

College of Western Idaho Journal of Undergraduate  
Research and Writing



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*RYAN RANDALL AND LIZA LONG*

COLLEGE OF WESTERN IDAHO  
NAMPA, IDAHO



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Welcome to the College of Western Idaho's Journal of Undergraduate Research and Writing! This journal is a collaborative effort between the [Liberal Arts Program](#) and the [President's Writing Awards](#) committee to publish undergraduate student work in the following categories:

- First Year Writing
- Critical Analysis
- Literature Based Research
- Original Research

One of our primary goals for this journal is to showcase our students' exceptional academic writing. We anticipate that these essays could be used as examples in a wide variety of academic contexts. We also use this journal to showcase photography and artwork from students in our [Studio Arts](#) program.

In the future, we may expand our submissions process to call for work from the broader community.

For more information about publication in the journal, please contact Liza Long, Department Chair of Integrated Studies, [lizalong@cw.edu](mailto:lizalong@cw.edu).

Many thanks to Carrie Bailey for her assistance in formatting and editing the 2021 and 2022 student submissions.

*Cover photo by Abigail Yorgason, 2021, for Shawna Hanel's ARTS 250 Digital Photography II course. The sculpture is called Aero Agoseries by Mark Bathes.*

# About the Authors

## 2021 Winning Authors

**Joanna Beck** graduated with a biology (Healthcare emphasis) associate degree from CWI in Spring 2019. She wrote her winning paper for MMBS 260 Cell Biology with instructor Teresa Rich. Six-word bio: “Sounded much better in my head.”

**Emma Bowman** graduated with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Spring 2020. She wrote her winning paper for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “Never let fear squander your passion.”

**Lisa Sunny Braithewaite** graduated with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Spring 2021. She wrote her winning paper for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “Education and experience took her far.”

**Jori M. Brough** will most likely graduate with a social work associate degree from CWI after Spring 2023. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 102 with instructor Catherine Kyle. Six-word bio: “My life: family, learning, the Lord.”

**Rachel Capezza** graduated with a biology (Natural Resources emphasis) associate degree from CWI in Spring 2021. She wrote her winning paper for ENVI 260L with instructor Dusty Perkins. Six-word bio: “Mom and scientist: recipe for insanity.”

**Anastasia English** graduated with a history associate degree from CWI in Spring 2021. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 102 with instructor Jaren Watson. Six-word bio: “Place my heart in the Euphrates.”

**Ali Murphy** will most likely graduate with an English (Creative Writing emphasis) associate degree from CWI in 2025. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 101 with instructor Malia Collins. Six-word bio: “Stubborn pessimist discovers half-full glass.”

**Gabrielle Peck** graduated with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Fall 2021. She wrote her winning paper for PSYC 250 and 251 with instructors Jana McCurdy and Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “I take it day by day.”

**Andrew Rose** graduated with a political science associate degree from CWI in Summer 2021. He wrote his winning paper for POLS 290 with instructor Robert Harbaugh. Six-word bio: “Concerned Citizen; busy reading right now.”

**Iisha Sivels** will most likely graduate with a liberal arts associate degree from CWI in the near future. She wrote her winning paper for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “Trust yourself the rest will follow.”

**Avigale Sperry** graduated with a history (Secondary Education emphasis) associate degree from CWI in 2021. She wrote her winning paper for HIST 190 with instructor Reginald Jayne. Six-word bio: “Growing through life’s trials and delights.”

## 2022 Winning Authors

**Kevin Chase** will most likely graduate with a political science associate degree from CWI in Fall 2022. He wrote his winning paper for POLS 221 with instructor Rob Harbaugh. Six-word bio: “Born and raised in Boise Idaho.”

**Kennedy Ann Cole** graduated with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Spring 2022. She wrote her winning paper for PSYC 250 & 251 with instructors Jana McCurdy and Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “Positive mindsets will heal the world.”

**Sawyer Ellis** will most likely graduate with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Fall 2022. He wrote two winning papers, the first for PSYC 250&251 with instructors Jana McCurdy and Heather Schoenherr, and the second for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr. Eight-word bio: “Dedicated to excellence, like my father Sawyer Ellis.”

**Savanna Gerlach** will most likely graduate with an English associate degree from CWI in 2023. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 115 with instructor Ryan Witt. Six-word bio: “Improving every day, bit by bit.”

**Jamie Hudson** graduated with a liberal arts associate degree in Spring 2022. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 201 with instructor Joy Palmer. Six-word bio: “You can, don’t give up yet.”

**Montana Keating** will most likely graduate with a liberal arts associate degree from CWI in the near future. He wrote his winning paper for HIST 190 with instructor Reginald Jayne. Six-word bio: “Brutal honesty will get you nowhere.”

**Devinne McCombs** will most likely graduate with a molecular biology associate degree from CWI in Spring 2023. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 101 with instructor Tiffany K. Hitesman. Six-word bio: “Mom by day, student by night.”

**Amanda Moorhouse** graduated with a history associate degree from CWI in Spring 2022. She wrote her winning paper for HIST 190 with instructor Reginald Jayne. Four-word bio: “Wife, mother and student.”

**Damien Perez** will most likely graduate with a psychology associate degree from CWI in Summer 2022. He wrote his winning paper for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr. Six-word bio: “Just a kid fulfilling a promise.”

**Craig Peterson** graduated with a social work associate degree from CWI in Spring 2022. He wrote his winning paper for PSYC 190 with instructor Heather Schoenherr.

**Kenton Piper-Ruth** will most likely graduate with an English associate degree from CWI in 2028. He wrote his winning paper for ENGL 101 with instructor Jon wood. Six-word bio: “Prefrontal cortex could use some love.”

**Rachel Roberts** will most likely graduate with an English literature associate degree from CWI in Fall 2023. She wrote her winning paper for ENGL 195 with instructor Lynne Tucker.





# PART I

## FIRST-YEAR WRITING



These essays were completed for 101-level courses including CWI 101, English 101, and other first-year courses.

Nalani B. Breakell, *Line Study* from ARTS/COMM 150 Digital Photography 1 with instructor Shawna Hanel





# (2021) Second Place: Tishreen Revolution: Fighting for Iraq's Future

*By Anastasia English*

The screen of my phone is filled with the darkest black I have ever seen—endless engulfing ink—unusual given the time of night; the streetlights should be on. Something is wrong. My chest tightens and anxiety grips me. The slightest movement, maybe the turn of a corner, reveals an inferno. A brilliant contrast of orange, yellow and red flames burst into the night sky, fingers of flame grasping for purchase in the abyss. I imagine the smell of burning fabric. I feel the heat, almost hear the crackling of the flames. Relatively quiet up until now, suddenly yelling explodes from the phone speaker. I hear a phrase most Americans are familiar with, although probably discriminatorily. A man's voice choked with emotion yells "Allahu Akbar!" This popular phrase that is commonly associated with terrorists, in this context, is like an American saying, "Oh my God!" On January 26th, 2020, when people were flooding social media with the news that Kobe Bryant had been killed in a helicopter crash, I was sitting on my couch frantically trying to contact my family in Iraq as I watched the tents, they had been staying in at the protest site be completely consumed by fire. There is a revolution happening in Iraq right now. To understand what led up to the events in Nasiriyah, where my in-laws in Iraq live, one must go back to October 2019, in truth, even further, to 1991, but more about that later.

Sixty percent of Iraq's population are twenty-four years old or younger (indexmundi.com). Undoubtedly, the youth of the protest has infused the uprising with its momentum. Young Iraqis who

have lived the entirety of their lives under the banners of war, bloodshed, and misery demand change from their government, and their passion for the cause keeps the wheels turning. It is not just the men who are protesting. Women are also taking to the streets, demanding that their voices be an integral part of this movement too. This is a relatively new thing for Iraq. My brother-in-law Ammar sends me pictures of his two little girls at the protests with him, the flag of Iraq painted on their faces. Students also joined the demonstrators. Medical school students transform the roads into a river of white doctors' coats. My nephew Ali is a pharmacy student. He was drawn to the protests by his professor. These young people are mixing in a way that has not been seen in Iraq for a long time. Men and women marching together. Shia, Sunni, and Christian—a sign that young Iraqis are ready to shed the divisions of the past and move forward as a collective people sharing a country. A Christmas tree ornamented with pictures of the martyrs was put up in Tahrir Square and still stands today, a touching tribute from the Christians of Iraq and a clear symbol of solidarity.

The first leg of this journey was short, lasting only a week. Every year in Iraq there is a pilgrimage, one of the biggest in the world, where millions of Shias Muslims walk to Karbala at the conclusion of Muharram. This occurs on the fortieth day, also known as Arbaeen, marking the martyrdom of Imam Hussain during the battle of Karbala. Clad in black, faithful Shia march, some for as many as twelve days, to reach Karbala. Tents line the roads, offering a spot to rest and eat. “Karim, 48, a tribal leader from Najaf, who provides free food for the pilgrims, recalls that when he first took part in an illegal Arbaeen walk under Saddam Hussein, ‘we had to take a roundabout route by the river [Euphrates] and try to keep hidden because, if we were caught, we would put in prison or executed’” (Cockburn). This history of persecution for the Shias is a testament to why even during an active protest, demonstrators temporarily abandoned the cause to pay respect to one of their most beloved martyrs.

The protestors decided to start a new wave of demonstrations. On October 25th, protestors filled the streets of Baghdad marching

towards the highly fortified green zone, chanting for the fall of the government. Initially, they were met with mainly tear gas and sound bombs to prevent them from getting too close to the green zone, which houses government buildings, villas, Saddam's Republican Palace, and the U.S. embassy. The green zone is widely regarded as a city within a city, a prime example of what Iraqis are angry about. "So now what they're calling for are really simple things. They want electricity. They want clean water. They want jobs. And they're fed up with this government that they say is completely corrupt. So, the government, in fact, is in a – quite a precarious position" (Arraf). In this oil-rich country, citizens see no reason their lives should not be better. The members of parliament certainly aren't doing without. The protestors began calling for a complete government change after security forces began using live rounds against demonstrators throughout Iraq. In November 2019, 44 protestors were killed by security forces in the southern Iraq and 33 of those deaths were in Nasiriyah alone (Ibrahim). Other protestors have been arrested, tortured, and some are still missing.

Militias are prevalent in the south. Young men and women demonstrating in Nasiriyah, Basra, and Najaf have faced escalated opposition from these groups. Truckloads of men creep into cities under the veil of nightfall, with the help of high-ranking officials, murder protestors, burn their tents, and threaten them. My brother-in-law Ammar just recently received a death threat, a letter warning him to stop participating in the protests accompanied by a bullet that serves as an ominous promise. Ammar messaged me on Facebook, sharing a picture of the letter and bullet that was sliding under his door while he was at the protests that day. My heart broke for him when he told me he had to send his wife and their daughters to her family's house for their protection.

There is also a tribal element at play. Tribes are still a part of life in the southern provinces and an individual rarely leaves the tribe they are affiliated with, even in marriage. A human rights activist in Iraq, Ali Wajih, had this to say about the tribal influence on the protests, "The demonstrator in Dhi Qar in general, and Nasiriyah

in particular, is the hardest and fiercest compared with the demonstrators in the rest of the provinces, because the tribal environment focuses on masculine concepts and develops the ego of the young men over time” (al-Salhy). The protestors are not deterred by danger, especially in Nasiriyah. They mourn the martyrs of the revolution lovingly and then they throw themselves back into their work. This includes burning tires so that streets and crucial bridges are completely blocked off. These protestors know that when they disrupt the flow of traffic and therefore the flow of money, which packs the biggest punch. Protestors have also engaged in sit-ins throughout various parts of their cities and held marches.

When a protestor is martyred, their coffin is carried through the streets by a sea of mourners. The deceased is delivered to their respective mosque, where prayers are held, the family then takes the body for burial. In Nasiriyah, the family will typically deliver the body to Najaf. This is because Najaf is the holy city of the Shia south. It has a burial site, Wadi-Al-Salam cemetery. Wadi-Al-Salam is the largest cemetery in the world, stretching for nearly 1,500 acres (Hill). In the streets of the martyr’s hometown, their pictures and names line the walls. During the attack on the protestors in Nasiriyah on January 26th, a man who had fought against ISIS was murdered by a militia, his name was Abady Ali Al-Asady (Naji). He survived fighting ISIS only to be cut down by his Shia brothers. He fought against one of the greatest threats Iraq has faced, ISIS, but was gunned down in the streets of his hometown because he wouldn’t allow the militia to burn his tent. His picture now joins the others, a tiny shrine to a big cause. The greatest honor the protestors can bestow upon the martyrs is to continue with the revolution they lost their lives to, ensuring their sacrifice was not made in vain.

Protestors sleep in the streets of Iraq dreaming of a better future. My nephew Ali recently spent the night sleeping on a lonely stretch of highway to guard against a blockade erected by the protestors. Trash bags serve as the only barrier between him and the relentless

rain. All for Iraq. All for a brighter future for his country. I am awed by Ali's dedication. Winters are wet and cold in Iraq, but the protestors must hold their line. To give up and go home to the comfort of their warm beds and hot meals would mean the end. The militias would quickly seize upon the moment and make it difficult for the protestors to organize and assemble again. These brave men of Iraq take their rest in large tents erected on the protest grounds. The tents are furnished with bright colored carpets, heavy blankets, and plush pillows—small comforts from home. The protestors discuss the day's events and what tomorrow might bring. When they are hungry, they sit on the floor and share a meal, their hands serving as utensils. An unmistakable show of brotherhood. No meal in Iraq is complete without the fragrant, fresh baked Iraqi bread, shaped like a diamond and sprinkled with sesame seeds.

One of my nephews, Mustafa, who is just seventeen years old, has been involved in the uprising since its beginning. Mustafa will send me pictures of the demonstrations and videos. It is a precious feeling of connectedness to see him and the other young men from his neighborhood smiling and singing. I open our conversation on messenger, and I feel my heart swell with pride. A group of young faces fills the screen as Mustafa pans around the inside of their tent, encouraging them to sing or attempt to say something in English. In these moments, they seem boyish, joking around in front of the camera for a stranger far away in America. It's easy to forget that any one of them could be transformed into a picture on the wall like the martyrs. A calculated risk they accept with pride. I've asked my husband before how he feels about his nephews and brothers taking part in the protests. My husband knows all too well what is at risk when an uprising fails. Tears glistening in his sad brown eyes he always answers, "Scared and proud. But we are Iraqis, and we will look at a bullet coming towards us and welcome it. We are not afraid to die for Iraq. Especially in Nasiriyah."

