

Great Bay Community College's Literary Magazine

May 2024 Edition



The Heron

David Mazur
PHOTOGRAPHY

Hello, Readers,

Thank you for your interest in this issue of Great Bay Community College's literary and art journal, *The Heron*! I'm Dr. Emily M. Hinnov, Professor of English and Program Coordinator at GBCC, as well as Editor-in-Chief of this journal. *The Heron* re-emerged in May 2023 after being out of production for several years; the English and Art department faculty are very excited to collaborate on the project once again this academic year!

Our 2023-2024 edition represents a diverse collection of literary, prose, and art works for readers to ponder and enjoy. Here you will find personal narratives, poetry, literary analyses, researched and argumentative writing, media and film analyses, and feminist manifestos created by current and former students at Great Bay studying across the disciplines.

The purpose of this journal is, in part, to highlight the analytical and creative work of our academic community. Bearing this aim in mind, I'd also like to take this opportunity to share five talking points regarding the value of the arts and humanities:

- Studying the humanities helps us to make moral, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic, and intellectual sense of the world and the human experience.
- The humanities teach us to understand other people's perspectives and experiences, thereby fostering greater social justice and equity through the cultivation of empathy.
- The humanities inspire critical, creative, and logical thinking about complex information, thereby leading us to better problem solving around questions about ourselves and our ever-changing world.
- Students of the humanities generate advanced skills in writing, critical reading, research, design, communication, collaboration, and consensus building.
- The study of the humanities develops informed and thoughtful citizens who are prepared to participate fully in the democratic process.

Offering this journal is just one way we can support the arts and humanities at Great Bay Community College and perhaps begin to meet some of the goals stated above. On behalf of the team of collaborators who made this publication possible, we hope your engagement with the 2023-2024 version of *The Heron* is both enriching and enlivening! Thank you again for reading.

Cheers,

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Women Writing Women

Fiona O'Shea

In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf famously said, "Women do not write books about men" (28). Historically, most writing was done by men, and therefore most books were centered around men. Women didn't have a voice in society and this was reflected in the media that was produced. Today, there are many more women authors and artists, but we still see an imbalance in the amount of female characters. The female characters that do exist often play a supporting role or are used as a device to move the plot forward. Even when "strong" female characters are present, they aren't often portrayed as complex characters with their own thoughts, emotions, and complete character arcs. The male gaze is still the default which leads women to write about their own experiences through the perspective of men. This allows them to explore more complex ideas and stories while still being taken seriously, however, the lack of representation of both female characters and female voices only reinforces this patriarchal perspective. Not only does it prevent women from having a model to work from, therefore reducing the chances that they would go on to write themselves, but it also prevents men from understanding the feminine point of view and reinforces the idea that men are the default in fiction. Women must write, and they must write about themselves.

When I was a child, I consumed books like I breathed air. I would read anything I could get my hands on, and I did. Reading so much inspired me to want to write my own stories, but being so young, I would simply copy what I'd been exposed to. I'd write versions of books that I loved, but with my own characters instead, most of which were based on myself. When I was that young, I could only write about women. I would write from my own life, and since I am a girl, it came naturally to me. I was around thirteen when that changed. I wanted to distance myself from my work, to write "a more serious story," so I started writing about men. Every book that I adored at that time was centered around men, even my favorite female authors wrote casts of primarily male characters. It seemed like the obvious choice to follow what they were doing. The issue here was that although I believed I was distancing my writing from myself and my own life, I was really continuing to write about myself, but now through the guise of male characters that behaved in a way that no man would. Not only that, but by forming this disconnect between myself and my art, I was discrediting my own ideas and work. Why shouldn't I write about myself? Were my ideas no longer good enough if I took the credit, from the mouth of my female characters? This problem seeped itself into everything I produced at the time, all my writing, all my art. I was making these paintings of men, but they were so clearly feminine, often covered in flowers. I was so drawn to the ideas of femininity, but I couldn't bring myself to actually use women in my art. One of the main blocks that was holding me back was that I struggled to find a visual of women that matched the way I perceived them. The only art I could find felt so unnatural, so smooth and perfect. To me, this abstract idea of men felt authentic and real, while women felt airbrushed and cold. Most of the art I made was inspired by the pieces I was writing, which in turn was inspired by the books I was reading. The literature I consumed had a direct influence on every aspect of my life, and the clear absence of well-written women had caused a separation of myself from my own art. I am still working consciously to address that bias, and to figure out how to write women authentically.

The first problem that women encounter when it comes to writing themselves is actually beginning to write. The act of writing feels sacred, something reserved for a more experienced, more intelligent subset of people, of which, of course, we are not included. In her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Helene Cixous describes the act of writing as a sensual, guilty experience, that ". . . is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great—that is, for "great men"; and it's "silly" (Cixous 392). Like writing in a diary, women's writing is discredited, even by themselves. Before they even start, they've already set their writing at a lower standard, and have doomed themselves to failure. This way of thinking is unconscious and therefore takes an active effort to address and fix. Changing this thought process is essential, as it only perpetuates the same cycle that all women have been stuck in. There is no separate class of people who are writers. Everyone is capable of writing, everyone is a writer. There is no one topic that is more deserving of acclaim than another, anything that is important enough to write is important enough to read. Women tend to be drawn to the more human

aspect of fiction, the parts of life that they have experienced. However, this genre of fiction tends to be taken less seriously. Woolf observes the differences in how the two are handled by scholars in *A Room of One's Own*: "This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room" (52). The idea that a man's book revolving around war, which is a subject he likely has experience with, is more important than a book based around what women have experience with, is simply misogynistic. A woman in that time period would not be allowed to have those types of "important" experiences, and would therefore never be able to write a book that would be considered "important" by those standards. She's deemed insignificant before she's even set pen to paper, and there's nothing that she could produce that would be enough.

The second problem that women face when trying to write about themselves is that they don't know how to write about themselves. Learning to write, and to take oneself seriously, is one battle. Taking this a step further and writing about women is a whole new problem. The male perspective is the default. The vast majority of well-written and complex characters in literature are men written by men. There is no example for female authors to write about themselves, they don't know how. Woolf summed it up perfectly when she said, "Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her to use" (*A Room of One's Own* 53). The simple structure of a man's sentence, the very basis on which someone would write, is fundamentally unsuited for female writers. Even if a woman were to find the time and motivation to write, she would find herself at a loss of where to begin. She would then (consciously or unconsciously) recall the books she'd read before, which set the standard for writing. She would have no other frame of reference. Woolf goes on to say that, "The weight, the pace, the stride of man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully" (*A Room of One's Own* 53). Every aspect of what she has been exposed to, in terms of writing, is not made for her. It is made very clear in the very bones of the art, that it is not something she is supposed to be doing. She's given two options then: fall into the place where she's "supposed" to be by giving up writing, or start completely from scratch.

The female way of writing is often different from that of the male's. Women have a different perspective on life that comes from their experiences, being raised differently than men and existing in a different role in society. They are taught to emphasize the connections that they have with other people and to observe the interactions between them. This differing perspective will inevitably appear in her writing. The most notable difference is the focus on characters over plot. As mentioned previously, although women try to write from their own perspectives, they ultimately combine what they've experienced with what they know. They know the male gaze. They know complex, emotional, developed male characters. It is the most logical conclusion that they would write their own experiences through a male character's voice. This separates them from their writing, allowing men to take them seriously, as they are conforming to the "important" subjects within literature. It also allows for them to take themselves seriously, as that degree of separation makes their stories feel less personal, and therefore easier to tell. They are able to imagine life from a man's perspective, which for many women, seems more desirable. More freedom, more respect. In the introduction of the collection *Women Constructing Men: Female Novelists and Their Male Characters 1750-2000*, they say: "When women construct and write about men in fictional worlds, not only do they analyze the causes and effects of patriarchy, as Woolf does in *A Room of One's Own*, but they also construct their own realities, imagining alternative masculinities that are desirable from a woman's perspective" (Ailwood et al. 2). For women, creating male characters in fiction is a way to portray men in an ideal way for them. Whether as a person that they want to be, in a world where they are not restricted, or as a man they wished they would meet, one who would respect them. They go on to say, "As such, women novelists not only deconstruct patriarchal structures and discursive strategies, but also participate in the reconstruction of ideal masculinity" (Ailwood et al. 2). Not only does writing from a female perspective help to destroy the standardized male gaze in the patriarchal society, but by women writing more emotionally complex male characters, it helps to provide a better template for what healthy masculinity should look like.

Woolf herself makes a commentary on this emotional disparity between men and women in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa, the main female character, is very emotionally intelligent and

spends a lot of time reflecting on her life and her relationships with the people in her life. She expresses frustrations with the men around her for not seeing things in the same way she does. She's walking and observing the world around her, and says ". . . Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look" (7). Peter isn't observant and emotional in the way that Clarissa is. He only looks if she tells him to. This is an inherent difference between the two characters, and is likely based around the difference in their genders and therefore the way that they were brought up in that society. Ailwood et al. makes the point that, "Therefore, examining the ways in which female authors construct, manipulate, ignore, or experiment with the representation of the actions, emotions, and inner life of their male characters exposes different but equally vital and telling perspectives of the construction of gender from that revealed by similar consideration of their female characters" (Ailwood et al. 3). It can often be seen that characters of different genders within a specific story are handled differently by the author, and this can give insight into the author, her internal biases, and any conscious decisions she has made to address them.

Men and women, as people and as characters, tend to act and handle situations in a particular way. In the essay "Men and women writing women: The Female Perspective and Feminism in U.S. Novels and African Novels in French by Male and Female Authors," Lange studies the differences in the way that male authors and female authors write female characters. She found that authors wrote their characters behaving how they instinctually would, regardless of the character's gender. She categorized female reactions to trauma as "acceptance" and male reactions as "action"-based on the way that each gender generally tends to handle situations. She found that: "The characters' reactions – action versus acceptance – after traumatic events depended on the gender of the author. Action is a stereotypically male characteristic. Thus, in the novels written by male authors, the female protagonists embody the male trait of action" (Lange 5). This shows that the gender of the author does make an impact on the characterization of the characters they are writing. Even if the novel is feminist, if it is written by a man, it is not going to be fully accurate to the female experience and perspective.

The only way to combat the overabundance of male characters and the lack of female characters written by women is for more women to write themselves. Women need to write women. They need to write from their own perspectives. Female characters from the female mind, from the female experience. Do not worry about being taken seriously. Cixous said it best in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, "Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. . ." (Cixous 391). The oppression of women has separated them from their bodies and their minds, and they need to reclaim them. Take control of their stories and their lives, set an example for other women to follow in their footsteps. Nothing will change if it isn't forced to. It takes conscious effort, they need to address the internal bias, the insecurities, the shame and the embarrassment. The only solution is to reclaim the narrative, to take back their bodies and minds and make them one and the same. My call to action is similar to Cixous's, she said to "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (Cixous 392). This is my purpose. Women need to write, and they need to write themselves.

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Memories Made Through Media

Jenna Maurice

The structural framework of my sense of self has been greatly influenced by the characters and stories of the books and movies that I consumed during my formative years. I wish I could say that it was the adults in my family, or church sermons, but that would be a lie. Escaping into a story to feel like I was living a different life was a favorite past time. I was the type of kid who would watch the same movie that I knew I liked over and over rather than watch new ones that I potentially would not like. The same held true for books, although if there was a series of books that I enjoyed, I could not wait to read the next one. Still true to the predilection for science fiction and fantasy of my inner child, I reread and rewatch, visiting my old friends to this day. These friends will always have many lessons worthy of my contemplation and appreciation. Reflecting on memories created from the shared experiences of my best friend and the characters of these stories leaves me replete with happiness and nostalgia that overflows the banks of my soul.

The first series of books that hooked me in like a soap opera was the *Animorphs*. My best friend and neighbor, Mel, and her older brother Matt, introduced me to this brutal sci-fi world of teenagers fighting an alien invasion of earth with their acquired powers of morphing when I was in the third grade. Every month we rode our bikes down from our houses perched atop “heart attack hill,” so dubbed by Mel for the exertion required for the return trip pedaling up, to the Waterstreet Bookstore in downtown Exeter to spend our entire weekly five-dollar allowance on the latest *Animorph* book. Cracking the crispy pages open and savoring that ethereal new-book balm was almost as satisfying as discovering what happened to the tenacious, transforming teenagers next. It was a race to see who could finish reading it first, but Matt always won. Despite his breakneck book reading, he was nice enough not to spoil the stories for us. In the time between waiting for the next book to be released, Mel and I pretended that we had the power to morph into different animals, just like the kids in the books. Recess time or playing outside after school was spent turning into cats, dogs, dolphins, hawks, or whatever animal’s abilities fit into the scenario that we imagined. It was exhilarating to fly high above and spy on the aliens below, swim to the secret alien base under the ocean, or have the strength and reflexes to fight enemies that only we could see.

Keeping with the sci-fi theme, we also played pretend as *Star Wars* characters. I was so obsessed with the original trilogy that I had practically the entire dialogue of each one memorized. I used to lay in bed at night, trying to fall asleep reciting the lines and replaying the scenes in my head. One of my fondest memories of childhood is of the time when Mel came with me to visit my Grandpa Bill’s farm. She was Chewbacca, and I was Princess Leia. The horse pasture and bales of hay were the corridors of the death star. In our version of the tale, Chewy and Leia were the Jedi. We used the mystical powers of the Force, bestowing us with lightsaber combat skills, telekinesis, and mind control to thwart the evil Imperials. Luckily, my grandparents had plenty of animal stand ins for these enemies in the form of dozens of cats. Grandma Kim would take in any unwanted or lost cat, dedicating an entire trailer on their property to the sole purpose of housing her cat collection. Of course, we never hurt or hit any of the animals; it was still fun to pretend they were after us, using our imaginary weapons to foil their fictitious forays. Hours passed until the sun sank so low on the western horizon that the first speckles of stars were visible in the inky purple firmament of the east. We slept in the loft of the barn on top of the bales of hay, too tired to mind the earthy smell of manure mixed with saw dust, completely oblivious to the spiders spinning in the rafters above and the gently nickering horses in the stalls below.

As we reached middle school age, we were exposed to horror movies for the first time. Mel and I were sensitive preteens, so watching an R-rated movie like *House on Haunted Hill* was a traumatic experience. Thoughts of an abandoned insane asylum filled with paranormal entities, gratuitous gore, and wanton torture lingered for days. Sleeping with the lights on was not enough to quell the anxiety that at any moment, an evil specter was about to murder us in gruesome fashion. It was an idea that Matt had that cured us, fight fire with funny. He and Mel had received a toy Tyco video camera for Christmas that year. It was preposterously crude by today’s standards. Only making black and white videos, it needed to be plugged in directly to your VCR with a blank tape, limiting the distance for

shooting footage to the length of the connecting wires. Simply put, the backdrop to any movie was confined to whatever room your VCR was in. We started making our own, kid friendly parodies of these scary movies. This happened several months before *Scary Movie* hit the theaters, so you could imagine our surprise when we realized that Hollywood seemed to have taken a page from the book of some silly middle school kids.

The first parody was *House on Haunted Hill*, which exclusively featured Mel and Matt. It opened with the funniest five second score from the brain of Mel, playing her trumpet in the most broken and comical way that only an 11-year-old can achieve. I still remember every cacophonous note. After this short opening came the theme song, which was a piece of paper with the title, *House on Haunted Hill* written in Matt's boyish scrawl. In the background played the theme song to *Little Shop of Horrors*, but every time the song was about to sing "shop," the recording was paused, and Matt's voice was heard saying the word "house" in its place. There was no way to edit the film, so each section was recorded, stopped, and picked up at the next recording. This led to hilarious cuts of Matt pretending to scream interspersed between scenes of laughable dialogue which consisted of Mel and Matt performing the main plot points, all while in Matt's bedroom. The entire movie lasted around five minutes but at the time it was more powerful and had a greater effect on me than any other movie I had ever watched. By transforming the stories into something that was funny, all the fear was gone. Mel and I would watch it at least once a week or more depending on how much cheering up was needed. I wish I knew what happened to that old video tape. I am certain that to this day, it would still leave me in stitches.

Now that I am an adult, I still find myself attracted to science fiction and fantasy themed media. My favorite book series are *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin and *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Both have popular television and film adaptations that I also enjoy, but the books have so much more nuance, so many more characters, and detailed world building. This is especially true in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since the book series has yet to be completed. Every time I reread these books, I find a new clue that generates a new theory about what the conclusion will be. I stubbornly refuse to believe that George R.R. Martin will end his epic saga with such an imprudent fizzle as the television series did. I religiously check Martin's blog for any updates to his timeline for completion of the much anticipated *The Winds of Winter*, book 6 out of 7 in the series. If only he could write as fast as K.A. Applegate wrote *Animorphs*! Luckily for me, the lesson of patience was one of immense importance during my adolescence and exercised presently beyond doubt.

I feel so fortunate to have grown up in the generation of kids just before social media and smartphones became the main source of entertainment. Having the equivalent of a kids' book club, riding our bikes all over town, and playing pretend outside until the streetlights came on with my best friend were the most jubilant times of my childhood. I do not know if my traditional values or droll sense of humor would have manifested had I been born just a few years later than I was. Although the advent of technology has provided us with unparalleled convenience and lofty standards of living, the consequences of instant gratification have robbed us of meaningful connections and our sense of purpose. The oversaturation of media has left me feeling like a dirty old sponge left to rot in a sink of scummy stagnant water, yearning for the years of dry sunny simplicity. Sometimes when I reminisce on the lightning bugs twinkling in and out of existence, the terrestrial stars of carefree summers, an almost predatory sadness creeps into the reliquary of my thoughts. A cold lead leaks into the hollow of my chest, knowing that I will never be so awash with wonder and joy, yet so thankful that I chanced upon it in what seems like a different life. There is one luminous lighthouse for me in the futuristic fog and that is texting. Mel has been my best friend for 32 years, and I do not get to see her as much as I would like to since she moved to Long Island a few years ago. No matter the distance, I can text her anytime to share an inside joke or a cute picture of my cat and she does the same. We do not have nearly as many cats as Grandma Kim had, but I suppose reality has a funny way of interfering with our dreams. Media brought us together in the past, and it will continue to connect us until our last days. I am unquestionably appreciative of her friendship, the memories, and the morals granted to me by the media of my youth.

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Letter to God Herself

Mikaela Belanger

Wrapped up in pearly envelopes
I sent my letter to Heaven
Kissed it goodbye
Along with all dead ends
I sent my plea
Covered in urgency
Crying where are you
I need you
For I seek you
I'll search you far from near
Darting my eyes like a Seer
I'll climb every mountain
Speak to every tree
Dreaming of God Herself
To pluck me free
Letters to God Herself
Sealed in desperation
I threw my letter to Heaven
My hands exhausted to the sky
As I wait for answers back
She's always in the back of my mind
Taking up space in my life
Troubled battles on distant shorelines begging back for time across the lines of space

“There’s Nothing Wrong with Being Respectable”

Carter W. Schofield

As human beings, there are many experiences that we have shared throughout every generation. Whether that be the simple joy of finding a new place to eat that you like, or the sharp and painful sadness of losing someone you love, everybody has experienced similar things throughout their lifetime. When watching movies, the same experiences that we find throughout our daily lives are presented front and center on the big screen for us to see. Movies do this as a way to let us relate to characters, sometimes in ways that we never knew we could. The best kind of director is the one that can take a simple premise or idea and turn it into a profound exploration of the human mind; or perhaps even of the generational gap between different ages and types of people.

Wes Anderson is someone I believe to be one of these directors. He has made countless movies that all have a relatively simple premise, yet every time they seem to get deeper into the complex issues that we experience as people, while also showing a sense of relatability in his characters that I would consider nearly unmatched. In my opinion, one of his best works to date is *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, an adaptation and partial addition to the novel by Roald Dahl. As mentioned before, the premise is simple, the characters are easy to understand, and they don’t have any overcomplicated or underdeveloped motives. That being said, I consider it to be one of Anderson’s best works, especially in terms of relatability and showing the effects of the generational gap. *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is an excellent insight into how different age groups and generations tend to act around one another, and how it can be applied to any generation, including our current one.

Our current generation consists mainly of teenagers and young adults that were born between 1997 and 2012. They’re commonly referred to as Gen Z, although I’ve personally always found our generational naming system to be a bit odd. Gen Z can often be recognized by a few key traits such as a focus on progression, an obsession with social media, and unfortunately, often an extreme focus on being self-centered. I think most of these defining factors play well into the story Anderson tells, and many of the traits on display in our current generation are exemplified through the actions of both Ash and Kristofferson.

For the purpose of this essay, I’m going to be focusing on one of the movies’ many subplots rather than the main plot. One of the larger subplots throughout the film is the relationship between Ash and Kristofferson. Near the beginning of the movie, Ash is constantly shown trying to impress his parents and prove to them that he has various useful skills as a fox. Later, Kristofferson arrives at the Fox’s home, and it’s determined that he will stay for a good period of time. It’s at this point that Ash starts to become extremely jealous of Kristofferson, as he feels vastly inferior in terms of abilities that he thinks would impress his parents. Despite it being a very simple dispute, it shows Anderson’s ability to relay relevant and relatable character theming early in the movie. As an opinion piece on the film explains, “Ash and Kristofferson are foils, and their relationship helps develop Ash’s character. In the beginning, seeing a young fox who’s athletic and popular makes Ash extremely insecure. Where Ash is short, Kristofferson is tall. Where Ash is a benchwarmer, Kristofferson becomes the star player in a day. Where Ash is awkward with girls, Kristofferson gets a girlfriend easily. He lashes out and is cruel to his cousin, who is already struggling with his father being seriously sick. But as Ash becomes more comfortable in who he is and his strengths, he and Kristofferson get closer” (Saroja). The struggle and growth shown in this friendship is what makes the subplot so intriguing, and the deeper things it shows us about how we treat each other as people makes it even more important to our generation, especially due to Gen Z’s obsession with self.

Regardless of the generation, children, teenagers, and adults alike all go through various emotional stages of development. Anderson shows different stages of emotion, and the different stages of life they refer to. In this case, he goes to great lengths to show emotions and actions that are extremely common in most people while they are teenagers and young adults. Ash has an extreme sense of jealousy towards his fellow fox and feels that he can’t find his meaning or live up to the expectations of his parents unless he proves himself to be better at physical traits than Kristofferson. On the other hand, the very fox he’s trying to beat often struggles with a sense of loneliness and isolation. He feels that despite trying to be friendly with people and get along with them, they tend to

avoid him, often due to his exceptional abilities compared to others.

I feel this is especially relevant to the current generation entering society for the first time. As teenagers and young adults, we have a terrible tendency to show extreme jealousy for others and a strong desire to put ourselves above them. Many can feel that if they don't have a certain skill set or portfolio worked out by the time they enter college or the workforce, that they've already failed to prove their place in the world and that they can't measure up to others. On the other side, there are plenty of people who can relate to Kristofferson, where they may have had incredible abilities as a young child, and maybe it even carried over to their adult years, but by only focusing on themselves individually, they've accidentally isolated themselves from others and now feel estranged from people that should have been easy to befriend otherwise.

Although it is a subplot above all else, Ash and Kristofferson's relationship is an integral part of the climax of the movie. Kristofferson ends up being captured by the farmers and gets used as bait to draw the rest of the group into a trap. In a complete reversal of the usual situations being set up throughout the rest of the movie, Ash is the one that gets an opportunity to save Kristofferson instead of the other way around.

This role reversal and the eventual saving of Kristofferson is what ultimately ends up being the turning point in their friendship. It's because of this that they each realize that the other has important qualities that they lack. Ash has a short temper and is quick to action, and while Kristofferson usually disagrees with this course of action, in this case it ultimately ends up saving his life and helping the rest of the team defeat the farmers. Ash's quick thinking didn't only end up being useful, it was paramount to the success of raiding the farmers. On the flip side, Ash finally realizes that there is merit to critical thinking and carefully planning how to use the skills you have. If it weren't for some of the planning that was done in advance by Kristofferson, Ash could have ended up in multiple dangerous situations as well. Their teamwork and realization of each other's abilities is ultimately what saves them both, and it being used as a precursor to the climax of the film goes to show how important it is to Anderson that this is shown, and how vital it is to draw out the biggest aspects from this moment and apply them to ourselves.

As is the case with many other problems that people face throughout their daily lives, the answer to fixing the friendship between Ash and Kristofferson was actually the simplest. By the end of the movie, both decided that there was no point in constantly arguing with each other or trying to prove themselves to Mr. and Mrs. Fox. They put their differences aside and decide to live with the fact that they each had their own skill set that was unique and useful to them and them alone. Again, while it seems so incredibly simple, and maybe even childish, it's something that I feel our current generation struggles with greatly. Instead of properly talking things over and helping each other to find what we're best at, I feel like people are too quick to simply fight with each other over meaningless things. This is especially prevalent when you take social media into account. There are countless young adults that see impressive things online while scrolling through social media and instead of taking at face value or using it for entertainment, they tend to use it as a detriment to their own growth as a person and often become convinced that unless they can measure up in a certain way to what they saw online, they'll never be able to succeed in real life. Even young children can see these themes throughout the movie. As is said in an analysis of the movie, "So is this a kids' film or a grown-ups' film? An English film (the landscapes are certainly English, and, in the classic tradition of silver-screen baddies, the wicked farmers remain firmly so) or an American one (like the rest of its cast)? Who says you—or Anderson—must choose?"

The warm, foxy tones of the delicate stop-motion animation create a completely particular space for the characters to inhabit—and like all the best work that's accessible to children, it offers another layer (many other layers) to the adult viewer. My son was nine when the film came out; he loved it because it was a great cartoon, and that was enough for him. Now that he's thirteen—just a little older than Ash, at least in human years—it has changed for him. He has thought about what it means when his parents change their jobs and their lives; he has considered how crucial it is to excel at whack-bat—and what you might do if you don't. His mother thinks about these things too. Fiction tells the truth about life—just in a different, an often unexpected, form" (Wagner).

Fantastic Mr. Fox truly does an excellent job of showing the differences between generations,

the problems facing them, and the surprising simplicity of overcoming some of these hardships. People need to learn that it's okay to have different skill sets and abilities, and that there's no need to measure up to another person with a different skill set when you already have your own. The movie constantly provides interesting dialogue and quick-witted conversations between Ash and Kristofferson, and while it may seem like it's done just for laughs on the surface, it really does go deeper and show how we as people, especially while growing up, have such a tendency to try to beat each other down instead of lifting each other up to show what makes each of us unique in our own way. Other authors and writers have clearly been affected by this character development as well. One review of the movie states, "Underground to escape the farmers, Mrs. Fox tells Ash, "We are all different...but there is something kind of fantastic about that, isn't there?" I identify with Ash more than any other character in the film. I remember the heavy self-confidence issues, but I also remember the people who invested in me and encouraged me, like Mrs. Fox with her son. This movie, along with the real people in my life, helped me embrace my own individuality, like both Mr. Fox and Ash learn to do by the film's end. The ending scene shows the family, along with Kylie, dancing in a supermarket, happy, confident, and ready to take on the next change in life" (Joshua). Real people have benefitted from seeing this natural development throughout the movie, and it shows. Even though it's not the main plot of the movie, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* has multiple subplots, each with their own valuable information and ideas. Just as Mr. Badger said early in the movie "There's nothing wrong with being respectable" and he couldn't have been closer to the truth.

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Brig Gen Frank W. Ramsey

Leo M. Bourbeau
Charcoal on Paper

Conforming to Society

Sarah Madore

At some point in almost every girl's life, they played with a Barbie doll. Not every girl was into Barbie, but for those who did, playing with dolls was one of the first things you got to experience as a young girl. It used to be paper or porcelain dolls that were the main craze. Until Barbie came out in 1959, girls could imagine their older selves through Barbie. Barbie and Ken became icons that shaped how societal standards were placed upon women and men. Many looked up to them while others looked down upon them due to the adverse effects that are still relevant today. My generation, Gen Z, has been brought up to fit into a subjected idealism that has become the standard. It brought about a new form of consumerism in fashion and plastic surgery, "Barbie proportions has yet to exist without the help of a surgeon" (Glasheen para. 8). All over social media and the news, you see glamorous lifestyles of others getting botched surgeries to look like a completely new person sometimes to feel better about their image, while for others conform themselves to fit in. The 2023 film *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig, has multiple messages demonstrating adulthood in women and men, women's oppression, feminism, patriarchy, matriarchy, and consumerism that ties into Gen Z.

The movie starts with Barbie living in her dream house, waking up every morning as perfectly as the day before, surrounded by big open walls of plastic and bright colors. The houses are mainly pink with a splash of glitter of course. Nothing is scratched or mismanaged, so fake it almost looks strangely real. Everything is toy sized, even the cars and dream houses. Overlooking the world, there is a sign that's bright and sparkly labeling the society as "Barbie Land." Driving down the highway you'll see directions from a billboard that says, "Real World this way." There is a separation between the two worlds, traveling over land and sea to get to reality. Compared to Barbie Land, in the Real World, all colors are dull and dim. We have scratches and marks that can never be erased. In contrast, Barbie wears bright colors in every outfit, demonstrating a sense of light and happy-go-lucky. In Barbie Land, nobody had any thought other than fitting into the standards presented to them. Barbie is introduced in the beginning as successful with everything figured out. Everything is mapped out for her, whether it's fashion to friends or a career. One day, her body changes when Barbie wakes up and starts to malfunction. She starts to form cellulite on her legs, has thoughts of death, and her arched feet become flat. As it turns out, a mom named Gloria who plays with her as a doll in the Real World, who is sad and lonely. When cleaning out old junk, she takes her younger daughter, named Sasha, to go through her old dolls, which include some Barbies. Gloria takes one of the Barbie dolls after wanting to reconnect with her inner child. It starts to affect Barbie in a way she didn't know existed. This shocks the other Barbies and Kens; they see this as a change needing to be fixed instead of accepting the way she is.

The societal "norm" is not attainable by any women in society of any generation. Weird Barbie comes into light and is created through girls playing too rough with their dolls. Some girls shaved their heads, painted their faces, or simply kept Barbie in splits. Placed into roles and standards that were put on at an early age made you want to be Weird Barbie. If you wanted to be Weird Barbie, others would look at you as an outcast. In Barbie Land, all the problems and contradictions of the Real World aren't a thought to begin with. Nobody is looked at differently because everyone fits into the mold. Most Gen Z's want to be spoken with, not spoken to. People of this generation tend to be very outspoken and blunt; nobody is afraid to share ideas and opinions with you. Many have come to the realization that the "mold" placed at a young age, is what nobody wants to fit into. Barbie Land is the opposite of the Real World because it is from the perspective of a girl's toy. The little girl sees herself in this doll as a successful independent adult who embodies anybody they imagine. In Generation Z, it's extremely relevant how we are presented through the media. Barbie Land is like social media in a sense. Reality is much different from how it's presented through apps. We see things through a screen all the time and were brought up on it only to learn that this was the only right way to be.

When Barbie must cross worlds into reality, shifting the split between the two allows her to see things for what they truly are. As said by Sasha, "You represent everything wrong with our culture. Sexualized, capitalism, unrealistic physical ideals. You set the feminist movement back 50 years. You destroy girls innate sense of worth and you are killing the planet with your glorification of rampant consumerism" (*Barbie* 1:42-2:06). Sasha reels this harshly and bluntly toward Barbie when they first

meet. Barbie shows a sense of entitlement wanting to be praised for this “good deed” done to women. Of course, she is shocked by the reactions when shown this claim, “Barbie’s unexpected appearance threatens the long-standing equilibrium between the ideal and the real” (Bello para. 6). Initially, Barbie thought the little girl she had to reconnect with to get her perfectly plastic life back, was Sasha. Barbie later finds out, it was Sashas mom Gloria playing with her doll. After meeting Sasha, she sees how high women are placed on a pedestal. Experiencing life in public, Barbie became objectified while walking past the road construction workers. Currently in Gen Z and even generations before, we have never drifted away from this. Women and men in society are portrayed with this ideal image of success that must be attained to be happy. Simple happiness in having success and control of your emotions, but mainly your career. Originally Barbie was portrayed as a fashion model. Barbie is known for promoting the idea that you can be anything you want to be in the world, a lawyer, astronaut, doctor and so much more. Her key brand is to promote knowing that you can make your own success.

In Barbie Land, women rule over everything. The president is a woman, and the entire group of the Supreme Court is made up of women. All Barbies have a house, car, and a job. While the Kens have nothing, they are just there for the ride. The men are displayed as disposable. When Ken goes with Barbie to the Real World, he learns that men are in charge, not women. He takes this as a sign to change the rules and brings this information to the other Kens, proclaiming a power switch. He learns how patriarchy takes a new look into how he can live his life to better suit his needs. Later in the film, Ken also discovers toxic masculinity. Typically, men displaying emotions are looked down on and less masculine. Gen Z tends to be overly critical of others and of how they present themselves. Many people nowadays have notions of wanting only women in charge, “In short, Gen Z – and particularly the women – won’t be denied. Even though their oldest members are only turning 26 this year, they are already reshaping society, the economy and the workplace. Companies that ignore them do so at their peril” (Kreacac para. 5). As they can make “everything better,” while in certain areas this is true, this wouldn’t be equality for both. It would form a matriarchy like Barbie Land. Instead of patriarchy, men in charge, a matriarchy would put only women in power. It would create a similar divide to what we currently experience with patriarchy. In Gen Z, feminism slowly expanded over generations. Nowadays the most basic level of feminism is wanting equality for genders at the expense of no one. In a more detailed summarization, it includes economic, social, and political views.

