the safety of his hometown, his PTSD leaves him stripped of his independence and therefore his identity. His inability to adapt to society has left him bereft of the one quality that defined him during the war. But perhaps most telling of Krebs’ uncertain future is when he “felt sick and vaguely nauseated” when reassuring his mother that he would change his lifestyle (6). Hemingway mentioned earlier that Krebs felt the same “nausea in regard to....untruth or exaggeration” when he spoke of his war stories (2). When Krebs acquiesce to do better, he experiences the same sickness he associates with deceit. Even if he is not actively aware of the lie he is telling, he subconsciously feels fear at the prospect of changing his lifestyle. He lies to his mother and is repulsed by his actions to assuage her fears. It is not that he does not want to finish the tasks he resolves to accomplish in Kansas City, but rather he is also lying to himself that he will be able to do so. Krebs’ story is just one of the many soldiers who return from the war, only to find themselves fighting a much more insidious one at home. One with an enemy that, like the author, he may not win against.

Hemingway was a man born into a life of both internal and external conflict. He is venerated as the poster boy of macho masculinity and his writing reflects the stoicism men aspire to have. But “Soldier’s Home” is an almost intrusive look at the cost of upkeeping such bravado. Krebs’ PTSD consumes his life even while he remains unaware of having the mental illness. He is dictated by his inability to emotionally connect with the women in his life, implying that he is

weak for being unable to obtain a girl. Hemingway himself was no stranger to the consequences of this mindset having undergone several rocky marriages himself. It is important to note that Hemingway did not write women in such a manner to draw attention to their oppression, but rather to garner sympathy for the man. This story is an inspection of a man at his weakest, understandable from the havoc war wrecked on him, but objectifies women so that they are portrayed as unattainable fantasies that only serves to drive the wedge deeper between Krebs' delusion and society's reality. His mental issues are covered up by the ideology that men are supposed to be distant and emotionally unavailable, especially to women. Like the structures that stand sentinel by the sea, Krebs is being eroded away by the pressure and isolation of a society that he cannot understand.

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Paper #1

The Pleasure Seeker

In the entire Shakespearian canon, few characters are more universally celebrated than Falstaff. This is, in part, due to his hilarious antics. However, Falstaff provides more than just comic relief. Falstaff undermines the value system on which *Henry IV, Part 1* operates, in which honor, gained through military violence and domination, is the highest virtue. Throughout the play, Falstaff argues for his own alternative value system, the pursuit of pleasure, which is justified through his own life and the life of Prince Hal. This makes Falstaff a much more subversive character than he at first appears, demonstrating the uselessness of a societal concept like honor and promoting, instead, the indulgence of physical desires. Falstaff is popular with audiences because he represents the power of pleasure over honor.

The theme of honor is introduced in the opening scene of the play in which King Henry airs his grievances concerning his son, Prince Hal, to the Earl of Westmorland. Although at war with Northumberland, the king confesses his “envy that my Lord Northumberland / Should be the father to so blest a son, / A son who is the theme of Honor’s tongue” (1.1.78-80). By admiring the enemy, King Henry demonstrates that the character quality of honor is of such value that it transcends the division of war.

In *Henry IV Part 1*, honor is gained through violence and domination. In Act 4, Hotspur, the “child of honor and renown,” delivers a monologue before the battle (3.2.144). Of King Henry and his men, Hotspur states:

They come like sacrifices in their trim,
 And to the fire-eyed maid of smokey war
 All hot and bleeding will we offer them.
 The mailèd Mars shall on his altar sit
 Up to the ears in blood. I am on fire
 To hear the rich reprisal is so nigh
 And yet not ours. (4.1.119-125)

In this speech, Hotspur emphasizes the honor of war by elevating it to the divine. He mentions the “maid of smokey war,” who is possibly the Roman goddess of war, Bellona, as well as the famed war god, Mars. Hotspur also uses the language of the sacred (“sacrifice” and “altar”) as if war were a holy sacrament. He eagerly anticipates the opportunity to dominate his opponent, considering it a “reprisal.”

Even Prince Hal, when he reconciles himself to his father, uses the language of violence and domination to describe how he will gain back his honor. He tells King Henry:

I will redeem all this on Percy’s head,
 And in the closing of some glorious day,
 Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
 When I will wear a garment all of blood
 And stain my favors in a bloody mask,

Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it. (3.2.137-142)

To Prince Hal, the path to honor lies in dominating Hotspur in battle and becoming covered in the blood of his enemies, which will wash away his dishonor. In the world of *Henry IV Part 1*, honor is gained through violence and the one who demonstrates the greatest dominance is the one who has the greatest honor.