Nasiriyah has become an unofficial leader in the uprising. Other cities have been sending blood letters requesting the people of Nasiriyah continue the protest in their place, signed with bloody

fingerprints. This comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with Nasiriyah, the southern provinces, and its history of rebellion. The Shia uprising of 1991, which resulted in my husband coming to America, was birthed in the southern provinces. "The province is known for its rebellious nature and has been an incubator for many of the country's political movements...It later became a hub for Shia armed groups challenging the rule of former president Saddam Hussein and its marshes were used as sanctuaries for these groups after they carried out attacks" (al-Salhy).

In the spring of 1991, having spent decades under the foot of the government, men began to quietly organize, whispers of a revolution quickly spread through the weary and battered south. These men were fed up with not having access to the same employment opportunities that Sunnis were afforded. Further education was out of reach for anyone not belonging to the Baath Party. Shia Iraqis had their houses searched by police and government officials and were often placed under arrest and detained without having committed any crimes. The intifada of 1991 was short, lasting only a month before it was brutally crushed by the regime. This has been an exceedingly difficult subject for my husband to talk about. We have been married for almost thirteen years and over this span of time, I have heard small pieces about his time in his homeland and his involvement in the uprising of 1991. He grips these stories tightly, memories of another life. Even in marriage, trust is earned and intimate knowledge of the most painful parts of a person's life is meted out in small pieces. The intifada had some of the same goals that the revolution of today has. They wanted to overthrow Saddam Hussein and have a new election. When I ask Haitham how many battles he was in with the Iraqi military he tells me, "I was in at least one fight a day, some of them lasting all day" (Al-Abdullah). One of the first stories I heard about Haitham's active role in the intifada was about a gun fight he was in. He told me he felt bullets go through his hair and skim the top of his scalp. On our second Valentine's Day, Haitham was in the hospital, grappling with overwhelming feelings of despair

from the painful memories that haunted him. I was twenty years old and sitting in the hospital visiting area, holding his hand, when I first began to comprehend the weight that these memories carried inside of him. A few days prior, while at work, I received a phone call that he had attempted suicide and that I needed to come to the hospital right away. I was so confused, and in my immaturity and self-centeredness, I questioned why I wasn't enough to make everything better for him. During his stay at St. Alphonsus was diagnosed with PTSD. In that moment, I finally began to understand that Haitham was dealing with long shadows from his time in Iraq.

I have been helping Haitham collect and organize his documents over the last few years. These documents are an important part of his history and I want his descendants to know his story. As painful as these memories are, I don't want these stories to die with him. Last year I requested his original paperwork and intake documents from when he applied to come to America as a political refugee. Our lawyer was able to obtain a transcript from his first interview with American officials. Reading the transcript was heartbreaking for me. My husband had been shocked and tortured. I remember holding the paper in my hand shaking slightly and asking, "Is that what the marks on your back are from?" My husband only nodded in response, a nervous smile on his face. I know he doesn't like it when I cry, it makes him uncomfortable and unsure, but I couldn't help it. The tears were there before I could gain control. I had asked before. When he had declined to explain, I let the matter rest, not wanting to pressure him into sharing something he wasn't ready to. I think of the thirty-plus scars on his back, and I now understand their origins. From my past research I knew that electric shocks were and are still used during interrogations in Iraq. Knowing someone who has been tortured in this manner is different though, it puts a face to these horrors.

During my husband's final days in Iraq, he visited his aunts and cousins. Slinking through alleys at night to avoid being detained. He was a wanted man for his activities during the uprising by Saddam's regime and they had already taken his father and one of his brothers

because they couldn't find him. He was at risk of being executed if they did. He played one last game of soccer with some friends in his neighborhood. This was the last time his feet were on the soil of his beloved Iraq. When he left, he went to Saudi Arabia where he waited in a refugee camp in the desert for six years, awaiting the green light to come to America. Haitham told me he was surprised that nearly all the men in his family were participating in the current uprising. I told him he shouldn't be. These men were following his example, picking up the torch he had been forced to lay down. A fact that my nephew Karam had relayed to me in a previous conversation. I have pushed myself to have more contact with Haitham's family and I plan to visit Iraq soon. Meeting his mother and family in person is so important to me. The bond I have formed through phone calls and exchanging messages with my nephews and in-laws has formed an unbreakable tether to the lives of people across the globe. My hope is that this protest will be successful, and my family members will emerge from it unscathed.

This story is unfinished. The revolution plods on, lives are lost and mourned. Fires are burnt and extinguished. Destruction comes and repairs are made. Every morning the sun rises over Iraq with new possibilities, indifferent to the previous day's losses and gains. In all, the cycle of the protest is much like the cycle of life in Iraq. Life is hard but it is also beautiful. Children grow up, go to university, get married, and new babies usher in new generations of Iraqis. All these precious new lives, a sunrise all their own. Maybe the future isn't with the Iraqis of this uprising, but it is most certainly somewhere amongst these new little ones. Iraq is ready for freedom, ready for change, ready for peace that will be won by these proud descendants of Sumerians. Iraqis call themselves the lions of Mesopotamia, and I can think of no better description for these courageous people, willing to risk everything so that future generations can live prosperous lives and have the opportunities they deserve.



# (2021) Third Place: The Lucky One

*By Ali Murphy*

I was lucky to have a love of reading and writing instilled in me at an early age. I cannot mention my love for the written word, without mentioning my parents. On the other hand, I can't mention my parents without feeling guilty or anxious. So why, you may ask, do I mention them here on this platform? My first real college assignment. At the beginning of quarantine, I started writing a memoir. Digging skeletons out of my closet and confessing my sins to the page, has been insightful, but very painful. So again, I will mention my parents.

Our story begins in December of 1986 in Salt Lake City, when two avid book readers were celebrating their only child's fifth birthday. For many years prior they had struggled with addiction and fertility. So, their child was truly a blessing, and this evening was special to them. It was their last time coming together this way as a family, as a loving married couple. One last 'good-bye' wouldn't hurt before signing the divorce papers.... Nine months later they welcomed me into the world.

My childhood seemed typical for any Nintendo wielding 90's kid from Montana. My mom wanted us to grow up with all the classic children's books. It's impossible to say if I related more to the wit of Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein, the heart of Roald Dahl, the magic of C.S. Lewis, the mystery of R.L. Stein, or the many friends that Judy Blume and Beverly Cleary introduced me to. As soon as I could read on my own, all my thoughts were stimulated with new imagery and ideas. I could hang on to a word or get lost in the illustrated pages at my own pace. My heart was becoming full of romantic notions and grand gestures, and it suddenly felt like I could see the world

more clearly. As if I was a fully actualized adult and not some pudgy, bullied tomboy. As I explored these new thoughts, I discovered stories as if they already existed in my head. As if someone much wiser than I had left them there and it was my job to get them out.

So... I wrote.

I didn't care if I was any good, until I wrote 'The Lost Puppy' in third grade. I had worked on it for days, carefully illustrating every page. I was confident when I handed it in, and I remember the immediate reaction my teacher had; being moved by the touching story of a pair of lonely grandparents adopting an unloved puppy. I got an A+ and a scratch-and-sniff sticker! I was thrilled! My mom was so proud of me, she took it to work and brought it on vacation to show it to our extended family. I felt as if I finally had a strength that others didn't. I was to be an artist, I was to be a storyteller, I was to be heard. These stories in my head were an escape from reality, and I was Houdini. I had this magic power to see and manipulate a world that my peers and bullies couldn't even fathom. Yet, as kids you really can't escape anything. I had my books, my toys, it was the era of premium nineties' MTV Broadcasting; and I was soaking it up. It didn't seem like anything bad could really happen to me, in my own comfortable world of imagination and creature comforts. I felt safe, but it would take nothing, and yet everything, to have my world come crashing down around me.

It didn't happen quickly. The ends of things usually happen that way, so slowly you don't even realize it's over. But my childhood ended so prematurely; I wonder if it ever had the chance to evolve into something else. It was around this time in my life that I began journaling religiously, clinging to the idea that I was full of purely original thoughts and feelings that no prepubescent tween could have ever thought or felt before. Reading the entries now is a painful reminder of rage and hurt. On one side, in pink gel pen, a list of all the cute boys at school, and on the other, the scratches of a brace-faced demon. I was mad at everything, so I didn't realize why I was so surprised and hurt when it all changed. Over a couple of years, my academic achievements went unnoticed, my art was going

unseen, and I felt isolated. During the summer of eighth grade, I went to spend some time with my father who was out of state. I didn't know that I wasn't to be coming home and by the next school year, I was living with my grandmother back in Utah. I was told Mom would come live with us but without going into detail, she was never really there again.

Because of my grandma's age, I had no discipline whatsoever. I took advantage of her, and it is one of my biggest regrets. I was acting out, and after falling into the wrong crowd, I was the victim of a sexual assault at 15. What self-worth I had left was gone, and by the beginning of my junior year, I started what was to be an awfully long battle of addiction. I burned bridges with my Mormon family and was asked to leave her house halfway through my senior year. I was able to rent out my first place, but it only led to an increase in terrible choices. I surprised myself even by graduating in time to walk with my class in 2005. Throughout it all I coped, barely, with my journal as my therapist, and my anger as my muse.

After high school, I found myself working at a bar on an Indian reservation outside of Glacier National Park, a relatively blurry period in my life. I do remember one night; I was sitting on the porch of my cabin, writing by the dying light of an old lantern. I wrote until my eyes hurt so much that I could barely keep them open. I stood up for a cigarette and walked out onto the dirt road. Only to find the vast sky illuminated by bright green aurora borealis. I felt overwhelmed with gratitude, that I was where I was meant to be, that I was supposed to be there at that moment, experiencing that exact moment as an artist. That's how the roller coaster of depression works though, these huge grateful moments of beauty and life, followed by vast moments of emptiness and darkness. The higher up I felt, the harder I would fall. I could never stay prolific for more than a few months at a time. Even when I did create anything, it didn't really have any profound impact on me anymore. I really had stopped caring about my body, my mind, my future. I was working hard and playing harder. Writing was just a thing I did to vent. Reading? Who had time for that?

My grandmother passed away in 2011. I didn't have a place to call home anymore, no neutral place to meet my family, no more place to feel wanted. Bygones were bygones at grandma's house, a place where you felt loved no matter what. I had buried not just my grandmother, but the one person who always said yes, in a world full of "NOS". Without her, what kind of relationship was I supposed to have with my family? Instead of healing evident wounds, I decided I needed an outlet. I needed a new project. One of my friends and I began writing children's books together, and suddenly an old familiar feeling rushed over me. Before long, I was thousands of words deep into a YA novel. Though I am working on it to this day, as I mentioned this is not the writing experience that I identify with most.

When the #metoo movement gained popularity in 2017, I felt a deep unity to other victims... but not for long. As I read on, the truth began staring at me in the face. I am a victim and an abuser. I hated myself for not realizing it before. How was this possible? I am self-aware, I am considerate, I try to be good. But how much clarity do I really have? I'm nice, sure, but I had been drunk for the better part of a decade. I am an addict. That was the revelation I needed. If I could forgive myself, why not my parents, or my bullies, or my rapists?

My mom came to live with me at the end of 2019, the first time we had lived together in 18 years. I was admittedly going crazy after quarantine started and that's when the memoir began, psychoanalyzing three decades of my own story. Writing a clear narrative to the scribbled ramblings of a drunken fool. I felt purposeful. And over scrabble and cribbage, my mom and I were bonding. She was able to see the woman I had become and the mother I am becoming. She asked about my writing project, and I could see the guilt on her face when reading just the prologue alone. Just the first page? Is my writing hurting her? I began doubting myself, not because of her, but because despite my traumas, I know how blessed I am. Is it even okay for me to complain about myself in today's turbulent society? How fortunate I am to be privileged

enough, or perhaps selfish enough, to be complaining about my own problems.

I recognize that I am the lucky one.

People always say they are afraid of becoming their parents, but I am already them. Their lives, even before mine, are parallel to mine in so many ways. But what happens next in my story is a choice that only I can make. So now, I make new choices every day. I am choosing to be in school, choosing to be a present mom, choosing to work on my art and my music. I choose to be happy. I am determined to make the most of this college experience, English 101 included. I am hoping to learn how to be analytical of myself without tail spinning into self-doubt. I hope to take advantage of writing alongside my peers, who perhaps are not my usual intended audience, and to learn from our differences. I hope to write with alertness, intent, and above all purpose and passion. I hope to open a door to a new world.

# (2022) First Place: Cause It's There

*by Kenton Piper-Ruth*

I was playing pretend with my life. Smoke trailed from the end of a tattered roach, wafting toward the open window. My thoughts were disconnected and discordant, moving like electric eels, shocking each other into unconsciousness before drifting down into the depths. My apartment smelled like a fruity skunk several weeks past its expiration date. I watched the walls closely, if I didn't, they'd come closer and consume what little space I had. Sitcoms played on repeat, trying to coerce me into smiling. I sat, I watched, I ate. No matter what I put in my mouth it all tasted like ash.

Knock, knock, knock.

I opened the door wearing a pair of green boxers with clovers on them. She wore all black, with a badge on her chest, a radio on her shoulder, and a gun on her hip.

"Are you Kenton?" She asked, her nose wrinkled from the smell.

I scratched at the stubble on my cheek. "I guess so."

Over the course of my life, I have made innumerable poor decisions; I have done many things I regret and have failed to do many things I should have. I can blame depression, lack of information, poor guidance, and lack of foresight, but it doesn't matter what I blame. All that matters is what I learned. All that matters is how to use what I learned to make better decisions in the present. And, I would not have been able to learn anything from my mistakes if I didn't have the social safety net provided by my community. Without my community there is no doubt in my mind that I would have gotten caught in a permanent, downward spiral.

I have been privileged in my life. I was raised by two loving parents. Competent teachers educated me. I made numerous

friends throughout my stay in the public school system. I was able to go to college immediately after high school. When I dropped out of college because of a premature mid-life crisis, my parents were kind enough to allow me to stay with them until I found a job. I was able to work to support myself—through a myriad of different occupations—and I was able to enjoy some portion of creature comfort: food, shelter, and the pursuit of television. These opportunities are rare. I often think of an old girlfriend of mine—whose parents paid for her education, her housing, and her car—with jealousy. Certainly, compared to her pampering, my privilege is lack-luster, but many people around the world would look at me and call me pampered, and they'd be right.