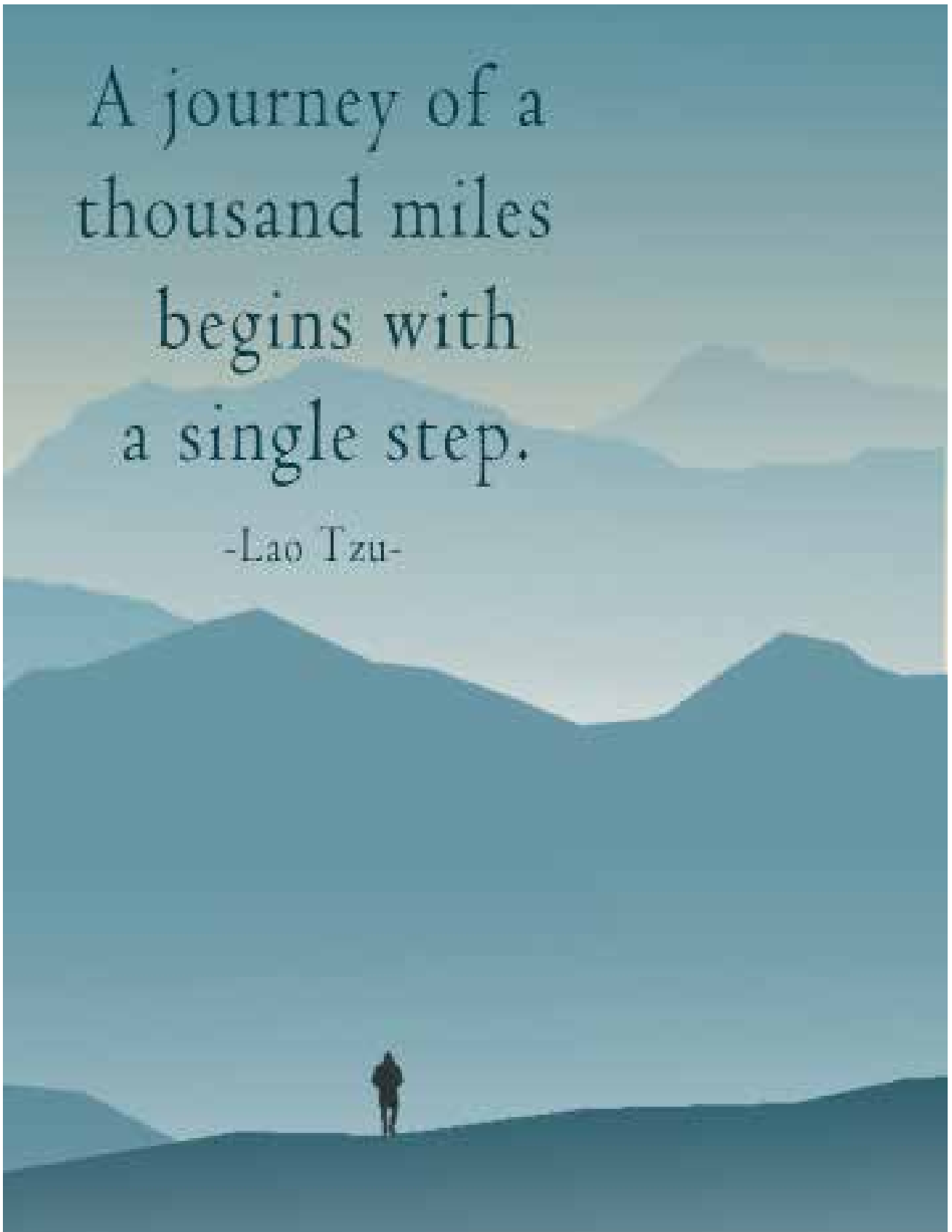
Barbie has impacted consumerism for retailers and shoppers of the Gen Z demographic. They add Barbie commercials to popular brands involving clothing, makeup, and the like. The majority of these brands include Crocs, Zara, Vans, GAP, and many more. Many brands will promote ideals like individuality and inclusivity that appeal to Gen Z’s. Barbie will be advertised in these brands to bring more out of that individual idealism. Due to Gen Z being one of the blunter generations, we are harder to appeal to when it comes to marketing. The group of this generation always must be up to date with the latest trends, even if it means buying into consumerism. Gen Z tends to be more in tune and careful with purchases: “Gen Z’s consumer characteristics tend to reflect their pragmatic approach to money and education. Other key influences are their affinity for technology, their belief in social causes, and a strong individualistic streak” (Bewicke para. 9). Many times, to catch one’s eye, brands and products need to be placed on multiple platforms to get noticed. Tik Tok is a perfect example of marketing for Gen Zs. It is the biggest billboard for any type of consumerism, allowing for a shorter attention span than previous generations. Barbie also promotes fashion and the ideals of glamorous lifestyles. It made young girls want to buy more clothes for their dolls, therefore turning a lot of young adults into shopaholics.

Overall, the *Barbie* movie was lighthearted, heartwarming and well put with some compelling points. I enjoyed the end of the movie the most. They put clips of raw real-life moments of women and girls being themselves and enjoying life at any moment. It made me appreciate my inner little girl, and what I have learned in my adulthood. The song by Billie Eilish (“What was I made for?”), made the scene a lot more heartfelt. Unfortunately, many women can relate to Barbie through this song, “Think I forgot how to be happy. Something I’m not, but something I can be. Something I wait for. Something I’m made for” (Eilish 2:56). It also helped bring a bit of light to certain discussions. When I talked about it with my peers who were from the same demographic as me, they thought it was disappointing and were left unsatisfied. These group of women would label the movie, “baby feminism.” In short terms,

this movie was shown as a steppingstone for feminism for those who haven't dabbled much in the discussion. It brought to light a pool of themes that feminism revolves around. For many women, they saw this movie as "old news." For example, many think this movie only demonstrates that feminism is talking about how women are only labeled as beautiful; not smart, strong, wise, etc. A lot of these issues are talked about multiple times a day and have become much more relevant in our upcoming society. Yet, it is still a reoccurring issue. Despite this, Barbie will always promote these ideals to most and will be an icon for others. "Barbiecore is a nostalgic lark, even with its subtext of body bias and beauty memes" (Glasheen para. 11). No matter how agreeable some are with Barbie's ideals, she is always going to be revolved around controversy. Having a set of perfect standards for yourself may result in failure, perfection doesn't exist with us ordinary human beings. Being "enough" is more than enough. You don't need to be told by a doll to do or be all these things, only to have confidence in yourself.

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A person is standing on a dark, silhouetted hill in the foreground. In the background, there are several layers of mountains, each rendered in a lighter shade of blue, creating a sense of depth and distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

A journey of a
thousand miles
begins with
a single step.

-Lao Tzu-

Journey of a Thousand Miles

Tom Devaney
Digital Print on Paper

Losing Sight of Meaning: An Analysis of Robinson's "Richard Cory"

Melissa Shortt

What is the meaning of life? That is a question that philosophers have been attempting to answer throughout the history of mankind. While there is no easy answer, more recent studies have reshaped such a question in the hopes of leading man to pursue meaning in his own life. In doing this, we have been led to understand that there are four specific needs we – meaning *all* human beings – seek in our pursuit of meaning: a sense of purpose, feelings of efficacy, actions that have value, and a positive sense of self-worth (Stillman and Baumeister 249). In contrast, feelings of self-uncertainty, which can be brought about by feeling rejected, can lead one to view life as meaningless. This paper will analyze E. A. Robinson's much-anthologized poem, "Richard Cory" (1897), revealing a warning to us all: Regardless of one's position in life, human beings have an innate need to belong; if we feel shunned by society, we risk feeling that life is meaningless, which can too often lead to thoughts of suicide.

In the opening stanza of Robinson's poem, there is so much information that must be considered. First, there is the speakers' use of "we people" (2), which alludes to multiple speakers sharing a singular perspective. Right away, this gives the audience a distinct impression of separation, or an "us against him" attitude. Noticing that Cory "went down town" (1), we have to consider the speakers' intent. Are they implying that he has come down from his place at the top? Perhaps. And what is it that "we" all did? Well, we "looked at him" (2) – nothing more, and nothing less. However, the fact that all the people "on the pavement" do nothing but look at the man might very well carry underlying negative connotations, implying that the people are actually *gawking* at Mr. Cory. In their inability to break their gaze, the people have determined, by sight alone, that he is a complete gentleman – from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. This determination is brought on due to Cory's "clean favored" (4), or clean-cut, appearance and a slim stature that is so perfect, it is "imperial," or majestic. By the end of the first stanza, we have a clear idea of the seeming adulation (and perhaps a bit of jealousy) the people of the town felt toward Richard Cory, even if he didn't know it himself.

This is not to say that the speakers of Robinson's poem intended to push Cory to suicide. After all, ostracism does not have to be a conscious act. Unfortunately, whether social rejection is conscious or not does not have any bearing on the pain felt by the rejected party. It has been said that human beings rely on their social groups as a large contributor to their survival (Stillman and Baumeister 250). When we consider that a sense of belonging is an essential component to finding meaning in one's life, "threats to belongingness," such as ostracism, can erode one's belief that their life has any meaning. While a positive relationship with one's family can often give a person the sense of belonging that they need in order to feel that their life is meaningful, feeling rejected can create a lack of meaning. In considering that we have no knowledge of Richard Cory having a family, we can only consider the relationship he has (or does not have) with the characters referenced in the poem.

Throughout the first three stanzas of Robinson's poem, the speakers' adulation for Richard Cory is clear to the audience, who sees him as placed on the proverbial pedestal. While the speakers *almost* recognize Cory's human characteristics, stating, "And he was always quietly arrayed, / And he was always human when he talked" (5-6), they have prevented any hope for establishing a connection, as the pedestal they have created is just too high. All it took to get pulses fluttering was a simple "Good-morning" (8) from such a revered man. This raises the suspicion that his fellow neighbors considered him, somehow, *more* than human, even believing that "he glittered when he walked" (8). Notice, however, that there is a lack of response from the speakers. Cory has displayed his good manners, greeting his neighbors appropriately, yet he is met with silence.

The act of ostracism has been performed for centuries, although we might be less cognizant of such treatment today. For example, in 5th century Athens, voting would occur once each year, with at least 6,000 votes needed in order to ostracize, or banish, an individual, casting them into exile for the next 10 years (Cartwright). In contrast, today's ostracism might more closely resemble simply ignoring someone, or excluding them from activities. The fact that this may sound far less deliberate does little to alleviate the effects of such mistreatment. In fact, in face-to-face encounters, an act as simple as averting one's eyes or being less open to conversing with a specific individual can incite feelings of anger, sadness, increased stress, low self-esteem, and a feeling of lack of control – even if we dislike

the person or group that has shunned us. While solid coping skills can certainly lead to a more positive long-term outcome, the fact of the matter is that no matter how “thick” an individual’s skin might be, we are social creatures; when we feel as though we do not belong, the initial pain of such a rejection is experienced equally by all human beings, and research completed as recently as 2020 has shown that “loss of meaning in life is a strong predictor of suicide” (Chen et al. 1423).

As mentioned above, this does not mean there was any intention on the speakers’ behalf to make Cory feel rejected, as there is no evidence that he was disliked in any way. In the instance of oblivious ostracism, the ostracizer has no awareness of the impact their lack of regard has on the victim (Sanders 15). However, even in situations where the person who has been ostracized believes that there is no ill intent on behalf of the other party, this does nothing to alleviate the victim’s feelings of insignificance. In instances where the ostracizer is aware of their actions, this cannot be automatically determined as malicious behavior. Instead, it may be “non-oblivious and unintentional” (16) ostracism, resulting from the ostracizer misjudging a situation. In “Richard Cory,” the speakers may very well have assumed that the “esteemed” Cory wouldn’t wish to speak with them, leading them to avoid him in order to save face.

In the second half of Robinson’s poem, the speakers exaggerate the wealth of Richard Cory, describing him as “richer than a king” (Cory 9). Because of his apparent wealth, and the lack financial freedom for the speakers, he was “thought to be everything” (11). While it is impossible to determine the extent of the exaggeration of wealth, let’s assume Richard Cory is in the “upper class.” When we consider that the percentage of Americans that live in extreme poverty is about the same as those who have extreme wealth, both classes are “the exception.” Regarding financial security, both groups are isolated from the remainder of the population; they also each face a problem in that nobody outside their group can understand what their life is truly like. We cannot speak for Cory and assume that he understood what his fellow townspeople were experiencing, yet it also would not be fair for the speakers to in any way minimize the man’s pain. Nor should their problems be held up for comparison.

This leads us to conclude that the speakers of the poem, in their inability to recognize that Richard Cory is simply a man, have lost sight of his innate human need to belong – a need that no amount of money can provide. As a result, the pedestal Cory finds himself unwillingly placed upon is his own personal island of rejection and isolation, leading him to believe that his only escape from his insignificant and lonely life is to die by suicide. This brings us back to what many of us were taught as children: Treat others as you wish to be treated (as Mr. Cory attempted to do, based on the speakers’ claims). To do anything other than that, as Richard Cory’s treatment by his community would suggest, can bring about a devastating end.

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Combating the Culture

Jenna Maurice

“The first rule of fight club is you don’t talk about fight club” (00:42:56–00:42:59), but breaking the rules is applauded in the movie *Fight Club*. It is a cerebral, intense, and darkly funny psychological thriller starring two actors, Edward Norton and Brad Pitt, at the peak of their careers. *Fight Club* is one of the most defining movies of the late 1990s. This film perfectly captures the angst, frustration, and resentment of an entire generation of young men raised on divorce and disappointment, cast adrift at the tail end of a mediocre decade, and enslaved to a world of soulless corporations and shallow consumerism. The moral of the story is about how a balance needs to be found between the two extreme personas of the main characters for one to successfully navigate the postmodern world and attain a gratifying life.

The movie begins with a flash forward to the climax of the story. The protagonist is being held at gunpoint by an unseen man named Tyler Durden. The audience is never told the protagonist’s real name, but for the sake of convenience, let us call him Jack. Jack explains that the high-rise office buildings around him have been rigged with explosives due to be detonated in seconds. The audience is immediately left questioning what the purpose of this attack is, who is Tyler Durden, and how does a woman named Marla Singer fit into all of this?

We then flashback a few months to the start of the story. Jack is working as an insurance specialist for a major car manufacturer. His job requires him to travel around America, assessing tragic car accidents in a detached, ruthless fashion. He is wealthy and comfortable, but bored and unsatisfied by his shallow, materialistic existence. The film maker uses a great scene showing the price tag of each impersonal item of furniture in his drab condo coming straight out of an IKEA catalog and Jack’s thoughts about how the content of his home reflected the person that he was. This lack of purpose and fulfillment results in chronic insomnia. In his miserable state, he desperately asks his doctor for help in the form of sleeping pills, noting that his inability to sleep is causing him true pain. Dismissing his concerns, his doctor instead recommends that he visit a support group for men with testicular cancer if he wants to see what real pain looks like.

Jack decides to do just that. Instead of observing the true suffering of the men in the support group to put his own pain in perspective, Jack pretends to be a cancer patient. He cries in the arms of a stranger named Bob, and this emotional release allows him to sleep soundly for the first time in years. He soon becomes a regular attendee of many different support groups, faking his way in so he can leech off other people’s anguish to make himself feel better. This works out great for him until a woman named Marla Singer starts showing up at all the same meetings as him.

Jack discerns that she is a grief tourist like himself, that “her lie reflected [his] lie and suddenly, [he] felt nothing. [He] couldn’t cry” (00:12:14–00:12:20). His ability to release his emotions is bottled back up and his insomnia returns. It is at this point when Jack is on another business flight that he is introduced to a mysterious soap salesman sitting in the seat next to him named Tyler Durden. Tyler is everything that Jack is not. He is laid-back, handsome, confident, captivating, and can instantly cut through the drivel of everyday life. He leaves Jack with his business card before they part ways.

When Jack returns home soon after the flight, he finds his apartment destroyed by a gas explosion. Realizing he has no friends to call and no place to go, he remembers Tyler’s business card and reluctantly calls him. They meet up at a local bar for a few beers, and on the way out, Tyler offers Jack a roof to sleep under until he finds a new home. He only asks that Jack hit him, as hard as he can. As strange as it sounds, Jack complies, leading to a clumsy brawl in the parking lot. Instead of this confrontation driving them apart, it solidifies their friendship, leading Jack to conclude that “we should do this again sometime” (00:35:54–00:35:52).

Soon, Jack has moved into Tyler’s dilapidated house and the two men are having regular fistfights in parking lots and back alleys. It is not long before other like-minded men get drawn to their violent contests. Before they know it, they have formed their own underground fight club where men from all levels of society find release from the pressures and discontents of the modern world through savage street fights. As time passes, Jack finds himself increasingly identifying with Tyler’s simple yet brutal world view. He quits his job after extorting his boss for money, renouncing the corporate world

he used to be a part of, giving himself up to the emotional and physical highs of fight club. It is like a drug for him, and like any addict all he really cares about is his next literal and figurative hit.

His situation becomes more foreboding when Tyler hooks up with Marla, driving a wedge between the two friends. Even worse, Tyler begins to transform fight club into an organized terrorist network called Project Mayhem, with himself seated firmly at the top. They start out with minor acts of vandalism but soon escalate into major attacks of blackmail and intimidation. As the group's power and influence grows, matters come to a head when one of the men, coincidentally the man, Bob, from the cancer group, is shot and killed. Jack realizes that Project Mayhem needs to be stopped, but the network has grown beyond his control. No matter how hard he tries, Tyler is always one step ahead of him. How does he manage this?

Jack and Tyler are the same person, Tyler has been an alter ego of Jack the entire time. The best part about this revelation are the hints subtly woven throughout the narrative in a way that is possible to gloss over the audience upon first viewing the film, but also makes complete sense upon repeated viewings. It puts a fascinating spin on certain conversations, especially the ones between Jack and Marla once you understand the full context behind them.

The action culminates right where it began at the top of a building with Tyler holding Jack at gunpoint. Except he isn't really. Once Jack realizes this and comes to terms with who and what he has created, he is finally able to kill Tyler, and consequently that part of himself, just in time to watch Tyler's plan come to fruition. The movie ends with Jack holding Marla's hand telling her, "You met me at a very strange time in my life" (02:15:53-02:15:55), office buildings all around them collapsing, and the fitting song "Where is My Mind", by The Pixies starts hauntingly playing in the background. The instrumentals and the first verse of the song, "With your feet on the air and your head on the ground/ Try this trick and spin it, yeah/ Your head will collapse, and there's nothing in it/ And you'll ask yourself/ Where is my mind" (The Pixies 0:27-0:47), cues the credits and leaves the viewer feeling unsettled and strangely sad.

Fight Club was not an enormous success at the box office when it was released over 20 years ago. It was too dark, confusing, and perverse for mainstream audiences. The famous late critic Roger Ebert deemed it to be "the most brutal, unremitting, nonstop violence ever filmed" but it grew in popularity over the years. Conversely, *The New York Times* film critic Janet Maslin expressed the complete opposite opinion, stating the film "might be mistaken for a dangerous endorsement of totalitarian tactics and super-violent nihilism in an all-out assault on society... It means to explore the lure of violence in an even more dangerously regimented, dehumanized culture" ("Film Review: Such a Very Long Way From Duvets to Danger"). Despite the controversy, the movie ironically became a kind of cult phenomenon just like its namesake, and for good reason. Quite simply, it is a brilliant film. It is a smart, twisted, suspenseful drama with black comedy elements that manages to present the story in witty, subversive style. It pulls the rug out from under the viewer in a way that feels satisfying and well earned. The best part is the well written character, Tyler Durden.

Tyler is one of the most compelling and fascinating characters in cinema. He is a shrewd, capable, highly motivated man that rejects the fakery of modern society. He easily sways others to his cause and has no regard for what society thinks of him. He is free in every way that Jack is not and represents what every button-down office worker toiling away in some quiescent cubicle wishes he could be. What's interesting is that Tyler does have a kind of loose moral code that he adheres to. He'll happily destroy property and intimidate others to achieve his goals, but he won't harm innocent people if he can avoid it, as evidenced by his reassurance to Jack at the climax that all the buildings were emptied of people before their eminent destruction. There is the suggestion that he ultimately has good intentions behind his villainous acts.

But the real reason *Fight Club* made such an impact on Generation X is because it dared to make astute observations about modern culture, particularly men's place in it. The characters in this movie represent what happens when Generation X must grow up and venture out into the real world. This world of bland offices, pointless meetings, generic apartments, and unfulfilling lives where men are conditioned to be sensitive, docile, and compliant. This was also the first generation to grow up with divorced and single parents being the norm, as Tyler himself remarks, "We're a generation of men raised by women" (00:40:20-00:40:23). The result of all of this is a lost generation of spiritless,

confused, emasculated corporate drones with no real drive or purpose. Whereas previous generations had fought wars or reached for the stars, the emptiness of this generation is filled with material possessions, cast adrift in an ocean of corporate mediocrity.

Fight Club posits the idea that perhaps aggression, competition, and the rush of physical danger are fundamental parts of the male psyche. If you remove these feelings, society ends up with weak, aimless, effeminate men sitting around crying about how hard their lives are. It is no coincidence that Jack finds solace in a testicular cancer survivors' group. He's literally surrounded by emasculated men lamenting the loss of their identity. This theory also explains why *Fight Club* quickly attracts legions of wayward, disenfranchised young men desperately looking for meaning and purpose. But the movie also portrays how easily that demographic can be manipulated by strong, charismatic leaders with destructive and tragic results.

The main message of the film is about rebelling against the empty, meaningless conventions of postmodern society. It is a stinging rebuke against materialism, corporate culture, and the pursuit of shallow, fleeting pleasure. It endorses taking a harder, more painful path to find deeper meaning and self-actualization. It is a warning against denying human nature. With Jack's final acceptance and defeat of Tyler, the film suggests the best way to achieve satisfaction in life is to strike a balance between the two extreme personalities of its protagonists and not falling victim to the pernicious proclivities of either extreme.

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Recreate Art
Tom Devaney
Digital Print on Paper

Nursing Practices Influencing Postpartum Parent-Newborn Bonding

Bree N. Tillinghast

A newborn begins to adjust to life outside of the womb in the seconds after they are born, including forming an attachment bond with their parents. “Attachment describes a mutually reciprocal relationship between the parents and their infant that begins moments after birth” (Scannell and Ruggiero 327). A newborn’s attachment to their parents is a critical part of their physical, emotional, and psychological growth and development, and nurses play an important role in fostering the growth of that relationship from the time the baby is born (Scannell and Ruggiero 327). Erik Erikson’s theory of development states that from a baby’s birth to age eighteen months is the stage of trust vs. mistrust; the ability to trust others (Potter et al. 146). These moments right after birth are “an ideal time to establish a trusting relationship between the newborn and the primary caregiver” (Scannell and Ruggiero 327). The newborn will develop trust by having their physiological, safety and security, and love and belonging needs from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs met (Potter et al. 76). Maternal-child nurses in an inpatient care setting are the first to observe the newborn and their parents/caregivers together and can help ensure that bonding is taking place by listening to the parents, allowing them to ask questions without being judged, and providing teaching on how to care for and bond with the newborn (Scannell and Ruggiero 327). This paper will explore factors contributing to parent and infant postpartum bonding and the implications for nursing practice of the maternal-newborn and neonatal nurse in an inpatient care setting. This paper will focus on nursing interventions that can promote this bonding, and the challenges nurses may face according to recent studies and articles on the matter.

One nursing intervention that encourages newborn-parent bonding as well as having health benefits is utilizing skin-to-skin contact, also called kangaroo care, which involves the baby wearing only a diaper being held against the skin of the parent or caregiver (Scannell and Ruggiero 334). This practice helps the infant to regulate body temperature, heart rate, respiration, and blood sugar levels, but it also “has been found to produce benefits by enhancing interaction and promoting bonding and newborn growth and development” (Scannell and Ruggiero 335). Promoting skin-to-skin contact between infants and parents should be a high priority for nurses because of this multitude of benefits. Newborns are usually put straight on the mother’s chest after a vaginal birth when both mother and baby are not at risk for health complications (Scannell and Ruggiero 327). A challenge to this practice involves caring for premature infants in a neonatal intensive care setting.

One study found that parents participating in kangaroo care of their infant in the NICU showed that it benefited both parties and had “an overall positive impact on caregiver bonding with their infant” and that “mothers who participated in kangaroo care displayed higher maternal attachment scores and lower levels of self-reported maternal stress than mothers who participated in standard care” (Louis and White 193). To implement this kangaroo care, NICU’s would need to change their facilities to allow parents to stay in the room with their infant and to care for them with the help of nurses instead of only by nurses and healthcare workers (Louis and White 193). Some hospitals, such as the one this student nurse had clinical experience with, do have a living area with a couch/bed and private room where parents can stay with their NICU infant, as well as receive support, order food, and live with their infant. This set up allows for many opportunities for skin-to-skin contact while caring for the infant. Regardless of the baby’s gestational age, it should be a priority of the maternal-newborn nurse to encourage the skin-to-skin practice of parents and infants to promote parent-infant bonding.

Another study found that a barrier to providing skin-to-skin contact and kangaroo care was the nurse’s knowledge and confidence about implementing the practice (Almutairi 18). Some nurses felt it was not their place to encourage skin-to-skin interactions, and others felt they could not “safely facilitate skin-to-skin contact with neonates” (Almutairi 19). The infant-parent bonding that happens as a result of skin-to-skin contact has many benefits and should be prioritized in maternal-infant nursing; the study recommends that hospitals provide continued education, classes and training labs to support nurses in their confidence to promote skin-to-skin care of the infant (Almutairi 19). As Almutairi states, “Skin-to-skin contact between newborns and mothers is evidence-based practice should be adopted” in maternal-newborn nursing, in-patient settings (20).

Another approach to maternal-infant nursing care that could benefit parent-infant bonding is

the concept of couplet care, the care of the mother and baby after birth by the same nurse and midwife or physician to keep them together to encourage and support maternal-infant bonding (Curley et al. 737). This would mean that nurses need to be educated in and be confident in their abilities to care for both the mother and the baby, regardless of the level of care they need. According to this study, “the benefits of couplet care include that it supports bonding and attachment” (Curley et al. 738). When an infant requires extra care due to their gestational age, birth weight, or other health deficits, many hospitals separate them from the parents and take them to the NICU (Curley et al. 739). This separation may inhibit the bonding experience of the parents and baby that would occur if they were allowed to stay together and can even have a negative impact on the health of the mother and the infant (Curley et al. 742). There is also the loss of skin-to-skin time for the mother and baby that could occur if they were instead being cared for together as a couplet in the same room.

As with kangaroo care, a barrier to offering couplet care of mothers and infants is the confidence of nurses to safely provide and have the education to implement it (Curley et al. 745). Another barrier is the cost hospitals would incur in upgrading their facilities to keep mothers and newborns together throughout their stay (Curley et al. 742). This study recommends providing cross-training to nurses and staff so that they may have the knowledge and training to provide couplet care and assigning nurses with that specialized training to patients requiring that care (Curley et al. 744). These changes would allow for improved outcomes, including the area of parent-infant bonding because the couplet is kept together throughout their stay. This student nurse observed couplet care achieved by having a maternal-newborn nurse assigned to the mother integrating care with and collaborating with a neonatal nurse attending to the newborn who had additional medical needs. Both mother and baby continued to be cared for in the same room; this may be a way to achieve couplet care in other facilities.

Postpartum nurses are responsible for the care of parents and the newborn, but they also “facilitate parent-infant bonding and instruction in infant care to new parents” (Buek et al. 2). During the COVID-19 pandemic, policies were changed that limited visitors and how many support people were allowed to be at the hospital or birth center when a woman gave birth, which proved to be a challenge to patients who felt isolated from their extended family and friends. However, maternal-newborn nurses found this to be of benefit as they were able to spend more focused time with the parents to teach them to care for the baby and to encourage their bonding with their newborn (Buek et al. 6). The extra privacy of the parents and nurses resulted in “more maternal rest, more breastfeeding, and more family bonding time” and allowed them to “bond as a family unit” (Buek et al. 7). This suggests that if parents had the time and space to learn from the nurses and to get to know their infant with limited interruptions, the outcome would be an improved bonding experience for the parents and baby (Buek et al. 7). In addition, more privacy could also increase skin-to-skin time that may not happen if visitors are in the room interrupting the parents and infant experience (Buek et al. 7). Now that COVID-19 limitations on visitors are being lifted, hospitals may revert to how it was before the pandemic. The findings of this study suggest that maybe there should be a continued restriction on visitors so that nurses and patients will have better outcomes, including newborn-maternal bonding (Buek et al. 8).

Going forward, maternal-newborn nurses may wish to advocate for such restrictions in order to assist with their role in promoting parent-infant bonding. This student nurse observed and learned that the maternal-newborn floor of the hospital to which she was assigned during a clinical rotation still limited the number of visitors allowed at one time, and enacted a two-hour mandatory quiet time each day in which visitors and other staff were not permitted to interrupt. These policies were implemented to continue these benefits that were observed by nurses at this hospital during the COVID 19 pandemic. Having limited visitors, more nurse/patient time, and privacy appear to play a role in facilitating and enhancing the parent-newborn bond.

This student nurse feels that the nursing practice of limiting visitors and protecting patient teaching and one-on-one time for parents and infants will be of benefit if she decides to pursue a career in maternal-infant nursing; the benefits would be positive for both the parents and the infant and encourage the parent-newborn bond (Buek et al. 8). Another way a nurse in this field can help improve maternal-newborn bonding would be to get the education needed to support couplet care

of mothers and newborns (Curley et al. 744). Succeeding in these nursing practices could also allow nurses to promote skin-to-skin contact and kangaroo care, which leads to successful parent-newborn bonding (Almutairi 19). The way a maternal-newborn area of the hospital is set up would also influence where a nurse decides to work; having a facility that was organized in a manner to maximize and encourage parent-newborn bonding would yield enhanced patient outcomes.

The benefits and importance of successful parent-child bonding that both infants and parents receive are critical to the emotional and physical health of all parties involved, and it is a maternal-infant nurse's responsibility to provide nursing interventions that will promote this patient outcome for them (Scanell and Ruggiero 327). Some practices from the literature discussed on this matter include providing opportunities for skin-to-skin contact, keeping mother and baby together, as in couplet care, and limiting visitors and implementing mandatory quiet time. In addition, nurses should have the training, education, and confidence to carry out this care, and hospitals need to adapt to the way the care is delivered by upgrading facilities and creating policies to protect the one-on-one time between parents and infants. These changes and interventions could maximize the outcome of successful parent-infant bonding in the postpartum inpatient setting.

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Media and Mr. Lee

Taner Kaya

I belonged to Mr. Lee's 3/4 Class, being a mix of 3rd and 4th grade classmates. We were separated from the greater body of our elementary school, detached from the rest within a repurposed mobile home. In our disparate island community, Mr. Lee reigned unchallenged as an educator. On the bus ride home my twin brother would tell stories of life in the main building. Math class was twice a day and lectures filled the time between; it seemed impossibly different. I'd clutch my assigned *Moby Dick* variation and wonder when my brother would learn about sperm whales. Mr. Lee had a relationship with media that was incredibly personal, and it leaked its way into his teaching style that defined my class time and life beyond it. Studies, overwhelmingly, show that individuals learn more easily when concepts are presented through visual and verbal media ("Pedagogy in Action" 1). Taking this to heart, Mr. Lee guided a semi-freestyle singalong every day on emerging topics. A skilled guitarist, he utilized a lot of "call and repeat" tactics in his songs, getting the class to chant new information till it was fully engrained in our little heads. This was just one of the techniques he employed, which I didn't necessarily understand. My twin brother was great at times tables, yet I came home with a giant mass of novelties I'd never become an expert at. Though, it was through this constant "performance" of concepts that Mr. Lee used media to shape our psyches. It was not his intention to teach us what to think through his utilization of media, but rather use media to expand our ways of thinking.

Mr. Lee was one to address his 3rd grade students with the exact sort of steady professionalism he never gave his peers. He'd send me outside of our tiny trailer classroom when I was behaving as I often did: distractingly. I'd detest that it was raining and he, unblinkingly, would ask that I then wipe my shoes when I get back in. He was a very tall man. Looking back with some post-adolescent perspective, a handsome one at that. Always clad in some striped amalgamation of green and brown, with wire-framed glasses fastened to his nose. Being just over eight years old, I was new to the concept of academia outside the realm of Silent Reading Time. It took a while to realize Mr. Lee's class was definitively atypical, this being the consequence of a very atypical man. I was always quite embarrassed when he herded us outside the trailer to rehearse short plays he had either found or written up. Adorned in hodge-podges of construction paper and recycled fabric, we followed his instruction as he directed us with juxtaposed seriousness. The other classes would watch us confusedly when they were at recess, not relating performance arts to education. At home, my father would rant incessantly about how the Chinese were surpassing America's youth. He'd say Mr. Lee wouldn't qualify to wash school toilets in Beijing. I had nothing to refute this, and I began to worry about whether I would fall behind my contemporaries and stay that way. Although I was quite young, I had a creeping suspicion of my curriculum.