Unlike the feuding nobles, Falstaff makes it clear that he does not think much of honor. In Act 5 Scene 1, Falstaff responds to Prince Hal's bravado by stating exactly what he thinks honor is worth. He begins by admitting, "honor pricks me on" (5.1.129). However, he then asks, "yea, but how if honor pricks me off when I come on?" (5.2.129) While the wordplay can distract from the gravity of this line, Falstaff asks a very serious question, especially considering that Hotspur, the "all-praisèd knight," meets his final end in the play (3.2.145). Even when Hotspur dies, Prince Hal declares "ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!," a moment which reinforces Falstaff's perspective that honor loses its value in death (5.4.90). Falstaff continues to question the usefulness of honor, asking, "can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No" (5.1.132-135). In this passage, Falstaff demonstrates the currency with which his value system operates. Falstaff's concerns are of a physical nature. He emphasizes the uselessness of an abstract concept as he continues, "What is honor? A word. What is that word 'honor'? What is that 'honor'? Air. A trim reckoning" (5.1.135-137). In a truly modern fashion, Falstaff deconstructs a socially accepted concept and finds it absurd. Ultimately, Falstaff argues, honor is only a word that is assigned to some people and not to others. To whom honor is assigned is an even more troubling question: "Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No.

Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it" (5.1.137-140). Falstaff, who lives by the impulse of the living body, has no use for a concept fit for the dead. As Hotspur's death demonstrated, even the dead may not retain honor.

Rather than honor, the currency of Falstaff's value system is pleasure. Falstaff's introduction is rather abrupt. He and Hal are first seen in Act 1, Scene 2, opening with Falstaff's line, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (1.2.1). Through the voice of Hal, Shakespeare takes this opportunity to make clear what kind of person Falstaff is. Hal answers:

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day.
(1.2.2-13)

As soon as Falstaff is on stage, Shakespeare makes the audience aware that Falstaff is a heavy drinker, a glutton, and one who consorts with prostitutes. This passage also reveals that Falstaff has no responsibilities or obligations (or, if he has them, that he chooses to ignore them). Prince Hal tells him he has no reason to ask what time it is, implying that Falstaff's daily life consists of an endless cycle of hedonism. Shakespeare is deliberate in demonstrating Falstaff's character to the audience as soon as they are introduced to him, so that there can be no doubt where Falstaff's values lie.

Not only does Falstaff spend his time in the pursuit of pleasure, but he attempts to frame it as a positive characteristic. There is a humorous moment in Act 2, Scene 4 when Prince Hal and Falstaff role play a conversation with King Henry. Falstaff takes the first turn in the role of King Henry, who reproves Prince Hal, saying, “Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spends thy time, but also how thou art accompanied” (2.4.411-413). He goes on to chide Prince Hal for spending his time among thieves. However, he notes, “yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name” (2.4.431-433). To this, Prince Hal responds, “what manner of man an it like your Majesty?” (2.4.434). Falstaff replies, “a goodly portly man, i’faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and most noble carriage” (2.4.435-437). Here, Falstaff describes characteristics which, he thinks, make a “virtuous man.” Falstaff references his weight twice with the words “portly” and “corpulent.” This emphasizes Falstaff’s habit of over-indulgence. Falstaff’s “cheerful look” and “pleasing eye” (joyful eye) stresses Falstaff’s dedication to a life of jollity and enjoyment. Falstaff also suggests a value of appearances when he references his “noble carriage” and later when he suggests that he looks much younger than he actually is. In summary Falstaff (as King Henry) states, “there is virtue in that Falstaff; him keep with, the rest banish” (2.4.443-444). Although Falstaff may appear to be no different from any other debauchee at Eastcheap, Falstaff sees himself as standing apart from the crowd, indicating that he truly believes himself to be more virtuous than the rest of the riffraff at Eastcheap. Falstaff sees his mirthful disposition, not as a vice, but as a virtue which, he contends, makes him a positive influence on Prince Hal.