I would be prouder of hiking a thousand feet from Mount Everest's base camp than of being dropped at its summit by a helicopter. Many people are never even able to get to basecamp, but their struggle is no less impressive, no less commendable. My country, my community, my parents, got me to base camp, and eight years ago I headed for the summit, cocky and ill-equipped. I slipped. I fell. I broke a few bones. Now I strike out again, going at my own pace. I packed some oxygen this time. I've got a heavy jacket and warm pants. Most importantly, I'm going to take numerous breaks along the way, turn around, sit down, and enjoy the view. I might not make it to the summit, but I've learned that's not really the point.

In *Outliers, the Story of Success*, Malcom Gladwell discusses all the different criteria that must be met for someone to succeed, “the tallest oak in the forest is the tallest not just because it grew from the hardiest acorn; it is the tallest also because no other trees blocked its sunlight, the soil around it was deep and rich, no rabbit chewed through its bark as a sapling, and no lumberjack cut it down before it matured”(19-20). I may not have started as a hardy seed; there may be many trees far taller than me blocking the light, and the soil might not be exceptional, but I do have my community (my family and friends), who protect me from those lumber jacks and rabbits and shine UV lights on me when the sunlight is dim. I am

hardier than I was, and I will grow hardier still. Maybe one day I'll be the one shooing those pesky axe-wielding rabbits away.

In *David and Goliath*, *Underdogs*, *Misfits*, and *the Art of Battling Giants*, Malcom Gladwell establishes that many things commonly considered advantageous (being a giant), can be disadvantageous (Goliath likely had poor eyesight and bad coordination because of his size). And that many things commonly seen as disadvantageous (David's small size and his pathetic weapon), can be an advantageous (easily able to evade Goliath's slow attacks, and the ability to hurl rocks with the speed of a bullet). In *David and Goliath*, Malcom Gladwell argues that once you look past the fallacy of Goliath's size making him unbeatable, you will see that Goliath never had a chance against David. Throughout *David and Goliath*, Malcom Gladwell gives many examples of supposed curses being blessings in disguise. There is a similar theme in his earlier work *Outliers*, where Gladwell talks about Joe Flom triumphing over adversity, "He didn't triumph over adversity. Instead, what started out as adversity ended up as an opportunity"(128). Something everyone thought was negative turned out to be a positive; a disadvantage became an advantage; a curse was revealed to be a blessing. I would not be the person I am today without having fallen on my face so many damn times. With the help of a little insanity, I choose to believe that my sordid past is a blessing in disguise. True to form, it was my father— a significant member of my supportive community—who recommended I read *David and Goliath*.

I can hardly look at where I am today and call myself a success. I don't know if I'll ever be able to call myself that. But without my community and the country my community is built upon, and the world my country drains life from, and the Sun my world... I would be nowhere and nothing at the same time. We all walk upon the shoulders of giants with the hope that someone might stand upon ours, so that they might see further than we did.

I want to achieve more than my forefathers did, not because I'm better than my forefathers, but because they gave me the foundation, the capability, to achieve more than they did. They



worked hard in the fields and factories, so that we would all have something to eat, somewhere to live, a foundation to stand on; I want to work hard on my computer, giving life to ideas, with the end goal of adding something substantial to the wealth of knowledge we all draw upon. I'm not there yet, and I may never be there, but I'm eager to try. Anything less than trying would be to squander the opportunity, and I will not squander this one.

When I sit down at the computer to write, I do my best to keep these things in mind, to remember why sitting down at my computer matters, to remember the countless people who made this act of creation possible. We love this idea of the self-made man. It is so provocative to think that through hard work, talent, and perseverance I can become successful, regardless of environment, regardless of circumstance. I think part of the reason we like this idea so much is that it makes it easy to feel superior: I have a higher standard of living because I worked harder, and that they live in poverty because they are lazy. The truth is success comes from an endless number of variables out of our control, plus what is in our control: working hard for an extended period of time—somewhere around ten thousand hours.

I know what rock bottom feels like, and it's not that scary. I've been to the deepest, darkest recesses of my mind where electric eels hide from the light, and they too, are not that scary. I do fear falling again. I do fear breaking a few more bones. But I know how to recover. I know the way back to basecamp. My community showed me the way at first, and now I've trodden the path to basecamp so many times I could find it in the dark. Now I can even help others in my community find basecamp. I can, and do, drop a few breadcrumbs along the way.

I am the person I am today because I gave up on the world, but the world didn't give up on me. I decomposed into a pile of stench so vile a police officer knocked on my door wondering about the smell. The smell didn't really matter. It was a symptom of my septic mentality. With the help of my community, I've been able to get a handle on that mentality. I've been able to rebrand it and use it

to my advantage. It's taken me a while to realize it, but I wouldn't change a thing. I needed to smell my own stench. It was the perfect catalyst to my creation.

"Are you Kenton?"

"I am now."

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# (2022) Second Place: Acceptance Letter

by Devinne McCombs

As a young child, I never really enjoyed reading. We had many books in the house, but I have no memory of my mom or dad ever reading one to me. It wasn't until around the age of eight that everything changed; I picked up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

One particularly sweltering summer day, I was stuck in my ordinary suburban home; trying to escape the excruciating California heat the best I could. As I wandered around my house, searching for something to keep me occupied, I noticed my sister sprawled out on the couch, reading a novel with the title *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*.

"What's that you're reading?" I inquired sheepishly.

My sister, being the delight she was, glared over the top of the pages, scoffed, and went back to her reading as if no one had spoken to her.

I decided I wasn't going to get any information out of her, but I was too intrigued by the art on the cover of the book to give up on my pursuit, so I decided to enlist the help of my mother. I slowly crawled up the stairs, thinking over my words carefully. My mother was usually very busy, and didn't have the patience for questions, or tattling, or any other such nonsense.

I reached the landing and reluctantly crept into her room, hoping I caught her in a good mood. I was relieved to see that my mother was in the bathroom, using a styling wand to produce loose curls in her yellow straw hair. Even though I was far too young to understand the crippling effects of mental illness, it was well known in our house not to bother her if she was in bed in the middle of the day.

Stuttering slightly, I stammered, “*w-what’s that book that Cami is reading? It’s got a picture of kids riding on a bird horse thing on it.*”

At first, she looked annoyed, then paused as though deep in thought.

“Oh, she must be reading *Harry Potter*” she responded.

I waited for her to continue, but when she didn’t, I pressed on, “Can I read it too?”

“Check the bookshelf,” she said while shooing me away.

I quickly sprinted down the stairs, nearly tripping over my feet, ran to the kitchen, sliding across the floor in my socked feet to the computer desk and shelves. I scanned the contents of the bookshelf until I found *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*: Book one. It had a picture of a boy with shaggy black hair, round glasses, and he was riding on a broomstick. I snatched it up from the shelf and scurried away to my bedroom with my prize.

I soon became so enthralled with the story of the boy who lived, that I only reluctantly emerged from my bedroom for meals and bathroom breaks. I stayed up late into the night until the weight of my eyelids finally forced me to surrender to a deep sleep with dreams of a little boy living under a staircase. Only to awaken and spend the next weeks doing nothing but exploring dark corridors in an old magic castle, flying across the quidditch field on my enchanted broomstick, and dodging chalk pieces being pelted down by the castle’s resident poltergeist, Peeves. I went on adventures into the forbidden forest and was equally astonished and aghast of all the creatures that inhabited it. The more I read, the more connected I grew to the characters; they were like family.

Reading turned into an escape, an escape to a better world. Even when I didn’t feel loved, accepted, and my emotional well-being seemed all but forgotten, I could always lose myself in books; wishing it could become reality. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve sat waiting and wishing for my Hogwarts acceptance letter.

As years went by, I continued to read *Harry Potter* several times over again; absorbing every word like a sponge. I’ve read those books at least ten times each throughout my life. Every time I go to

read a new book, I must fight the urge of reading them again. Maybe it's an obsession, or maybe it reminds me of that little girl that I once was, so enchanted by a magical world that I so longingly wished to escape into.

Finding my love for reading not only improved my emotional well-being, but it also helped me academically. *"Research suggests that reading literary fiction is an effective way to enhance the brain's ability to keep an open mind while processing information, a necessary skill for effective decision-making"* (Seifert). If I had never developed a love for reading, I could not possibly be the writer, academic student, and overall person I am today. I have learned almost everything I know about writing from reading books.

I've always regarded myself as being particularly perceptive; I can pick out certain nuances and implications of things, including while reading. "As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader" (Bunn 72). In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* for example, Rowling uses foretelling when Ron is looking at Hermione's class schedule and notices she has classes listed that are at the same time. For some, it may just seem like Hermione made a mistake, but anyone that knows her character knows that she would never make such a trivial mistake. Having the ability to pick this out is a technique known as *"reading like a writer."* It's later that you find out Hermione does have classes at the same time, and has been using a time turner, a device that allows her to go back in time to attend all her classes. This device becomes an integral component of the story later on. When you learn to read like a writer, you are more adept at picking out foretelling to better understand why the writer may be including clues that can seem trivial to an untrained eye.

Most people know how essential that reading is, especially while we are young. In a University of London study led by Alice Sullivan, a Professor of Sociology, they looked at the correlation between reading regularly from an early age and having a wide vocabulary. They concluded that *"Children's own reading behavior was strongly*

*linked to test scores in mathematics and vocabulary. . .”* (Sullivan). As I developed a love of reading, it provided me with the ability to absorb and learn a wide range of words and has enabled me the ability to better articulate myself.

Once I finally started my college career, I settled on a major of Microbiology. Even though I had limited prior knowledge of the subject, I felt confident in my ability to learn, in part due to my love of reading and exceptional vocabulary. *“Science is a discipline that relies heavily on students’ ability to understand new terms and concepts. A strong focus on vocabulary helps students understand and communicate using appropriate terminology. . .”* (Cohen). I only hope that my enjoyment of reading, broad vocabulary, and curiosity will aid me in my pursuit of scientific knowledge. Like the sorting hat said when placed on Harry’s head, I have a thirst to prove myself.

I owe my future academic success, methods of learning, fine-tuned vocabulary, and my happiness to the first time I opened a Harry Potter book. I would not be the same person I am today had I not read those books. Even though I’m not a little kid anymore, I’m still waiting for my acceptance letter to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

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# (2022) Third Place: College is More Valuable Than a Car

*by Eli Stoops*

Rising costs and fees along with the ever-increasing complexity in application processes are motivating people to determine that college is no longer worth the time, money, or hassle that it takes to get an education. And after all of this, it often takes at least four years of dedicated time and work to receive enough credits to earn a bachelor's degree. I have heard many people who believe that most students who get a college degree don't even end up utilizing it after they graduate. All of these things are causing many people to completely avoid going to college and instead go straight into their careers after high school. They have decided that the benefits of a college application are not worth the payment that schools require of them. I have often pondered the question of whether or not the value of a college education outweighs all of the costs. When I say college education, I am referring to receiving a college degree of some kind (associate, bachelor's, etc.), not necessarily any amount of higher education. So, should people go to college? The answer for the majority of people is yes. While getting a college education may not be the best decision for everyone, there are a lot of great benefits that make college worthwhile for the preponderance of people.

## **A Large Exaggeration**

It is no secret that almost every college graduate leaves their school with thousands of dollars in student loan debt. However, most people have a flawed view of how much debt most students actually have. While I am in no way arguing that it is a small amount of money, the media has greatly exaggerated the exact amount of debt that most students leave with. Everyone has heard the



nightmarish stories of students burdened with over \$100,000 in debt, and while there are cases where this is true, it is not the case for most students. Megan Scott, a writer for Knox College's *Knox Magazine*, debunks this illusion in her article, "Yes, College is Worth It: Busting Myths about Higher Education." Scott asseverates that only four percent of students in 2014 owed \$100,000 or more in student debt, much of which was acquired by graduate students at for-profit institutions. In 2018, the national average student debt in America was about \$30,000 (Scott, 2018). It doesn't take a mathematician to understand the dramatic difference between \$100,000 and \$30,000.

Although \$30,000 is much less than the extreme what the media will often portray as normal, it is still a substantial amount of debt to accumulate. This can still be extremely discouraging to someone looking into the prospect of being a college student, especially right out of high school. To put it into another perspective, Scott compares the cost of college to a \$30,000 car loan. She explains that most people wouldn't even think twice about a car loan like that (Scott, 2018). According to Kelley Blue Book, \$30,000 is less than the average transaction price for a new car was at the beginning of 2019, and a car will often only last around a decade (Vincent, 2019). So, is the value of a college degree greater than that of a car? If so, then \$30,000 should not be a reason that someone chooses to refrain from getting a college education. If anything, it should be seen as a pretty good deal.

### **Costs Equal Quality**

The high monetary cost of a college education is not entirely bad either. While it will often put a lot of extra stress on the life of a graduate, many Americans will still choose to pay more for their college education. Barry Werth (an American writer who has written for *The New York Times*, the *Smithsonian*, and *MIT Technology Review*) explains this in his journal "Why Is College So Expensive?" Of course, the answer to the titled question lies in a variety of explanations. These include staff and faculty pay, maintaining and operating the school, student services, and many other costs. The

way colleges choose to spend their money accounts for a lot of extra funds needed by schools.

However, not all the blame can be put on the colleges' spending habits. Part of the blame (arguably the largest part) falls on American culture. In today's consumer-focused society, the population has decided that they are not willing to pay for anything less than the best, and for that, they are willing to pay greatly (Werth, 1994). As a result of this, companies and corporations know that they can charge the consumer more when their products and services have a higher quality. This same principle applies to college as well. So, when students pay more for college, they are paying for higher quality education, better services as a student, and will feel better about their college experience. This higher quality education in turn will better equip students for life after college. So, while they are paying more monetarily, they are getting more out of the time they spend as a student.

### **The Benefits**

However, quality alone is not a reason to spend thousands of dollars on anything. So, what are the benefits of these high-quality educations? Stephen Rose answers this in his article "*The Value of a College Degree*." Rose is a Research Professor and economist who has been researching this topic for over 30 years. He states that the reason most students choose to attain a bachelor's degree is due to the financial gain in the workforce. Over the course of their careers, workers with a bachelor's degree earn \$1,000,000 more than workers with just a high school education (Rose, 2013). Rose attributes this to two factors. First, people who have a degree are much more likely to be put into higher positions that often earn more. Second, even within the same professions, people with a degree often earn more than those without one, both in high- and low-paying jobs (Rose, 2013).