Many nights my twin would go to bed after an hour or so of division problems. Meanwhile, I would be up cramming to memorize lines for a recreation of some old Rudyard Kipling story. There was a sinking fear that I would not only "fail" my "assessment," but do so in front of the onlookers Mr. Lee brought in as an audience. For him, there always needed to be something more on the line. As silly as I looked in costume, the pressure felt more palpable than any written test in personal memory. Mr. Lee did not take things lightly. He didn't care if we looked foolish or felt triply so. Conquering humiliation was all part of it. Many Fridays, we would ask to watch something on one of the old roll-in televisions. The classes in the main building did it, so we assumed we had such the right. Mr. Lee would never allow this. In fact, he was so content in withholding the television that he would simply smile and say, "That does sound fun, doesn't it?" This would spark a completely alternate activity. Free writing, which involved sharing what you wrote with the class. There was also free reading, which involved choosing a passage of interest and, of course, sharing it with the class. My personal favorite was a free drawing period, where the pattern continued.

It was odd, though, when we eventually stopped asking for the roll-in television. I'd clamor to start my short story, fully realized in fifteen minutes, and read it to my class. It was no different for the rest. Children are surprisingly inventive. I found myself having an exceptionally fun time listening to the others read aloud. Experiencing all that my peers had to share incited a deep desire to share my

own work. With work that was made to be shown off, it was done with a fervent passion not discovered by those routinely passing in “Mad Minutes.” There was something rewarding about having skin in the game, this being a creation of the environment Mr. Lee had so carefully designed. We were a class of content creators. We mastered not the foundations of arithmetic but could wholly express ourselves with earnest intelligence. It was not till later in my academic career that I found how easily long expanses of text were logged into my brain. Studying had become a breeze. The practice I had in Mr. Lee’s class committing lines to memory had directly correlated to all other areas of academia. Through all the creative bustle, Mr. Lee had gotten us to learn.

The high pace of our content creation made us particularly uneager to slog through Mr. Lee’s curated content consumption. Throughout the year, we read only one story. My brother remembers fondly the misadventures of Ms. Frizzle. We, the less fortunate, were subject to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Every day. All year. He read a different adaptation each month till we had progressed our way to the original. I vividly recall the subtle snores and heavy eyelids of my classmates. Mr. Lee would read on, unoffended, through vast sections of story that contained nothing but the processing of dead sperm whale parts. My parents had trouble believing how much of my curriculum was purely whale-based. It began to strike me that most 3rd graders had no connection with Captain Ahab et al. I was nervous to leave Mr. Lee’s class, as his lessons didn’t seem transferrable. Just eight years old. An incredibly formative year in development. Yet, I seemed to only be engaged in spermaceti and the intricacies of the Bowline knot. This is when any single episode of *The Magic School Bus* seemed preferable. Some good, generalized information. Wrapped in a neat, 2D bow. If everyone else learned from cartoons, why shouldn’t we?

When I reached middle school, *The Iliad* felt like a Judy Blume novel. Finally, I got it. Mr. Lee’s greatest lesson in conditioning. It was never about the white whale, or the spermaceti, or unconquerable nature in the mortal face of Man; It was about reading a difficult book. Mr. Lee used media to challenge us. He never wanted it to be comfortable. In everything we did, we had to rise to the occasion or simply be left behind; be unheard. Mr. Lee recognized that great media requires great consumers, which is what he intently molded us into. He taught us to tame media, be able to participate in it, and analyze it with care. He didn’t let me get sucked into the inviting glow of the roll-in television, left to think about nothing as I am fed packaged infographics. In my generation, I hear so often the classic “school taught me (insert trivial information), but they didn’t teach me how to do taxes. What a scam.” School is not about the specifics, just as media isn’t bogged down in the minutiae. Media’s great purpose is helping us, as locationally limited primates, get a little more perspective. It allows us to open our mind to things far beyond our normal train of thought. Mr. Lee used media to help set standards for ourselves and drive home lessons that we would otherwise forget entirely. He showed that there is a progression to consuming media, and it is a great achievement to advance to higher difficulties. If we consistently consume and participate in media in ways that are strictly comfortable, we lose out on the potential to grow. Media is a responsibility. If we do not give it our utmost effort, it will continue to ask nothing of us. In this, there is great loss. In loss, there is no class singalong.

Thanks, Mr. Lee.

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I Recall
Melissa Shortt
Oil Paint on Canvas

A Mother's Love: Considering History Alongside Gwendolyn Brooks's "the mother"

Melissa Shortt

I can still vividly recall the first time I was asked to analyze Gwendolyn Brooks's poem, "the mother," and the question that followed. At the time, I had a male professor, certainly not one who has ever experienced what a mother has – and as he threw a quick glance around the room, he threw a general question into the center: "So, is *she even a mother?*" I looked around the room, full of faces much younger than mine, and mostly male, save for the one person sitting directly behind me. Knowing her personally, I knew that she had no children; I was the only mother in the room. While I felt as though this gave me some sort of authority on the subject, I wanted to hear the opinions of the others before sharing my own. It was as I had expected – the general consensus is that, no, she is not a mother. She has "killed" all of her unborn children. Even in the title of this poem, we catch a glimpse of the speaker's self-doubt, as it is written in all lowercase letters; this signifies the uncertainty she has as to whether she deserves to use such a title. While Brooks has given us no clear answer to this question within the lines of her poetry, we need only to consider the expectation that is placed on a mother to arrive at a logical conclusion; a mother's primary role is to sacrifice for her child's wellbeing. Armed with this knowledge, we can shine a spotlight on the historically poor treatment of Black women and see that the speaker is, in fact, a mother – making sacrifice after sacrifice so that her unborn children do not suffer the same fate as her.

It is important to note that Brooks is a Black woman, and her poem is written in 1945, which is less than 100 years after the abolition of slavery, and about 20 years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Racial segregation at this time is still very much a reality, as is the often-violent mistreatment of Black individuals. While slave owners of the past would rape their female slaves with the intention of creating a future slave generation, white males in the time after abolishment were more likely to rape as a means of exerting their dominance, as well as to serve as a reminder to Black women that "their bodies were not their own" (McGuire 907).

In the first stanza of Brooks's poem, the speaker is addressing her audience, repeatedly using the word "you." In the opening line, for example, she states, "Abortions will not let you forget." Initially, this can be considered a warning to women who are considering this as an option, as well as a reminder to herself. However, if we consider the meaning in "You will never neglect or beat/ Them, or silence or buy with a sweet" (5-6), we might consider the possibility that she is actually addressing somebody else – the other party that is responsible for her pregnancy. This makes even more sense if we travel a bit further back in history.

In 1808, Congress ruled the importation of slaves a prohibited act. It was a ruling that created a new fate for enslaved Black women, as slave owners would need to find new ways to "replenish their labor force" (Amicus Brief 5). Enslaved women had become dually valuable, as they still contributed their labor, but they had also been tasked with increasing the slave population. One of our notorious "Founding Fathers," Thomas Jefferson, has been quoted as saying "I consider a slave woman who breeds once every two years as profitable as the best worker on the farm" (6). Seen merely as chattel for the white man, slaves had no rights to their own bodies, and no rights to the children they were forced to birth. Women, desperate for some semblance of control over their own bodies, would often find a way to fight back: possession of "a secret by which they destroy the fetus at an early stage of gestation," which would ultimately "effect an abortion" (8).

In Brooks's speaker's suggestion that she may have "stole[n] your births and your names" (17), one can argue that this means the mother has named her aborted child – stealing that ability away from whoever would become the child's owner if they were sold into slavery. Just as she has stolen their "luck" (15), their "lives" (16), their "stilted or lovely loves, [their] tumults, [their] marriages, aches, and [their] deaths" (19). So, what does the speaker mean by "stole" (17)? This most likely implies that these things were not hers to take, as when one is considered to be property, they are entitled to nothing.

When the speaker in Brooks's poem states, "If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths, / Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate" (20-21), this would allude to a couple of different things. First, the mention of "poisoned" breaths refers to the products such as camphor

that were used by enslaved women to promote abortion. The fact that women did this to both take control of their bodies, as well as to prevent their potential offspring from being subjected to the same violence as they themselves were facing would make the speaker's choice deliberate. In contrast, she acknowledges that this was not done as an act of cruelty toward the unborn child – not deliberately, anyway.

By the early 20th century, slavery had been abolished. Yet, this brought forth a new punishment to submit Black women to: “Compulsory Sterilization” (Amicus Brief 10). This would allow for the mandatory sterilization of “the feebleminded, those on welfare, or those with genetic defects” in 27 states. Oftentimes, this would be done without a woman's knowledge or consent, as Black women have been labeled “sexually indiscriminate, and as bad mothers who were constrained by biology to give birth to defective children” (11). While Black women were forced into sterility, President Roosevelt would state that, “race purity must be maintained” as he chastised “well-born white women who engaged in ‘willful sterility—the one sin for which the penalty is national death, race suicide’” (12). This is a good time to again point out that this is written in 1945, a time when abortion was illegal, and Roe v Wade was still about 30 years away. So it seems as though our government has been on the fence over which rights a Black women in the United States deserves to have; she is forced to give birth, then she is forced into sterility – it is no wonder that unsafe, home-induced abortion might seem like the most viable option for her. After centuries of mistreatment and abuse, Black women instead chose silence.

What if she were to make the choice to carry her baby to term, perhaps even giving birth in a hospital? How much better would the outcome of mother and baby be? In 1940, the Maternal Mortality Rate for white women was approximately 350 per 100,000 live births, while for Black women, the rate was greater than 750 deaths per 100,000 live births (Grove and Hetzel 65). Shockingly, even today, the Maternal Mortality Rate for Black women remains significantly higher (69.9 in 2021) than that of white women (26.6 in 2021) (Hoyert). These numbers point to the lack of adequate healthcare that Black women have received throughout history. In fact, it should be more surprising that the speaker in Brooks's “the mother” was able to survive multiple abortions, because if she had gone to a doctor to have them performed, she likely would not have fared as well.

This poem continues to be relevant today, as it speaks to the fact that, when a woman is desperate, some ridiculous law that has been established by a white-dominated patriarchal society cannot stand in her way. Many may read this poem and grieve for the babies that “never were.” I read this and I feel an urge to commend any woman who has survived such losses in the wake of a society who has continued to beat her down – a woman who protected the lives of her unborn children in the only way she knew how, and prevented them from suffering the same through each tragic experience that was likely to follow. In her desire to shield them from such pain, she has become the definition of “The Mother.”

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Sanctions

Mikaela Belanger

Fear has his claws piercing my heart
He poisons my brain with sweet venom
Falling mindlessly apart
He travels like a virus through my system
Cursing me with his love
It's plenum and soaring above
Confusion arises among the surprises
What if he lifts many disguises
Are the syllables that roll off his tongue
Like crisp fallacies
Am I too afraid of fear to be here
Is it me at the meres sear
Get me away from here
But it's him I wanna be near ...

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Clouded eyes of a questioning mind, a healthy poisoned heart
From the ashes, she rises to condemn fear to dust.
She bares the eyes of time, a beautifully cursed ordainment
Omniscient wallows of Her soul She unmapped from mortification
Her hands held the weight of his world She no longer chose to bare
Stripped of Her baggage to burn bridges to build new ties stripped of lies
Proud in solidarity from the beginning to have the power to silence in the end
Her shoulders held tall centered in her alignment, kicking the dust off Her heel
She is no longer afraid of fear
I saved Her from there
Now it's Me without the care, their nightmare
Long last awaits judgment calls at the pearly gates
The lost will be found and the saved will be forgotten
The feared are afraid of the ones who destroy fear.

Mask Aversion Among Health Care Workers and What We Can Do About It

Kelly Marsh

In late 2019, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome, changed what we thought we knew about coronaviruses. COVID-19's unique ability to spread easily and asymptotically presented health care professionals with many challenges; notably, how to best protect health care workers. Inconsistent messaging from governmental agencies regarding mask usage likely contributed to confusion and fueled distrust in medical advice. Once an uncontroversial part of personal protective equipment, masks are now seen by many providers as political and even harmful to wear. Even under the best of circumstances, behavioral changes can be difficult, but especially so for those who consider the changes to be unnecessary and burdensome. By addressing these concerns using an open, nonjudgmental, and evidence-based approach, we can promote a culture of safety in the health care setting and regain the trust of our workers.

On December 12, 2019, a cluster of patients in Hubei Province, a large region in central China, were identified as having a fast spreading, atypical pneumonia-like illness that was not responding well to standard treatments (COVID Timeline 1). Within a few weeks, the World Health Organization (WHO) had identified over forty cases and traced them all to a live animal market in Wuhan, China (COVID Timeline 2); the illness spread quickly and with devastating results. At the time the pathogen was identified as a novel (new) coronavirus, viruses within that family were known to cause mild respiratory illness, like the common cold but were rarely fatal, such as the coronaviruses that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and easily contained. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States established an incident management structure to guide their response by following a preparedness plan designed to handle MERS exposures (COVID Timeline 2). By mid-January 2020, the deadly virus had spread outside of China and the WHO found evidence of possible human-to-human transmission (Covid Timeline 2). The prospect of human-to-human transmission was critical because it indicated the potential for rapid transmission of a virus for which no wide-scale testing or treatments were available.

Within those first weeks of the pandemic, public health officials recognized similarities between SARS-Cov-1 (SARS virus) and SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) (genetic relatedness, transmission primarily through respiratory droplets, and the frequency of lower respiratory symptoms). However, they failed to appreciate one key difference, transmissibility (Ghandi et al. 1). The ease of which a pathogen spreads from one person to another is measured using the R_0 (pronounced R naught) scale. A microbe with a R_0 scale under 1 will not be able to infect enough hosts to perpetuate further transmission and is likely to die out (Achaiah et al. 5). Ying Liu of the Xiamen University School of International Business and Joacim Rocklov of Umea University Department of Public Health found that the Delta variant of the COVID-19 was almost twice that of the ancestral strain of the virus, an average of 5.06 compared to 2.79 (5). One study suggested that the rate for Delta was up to 8.0 (Liu & Rocklov Table 1). According to my calculations, each person infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus to an average of 5.06 people instead of only 2.79 people with SARS.

The ability to shed higher amounts of virus among pre-symptomatic patients in the upper respiratory tract also set COVID-19 apart from any other known respiratory disease-causing viruses (Ghandi et al. 2). A study published in the *Journal of American Medicine* in 2021 found that "transmission from asymptomatic individuals was estimated to account for more than half of all transmissions" (Johansson et al. 6). Furthermore, Professor Kelvin Kai-Wang To et al. noted that unlike SARS, patients with COVID-19 had the highest viral load near presentation, which is just before appearing symptomatic, in saliva samples taken from an area in the back of the throat (To et al. 4). Additionally, SARS is believed to be contagious only when symptoms are present and then lasting for up to 10 days (FAQ SARS 7), whereas patients with COVID-19 can spread pathogens up to 10 days prior to illness and, depending on the severity, can remain infectious for up to 20 days after (COVID Isolation 2). This research is significant because it highlights the flawed assumption that genetically similar viruses could share mitigation strategies. COVID-19 patients who present as asymptomatic and carrying a high viral load in their upper airway can transmit the virus easily through talking or laughing, as opposed to a virus which is present only in the lower airway and must depend upon coughing to spread into

the environment. Relying on symptoms to present themselves before instituting control measures, such as facial masks, gives the virus up to ten days of unmitigated transmission potential. It quickly became apparent that using a MERS or SARS strategy for COVID-19 was not going to be adequate. Unfortunately, the guidance from the CDC didn't reflect the severity of the situation.

On April 3, 2020, the CDC recommended using cloth face masks despite admitting that their widespread use had never been studied (Fisher et al. 2). It did not take long for the scientific community to point out that cloth masks were less effective than medical masks and respirators (Chughtai 1). Many health care workers saw this conflict of only recommending cloth masks but not medical masks and concluded that the CDC COVID-19 guidelines could not be trusted. Datta et al. found that weekly mask compliance in a facility with a mask mandate was only 82.2%, which they considered "suboptimal" (Advani et al. 6). Infectious disease researchers from Duke University, Sonali D. Advani et al., also noted that poor compliance in shared spaces led to "known exposures" in some facilities that resulted in "employee furloughs, a substantial burden of contact tracing, and unnecessary anxiety for exposed individuals" (2). Despite being faced with the possibility of these ruinous consequences, many healthcare workers clung to their convictions and chose not to comply with the mandates.

It is important to learn why many health care workers were (and still are) willing to risk job loss, illness, or even death rather than follow evidence-based recommendations, such as wearing a mask in the health care setting. One reason often cited by mask-averse workers is the belief that COVID-19 is not a serious illness when in fact, even a "mild" case of COVID has the potential to negatively affect your health for months or even years post-infection. Perhaps seeking to understand this behavior, Johannes Brug of the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and fellow researchers found that one of the main predictors of compliance with protective behavior is risk perception: "People are more likely to comply with recommended precautionary behaviors if they think they are susceptible to contracting the disease (i.e., perceived vulnerability) and if that illness is deemed to lead to severe health consequences (i.e., perceived severity)" (Brug et al. 8). The researchers also noted that risk perceptions are often biased (Brug et al. 9) and dependent on communication (Brug et al. 10): "Risk communication messages that are not comprehended by the public at risk or communication of conflicting risk messages will result in lack of precautionary actions. Communications that are perceived as coming from a non-trustworthy source may have the same results." Dissemination of clear and scientifically accurate information is always important but never more important than at the beginning of a crisis. Once a source is perceived as being inaccurate or otherwise untrustworthy, it is exceedingly difficult to regain any credibility. Recognizing the reasons for mask-aversion among health care workers is an important first step towards building trust between the research community and practitioners.

Hesitancy in adopting infections control measures is not new; antiseptics and surgical glove use were both dismissed by skeptical health care professionals when first introduced. Employing caution when introduced to new techniques or technology isn't always detrimental, in fact, practicing evidence-based medicine is not only appropriate but also critical to ensuring patient safety. Nevertheless, when given sufficient, scientifically accurate information, health care workers must be prepared to adopt standards of care. A case in point is when, in the late 1800s, surgical gloves were introduced to surgeons in German-speaking countries. Prior to glove use, surgeons would "root around in the patients' body cavities with their bare hands" (Romeo 2), spreading germs easily to the patient and then to other patients as well. In this example, surgeons were asked to learn a new behavior using early glove models that were made of permeable materials, such as cotton and were ill-fitting, like ones made from leather (Romeo 7). Clearly, the fabric gloves would not prevent disease transmission and the leather gloves made it difficult to perform their surgical duties. Given those options, it is not difficult to understand why many doctors resisted the call for change. It is challenging to convince people, especially health care workers, to change their behavior if the solution does not adequately address the problem at hand.

Once we understand the reasons behind mask aversion in health care workers, we can work on building a dialogue with the goal of changing the culture in health care to one of safety for practitioners and patients alike. Sociologist Dr. Matthew Facciani specializes in misinformation and

political bias regarding health care workers; he recommends being open to productive conversations and to listen “with compassion” so as not to give the impression of being judgmental and “triggering defensiveness” (Scanlan 8). As noted in Advani et al. par. 7, “we need to work closely with health care providers to better understand the root causes for poor masking compliance and to identify and remove barriers to doing the right thing.” By bringing mask-averse workers into the conversation, we are demonstrating that we hear their concerns and value their participation in crafting a solution based on scientifically accurate information.

There has never been a more important time to rethink our masking policies. COVID is just one of several respiratory infections currently circulating in the human population. China, Denmark and some European countries have reported “rising pneumonia activity...due to a mix of respiratory viruses, including *Mycoplasma pneumonia*” (“*Mycoplasma pneumonia* epidemic” 2023). Here in the United States, Covid, Influenza, and the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), referred to as the “triple-demic” by the CDC, present a moderate to severe risk for the winter 2023-2024 (“Respiratory Disease Season Outlook” Figure 1). Additionally, Warren County, Ohio recently declared an outbreak of 142 pediatric pneumonia cases reported since August 2023. “Not only is this above the county average, it also meets the Ohio Department of Health definition of an outbreak” (“Media Release – Pneumonia” 2023). One theory for the surge in respiratory infections is that a COVID infection may inhibit the ability of our dendritic cells (DCs) to recognize viral infections and diminish our ability to fight off other disease-causing agents (Winheim et al. 2). This study, published in PLOS Pathogens, concluded that “Depletion and functional impairment of DCs beyond the acute phase of the disease may have consequences for susceptibility to secondary infections and clinical management of COVID-19 patients.” Essentially, COVID may leave the door open and allow other infectious agents in, with little challenge from our damaged immune system. Wearing masks correctly can prevent the spread of multiple disease-causing agents (“Healthcare Provider Toolkit” (2).

Mask hesitancy among health care practitioners is an ongoing issue that requires more research. Confusion and mixed messaging have created an atmosphere of distrust in public health agencies that has allowed almost unmitigated spread of the virus. Going forward, the focus of health care agencies should be to understand the nature of workers’ mask aversion and to work together on evidence-based solutions. We owe it to ourselves, our families and our patients to come together and facilitate a culture of safety in all aspects of health care.

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Dismantling the Patriarchy through Women's Literature

Bethany Gibney

Throughout history women have faced undeniable oppression and unequal treatment at the hands of the patriarchy. Women have long been thought of as second-class citizens, not worthy of participation or recognition in many aspects of mainstream life. However, our advancements have prevailed regardless of the barriers created by a male dominated society. Women of all races, sexualities and classes have found voice via literature and have used their voices and respective works to address relevant women's issues. Authors Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Alison Bechdel all use literature to address relevant women's issues that stem from patriarchal society in their respective novels — *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and *Fun Home* (2006). Throughout the three distinct waves of the feminist movement, literature can be observed as a powerful and vital implement when advocating for women's equality.

The first wave of feminism began in the 1840s and concluded around the mid-1920s. The beginning of the movement is often marked by the first formal women's rights convention which was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 (Lee). First wave feminists advocated extensively for the right to formal education and the right to own property in addition to the right to vote. However, discrimination within the women's rights movement can be observed. The concerns of women of color regarding the discrimination they faced were often overlooked or disregarded by other activists and supporters (Hill). The initial mainstream wave of feminism was concerned mainly with securing equality for white middle- and upper-class women rather than all women. Racism within the feminist community was a prevalent issue during the first wave. Despite this, women of color continued to fight and advocate for their rights and equal treatment and in 1896 the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was founded (Lange).

The initial feminist movement was influential in the passing of the nineteenth amendment which secured women's right to vote in the United States in 1920. Virginia Woolf's novel titled *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in May of 1925, only five years after white women gained voting rights. The main character, Clarissa Dalloway, is an affluent white woman living in London. Although *Mrs. Dalloway* is set in London, many universal feminist themes are featured prominently. As mentioned previously, the early feminist movement was mainly focused on the rights of middle- and upper-class white women. It is important to note the lack of diversity within the novel, this is reflective of the lack of inclusivity within the early phases of the feminist movement. The exact reasoning behind Woolf's exclusion of people of color in her novel is unknown but it can be theorized that the prevalence and normalization of racism and classism of the time could have influenced Woolf's decision. Despite the lack of diversity in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a plethora of ideas and subjects consistent with the first wave of the feminist movement can be observed.

Societal expectations and the burden they have upon women are addressed both indirectly and directly throughout Woolf's novel. The main character, Clarissa Dalloway, struggles with others' perception of her, causing a great deal of stress and anxiety that is highlighted through her narration. In the beginning of the novel, Clarissa compares her physical looks to the other women she is familiar with. She is quick to point out the flaws of other women, as well as her own, "She had a narrow pea stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's" (Woolf 9). Clarissa's fear of social rejection makes her extremely critical of herself and other women around her. She harbors deep insecurities regarding her looks, but her criticism of other women is what truly stands out in this passage. The incredibly restricting societal standards of women are a product of the patriarchy; yet men are not the only ones pushing these standards. This is exhibited by Clarissa Dalloway. The superficial judgments of women are especially damaging when perpetrated by other women. Clarissa Dalloway's character highlights how male dominated society plays a role in the deconstruction of women's personal self-esteem and confidence. This can be very damaging on an individual level and even more so on a large scale.

Woolf additionally emphasizes the role of class and how this affects the status and treatment of women. During the period in which *Mrs. Dalloway* was written, class played a major role in the treatment women were subjected to. Arguably, class still plays a major role in the respect and

treatment women receive. Clarissa's party is a display of her social status and class which undoubtedly causes her a great deal of anxiety, "She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat. Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly, standing in a bunch at a corner like Ellie Henderson, not even caring to hold themselves upright" (Woolf 146). The importance of the party is significant and reflects the social pressures Clarissa, and many other women face. Even in modern day society, the remnants of the rigid expectations women were expected to live by are present. It is vital to acknowledge Clarissa Dalloway's privilege due to her race and class and understand that not all women were afforded this benefit. Virginia Woolf conveys a multitude of issues that women faced during the first wave of the feminist movement throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, but it is essential to note that many of these issues disproportionately affected women of color. Even with the limited scope of Woolf's novel, she still employs literature as a technique to underline prominent issues within society and call out the oppression and unequal treatment of women.

The second wave of feminism occurred in the United States from the early 1960s to the mid '80s. Second wave feminists fought against domestic and sexual violence and advocated for protected reproductive healthcare. Additionally, feminists of this era were also fighting against workplace and pay discrimination. This phase of the feminist movement was extremely influential and the lasting effects of it can still be observed in the present day. Notably, the second wave of feminism was influenced and inspired by the Civil Rights movement that was also occurring simultaneously in the United States. Issues surrounding racial equality and the social rights of all women were at the forefront of this campaign. The concept of the different "waves" of feminism was coined during this period by a woman by the name of Martha Weinman Lear. Lear's article titled *The Second Feminist Wave* was published in the *New York Times* in 1968 and would effectively establish the two distinct phases of the feminist movement (Napikoski).

Author Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970, during the wake of the civil rights and the second wave feminist movements. Morrison's novel explores themes relevant in the continued fight against the oppression of women and racial inequality, making it a vital piece of women's literature stemming from the second wave feminist movement. Morrison's choice to write this novel solely based on the experience of people of color was intentional and quite influential. The main perspective featured throughout the novel is that of Black women and girls. This is a significant choice and gives voice to women who would not normally have their perspective shared in a mainstream way. The novel's popularity among feminists is reflective of the shifting focus of the movement towards equality for all women. Morrison addresses the violence that women, especially women of color, are subjected to at an alarming rate. The character of Mrs. Breedlove speaks directly about the violence she experiences at the hands of her own husband: "Cholly commenced to getting meaner and meaner and wanted to fight me all the time. I give him as good as I've got. Had to. Look like working for that woman and fighting Cholly was all I did" (Morrison 119).

Domestic violence was initially criminalized on a state-by-state basis and was exceedingly difficult to prove in a court of law. In 1978 The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) was formed. Prior to the formation of the NCADV, there were several smaller independent organizations that assisted women who were victims of domestic violence. Despite these resources, violence against women continued. It wasn't until 1984 that the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) was created, which established emergency crisis services for women and children experiencing domestic abuse and or violence (Graboyes). Sexual violence against women and girls is a prevalent issue in our patriarchal society as well as in Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Without a doubt, the subject matter is extremely brutal and disturbing, yet it brings awareness to the fact that this issue affects a significant portion of women and children.

The landmark ruling of *Roe vs. Wade* effectively legalized and secured women's constitutional right to abortion in 1973 (Taylor). Despite this, the subject matter of abortion is still taboo. The silencing of women's issues is a product of the patriarchy, for centuries women were told that their opinions and issues do not matter. Second wave feminists did not comply with the silence placed upon them, instead they expressed their frustration and concerns outwardly through activism and literature. This controversial subject matter is employed by feminists as a means of drawing attention to the issues

at hand. The way society treats survivors of abuse, both sexual and domestic, is frankly disgusting. This is observed throughout Morrison's novel via the character Pecola Breedlove. She is ridiculed and even directly blamed for causing her assault. This was not uncommon and still occurs in the present day. Women's "credibility" and personal morals are often called into question in the wake of assault. Personally, I believe that this is the result of male dominated society once again trying to silence women's issues. Literature is a powerful tool that can be used to educate and spread awareness regarding the extreme oppression, inequality and violence women are subjected to. Literature can directly communicate women's viewpoints without outside input from the patriarchy. This is observed throughout *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison's novel is a form of activism that aims at combating against discrimination and the mistreatment of women.

Morrison has also been notoriously outspoken about the narrow views associated with the mainstream feminist movement, "One of Morrison's issues with the feminist movement is that it has been dominated by the ideologies of white women belonging to the upper-middle class. The Radical Feminist Movement, according to Morrison, and many other womanists have failed to discuss the key problems confronting African American women: racism, poverty and class" (Elsch, 3). *The Bluest Eye* is Morrison's response to the lack of diversity and inclusion within the second wave of the feminist movement. Although advancements were made from the first movement, women of color were still disproportionately affected by discrimination and violence. The experiences of women of color during this time were drastically different from white women and it is vital to understand the differences in the fight for equality both racially and socially to understand the second phase of feminism as a whole. This phase was influential to the beginning of the third and present-day waves of the feminist movement.

The third wave's focus is on the remaining issues not fully resolved by previous generations. The continued threat of intolerance of sexual preference, challenging gender norms, and addressing the stereotypical family dynamic are all important aspects of the modern-day feminist movement. This stage of feminism began in the early 1990s and is still flourishing today. Third wave feminism is much more inclusive of women of all races, classes and sexual orientations compared to previous generations (Pruitt). The inclusivity and diversity within the modern-day feminist community has strengthened it immensely. Author Alison Bechdel examines many of the prominent issues the feminist movement is actively working to combat in her memoir titled *Fun Home*. Bechdel, like many other women, struggles with her sexual orientation and acceptance from society. She details how heterosexuality is the perceived standard within the culture of the United States and how this affected her growing up while questioning her sexuality. After coming out to her parents in a letter while away at college she is disappointed by her mother's initial reaction: "Mom wouldn't come to the phone, but her return epistle arrived a week and a half later. As disapproval goes, I suppose it was rather mild. Still, I was devastated" (Bechdel 77). Her mother's adverse reaction highlights the stigma that unfortunately still surrounds those in the LGBTQIA+ community, especially women. Although one of the main goals of the third wave is to directly diminish homophobia, there is still work that needs to be done to truly find a solution to this issue. Sexual preference should not be a hindering factor in the lives of anyone, Bechdel emphasizes this point as she speaks on her own sexuality in her memoir. Third wave feminists have made an enormous effort to diminish the intolerance of the LGBTQIA+ community within the movement as well as in everyday society. The acceptance and respect for this community has grown exponentially since the first and second waves. However, many do still face discrimination and hate which is undoubtedly a byproduct of patriarchal norms.

Changing gender expectations are also at the forefront of Bechdel's memoir and the mainstream feminist movement. Throughout her childhood Bechdel struggles with conforming to gender norms: "It was a thrilling trip. In Switzerland I talked my parents into buying me hiking boots. In Cannes, I argued compellingly for the right to exchange my tank suit for a pair of shorts" (Bechdel 73). Her clear distaste for femininity is met with extreme resistance by her father, who can be observed throughout the novel pushing Bechdel to conform to traditional gender roles. This is significant, and possibly stems from the lack of acceptance he felt for the greater part of his life. He did not have the freedom to express himself openly and projects his own fear of rejection onto his daughter. The expectation of maintaining gender roles has changed immensely over the course of the 21st century.

The “nuclear family” dynamic has been called into question by feminists over the course of the second and third waves. Bechdel herself struggles with this in her memoir. It is difficult for her to understand her father due to his lack of masculinity, even finding it bothersome at times, “I measured my father against the grimy deer hunters at the gas station uptown, with their yellow work boots and shorn-sheep haircuts” (Bechdel 96). She expects her father to be like the masculine men she has observed in the past and finds it disappointing when this is not the case. Bechdel’s judgment of her father points out the influence the patriarchy has on individual thinking even from a very young age. Our society pushes gender expectations, and when an individual fails to conform, they often stand out and are ridiculed because of it. Individuality is one of the biggest threats to patriarchal society. If men and women alike did not feel some sort of outward pressure to conform, would they?

Women’s literature effectively fuels the feminist movement and the fight against suppression. By addressing relevant themes and struggles consistent in the everyday lives of women, authors Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Alison Bechdel all use their works as a means of amplifying the feminist voice. Without the presence of women in literature, the movement itself would not have gained the support or following it has today. First, second and third wave feminism and the literature associated with each movement helped amplify the voices of women of all races, classes, and sexual orientations. The voices of these women, past and present, are essential to advocating for future change and the further dismantling of the patriarchy.

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Short-Staffed: A Tall Order for Change

Jenna Maurice

Imagine a world without nurses, no one to care for the older people in the population or for people of any age who were sick or injured. People with curable diseases and treatable injuries would be left to die, their families anguishing. This scenario would be a world parallel to the times before modern medicine, where people relied on religion and superstition to cure their ails, and the average life expectancy was half of what it is today. Our healthcare system faces a nursing shortage crisis, threatening to send us back to the dark ages. The aging patient and nursing workforce population, waning numbers of nursing educators, and workforce turnover and burnout have set the stage for a global disaster. The effects of COVID-19 have intensified the urgency for transformation. Conflict and war add to the burden on already stressed healthcare systems worldwide. The way the healthcare system recruits new nurses and retains current nurses requires a complete restructuring of its educational, compensatory, and work-life benefits to avoid total collapse.