When the role-play is reversed, with Falstaff playing Prince Hal and Prince Hal playing King Henry, Prince Hal undermines Falstaff’s previous assertions by calling him “the villainous

abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan” (2.4.479-480). Falstaff, however, is quick to argue back. Speaking as King Henry, he states, “if sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked. If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh’s lean kine are to be loved” (2.4.487-491). After disarming Prince Hal’s insult by pointing out the harmlessness of his supposed vices, Falstaff reasserts his virtues, asking (as Prince Hal) that King Henry banish all his other companions “but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry’s company” (2.4.492-496). Falstaff, again, charismatically makes the case for his own goodness, drawing the audience into his perspective.

However, Falstaff needs to draw Prince Hal, as the protagonist, into his perspective for his system of value to truly win out. Prince Hal maintains complex relationships with both honor and pleasure throughout the play. In Act 1, Scene 1, King Henry complains that “riot and dishonor stain the brow / Of my young Harry” (1.1.84-85). In the next scene the audience is introduced to Prince Hal in the context of Eastcheap. Shakespeare’s choice to make the tavern the first setting in which the audience sees Prince Hal (and planning a robbery, no less) is significant. This choice demonstrates that, at the beginning of the play, Prince Hal is fully immersed in the hedonistic lifestyle of the Eastcheap crowd. However, at the end of this scene, Shakespeare indicates that Prince Hal may not be completely thoughtless in his choices. After Falstaff and Poins have exited, Prince Hal states, “I know you all, and will awhile uphold / The unyoked humor of your idleness” (1.2.202-203). Prince Hal goes on to soliloquize over his plan to act so worthless that the kingdom will be shocked when he proves himself a decent king and

“so offend to make offense a skill, / Redeeming time when men think least I will” (1.2.223-224). While it would be hard to call this kind of manipulative scheming “honor”, it is one of the few indications early in the play that Prince Hal is thinking anywhere beyond the immediate pleasure of the here and now. In Act 3, Scene 2, Prince Hal follows through with this scheme, apologizing to King Henry for his life of sin and promising, “I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord, / Be more myself” (3.2.94-95). This scene seems to indicate that Prince Hal has completely cut ties with his former life and is fully dedicated to a life of militaristic honor in service of the court. However, in the next scene, Prince Hal goes back to Eastcheap to offer Falstaff a position in his army. Because this is obviously not a military strategy, this act must be interpreted as a symbol of friendship, and therefore a sign that Prince Hal is not entirely repentant of his former life. He even tells Falstaff, “I am good friends with my father and may do anything,” indicating that even his apparent turn-around may have been little more than another scheme to get what he wants out of other people (3.2.192-193). Although Prince Hal becomes a military leader, he continues to associate with Falstaff, even indulging him by playing along when Falstaff falsely claims to have killed Hotspur, simply remarking “this is the strangest fellow” (5.4.159). Prince Hal’s continued friendship with Falstaff, even after his supposed change of heart, demonstrates that even at the end of the play, Prince Hal still sympathizes with Falstaff and his values.

Falstaff’s optimistic resilience through the play demonstrates that his value system, though apparently amoral, is sustainable and therefore valid. While Falstaff does provide comic relief to *Henry IV, Part 1*, his character is far more complex than this single aspect and it does not completely account for the fact that Falstaff has remained one of Shakespeare’s most beloved characters throughout the centuries. Falstaff has maintained his popularity with audiences

because he represents the power of pleasure over honor, thereby usurping strict morality codes in favor of the satisfaction of the body's appetites.

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The Plague of True Womanhood and the Privilege of Masculinity

At the emotional climax of Louisa May Alcott's cornerstone of American literature, *Little Women*, Beth March dies while holding her mother's and father's hands. This is a moment that has been canonized by both male and female readers alike for the last 150 years. At the same time, headstrong Jo March, who is similar to Benjamin Franklin, undergoes a radical transformation in the midst of her grief: Jo denounces her tomboyish, rebellious ways, and contradicts her defining characteristics that were blatant for the greater portion of the novel. In Beth's memory, Jo dedicates her life to becoming the perfect daughter. She cheerfully cooks, cleans, sweeps, and even ponders marriage, all while humming Beth's favorite hymns. Prior generations of readers see Beth's death as the ultimate tear-jerking moment, but one may interpret Beth's death as the catalyst for Jo inadvertently becoming a parodic version of Benjamin Franklin's self-made man, prompting an examination into themes of self-abnegation and gender in *Little Women* and *The Autobiography*.