There are a couple of possible reasons why people with degrees earn more than their less-educated co-workers within the same field. Many economists attribute higher pay in the workforce to higher productivity. They believe that those who are better

equipped to perform their job will be more efficient workers, and therefore receive higher pay. These economists conclude that skills learned in college best equip workers for work. Others disagree with this viewpoint. They believe that college graduates do not receive higher pay because of their higher productivity levels, but rather employers of higher-paying jobs are more likely to hire people with degrees than people without them (Rose, 2013). While it is difficult to prove either side of this debate, I believe the most logical explanation can be found in a combination of both sides of the argument. The reason that employers tend to hire workers with a degree may be that those workers are often the most productive. Whatever the truth is, it is certain that a college degree is very influential on someone's pay throughout their career.

Some people disagree with the idea that college is worth the cost. Ellen Shell, a writer for the New York Times, is among many people who believe college education is not worth paying for because those who receive the education already have the advantage to obtain higher-paying jobs. She believes that the majority of students who attain a bachelor's degree before going into the workforce have advantages other than education, such as race and financial class. According to her, people in the lower class have less ability to earn more after college than the people in the middle or high class (Shell, 2018). Shell offers some great insight when she states that people who are in the middle class and higher have a much better advantage to earn more in their career than those in the lower class. However, this should not imply the lower class lacks a financial advantage in obtaining a bachelor's degree, nor does her statement deem it unwise for the lower class to receive post-secondary education. People in the lower class can still profit from receiving a college education, and there are advantages to earning a degree that exist outside of wages.

### **Longer and Healthier Life**

A college degree holds high value not only in careers, but it directly influences a person's health. A report by the Brookings Institute discusses a study that focused on the effect of college

education on mortality. In the study, the contributors reviewed census data to assess the relation of various amounts of education and adult mortality. *“The study... notes that health benefits from education could increase the total returns to education by 15 to 55 percent...”* (Buckles, 2016). The researchers also looked at previous research that showed *“high school graduates have a mortality rate that is double those with some college or a college degree,”* (Buckles, 2016). This research proves that college education has benefits outside of financial worth: improved health. Anyone can reap benefits from post-secondary education, regardless of class, race, etc.

### **Unequal Effects**

A common idea that many people hold is that *“college isn’t for everyone.”* This phrase will usually be used by someone trying to defend their or someone else’s decision not to attend college. Many people have different implications than others. Some merely believe that certain people will not survive well in the college environment, whereas others assert that people do not or will not benefit in any way from a college education. The latter assumption is simply inaccurate. Everyone who receives a college degree will profit from it in one way or another. However, they are correct in the implication that not everyone benefits in the exact same way from higher education.

Renee Luthra and Jennifer Flashman compared international wage returns between people who are likely to complete a university degree and those who are less likely to do so. A student’s family background (whether or not their parents attended college), previous performance in school, class status, and geographic proximity to a university or college all will play into a person’s likelihood to complete a degree. Up until recently, it has been widely accepted by researchers that those who are more likely to complete a degree will financially benefit the most from one. However, recent research has suggested an opposing conclusion: those who are less likely to complete a degree are the ones who will benefit the most from it.

This has sparked a debate among researchers as to who benefits

more from college education (Luthra, 2017). While this debate proves that some people benefit less from college than others, it also confirms the fact that everyone benefits from a degree in some way. According to Luthra and Flashman, researchers are also beginning to examine other advantages of going to college as well. “... university education can be a pleasurable pursuit, an entrance to a marriage market (Blossfeld and Timm 2003), and a cultural good (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) as well as an economic investment” (Luthra, 2017). Regardless of background, there are benefits to completing a college degree. Benefits will not be equal across the board, but everyone who receives a college education will reap financial and non-pecuniary profits.

### **Conclusion**

Obtaining a college education is an extremely wise and valuable asset to have in life, especially in today’s culture. The cost of education is undoubtedly worth the benefits one will earn from it. Studies have shown that college degrees make getting a job and performing well in a career easier for most people, they will lead to higher pay, and ultimately encourage longer and healthier lives in graduates. Even though the advantages differ from person to person depending on the individual, it still is a very impactful asset to have for everyone. Although it will often be a costly endeavor, the quality of education a student will receive will match if not exceed the costs. For all of these reasons, I believe that most people should get a college education.

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## PART II

# ORIGINAL RESEARCH



These essays include reports of findings from original research conducted by the student on a topic through experiments, surveys, observations, lab reports, etc., in the documentation style specific to the discipline.

Aaron Gill, Diptych, Line Study from ART/COMM 150 Digital Photography 1 with instructor Shawna Hanel.





# (2021) First Place: Sage Steppe Post-Fire Recovery Dynamics on *Bromus Tectorum*, Native Bunchgrasses, and *Artemesia Tridentata* at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge

*By Rachel Capezza*

## **ABSTRACT**

Sage steppe communities, composed of sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*) and a variety of native grasses, are vital ecosystems for a variety of animal wildlife, including sage grouse, small mammals, and raptors. Anthropogenic disturbances have led to increased fire frequency and the establishment of non-native, invasive plant species which put both plant and animal species within sage steppe communities at risk. Our research focused on the efficacy of recovery efforts at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge following the Sage Fire in July 2003. We established two treatment sites denoted as burned and unburned to determine whether recovery efforts in the burned treatment site effectively increased sagebrush density to levels comparable to the unburned treatment site. We also measured comparative foliar cover of both native and nonnative understory plant species, with particular focus on cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*). Statistical analysis of comparative foliar cover of understory species and density of sagebrush yielded mixed results but indicated overall marginal success of recovery efforts in the

burned site. Sagebrush density and cheatgrass prevalence remain suboptimal in both burned and unburned sites, suggesting that there is still much work to be done for the recovery and conservation of the sage steppe community at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge.

## INTRODUCTION

Arid shrublands in the Western United States are ecosystems classified as having little annual precipitation, with particularly hot and dry summer conditions. Sage steppe communities are one such western shrubland, consisting of sagebrush (*Artemisia Tridentata*), native grasses, and a variety of wildlife including sage grouse (Dumroese et al., 2015), small mammals such as bats (Whiting et al., 2018), and a variety of raptors (Olson et al., 2015) all of which depend on sagebrush either for habitat or food resources. Anthropogenic disturbances to these landscapes, including agricultural overgrazing, plowing, road-building, and recreational activities, have increased fire frequency and severity in these communities. These disturbances have led to a reduction of sagebrush density and the introduction of non-native annual grasses such as cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) in sage steppe ecosystems (Chambers et al., 2015). Cheatgrass, native to Eurasia, is a ruderal species that is particularly adept at colonizing semi-arid post-fire landscapes such as sage steppe ecosystems (Bradford and Lauenroth, 2006). Furthermore, as cheatgrass is highly flammable, its increased prevalence in sage steppe ecosystems exacerbate fire severity when it occurs, promoting continuous cycles of fire disturbance that threaten sagebrush abundance and inhibit success of its post-fire recovery. Frequency of fire disturbance is also greatly altered, as fire disturbance intervals decrease from approximately every 107 years for unaltered sage steppe communities to every nine years if cheatgrass or other non-native annual grasses have established dominance (Weltz et al., 2014, as cited in Jones et al., 2015). Sage steppe ecosystems characterized by low elevation sites and hot, arid climates, such as the communities which are the focus of this study, are particularly susceptible to fire disturbance and colonization of

ruderal species, demonstrating both lowered resistance and resilience in response to disturbance (Chambers et al, 2015). In light of these challenges, reduction, and management of cheatgrass is an important focus of our study, as its colonization post-fire can quickly spread, hindering recovery of native grasses and shrubs (Bates et al., 2011) implicating risks of long-term structural changes to sage steppe communities. Thus, understanding the role that cheatgrass plays in the degradation of sage steppe ecosystems is a vital component to the development of management and recovery strategies for sage steppe ecosystems that are vulnerable or exposed to fire disturbance.

Cheatgrass, an early germinating annual, capitalizes on the cool, mesic conditions typical of sage steppe communities in the late fall or early winter, outcompeting native plants by colonizing and acquiring space through rapid proliferation and limiting nutrient and water resources for the native plant community (Chambers et al, 2015). Furthermore, cheatgrass invasion can result in a shift in the composition and diversity of soil microbiota, altering ecosystem characteristics that encourage their continued colonization while potentially suppressing growth and fitness of native species such as sagebrush and bunchgrasses (Gehring et al, 2016). Understanding the impacts of cheatgrass invasion on soil suitability for native species of sage steppe communities is of fundamental importance when determining management strategies to encourage their recovery and growth. Moreover, cheatgrass may play a role in the overall net carbon exchange in sage steppe communities that it has colonized (Prater et al, 2006). Sagebrush species are effective carbon sinks, with longer life cycles and larger biomass, capable of storing greater amounts of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. Thus, the reduction in sagebrush density and increased colonization of cheatgrass, an annual grass with little capacity for CO<sub>2</sub> storage, has profound implications for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the surrounding landscape. The cascading results of increased CO<sub>2</sub> include warmer mean temperatures and decreased precipitation, leading to greater propensity for fire disturbance as well as lower rates of sagebrush

recovery, as recovery rates of sagebrush are negatively correlated with dry conditions in the year immediately following fire disturbance (Nelson et al, 2014).

The sage steppe landscape at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (DFNWR) experienced a human-caused fire, named the Sage Fire, on July 5, 2003. Prior to the fire, the sage steppe community was already composed primarily of cheatgrass with low densities of both native grasses and sage brush (Patton, 2003). Thus, even the unburned site in the following study does not represent a sage steppe community in its pristine state, as the entire landscape had already experienced frequent fire events, degrading the community to one in transition between an invaded state to an annual dominance state. Nevertheless, post-fire recovery strategies were focused exclusively on the burned site to suppress the colonization of cheatgrass and aid in the recovery of native grasses and sagebrush. These strategies included herbicidal treatment on cheatgrass and other non-native species and drill-seeding of native and native-friendly species (Patton, 2003). The objective of this research is to determine the efficacy of the post-fire recovery strategies at the Sage Fire by comparing unburned sites to burned/treated sites and analyzing differences between non-native understory, native bunchgrass, and sagebrush/overstory density between sites. According to Nelson et al. (2014), sagebrush recovery is a slow process, taking anywhere from 15-100 years, with greater cool-season precipitation accelerating sagebrush recovery rates, particularly in the season immediately following disturbance. Typical climatic patterns at DFNWR include wetter winters and somewhat arid summers (Patton, 2003).

Therefore, with the combination of 17 years having elapsed and the likelihood of favorable, high precipitation conditions in the cool season immediately following fire disturbance, we predict that recovery efforts will demonstrate a moderate degree of success, effectively increasing sagebrush density to comparable levels of those found in the unburned site. To accept this hypothesis, we should expect to find no significant difference in sagebrush density

between burned and unburned sites. If recovery strategies have not been successful, we should expect to see significantly reduced sagebrush density in the burned/treated site when compared to the unburned site.

Furthermore, we hypothesize that aggressive herbicidal treatment and drill-seeding efforts will yield significantly reduced cheatgrass and other non-native understory cover and increased native bunchgrass cover in the treated sites when compared to the unburned/untreated sites. No difference between cheatgrass, other non-native species, and bunchgrasses between sites indicate limited success. Considering the fact that even the unburned site was in an invaded state, the desired goal of recovery should be to significantly reduce non-native understory and increase native grass cover even when compared to the reference (unburned) site. Finally, an increased abundance of cheatgrass and other non-native species with a decreased abundance of native bunchgrasses when compared to the unburned site would indicate that recovery strategies have not been effective at mitigating invasion of non-native species or recovering bunchgrasses in the burned site.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

We established two treatment groups, denoted as unburned/untreated and burned/treated sites at DFNWR, each consisting of eighteen 50 m long randomly placed transects (Fig. 1). Understory density, including estimates of bunchgrass, cheatgrass, and other non-native species cover, was estimated using a 1 m<sup>2</sup> quadrat every 5 m along each transect, accounting for a total of 198 quadrat data points per treatment group (Daubenmire, 1959). However, due to missing data points, the burned and unburned groups had respective sample sizes of 191 and 192. Estimation of understory density was calculated with a modified Daubenmire cover class method on a scale from 0-6.

**(Table 1)**



**Figure 1:** Study area, fire perimeter and transects sampled

Table 1: Daubenmire Cover Class Metrics							
Cover Class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Percent Range	0%	1-5%	5-25%	25-50%	50-75%	75-95%	95-100%

Percentage estimates were each converted to their midpoints, and the resulting data were evaluated with descriptive statistics and histograms to assess a normal distribution of the data. We calculated the occurrence of each understory component using the COUNTIF- function in Excel. Data across treatments were analyzed with three two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances comparing differences in cover percentage between unburned and burned sites for cheatgrass, native bunchgrasses, and other non-native species. For overstory density, points were established every 10 m along the previously established transects for a total of 108 data points per treatment group. Due to missing data points, the actual sample sizes were 106 and 108 for burned and unburned treatment groups, respectively. A point-center quarter method (Curtis, 1956) was utilized to estimate mean distance from each point to the nearest overstory species, usually identified as *Artemesia tridentata*, although four wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) and grey rabbitbrush (*Chrysanthemums nauseous*) were also included for overstory density analysis. The mean distance was then converted to density measured as shrubs per 10 m<sup>2</sup>. The resulting data were

then compared between treatment groups with a two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances. Additionally, cumulative mean and cumulative standard deviation were both calculated and plotted to determine reliability and consistency of the collected data.

## **RESULTS**

### **Understory Analysis**

Significant differences were found for all understory species measured between burned and unburned treatment groups. Analyses of bunchgrasses (t-test,  $p=5.5 \times 10^{-14}$ ,  $df=212$ ), cheatgrass, (t-test,  $p=1.8 \times 10^{-14}$ ,  $df=357$ ) and other non-native species (t-test,  $p=1.5 \times 10^{-9}$ ,  $df=376$ ) demonstrated statistically significant differences between treatments for foliar cover of each understory species. Mean foliar cover of native bunchgrasses for the burned sites was 11.5%, while the unburned sites had a mean foliar cover of 0.3% (Fig. 1a). Bunchgrass foliar cover was an estimated 38 times higher in burned/treated sites than in unburned/untreated sites. Mean covers of 67.4% and 45.8% were found for cheatgrass in unburned and burned sites, respectively (Fig. 1b). Cheatgrass foliar cover was approximately 1.5 times higher in unburned sites when compared to burned sites. Mean covers for other non-native species were 33.6% for unburned sites and 17.7% for burned sites (Fig. 1c). Non-native species foliar cover was 1.9 times higher in unburned sites than burned sites.