Two types of nursing shortages occur that warrant discussion. The first is background nursing shortages, which “develop when forces temporarily alter the demand or supply of nurses” (Buerhaus 247), leading to an acute shortage in one facility or location that typically resolves over a short time. The second is national nursing shortages, which “are more severe, longer lasting, involve many hospitals, and affect access to care, quality, safety, and costs” (Buerhaus 248). Our country, along with the rest of the world, is amidst a national nursing shortage, the outlook of which grows ever bleaker as demand for health services increases while the supply of nurses decreases.

There is a positive correlation between the aging of a population and the amount of health care services needed. The baby-boomer generation is the largest population ever to reach retirement age in the history of the United States, “resulting in a 73% increase in Americans 65 years of age and older, 41 million in 2011 compared to 71 million in 2019” (Haddad et al. para. 4). This number of retirees will include a significant number of nurses as “approximately one million registered nurses older than 50 years” (Haddad et al. para 6) will reach retirement age by 2035. Once these nurses retire, one-third of the workforce will be gone – the only way to replace these nurses and, ideally, add more than before is through access to education.

Unfortunately, the nursing education system suffers from the same staffing challenges as the healthcare system. Like nurses working in the field, these faculty nurses experience similar obstacles like low job satisfaction and high turnover rates. Finding solutions like “options for remote work, flexible scheduling, teaching assistant support, and reduced teaching loads” (Boamah et al. 11) could improve work-life balance and retention of nursing faculty. Solving the nursing educator shortage by awarding college credit to existing, experienced nurses in the work field who are interested in becoming educators is a possibility. If the organizations they work for could become accredited, their work experience could qualify for these credits. This solution would address the real-life barriers many nurses face, like deficits in time for completing their education due to caring for their families and financial issues preventing them from furthering their education. The nursing shortage crisis has revealed the need for change in the system that currently creates “firm ceilings for those not born with the means or mentors to help them into and through higher education” (Graebe et al. 249). These educational obstacles are essential to resolve beyond the creation of nursing educators and apply to potential nursing students.

The amount of nursing school applicants far exceeds the number of qualified educators. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) reported the rejection of “91,938 qualified applications (not applicants) from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2021 due to insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, and clinical preceptors, as well as budget constraints” (AACN 2). This inability to educate new nurses frustratingly compounds the nursing shortage issue. Finances and legal red tape should not restrict the opportunity to become a nurse. It would be like an apprenticeship by passing legislation for hospitals and nursing homes to become accredited sites of education, where on-the-job training and supplemental online classes are available to anyone who qualifies to become a nurse. The student learns and performs duties under the supervision of a tenured nurse. This kind of program would solve staffing issues in the short term,

with student nurses carrying out the less skilled duties while they are in the process of learning. “Accrediting and certifying organizations must mandate demonstrated mastery of clinical skills, managerial competencies, and professional development at all levels” (“Transforming Education” 213), serving as a long-term staffing solution once students pass a clinical test. After demonstrating the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the job, they could be awarded the title of registered nurse by their accredited facility, filling in the gaps and adding to the workforce in unprecedented numbers. Having the confidence after passing this skills test after on-the-job training would truly prepare these students for the job far better than the system that is now in place.

Nursing students require more than confidence and intellectual abilities to succeed. Skills of “motivation and temperament are necessary for success in the health professions, especially nursing, and the characteristic of grit is one that is particularly needed by nurses” (Burke et al. 197). Students with “high levels of grit can overcome obstacles, maintain passion, and persevere long after others would have given up” (Burke et al. 197), a promising factor for the nursing shortage. However, many newly graduated nurses face workplace incivility once they become licensed and start their professional careers. Their nursing colleagues and superiors perpetrate bullying, intimidation, and belittlement of new nurses in the highest numbers (Mammen et al. 7). According to a survey conducted by doctorates in nursing research, Vogelpohl et al. in 2013 of new graduates, “29.5 % considered leaving nursing and 35.4 % changed jobs within two years due to workplace incivility” (qtd. in Mammen et al. 8). This atmosphere of hostility places undue stress on new nurses, causing an estimated one-third of them to leave their positions. Facilities must implement zero-tolerance policies and train staff about the harm such acrimony can cause new nurses and their patients when they quit.

Patient safety should be the highest priority of any healthcare facility. To fill the gaps in permanent nursing staff, many facilities hire temporary travel nurses at a much higher pay rate than regular staff to keep their nurse-to-patient ratios at legal limits. In a study conducted in 2023 by the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing, Polancich et al. examined:

The relationship between permanent registered nurse (RN) and travel RN staffing during the pandemic and the nursing-sensitive outcomes of catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTIs), central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSIs), falls, and hospital-acquired pressure injuries (HAPIs) and length of stay and compared the cost of CAUTIs, CLABSIs, falls, and HAPIs in fiscal years 2021 and 2022. (174)

These are all adverse and potentially life-threatening but preventable patient outcomes. They found that “a strong, statistically significant negative correlation” (Polancich et al. 181) exists between the average length of stay for patients and the number of full-time RN permanent staff. As the average length of stay increases, the probability of adverse events also increases, along with costs. A well-staffed facility with employees loyal to their employer and patients is imperative to maintaining patient safety. This loyalty is damaged when they feel underpaid compared to the travel nurses brought in to supplement the workforce. Competitively paying staff nurses would help attract new and retain existing staff. Patient outcomes would improve, and facility-related infections and injuries would decrease, resulting in lower costs to the patient and the healthcare organization in the long run. At the very least, this wage increase would help alleviate financial stress and empower nurses to find a better work-life balance.

Financial strain is not the only factor that can negatively impact the retention of nurses. In the US, there are currently 32 states that have legalized mandatory overtime for healthcare workers (Deering para 14). Healthcare workers face termination for refusing to stay at work longer than scheduled when asked to do so in one of these states (Deering para 17). The lack of control and uncertainty of work schedules increases the risk of psychological distress and decreases cognitive functioning (Yu and Leka 1). Burnout is mental and physical exhaustion from working too many hours over a long period. Burnout can lead to compassion fatigue, which happens when “nurses experience the inability to empathize with their patients” (Deering para 19). The probability of a nurse suffering from compassion fatigue and burnout quitting their job grows higher when compounded with all the other stress-inducing factors associated with nursing. To mitigate the increasing rates of healthcare worker turnover, organizations must “carefully assess the reasons for overtime and explore potential ways to facilitate voluntary overtime and avoid involuntary overtime for the promotion of occupational

health and performance” (Yu and Leka 12). Forced overtime is used to keep the nurse-to-patient ratio at safe standards but fails to realize that an overworked nurse is more likely to make mistakes that could be detrimental to patient safety. It also accentuates the nursing shortage when burnt-out nurses leave the workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic further fanned the flames of the burnout fire, magnifying the “deep socioeconomic inequities, communication and workforce challenges, and weaknesses in U.S. healthcare delivery systems present before the start of the pandemic. It also brought into focus the important and unique role of nurses” (Reynolds et al. 188). Nurses were the US’s largest and most vital component of healthcare delivery during the pandemic (Reynolds et al. 188). Unfortunately, these nurses on the frontline endured and observed the devastating effects of COVID-19 on their patients, families, friends, and themselves more than any other group of healthcare professionals. Face masks and goggles depreciated the interpersonal connections with patients. Patients isolated from visitors relied on nurses as their only source of human contact. Elevated hospitalizations “accentuated pre-existing nurse burnout and concerns related to well-being, adequate staffing, working conditions, and salary compensation” (Reynolds et al. 192). COVID-19 also impacted nursing education, heightening “pre-existing challenges including faculty shortages and problems securing clinical learning experiences” (Reynolds et al. 193), with many facilities shutting their doors to onsite clinical learning for safety. The endless debates over vaccines and mask mandates, perpetual staffing shortages, and constant media coverage made the escape from the mental and emotional stress impossible for nurses at this time. This chronic stress amplified and quickened the burnout effect for many nurses.

The effects of nursing shortages are felt catastrophically in conflict zones, like in Ukraine. Russia’s tactic of targeting and terrorizing civilian infrastructure, like hospitals, will have long-lasting impacts on healthcare delivery in Ukraine. Between February 24, 2022, and December 31, 2022, 292 documented attacks destroyed 218 hospitals, 62 healthcare workers were killed, and 52 healthcare workers were injured, with unknown numbers taken hostage, imprisoned, or forced to work for the Russian occupants (De Vos et al. 3). These were only the documented numbers, for just under a year. Almost another year has passed, so these numbers have only inflated as the war has marched on. Many more healthcare workers have been displaced or fled the country as refugees. Add in the increased demand for healthcare from the casualties of the war itself to this decreased ability to provide services and the stage is set for years of struggle and rebuilding, further adding to the plight of the Ukrainian people, even after the fighting has ceased. Humanitarian and foreign aid will be imperative in reconstructing, resupplying, and restaffing hospitals to establish a healthier future for Ukrainians. This is only one of many combat zones, but it is currently the most infamous. The nursing shortage exists in every country, so anywhere that becomes an area of contention will suffer a similar fate regarding healthcare.

Dwindling numbers of nurses are causing a real threat to the health of our nation and the world. Without radical changes to the healthcare system, the rising population of older adults with multiple, complicated health conditions threatens to create a situation where there will be no one left to care for them. Altering the education system must be a priority so everyone wanting to become a nurse can do so without being denied due to regulations surrounding the facilities used as clinical teaching sites. Nursing professors must be paid at a rate comparable to nurses in the field to ensure that nursing programs have enough staff. New nurses replenishing the roles of the old are vital to the future of healthcare. It is also critical to preserve current experienced nurses and for these tenured nurses to cultivate a better sense of empathy towards their more novice colleagues. Promoting a friendly work environment and wages more reflective of travel nurse pay will improve the retention of staff and patient outcomes. Enacting federal legislation to make mandatory overtime for healthcare workers illegal helps to solve the same issues. This reassurance would also attract more potential students to the field of nursing. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed and exacerbated the flaws and shortcomings of the current healthcare system. Correcting these deficiencies in preparation for the next global health crisis will be crucial in avoiding another disaster. Humanitarian response and peaceful resolutions to global conflicts will markedly ease the demand for healthcare services. These solutions are realistic, attainable, and sometimes downright obvious. Changes to the healthcare system are necessary to avoid complete system failure and secure a healthy future for all.

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Queer Rebellion

Sonnen Bolevic

Widely known as a narrative centered around teenage rebellion, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) follows the characters of Jim, Plato, and Judy and their reactions to the demands made of them by their guardians, peers, and broader society as they move from childhood into adulthood. Jim, whom the film makes more closely relatable to the audience than the other two main characters, struggles to deal with the dynamics of his parents' relationship with one another and with him, and his family moves too frequently for him to feel settled anywhere (*Rebel Without a Cause*); Plato, who seems to be a social outsider, is often anxious and exhibits violent tendencies which he would be receiving counseling for if his absent mother was not against it; Judy has a particularly fraught relationship with her father, whom she loves but who disapproves of the way she dresses and distances himself from her emotionally as she grows up. Over the course of the film, the three teenagers meet and form an emotional dependence on one another after they collectively experience a traumatic event. The common interpretation of these characters' intentional disobedience as a response to their circumstances in life is certainly apt, but there is another lens through which their actions can be viewed that allows for a deeper perspective on the film. Queer theory in film places importance on the presence of LGBTQIA+ characters within a narrative as independent forces which aren't defined solely by their differences to a cisgender and straight society and examines their portrayals through both the film's explicit – or literal – meaning and its implicit meaning – or “meaning that is not given directly to the viewer, but is hidden and needs active interpretation to unpack” (Moss and Wilson 40). Queer identities and interpersonal relationships, while not represented in an explicit sense, can be interpreted throughout *Rebel Without a Cause*, woven deeply into its implicit meaning through emotional expression and character interactions and adding dimension to the purpose behind the rebellion the film presents.

The beginning of the film sees Jim brought to the local police station after he is found drunk on the street – this is where all three teenagers initially encounter one another (*Rebel without a Cause*). Here, he is confronted by his parents, but their presence merely exacerbates his frustration and distress. Only a police officer, pulling him aside into another room, is able to convince him to open up about the root of his actions, and Jim explains that while he does not know exactly why he acts out, he has a constant sense of shame in his life and does not feel that he belongs anywhere. This description is extremely accurate to the experiences of many queer individuals, and especially teenagers; the expectations enforced by a heteronormative society are bound to cause feelings of shame, inadequacy and rejection when one cannot meet them, and these are only enforced by the strict hierarchical structure of high school faced by the characters in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Jim also says that he often feels confused, which may tie in with his character's struggle to form a unique sense of self that does not simply react to the categorizations placed on him by others (such as being called “chicken”); this relates to the sentiment held by John Champagne which Mark Adnum agrees with in “My Own Private New Queer Cinema” that “culturally marginalised groups – such as gay men – cannot define and conceptualise themselves outside the imposed frameworks that contain them.” Thus, the problems Jim expresses which cause him to rebel can easily be seen as signifiers of a queer identity. Additionally, Adnum identifies James Dean, Jim's actor, as a gay icon whose “sexuality draws freely from both genders,” which is reflected in some of Jim's actions throughout the film – notably in a scene at the high school where Jim almost enters the girls' bathroom by mistake before entering the boys' bathroom instead, implicitly suggesting that his character does not completely conform to gendered cultural expectations (*Rebel Without a Cause*).

Jim is not the only character who represents aspects of queerness, however. While at the police station, Judy describes running away from her home after her father forcefully wiped off her lipstick; this could also be viewed as allegorical to queer identity, as her experience was one of an authority figure suppressing her outward self-expression of individuality in order to conform to societal standards of how she “should” present herself. Additionally, Plato's status throughout the film of a social outcast – only spending time with Jim and Judy and describing Buzz's group in a later scene at the observatory as difficult to make friends with – is another common symptom of being a member of a marginalized and othered group such as the LGBTQIA+ community. As such, all three characters

exist at the fringes of society in one way or another, and though Jim and Judy are able to find some temporary social acceptance among their peers — albeit highly conditional and reliant on them following certain “rules” — none of them are viewed as adequately meeting the behavioral standards put in place by authority figures.

As the film’s narrative progresses, Plato grows increasingly attached to Jim and begins to project his desire for a father figure onto him (*Rebel Without a Cause*). He imagines scenarios in which Jim would take him fishing or stay at his house and have breakfast with him, and explicitly tells Jim that he wishes he was his dad. Later in the film, at the abandoned mansion, Jim and Judy pretend to be a married couple touring the house with the intent to buy it. Plato originally plays the part of the one giving them the tour, but as their game winds down, the three of them sit together with Jim and Judy on a bench and Plato on the ground next to them. Jim places Plato’s jacket over him when he falls asleep there, as though tucking him in. The character blocking and choreography in this scene suggests a family dynamic that has developed between the three. This type of constructed family dynamic, built on bonds between individuals who are not literally related to one another, is common within queer communities, whose members are significantly more likely to be rejected by the family they were raised within than individuals who fit heteronormative standards are. Such familial rejection is also perceived by each of the main characters in *Rebel Without a Cause*, none of whom feel truly emotionally connected to their parents (to varying degrees). The relationship between Jim, Judy, and Plato, then, can be viewed as exemplifying an interpersonal bond often found in queer communities.

Plato’s relationship to Jim, however, can also be interpreted to contain an undercurrent of romantic attraction, offering an implicit understanding of his character as queer. His expressions of open admiration and even awe of Jim during certain scenes — when he stares through the window at Jim at the police station, when he watches him carefully in the reflection of his locker’s mirror, or when he admires Jim from afar at the “chickie” run — in combination with his shy eagerness to speak to and spend time with Jim, as in the observatory field trip or their conversation at Jim’s house after the chickie run ends, and his bragging exaggerations to Judy at the chickie run of how close Jim is to him all come together to paint a picture of a teenager who is overly invested in a high school crush (*Rebel without a Cause*). Close-up shots of Plato’s face during many of these scenes serve to further emphasize to the audience his clear adoration, effectively used in their typical function of stressing a character’s emotional state (Moss and Wilson 49). When Jim gives Plato his jacket toward the end of the film — the second time he offers it to Plato in all — he cradles it and puts it on reverently, calling to mind the fictional romantic (and heteronormative) trope of a man giving his jacket to his female love interest, though the action is given new meaning in this context by its implicit queerness. The extremely short span of time over which Jim and Plato come to know each other — about a day in total — certainly seems characteristic of romantic infatuation, as well. All in all, the narrative choices and use of specific camera shots and costume pieces to heighten emotion in certain scenes throughout *Rebel without a Cause* make it quite easy to read Plato’s character as queer and, particularly, as being in love with Jim.

Rebel without a Cause was created long before the advent of New Queer Cinema in the 1990’s, though in some ways it set the stage for it; it can be seen as part of the queer past which B. Ruby Rich describes the “queer present” as “[negotiating] with” (Adnum). Likely due in part to the period it was created in, queerness is never mentioned within the film itself, but it can be found silently throughout when one looks for it. Each of the three main characters, Jim, Judy, and Plato, are imbued with traits that set them out of place in society and lend themselves naturally to queer readings. The teenagers’ interactions with one another are also characteristic of queer social interactions — whether expressing a platonic-familial bond or romantic attraction. Beyond these details, though, even the very premise of the film itself — youthful rebellion against rigid social structures — can be interpreted as inherently queer in a society where younger generations are increasingly accepting of and aware of queerness and willing to rebel in order to express it. Queerness as the crux of the group’s place as societal outsiders trying desperately to break the constraints placed on them creates a factor which unites all three characters, allows for a deeper understanding of the story, and only strengthens the overall themes of the film.

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Sunset Geese
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Media as a Tool, Not a Weapon

Carter W. Schofield

Writing is not a natural talent that most people have or want. It takes practice, perseverance, and patience; and there are far too many times where I lack all three of these things. Reading is also something that too many people tend not to enjoy. I know many people who find it boring and would rather have something flashing in front of their eyes. The need for constant stimulation in our current world is becoming frightening. However, I've never been able to understand that point of view, and I've always loved reading from a very young age. When I was little, my parents told me that they found me on multiple occasions sleeping with books that I had read and enjoyed. Reading came naturally to me, and as time went on, I always loved when school gave me a reading assignment or a book to study. Yet not all good things can last forever, and eventually, I was required to write book reports on what I had read and had to defend my point of view against others. This is when things became difficult for me, because especially as a child, there is nothing I despised more than sitting in front of a page and slowly chipping away at a paper, when I'd rather immerse myself in a new book. It wasn't until high school that I started to find enjoyment in writing and was presented with assignments that truly got me to learn the importance of knowing not only how to sit down at that page and chip away at it but produce something much stronger than a monotonous report.

As books were important to me from a very young age, I've read more than I could ever hope to count. There are entire bookshelves in my living room and bedroom filled to the brim that I've kept and cherished as I've grown. I believe that when I was younger, I probably focused only on immersing myself in the beautiful worlds that authors could create rather than also trying to look deeper and learn from what I was reading. When I began a co-op course called Classical Conversations in middle school, I think that's truly when I started paying attention to the books I was reading and what they were teaching me. In particular, I loved that we were able to have Socratic circle-esque discussions every week around the classroom, as it basically acted as a small book club that helped encourage the students' ideas and helped them to realize the true meaning of what they were reading. There were your typical high school books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Pride and Prejudice*, but they were also more obscure books, ones I'd never had the chance to read before. A favorite memory of mine from class was when we went through a few of Shakespeare's works. We would all read the plays on our own, and then as a class we would get together and find a modern interpretation of the play in movie form to see if what Shakespeare taught hundreds of years ago could still be applied in the modern day.

There's something truly fascinating about remaking an ancient piece of literature and adapting it to be modern and up to date with the times. Media as a medium has evolved so much over the past few centuries that it can sometimes feel strange to see the two time periods clash on screen. It's almost odd to think that just a few hundred years ago, the most advanced form of media we had were the very plays that Shakespeare wrote. Seeing one of these plays as a regular citizen was considered a rarity, or perhaps a special family trip; but now, different forms of media are one of the most common things in our lives. All it takes is a few clicks to see full movies; productions that are on a much bigger scale than any play could ever hope to be. Because of how widespread it is today, media can sometimes be extremely dangerous to us. There can always be too much of a good thing, and the ease of access created by phones and computers in our everyday lives can truly exemplify this.

For myself, I've seen people that have received too much of a good thing before. All forms of media can quickly become an obsession when it's presented so easily to us. For example, I believe that social media is potentially the most dangerous form of media ever produced. Unlike a play or a movie where you slowly watch plot points unfold and can properly focus on one thing at a time, social media is based off short form content that gives you no time to think, no time to ponder, and no room in your brain for anything more important. As far as I'm concerned, social media can be extremely dangerous if not placed under strict control. It's for this reason that I don't use it myself, and I try not to recommend it to anyone who asks if they should start using it. That's not to say there aren't any benefits, as it is the easiest way to keep up with your friends and see what they've done recently; but overall, I don't believe that the pros outweigh the cons. It's always disheartening to watch someone become further and further engrossed in it until it becomes a true addiction. I obviously have nothing against anyone

who uses it, and I think that somewhere out there exists a happy balance between social media and engaging with real people. However, I don't like placing that risk on myself, so if it means I must find other ways to keep in touch with the people I know and care about the most, then that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make.

I think this has helped my reading and writing ability over time. Even if it meant extra time was spent studying for school, the time I didn't spend on social media has been very beneficial to me. Not everything I've read is beneficial, and I haven't learned something from every paper I've ever written, but I still think that I have improved as a writer because of this lack of distraction. The senior thesis project I had in high school required me to write almost 20,000 words of content to present to a panel of judges. This may have been the biggest turning point for me in my writing because it not only would be helped by less distractions, but it also absolutely required it. There was writing that had to be done every day, and putting things off was never an option. It's through these exercises, and thanks to the mentors I had during that time, that I'm able to write at even an acceptable level today.

For my senior thesis, I chose to focus on the art industry and how modern art along with AI-generated art has ultimately damaged the industry. By not giving the proper time of day to those who have spent years perfecting their talent for art through countless hours of hard labor and practice, the industry is severely harmed, and thousands of people are at risk of being out of a job because of it. I especially found AI art to be dangerous when it came to the longevity of artists. As one of my sources stated, "AI Art takes jobs from human artists, designers, illustrators, and uses their work without their consent or compensation to create what it calls 'new work.' It also devalues the years of practice, unique vision, skill, and experience that human artists work hard for" (Fox 1). I focused the majority of my writing on points similar to this, while also diving into the statistics of how artists' pay was being directly affected by these changes and the negative results it had on art.

Media and literature have affected me greatly over the course of my life. It's because of the books I read years ago that I have an enjoyment for learning and reading today. The tutors I've had throughout my life have given me a joy when it comes to writing as well, and while there are absolutely aspects that need to be improved in my papers, I can at the very least always know that I've had fun with what I've written and that I'm looking forward to my next assignment. In my opinion, there are many things that can be missed in life by wasting time on a social media app that doesn't truly do anything to improve yourself. Writing requires practice, perseverance, and patience. I might lack some of these things at times, but I can always continue to write regardless if there's room for growth and knowing that there are always new opportunities to learn from what I've read, and perhaps even from what I've written.

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Natural Disaster

Melissa Shortt

The wind howls and the pelting rain threatens the cracked glass of the dingy basement window. I make my way down the precariously shifty stairs, reaching for the pull cord that will ignite the room's sole source of light. As the hanging 60 watt bulb sways from side to side and I take in my surroundings, I am at a loss for further denials and excuses; the floodwaters are rising, and there are some things that must be salvaged before it is too late. Admittedly, I have avoided this place for far too long, and as I examine each square inch of the cramped space, I am surprised to discover that I couldn't fit another one of these boxes even if I wanted to. A quick survey of the room tells me that some boxes are bursting at the seams, while others are left wanting more. Stacked so haphazardly, the removal of one threatens the stability of them all, and while each is simplistically labeled with a single word, such as *Childhood*, *Joy*, *Mom*, and much more, the contents remain still too obscure. A boisterous rumbling in the sky just beyond the cracked window adds to the rumbling in my core as I reach for the small box labeled *Joy*. However, my fingertips can barely graze a corner; it's just beyond my reach. Instead, I'll have to settle for *Childhood*.

I've braced myself for the retrieval of this oversized box of history, yet as I give it a tug, I am sent reeling backward; the box is almost weightless. Settling myself onto the splintering steps behind me, I wedge the dramatically large box against the wall. With my left thigh holding it in place, the box is distorted into an almost-but-not-quite diamond, spreading the top so it is not quite closed, yet not open. I blindly reach in, prepared to view whatever my fingers first encircle, but I find that I must stretch further and further to feel anything at all. When I pull my hand back, all it contains is a small stack of faded photos. The first is my grandfather, almost exactly as I remember him – although I remember him very little by now. A tall, handsome man like my father, over six feet to be sure, I recall that he used to wait for me at the bus stop when I was in kindergarten. He'd walk me into the house, make me a sandwich, and teach me how to play Solitaire. I thought it was so unusual that he would take scissors to all of the corners of the decks of cards, and when I asked him why he did that he would simply explain, "So the sharp edges don't hurt us." One day, my five-year-old self exited the bus and Grandpa wasn't there. In fact, nobody was there, and I was locked out of our house. I can't recall much from that day, but I have been told that my neighbor took me to his house, where I waited who-knows-how-long for God-only-knows-who to come retrieve me.

In the next photo of my grandfather, he's sitting in a wheelchair, tubes connecting his face to an oxygen tank. Still only five years old, I sit in a chair next to him, uncertainty written across my face. This image forces me back to a moment, just days before the photo was taken, when I heard a thud in Grandpa's bathroom. Later, after the ambulance loaded Grandpa up and brought him off for his final race down the streets of our small town, I would be made aware of my "self-centeredness," as my mother would so eloquently word it; accusations of "You should have known that Grandpa needed help" and "I thought you were smarter than this" nestled themselves in the empty spaces of my brain. Grandpa died on my sixth birthday, and this box contains the only memories I have of him, each marred by the trauma of his loss. Setting these images aside, I reach into the box once more, but I can't grasp the memories that remain stuck in the recesses.

The wind outside has picked up speed, and the rain is falling sideways now. My eyes are drawn to the small droplets of water that permeate the crack in the window – trespassers that exacerbate the stench of rot and decay in this dark space. What the heck is this? I glance back down into the box, but whatever remains refuses to yield. No matter which way I turn the box, I cannot seem to hold it at an angle that allows me a clear view of its contents. However, I can't stay in this place forever, and I need to move on. Placing what I've been able to retrieve on the step beside me, I feel a wave of disappointment as I close up the unknown remnants of the box; where are all of the memories of my childhood? I've grown weary of the tales of happiness, and the lack of images make me question the time I'm told was devoted to those younger years. Resentment threatens to spill into my thoughts, but I have no time for that right now; I push it back down, where it lays just beneath the surface.

The next box, with the word *Dad* scrawled on its side, is far smaller than the others in my line of sight. This should be easy enough to get through, and I need to feel like I am making some sort of

progress, so I snatch it greedily from its resting place. As it feels empty, I give it a little shake, hearing its contents quietly rattle around inside. Resuming my place on the step, I study the first snapshot with an easy smile: Dad stands, frozen in time, with his shoulder-length curly brown hair fluffed around him, bright blue eyes that sparkle in the sun, and a mischievous grin that tells me he's just been laughing. I struggle to recall the sound of his laughter as I flip to the next snapshot. Dad stands in the center of the living room, surrounded by darkness. He is all I can see in this image, and gone are the smile and sparkle. I know this day, and I'm not ready to go there yet, so I flip the images again. There is too much darkness though, and I can't bring anything into focus. Finally, a flash of white catches my eye, and I pause to study the photo. Dad lays in the hospital bed, having survived an attempt on his life – by his own hands. I don't want to relive this horror, and I drop the weight of these memories back in their box. As I make my way to the dark corner, I will myself to remember his laughter, but the memory of it is beyond my reach. I came here with a purpose – to clear out some of these boxes; yet, they had been packed away for so long that I had no idea unpacking them all would be such a challenge.

Taking a moment to gain my bearings, I attempt to logically consider my circumstances. The storm that surrounds this isolated dungeon of history threatens to spill each box's contents, and I know that if that happens, I'll never be able to retrieve all of the pieces of my past. Risking a quick glance toward the window, I'm alarmed to see that the water level has risen, and soon it will reach the cracked surface of the pane. Acknowledging that time is not on my side any longer, I begin hastily snatching boxes from along the walls, haphazardly dumping their unknown contents into the backpack I carry with me. As I do this, I make a mental note of just a few of the labels I see: *High School, Friendships, Marriage, Motherhood*; in the bag the contents go. As the bag's seams begin to stretch and pull away from each other, the anxious realization comes to me; I can't fit everything, but I also can't bring myself to let go. Only three boxes remain now, leaving me secure in the belief that I have a few minutes to assess their contents – weigh their importance.

The temperature in this darkened space plummets as I reach toward the box. Fear and trepidation cloak me in a blanket of ice as I touch the edge of the box labeled J. My only surviving biological sibling, my *protector*, as I recall from this first image. Here he is, knocking out the front teeth of a neighborhood boy when I was eight; the boy referred to me as "Bitch." A shaky little laugh escapes me as I recall my brother's words after the fact, "It's gonna be a long time before he can even pronounce the word *bitch* again. I promise. If mom asks, I don't care what she says, you just deny anything happened. Okay?" I never told, either; I took that vow of secrecy very seriously. As I drop the memory into my bag, the next one hits me like a freight train. As I see the image of my brother and I laying on the pull-out sofa in Grandma's living room, I recall that night, when my eyes would spring open to suffocating darkness. Holding my breath, certain this was all just a bad dream, I urged myself to wake up. *Wake up now!* Like I said, I took the vow of secrecy very seriously, enabling him to harm so many others before his punishment would come.

As the window shatters and the murky waters come rushing in, I jump from the dilapidated step, the contents in my lap spilling into the swirling flood. Afraid to let anything go, still unsure of its significance, I reach into the darkest depths and pull out the soggy ruins of my past. Into the bag they go. Time has slipped away from me, and now I understand the urgency of my departure. Still, there are two boxes that remain, and I refuse to leave them behind. Wading through the icy waters, the box labeled *Mom* is placed in my backpack. However, the weight of this is too much to bear, and I can go no further. The iciness from within me, which I believed to be my impenetrable barrier – a shield from the pain – has frozen the waters that rage around me. I stand here, unable to move forward or back, the weight of each little box holding me firmly in place.

The weather in New England has always been rather unpredictable. Yet, history tells me that I can always count on the storms to pass, the ice to melt, and the sun to shine again. Although I remain cemented in place today, someday I will be free. Perhaps this time that I am given is a gift, allowing me to relieve some of the weight that rests upon my shoulders. The ability to part with some of this baggage ensures that, when I am once again able to move forward, there is space for Joy.



Trapped
Melissa Shortt
Oil Paint on Canvas



Gray Skies Ahead
Melissa Shortt
Oil Paint on Canvas

Chaos of Humanity in *Lady Bird*

Michael N. Eager

Many films have offered commentary about human nature, but perhaps very little understand or fully consider the vastness of human behaviour. A majority of these films arguably only highlight one or two aspects of humanity, *Citizen Kane* emphasizes ego and the results of a childhood, *The Searchers* shows a shared savagery amongst all of man, and *Rebel Without a Cause* encapsulates the contrast between societal expectations and reality, but none of them show humanity as a whole. Having a focus on a particular aspect of humanity allows for a stronger and more impactful message, but simultaneously having more underlying themes through the medium of film itself is something that Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* excels in, especially due to the prominent metamodern aspects.

One of the most notable aspects of this film is the pacing. *Lady Bird* is mostly comprised of fast-paced montages and short scenes, which may seemingly make it difficult to follow. However, through the simple usage of cinematography, clear but unwritten "Acts" can be determined from the distinctive focuses they hold during their timeframe. Three of these acts may easily be interpreted as beginning from the same shot of a wall. Up-close and paired with the introduction of a new character (with the exclusion of the lattermost act), these transitional scenes showcase the protagonist's hand writing the name of the respective character on the wall, signifying who is of focus during the act, and also creating a clear image for the audience to follow along and understand. In addition, these shots are almost a point-of-view perspective, creating a subtle connection between the audience and the protagonist. There is no need to have a scene where Christine blatantly asks out these respective characters on dates or breaks up with them, the Kuleshov effect of association of paired and sequenced shots already informs the audience of these events, keeping the fast pace. In some sense, this pace and frequent use of montage can arguably be perceived as the metamodernist tendency for collaging and amassing series of small aspects into a greater picture.

The message of the rather brief and final "act transition" is of significant note. The mise-en-scène of almost every film is intentionally chosen, no matter how seemingly small the detail may be, and this is no exception. Film theorists Yelizaveta Moss and Candice Wilson state that color is an important aspect of the mise-en-scène, and may be used to signify emotion, intention, and even a change of perspective (57). This shot of question showcases the names of Christine's former lovers being painted over white with a paint roller. Through this action, not only does this implicate that Christine has moved on from her two aforementioned lovers, but the specific colour of white implicate a forward movement away from juvenile behaviour, and more importantly, a metaphorical blank canvas in which she may paint however she pleases.