Initially, Benjamin Franklin's autobiography stands out to readers due to his dedication towards improving himself throughout his life. However, after reading Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography* takes on a new meaning; both works explore themes like virtue, morality, and self-improvement. Franklin is organized, articulate, and rational, but most of all, his ideas surrounding "arriving at moral perfection" are more closely

related to practical skills and knowledge, for the purpose of reinvention, than actually being virtuous. On the other hand, Alcott's novel preaches the theme of value in sacrifice. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy overcome their vices and shortcomings through self-abnegation. There are sprinkles of moral lessons throughout the novel, but each March girl has one main obstacle to overcome: Meg gives up her materialistic ways, Jo gives up independence and her dream of becoming an author, Amy overcomes selfishness and her dream of becoming an artist, and Beth is depicted as a martyr figure who consoles her family as she openly accepts death. While Benjamin Franklin and Louisa May Alcott both explore themes of morality and virtue, Franklin's personal journey of "arriving at moral perfection" is inherently egocentric, while Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy's journeys are grounded in self-abnegation. The March sisters are continually forced to deny themselves as a result of the suppressive expectations of women during the nineteenth century, illustrating the double standard of what it means to be good.

The Autobiography, written at various points throughout the eighteenth century, is Benjamin Franklin's story of the "self-made man," with an emphasis on the "self" being of the utmost importance. In fact, Franklin says, "I conceiv'd the bold and Arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection. I wished to live without committing any fault at anytime; I would conquer all that either Natural Inclination, Custom, or Company might lead me into" (Franklin 276). Franklin embodies the Enlightenment worldview with his pragmatic approach towards perfecting himself; he is scientific, calculated, and logical, which speaks to his unsympathetic dedication towards social mobility more than it does to true morality and virtue. Judith P. Saunders, in *American Classics: Evolutionary Perspectives*, outlines how Benjamin Franklin's "extraordinary career depends on his ability to assess his eighteenth-century colonial environment perceptively,

responding in a canny way to its expectations and opportunities,” (1) and Franklin’s masculinity grants him the privilege of doing so. Franklin advances himself and his character in the public sphere.

On the other hand, *Little Women* takes place in the nineteenth century. Though written during the Romantic period, which celebrates emotion over rationality, Louisa May Alcott captures similar Enlightenment ideals about renewal, morality, and improvement; yet, the March girls’ femininity serves as a constraint because societal standards force them to be “good” by conquering themselves and their feminine woes within the home sphere. In the first chapter of *Little Women*, Mr. March defines the scope of the girls’ responsibilities as women: they shall “do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully, that when [he] [comes] back to them [he] may be fonder than ever of [his] little women” (Alcott 8). Mr. March’s words limit the girls to conquering feminine woes within the constructs of the household; the March girls are taught to deny the self, their ambitions, and their feelings, outlining the main theme of self-abnegation. Barbara Welter, author of *The Cult of True Womanhood*, explains that in nineteenth century publications, “the true woman’s place was unquestionably by her own fireside as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother. Therefore domesticity was among the virtues most prized by the women’s magazines,” (162) and by extension, female readers. In sum, Franklin’s masculinity provides him with the opportunity of literally improving the “self” socially and economically, while the March sisters’ femininity emphasizes self-abnegation within the constructs of the home.

Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy wake up on Christmas morning, and each receives a copy of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, or “that beautiful old story of the best life ever lived...” (Alcott 12). *The*

Pilgrim's Progress is an allegorical novel about leading a christian life, similar to the March sisters' journeys that forced them into domesticity. An uncanny similarity is when Benjamin Franklin comes across his favorite novel: "It prov'd to be my old favorite Author Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* in Dutch... Honest John was the first that I know of who mix'd Narration and Dialogue, a Method of Writing very engaging to the Reader..." (Franklin 235). Franklin's words outline his logical worldview; Franklin analyzing the writing style shows his dedication towards intellectual advancement and improvement of the self. However, Jo March's are the opposite, depicting an image of piety, a virtue that Barbara Welter identifies as a vital part of femininity in *The Cult of True Womanhood*. Later on Christmas morning, the March girls practice the art of denying themselves. They hear that there is a family in need next door. Mrs. March prompts her daughters to go to their neighbors' home, tidy up, comfort the children, and give away their breakfasts. The narrator says, "I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their breakfasts, and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning" (Alcott 16). Within the first couple chapters of *Little Women*, Mrs. March begins teaching the girls that virtue is intertwined with self-abnegation. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy continue to apply this behavior as they get older.