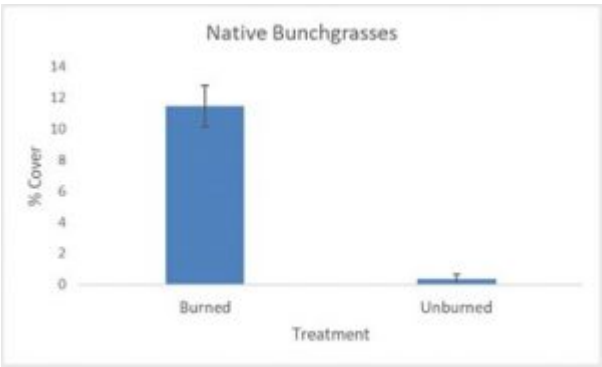
Analysis of frequency for understory species (Fig. 2) found cheatgrass occurrence between burned and unburned treatments to be nearly equivalent with respective frequencies of 98% and 99%, while occurrences of native bunchgrasses were much higher in burned/treated sites (50% frequency) when compared to unburned/untreated sites (0.5%). Finally, other non-native species frequency was somewhat lower in the burned sites (79% frequency) when compared to the unburned sites (98% frequency).

### **Overstory Analysis**

Mean shrubs per 10 m<sup>2</sup> in the burned sites was 0.069 compared to 0.085 shrubs per 10 m<sup>2</sup> in the unburned sites (Fig. 3). Standard deviation was 0.16 in unburned sites and 0.11 in unburned sites. T-

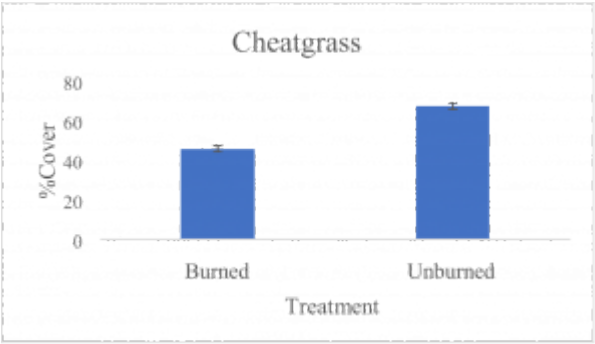
test analysis (p-value=0.36) did not find any statistically significant difference in overstory density between burned and unburned sites. Overstory density in the burned sites was 81% of the overstory density found in the unburned sites.

Cumulative mean and standard deviation values for overstory data collected in the burned treatment group demonstrated variability in the cumulative standard deviation values throughout the dataset, with standard deviation values exceeding mean values and minimum values overlapping values of zero (Fig. 4). In the unburned treatment group, cumulative mean and standard deviation values approached equilibrium approximately halfway through the dataset, but still contained minimum standard deviation values that overlapped zero (Fig. 5)

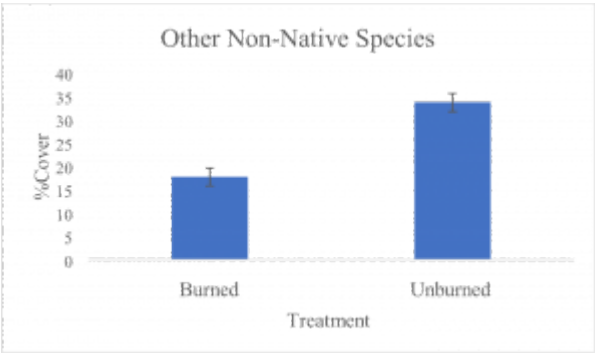


**Fig. 1a:** % Foliar cover estimates of native bunchgrasses based on % midpoint values derived from modified Daubenmire cover class method, across burned and unburned treatments at DFNWR. Error bars are based on standard error values.

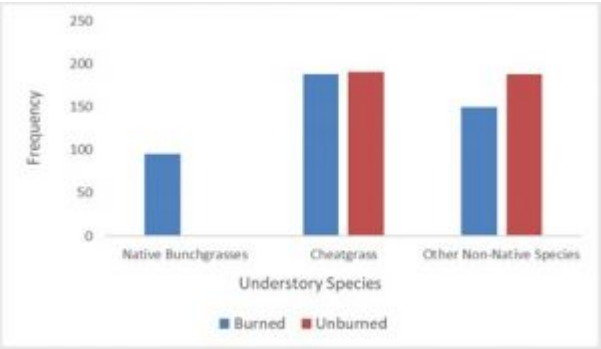




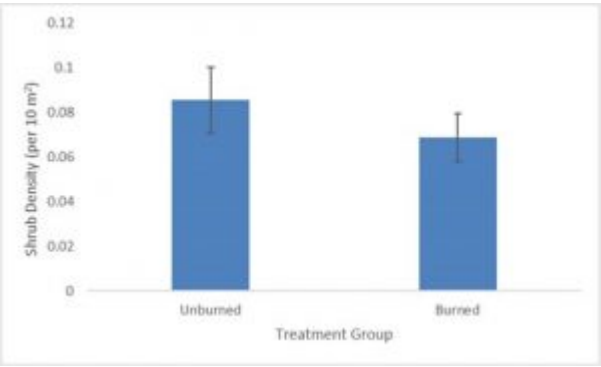
**Fig. 1b:** % Foliar cover estimates of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) based on % midpoint values derived from modified Daubenmire cover class method, across burned and unburned treatments at DFNWR. Error bars are based on standard error values.



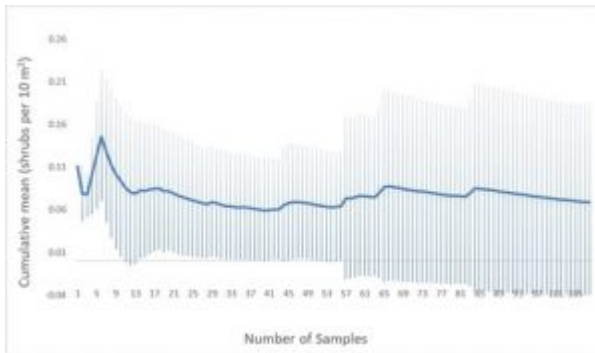
**Fig. 1c:** % Foliar cover estimates of other non-native species based on % midpoint values derived from modified Daubenmire cover class method, across burned and unburned treatments at DFNWR. Error bars are based on standard error values.



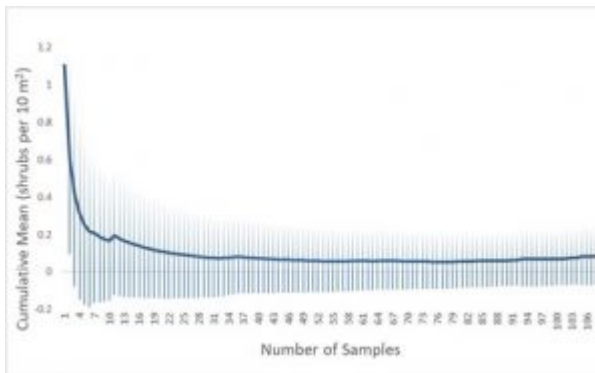
**Fig. 2:** Understory species frequency for native bunchgrasses, cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), and other non-native species in burned unburned sites at DFNWR.



**Fig 3:** Mean overstory (shrub) density measured as shrubs per 10 m<sup>2</sup> between unburned and burned sites at DFNWR, with error bars calculated from standard deviation.



**Fig 4:**  
Cumulative  
mean and  
cumulative  
standard  
deviation in  
burned site  
for shrubs  
per 10 m2.



**Fig 5:**  
Cumulative  
mean and  
cumulative  
standard  
deviation in  
unburned  
site for  
shrubs per 10  
m2.

## DISCUSSION

A significantly higher percentage of foliar cover for bunchgrasses in the burned treatment group, when compared to the unburned treatment group, suggests that re-seeding efforts have successfully increased the presence of bunchgrasses in the burned sites. Additionally, significantly lower cover of cheatgrass in the burned sites may suggest that herbicidal application effectively reduced the degree of cheatgrass dominance in the burned sites. However, research conducted by Lehnhoff et al. (2019), which implemented herbicidal treatments for management of cheatgrass, found that

cheatgrass cover was not significantly reduced by herbicidal treatment alone. Their study showed, however, that herbicidal application did increase percent cover of native bunchgrasses. Thus, it is possible that herbicidal applications at DFNWR did not effectively kill or hinder growth of cheatgrass, but facilitated growth of bunchgrasses, indirectly reducing cheatgrass cover by allowing for increased cover of bunchgrasses to outcompete cheatgrass in treated areas.

**Fig. 2** demonstrates that frequency of cheatgrass was similar between treatment groups; however, **Fig. 1b** reflects a significant reduction in percent cover of cheatgrass in the burned site.

This suggests that cheatgrass prevalence is still a concern, although progress is being made in reducing its dominance in the burned and treated sites. According to Bates et al. (2011), fire disturbances facilitate colonization of cheatgrass particularly when those disturbances destroy existing native bunchgrasses. This infers that re-seeding of bunchgrasses appears to be an important recovery strategy to successfully reduce cheatgrass dominance post-fire disturbance. Overall, the burned/treated site had both increased bunchgrass cover and decreased non-native weed cover (including cheatgrass), suggesting that restoration efforts have made a positive impact for the burned/treated site.

The dominant understory species in both the unburned and burned sites remain to be cheatgrass, with other non-native species also accounting for a greater percent composition of understory than native bunchgrasses in both sites. Prevalence in the frequency of cheatgrass in both unburned and burned sites suggest that disturbance events have likely occurred in both sites, facilitating the colonization, and spread of cheatgrass (Bradford & Lauenroth, 2006); thus, restoration efforts (herbicidal application and planting native bunchgrasses) may be needed to reduce and control cheatgrass cover in both burned and unburned sites. Other combination strategies conducted by Lehnhoff et al. (2019), such as controlled grazing combined with herbicidal application, may be worth consideration as a strategy to significantly decrease

cheatgrass frequency in both burned and unburned sites. The concern with this strategy is that while this combination of treatments successfully reduced cheatgrass cover, it did not increase native grass cover. A rotation of grazing/herbicidal treatment followed by aggressive re-seeding of native bunchgrasses may be a worthwhile recovery strategy to consider at DFNWR.

While recovery metrics proposed by Germino (2017) suggest a target understory foliar cover of bunchgrasses of at least 20%, the treated area at DFNWR showed only 11.5% native bunchgrass cover. Due to repeated fire disturbances in this area, it may be unrealistic to expect Germino's proposed recovery metrics at DFNWR unless frequency of fire events can be successfully reduced via prevention strategies. Native bunchgrasses behave as competitive, midsuccessional species following disturbance; thus, given enough time, these grasses are likely to dominate over ruderal non-native species such as cheatgrass (Hanna and Fulgham, 2015), but reclaiming dominance in sage steppe ecosystems relies on preventing frequent disturbance events, which is difficult to control.

There was no statistically significant difference of overstory density between treatments, and overstory density in burned sites was 81% of overstory density in unburned sites, which suggests that recovery efforts have made significant progress in restoring overstory density in burned sites to pre-fire conditions. Sagebrush recovery appears to be on track with expected recovery rates, with 17 years passing since the fire event and marked progress in sagebrush recovery being observed in the burned site. Observed average recovery time for sage steppe ecosystems is between 15 and 100 years (Nelson et al., 2014), which indicates that recovery is making headway on track with expected recovery rates. While the burned sites did show slightly lower density estimates, overlapping error bars derived from respective standard deviation values underscore the similarities between density values across both treatments.

Limitations to this study include the methodology utilized to collect data on the understory species as well as the sample sizes

of the overstory species data. For example, a modified Daubenmire cover class method, while commonly used for ease and convenience, does not yield precise estimates of foliar cover. With large ranges within each cover class, midpoint values procured from this method of estimation may be significantly different than if another metric was used, such as measuring actual percentage estimates for each 1 m<sup>2</sup> quadrat. Using midpoint values also skews the normality of the data, in contrast to actual percentage estimates which could be assessed for normality.

Additionally, variation in overstory estimates arose likely due to a number of potential causes. Cumulative mean and standard deviation values, particularly in the burned site (Fig. 4) indicated that more data points may have been needed to yield more accurate and reliable results for shrub density. Cumulative mean and standard deviation values in the unburned treatment group, by contrast, demonstrated a sufficient sample size for equilibrium of both metrics, (Fig. 5), but still yielded standard deviation minimum values that overlapped zero. In the future, more precise measurements of foliar cover, such as specific estimates for each quadrat, as well as larger sample sizes for shrub density, may increase reliability of the data, offering a clearer picture of the efficacy of recovery efforts at DFNWR. Variations in soil type were also not accounted for, which may significantly impact plant community structure and recovery efficacy (Gehring, et al., 2016). Slope and aspect of sites may also account for variability in plant composition due to variations in light and nutrient availability between different combinations of slopes and aspects throughout the landscape. In the future, accounting for slope and aspect as well as soil type variability throughout sampled transects may reflect more accurate differences between burned and unburned treatment groups.

Although the data indicates that recovery efforts have had a significant and positive impact on the sage steppe ecosystem in the burned/treated sites, both bunchgrass cover and sagebrush density still remain low across both treatment groups. This suggests that

more than post-fire recovery strategies may be needed in order to make a difference for the many animals that depend on sage steppe ecosystems, such as the sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), which depends on an abundance of sagebrush not only for habitat cover, but also for the array of ecologically connected biota that sagebrush give rise to, such as perennial native forbs and insects, which young sage grouse depend on for nutrition (Dumroese et al., 2015). Post-fire recovery strategies at DFNWR may not effectively provide sage grouse with their habitat needs. According to Ellsworth et al. (2016), sage grouse generally depend on 15-25% shrub density for nesting. While recovery efforts have shown an increase of shrub density compared to levels immediately post-fire, there is clearly more work to be done to restore the sage steppe community at DFNWR to optimal levels for its many inhabitants, in both burned and unburned sites.

Future studies on native animal populations within sage steppe ecosystems between post-fire and undisturbed treatments could offer insight on the impact that sage steppe ecosystem recovery efforts are making on these species. Focusing on the larger objective of sage steppe recovery, such as investigating whether restoration is positively impacting sage grouse and other animals dependent on these ecosystems, could help determine whether these efforts are worthwhile and effective at achieving the ultimate goals of sage steppe restoration. Furthermore, studies on the invasions of animal species following fire disturbance in sage steppe ecosystems could help inform our understanding of ecological shifts within sage steppe ecosystems beyond the scope of plant invasions.