As for the former of the two artistic meanings behind the white walls, it is once again re-emphasized that this film has a metamodern characteristic, as this was subverted from Christine later being intoxicated with a new potential lover and being hospitalized. The scene of her awakening in a hospital bed and crossing gazes with a child might initially appear pointless, but a visual connection in the costume designs may be made. The child, sitting next to his presumed mother, clearly has an eyepatch, while Christine's mascara is blemished, alluding to a similarity between the two, thereby viewing Christine as still a child.

The character design of Christine in particular is a fairly metamodern approach as well. Typically, character designs and traits allude to their role in the story, as evident through Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. In that film, the protagonist's broken leg and position in photography define his character, playing a part in his actions and conclusion. On the other hand in *Lady Bird*, Christine also happens to have a broken limb in a majority of the film, but this practically never comes up. In another metamodern analysis of the film, it is noted that, "[Christine's] hair is dyed pink but this doesn't mean she's a countercultural punk, and it doesn't mean she is not. She's the kind of person who will throw the door open and jump out of a moving car when she feels misunderstood by her mom. Because that's how intense life is" (Dember). By having clear characteristics through the costume design of Christine, the audience, who is likely expected to come to conclusions because of these aspects from narrative expectations, have their presumptions somewhat subverted when presented with an arguably more realistic character design. In some regard, Christine's broken arm and dyed hair are intentionally

chosen as a “useless” aspect that seems to provide nothing, and yet provide something because it provides nothing. The lack of importance associated with these traits turns Christine into one of the more human characters in the world of narratives, she can be best described as a person.

To a film analyst’s eye, *Lady Bird* also contains instances that actively goes against their expectations. For instance, when Christine’s relations with her mother appear strained, she tries having a conversation with her, the two in opposing rooms, one in the foreground and the other in the background. A distance held in a shot such as this is typically regarded as implying a lack of connection between the involved characters (Moss and Wilson 66). However, this is quickly subverted as her mother walks into the foreground, next to Christine but refusing to interact. This movement alludes to her mother’s genuine love for her daughter, but unwillingness to directly show it. They have a connection, but it is an atypical connection.

Regardless, the most metamodern aspect of this film is the implication made when the shots are collaged into a single picture. What *Lady Bird* attempts to highlight throughout the film is the definition of “love.” In this, it is regarded as attention as opposed to outright affection. The alternative portrayals of love in film and other such art contrast the perspective held in *Lady Bird*. In Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*, for example, love and hate are portrayed through the right hand and left hand respectively, the two battling against one another. What isn’t mentioned is those two hands are linked by a greater mass, the same flesh and blood comprise these two sides of the same coin. Hence, the exertive hate shared is also a form of love. Due to this, love and hate are a single entity, oscillating constantly without definitive boundaries.

Throughout *Lady Bird*, Christine and her mother are often found arguing. Despite this, through the sequence of shots, these two contrasting forces are revealed to share many things in common. One of the climactic scenes involves parallel shots of Christine and her mother driving the same roads and performing the same actions. This scene’s purpose is reinforced from two sources: the fact that this scene occurs during Christine’s speech to her mother over phone, and previous scenes of romantic affection. The former is fairly obvious, and declarative of their relations being positive. As for the latter, all scenes involving Christine’s romance are cheesy, over-the-top (featuring excessive and exaggerated choreography during makeout shots), and rather awkward. As a result, this reinforces an argument of attention being the primary factor of love, as opposed to previous foundational perspectives on this emotional state.

While this may be the intended focus, *Lady Bird* has subtle commentary on human nature. Through character design and shot sequencing, perspectives on humanity are made. Combined with the main focus, humans become difficult to define. In tandem, many minor characters specifically have traits revealed throughout the film (such as Danny or the play instructor) to create a larger world in which the film encapsulates. By intentionally baiting and under-delivering on these characters, they become less two-dimensional, and become three-dimensional entities with their own stories. Even still, some, such as Christine, are difficult to easily define, arguably becoming a four-dimensional tesseract with blurred beginning and end-points to their traits. A cube holds an area inside, but a tesseract can hold more surfaces on the inside that link to the outside at given angles. Simply put, these characters are reflective of real-world humans. Just like the real world, these characters are not limited by existing on opposing ends, it is neither monochrome or a binary system. The only limiting factor is restricting their own screen-time as they are not the dominating emphasis of the film. With these lenses, *Lady Bird* is a chaotic mess that is simultaneously hopeful: a mirror of metamodernism and a mirror of humanity.

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A Single Wish
Melissa Shortt
Oil Paint on Canvas



Butterfly
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Lost Voices: The Educational Needs of Children with ASD

Mia Stevens

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a common neurodevelopmental disorder that affects 1 out of every 110 children (Atiles et al. 63). Children with ASD are found in every school and in most classrooms at all different grade levels. Many teachers have worked with a child with ASD, but they may not have had the resources or training that they need to be the best teacher to that child. They need to know how to help that child, make them feel part of the class, and help them make friends with the other students. Children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) need more personalized support in the classroom setting.

ASD stands for Autism Spectrum Disorder. It is one of the many disabilities that children and adults around the world may have. ASD has many different symptoms and behaviors and looks different in each child. Some signs of ASD are preference for playing alone, limited or no response to their own name by 12 months of age, not sharing similar interests with other kids, self-stimulating behavior like rocking, flapping hands, and other repetitive behaviors, and they are often upset by minor changes in their routines (“How Do I Know”). This disorder is one of the most common disorders warranting Individualized Education Plans (IEP) in special education settings.

Here are some numbers that are surprising. ASD has increased 57% from 2002 to 2006 (Atiles et al. 63). There are at least 700,000 people (about half the population of Hawaii) in the United Kingdom with ASD (Alotaibi and Maharatna 1914). People sometimes confuse ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) with ASD. ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Most people get confused because ADHD and ASD sound very similar and they have similar symptoms, but they are vastly different diagnoses and conditions. A lot of children with ASD also have ADHD. There are at least 5.7-7.1% of all children who have ADHD (Melchior et al. 855). There are 0.62-0.70% of children have ASD (Melchior et al. 855).

Children whose development is considered to be normal are often referred to as having neurotypical development, while children with ASD lack many of the standard capabilities, resulting in abnormal neurological development. Children who have ASD have a harder time with school and making friends, whereas children with neurotypical development often have a much easier time with school and with their peers. Alotaibi and Maharatna and Crandall et al. wrote about the difference between a neurotypical child and a child with a disorder.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopment disorder where people lack social communication and language (Alotaibi and Maharatna 1932). Children with ASD often have difficulties with shifting attention and focusing (Crandall et al. 1788). It can be hard with a child to determine what is ASD and what is neurotypical development (Alotaibi and Maharatna 1932). With a disorder like ASD, brain development is not typical, which is why ASD children have trouble with focusing and communication. It can take them longer to learn and they need extra help learning, particularly in a classroom environment.

For children with ASD, school can often be tough, and they have a hard time fitting in. It is especially hard for the parents when the children are very young. When the child is 3 years old, it is not easy to know if they have a developmental delay or if they have a disability (Alotaibi and Maharatna 1932). If a child is tested too early for a disability, it might not show up. Sometimes, a child may need to be retested if they still have signs of ASD. This can make it hard for teachers to know how to treat the child and how to help the child.

In the past, there has been a lot of debate about how public schools were treating children with disabilities. The public-school districts have been legally required since 1970 to educate young children with disabilities (Atiles et al. 63). Some might say since then public schools have come a long way, and some might disagree. There are also a lot of private schools who accept children with disabilities like Montessori schools, Waldorf schools and Rise schools. Rise schools are a lot more prone to helping children with disabilities (Atiles et al. 68). There are more schools in the United States that help children with disabilities than there are anywhere in the world (Atiles et al. 68). Even so, teachers and schools need more support on how to teach special needs students.

Children with ASD have a hard time in early childhood classrooms and when they are older, in

public-school system's regular classrooms. Some of the children have ASD and other children have other learning differences and need extra help. For those children who have a neurodevelopment disorder, the classroom setting isn't always easy and they can feel left out. D'Agostino and Douglas and Atilas et al. talk about making sure there is an inclusive environment at school. Children with special educational needs should be educated in inclusive settings (D'Agostino and Douglas 729). Early childhood teacher programs work to have teachers learn skills to meet the needs of young children with ASD (Atilas et al. 62). Marilyn Brown is a psychologist at an elementary school in Connecticut. She said that teachers may not know how to deescalate a student or a situation if it gets out of control and then don't have the children participate in classroom activities because they are worried they can't help the child. Ms. Brown says that teachers think they are actually helping by not upsetting a child with ASD and trying to include them if they don't know how the child will do in the activity (Brown). Classroom teachers may not be as connected to that student and worried that they will not do the right thing with the child.

There are tools that can help children with ASD. Educators need to get to know the student as a learner first before just jumping right in. Educators can do this by asking past teachers or the parents, who almost always know best what child's history is. Getting to know what the child with ASD needs the first step is to help. The second thing that will help ASD children is for educators to learn what strategies and tools help the ASD child learn (Kluth). Some strategies are having the child read in quite a corner to calm their bodies, going for a walk with the child if they need to take a break during an activity, and giving different options for activities and how they will complete the task (Kluth). The third thing that will help ASD children is helping with their communication so they can get what they need (Kluth). It will help them to have opportunities to share and exchange ideas, ask and answer questions, and give their thoughts (Kluth). In one study, a high school history teacher used this strategy throughout the year to break up his lectures and to give students time to teach the material to each other. After giving mini lectures of fifteen minutes, he asked students to turn to a partner and answer a specific question or re-explain a concept he had taught. For instance, after giving a short lecture on the Presidency, he asked students to discuss, "What qualities do Americans seem to want in a President?" A student with Asperger's syndrome (part of the ASD spectrum) who needed practice with skills such as staying on topic and taking turns was able to practice them daily (Kluth). This means that in classrooms, we should provide a student with ASD with the opportunity to talk with other children and the teacher. This shows that students with disabilities need more chances to talk in their classroom setting. The fourth thing that will help ASD children in the classroom, is when a child gets upset or angry give the child choices. Some examples of choices are solving five of the ten problems assigned, working alone or with a small group, and reading quietly or with a friend (Kluth). All of these strategies help ASD children be included in the classroom.

Educators are not informed often enough about how to help special needs students. The general educator in the average classroom has reported that they do not know how to work with special education students. Currently, more than 57% of students with disabilities spend more than 80% in a general classroom (O'Conner, et al). Understanding this the teacher should take a workshop or a college class to learn more about what students have the right to receive. Schimmel and Militello did a survey in 2007 with 1300 teachers (O'Conner, et al). They found more than 75% of the teachers did not take an undergraduate education law course that can help teachers understand more about their role with students with special needs. One of the questions was did teachers know the legal rights for children. Educators need to be more aware that students have rights in the classroom setting. Special education students' rights to accommodations for quality education are protected by a law which is called "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act." The law provides students with the right to get services in their schools and classrooms. This law is something that teachers need to follow (O'Conner, et al). Educators need to make their classroom an inclusive environment that works for all students, including students with ASD. Classrooms may have a lot of decorations on the walls and a lot of toys and activities in them. The classroom can be hectic and busy and very distracting for ASD students. Children with ASD need a quiet class where they will not be as distracted (Brown). They need more help going from one activity to the next activity and will need transition time between activities (Brown).

Once a child is identified with ASD, a teacher needs to be informed and be shown how to make their classroom work for this student and how to make sure the student feels included. They need to

know how to help children go from one activity to another activity like giving them a five-minute warning (Brown). Marilyn Brown talked about how teachers often treat children with ASD and what they could do better. She felt as though many teachers are not connected with their students with ASD. They are trying to teach a majority of the students in the class and children with ASD often have an aide to help them in the classroom. It can be hard to know how much the student understands the curriculum and they can be disruptive and be pulled out to a self-contained classroom where it is quieter and they can get more of what they need (Brown). She also said that if they are pulled out a lot, the teacher gets used to that being an option and then they don't learn how to make them part of their classroom. Having an aide for a child with ASD can help, but that doesn't mean the teacher should not find ways to include the student. They may have to change how they do activities or teach all children a little differently, so all of the children feel included.

Educators need to be more knowledgeable about ASD. At some colleges, students only get one class of learning about special needs in the early childhood program. This class is about all special needs for young children and may not have a lot of information on ASD. Rodden et al and Alotaibi and Maharatna showed that teachers don't have the knowledge and training they need to work with special needs children. Teachers lack knowledge and skill of including students with ASD in their classrooms (Rodden et al. 238). Schools are required and responsible to include children with ASD (Rodden 238). Educators need to know how to help children because *many* do not know what ASD is or if a child has ASD (Alotaibi and Maharatna 1932). There are many ways teachers could be educated about ASD and other learning disabilities. There are a lot of training programs out there for educators to learn more about different disabilities. Teachers should continue to get ongoing training on learning disabilities. Marilyn Brown recommended a podcast that educators should listen to and follow to continue to learn about learning disabilities. The podcast is called the Neurodiversity Podcast and provides up to date information for teachers and families. This podcast does not just talk about ASD, it also talks about other neurodivergences.

There are many children with ASD and they are found in all of our schools and programs. Having an inclusive classroom where all children can learn is hard for teachers but important for children. They are not always the easiest students in a classroom for other children or the teacher. It is still important that they are included in the classroom and feel a part of the class. Children with ASD need more help in the classroom to learn and they need to feel a part of the class at the same time. For children with ASD to be included, teachers need more training and help to find the right ways to include them.

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AI Expands Possibility for Creatives

Laney Arcieri-Rowe

As inherently creative beings, art has always and will always be an integral aspect of human expression. Art has been the basis of nearly everything we have built throughout history, no matter what culture, race, or language. Whether it be stories passed down through families, sculptures adorning cities, paintings admired in museums, feats of architecture withstanding the test of time, or films cherished for decades, human creativity continues challenging beliefs of what is possible. As technology develops, our limitations grow thinner, and the capacity of our creative nature grows wider. Debates about using artificial intelligence have come to the public eye in the past couple of years, all wielding valuable ethical dilemmas of ownership and artistic originality. However, integrating artificial intelligence into our creative culture shows excellent potential to broaden our ideas of art, aid imagination, enhance storytelling, and diversify our definition of the word artist.

As we look at the story art tells of humans' time on earth, it is difficult to ignore that the modernization of technology was necessary for furthering our creative expression. As early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the arrival of reproductive prints expanded the audience of viewers for works like the Sistine Ceiling and *Last Supper* (Farrell 2). One of the earliest artists to rely heavily on the interplay between science and art was Leonardo Da Vinci, whose name rings familiarity in the minds of the masses to this day. Without Da Vinci, groundbreaking inventions such as the microscope and telescope may never have emerged (Velimirović and Pantelic 1). Although Hans Lippershey did not invent the telescope until 100 years later, Da Vinci explored the possibilities of using mirrors and lenses to better understand celestial bodies (Pioneers 5). His curiosity for the alteration of optics and his eyes, which wandered skyward, aided those to come in their discoveries.

Moving chronologically, in the nineteenth century, we began to explore the limitations of the human eye and perception. This curiosity led to the development of photography, which continues to evolve today. The birth of this technology led to numerous opportunities, including the inception of motion pictures similar to the ones produced by early Walt Disney (Velimirović and Pantelic 2). However, the most impactful invention that acted as a catalyst for what we understand of the digital arts in modern times is the creation of the computer in the late 1930's. As the computer was further integrated into creative realms, the term "new media art" (Velimirović and Pantelic 2) defined art that applied computer technology in its creation. New media art is an umbrella term for the multimedia approaches introduced in the 1960's. For example, "computer production, video art, computer-based installations, and later the Internet" (Velimirović and Pantelic 2). As new media art was introduced, it was commonly shown to the public as installations, mainly consisting of video graphics. In 1969, Dan Graham showed his installation *Sunrise to Sunset* at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York City (Wolfe 9). *Sunrise to Sunset* was his first film, it gained popularity because he "moved the camera in the opposite course to the path of the sun, creating a conceptual inversion of the passage of time" (Wolfe 9). New media art took over the creative scene for the next 20 years and remains integral to many exhibitions, museums, and galleries today.

From the 1960s to modern times, we have explored seemingly endless realms of new media. Many artists became famous through this opened door, using techniques we could not have dreamed about just 20 years prior. Andy Warhol is a prime example; throughout his career, he used the silkscreen printing process to create some of his most famous works (MOMA 2). Andy Warhol gained popularity from his play with pop culture and the idea of "serial repetition" as themes in his art (MOMA 1). In 1962 Warhol entered the art world with 32 canvases of Campbell's soup cans. He painted each piece by hand, yet he was able to make them seem "mechanically reproduced" (MOMA 1). His view on industrialization and repetition was reflected when Warhol wrote this: "The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel" (MOMA 3). This sentiment resonates in the hearts of many. Modern technology has made creation faster and easier than ever, yet the recognizable quality of personalization and labor gets lost when we utilize mechanical reproduction. This concept is what makes artists like Warhol so popular. In a world where copies are made in the blink of an eye, the originality of the true artist stirs profound emotions, prompts reflection, and incentivizes art lovers to spend millions on one piece of artistry.

Scholars around the world have opinions on the exposure and use of new media in an academic setting. One that particularly stood out to me was John M. Culkin. He was a prominent scholar and critic in the media, an educator, author, and consultant. As an advocate for exposure to media, he argued that students should not be sheltered from the world around them but should be taught to analyze what they consume (Lambert 5). He and Marshall McLuhan worked closely to spread their ideas throughout their careers. Many argue that the quote, “We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.” initially written by John M. Culkin, was actually the brain-child of McLuhan who used this quote in his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher and educator known for his belief in embracing modern technology for “social organization” (McLuhan 1). His book was published in 1964, positing that as we advance in technology, it becomes an extension of ourselves. Consequently, any output generated by the machines we create serves as a metaphor for the messages we wish to convey to the world.

Technological advancement allows us to do the things we were already doing at an accelerated pace and with a broader audience. Whether or not the technology itself is inherently good or bad is up for debate. McLuhan cited a quote from Notre Dame graduate General David Sarnoff in chapter 1 of his book, stating, “We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value” (qtd. in McLuhan 1). Sarnoff’s words here aid us in understanding that AI is not inherently harmful in nature. Like any tool, it can be appropriately used to aid us in achieving our goals or be abused.

Internationally, artificial intelligence’s role in modern society continues to be debated. Many are weary of the implications that AI will take over jobs, sacrifice security, and hinder native creativity within the art fields (Littman et al. 4,7,8; Mineo 2,7). The integration of AI into our world fulfills a long-held dream; it has now become a surreal reality. However, the birth of AI prompts divisive ethical questions. It is only natural that AI incites fear as it automates aspects of our lives that would otherwise be entirely in our hands. Some areas of concern are its place in criminal investigations, judicial systems, the spread of disinformation in the media, and the medical field (Littman et al. 4–8). The ethical dilemmas in these fields are more than understandable, as the potential for loss is much greater than in artistic communities.

AI in the creative fields raises a much different set of questions. Many wonder if it has a place in the art world; will it truly add to our creative development? Others debate if AI is developed enough to truly make a profound difference in the arts at this time. One of the strongest arguments against the use of AI in a creative setting is the issue of copyright. AI pulls information and images from all over the internet to produce its final rendered images. Since it is nearly impossible to trace back where the AI is getting the information, is it really credible? Some critics argue that “The identity of the art is no longer just the signature of the artist but could be a string of code” (Ganesh 3). Others argue that using AI is like “prompt engineering” (Elgammal 6); the user is forced into the long process of trial and error of using the right words to generate the desired image (Elgammal 6). In a survey conducted by PlayformAI with 500 artists of different mediums, many reported a lack of control while using generative AI (Elgammal 16). AI developers report that “it is unclear how precisely the generated images express contexts and emotions from the input texts” (Yunlong et al. 1).

Today, the available versions of generative artificial intelligence are very new. As developers continue to perfect their craft, the imaging quality and control will improve with time. Copyright issues remain minimal as the pieces AI draws from external sources are so vast and minuscule that they are comparable to artists pulling ideas from other artists. Some digital artists express welcome to the opportunities that AI might bring, while some believe it wouldn’t add much to their work (Mineo 7). *The Harvard Gazette* conducted interviews with Harvard University faculty to discern professional opinions on integrating AI into their creative worlds. Writer Daphne Kalotay expressed that the “Most at risk are commercial genres with easily recognizable styles and tropes” (Mineo 2). This is because the software easily recognizes and regurgitates their writing patterns. Kalotay argues that AI cannot overtake originality in writing because it is merely an imitator and a tool for “linguistic experimentation” (Mineo 3). Yosvany Terry, a senior lecturer on music and director of Jazz Bands at Harvard, agrees with Kalotay in his belief that AI will never be able to imitate the “in-the-moment composition, something that

happens as musicians are collaborating onstage” (Mineo 3). Therefore, it cannot overtake the world of performative music because so much of it is emotional and relies on the interplay between musicians on and off the stage.

It is evident that AI can never replace the artist within creative realms. It is the artist who plants the seed of thought, which blooms into its final form through their fingertips. Outer and inner realms serve as inspiration for any artistic endeavor. Even students at a 4-year college in St. Louis, Missouri, mostly responded in a survey that AI aided their inspiration process (Hutson and Robertson 12). In this study, students used AI platforms such as DALL-E 2 and Craiyon to exercise their creative minds through prompts. This study showed that generative artificial intelligence imaging cannot correctly render proper perspective drawings. However, it does offer valuable suggestions and unexpected ideas for artists to draw inspiration from (Hutson and Robertson 19). Most students reported that they enjoyed utilizing the software in their work but may not use it again since it only slightly helped build the foundations of their creative processes (Hutson and Robertson 13). While AI can add to and help facilitate imaginative processes, it can never replace the raw emotion of a visionary artist.

AI may never fill the shoes of a flesh-and-bone artist; however, it can enhance the potential for their work and redefine who we deem to be artists. In October 2023, the Dubai Assembly for Generative AI was held. Reports declare that attendees were offered a glimpse into the infinite creative capacity of artists when joined with this technology. “During a series of exhibitions and innovations showcased at the Dubai Assembly for Generative AI, the Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) brought artists and technologists together to display groundbreaking pieces of artwork, novel musical performances, and trailblazing technologies” (Al Fahaam 2).

The exhibitions at the Dubai Assembly for Generative AI illustrated the revolutionary products of artist partnership with artificial intelligence. One performance that stood out particularly was the Human x AI Music Show. An 11-year-old Emirati pianist performed with advanced AI, which produced “melodies both familiar and otherworldly” (Al Fahaam 3). As the duet rang sonorously throughout the building, visuals were displayed to the masses. Together, the duet formed a multisensory experience never before seen. In several exhibitions, visitors could create masterpieces of their own in partnership with AI technologies. One of which allowed them to use their voice to create tangible artworks. In another exhibition, an AI portraitist invited the visitor into its realm, offering an interpretive portrait of the subject. Retellings of the experiences at this assembly incite enthusiasm for the integration of AI into creative fields.

It is natural to have anxieties about the future as we cannot predict or control it. Historically, implementing the technology we have built into our creative practices has led us to many outstanding, world-renowned artists and pieces of art that evoke emotion and spark inspiration. To ignore a technological feat such as artificial intelligence and discard it as useless or unhelpful before we have explored its potential is a great disappointment. Marshall McLuhan and John M. Culkin worked together to spread the valuable message that the technology we build is not inherently good or evil. The way in which we choose to yield our tools defines us as humans. AI’s technological nature allows computer-savvy people to tap into their creativity on an unexplored frontier. It opens doors to profoundly express human emotion through creativity, aids in building visual installations, incites inspiration for struggling creatives, and expands the definition of the word artist. Let us, as creative individuals, venture into the potential uncovered by AI and further develop the creative pathways it has opened.

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The Domino Effect of Low Wages: An Educator's Career

Jacqlyn Leger

Arguably, educators serve as the backbone of the community and work tirelessly to shape the minds of future generations for notoriously low wages. The field is responsible for educating children and young adults to have the skills necessary to thrive and succeed, and the individuals responsible for facilitating the learning involved deserve better and livable compensation. Low wages are but one of the more massive contributors to an enormous increase in teachers leaving the field. Many educators express that a field requiring a college degree should at least warrant compensation that allows them to live outside of a paycheck-to-paycheck life. A dissertation by Liza Mazur on the epidemic of teachers leaving the profession states, "Once experienced teachers leave the profession, they take with them all of their knowledge, experience and talent" (Mazur 6). The shockingly low wages of educators have become alarmingly evident in recent years. Those who embark on a path dedicated to shaping the minds of many future generations are the same who are on the receiving end of one of the lower-paying career paths requiring a degree. Low wages among educators contribute to low professional motivation, burnout, low quality of education, and many related challenges. By giving attention to proper compensation and recognition to the educators who fuel the minds of many, educators can begin feeling confident in their work once again and produce more stable work environments for school systems, higher rates of retention, and peace of mind for families over the quality of their children's education.

History does not fail to prove that educators have been underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked since the beginning of education. An article for *Time* magazine tells us, "Since the first U.S. public school system was established in Massachusetts in 1647, many localities have struggled to pay teachers and searched for people willing to do the job for less" (Edwards 29). Additionally, in an article published by Tim Walker, a senior writer for *NEA Today* states, "Furthermore, inflation-adjusted starting salaries are now \$1,689 less than they were in 2008-09" (Walker para. 6). These sources tell us that history shows proof of the infamy of the wage crisis, and how it continues to decrease with time. For many years, teachers have opened up about their stories of low compensation, poor working conditions, and the ultimate decision to leave the field altogether. Many teachers resort to striking for better and more livable wages. The average number of teachers on strike changes annually, but in 2018, about 24 strikes for teacher's wages were recorded. In her dissertation titled "Teachers Leaving the Profession: A Multimethod Identification of Key Factors Through a Humanistic Lens," Lisa Mazur says, "The efficiency wage model suggests that if employees are granted a wage rate above the market rate, they are likely to improve the outcome of their work, enhance cohesiveness among others in the workplace, be more satisfied, be more responsible and loyal, reduce shirking behavior, and ultimately, lower turnover. (16)

The compensation teachers receive does not accurately reflect the sheer amount of training, experience, level of education, and time that these teachers have poured into their work. Levels of frustration increase as workers at the local retail store often make more for less.

To first understand why we must begin to raise compensation for educators, we must first investigate the individual effects that low wages have in the long term. In an interview done for an article on the life of an American teacher, educator NaShonda Cooke states, "It's not about wanting a pay raise or extra income, it's just about wanting a livable wage" (Edwards 31). She even explains how, at times, she resorted to skipping out on doctor's appointments to avoid paying a copay (Edwards 31). Skipping out of doctor appointments to save some money is not entirely unbelievable when taking into consideration the severity of just how low income looks for educators. The effects of low wages become increasingly prevalent when comparing the numbers. Edwards writes, "In 2016, for instance, the average teacher's starting salary was \$38,617-20% lower than that of other professions requiring a college degree" (Edwards 30). The consequences of low wages cause a decline in the overall quality of educational outcomes given. Studies show that low financial compensation significantly affects the quality of work put into the field. When employees or educators do not feel their work is noteworthy, their motivation to continue diminishes. So, how does receiving low wages correlate with low motivation? Humans thrive off positive reinforcement. When an individual works extended

hours, frequently giving up break hours and free planning times to extend the efforts out without any compensation financially or morally, the individual will begin to exhaust themselves. Again, motivation diminishes.

Motivation is a critical factor that defines a person's actions. To have the desire to complete a task out of one's own free will keeps people moving throughout their day. For an educator, making a difference in learners' minds is a huge motivator to continue their work. When compensation due to hard work gets removed, the motivation to continue plummets. Low wages for teachers in the field of education are not a secret. A quote from a scholarly article exploring the effects of motivation on professional performance says, "Motivation, by energizing it and providing directions to the desired objectives is most significant factor effecting performance and individual behaviors" (Samo et al. 8006). When teachers are set up for success with positive work environments, comfortable wages, and positive reinforcement, educators are more likely to experience a higher sense of motivation in their work.

So what exactly does that mean? This study of 150 participants concludes that the research hypothesis "There is no significant effect of teachers' motivation on their professional performance" (Samo et al. 8008) was found to be rejected, proving that motivation does play a considerable role in the professional performance of educators. When motivation is removed, educators are left grasping for excuses to continue working, becoming tired and burnt out. Burnout is a mental health collapse caused by repetitive and excessive exposure to a draining profession and exorbitant amounts of stress. In education, teachers put in extra work hours to plan curriculum, grade work and drain personal time and money into their classroom. An interview within the following dissertation states, "While in her tenth year of teaching working sixty hours a week struggling to reach and engage students, Elena began to lose her passion for teaching. Burnout is basically depression" (Mazur 26). It is widely known and has become an identifying factor in why college students are shying away from education as a career.

The prolonged and unaddressed causes of burnout often leave educators feeling helpless and overwhelmed. Lack of administrative support and low morale have lasting effects on their work. For instance, the inability to connect with students, provide a good education for them, or leave the field of education altogether. Inconsistent learning and a curriculum needing more material for academic learning show in the student's standardized testing. When an educator burns out, it shows in more than just one individual. The importance of this topic is unfathomable; educators are the professionals responsible for instilling the information a parent's child will need to succeed in their future. A dissertation written by Chien-Jung Lin dives deep into the reasons why educators are leaving, stating, "Many teachers have left the profession not because they were not satisfied in working with students in the classrooms, but because they were overwhelmed with extraneous responsibilities and tiring working conditions such as discipline problems, insufficient compensation and lack of administrative support. (8)

These stressors are contributing to a massive increase in teachers leaving the profession much sooner than anticipated, at an alarmingly high rate.

Teacher turnover is the rate at which teachers leave the profession and become replaced soon after. In recent years, the rate of educators leaving the field has dramatically increased. Shawnese P. Harden, a 2023 Regent University Alumni writes in his Doctor of Education dissertation, "Flaherty (2022) described how within the first 5 years of their careers; 44% of instructors resign. That is more than one third of all new instructors" (Harden 11). So what is the reason educators are leaving? We continue to learn that, "It springs from several things, including insufficient training, insufficient mentoring, the demands of responsibility based on test scores, low pay, and unfavorable working circumstances for teachers" (Harden 11). The theme is that low wages are a noteworthy common denominator in many issues that play into an educator's choice to exit the field. Teacher turnover rates affect many more people than meets the eye. The institution the teacher works for then must struggle to find replacements, the students must adjust to a new teacher, parents may begin to worry about the quality of their child's education and more.

What happens to students when teacher turnover is at an all-time high? Studies show a direct link between a teacher's motivation to teach and a student's motivation to learn in the 2023

dissertation, stating, “This constant turnover has a negative impact on teacher supply and demand and the learning environment for pupils, which lowers student achievement levels and demoralizes teachers” (Harden 14). Financial compensation plays a critical role in teacher turnover, the numbers signaling exactly how crucial the issue has become. Harden’s 2023 dissertation continues to tell us about the statistical numbers of industry fallout as a result of low wages, saying, “However, the industry is in disarray; many teachers make less than what it takes to support a family, up to 25% of the workforce quit every year, and approximately one fifth are compelled to work a second job” (Harden 22). These teachers are the same teachers who leave their jobs in education in favor of secondary jobs that pay more, contributing to the massive decline in teacher retention over the past couple of years.

Over the past few years, Covid-19 became a pillar of stress and many changes in the field. From remote learning to an increased workload, curriculum changes, and more. Educators were put on the spot more than ever, and it quickly became a highly demanding and very low-compensated job. Although the pandemic challenged each differently, educators had to quickly change to an entirely new format of teaching with very little time to learn themselves. Mazur mentions in her detailed dissertation the struggles of teaching in this new format, stating, “In-person teaching in schools has been long characterized but it’s predictable daily structure, but the pandemic, as has been evidenced in several large-scale surveys, introduced unprecedented challenges in teachers’ daily time use” (Mazur 34). The pandemic and this quick and unprecedented change in teaching put much stress on the average teacher’s shoulders. However, the epidemic is not the only challenge educators face. Challenging student behaviors, limited resources provided, the importance of student engagement, and an accommodated curriculum for different learning needs are just some of these challenges faced on a daily basis.

An obvious solution to low wages for educators would be to increase teacher base pay. Inflation is rising, and the rates at which teachers are compensated are not. In an article written by the National Education Association (NEA) it was found that, “Last year, in 2020-21, the average starting teacher salary was \$41,770, an increase of 1.4 percent over the prior school year. When adjusted for inflation, this represents a 4 percent decrease” (Walker 6). Teachers ultimately taking a decrease in compensation is a harsh and actual reality. If the teacher’s pay reflected the cost of living in the U.S., it would be a step in the right direction to increase teacher retention. Additionally, offering incentives for educators who need to give up personal time to fill in the gaps caused by shortages of educators would increase motivation to work. The importance of finding solutions to low wages of educators is so that the future of students can begin to receive the best possible education they can access. The future legislators, scientists, medical personnel, and even future educators lay in the hands of teachers worldwide. By finding positive and effective solutions to these issues, we can give teachers the motivation they need to continue making meaningful relationships with students as well as success for their respective institutions.

Over the years, educators have faced many bumps in the road, from a global pandemic to burnout, low motivation, and little financial compensation. Through it all, we learned from statistics and various pieces of analytical data that some educators have stayed, and the majority have left the field altogether. The common theme among teachers leaving the field of education is due to many factors, but low wages above all else. As a society, one of our most essential focuses should be increasing teacher retention rates in the United States. This can be done by increasing base wages among educators, offering incentives for added work like bonuses, providing educators with more administrative support, encouraging cooperation, and even enhance working conditions. These solutions can become stepping stones to a world where educators are prioritized and given the spotlight for the significant work they do for our present and future generations. Furthermore, these solutions will increase retention rates, increase motivation, and lessen the effects of burnout that otherwise cause educators to leave. Addressing the issue would not only make a significant and worthwhile contribution to the future of these students but also help educators who helped them succeed—a more positive domino effect on all parties involved.