Meg March is the oldest sister. She is depicted by Alcott as the most womanly of the sisters because she is dutiful, proper, docile, and motherly. Even when she is angry with her husband, John, over a domestic scuffle, she stifles her feelings: "Be careful, very careful, not to wake this anger against yourself, for peace and happiness depend on keeping his respect. Watch yourself, be the first to ask pardon if you both err..." (Alcott 279). Meg's sex and the time period determine her role in the home, so she must be docile to John and deny herself. Oftentimes, in

the nineteenth century, women were “constricted by family pressures, forced to contain their anger, and restricted in their verbal power” (Armstrong 471). Meg displays these qualities more than the other sisters in *Little Women*; her voice is practically forgotten in the second part of the novel due to being consumed by her marriage to John. On the other hand, masculinity afforded Benjamin Franklin with the privilege of doing the opposite. In his town, there was another intellectual. Franklin describes how “very fond we were of Argument, and very desirous of confuting one another” (Franklin 228). Moreover, Franklin is able to voice his feelings and opinions because he is a man, while Meg is forced to deny herself because she is a nineteenth century woman. In *Little Women*, Meg’s flaw is that she is materialistic and envious of the people around her, but she “learned to love her husband better for his poverty...” (Alcott 284). Contrarily, Benjamin Franklin’s entire autobiography is based around a “rags to riches story.” His egocentrism makes *The Autobiography* a self-help guide, similar to modern diet books offering a panacea. In *American Classics: Evolutionary Perspectives*, Judith P. Saunders says, “He acknowledges no disadvantages to being rich and powerful, and he takes uncomplicated pride in having become so” (2). In other words, society rewards a proactive man who makes an effort to be a social climber, yet rejects a woman who attempts the same, which is why Benjamin Franklin becomes successful socially and economically, while Meg is restricted to the home, having to deny her want for a better life.

Jo March is the second oldest and is unapologetically herself. In the first part of the novel, she is tomboyish, has a temper, never wants to marry, and her dream is to support herself through writing. In effect, Jo is similar to Franklin; they both are smart, independent, love writing, and think outside societal constraints. Despite Jo’s ambition and similarity to Franklin,

she perpetuates the legacy of self-abnegation for nineteenth century women. Mr. March falls ill in the first part of the novel, and Mrs. March wants to go to Washington to support him through his illness, but they barely have enough money for her to make the journey. Jo, in a very Jo-like fashion, chops all her hair off and sells it to the barber for twenty-five dollars so she can give it to her mother. The family is speechless, and she says, “No, it’s mine honestly; I didn’t beg, borrow, nor steal it. I earned it; and I don’t think you’ll blame me, for I only sold what was my own” (Alcott 161). Jo uses the little money she earns for the benefit of the family; not only does she give up the money, but she shows her virtue by literally giving up a piece of herself, furthering the theme of self-abnegation. Like the Marches, Benjamin Franklin has to find ways to earn money: “From a Child I was fond of Reading, and all the little Money that came into my Hands was ever laid out in Books” (Franklin 227). Franklin uses his money to better himself, and in actuality, his journey of “arriving at moral perfection” is self-serving. After Beth’s death, the ultimate tear-jerking moment, Jo struggles with her grief and decides again that her desires are secondary to her family’s needs. For Jo, “What could be more beautiful than to devote her life to father and mother, trying to make home as happy to them as they had to her... what could be harder for a restless, ambitious girl, than to give up her own hopes, plans, and desires, and cheerfully live for others? (Alcott 433). In addition to denying herself, this is the moment that Jo undergoes a radical character transformation. She is ready to give up everything; Jo stops writing, no longer wants the freedom she desired before, and accepts more womanly duties in an attempt to hold the family together, but most importantly, she stops mirroring Benjamin Franklin’s character traits. Shockingly, she gives in to the pressures of the time period and marries Mr. Bhaer. In the nineteenth century, “The ‘sedative quality’ of a home could be counted

on to subdue even the most restless spirits” (Welter 170). Jo is no different; she is coerced into becoming everything that she despises in the first part of the novel as a result of the suppressive expectations surrounding women, and learning that virtue is synonymous with self-abnegation.