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# (2021) Second Place: Final Lab Report: Dihydrofolate Reductase (DHFR)

*By Joanna Beck*

Dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR) is an enzyme involved in the synthesis of purines and thymidylate. It functions by converting dihydrofolate into tetrahydrofolate (Lin & Gerson, 2014). Increased expression of DHFR can be linked to tumor resistance to methotrexate, a drug used in chemotherapy treatment (Nakano, Fukami, Gotoh, & Nakajima, 2017).

Gaining an understanding of DHFR can lead to discoveries that would further improve the treatment of cancer in a clinical setting. The production of large amounts of purified protein can make it easier to measure protein activity and interpret an SDS-PAGE gel.

In our experiment, we are expressing and purifying recombinant DHFR following methods from BioRad: Protein Expression and Purification (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Similar experiments have been conducted in previous semesters and our goal is to further test variables to find more efficient methods of producing purified protein. Different lab groups are testing various methods of cell storage: cells left in suspension vs. pelleted down. Another variable that is being tested is the method of freezing the cells during the cell lysis process; some groups held the microcentrifuge tube in the dry ice/ethanol bath, while others let it float on the surface, and others froze the cells at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Our group (#4) is testing the method of pelleting the cells and allowing the microcentrifuge tube to float during the freezing cycles. I expect there to be no significant difference between our yield and the yield of those who submerged their tube during the

lysis procedure since the lysed cell fractions appeared to be completely frozen. Our lab group pelleted the cells after induction and before refrigeration. I expect to have a higher yield than the non-pelleted group which followed the same lysis protocol since cells are often pelleted for storage for better preservation.

### **Materials and Methods:**

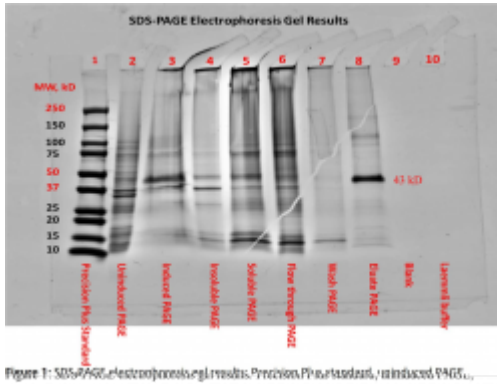
Complete material list can be found in the Protein Expression and Purification Series protocol by Bio-Rad Laboratories (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Protocols were followed as written in the above-mentioned document and aseptic technique was used in accordance with the Microbiology: Laboratory Theory & Application protocol (Aseptic Technique Protocol). Lab activities are outlined below with details describing changes from the original protocols (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.).

- Plate Cells: Isolation streak plating of BL21 (DE3) E. coli on LB/amp plate. Modified protocol was followed (Isolation Streak Plating Practice Protocol) with 7.5ul per plate. Two plates were inoculated to ensure useable cell colonies.
- Inoculate: Several cell colonies appeared favorable. Chosen cell colonies were inoculated in LB/amp broth in order to allow cells to multiply in favorable conditions (37° C, glucose for food).
- Subculture, Monitor and Induce Cell density was measured using UV-Vis spectrophotometer and found to be sufficient. OD600 of 1:10 dilution of overnight culture: 0.934. Subculture was induced according to protocol (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.).
- Harvest and Lyse: Cells were pelleted on the same day as above procedure (four hours had elapsed before continuing). Lysing took place according to protocol (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). When cells were chilled in the ethanol and dry ice bath,

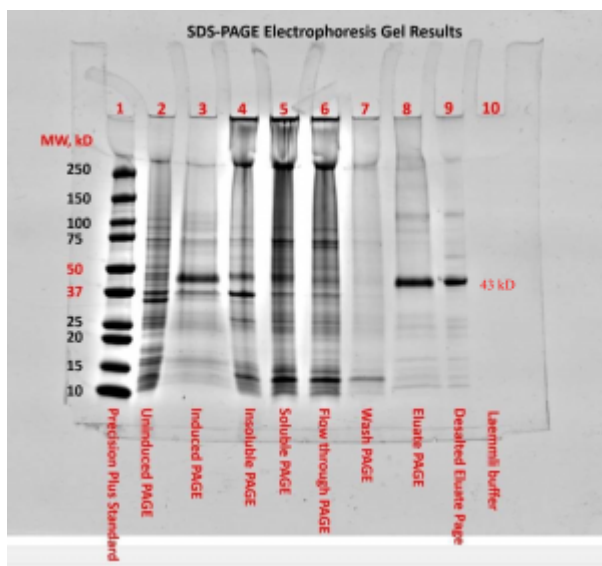
they were not manipulated to ensure even cooling, however cells appeared to be completely frozen and completely thawed upon each cycle.

- Purification: Soluble and insoluble materials were separated following protocol (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Hypodermic needle was used to break up cell chunks. Vortex was used for further agitation. No visible insoluble fraction was with the soluble fraction at the end of separation.
- Affinity and Size Exclusion (Desalting) Purification: Protocol was followed as written using aseptic techniques (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d. pg. 101-103) including preparing SDS-PAGE samples. Desalting the eluate took place on a different date (11/30/20).
- Protein Quantification: Protein quantification protocol (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d. pg. 104-105) was followed as written and resulted in the following values: 1.356 mg/mL of protein for the eluate and 0.345 mg/mL for the desalting eluate. The protocol notes that it is ideal to have greater than 0.1 mg/mL of protein in the desalted elution fraction (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d. pg. 104-105).
- SDS-PAGE Electrophoresis: SDS-PAGE electrophoresis protocol was followed as written (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc. (n.d. pg. 106-107). It was completed twice, on two different days since the desalted eluate was not ready for the first day. See figures below. The first gel tore but results are still visible.
- Gel Imaging using Azure c600: Procedure was followed as written in document modified from the Azure Biosystems user manual (Azure c150, c200, C300, C400, C500, C600).

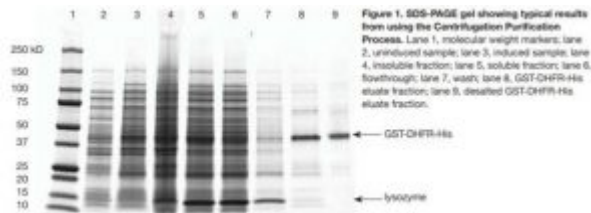
## Results:



**Figure 1:** SDS-PAGE electrophoresis gel results: Precision Plus Standard, uninduced PAGE, insoluble PAGE, soluble PAGE, flow through PAGE, wash PAGE, eluate PAGE, a blank well, and Laemmli buffer. Note the bands near the 43kDa mark as they are indicative of the presence of the GST-DHFR-His protein (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.).



**Figure 2:** SDS-PAGE electrophoresis gel results for the gel run on Nov. 30, 2020: Precision Plus standard, uninduced PAGE, induced PAGE, insoluble PAGE, soluble PAGE, flow through PAGE, wash PAGE, eluate PAGE, desalted eluate PAGE, and Laemmli buffer. Note the bands near the 43kDa mark as they are indicative of the presence of the GST-DHFR-His protein (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Image from Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d., pg. 213.



**Figure 3:** SDS-PAGE gel showing typical results from Bio-Rad page 213 (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Samples are in the same order as other figures above.

The SDS-PAGE electrophoresis protocol was followed. We can see in figures one and two the presence of a faint band for the uninduced PAGE (lane 2) and more noticeable band for the induced PAGE (lane 3) near the 43kDa mark. This band also appears in lanes 3-7 and was highly visible for the eluate PAGE (lane 8) and desalted eluate PAGE (lane 9 in figure 2). There appeared to be a band around the 15kDa mark for lanes 2-8, with higher visibility for the soluble PAGE (lane 5) and flow through PAGE (lane 6). These strong bands at approximately the 12kDa mark in lanes 5 and 6 can be attributed to lysozyme and should be expected (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Inc., n.d.). Both the blank (lane 9) and Laemmli buffer (lane 10) show no apparent bands. The first lane, containing Precision Plus standard, provided a reference ladder for interpreting the gel.

### Discussion:

Since increased expression of DHFR can be linked to tumor resistance during chemotherapy treatment (Nakano, Fukami, Gotoh, & Nakajima, 2017), gaining an understanding of DHFR can lead to discoveries that would further improve the treatment of cancer in a clinical setting. Producing large amounts of purified

DHFR protein can allow for more reliable data through larger sample sizes.

The presence of a faint band for the uninduced PAGE (lane 2) and more noticeable band for the induced PAGE (lane 3) near the 43kDa mark are an indication of successful induction of GST-DHFR-His. Progressing to the soluble PAGE (lane 5) the band became fainter. This could possibly be attributed to some of the protein misfolding and aggregating.

The experimental variables we followed (group four) included following the lab procedures with a freeze thaw method of allowing the microcentrifuge tubes to float freely in the dry ice/ethanol bath for five minutes. Cells were pelleted that day and stored for one week (as opposed to being stored with cells in suspension). Cells were stored in the refrigerator at approximately 4° C.

During the freeze/thaw cycle the microcentrifuge tubes appeared to be completely frozen. It is thought that there is likely no significant difference between results from the various freeze/thaw cycles and methods of cell storage (pelletting vs. leaving in suspension). Another student with the same variables had similar results with more faint, but visible bands at the ~43kDa mark in both the eluate and desalted eluate. The group that left their cells in suspension and changed the freeze/thaw protocol to freezing at -80° C saw visible bands at the ~43kDa mark for both the eluate and desalted eluate in one sample and no band for the desalted eluate on the other. The group that pelleted their cells before refrigeration and changed the freeze/thaw protocol to freezing at -80° C saw strong bands at the ~43kDa mark for both the eluate and desalted eluate. The group that pelleted their cells before refrigeration and held down their tube during the freeze/thaw cycles saw strong bands at the ~43kDa mark for both the eluate and desalted eluate. It is, however, possible that a shorter induction time could produce better results (cells were induced for four hours). Further experimentation is needed to determine if an altered induction time would result in a more favorable yield of the GST-DHFR-His protein.



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# (2021) Third Place: Mindfulness and Well-Being: A Survey About the Relationship Between Present Awareness in Community College Students and Their Physical and Mental Well-Being

*By Gabrielle Peck, Cynthia Narkin, Tyler Taysom, Jordan  
Stevenson, Alex Johnston*

## **Abstract**

Mindfulness is the ability to be aware of the present surroundings while acknowledging one's feelings and state of mind. This study aims towards gaining understanding of the link between practicing mindfulness and how it impacts the mental and physical well-being of community college students. We surveyed 116 participants in the psychology 101 and 201 classes at College of Western Idaho. It was found that there is a positive correlation between mindfulness and the student's self-esteem which would mean that as the level of mindfulness increased, the level of self-esteem increased. A limitation that could be further researched for future studies that we ran into are on different genders and mindfulness attributions and there was a gender split of men, women, prefer not to say

and other were not equal, and making the gender population more represented would result in different findings.

**Keywords:** Mindfulness, college students, well-being, self-esteem

Mindfulness is defined as the ability of a person to be attentive and aware of their present surroundings and situation and has been shown to have a direct correlation with multiple aspects of an individual's well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003, Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Not being able to utilize mindfulness can have an impact on stress, anxiety, and lead to struggles in multiple social environments such as school (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness is an important building block on a student's social skills and helps prepare them for the challenges of life and stressful situations (Finn, 2006).

Mindfulness practices are accessible and approachable options for community college students who face common stressors associated with college life. Mindfulness techniques focus on awareness by bringing attention to the inner workings of the body and mind through methods such as breathwork, yoga, and non-judgmental acknowledgement of thoughts and emotions (Danoff-Burg & Robert, 2010; Plouffe & O'Neal, 2020; Christopher, 2018). These types of mindful approaches are effective in providing students with mechanisms that support coping with stressful situations, greater resilience in positive affect, and higher senses of overall wellbeing (Shearer et al., 2016; Rowland et al., 2020; Ko et al., 2018).

This research is investigating whether mindfulness is related to community college students' well-being. It is shown that there are mental and physical benefits to practicing mindfulness techniques (Brown & Ryan, 2003). I hypothesized that mindfulness is related to a college student's happiness. I survey student's gender, student's quality of work, and student's self-esteem all in relation to mindfulness.

The overarching research question is, "Is there a relationship between mindfulness and community college students' well-being". More distinct research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: Are men and women different in their mindfulness?

- H1: Mindfulness has different effects in men and women.
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem?
- H2: Mindfulness is related to self-esteem.
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work?
- H3: Mindfulness has a relationship with the quality of an individual's work.

PSYC 101 will be encouraged by their professors to complete the survey and will receive extra credit for their time. The study's participants will consist of College of Western Idaho students that are currently enrolled in Psychology 101. The start of the survey will include a copy of the consent form, and it must be filled out completely before answering questions. The surveys will be available electronically through Google Forms. Age and gender will be the only personal identifiers recorded. Collected data will be kept in a database that is password protected and will be destroyed after 5 years.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

There was a total of 116 participants, with 25 participants identifying as "men", 88 identified as "women", and three identified as "other". All participants were students enrolled in the 2020 Spring semester of PSYC 101 at the College of Western Idaho (CWI).

### **Measures**

Sixteen questions were written about mindfulness, meditation, student's psychical and mental well-being, college schoolwork, and the school environment. A Likert Scale was used for fifteen questions. The Likert Scale was used due to the answers showing more solid results with how strongly students felt about each question. The other question was a fill in the blank about gender. Refer to Appendix A for the sixteen list survey questions.

### **Procedure**

We recruited participants by having PSYC 101 and PSYC 201 faculty share the survey link with their students through the CWI

blackboard site. The participants were informed that they must be 18 or older to participate in the survey. The faculty got to decide whether to offer extra credit for filling out the survey. If the faculty made the survey required for class credit, they also had to offer an alternative assignment as well.

The surveys were distributed through Google Forms and began with a page of consent. The participants then had to click “next” to continue to the survey if they are 18 years or older. If they did not agree that they were 18 years of age or older, they could not participate further. Participants then had to take a screenshot of the consent form.

Data is anonymous, which means that only the faculty advisor accessed the data in Google Forms after the survey was collected live. Once the survey was closed, the advisor shared the data by CWI blackboard with the team members to be stored on the CWI blackboard file share. Both Google Forms and the CWI file share are password protected. Surveys will be deleted 5 years from the date they were closed.

## **Results**

We had hypothesized that people who practice mindfulness have a difference in gender, with the gender options being men, women, prefer not to say, and other. Group 1, or men, had 25 participants. Group 2, or women, had 88 participants. Group 3, or prefer not to say, had zero participants. Group 4, or other, had three participants. Participants marked their gender on a scale of 1-4 with the correct gender coded for the correct number. A One-Way ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups,  $F(2, 113) = .58, p = .561$  (see Table 1).