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Fire in the Sky
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography



Foggy Sunrise
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Pulling Punches

Sonnen Bolevic

Stand-up comedy blends writing and performance into one cohesive medium. This form of art, wherein one comedian performs a planned routine of jokes to a crowd, has been described as inherently democratic in that “a joke is only deemed successful if it lands with an audience” (Wolfink 927); it is unsurprising, then, that despite the infinite number of topics available to them, stand-up comedians often draw from politicized subjects. Covering this controversial and often crowd-stirring ground enables them to either “punch up” or “punch down” with their jokes – that is, to criticize groups who either hold societal power or are relatively powerless, respectively (Longstaff; Sculos). Those who make this distinction typically hold that the former is acceptable while the latter is not (Longstaff), as the former aims to reduce existing imbalances of power while the latter exacerbates them. Jokes which punch down are often about marginalized groups of people, but the inverse is not always true, as marginalized people can find comedy in their own experiences and punch up simultaneously. Thus, comedy centered around victims of oppression can serve negative or positive functions, depending on whether they are the targets or the directors of jokes; the former case, despite claiming to challenge popular ideas, strengthens power structures and contributes to the struggles of marginalized groups with few repercussions for its authors.

One of the biggest concerns surrounding comedy which punches down is that jokes which attack a vulnerable group have been shown to have measurably harmful effects on the way an audience is likely to feel about the group in question. This type of comedy, which is written about a marginalized group by someone outside of that group and which devalues those individuals’ experiences, thoughts, and sometimes even lives, is described by Wolfink in their article for *Theory and Event* at Johns Hopkins University as purely “edgy” with little to add in the way of actual humor (942); it is essentially void of substance. E.M. Dadlez, writing in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, discusses several academic studies which examine the effects of prior exposure to sexist jokes on the way that male audiences responded to questions regarding their opinions toward and treatment of women (521). All found that “men whom researchers ranked higher in ‘hostile sexism’ – that is, in antagonistic attitudes toward women, especially women violating prescribed gender roles” reported more support for harmful actions toward women after viewing sexist jokes than they did beforehand (521), by describing themselves as less likely to be disturbed by workplace sexual harassment, in greater favor of reducing funds to a women’s organization, and, distressingly, more likely to sexually assault a woman in a given hypothetical scenario (521). This proven relationship between comedy and reported beliefs demonstrates a link between jokes which punch down and an audience’s negative views toward the groups they victimize, reinforcing the idea that jokes at a community’s expense have actual consequences for the people they target.

In addition to influencing audiences’ mindsets, these harmful effects could extend beyond the subliminal and as far as putting individuals in tangible physical danger. Dadlez suggests that the crowd-focused environment and even the atmosphere created by low lights at stand-up comedy clubs provides a sense of anonymity to the audience and notes that, “in group settings,” anonymity “can lead to participation in antinormative or even aggressive behavior” (522).

Therefore, harmful attitudes encouraged by cruel jokes in combination with a willingness to go along with the actions of a crowd could feasibly create a hostile climate among an audience toward members of marginalized groups who may be present. This has, in fact, been the case before; Dadlez describes an incident in which comedian Bernard Manning and his audience collectively participated in the racist and sexist harassment of two Black waitresses at one of his shows (518-519). These factors make another example of such behavior referenced earlier by Dadlez even more chilling – that of one comedian, Daniel Tosh, who targeted an audience member for heckling his joke about sexual assault and claimed that it would be “funny” if she were sexually assaulted at that moment (to the laughter of the rest of the audience) (513). It is not unreasonable to argue that both of these situations were deeply unsafe for the victims of such jokes on many levels, even if their harassers did not escalate beyond verbal assault. These observations, both of broad trends and specific, documented cases of harassment, suggest that jokes which punch down may have effects that pose a threat not only in the long run and

to groups as a whole but also in their immediate aftermath to marginalized individuals.

Comedians who take part in punching down are often resentful of their behavior being described as such; many are quick to claim that they should not be faulted for exercising their right to free speech. These individuals may also state that being critical in general is fair game in comedy while simultaneously shunning any criticism they receive. Wolfink, describing the fallout after a “transphobic stand-up comedy performance” by comedian Ricky Gervais (926), argues that “Gervais’s claims about censorship amount to uses of the language of free speech rights as a means of shielding him from accountability for the effects of that speech” (930). Essentially, Gervais and comedians who use similar strategies to defend their actions are not truly advocating for free speech, but are merely hiding behind the terminology of free speech – something that is obviously difficult to criticize – as far as it is useful to their purposes. This exposes such insistences as simply ways to escape backlash rather than expressions of actual convictions held by the comedian in question.

There are several views on the defensive claim of “playing a character” in stand-up comedy. Character performances are, in fact, an established part of stand-up, but frequently comedians who have performed jokes which punch down will argue only retroactively that they were playing a character, when this was in no way obvious to the audience initially; as Dadlez puts it, “we may usefully draw a distinction between those comedians who actively participate in and foster this conflation between self and persona and those who are, like Dave Chappelle in his Clayton Bigsby routine, presenting a persona that is alien to them...” (518). One perspective on characters in stand-up, as held by Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn in their article for the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, is that “like actors on the stage, stand-up comedians do not perform genuine speech acts, but rather pretend to do so...” (488) – that is, even if a comedian fully believes the things they say in a performance, they are still only *pretending* to make these assertions. Dadlez, meanwhile, argues that stand-up performers cannot be understood as analogous to actors because comedians typically claim to reference their own lives and beliefs, and audiences react to their statements as though this were true, while actors and their audiences do neither; as Dadlez says, “even if inaccurate, such more than occasional audience assumptions about the referents of a stand-up comedian’s pronouncements are unlikely to detach them from real-world contexts and concerns” (517). Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn posit that “a stand-up performance cannot be morally evaluable because of the kinds of assertions made therein (since there are no such genuine assertions)” (487), while Dadlez conversely asserts that stand-up *can* be morally assessed by its content because “to offer something up to an audience as funny, is to endorse its (relative) harmlessness...” and “the nature of the enterprise is such that responsibility can attach to content in a way that it does not in most other performance arts” (518). The main division between these two positions seems to be whether more ethical importance should be placed on a performer’s intent or the consequences of a performer’s actions. When considering the evidence presented previously of how stand-up performances’ content can affect real people in extreme ways, it becomes crucial that the *result* of a performance be weighed more heavily than the *intentions* (or claimed intentions) of the comedian who performed it, in a moral sense. From this viewpoint, therefore, stand-up comedy may be both morally evaluated and justly condemned if it is found to have profoundly detrimental effects.

In the face of criticism for performances judged as harmful to marginalized groups, many “edgy” comedians claim that they are being censored or “canceled” for merely telling jokes. One such comedian is Dave Chappelle, who, from 2017 to 2021, released several recorded stand-up shows which included numerous jokes that “fail because they are unironically regurgitating tired, often very old-fashioned, tropes and stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ people,” according to Dr. Bryant Sculos, lecturer in the Department of Political Science at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (6). Sculos observes that neither Chappelle’s income nor career were significantly affected by the backlash he received for these jokes, despite Chappelle’s claims to the contrary, adding that “this is pretty typical for the supposed victims of supposed cancel culture” (6). Sculos then contrasts this phenomenon with comedian George Carlin’s arrest and lawsuit in response to one of his performances which criticized the institutions of public broadcasting in the United States (6). The effect of this comparison is clear; comedians such as Chappelle, who punch down at marginalized groups, receive few to no lasting consequences for their actions, while comedians like Carlin, who punch up at powerful systems, are

censored in a very literal sense. The dichotomy only further emphasizes the influence that societal power has in how these potential ramifications play out.

Some argue, though, that punch-down routines have a place both in comedic and political schools of thought. This perspective offers the idea that politicized subjects which are often perceived as difficult for the average person to understand might be introduced and made approachable to an audience by a comedian, and that an imperfect introduction to them may be more helpful than ignoring them outright. David Gillota — Associate English Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Platteville — for instance, proposes that Dave Chappelle’s controversial stand-up through 2019 depicts Chappelle as confused by issues such as LGBTQIA+ rights deliberately, and that this portrayal creates a productive environment in which audiences may begin to interrogate their own beliefs and process their own potential confusion surrounding these topics (2-3; 9-10). This interpretation is generous in comparison to Sculos’ criticism of the same performances, which claims that Chappelle’s harsh jokes are “badly-written, poorly thought-out, and blatantly unfunny...” and show him “at his worst...” (5-6). The disagreement here appears to be both on a level of intent *and* of impact. Chappelle’s “confused” structure for his jokes may be either purposeful or a result of shoddy craftsmanship; the jokes themselves may enable others to open their minds to new concepts, or they may simply be cruel and low-effort.

Ultimately, though, the negative effects of these performances were demonstrated in much more obvious ways than the suggested positive ones. Several LGBTQIA+ employees of Netflix, where recordings of Chappelle’s performances were hosted, protested the streaming service’s continued endorsement of him and coincidentally received suspensions by their employer soon after, which Sculos suggests is more of a “cancelation” than Chappelle ever received (7). Even Gillota agrees that many of Chappelle’s jokes are “problematic at best and offensive at worst” (2). Additionally, there are forms of comedy with similar potentials to allow audiences to explore unfamiliar political territory without harming vulnerable groups of people in the process — namely, those created by said vulnerable people.

Jokes about marginalized people take on a much brighter color when they are written and performed by members of the marginalized group in question. In this context, they are capable of actually effecting positive changes for the oppressed, whether on a personal or political level. For example, according to Wolfink, bringing a humorous light to the often traumatic personal experiences associated with belonging to a societally disempowered group allows other members of that same group to feel a sense of “release” from those difficulties and, ultimately, to derive joy from that initial pain (928-929). In this way, humor — even “dark humor” focusing on unpleasant situations—serves to unite and uplift the downtrodden. Additionally, extending these jokes to those *outside* of the marginalized group in question “can play an important role in building awareness of and empathy for those experiences, in turn generating support for marginalized communities” (943); even those who hold negative or mixed views about the group might be swayed in their favor by comedy as a form of communication, as its purpose is largely to spark positive emotions and raise questions in the audience. Through these methods, then, a marginalized group may begin to create actual political changes in their favor. One example rife with such “dark humor” is Hannah Gadsby’s critically acclaimed performance, *Hannah Gadsby: Nanette*, which retells traumatic experiences from the comedian’s own life as a marginalized individual through the lens of a comedy show while simultaneously refusing to downplay the severity and impact of the events (*Hannah Gadsby: Nanette*). This form of oppression-related comedy, authored by marginalized people and about their own realities, therefore serves multiple purposes in the effort to ease the struggles of their communities, both emotionally and materially.

Punching up and punching down, in comedy, can have a significant effect on either the comedian performing the action or the target of the “punch.” When a comedian punches up, they are more likely to face repercussions, as the power in the interaction is held against them; when they punch down, they typically forgo any serious risk in favor of harming a less powerful community of people. The former is a bold act of defiance against established societal hierarchies and allows for poignant social commentary in combination with comedy, while the latter is cowardly at best and cruel at worst while simultaneously putting marginalized people in real danger. The consequences

for these marginalized groups can be dire, leading to documented verbal harassment and influencing large audiences to feel and behave more negatively toward them. The emotional damage this widespread treatment causes over time is not to be understated, either. Meanwhile, there is a place for marginalized groups as the subject of comedy which does not harm them — that is, when they are the ones making the jokes. Thus, comedy can be wielded in many different ways, as a tool for oppression or for liberation; the onus is ultimately on comedians to handle this power responsibly.

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Starry Blight
Mikaela Belanger

Missed,
mistakenly admiring the mystical elements looked upon by the masses of screaming back doors and
fluorescent lights
as lives compared, test scores and privilege opportunities that would slip through her fingers hang
delicately over her head.
Jarring,
snakily grinning of tormented power, it tears each drop of bloodshed from her oceans.
Crying through dead eyes staring through thousands of yards
Teardrops of dust with a rustic heart to be set apart
Drowned and burned, formed like glass, suffocating in scorching refinement once again
She patches the edges of cuts and bruises from flicks of the tongue, sharp like swords, slicing deep into
the confines of authority.
Draped in the armor of comfort and insecurity, securing the only weapon from locked eyes of
judgment and pierced lips of distasteful jealous dialect.
Double sworded, two faces, a mask to be awarded, residing in forbidden places
Awards of silver and gold, of Honors, and ones of the most high
I've won the show of Jones's as they cry a sea of complementary colors.



Heron
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Holistic Medicine: What it is and Why it is Important

Katherine Lynehan

Holistic Medicine involves healing modalities, including: herbalism, reiki, spiritual practices, diet, and exercise. It is a type of healing approach that considers the entire patient and the communications between their mind, body, spirit, and environment. Holistic healing is important because it focuses on patients' overall well-being. Modern medicine is full of chemicals that end up causing lots of adverse side effects. The pharmaceutical industry does not have the consumers' or the environment's best interest at heart. Because of this, people are interested in a more natural approach. There are many diverse types of holistic healing to explore with lots of benefits to create healthier, more well-rounded individuals, which will in turn create a healthier society.

Herbal medicine is a commonly used type of holistic healing. Herbalists have existed "since 3,000 BC" (Sanchez and Kelley para 7). Herbal medicines can come in different forms, including powders, tea blends, supplements, and topical lotions. Western medicine is known to prescribe medications to treat patients, while not necessarily considering all aspects of the patient's life. Although herbal medicine can cure lots of ailments, it is crucial to first consider the person's medical history including the drugs they take, because the interactions can be harmful. The average American takes four pills a day, not including various other over-the-counter pills or supplements, according to a *Consumer Reports* survey (Carr para 1). An example of an herb that is commonly known for bad interactions with drugs is St. John's Wort, which has been cautioned with drug classifications, including "anxiolytics, lipid lowering agents, oral contraceptives, and others" (Glynn and Bhikha 26). The interactions between drugs and herbs are not yet fully understood. It is known that they do not form a "toxic intermediary," but are thought to change the level of drug absorption (Glynn and Bhikha 26). Herbal medicine has lots of potential healing properties to alleviate all kinds of symptoms.

Herbal medicine is a commonly used type of holistic medicine that is becoming increasingly popular today. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Herbal medicine is "the art or practice of using herbs and herbal preparations to maintain health and to prevent, alleviate, or cure disease" ("Herbal Medicine"). Herbs are powerful and contain lots of medical benefits and properties. Herbalism is a type of holistic medicine used to describe any medical treatment different from Western medicine. Herbs have many benefits, from gastrointestinal support to treating illnesses, and lowering stress.

In addition to helping physical symptoms, herbs can have a positive effect on a patient's mental health. A common herb used to treat mental health is called St John's Wort, which increases the flow and effectiveness of serotonin in the body and therefore alleviates symptoms of depression ("Herbs Good for Mental Health" para 5). Serotonin is a chemical that helps the brain and nerve cells communicate. It plays a vital role in bodily functions, including the influence on "memory, happiness, as well as regulating body temperature, sleep, sexual behavior, and hunger" (Cleveland Clinic, "Serotonin" para 3). When serotonin levels are low, many people feel down and depressed. Herbs like St John's Wort can help, but since it is known for reacting poorly when mixing with drugs, it is important to consult a professional first. Another herb recommended for mental health is Ashwagandha. Ashwagandha is an adaptogenic herb that is used to treat insomnia, anxiety, and increase weight loss (Bastian et al. para 1). Adaptogens are defined as "active ingredients in plants and mushrooms that may impact how your body deals with anxiety, stress, and fatigue" (Cleveland Clinic, "What are adaptogens" para 1). Professional medical herbalists have such a wide range of knowledge, and their goal is to utilize plant powers to heal and prevent disease. As holistic practitioners, they consider the whole person they are treating as opposed to just a single symptom that the person is experiencing. Some advantages herbal medicine has over traditional pharmaceuticals are that it is easily accessible, requires less packaging, and is more cost efficient.

Aromatherapy is a more concentrated and potent form of herbal medicine. It uses essential oils that are pulled from "herbs, flowers, leaves, and other plant parts" to help treat or relieve a patient's symptoms (Tan et al. para 4). Essential oils commonly used in aromatherapy include lavender, peppermint, orange, and rose. They can be consumed orally, through massage, or by inhalation. Essential oils have been found to help lower anxiety and increase quality of sleep for patients (Tan et al. para 5). Lavender is specifically used to lower mental illness symptoms, including anxiety and

depression, as well as aid in sleep (Mendicino para 9). According to a study with thousands of patients, “79% of individuals with anxiety had their levels reduced after lavender inhalation” and within this same study, a lavender extract supplement was also proven to diminish anxiety symptoms within 6 weeks” (Mendicino para 13). Lavender, among many other herbs, has unique healing properties that can help treat a wide range of symptoms.

It is important to be cautious with essential oils in the home, especially if you are a pet owner. As these herbs are extremely concentrated, they can be toxic to pets. According to the SPCA, these oils can specifically be an irritant if pets walk through them, ingest them, or get them on their coat. It can cause “unsteadiness on feet, depression, or low body temperature (in severe cases). If a pet ingested concentrated oils, you may see vomiting, diarrhea, and depression as well” (“The Essentials of Essential Oils around Pets” paras 3-4). As a pet owner, you must be cautious while utilizing the benefits of essential oils in your home. You can do this by avoiding essential oils that are deemed toxic for your pets and consulting the veterinarian before using them as a treatment for your pet. When using essential oils topically, it is also majorly important to consider their potency and follow dilution directions so as not to further aggravate your skin.

Where the pharmaceutical industry only cares about treating a patient’s symptoms, holistic medicine considers the whole person and how multiple approaches can create not only a healthier human, but also a healthier planet. Holistic health practices require much less harmful materials such as plastic prescription bottles, paper pamphlets, and doctors prescribing to make more money which are found in the pharmaceutical industry. Holistic medicine is a much better approach to the problems our world faces today as it has been found to be a cheaper and highly effective alternative to Western medicine (Vetengodt para 6). Holistic medicine professionals consider the whole person, rather than just a symptom, by prescribing things like exercise, diet, therapy, spiritual practices, as well as herbal medicine. They focus on a wide range of things as opposed to just one symptom. Often in the pharmaceutical industry, things are prescribed with a one pill fixes all sort of mindset, when a single pill can cause a whole list of other symptoms.

There are herbs already growing and people with the power to heal others. There are so many healing opportunities at our fingertips that are just waiting to be recognized and met with an open mind. Imagine how beautiful the world would be if we accepted that within each of us, there are healing properties that are just waiting to be discovered and explored. Within a thriving community, each of us has the key to different healing modalities to share with others. Instead of chasing the newest pill to “cure” us, we would collectively come together to heal various parts of us as both individuals and as a society.

Forest bathing is a healing approach that initiates a conscious engagement of the five senses, surrounded by nature. It involves patients submersing themselves in beautiful natural environments and has been found to support both mental and physical health. According to a three-day study in Italy, forest bathing can increase feelings of optimism, gratitude, and positive emotions (Guardini et al. para 7-10). Practicing gratitude can majorly benefit people’s mental and physical health. Like forest bathing, gratitude focuses on mindfulness in the moment, and emphasizing the positives in one’s life. Practicing and focusing on gratitude can not only help mental health, but also promote better relationships, “by fostering a sense of connectedness.” While this traditionally refers to relationships with other people, it can also apply to the relationship with ourselves, and with the natural world” (Mills para 4). This means that nature immersion can increase gratitude, and gratitude can increase a deeper relationship with nature, which creates a positive feedback loop. According to a study of over 20,000 people, it was reported that people who spend 2 hours, or 120 minutes per week were “substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don’t” (Robbins para 1). Learned from this same study, led by Mathew White from the European Centre for Environment and Human Health, it is found that nature is not only pleasant to enjoy, but it is also “a have-to-have for physical health and cognitive function” (Robbins para 6). The natural world is full of all kinds of resources to help better our health. Forest bathing is an example of a type of healing that does not require many (if any) materials, and an opportunity to join others in creating healthy habits by getting together to exercise in nature.

Reiki is a type of holistic treatment, known as energy healing. The word itself is broken down into “universal energy” (“Healing your soul; Reiki: Universal Healing Energies” para 2). Reiki healing is

an energetic frequency passed on by a reiki practitioner that can only be accepted by the receiver if they believe and are open to accept the energy. It involves the practitioner holding their hands gently on or near the patient's body while releasing a healing energy. Reiki connects with the life force within the patient and helps the body activate its own natural healing abilities, inviting the body back to its neutral state. It helps the body heal and balances the nervous system. Reiki is a healing modality that promotes relaxation, balances emotions, and aids physical pain to support the patient's overall well-being. According to Vickie Bodner, a licensed massage therapist and Reiki Master, "Reiki complements other types of medical and therapeutic treatments, and it can increase the efficacy of other types of healing" ("What Is Reiki, and Does It Really Work?" para 8). It is not only good for patients with illnesses including cancer, chronic pain, Parkinson's disease and so on, but it is also beneficial to people who just want to further their wellness and strengthen their body's healing capabilities. Reiki invites an intimate relationship, where the patient trusts the practitioner to hold them a safe space to recalibrate their nervous system. Although a reiki session can be embellished with things like aromatherapy and other materials, it is not required, which makes it another example of bringing people together and limiting excess materials.

Another form of holistic healing is sound healing or sound baths, which include a variety of vibrational instruments, including bells, gongs, and others. It is called a sound bath because people describe it as the sound and vibrations "washing over" their body (Goldsby et al. para 7). Instruments used within sound baths as a healing tool have frequencies that you not only hear, but "also experience at a psychological level" (Bresloff para 5). Sound healing can help relax the body and reduce stress, which in turn, allows for better sleep. It is becoming increasingly popular, along with yoga and meditation. Karen Bresloff, a sound healing practitioner, explains that "Human bodies are 70 per cent liquid and great conductors of sound, so when you have a sound healing session the frequencies have the potential to correct imbalances of dense stuck energy deep down at a cellular level" (Bresloff para 5). Sound healing is a modality with multiple benefits. Sound healing has been seen to activate or stimulate the vagus nerve, which is responsible for carrying "signals between your brain, heart and digestive system" (Cleveland Clinic, "Vagus Nerve" para 1). Functions of the vagus nerve include digestion, heart rate, blood pressure and respiration, immune system response, mental health, and so on. Sound healing has lots of benefits for people's health and is a wonderful way to connect with community.

Holistic healing and medicine can not only heal our population but help heal our environment. It is a more sustainable, cost efficient, as well as proven effective type of medicine that should be utilized more. Examples of holistic healing include herbal medicine, energetic healing, and therapy. When we hire a professional to help us with medical symptoms, we want to be heard, understood, and supported. While some doctors may have great intentions, others are only in it for the money. Holistic medicine considers the whole patient and gets to the root of the problem by "prescribing" lifestyle changes, while the pharmaceutical industry is quick to prescribe pills to "treat" a patient's symptoms. I have personally benefited from multiple different modalities of holistic medicine, including energy healing like reiki and herbal approaches including aromatherapy and herbal teas. Holistic health practices can help people create a stronger connection to themselves and their community. Within each of us, there are healing properties to unlock that opens the door to a cohesive journey of healers and healing individuals to come together and support one another. If society utilized holistic medicine as our main healing modality, we would be healthier and happier, and our environment would benefit as well.

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A Woman's Sense of Worth: The Pressure of the Beauty Standard

Sarah Toms

If not to look beautiful, what else is a woman fit for? The beauty standard is this ridiculous set of rules that says what is considered beautiful and what is not about an individual's body, and this impossible standard is continually forced down the throats of women and girls from the moment they are old enough to showcase physical characteristics. Society, and especially the media, is constantly upholding this standard by intricately placing thoughts and ideas about beauty in young girls' minds, telling them what they're supposed to look like. All it takes is five minutes of scrolling on social media to start a war of comparison in your own mind. You see all of these portrayals of what "beauty" is and immediately notice how it looks nothing like you.

Why is a woman's worth socially considered less than because she looks a certain way? From a very young age, women and girls are conditioned to believe that their worth is entirely determined by whether or not they fit this unachievable mold of beauty, and this forever alters their sense of self and overall livelihood. I remember being told to my face when I was a child that I would look prettier if *only* I changed X, Y, and Z about my physical appearance. More specifically, I remember feeling that pressure to be beautiful cultivating at such a young age because it was said to me as if I was disappointing people by daring not to look perfect. Every single woman in this world has so much worth, but she's constantly torn down based on her looks to the point that she doesn't believe it. Rather than a woman's sense of worth being defined by physical characteristics that she has absolutely no control over, worth should be attached to more important factors. What kind of person is she? What does her mind and soul look like, and what does she love? How does she live? This manifesta is meant to deconstruct and call out the beauty standard for what it really is – complete bullshit – and to reinforce a new idea of worth being unattached to external appearances.

From a young age, girls are conditioned to compare every aspect about themselves to other people. They hear their mothers and sisters say they wish they had someone else's stomach, or their face, or their hair. They see the beautifully constructed advertisements that showcase the most perfect-looking women, and they ask why they don't look like that themselves. The media is constantly saying, "Look at these beautiful women! So perfect!" while simultaneously tearing down the less-than-perfect girls by telling them the ways in which they are expected to change. With this constant display of who is and isn't considered beautiful by society's standard, girls are pinned against each other to determine who is going to fit that "perfect" mold better. There is this constant comparison between women and girls, and this ultimately leaves almost every woman feeling less-than simply because she doesn't look identical to another woman that is considered exemplary in beauty.

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Miss Kilman is a character that is fairly confident in herself and who she is as a person. She expresses her distaste for Clarissa Dalloway's personality and the way she lives her life. While Miss Kilman dislikes Clarissa Dalloway as a person, she still reflects on the fact that, by society's standard, Clarissa is a beautiful woman. Even though she is confident in who she is as a person herself, Miss Kilman deems her own worth as less-than because she looks different from Clarissa:

Ugly, clumsy, Clarissa Dalloway had laughed at her for being that; and had envied the fleshly desires, for she minded looking as she did beside Clarissa. Nor could she talk as she did. But why wish to resemble her? Why? She despised Mrs. Dalloway from the bottom of her heart. She was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit. Yet Doris Kilman had been overcome . . . "It is the flesh, it is the flesh," she muttered. (Woolf 125)

Miss Kilman had associated her sense of worth to the way she physically appeared. She was deemed less worthy than Clarissa Dalloway to be happy and content in life because she wasn't socially considered as beautiful as Clarissa. Had the beauty standard not trained Miss Kilman to attach her sense of worth to the way she looks, she could have been inclined to be more happy and content in her life and in her own personhood. Similarly, if the beauty standard had not taught Clarissa that her looks gave her worth, her personality may have been considered better to Miss Kilman.

One of the aspects of the beauty standard that makes it so incredibly impossible is the fact that

it doesn't adhere to the majority of the population, but rather it describes only a tiny portion of the human race. Women are expected to have the perfect body that rarely occurs naturally, the perfect skin that most people don't have, and the perfect hair that only a small percentage of the world gets. More drastic is the fact that the beauty standard adheres to only one specific race: the white race. The beauty standard is majoritively eurocentric, with the standards for a specific skin tone, european facial features, and Caucasian hair. Dia Sekayi wrote an article titled "Aesthetic resistance to commercial influences: The impact of the eurocentric beauty standard on Black College Women" in which she discussed the unique and especially impactful experience Black women have with the beauty standard. She states that the impact of the standard of beauty "is magnified for girls of African descent in the United States being measured against a yardstick that does not emanate from their cultural norms (Perkins, 1996; Smith & Burlew, 1991; Wade, 1996)" (Sekayi 468). Imagine being expected to fit into a mold that isn't only different from you but the exact opposite. It's a completely impossible expectation that leaves these women feeling even more distraught and powerless.

In *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, Pecola is a young Black girl that faces this specific experience. Pecola had been taught by society that her worth was entirely based on how she looked. She had an incredibly disadvantaged life and was forced to face some of the most immense adversity. Socially forced to construct this entire belief system that everything bad that ever happened to her was because of the way she looked, she firmly believed that having the bluest eyes would make her worthy of a decent life. At her lowest point, Pecola is speaking to an imaginary friend about her new blue eyes that she believed she had received, and she completely equates her worth to her eyes. Having different eyes, pretty blue eyes like the pretty white girls, made her worthy of happiness and of a friend: "Will you come back if I get them? Get what? The bluest eyes. Will you come back then?" (Morrison 204). Even after getting her blue eyes, she still fears she isn't good enough. This is a perfect example of how ridiculously unattainable the beauty standard can be. Even when you've adhered to it, you can always be prettier. Therefore, you haven't reached the fullest potential of beauty and aren't quite worthy enough yet.

Throughout *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola also dreams and fantasizes of pretty white girls because deep down she wishes she could be them. There was this Shirley Temple cup that Pecola was fond of, and she took every chance she could get to drink from it. Meanwhile, Claudia despised Shirley Temple because she represented the beauty standard she knew she would never be able to live up to:

Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face. Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how cu-ute Shirley Temple was. I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels. (Morrison 19)

This is a good representation of the different emotions that come with the pressure of the beauty standard. While Pecola held Shirley Temple up on a pedestal and adored her because the standard deemed her worthy of it, Claudia resented her for the same reasons. Claudia asked the questions about why Shirley Temple was worthy but not someone that looked like herself.

Another way that the beauty standard subjects a specific group of people as being unworthy is the specific challenges that transgender women face. As transgender individuals, they have had to face beauty standards for both genders. Before transitioning, these individuals typically fail to adhere to masculine beauty standards for the entire beginning of their lives, but they then proceed to face the harsh cruelty of the feminine beauty standards for the remainder of their lives. Their failure to adhere to beauty standards for either gender binary will leave these individuals feeling even more secluded and less-than compared to a cisgender woman. Vivek Shraya conveys this idea well in her book *I'm Afraid of Men*: "How cruel is it to have endured two decades of being punished for being too girly only to be told that I am now not girly enough?" (Shraya 80). A transgender woman's personal sense of worth is impacted in a unique sense of general womanhood, in addition to the general standards for

beauty, which can be an awfully difficult experience to have.

In more recent times, there has been progress made in terms of broadening the general idea of what is “beautiful.” By trying to be more inclusive of different body types, races, and looks, the media has slightly improved in some of these aspects. Jennifer Millard wrote an article titled “Performing beauty: Dove’s ‘Real beauty’ campaign” in which she discusses a beauty campaign that Dove did in 2004. In this campaign, they challenged the beauty standard and aimed to create a more realistic approach to beauty as a concept. Millard explains the complexity of the challenges that the beauty standard creates quite well. She says that

In Western culture, those with beautiful bodies and faces ‘get more’ out of life because beauty is highly valued (Black 2004). Beautiful people are viewed as more intelligent, powerful, healthy, and of higher class than the masses of regular Joes and Janes (Plous and Neptune 1997). To be part of the beauty elite requires a carefully managed set of semiotic resources, including long, shiny hair; clear, smooth skin; cosmetics; thin body; straight, white teeth; and trendy clothes. (Millard 150)

She emphasizes the fact that fitting into the mold that the beauty standard creates gives you a higher status in society. The set of standards that characterize someone as “beautiful,” though, are generally not attainable by the large majority.

While the campaign that Dove created in 2004 is a step in the right direction in terms of lessening the strength that the beauty standard holds, the standard still has that intense grasp on many women and girls. All it takes is 10 minutes scrolling on social media to find the next trend for a body part that has recently been deemed “unattractive,” or to see constant comparison. There are comments on posts between complete strangers saying things like “I wish I looked like you,” or “couldn’t be me.” I, for one, have fallen victim to the impossible standards several times throughout my life, just like every woman I have ever known. At one point or another in my life, I have created an insecurity about virtually every single inch of my external appearance, and I have at those times equated my worth with those physical aspects of myself. I have experienced intense emotional turmoil, believing that I am not worthy of love or happiness because I am not “pretty enough,” and I have witnessed nearly every woman in my life experience the same intense emotional turmoil. I have listened to my mother cry because she is unhappy with the way her body looks after having three children. I have listened to my sister complain that her glasses that help her see make her less beautiful. I have listened to my best friend express her distaste for herself because one person told her that she wasn’t “that pretty.”

Women are taught that all of their worth is determined by their ability to adhere to these intensely ridiculous, impossible, bullshit standards, and they spend their lives thinking that maybe they would be more deserving of happiness if only they looked different. This simply could not be further from the truth because women, and every single person for that matter, are worth so much more than how they appear. They have minds, souls, and personalities. Beauty should not be a term associated with physical characteristics, but rather with the ability to be kind, to experience joy, to laugh and smile in ways that make them incredibly beautiful human beings no matter what they look like. The standard of beauty should be destroyed, if not for the fact that it’s moronic and completely unattainable no matter what, then for the fact that it has completely ruined lives. Imagine how much happier everyone would be if we weren’t all convincing ourselves we weren’t good enough, or if we weren’t all fighting for the chance to be more beautiful than we already are.

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Moose
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Ideas of Love

Melissa Shortt

Everybody loves love.
Well, they think it's love, anyway.
I wonder if they just love the idea of love –
Conjured up from fairytales
Full of happily-ever-afters.