Beth March, the second youngest sister, is sensitive, caring, quiet, musical, and extremely shy. Beth cannot even muster up the courage to go to school. She is a sympathetic character that readers can relate to, especially when she “wiped away her tears with the blue army-sock... She resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that father hoped...” (Alcott 9). Beth is different from her sisters; she is an outlier because she has a hard time imagining her future and has few desires. In giving her asocial, angelic traits, Alcott creates the perfect conditions for Beth’s untimely death: “Many homes had ‘little sufferers,’ those pale children who wasted away to saintly deaths” (Welter 163). Beth contracts scarlet fever and miraculously survives the first bout, but never fully recovers and begins to waste away. She never shows fear or regret as she openly accepts her dark fate. She tells Jo, “I’ve known it for a good while, dear, and now I’m used to it, it isn’t hard to think of or bear. Try to see it so, and don’t be troubled about me, because it is best; indeed it is” (Alcott 372). Surely, Beth is in more pain than she is showing, but she suppresses her feelings like a good “little woman,” and uses the time she has left to console her loved ones. This is the highest form of self-abnegation in *Little Women*; Beth has become an angelic martyr. While she is bed-bound and actively dying, she sits “tranquil and busy as ever; for nothing could change the sweet, unselfish nature; and even while preparing to leave life, she tried to make it happier for those who should remain behind” (Alcott 414). Finally, within the confines of the nineteenth century, Beth dies in her parents’ arms, having lived a perfect, altruistic life.

Amy is the youngest March sister. She is described as the most attractive and wants to be a part of high-society. Amy suffers from “youngest child syndrome” because she is annoying, spoiled, and vain. However, her character grows on readers later in the novel. Amy gives up her selfish ways and becomes a respectable young woman who is worth listening to because she gives valuable advice to the people she loves. Sadly, in her quest to be a gentle-woman, she adopts repressive and sexist views, like “Women should learn to be agreeable, particularly poor ones; for they have no other way of repaying the kindness they receive” (Alcott 295). Amy is the most ready of all the sisters to denounce her appetites and ambitions in the hopes of becoming a perfect woman; giving up her artistic dream seems natural by the second part of the novel. In contrast, Benjamin Franklin cannot fathom the idea of being agreeable. He studies philosophy and employs deceptive tactics to get what he wants: “I took Delight in it, practic’d it continually and grew very artful and expert in drawing People even of superior Knowledge into Concessions the Consequences of which they did not foresee...” (Franklin 230). Namely, Amy’s submissiveness and denial of herself advances her status, while Benjamin Franklin’s haughtiness is beneficial to his reputation and grants him more power in public affairs. These conflicting behaviors and their outcomes are a direct result of the time period and their sexes. Another example of Amy’s virtue through sacrifice is at Mrs. Chester’s fair. Amy prepares trinkets to be sold at the art table, but at the last minute, she is snubbed out of running it and moves to the flower table. The next day, she notices how bare the art table looks and decides to give May Chester her wares to be sold at the table she was previously kicked out from. At first, “Amy was sorry that she had done it, feeling that virtue was not always its own reward. But it is, as she presently discovered; for her spirits began to rise...” (Alcott 303). Readers gain a newfound

respect for Amy in this chapter, but she also imitates a learned, self-abnegating sense of virtue by giving away something important to her, while expecting nothing in return. Amy's altruism is not self-serving or about appearances, but Benjamin Franklin's is. He outlines how, "In order to secure my Credit and Character as a Tradesman, I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the contrary" (Franklin 265). Unlike Amy, Franklin is only concerned with appearances; he invests significant energy into appearing sedulous and prudent, a quality that is respected in a man, and condemned in a nineteenth century woman.

Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography*, and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* both works explore themes like virtue, morality, and self-improvement. Franklin's masculinity allows his journey of "arriving at moral perfection" to be self-serving. He cultivates himself for social and economic gain, while Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy's moral journeys are rooted in self-abnegation as a result of the suppressive expectations surrounding women in the nineteenth century. Benjamin Franklin comes from humble beginnings, but expertly applies his definition of virtue so that he can rise through societal ranks and become the best, or most powerful version of himself. Conversely, the March sisters must conquer themselves, and their moral development is restricted within the constructs of nineteenth century femininity. Benjamin Franklin is good, and the March sisters are good, but ultimately, virtue is defined by gender, time period, and societal standards.

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