The second hypothesis was that people who practiced mindfulness have no relationship, sometimes a relationship, or have a relationship with self-esteem. Group one had no relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ( $N = 31$ ), group two sometimes had a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ( $N = 44$ ), and group three had a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ( $N = 41$ ). For a scale of 1 being no relationship, 2

being some relationship, and 3 being a relationship, there was a mean of 2.09 and a standard deviation of .79. A Bivariate Correlation revealed that there was a significance between mindfulness and self-esteem,  $r(114) = .30$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r^2 = .09$ . As the practice of mindfulness increased, the level of self-esteem increased (see Figure 1).

The third hypothesis was that people who practiced mindfulness have no relationship, sometimes a relationship, or have a relationship with quality of schoolwork. Group one had no relationship between mindfulness and quality of schoolwork ( $N = 14$ ), group two sometimes had a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work ( $N = 31$ ), and group three had a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work ( $N = 71$ ). For a scale of 1 being no relationship, 2 being some relationship, and 3 being a relationship, there was a mean of 2.49 and a standard deviation of .70. A Bivariate Correlation revealed that there was not a significance between mindfulness and quality of schoolwork,  $r(114) = .11$ ,  $p = .223$ .

### **Discussion**

Our hypothesis that there is a difference in mindfulness practice and different genders of men, women, prefer not to say, and other was found to have no significant difference. It was noticeable that there were more women who participated in the study, so it was surprising. Without significant findings it is inconclusive. A previous study ruled a mindfulness link with gender differences as inconclusive as well (Gould et al., 2012). Perhaps with a more equal amount of genders who answered the survey questions of participation in mindfulness, this study could be repeated to find a difference.

The hypothesis that linked a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem with none, sometimes, and yes showed significance. Those who practice mindfulness do have an increased significance of self-esteem. This is supported from a previous study that linked mindfulness to lower social anxiety and higher self-esteem (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011). This shows that the ability

to be aware of the present surroundings while also acknowledging emotions and physical well-being can improve one's self-esteem.

The hypothesis that linked a relationship between mindfulness and quality of schoolwork with none, sometimes, and yes showed no significance. Those who practiced mindfulness did not have a correlation with their quality of schoolwork. Because the p-value was .223, although no significance indicated, was not statistically low or high. Further studies with a higher number of participants and a larger number of questions asking about schoolwork could show different results.

### **Methodological Limitations**

Surveys can be unreliable. Our questions are short and to the point, and they may not represent the whole picture for participants. We asked questions about stress management, eating habits, self-esteem, schoolwork quality, etc., which are questions that may need more elaboration. Student's experience with those variables may feel different about them depending on the time of year, such as the beginning of the semester or the end of the semester. Their outside factors such as employment can affect those variables as well.

### **Statistical Limitations**

A statistical limitation for this study was the inequality between gender replies of the survey. If there was an equal reply between men and women who participated, there could be a difference in the practice of mindfulness. This study is important because it brings awareness for how practicing mindfulness impacts community college students. It is necessary that this type of research continues because our results left us with questions. Further research may benefit by doing an experiment about mindfulness training on students. Our research questions could get more results with an experiment than a survey because the questions could get a deeper dive into what the students are experiencing during the school year while intertwining mindfulness. College students bring bright discoveries for society's future, and ingraining mindfulness could unpack positive benefits to college students.

**Table 1**  
**Different Genders and Their Relationship to Mindfulness**

Gender	n	%
Men		
25	21.55	
Women	88	75.86
Prefer not to say	0	0
Other	3	2.59

**Note.** A One-Way ANOVA found no significant difference between the four groups ( $p = .561$ ).

Each gender replied to the survey a question about their relationship to mindfulness.

**Figure 1**

The Correlation Between Mindfulness and Self-Esteem Note. As the level of mindfulness practice increased, the level of self-esteem increased. ( $p = .001$ )

**Appendix A**

**Survey Questions**

- 1: Have you practiced mindfulness before?  
Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot ☐ Every day ☐
- 2: Practicing mindfulness has decreased your stress levels.  
Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot ☐ Every day ☐
- 3: The pandemic has disrupted your practice of mindfulness.  
Not at all ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐
- 4: The practice of meditation improves your awareness.  
Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐
- 5: Practicing mindfulness lowers your heart rate.  
Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Every time ☐
- 6: Practicing mindfulness helps you focus more on homework and in class.  
Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐



- 7: Practicing mindfulness helps your public speaking anxiety.  
 No ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐ Every time ☐
- 8: Does your self-esteem improve when you only focus on the present moment?  
 No ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐
- 9: Do you feel like your quality of schoolwork is better when you focus on the present moment?  
 No ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes ☐
- 10: I am more aware of my surroundings after exercise.  
 Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 11: I am more likely to eat unhealthily when I am emotionally exhausted.  
 Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 12: I perform better on exams after taking a moment to clear my head.  
 Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 13: Practicing mindfulness provides me with a stronger sense of confidence in tasks I undertake. Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 14: Emotionally stimulating circumstances are more manageable when I meditate.  
 Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 15: Practicing mindfulness endows me with a better sense of my emotions, thoughts, and surrounding circumstances.  
 Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐
- 16: What is your gender?  
 Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say ☐ Other ☐

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# (2022) First Place: Surveying Psychology Students: Analyzing Attachment Theory and How it Impacts Romantic Relationships

*by Sawyer Ellis, Yeva Veraksa, Olivia Vargas, Kareli Mata, & Saige Self*

## **Abstract**

Childhood development plays a significant role in romantic relationships. The purpose of this study is to explore childhood development and if parent-child attachment predicts insecure behaviors: including impulsive, possessive, and habit formatting tendencies in adult romantic relationships. Even further, the relationship between parental substance uses and offspring adult attachment styles. This study explores if insecure attachment styles can negatively affect romantic relationships and if parents' alcohol consumption is related to offspring's insecure attachment style. College students were asked to rate their impulsive behavior along with their partner's possessive traits. The results concluded further research is needed to determine possessive & impulsive behavior. Specifically, what causes insecure attachment in relationships and if substance dependency is the root cause of partner dissatisfaction.

**Keywords:** impulsive behavior, possessive behavior, parental substance use, adult attachment, parent-child attachment, anxiously attached, avoidant attachment, secure attachment

Relationships have many factors that play a role in the success that you and your partner will have together. Relationship attachment styles have influenced the satisfaction of each partner. Those with deactivation attachment style, the emotional withdrawal from a partner when under distress, felt unsatisfied in romantic relationships but those with hyperactivation attachment style felt no difference in their relationship (Mondor et al., 2011). In surveys done of married couples, researchers found that after at least two years of marriage, distress appeared in the marriage (Sibley & Liu., 2006). Distress in marriage, especially those with children, can deflect those emotions onto them.

Attachment theories allow us to better understand the behavioral dynamic in romantic relationships and may even predict the relationship length. It is important to understand why some relationships last longer than others, especially when a child is involved (Barbaro et al., 2016). One study found that neglected children avoided their distress in adulthood. Later, these anxious individuals projected distress onto their own children (Julal & Carnelley, 2012). In essence, children are influenced through relationships, parents, friendships, etc. in their life and the big question is to research what causes this.

How a parent raises their child and what they expose them to is a great indicator of the child's attachment style (Roeofs et al., 2008). Research found that children in later years respond similarly to their parents when given alike situations. A caregiver's romantic relationship can affect the flow of family day-to-day life. Low levels of anxiety and avoidance in a relationship can lead to a more harmonious family life and higher marital satisfaction (Pedro et al., 2015). In unhappy marriages, parents bring in the child as a third-party buffer which can lead to traumatic childhood experiences. It would be helpful to know if overly exposed children mimic their parents' insecure traits in their adult relationships. If so, what measures does one take to prevent this from happening?

The general research question asks, "What is the relationship

between parenting styles and their children's adult attachment styles later in life?"

H1: Parent-child attachment is related to impulsive behavior in adulthood.

H2: There is a relationship between parental substance use and offspring adult attachment style.

H3: Partners' possessive behaviors are predicted by attachment style.

PSYC 101 professors will encourage their students to participate in the survey, and to reward student participation with course credit. The participants of this study will be current College of Western Idaho students enrolled in Psychology 101. The consent form will be attached at the beginning of the survey. The surveys will be conducted online through Google Forms. No names or personal identifiers will be collected. Information will be stored in a password-protected database and data will be destroyed after five years.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 44 psychology students participated in our research study at The College of Western Idaho fall of 2021. Seven identified as male and 35 identified as female. Only two were identified as nonbinary. The student's ages ranged from 18 – 42.

### **Measures**

Our survey had a total of 65 questions. Sixteen of these questions were with reference to possessive, impulsive, and addictive behaviors regarding students' romantic partners, caregivers, or themselves (see Appendix A). The rest of the questions pertained to parenting styles, participants' relationships with caregivers, and romantic partners. The answers to our survey questions were in the form of a 1-10 satisfaction or dissatisfaction scale, Likert scale 1-5, and free response.

### **Procedure**

PSYC 101 professors encouraged their students to participate in the survey and to reward student participation with course credit.

The participants of this study were College of Western Idaho Psychology 101 students. At the beginning of the survey, a consent form was attached verifying the participant was at least 18 years of age. If a student was under the age of 18, they were unable to complete the survey and were given a different assignment to earn extra credit. Each student participating in our research study had 11 days to submit feedback. The survey was conducted online through Google Forms. No names or personal identifiers were collected. Information is stored in a password-protected database and data will be destroyed after five years. Once the student completed the survey, they were instructed to screenshot completion for proof. They were asked to submit the image to the online learning platform Blackboard. Free counseling was offered to participants affected by our survey questions.

Once our research team received survey feedback, we cleaned the data. We made changes to the variables to better understand and identify our questions. This made it easier to run our analysis. Next, we threw out data that was not related to our survey question. For example, a few participants mixed up the free-response questions with questions asking to identify parent one and two. We eliminated one answer that stated, "it's none of your business". Our group input zero for participants who were not in a relationship, or the question was not applicable.

## **Results**

The first hypothesis was parent-child attachment is related to impulsive behavior in adulthood. To test this hypothesis, data were collected from a total of 44 college students.

Participants were divided into four categories of parent-child attachment: anxious ( $n = 7$ ,  $M = 12.71$ ,  $SD = 4.19$ ), avoidant ( $n = 2$ ,  $M = 13.00$ ,  $SD = 7.07$ ), secure ( $n = 16$ ,  $M = 12.94$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ), and disorganized ( $n = 19$ ,  $M = 13.21$ ,  $SD = 4.54$ ). On average, the participants scored 13.00 ( $SD = 3.78$ ) on the impulsive behavior scale (scores ranged from 5 – 19). There was no significant difference found between parent-child attachment and impulsive behavior in adulthood, as indicated by a One Way ANOVA,  $F(3, 4.32) = 0.02$ ,  $p =$

.99 (see Figure 1). The second hypothesis was there is a relationship between parental substance use and offspring adult attachment style. To test this hypothesis, data were collected from 44 college students. Participants were divided into three categories based on their adult attachment style: avoidant ( $n = 20$ ,  $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), secure ( $n = 16$ ,  $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ), and anxious ( $n = 8$ ,  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ). On average the participants scored 3.98 ( $SD = 1.25$ ) on their parents' alcohol consumption use (scores ranged from 1 – 5). There was no significance found between participants adult attachment style and their parents' alcohol consumption, as indicated by a One Way ANOVA,  $F(2, 16.2) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .16$  (see Table 1).

It was hypothesized partners' possessive behaviors are predicted by attachment style. Data were collected from 44 college students. On average, participants reported partners' attachment style 3.38 ( $SD = 0.95$ ) and their possessive behavior (scores ranged 0 – 5) 3.33 ( $SD = 1.45$ ). To test the relationship between a partners' possessive behavior and their attachment style, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. There was no significance found,  $r(35) = -.04$ ,  $p = .820$ .

## **Discussion**

Our first hypothesis that parent-child attachment is related to impulsive behavior in adulthood was unfounded. There is little research if impulsive behavior is tied to attachment theory. Impulsivity in most research studies is measured by instant gratification. For instance, the gift task delay experiment. In this observation, children under the age of four were tempted with a beautiful Christmas present (Mittal et al., 2013). The caregiver told their child not to touch the gift and left the room. The study found anxious ambivalent children had no problem resisting the present because they did not rely on their caregivers to parent them. They parented themselves (Mittal et al., 2013). To measure parent-child attachment style, the stranger in the room situation was performed. I used questions regarding the stranger in the room experiment (see Appendix A). It has been found that the way a child reacts to their caregiver leaving the room determines temperament



and attachment style (Mittal et al., 2013). Although the results of my study were not significant, it did open the door to further exploration. I found that anxiously attached participants in our study scored the highest on the impulsivity scale. Focusing on anxiously attached children and comparing them to anxious adults may show significance. Our second hypothesis, there is a relationship between parental substance use and offspring adult attachment style, was unfounded. In past research studies, it has been found that attachment theory is a predictor of developing alcohol dependency (Hazarika & Bhagabati, 2018). Specifically, the dynamic between father and son in families of alcohol dependency versus nonalcoholic families. The study concluded that individuals who were securely attached found emotional support while insecurely attached individuals sought other means; In this circumstance alcohol (Hazarika & Bhagabati, 2018). Although my findings were not significant, I found the average of anxiously attached individuals' parents drank somewhat often. I did not ask questions about the participant's alcohol consumption, considering some students are under the legal age to drink. Past research studies are mostly tied to father and son relationships (Hazarika & Bhagabati, 2018). Exploring all genders may give researchers more information on how to help support individuals who want to stop or reduce alcohol consumption.

Our last hypothesis found partners' possessive behavior is predicted by attachment style was unfounded. I was hopeful but not surprised by the output. Research has a difficult time determining what exactly defines a romantic partner to be possessive (Craddock, 1997). Considering attachment styles have a different definition of controlling behaviors. However, one study found in marriages there is an expectation of privacy and respecting the property of your spouse positively impacts marriage satisfaction. On the other hand, the study was conducted in the late 90s and called for further research (Craddock, 1997). Although my findings were contrary to this specific experiment, measuring and understanding what

possessive behavior looks like in romantic relationships may give researchers a clue if lack of privacy is a cause for divorce.

**Methodological Limitations**

My portion of the survey was less reliable and required knowledge of childhood. For example, I asked questions pertaining to how the participant responded to their caregiver after leaving them alone in the room with a stranger. Some individuals have a better memory of their childhood than others. The participants may have felt influenced to answer dishonestly because of social pressure and sociocultural differences. We listed questions related to childhood at the end of the survey, which would give the participant enough knowledge of parent-child attachment. Our survey relied on self-report instead of observations. The demographics were primarily young adults, mostly female.