Well, Everybody, love is hard.
They say love is all patient and kind,
But it's not. Love is brutal and
Torturous, agonizing, and messy.

Just rip your own heart out, and as you stare
At it, bloody and pulsating on the cold marble floor...
Stomp on it! Stomp it again! And again!
Better yet, let your lover stomp on it, too!

Now, pick up whatever pieces remain
And shove them right back inside.
And go on about your business
Like the brutality that you have assisted
Never even existed.

Does that all sound familiar to you?
If it doesn't, then you don't know love.



Hidden Deer
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

The Spanish Civil War and its Relevance to our Society Today

Liam McLaughlin

The Spanish Civil War ravaged the Spanish countryside from 1936 to 1939. To say that it was caused by a single event, group, or act would be disingenuous to the intricacy of the political climate of Spain during the period. Though the event that started the actual combat in earnest was when Francisco Franco, a General in the Spanish Army, attempted a coup after the Popular Front was elected into office. It was thoroughly planned and skillfully executed, yet the Republican forces, along with a Left Wing coalition, resisted Franco's Putsch, and thus bloodshed began (De Kerangat 105). Franco's failed coup led to the formation of his very own coalition, consisting of the military under his leadership, the Carlist Restorationist Movement, and the Falangist movement. This was the Nationalist Front of the Civil War; they were united by anti-communism, anti-democratic ideas, and varying degrees of Catholicism (Sánchez 499-530). On the contrary, the Republican Front was a coalition of many different ideologies, all united by their hatred of Franco and his allies. It saw the Republican government, the PCE, the CNT-FAI, and the POUM all attempting to work together (Osinsky and Eloranta 330-332).

This conflict had an extremely diverse set of ideologies fighting for what they believed, for one side or another. As you will observe, more extremism spawns more death and destruction. We can learn so much as a society from these ideologies, how they interacted with one another pre war, during the war, and post war. The better we can understand ideology and extremism, the better we will be at preventing it, and cooperating as a society. It is important to have a clear image of both sides and their ideals, actions, interactions, and beliefs, so that we may learn from them to make a better future.

Carlism at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War had been in Spain for nearly a century. It had been the causation of the first Spanish Civil War, over a succession dispute over Queen Isabella and Charles V. The Carlist movement was outraged that a woman was to take power in Spain, and viewed Charles as the rightful heir to the throne. This is the motif of the Carlist movement, they are vehemently anti-liberalization (Parker 16-25). The slow process of constitutional democratization of the Alfonsoist lineage infuriated the Carlists, and when the Spanish Republic was declared, Carlist terrorism against democracy began. The Carlist movement is fanatically devoted to an autocratic, despotic, king of the Bourbon Dynasty. At the time of the Civil War, Prince Javier of Bourbon-Parma was the claimant to the Spanish throne, and joined the Requetés, Carlist militias. However he was eventually exiled by Franco in order to unify the Nationalist Front (Kirkpatrick 24-32).

Many joined the Carlist ranks as reactionaries to the left leaning government of the Spanish Republic. A plethora of anti-clerical laws were passed by Manuel Azaña, the prime minister. He and his liberal-socialist coalition believed in order to modernize Spain, they must resolve Spain's issue of religion (Sánchez 499-530). At the beginning of the war, the Carlist Movement was seen as the vanguard of Catholicism against the Socialists who wished to destroy religion. By the time Franco fused the parties however, the savior of Catholicism in Spain slowly became Franco and his coalition, rather than solely the Carlists (Sánchez 499-530).

An example of a young conservative volunteer for the Carlist Movement was Peter Kemp, a British law student from Cambridge. Kemp joined the Requetés and fought among them for the majority of the war. After the war he joined the Spanish Legion and fought as a volunteer on the eastern front of World War 2 against the Soviet Union. He was eventually distinguished for his exemplary service by Francisco Franco himself. Kemp highlights his experience in Nationalist Spain in his book *Mine Were of Trouble*:

The bright sun shone golden on the fields and the olives; it shone also on the huddled corpses of the Frenchmen, heaped around the bridge where we had expected to find them. Most of them had been stripped of their boots and outer garments by the Moors and lay there in their underclothes in every attitude, grotesque and stinking, shriveled by two days' hot sun. (Kemp 57)

I found this a very moving account — especially how exhaustively detailed it is. The beginning of the passage reminds us of the beauty of the Spanish countryside, and yet how quickly the blood of brothers tainted the soil because of the terror of extremism.

The second monarchist faction within the Nationalist coalition was Renovación Española, the more moderate monarchist faction of the two. This would benefit them pre war as they were much more popular then, but during the war, with the rampancy of reaction and extreme political maneuvers, the more radical Carlist faction appealed to more because of their unwavering hatred of the Left. Renovación Española were the followers of Alfonso XIII, descendant of Isabella and former King of Spain (Sánchez 499-530). Despite Renovación Española being assuredly being a more modest monarchical faction, their leader, José Calvo Sotelo was assassinated in 1936 by Socialist soldiers (Sánchez 499-530). At the end of Franco's dictatorship, Franco appointed Juan Carlos I as the King of Spain, officially restoring it as a Kingdom once Franco passed. Juan Carlos I was the grandson of Alfonso XIII, showing that Franco officially chose the Alfonsoist line over that of the Carlist Bourbon candidate, despite Franco's alliance with the Carlists (Encarnación 435-459). This could be viewed as a wise decision from Franco, because of the extremism of the Carlist movement. The current king of Spain, Felipe VI, is of Alfonso's bloodline and is the great grandson of Alfonso XIII (Sánchez 499-530).

The next faction in the Nationalist Coalition is one of the most influential; they are the Falangists, National Syndicalists, FE de la JONS, Falange Española de la Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista. For simplicity's sake, from now on we'll refer to them as the Falange and or Falangists, but it is important to note that they were officially FE de la JONS, because itself was a coalition between FE (Falange Española) and JONS (Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista). This is because, as with many things during this period, due to political assassinations and heightened political tensions, FE and JONS fused creating their party as a countermeasure to the leftists killing many prominent members of both FE and JONS (Southworth 148-152). Falangism is a populist ideology that vehemently rejects both Communism and Monarchism (Sánchez 499-530). The term National Syndicalism helps us further understand the Falange and its ideas. The "National" in National Syndicalism refers to a sense of national pride and the country above all, not dissimilar to other fascist nations of the period. Syndicalism refers quite literally to the ideology of Syndicalism, the removal of the old society and unionization of the means of production, along with nationalization of the economy at large. This relation with Syndicalism and traditionally left wing doctrines made the Falangists unpopular amongst other far right groups of the time, despite their ferocious hostility towards Communism (Sánchez 499-530). On top of this, before the eruption of the war, they were extremely unpopular, and you'd be forgiven if you'd never even heard of them in early 1936. For all intents and purposes, the Falangists were an extremely niche, fringe group on the political spectrum, capturing both far left and far right policies, making them an enemy to both sides (Southworth 148-152).

The leader of the FE de la JONS was José Antonio Primo de Rivera, a young, handsome, charismatic lawyer, who was the son of Spain's previous military dictator (Southworth 148-152). In 1936 José Antonio was imprisoned in Alicante for illegal possession of firearms. He was charged with conspiracy against the Republic, and found guilty by a People's Tribunal. He was sentenced to death and executed in Alicante on November 20, 1936. The Republic hoped that by killing Primo de Rivera, the Falangist movement would slowly die without him, yet his death had the very opposite effect (Southworth 148-152). The prominence of the Falangist movement skyrocketed not only after the beginning of the war, but also after José Antonio's death. Martyrdom is an extremely persuasive tool, and José Antonio's execution was used very heavily in Nationalist propaganda. He was referred to as "The Absent One". It is a Falangist custom of shouting "Present!" during rallies in reference to José Antonio, suggesting that he is present and with them in spirit. Despite all of this, Franco and José Antonio very much did not cooperate. In fact it would be a safe assumption that Franco was relieved to hear of José Antonio's execution, as this eliminated Franco's most formidable rival in the Nationalist Coalition (Sánchez 499-530). After José Antonio's death, despite Franco's disdain for the man, this did not stop him from allowing the deification of Primo de Rivera as a martyr of their struggle against Socialism (Southworth 148-152).

As for the FE de la JONS after José Antonio's death, it slowly lost its ferocious unique fervor and assimilated under Franco. Franco arrested the appointed leader of the Falange after José Antonio's death, Manuel Hedilla Larrey. After this Franco merged the FE de la JONS and created the FET de la JONS (Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista), with himself at the chief of the new party (Southworth 148-152). This move by Franco was his play to unify the

Nationalist Coalition, in response to the growing tensions between the doggedly Catholic Carlists and the begrudgingly and questionably Catholic Falangists (Sánchez 499-530). This is also when Franco exiled Javier of the Bourbon Dynasty as mentioned previously (Kirkpatrick 24-32). It is a marvel that Franco was able to successfully fuse both the Carlists and Falangists, given the political differences of the two, and it's safe to say that if Javier or José Antonio were in the picture for the Nationalist Coalition for any longer, it may have collapsed in on itself as seen with the leftists.

The final member of the Nationalist Coalition was the center of it, and the unifier, General Francisco Franco and his Military Junta. Angered by the many anti-clerical laws passed by the Republican government, himself, Emilio Mola Vidal, and José Sanjurjo, all high ranking generals in the Spanish military, plotted a military led dissolution of the Republic (Callahan 201-216). Franco himself was a practicing Catholic, and a very conservative man in general. Between the three heads of the plot to overthrow the republic, Franco found himself as the moderate, very similar to his position later on in the coalition at large. Emilio Mola Vidal was suspected to have more Falangist tendencies, while Sanjurjo was more Carlist in nature (Sánchez 499-530). Though very soon into the war, both Vidal and Sanjurjo died in a plane crash (Sánchez 499-530).

During the war itself, Franco led the Nationalist cause as a whole once the FET de la JONS was solidified. He was well respected among the other Fascist powers in Europe, and both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany sent much aid to the Nationalists during the war (Sullivan 697-727). The Nazis sent the feared and horrific "Condor Legion", along with transport planes to escort the Nationalist Army of Africa out of Spanish Morocco. Italian contribution to the Nationalist cause was monumental. The Italians sent many men, guns, aircraft, tanks, and even a detachment of the Navy to help secure Spain from the Republic (Sullivan 697-727). Many argue that without Italy's intervention in the war, the Nationalists very well could have lost. Mussolini's motive is clear for his actions in Spain, himself and Franco were very similar men, along with Mussolini's ambitions to revive the Roman Empire, and the Italian armed forces' need of experience, for Italy the ends justified the means (Sullivan 697-727).

Francisco Franco and his Nationalist cause won the civil war in 1939, and Franco installed an ultra conservative dictatorship that would last until 1975. Many mass executions would occur under Franco's regime, those targeted were Socialists, Communists, Jews, Protestants, Catalan/Basque Nationalists, and Homosexuals. In return for Nazi intervention in the Civil War, Franco gave Hitler many of Spain's "undesirables," mainly Jews, Communists, and Homosexuals (De Kerangat 104-121) (Ruiz 171-191). Along with this, Franco formed the Spanish Legion, a volunteer force of Spanish soldiers to join the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front of World War II. This would last until 1944, when Franco recalled them due to fear of retaliation from the UK and the US (Callahan 201-216). Though many of the volunteers of the Spanish Legion stayed and joined the Waffen SS, those who stayed despite Franco's orders were referred to as Legión Azul. Despite these gestures, Hitler was infuriated that Franco did not join the war in earnest. Franco knew that he would be unable to convince the people to join the war, after three years of destruction. On top of this, many of his Carlist, Alfonsoist, and Church advisors heavily urged him against diplomatic ties with Nazi Germany (Callahan 201-216).

After 36 years of controlling Spain, King Juan Carlos tirelessly worked to liberalize Spain, and the Spanish Constitution was created in 1978. King Carlos and democratic elements had a very difficult time in the transition to democracy, and narrowly avoided another military coup from conservative elements. Pacto del Olvido (Pact of Forgetting/Oblivion) was their solution to the precarious political situation. The Pact of Forgetting was a tool used by democratic elements to democratize the nation quicker, and without bloodshed (Encarnación 435-459). It ordered the release of Franco's political prisoners, while ignoring the crimes of Franco's regime, in the hopes that it would peacefully secure democracy, and with hindsight we can see that it did (De Kerangat 104-121).

The downfall of the Republican cause of the war was its lack of centralization, and lack of cooperation within the factions, despite the best efforts of many in the coalition (Osinsky and Eloranta 318-341). I'll begin with the Republican forces themselves, who wanted to restore the democracy that was being assaulted by Francisco Franco and the Nationalists. The democracy in itself was left leaning with many liberal/socialist agreements and concessions, with the prime minister Manuel Azaña being an undoubtedly left leaning man (Payne 550-556). The Republican forces were popular amongst the lower echelon of the working class, as many of the Socialist policies benefited them (Osinsky and

Eloranta 318-341). Along with this, much of the Spanish working class had long ago grown a disdain for the Spanish Church, so the anti-clerical laws passed by Azaña were well received by a considerable portion of the proletariat in Spain (Sánchez 499-530). At the beginning of the war the Republican forces that wished to restore democracy under Azaña were the majority of the Coalition, and held international support amongst the democracies of the world. Though it would eventually lose its popularity to a more extremist faction within the coalition, before the war was lost. This faction in specific was the PCE.

The PCE, Partido Comunista de España, or Communist Party of Spain, is self explanatory in the sense that they are Communists. More specifically however they were Stalinist in nature, opting for a much more authoritarian stance of Socialism (Payne 550-556). This led them to be the favorite of the Soviet Union, and the USSR sent the PCE men, equipment, and advisors because of this. José Díaz was the General Secretary of the PCE during the civil war, and this faction would eventually become the strongest ideology in the Coalition, thanks to popular support and Soviet aid. As mentioned previously, the PCE assumed leadership of the Republican Coalition towards the end of the war, outcasting Manuel Azaña and his bureau (Payne 550-556). Along with this, the PCE would consolidate their control by attempting to silence the other rival socialist parties in the Coalition, similar to Franco in his unification, but not as effective (Ruiz 171-191).

The Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), or POUM was the main Socialist rival to the PCE in the coalition . Unlike the PCE, the POUM was very much anti-Stalinist, and wished for a much less authoritarian Socialist world (Payne 550-556). Many in the POUM declared themselves Trotskyists, though this wasn't an entirely agreed upon ideology for the party (Orwell). The anti-Stalinist goals of the POUM made them a quick enemy of the PCE, and the two factions struggled to cooperate (Osinsky and Eloranta 318-341). This also assured that the Soviet Union sent little to no aid to the POUM, and only favored the PCE as previously stated.

A recognizable example of an international volunteer for the POUM would be that of Eric Blair, otherwise known as George Orwell. Famous for his novels 1984 and Animal Farm, he also wrote a personal recollection of his service during the Spanish Civil War under the POUM, this novel being *Homage to Catalonia*. Here is a compelling passage:

And quite half of the so-called men were children – but I mean literally children, of sixteen years old at the very most. Yet they were all happy and excited at the prospect of getting to the front at last. As we neared the line the boys round the red flag in front began to utter shouts of “Visca P.O.U.M.!” “Fascistas-maricones!” and so forth – shouts which were meant to be war-like and menacing, but which, from those childish throats, sounded as pathetic as the cries of kittens. (Orwell 20)

Orwell's account of the war goes extremely in depth on the intricacies of the Republican side of the Civil War, such as the infighting between the rival factions, and the morality of the war at large. If you wish to better understand the setting of the Civil War, I highly recommend this read. I chose this passage because it was one of many that highlights the human aspect of this conflict. Literal children being sent off to fight and likely die in an ideological crusade, being robbed of their lives. To me this paragraph really reinforces the unmistakable tragedy that is found within the Spanish Civil War.

The final ideology in the Republican Coalition was the CNT-FAI, Confederación Nacional del Trabajo-Federación Anarquista Ibérica (National Confederation of Labor-Iberian Anarchist Federation). The CNT-FAI were Anarcho-Syndicalists, hoping to achieve the destruction of previous society, and the collectivization of the nation to create an Anarchist utopia run by the people. Their hatred for conservative elements can be seen by their desecration of Churches, and there are many instances of the CNT-FAI burning down Catholic chapels, and indiscriminate murder of priests and nuns alike (Sánchez 499-530). The CNT-FAI failed to effectively cooperate with any of the other members in the Republican Coalition, as the democratic elements weren't extreme enough for them, the Stalinist PCE despised Anarchists, and the POUM did not agree with Anarcho-Syndicalism either (Osinsky and Eloranta 318-341). There were occasions of the CNT-FAI creating Anarcho-Syndicalist communes in Spain, many of which were in Catalonia. However these radical political changes were quickly reversed once the Nationalists captured the respective zones (Payne 540-556).

The failure of the Republican Coalition to effectively cooperate would lead to their

downfall. Each and every faction within the alliance either distrusted one another or blatantly hated each other for one reason or another. In contrast, Franco's fusing of his league led to stability and centralization, a luxury the Republicans did not share (Osinsky and Eloranta, Sánchez 318-341). In 1939 when the war ended, some democratic elements fled to the free world, few of the PCE escaped to the Soviet Union, and the rest were at Franco's mercy. Most of those who could not flee Spain were either imprisoned, executed, or sent to concentration camps by Franco (Ruiz 171-191).

The prelude to the Civil War and its eventual violent outbreak is an instance of the failure of a modern, western, democratic society. The Second Spanish Republic was a semi industrialized nation, with a relatively large population, yet such a gruesome bloodbath occurred. This is what I have gathered from all the research I have conducted; the degradation of Spanish society can be attributed to extremist policies and actions on both sides, and a lack of cooperation between all political entities led to the countless deaths of the Civil war. I believe that this is such an immensely important topic to today because of our political climate, and how people have begun radicalizing, and refusing to cooperate with opposing political views. This is the beginning of the very treacherous path Spain found itself on in the 1930s.

Political polarization is extremely destructive, as shown in the research above. If Carlist terrorism wasn't so prominent in Spain, many people wouldn't have radicalized towards the Left. If Manuel Azaña and his advisors had enacted so many anti-clerical laws, so many wouldn't have found reason to join the Carlists. Silencing your opposition is not always the correct option, as seen with José Antonio Primo de Rivera and his execution. His movement, and even his very name, have almost been immortalized because of his execution in Alicante.

You can see that even within coalitions to fight against the opposing political aisle, infighting was still rampant because of the inflamed political culture of the time. This could be attributed to the many years of political extremism, all ideologies grew to detest cooperation with the opposition, and their political doctrine was the only conceivable path forward for Spain. I fear for our youth in our political climate, many of which have forgotten the past and focus solely on the present and future. The past is a tool for us to learn from our predecessors, in hopes that we do not repeat their same mistakes. I urge those who refuse to cooperate or listen to rival political opponents, turn your gaze to the past, the Spanish Civil War is the fate of a radicalized society.

Listen to your political opponents, absorb their beliefs, find common ground and make concessions. This is what the Spanish failed to do in the 1930's. They opted instead for ignorance, violence, and murder. However hard it may be to understand and hear the words of political rivals, heed my words, it is better than the alternative. As Orwell reminds, us, "These deserters were the first 'real' Fascists I had ever seen. It struck me that they were indistinguishable from ourselves, except that they wore khaki overalls" (Orwell 18). We are all people, under the ideology, stance on certain political issues, we are all human, when we forget that fact is when we all become monsters. Monsters burn down churches, kill priests and nuns, and execute people based on their political, religious, or sexual beliefs. We all crave kinship, identity, love, and purpose, never forget this. For the sake of the future, we must cooperate.

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A Film about Losing

Taner Kaya

“You can’t help but compare yourself against the oldtimers. Can’t help but wonder how they would have operated these times.” (*No Country for Old Men*)

Generation Z is often jokingly said to be given the last alphabetical letter because they are the last generation in entirety. Despite many of us being old enough to parent children and many doing just that, there seems to be a universal aura of finality. Not just total impending doom, but a looming sense of isolation until the day officially comes. The world has become chiefly cynical in disposition. The future is laden with doubt as society braces to pay for its own insatiable greed; the collapse of an echelon rising for millennia. The forests are dying. The water is being tainted. AI will replace us all, etc. Nihilism courses through the masses as young adults can only hope to laugh at the absurd vastness of their problems. Technology overexposes us to previously unimaginable tragedy on a consistent basis, nagging at our psyches until a randomly cruel universe is all we can rationalize. Life is simple chance, and our ruination is probable.

No Country for Old Men is a 2007 film adaption of a novel by the same title. Written by author Cormac McCarthy, the film was directed by brothers Joel and Ethan Cohen. It was the winner of several Academy Awards, including Best Picture. In my opinion, it is the greatest piece of mainstream nihilism and perfectly replicates the sentiment of modern Gen Z attitudes and media. Being from 2007 it is a film many have grown up with, and I’ve found myself becoming only more terrified of its themes as the years go on. The premise appears deceiving simple: a masculine, rugged protagonist shadowed by an old wise man. Coming ever closer, a trademark villain. Though, despite all this, it is no *Odyssey*. Rather, it is a beautifully drawn-out forewarning. Try as you may, and for whatever reason you have, the universe will defeat you. Once it has, it will simply march on. In any way we progress to combat this reality, the agents of our fate will simply adapt. With every human advancement comes a new capacity for evil.

Llewelyn Moss, a trailer-dwelling Texan, stumbles upon the aftermath of a Cartel shootout while hunting in the desert. Cars lay torn with bullet holes and newly deceased men dot the area. Understanding the mess as a drug deal gone wrong, Moss finds a case containing two million dollars. He rushes to hide it and go home to his young wife, and it is made clear by Moss that he is going to go on the run for a while. The plan was to shake off those who potentially went after the case of money. After completion, he would reconnect with his wife and start life anew. Unknown to Moss, the case contains a satellite tracking device. So begins the hunt, and so enters the hunter.

A large, pale man with an oddly feminine bob-cut sits on a bench in a small police department. A deputy sits distractedly on the phone, calling in the man’s arrest as car theft. Lost in conversation, he fails to notice his suspect slip his handcuffs under his legs so that his hands lay in front of him. The man, out of focus, stalks across the room till he towers over the back of the deputy. He slips the cuffs over the deputy’s neck, drags him to the floor, and violently chokes him to death. Through the struggle, a faint smile on his grimacing face. Anton Chigurh is *No Country’s* primary antagonist. He is a single man hit squad following the tracking device Moss ignorantly carries while he attempts to flee. Throughout the film, Chigurh is presented more as an entity than a mere man.

“What’s the most you’ve ever lost in a coin toss?” (*No Country for Old Men*), Chigurh asks the proprietor of a gas station. Without any more implication than this, the proprietor’s life now relies on the outcome of Chigurh’s signature coin flip. It is felt that Chigurh does not see himself as a regular person and operates as if he is a manifestation of fate. “Well done,” he tells the proprietor as he correctly guesses heads. His life is spared; his continued existence determined by a single rotation of a coin. This is where Nihilism rears its head. There was nothing to do in that moment but be subject to probability. No morals to be respected, no beliefs to save the proprietor’s life. Chigurh is random, relentless destiny. He is the universe’s response to modernity. He is a type of evil designed to tear through the cushy morals of a changing world. Chigurh is what the “oldtimers” never saw. He calmly decimated groups of men with a silenced shotgun. He carried a ‘knocker’ with him. A knocker being a device that uses compressed air from a tank to drive a retracting steel pin through a hose. Its purpose is to euthanize cattle before slaughter. This demonstrates the supernatural quality of Chigurh, who

used the knocker to dispose of his fellow man as if they were cattle. He also used it shoot the locks out of doors, showing that he was something you truly couldn't hide away from. From his strange, coin-based morality and air tank, he had no reflection of regular humanity. Even his silly haircut showed that he was clearly beyond societal conventions. Moss seemed to be running from death itself.

Through it all, an old sheriff on the brink of retirement follows the trail of crime that Chigurh leaves in his path. Ed Tom Bell hardly appears to be in any direct danger, always showing up to crime scenes after they've been committed. He simply can't understand the trail of horror that he is led on, perplexed by the sheer brutality of the perpetrator. Bell is always a step behind. Close to the end of a quiet police career, this new wave of criminality is something he simply can't keep up with. In his twilight years, he is now forced to make realizations he never had before. With his mortality setting in, the world has grown newly confusing and sinister. Bell must wrestle with the fact that after a lifetime of fighting crime the notion seems entirely hopeless. He's learned only that he's out of date and will leave the world to be ravaged by forces he could never contend with.

From this setup we are led to assume that the movie plays out as expected: Moss hides, and Chigurh searches. They will meet at the film's ending climax, and Moss will either heroically prevail or die trying. Perhaps Bell will locate Chigurh at the last moment, shooting him as he monologues over a beaten Llewelyn. The story, however, doesn't play out like this. This is no common Western. Moss is killed offscreen far from the film's conclusion. No ending sequence or last words, just a bloodied body being uncovered as cartel members flee the scene. Throughout it all, Moss was just another victim of randomness. This cunning protagonist couldn't see it coming. It wasn't even Chigurh who had finally made his kill; just nameless extras skidding out of the motel Moss had stayed in.

This plot point, for many, felt traditionally unsatisfying. *The Hollywood Reporter* stated that, "...Setting a major climactic scene offscreen serves to undo all [the director's] fine work" (Bennett). This was a film that didn't follow the "rules" of cinema. It was adapted semi-faithfully from a book, where conveying themes are more important than a neat two-hour Hero's Journey. Feel bad that life caught up to your favorite handsome cowboy? Too bad. It'll catch up to you, as well. No *Country* isn't here to offer solutions. The hero dies like a side character, and the viewer is left to rethink the entire purpose of the movie.

"If the rule you followed [your whole life] brought you to this," Chigurh says, shotgun pointed squarely at his captive, "of what use was the rule?" (*No Country for Old Men*). A phone rings. He shoots. Whatever logic we follow, death prevails. If everything ends in tragedy, it raises the big questions. Why even care? Why even try? Why build anything if it will eventually topple down? *No Country* seems to address these questions with fervor. But remember, solutions aren't something it offers. This is a story of futility. No one is safe in a random universe where everything possesses a time limit. Throughout the duration, Chigurh is destiny incarnate. It seems one can only prolong their attempt survive him. He is embodied certainty. The universal certainty that, well, you're going to get beat out there. One way or another.

At the end of the film, Chigurh pays visit to Moss's wife, Carla Jean. He considers it unfinished business. Once again, he brandishes the fateful coin. "Call it," he says.

"The coin don't have no say. It's just you," she replies.

"Well, I got here the same way the coin did." (*No Country for Old Men*)

Chigurh is then seen exiting the house, checking the bottoms of his boots. He drives off absentmindedly through an intersection; he was given a green light. In that moment, the movie seems complete. All loose ends have been tied. Until, abruptly, another car comes smashing through his side door. He gets out, shaken and bloodied. The bone protrudes from his arm. Randomness prevails. Of all the forces in the film none felt quite as supernatural or untouchable as Chigurh. Despite what even he believes of himself, he is at the mercy of pure chance. A couple Texas teenagers rush to check on him, and he accepts no help but the shirt off one of their backs. He ties it into a sling, pops his arm in, and walks off.

"You can't stop what's comin', it ain't all waitin' for you...That's vanity" (*No Country for Old Men*). Ed Tom Bell's brother says to him. The times change. Whether the universe is an endless, grinding march toward entropy is yet to be confirmed. What is known is that it certainly appears that way. In a film where even Fate has a fate, one constant remains: You can always be humbled. There is no

preparation for coincidence. There is no defeating time, as eventually it presents to us an adversary we no longer can face. The world is anew, and things are just getting scarier. It's no place for old men.

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Mirrors of a New World: A Media Reflection

Brendan Eaton

Media and the role it plays in our lives has developed at an exponential rate throughout my lifetime. The way we consume it continues to change as more and more platforms and mediums become available to us. The term “going off the grid” seems almost impossible now as media has adapted new ways to reach us in practically every aspect of our daily routines. Consuming media on a day-to-day basis now feels as natural as consuming our meals. While social media outlets have completely transformed how we intake this information, it is also changing how we output and write.

As a child, some of my earliest memories of media consumption were evenings spent with my father after he came home from work as a New Hampshire State Trooper. He frequently kept irregular hours with that profession, so we were usually like trains passing in the night. I had little interaction with him most weeks, so to spend more time together, my mother sometimes rewarded my good behavior by letting me stay up late to see him when he returned from his shifts. One of our favorite things to do together was to reheat some of my mother’s cooking, lay down on the cozy, shag living room rug in front of the television, and read the daily paper. He would tune our dated, boxy Sony television to the evening news at low volume, spread the paper out for both of us, and we would read, watch, and discuss the daily events. As I was probably in the six to seven-year-old age range at the time, my literacy skills were just developing, so he assisted me through the articles and explained things we’d observe on the news. This made me feel so grown up; being allowed to consume this kind of media with my father, when most kids my age had little to no interest in current events, was thrilling. Although most topics went completely over my head, he took the time to explain the material in a way I could understand.

It’s amazing what I can still remember to this day. It’s the little details like the way the thin newspaper felt in my hands and dried out my fingers that I can recall now. Or, the glow of the TV as it flickered on the dimly lit floor, displaying ads for Motorola phones and Dairy Queen Blizzards. Even the smell of my mom’s Italian style cooking, that had been heavily peppered to my father’s liking, sticks out in my mind. This all became a routine for us. As a result, I seriously looked forward to that time that we shared, just the two of us. As we didn’t get a whole lot of quality time together during the daytime hours, and I had to compete with my brother for his attention when he was around, this was something that was just ours.

Reading was not always a joy for me. I wasn’t particularly overexcited to pick up a book over a baseball mitt or a skateboard, but I did consider myself a somewhat avid reader. It took me a little time to get into a book or series, but once I did, I could not put it down until it was completed. My mother was an elementary level educator and made sure we always had access to all types of literature. Weekly trips to the library were a regular occurrence, and she always made sure my brother and I were reading from outside sources on top of our required work for school. She even enrolled us in a book club at the local Pizza Hut called “Book It.” If my memory serves me correctly, it was a reward-based system set up by the pizza chain that involved a lot of buttons and stickers in return for parental proof of reading various assigned books. It also involved a bunch of complimentary personal pizzas in return. When I think about it now, the whole thing was pretty genius.

The fiction sections were where I usually found myself searching for the collections I’d take home. My brother was a big fan of mysteries and sci-fi stories that often had spooky elements to them. His favorites were often from the *Goosebumps* series, but they were a little too creepy for me at the time. I was drawn more toward books that dealt with more believable characters and situations. One particular series I remember getting hooked on was called *The Boxcar Children*. It described a small group of orphaned children that through a series of circumstances ended up finding shelter within an old run-down boxcar that was abandoned in the woods. The books follow the children through adventures, struggles, and sometimes mysteries they encounter while trying to stay alive and keep each other safe. While I don’t recall many details of the stories, I do remember the way they made me feel as I read them — usually in bed and sometimes in the late-night hours because I couldn’t put them down. They always seemed to be searching for food, and when they did manage to find some, it was described in detail, which always made me feel the need to sneak into the kitchen for a late-night salty

snack, as they were constantly referencing salt pork or beef jerky they had come across.

As I grew older my taste in literature obviously changed as my interests shifted. School-required reading rarely excited me. I took in what they assigned, but it felt like a chore. It was somewhere during junior high when I began feeling much less enthusiastic about reading or writing. I did, however, care about maintaining respectable grades, so I kept up with my skills, but just enough to maintain my spot in the honor role. Writing had never been much of a passion of mine. It always felt forced and just like a task that had been assigned to me.

It wasn't until high school that I began to find a new spark of interest in my literacy. With more freedom to choose the topics I could read and write about came new interests and ideas. Architectural courses were offered at my school and that quickly became a subject of great interest. Upon entering that program of study in high school, and continuing that path into college, I found myself spending lots of time consuming any sort of media I could get my hands on that pertaining to architectural history, techniques, and practice.

With time, the way I accessed media evolved, as well as the media itself. A shift from receiving and creating media mostly in print form to digital forms occurred. Things became faster, more streamlined, and more efficient. Projects that I would normally put pen to paper for became something that could live in my pocket. Information I used to have to search far and wide for was now available at my fingertips in a matter of seconds. As someone who considers myself as somewhat of a tech enthusiast, I mostly embraced this change. If you visited my house today you would see what most people would probably consider an above average amount of technology, all of which is capable of delivering endless media. There are three large scale, flat screen televisions in my living room alone, mounted side by side on the wall in a large room with vaulted ceilings. They typically screen news, sports, and various other media throughout the day, as if I were living in a bustling local pub. Some people in my life embrace it, while others are very confused to why I would have such an abundant display of media. The truth is, I just enjoy technology and staying informed via various types of media; but recently, I must admit that it may be getting a little out of hand.

There is an Amazon Echo Show display that sits on my nightstand, eager to deliver the weather and daily headlines the moment I wake up. In fact, I have it programmed in a way where when my alarm goes off in the morning, I simply say a good morning command, and it begins reading and displaying the daily information. It will even read me texts, emails, and reminders that others may have left for me while I was asleep, enabling me to stay connected to people from the moment I wake up. Living in a home and a world with all these capabilities allow me reach out, connect, and share with anyone at a moment's notice, sometimes without even having to pick up a device, has its good and bad effects. Now, as much as I enjoy this new tech, and the almost endless possibilities they come with it, I do sometimes feel a bit too connected. There are times where my life begins to feel so saturated with media as it is coming at me from every direction like a swarm of pestering mosquitos. From the nightstand display providing me with my morning briefing, to the TVs around my home displaying ads for things I don't need, it can get overwhelming at times. My computer wakes up and starts reminding me of tasks for school as the Tidbyt news ticker on my dresser flashes a disturbing headline and tells me my favorite baseball team lost again last night. A friend rifles a series of memes at me that he finds amusing that I see on my smart watch that tapped me for my attention. At the same time my work cell phone chimes and reminds me to pick up a bag of limes and milk on my way in. This has all been fed to me before I even brush my teeth. I'll breathe a sigh of relief and stare at the floor as I sip my morning cold brew coffee, but it is short lived. My personal cell phone beeps and prompts me that it is time to leave for work. The moment I get in my car it wirelessly connects to the display inside and begins playing the podcast I never finished yesterday. During the commute to work I listen to comedians argue and joke about current events. It gets old so I switch to the radio; maybe they are playing that new song I like but couldn't remember the name of...Nope, it's an ad for a new Jordan's Furniture store opening up this weekend, followed by an annoying jingle for State Farm auto insurance. Maybe Spotify is the better choice for my last few minutes of this ride. At least I paid for the premium service so there are no commercials, I think to myself. I get a song or two in before pulling into to work where I have to open the bar for the day shift.

Once I arrive, I unlock the heavy, warped wooden doors, put the tattered open flag out, turn

on the TVs to various news and sports stations, stare at the screens for a few minutes, and go about my morning duties as I listen to the morning ESPN personalities bicker over who is going to start the big game on Sunday. It's not even 10AM yet and I haven't had a single face-to-face human interaction today, and I'm already feeling burnt out on people. Maybe I need some silence. Maybe I need to unplug. As much as this transformation has made my life more convenient and streamlined, it has diminished the so-called shield that defended us against how it penetrates our lives. My daily routine has drastically changed over the years as we allow the flood gates to open more and more. I often speak with friends and colleagues who were born around the same time and discuss how unique of a time it has been for us to experience. We were truly the last in an era that can remember what it was like to not have access to things as monumental as the internet or cell phones in every pocket. The days of the landline are not lost on us. I remember the days of answering machines, pay phones, malls, and paper forms of media. Although some of these still remain, they hold on to a thin shred of life; their reign has come to an end. It fascinates me to think that this next generation knows only tales of such things, a world that was already at their fingertips upon their arrival. I've embraced that change is inevitable, and most of these advancements have benefited me in some way, but a healthy fear remains. The tidal wave of media doesn't seem to be slowing any time soon. Ads and information keep finding more clever ways to reach us in new places where we may least expect them to exist. My hope is that we all learn to co-exist with these new fast-paced forms of media, while still maintaining our humanity and remembering where we came from.

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Overworked, Underpaid, and Falling Apart

Carter W. Schofield

Entertainment is a natural and constantly recurring part of our modern lifestyle. Whether it's the billboards we see while driving down the road, or the random TV show we see in passing while flipping through the channels, we've reached a point as a society where the entertainment industry is involved in almost everything we do in our daily lives. This also means that the entertainment industry is always growing, and this causes a lot of positives and a lot of negatives for the people involved in making said entertainment. The amount of entertainment being produced every year is significantly increasing, but with it, the issues surrounding the production and staff of said entertainment are becoming incredibly concerning. It's starting to feel like every day you hear of a new popular show or movie that was secretly a disaster behind the scenes. This has become especially evident post-covid, as many more people have started working remotely rather than being in an office, and while that may be better for people from a work-life perspective, it can be extremely damaging to a production's well-being (Zahid et al. 12). This and many other issues plaguing the industry have caused many major productions to collapse in on themselves, with some movies from this year having over 100 staff quit during the production due to an overly tight schedule and rushed work.

The harsh combination of overwork and underpayment is causing the quality of what could have been fantastic entertainment to plummet. It doesn't take a genius in the subject to be able to watch a lot of the major movies that have come out in the past three years or so and visibly see the issues with them. Between big-budget movies with over 15 different CGI studios, animation projects that have sent their executive producers to the hospital, and companies that have flat out refused to pay their workers despite them putting in their best efforts, makes up just a small fraction of what the entertainment industry has faced in the past three to five years. Companies want their work put out faster and faster without any regard for quality or attention to detail, just the money that it manages to bring in. A common example of this mindset can be found in Japan, a country that has become famous in the past decade or so for extreme overworking and underpayment not only in the entertainment industry, but media as a whole (Ikeda et al. 1). Major television and film productions are suffering worldwide due to improper staff management and unreasonable production time; and right now, it looks like it's only on track to become worse.

While he did not disclose the name of the movie for security reasons, Andy K-D is a perfect example of someone who was treated wrongly by the film industry despite it being a profession he had been in for years (para. 2). He works as a perfect example as someone that simply wanted to do his job and get paid. Even just working as a cameraman, Andy was continually faced with absurd working hours and unrealistic deadlines (para. 7). The fact that this has become common practice for most television and film sets is horrific. If every crew member isn't truly passionate about the work that they're creating and feels like the time they're putting in is worth it, then you'll never end up with a truly complete and worthwhile product. Andy even states himself, "I've seen attitudes change, as our working conditions are getting more and more ridiculous. As workers are being pushed over the edge, you see more and more of us being open to speaking out. The businesses say they're injecting 30% more into productions to cover COVID protections but they never use funds to improve our conditions. They haven't restored night premiums, or time off to rest and recover. They maintain that they can't improve things but, as publicly traded companies, we can see that they're immensely profitable. We see them raking in record profits and diverting funds away that are rightfully ours at the expense of the health and safety of our coworkers" (para. 13). We've gotten to a point where instead of being valued members of a team that can work together and create something special, even a job as important as a cameraman is being treated as just more cheap labor in order to pump out a profitable product. It's a dangerous hole to spiral down, and it's causing many companies to create significantly worse pieces of work than they used to while also having terrible production times and no rest for the people making it.

Overwork and exhaustion are both very dangerous things when it comes to the staff of any given project. The number of side effects that it can have on your daily life is frightening, and it's something that companies should be striving to avoid, not encouraging through their poor work

environment. However, this has not stopped countless companies, and at some points even entire countries, from becoming bent on using employees as nothing more than a quick way to get labor done, regardless of the quality. The country that has become most famous for poor working conditions in the past decade or so is Japan, and to show just how dangerous both overwork and exhaustion are, a group of researchers set out to determine exactly what affects these ailments have on the human body. They did this by testing 98 different people with varying backgrounds to determine exactly how much overwork and engagement with a given company outside of their regularly scheduled hours affected them health wise (Ikeda et al. 1). The results are about as depressing as would be expected. Many of the participants saw a steep increase in depression, physical fatigue, sleepiness, and developed other symptoms within just the nine days during the testing period (Ikeda et al. 5, 6). It's horrifying to think that all this happened just from less than a week and a half of interacting with the workplace regularly outside of normally scheduled hours. This means that the effect would be even greater upon someone if they were working almost 12 hours a day and still getting calls and requests outside of work hours. Sadly, this is happening constantly to those in the film industry, regardless of their position. While it may be more prevalent in Japan, these things are still happening across the world regardless of the location, and it not only hurts the quality of the actual production, but more importantly, it's hurting the very people making it.

To see just how important it is to have a properly functioning schedule and workers that genuinely care about the final product they're helping to create, I think it's very important to look at films and television that succeed in their creative vision and didn't cause any overwork or exhaustion in staff members. For this example, we'll be looking at movies that are produced at Studio Ghibli, a company famous for allowing the people that work there to work on a given project for as long as they want, which helps ensure that the final product is as perfect as possible. Even their most recent movie was in production for almost a full 10 years, just to ensure it was as complete and well-made as possible.

Cristiana Bartolomei, Alfonso Ippolito, and Davide Mezzino all take a deep dive into the production of the movies, and they properly show the love and care that goes into every single one. As is stated in their research on the subject "His (Miyazaki's) mastery of drawing and deep understanding of landscapes enable him to create scenes that convey emotion, atmosphere and meaning. The traditional tools he uses in the early stages of the creative process allow him to explore the shapes, details, and lighting effects of the landscapes to be animated. Once the basic drawings have been created, the animation team use high-resolution scanners to convert the paper-based work into digital images. This step preserves and refines the details of the drawings and provides a digital base for further processing. Artists then use a variety of coloring techniques to bring life and depth to the landscapes. A common technique used is watercolor painting, which allows for subtle and gradual tonal variations, giving the landscapes a harmonious and natural appearance" (Bartolomei et al. 11). There are certain things that just aren't possible in a movie if the proper love and care isn't put into it. When watching these movies, you can feel just how passionate the team is and how much they're able to take advantage of the time that they're given. Just a brief skim of this description should give a basic idea of just how much work goes into something as seemingly simple as an animated movie, further cementing why it's so important to be able to have the proper time to do it right.

So, what do we do? How do we escape the constant spiral we've fallen into of overwork and the mistreatment of employees? The world has reached a point where it seems almost impossible to come back from the pit we've fallen into. Especially since the pandemic, the amount of overwork and the number of productions that face severe issues has increased at an alarming rate. Some of the potential solutions to these issues may seem somewhat unorthodox, but I think it's important to consider all of the options in order to find a proper solution that allows films and movies to look as good as they used to while also having the staff enjoy making them and ensuring they can put as much love and care into creating what they want to how they want to. It's also important to remember that not every option that looks like a solution actually is. A good example of this danger in action is currently taking place in India, a country where the animation and film Industries are falling apart due to having too many new people.

While hiring new faces can often be a very good thing as it allows new talent to enter into the

industry and gives more opportunities for freedom within a tighter schedule; it can often be a double-edged sword as by hiring too many people, India has reached a point where there aren't any artists that actually want to remain in the industry, causing the turnover rate of new employees within both the 2D and 3D animation industries to be over double that of the global average (Priyanka & Rao 1). In fact, this practice of over hiring, then losing countless valuable employees only months later has already been tried by quite a few countries as a potential solution to the overwork crisis. However, the result always ends up the same. Between too many people who don't have proper training, people who aren't used to high octane, constantly moving environment, and deadlines that become even stricter due to the excess of people being used as a parachute, it's become clear over the past five years or so that this is not a proper solution to the problem at hand.

While not perfect, some countries have at least begun to investigate how to have new people properly integrate into the industries they want to be a part of. A more recent example of this is Canada, which has started using a work integrated learning system to better allow newly graduated people to transfer directly into the workforce of their choice (Wyonch & Seward 1). With these programs, although not yet perfected, it's become more possible for people looking to enter a certain field to truly test it out and see if it's what they want to do for a living while also receiving proper training that will help them once they enter that field. C.D. Howe Institute's study on the subject describes the work placement program as such; "Work placement normally occurs at the end of academic studies, but may be interspersed among academic terms, for varying lengths of time. Work placements might be paid or unpaid, but students should be engaged in professional activities that complement their discipline. Completion of a work placement may or may not be required for graduation, depending on the program of study" (Wyonch & Seward 3). With this program in place, students can test out the industry of their choice, including the film industry. They'd be able to see if it's something they want to be a part of, and they'd be able to learn something so that when they officially join, they don't end up in this weird state where they want to quit after just a few months because it feels like their whole job is learning rather than actually doing. It's not a perfected system, and it takes more than just more student to career integration to ensure that the whole film industry returns to a healthy point of development, but at the very least it's a step in the right direction that allows upcoming people in the industry to be properly trained and have a full understanding of the job they're about to take on, rather than being thrown into the industry without any support and end up quitting from stress and overwork only a few months later.

Even if these countries are stepping up and making it easier for people to directly integrate into the field of work that they'd like to work in, there's still work that needs to be done to ensure that there is a healthy balance between work and life, especially when it comes to a demanding industry like film. At the very least, this is one of the few things that most countries seem to see as an actual issue that needs to be addressed. Over the past four years in particular, the number of articles and essays written about striking a proper work-life balance has increased exponentially (Zahid et al. 8). A potential solution that's been suggested is remote working for at least some days during the week, as in theory it should provide a more stress-free environment to work in and could potentially also involve less physical working hours. While tests have certainly shown promising results in this regard, it's important to remember that there's more to consider than just traditional office fields or work (Zahid et al. 12). In the case of the film industry, remote work can often be challenging, even for the positions that would seem doable over the internet. However, that's not to say that remote work shouldn't be considered for the film industry, as it has proven time and time again throughout testing that it helps reduce stress levels, reignites passion for your job, and results in less exhaustion overall (Zahid et al. 12-13).

Overall, there are countless options being presented daily as ideas to help stress and issues within not just the film industry, but all workplaces. While nothing has proved to be a perfect solution yet, it's promising to see that some places around the world have at least tried to take the right steps to ensure a healthier workplace. That said, the problems in the film industry most likely won't stop anytime soon. Productions are still collapsing in on themselves all the time, and more trusted experts are quitting by the day. People are starting to become scared to enter the industry, fearing that they too will end up hating their own work and being left behind by the fast-paced productions. That's

exactly why it's become even more important now than ever to properly support and assist those who are actively trying to fix the industry and help it return to the way it was. There's obviously no guarantee that any one idea will work, but if no one ever tries, then a solution can never be found. As someone entering this industry soon, there's nothing I'd like to see more than healthy productions, and even more so, healthy people. I also don't know what the solution is, but that's exactly why I think it's so important to think about it deeply and attempt to find the best answer; so at the very least, we should all be sure to give every last creator who manages to push through the horrific productions and create something special all the credit and praise in the world, rather than the exploitative companies that are forcing them to work under these conditions.

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Book Club

Cate Jedrey

Hello Judith, welcome to book club.

Don't worry about walking to your car alone in the dark. You can't come here at night. The parking lot is shit isn't it? They are never going to fill in those tiger-trap potholes. The mall's upkeep budget fell off after Amazon ruined shopping for everyone. Most of the lights burned out somewhere in two thousand and one. It doesn't really matter anyway; the whole place shuts down at six-thirty.

The mall made me fill out a form for our store front. When the cheerful man at the front office asked what sort of store "Yellow Wallpaper Press" was, I told him I was checking off "home goods" on the application form. I don't think he appreciated the air quotes. He told me I had to be specific and accurate. I told him our group was focused on revolutionary change by publishing women's experiences in physical non-electronic mediums, such as books, comix and art. We were a group dedicated to challenging the uprising censorship against women in this country. We were going to fight the erasure of women of color and protect the first amendment rights of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices in public spaces and, we were as an outfit: "Y" know more Dystopic than Hot Topic." He didn't laugh. I'm sure he thinks we are going to sell weed in the half-abandoned mall and I'm pretty sure he doesn't care if we do. He told me to check off the box labeled "other/social" so shoppers wouldn't bother our lesbian weed-selling outfit by trying to buy a stand-mixer. I pointed out the category labelled "other/social" on his application form wasn't particularly specific or accurate. He said I should have a nice day. Step one of book club complete. A room of our own. Soon to be an underground publishing house and movement.

Virginia Woolf would be proud.

Book Club Statement of Purpose:

Part one: the safety of Judith

To be seen as legitimate we must have a legitimate name, but to keep our members safe from the inevitable violence and intimidation which will run counter to our cause, we will have to adopt a persona. I put forward Judith slayer of the Assyrian general Holofernes. We will all be called Judith while we work here in book club. We will be an untraceable gestalt entity of seductive rebellion. We will be united as creative artists and rebels who fight as one body but who speak with many voices.

Judith is better than "Book Clubbers" which a Judith pointed out, sounds like a group created to ban books not protect them, and furthermore as to the generic name of Book Club, well, some

Judiths keep referencing *Palahniuk* and *Fight Club*.

Judiths aren't wrong about the similarities in title, but they are kind of dicks for pointing it out.

Operation Holofernes:

Book Club Agenda Week two

Item 1: Book club is now a Zine:

The old-fashioned printing press was a cool idea, but it takes all day to line up a single paragraph and

Judith has been jamming her fingers in the cast iron gears of it. As a sendoff to the old machine, we are gonna put a copy of our manifesto in the press clamp and drop the whole works on a sexist dude at some sort of sporting event. Judith is now searching Etsy for a trebuchet.

Item 2: Resistance at the Barnes and Noble

From now on since we won't use the printing press, the Book Club Zine will be laid out and edited on computers, but we will make hard copies of it and as an act of rebellion we will put them in the "women's interest" section of the periodicals in the Barnes and Noble bookstore.

Judith has been sneaking other types of magazines and reading materials into the same "women's interest" shelves. Not just our Zine. She has rightfully pointed out women have interests in every category of periodicals (from *Fangoria* to *Scientific American*) and part of Book Club's ideals is to initiate change by addition instead of censorship. Instead of moving the bride books and gossip rags, she has added literary reviews, *Mad Magazine*, and *Tattoo*. All Judiths should do the same. Remember if you get stopped by anyone bite them and run. You don't work there so biting is on the table.

In the meantime, we will write a request to B&N to expand topics placed under the "women's interest" Section, so the company doesn't appear to be full of sexist condescending monsters from the sixties.

Item 3: As much as I understand the absolute hatred of online incel message boards we can NOT make Operation Holofernes a curated list of men we would like to behead. Not so soon after Operation Vlad Tepes went sideways at the beach. I know peroxide can take blood stains out. I knew that before we got to the beach.

Item 4: We need a van for the guerilla book fare. Anything will do.

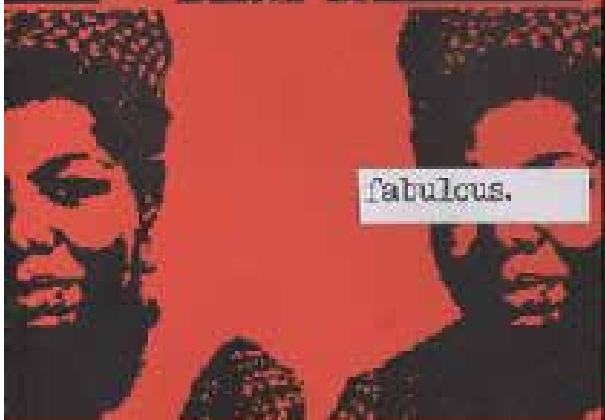
Item 5: Our first Zine is Called Judith. The first issue is called "Body."

Page 5 on is the entire content of our first Zine.

So, Let's play Body, Bawdy Exquisite corpse.

issue (1)

body



THE
WORDS

Words

They ban books for obscenity most of the time.

According to The American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom, "Of those titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color" (ALA). They are also most often female. PEN America has updated these statistics, according to their webpage the number of book bans between the years 2022 and 2023 were 3,362. There are many instances where challenges and bans are not reported to either organization (PEN.org).

Body

These challenges are not made because the book is obscene. The very act performed between writer and reader is by its nature deeply obscene. It is raw mind to mind connection. It is the exploration of another human being's experience and the sensation of it as it is filtered through the reader's own personal framework. This direct intercourse between writer and reader brings each inside of the other intimately almost atomically, without involving the grotesquerie of the prophylactic flesh. This is as true for a comic book as it is for a piece of difficult feminist prose. It is a mental and spiritual communion in which the writer spreads out her body of experience and offers it to the reader who willingly partakes. This union is too intimate to be anything but obscene.

It is control, which is the root cause of censorship, sexual content is incidental. *The Bluest Eye* isn't a book about Pecola's rape, it is a narrative expression about how Black women and children view themselves in a white society which doubly marginalizes them, which both hypersexualizes them and degrades their worth as women and more broadly as human beings. It is the disquieting thought she asks us to explore with her, of how white society frames the Black as ugly and ignorant, instead of framing them as human beings deserving of love and respect and how that insidious all-encompassing message impacts girls.

Inside of this narrative framework Morrison reaches out to the reader, her mind connects to the reader's mind and she summons between them a Black girl child to express the torture of wanting to be loved and not to have that desire to be loved, answered in any way but rape.

"A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of her fulfillment" (Morrison 204).

"There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of her lover's inward eye" (Morrison 206).

Examine those quotes from Morrison. Feel them, live them with her. Neither of them are openly sexual. Neither of them have foul language in them. Still, as a reader you feel disquieted. You may question your own culpability, as you partake of her text. You have no choice but to see Morrison's world through your own lens, to filter it through your own experience and digest it for the truth.

For a while, Toni Morrison takes up space in your mind. She has been banned more frequently than most authors. In 2023 she was banned 29 times (PEN).

It's not about sex. A Black woman has entered the reader's mind and her voice has shaken their heart and connected with their soul. The reader will take her with them when they close the book. She has marked them, with her own experiences, with her womanhood and her Blackness. This act can't be undone.

This intensity of emotion from an uncontrollable (but human) experience becomes unbearable to the inflexible and uncurious mind and it becomes radioactive to a reader who brings calcified prejudices with them to the narrative.

Without the willingness for the reader to open up themselves to a different point of view, reading the experience of another who is considered inferior feels obscene, invasive, and accusatory. The narrative of a woman is dangerous and needs to be controlled. The same is true for LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC voices.

They don't want us in their minds. They would much rather refute our reality and replace it with their own idea of female experience, than to actually suffer understanding it. If they actually listened to us, and set aside "feeling bad about themselves" would it be so easy to deny us our personhood? Let's hear that Maya Angelou beat: "You may write me down in history/ With your bitter, twisted lies,/ You may trod me in the very dirt/ But still, like dust, I'll rise" (Maya Angelou lines 1-4).

The patriarchy has attempted to control the narrative of women, rewrite female experience, and erase female existence. As if every part of us is theirs to know, define and control so men can be considered the superior being.

For centuries the powers that be have insisted women could have no thoughts outside dim ideas of motherhood or catering to men. They have spent blood, time and toil beating us, raping us, burning us, and killing us to make sure we were properly domesticated for their use. When those tactics didn't work to their satisfaction they took our minds away from us for centuries.

They forced us to be illiterate, denied us education, and hindered our access to our own creative thought, they divided who was meant to be ignorant and beholden to their masters and who was predetermined by superior intelligence to be the masters; They narrowed down our socially acceptable focus of interests to mothering and marriage and tried to sell us on the idea it was all we wanted and all we were capable of.

So they wouldn't feel responsible for forcing us to be intellectually truncated and creatively stunted, they taught us to believe we were incapable of anything deeper than the thoughts of an especially dull child and when we remained as ignorant as they made us, they convinced themselves they were right all along.

Women have offered them succor and companionship and sacrifice and have been rewarded with intellectual enslavement for generations and no space they were allowed to call their own. In the past men in power felt the need to push their presence into every space we occupy and give us no peaceful place without their consultation while also denying us the ability to occupy their minds with our true female experience lest it make them inferior men.

Virginia Woolf illustrates this in *A Room of One's Own*. When she goes to the library, she finds every book about women has been written by men and those men wrote with anger: "Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority" (Woolf 18).

Censorship is not about keeping easily influenced people, like children safe from obscenity. It is the attempt of feeble minds to dodge critical understanding of another human being while simultaneously keeping information from others.

Ultimately censorship is fear-based control. It is fear of losing positions of authority in a changing society, fear of becoming a less relevant voice in national conversations, fear of competition for creative space, fear of being shoved to the side and ignored and ultimately the fear of becoming so marginalized they are opened to violence and enslavement. Ironically, censorship is the first step toward all of those things.

Now we have added "the Other." Instead of denying the freedom of only women, the new wave of oppressors have determined our "free" society must now additionally stifle and mutilate the expression of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC humans.

The number one type of person who engages in book challenges and censorship is a parent. They are saving the children in an epic battle between literacy and decency. Apparently.

What about the children? What about American Children? We are doing a great job at keeping Toni Morrison from their impressionable minds. How are we doing defending them in other more concrete ways?

According to the Pew Research Center, between 2019 and 2021 gun deaths in the United States increased for children by 50%. In 2021 the total number of death of children under the age of 18 was 2,590.

There were 48,830 gun deaths in 2021 alone. Adults and kids combined (Gramlich). They were ruled in order: Homicide, then suicide and then accidents. John Gramlich shows in his data that most children's deaths by gun are ruled homicides. Most of those children are Black. Most are male (Gramlich).

LGBTQIA+ children encounter violence at many points during their childhood. Let's look at the stats from SandyhookPromise.org: 16% of LGBTQIA+ children have been threatened or injured while in school. 10% of those kids are Bi-sexual. Bullying based on sexual orientation is double that of straight kids. (Sandyhookpromise.org) Much of that bullying involves the threat of a weapon.

Let's look at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health to explore the number one cause of pregnant women's death. Did you guess murder? Because its fucking murder. The number one reason a pregnant woman dies in the US is because her partner shoots her to death. In 2009-2019 69% of pregnancy related homicide involved a gun. Black women were at higher risk than any other race to be murdered by intimate partner femicide. The rate of homicide has risen now that access to abortion has been restricted (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health).

Maya Angelou says it best: "You may shoot me with your words,/You may cut me with your eyes,/ You may kill me with your hatefulness,/ But still, like air, I'll rise" ("Still I Rise" lines 21-24).

Bawdy?

Earlier this year in our state's capital, over in Concord. The Teatotaller (sic) billed as a café, bakery, and venue held a Drag Queen story hour. Where a man in a princess style dress read a children's book to a small group of little kids and their parents.

In order to save the children, the NH chapter of the Nazis showed up, threatened the parents, and frightened the children and Sig-Hieled the participants into the inner safety of the shop. They banged on the glass windows of the shop, they screamed at the participants, and they made the decision for everyone in New Hampshire on what was appropriate at a children's story time.

Which is apparently, violence.

And nazis.

Live Free or die, my ass. What about the children, indeed?

Censorship is not about saving the children. There is a great overlap in the states with the highest number of gun deaths and the highest number of book challenges and censorship. Texas and Florida lead the charge (pewresearch.org). New Hampshire comes up on the lower scale of both, but we have nazis. So we still suck.

Exquisite Corpse.

The act of writing itself is communion and feast. We could die being free, which is better than being driven mad in chains. An exquisite corpse is a narrative made by many people who latch their stories onto the last thought of the writer before. With no other context than that one line. Women's history has places which are a narrative corpse, where we can only pick up the last line of our mothers because everything else has been taken from us. Erased.

Judith, my loves.

Mark the world as yours, write your story over the yellow wallpaper and under it and along your skin in ink and from the blood between your legs and all the gods you know or disbelieve in. Write it down on paper so it can't be blasted away by a single keystroke but mark the digital world with yourself as well and send it out among the great human connection, the hivemind of the internet and everything after. Add your story to the human experience in a beautiful, personal exquisite corpse.

Toni Morrison once said she wrote the book she wanted to read.

Write the life you want to be.

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*Author's note. The version of AROO which I cited comes from Project Gutenberg and it was a text formatted resource, there were no page numbers to reference so I copy/pasted the text into Word and used the page numbers as they appeared in Word to give an idea of where the text I cited could be located.

Recollection
Sonnen Bolevic

Sweltering, to shelter from that hushing frost,
you dipped palms under warm water.
Sting gave way to hum, crept up your wrist;
each knuckle, flushed with russet, crystal kissed.
You breathed winter-smoke and sublimated mist.

The floor paces across you, scuffs and dulls,
and paper cuts and creases your skin.
The metronome kicks, beating its commands;
and still some weathered piece inside withstands.
A faucet will spill balm upon your hands.

Underneath the Couch

Seven Hinnov

From as far back as I can easily remember, music has been a fundamental part of my life. Its all-encompassing grasp on my imagination always seemed to be present. In the blurry haze of car-rides home from kindergarten, while my dad's selection of heavy metal blared out from the plastic, tin-like Mazda speakers, I first discovered my love for music. The sounds of earth-quaking drums and sky-shattering electric guitars filled the air as we barreled home. We travelled by way of old forest roads, past lit-up fluorescent fast-food signs. The pale-yellow high beams of our station wagon created a tunnel of light through the trees, illuminating the thick smog of rural, working-class towns.

My favorite childhood pastime was diligently sketching superheroes and tracing abstract Pinterest-board figures. It wouldn't be for years that my laser-like focus would shift towards the guitar. I remember seeing my dad in the living room, strumming his childhood classical guitar, and wondering if I could do the same. The guitar itself, always a pinch out of tune, was rarely ever picked up. It lived the majority of its patient, dormant life underneath the couch, in a plastic-leather case with cheap blue plush on the inside. The zipper didn't quite close all the way and would frequently get stuck. Despite the instrument's lack of regular use, the knowledge of its frail existence beneath couch cushions piqued my curiosity. Though this knowledge would occasionally escape me, it would always reassert itself with a sudden jolt, a call to burst out of the fragile bubble of whatever happened to occupy my young mind, milliseconds before one of these realizations.

For the most part, I would ignore this momentary spark until it passed, and return to the rhythm of the activities I was used to. Looking back, I can only dream of what place I would be in, if only I'd picked it up sooner. Nevertheless, as the word of a new infectious disease called COVID-19 spread through my small New Hampshire town in March 2020, I, and those around me, could have never expected the impact that the next two years would have on our lives. In my little world, this momentous change was almost instantaneously stirred up by me finally heeding the call of the under-couch-classical-guitar. After hearing "Clint Eastwood," by the band Gorillaz, I thought, *Hey, maybe I could play that.* At long last, I acted upon a feeling that had been festering within me for years. I went to the living room and knelt beside the couch so I could see beneath it. And there it was. *Like it would be anywhere else.* I stretched to reach the black plastic leather case and pulled out the guitar, dragging it across the rough carpet.

Over the next two years, I would fall hopelessly in love with the guitar. I was entranced by the inherent beauty of the instrument. I was starry-eyed as I discovered how it rejuvenates the spirit; how it takes an idea and conceptualizes it into a tangible work. A firing neuron laid bare, shown in the light. I learned songs that I loved. Through the voracious cycle of listening, learning, and searching for more to listen to and learn, I discovered swirling galaxies of songs, coming to me through my headphones in blue, undulating waves.

About a year and a half after I began learning this instrument, I started writing poetry. I had things to say that I couldn't communicate through songs that others had written. Stringing words together in long lines, fading from one to another, like long, sprouting vines growing across a brick wall, blowing in the wind. After a while, I felt confident enough in my writing to share it with others. I started occasionally posting some pieces on social media. I also read them, timidly, at open mics around town. Slowly, I met many other poets, both amateur (like me) and more well-versed. I became immersed in an ocean of pretty words and absurd phrases; of free expression and unapologetically human emotions. Despite my captivated state, I couldn't help but feel out of place. This disordered feeling was internal, created because of my own subconscious conflict. I soon realized that this "out of place" feeling was really one of incompleteness. What I wanted to convey in a poem was lively, rich, and alive, in my mind, but slow, uneasy, and lack-luster on paper. There had to be some greater way to communicate these big ideas that I was dreaming up.

I continued to play guitar and write poetry. After about a year, I began to find that I could, possibly, combine these two mediums into something more fulfilling. So, I went cold turkey with poetry; I started writing songs. At first, this was an awkward, robotic, and uncomfortable experience. I couldn't really play and sing simultaneously, so I struggled with writing actual songs. Limping along, I

grew out of this impediment, unhurriedly. It wasn't until I started recording my music that I was proud of it, using a recording software as a crutch for my inability to musically multitask.

It was at that point that I fell in love once again. This time with recording. All these new techniques revealed themselves to me. I picked up a little cassette recorder from Savers, and excitedly drove home, imagining the new horizons that awaited my arrival home. Recording on tape still is my favorite medium. It's imperfect and outdated. Its limitations allowed me to grow in new ways. New sounds travelled up through my headphones, like a little flower, blooming meticulously, out of a patient crack in the concrete. I became accustomed to the hiss of analog recording, and the tape winding around the spools of the cassette.

I was free. I was finally able to realize the ideas that hadn't seemed to be communicable, floating around like clouds of dust in a void. It felt instant – the second a spark would light up in my mind, as soon as an idea came, I could press down the chalky, spring-loaded “record” button and make it physical. It was there, on that little brown spool of tape. After a while, these concoctions started to become numerous. I dove head-first into the deep, murky water of the empty space that is the present moment; immersed, weightless. I wanted to share these abstractions, and so, I digitized the recordings and sent them to some of my friends. I was surprised to learn that they saw value in what I had made.

In December of 2022, I started sharing this work more. I made profiles on a few different music streaming sites and began releasing some songs. This slowly progressed, with my growing ambition, to wanting to play some of these songs to real people. Already being involved in the music scene locally, I asked around and emailed some venues, and I got a show. In January, I played my first show as a musician, fully diverging from the poetry I had performed a few times over the past year. The experience was beyond what I could've imagined. Although I was (and still am) far from perfect, I felt a way that I had never felt before; as my friends (and some people I didn't know) sat and listened as I sang and I played. I recognized a look in their eyes, an appreciation for honesty, and humanity. Music was only the vehicle for this humanity, and what was beneath the layers of chords and notes and melodies was something truly human.

And now, having put out an album a few months ago, I carry with me an awareness; the awareness that I feel the most like me when I'm playing music. As I drive down winding roads in the dusk, in my car, and listen to songs that I recorded, even despite how self-critical and self-conscious I may be, I feel like I know myself. All pasts and presents jumbled together, existing in parallel, I'm reminded of spring evenings years ago. The cold night, the high-beam lights, and the music blaring out from the speakers bring me right back to cold nights spent listening to my dad's CDs. On our way home in the dark.



Sunset Fox Point
Robert Wiechert
Digital Photography

Notes





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