**Statistical Limitations**

One statistical limitation of this study is no equal variance between groups, meaning the population variances differed. The skewness of partner possessive behavior and the participants parent-child attachment style were negatively skewed and violated the assumptions of a one-way ANOVA. Normal distribution is important because data near the mean shows the most frequency; in which the population is normally distributed.

Studying impulsivity, possessive, and habit formatting behavior is important to study and needs further research. To illustrate, researching parent-child attachment may innovate specialized support groups for adults on the road to recovery. It may determine an effective way of managing alcohol consumption. Attachment theory may also explain why individuals stay in unsatisfied relationships where possessive behavior is present. Finding answers may give researchers more information about impulsive behavior and if impulsivity is or is not the source of possessive relationships. This information may educate psychology branches such as victims' advocates on how to give proper guidance and resources to victims who want a way out of a possessive relationship.

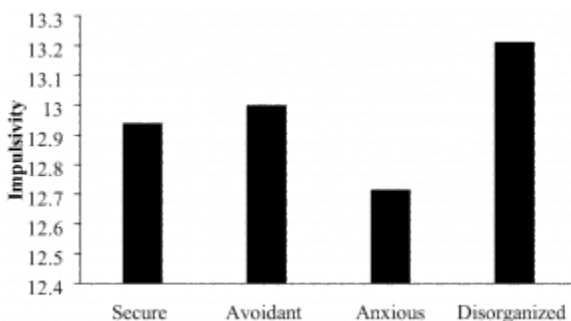
**Table 1**

### Attachment Style based on Parents Alcohol Consumption

Attachment style	n	M	SD
Avoidant	20	4.35	0.875
Secure	16	3.88	1.360
Anxious	8	3.25	1.581

Note. A Likert scale was used to measure how often participants' parents would drink ( $p = .16$ ).

**Figure 1**  
**Relationship between Parent-Child Attachment Style and Impulsivity**



Note. A Likert scale was used to measure participants' impulsivity. No significant difference in impulsivity based upon parent-child attachment style ( $p = .99$ ).

### Appendix A

#### Survey Questions Analyzing Attachment Theory and How it Impacts Romantic Relationships

1. I often purchase things without thinking  
(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree strongly disagree)
2. I engage in risky behavior before considering the consequences

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

3. I interrupt conversations

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

4. I am impatient

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

5. My father drinks alcohol often

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

6. My mother drinks alcohol often

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

7. My parent/caregiver behavior is uncontrollable when drinking

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

8. My father purchase things without thinking

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

9. My Mother purchases things without thinking

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

10. My father says things he regrets

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

11. My mother says things she regrets

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

12. My partner wants to spend time with me even if I don't want to

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

13. My partner believes my property belongs to him too

(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

14. My partner invades my privacy  
(Strongly agree somewhat agree neither somewhat disagree  
strongly disagree)

15. Choose one that best applies to you (Multiple choice)

A. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

B. I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

C. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away.

16. What is your age?

17. What is your gender?

18. If your parent left you alone with a stranger in the room, how would you react? (Multiple choice)

A. Feel extremely distressed and chase after parent

B. Have no emotion

C. Feel somewhat distressed yet still explore the room

19. When my parent returns to the room I would most likely  
(Multiple choice)

A. Feel angry at the parent for leaving me with said stranger

B. Ignore parents' arrival

C. Feel happy upon parent arrival

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# (2022) Second Place: Growth and Fixed Mindsets: A Survey About Mindsets and Their Relationship to Symptoms of Mental Illness, the Internalization of Problems, and Emotion Regulation Strategies

*by Kennedy Cole*

## **Abstract**

Mindsets, whether fixed or growth, are extremely powerful frameworks that influence nearly every aspect of individuals and their lives. Consistent with prior research, to determine the impact of these mindsets on college students, we considered the relationship between mindsets and mental health symptoms, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies. Findings indicate individuals with fixed mindsets experienced less severe symptoms of depression; however, an individual's mindset does not influence the internalization of their problems or the emotion regulation strategies they use. Because this study resulted in insights contrary to previous research on this topic, and that the data upon which this study is based was self-reported, there is a possibility that it might be biased and/or inaccurate. Additionally,



other aspects, such as background, culture, and life experiences, were not considered or examined. Furthermore, because of the small sample sizes (22 participants per mindset) Type I and II errors could have been made. This study allowed for a deeper understanding of this area and hopefully will provoke more in-depth research of this topic. To improve internal validity, we suggest an experiment be conducted. If mindsets influence and impact the variables investigated, it is important to determine this to help ensure that individuals have and maintain positive mental well-being.

**Keywords:** growth mindset, fixed mindset, symptoms of mental illness, reappraisal coping strategy, suppression coping strategy, emotion regulation strategies

### **Strategies**

Within the past few decades, research began on growth and fixed mindsets' impact on individuals' academic and psychological functioning. Mindsets create psychological worlds or meaning systems that are extremely powerful and shape how people process information, their reactions to events, and influence many important aspects of their life, including self-regulation, self-esteem, and social perception (Schleider & Weisz 2018; Sun et al., 2020). Furthermore, these mindsets can affect an individual's academic success by influencing the mastery of goals, perception of intrinsic and extraneous loads, retention of the learned information, and transfer performance (Xu et al., 2021). Individuals with growth mindsets believe their traits, such as intelligence, are malleable through effort; whereas individuals with fixed mindsets believe their traits are innate. Maladaptive belief systems, such as fixed mindsets, can have negative consequences, including causing individuals to question their abilities, use unhealthy coping mechanisms, and experience more intense feelings of helplessness (Schleider et al., 2016). These negative consequences of maladaptive belief systems can lead to the onset of symptoms of emotional problems such as perfectionism, anxiety, and/or depression (Schleider et al., 2016; Shroder et al., 2015).

Mindsets can be predictors of mental illness, influence emotion regulation strategies, correlate to intellectual humility, and contribute to academic success (Burnette et al., 2018; Porter & Schumann 2018; Shroder et al., 2015). Individuals with a fixed mindset, often have worse mental health and mental illness symptoms. Furthermore, individuals with fixed mindsets more often have negative emotion regulation strategies, such as suppression, hiding and/or ignoring one's emotions; whereas individuals with a growth mindset have a higher frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies, such as reappraisal, or adapting how one thinks (Schleider et al. 2016). Individuals with a growth mindset demonstrate more intellectual humility compared to individuals with a fixed mindset (Porter & Schumann 2018). Growth mindsets result in increases in positive academic attitudes, motivation, and perception of academic competence, which leads to improved learning efficacy and correlates to higher grades (Burnette et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2017).

This study was conducted to determine how growth and fixed mindsets: relate to symptoms of mental illness; the internalization of problems; and emotion regulation strategies. Previous research has shown that growth mindsets are positive, can be extremely beneficial, and can lead to increases in mental health, positive emotion regulation mechanisms, and decreases in the internalization of problems. To collect data for this study, a survey that focused on the relationship that growth and fixed mindsets have on symptoms of mental illness, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies was distributed to College of Western Idaho (CWI) students currently enrolled in a Psychology (PSYC) class. This study was necessary because it allowed for a deeper understanding of how these mindsets affect individuals, specifically college students. Based on existing research, it was hypothesized that individuals with growth mindsets: have less severe symptoms of mental illness and experience a decrease in their existing mental health symptoms; experience a decrease in the

internalization of problems; and have a higher frequency of utilizing positive emotion regulation strategies.

The general research question asks, “What is the difference between growth and fixed mindsets and their relation to symptoms of mental illness, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies.” Specific hypotheses include:

H1: Individuals with growth mindsets will differ compared to fixed mindsets on the severity of their depression symptoms.

H2: Individuals with growth mindsets will differ compared to fixed mindsets in preferring talk therapy to treat mental health symptoms.

H3: Individuals with fixed mindsets will differ compared to growth mindsets in preferring medications to treat mental health symptoms.

H4: Individuals with growth mindsets will differ in the internalization of their problems compared to individuals with fixed mindsets.

H5: Individuals with growth mindsets will have a higher frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies compared to individuals with fixed mindsets.

To collect data, we used a survey which allowed for relatively easy and timely remote distribution, collecting a wide range of data, in a cost-effective manner.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants included 7 non-binary, 33 male, and 93 female students whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 and were enrolled in a PSYC class at CWI during the 2021 fall semester.

Measures Ten questions were developed to determine growth and fixed mindsets’ relationship to mental illness symptoms, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies. To obtain more accurate information and to determine the severity of the impact these mindsets have, a Likert scale was used for all ten questions. For the complete list of survey questions, refer to Appendix A.

## **Procedure**

To obtain participants, an email that included the survey link and information about the study was distributed to the CWI PSYC faculty by Professor Jana McCurdy. The faculty then disseminated the survey amongst their classes and encouraged student participation by offering course credit. If the students did not want to participate in the survey, another option for course credit was presented.

To develop, design, and distribute the password-protected survey, Google Forms was used. The first page of the survey consisted of the consent form and by clicking “next”, participants confirmed they were a minimum of 18 years old, had read and understood the consent form, and agreed to be a participant.

Once distributed, the survey was available to students for 13 days; the data was anonymously collected, and no identifiable information was used or recorded. While the survey remained available to students, the faculty advisor was the only one who could review the data. After the survey was no longer available, through a password-protected email, the data was distributed amongst team members, stored on a password-protected server, and will be destroyed after 5 years. Participants were divided into two groups based upon their responses to four questions: when I succeed, I believe it is mainly because of my work ethic; when I succeed, I believe it is mainly because of my innate (traits you are born with) abilities; when I fail, I believe it is because of a lack of ability; and when I fail, I view it as an opportunity to learn.

Three data points were identified and cleaned. First, regarding question number one (“I believe my traits, such as my intelligence, can improve over time with practice and hard work.”), out of the 133 total participants, only one person said no. Because of this, their data was determined to be insufficient to determine mindset; and therefore, this question was eliminated. Second, regarding question number three (“On average, for each class, I roughly spend \_\_ hours on my homework per class every week.”), all answers were changed to the middle point if a range was provided (e.g., 3.5).

Third, and finally, regarding question number 28 (What age are you?), nine individuals reported that they were under the age of 18 and two individuals did not report their age; therefore, their data was removed because they did not meet the appropriate age criteria.

## Results

It was hypothesized that there would be a difference in symptoms of depression based on an individual's mindset. To test this hypothesis, data were collected from a total of 44 participants. Participants were divided into two categories of mindsets: growth ( $n = 22$ ,  $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), and fixed ( $n = 22$ ,  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ). On average, participants' overall score for symptoms of depression was 3.47 ( $SD = 1.39$ ) on a Likert scale of 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). Overall symptoms of depression did significantly differ between individuals' mindset as indicated by a One Way ANOVA,  $F(1, 19) = 3.81$ ,  $p = .025$  (see Table 1). Comparison of the means of the two groups showed that individuals with growth mindsets had more severe symptoms of depression compared to individuals with fixed mindsets.

It was also hypothesized that there would be a difference in individuals' internalization of their problems based upon their mindset. On average, participants' overall score for the internalization of their problems was 3.38 ( $SD = 1.23$ ), 3.55 ( $SD = 1.18$ ) for growth, and 3.09 ( $SD = 1.41$ ) for fixed, on a Likert scale of 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). Overall, the internalization of problems did not significantly differ between individuals' mindsets as indicated by a One Way ANOVA,  $F(1, 19) = .82$ ,  $p = .441$  (see Figure 1).

It was further hypothesized that there would be a difference in the frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies based on an individual's mindset. On average, participants' overall frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies was 3.54 ( $SD = 1.20$ ), 3.27 ( $SD = 1.42$ ) for growth, and 3.77 ( $SD = 1.15$ ) for fixed, on a Likert scale of 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). Overall, the frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies did not significantly differ between individuals' mindsets as indicated by a One Way ANOVA,  $F(1,19) = .96$ ,  $p = .387$  (see Table 2).

## Discussion

A significant difference was found between fixed and growth mindsets regarding the influence on symptoms of depression. Surprisingly, individuals with fixed mindsets reported less severe symptoms of depression compared to growth mindsets. This result is concerning because it is contrary to all previous literature on growth and fixed mindsets' relationship to mental illness. Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals with growth mindsets often experience less severe symptoms of depression and better overall mental health compared to individuals with fixed mindsets (Schleider et al., 2016; Schleider & Weisz 2018; Shroder et al., 2015). However, this difference in findings could be because previous studies used the method of an experiment instead of a survey.

The hypothesis that individuals with growth mindsets will differ in the internalization of their problems compared to individuals with fixed mindsets was not supported. It was shown that individuals' mindsets do not influence the severity or frequency of the internalization of their problems. This finding is disconcerting because previous research has shown that individuals with fixed mindsets correlate to a higher frequency and more severe internalization of their problems (Schleider et al., 2016). However, in previous literature the participants were adolescents rather than college students, and larger sample sizes were utilized; and therefore, this could explain the difference in results between the existing literature and this study.

After testing the hypothesis that individuals with growth mindsets will have a higher frequency of using positive emotion regulation strategies compared to individuals with fixed mindsets, an insignificant difference was found. The results demonstrated that an individual's mindset, fixed or growth, does not influence the type of emotion regulation strategies they use. These findings are contrary to previous research showing that individuals with fixed mindsets correlate to a higher frequency of using suppression, whereas individuals with growth mindsets correlate to a higher frequency of using reappraisal (Schleider et al., 2016). A possible

explanation for the difference in these results could be because of inadequate wording of the questions and/or a Likert scale was used.

### **Methodological Limitations**

Because only CWI PSYC students were asked to participate in the study, convenience sampling was used. Additionally, since the data was self-reported and individuals want to be viewed as socially acceptable, this allowed for the possibility of inaccurate and/or biased data. Also, because individuals' mindsets can change daily, just one survey may not be enough to determine mindsets' relationship to mental illness symptoms, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies. In addition, this study did not consider or examine how different cultures, backgrounds, and life experiences may affect mindsets and their relationship to the variables investigated. Furthermore, because of questions related to mental health and how severe the symptoms are, there is a possibility that participants could have experienced emotional distress either during or after the survey.

### **Statistical Limitations**

One possible statistical limitation was the small sample size of each group, because they are not representative of the population, and increases the possibility for margin of error.

Additionally, all three dependent variables were ordinal data that were treated as interval ratio (IR) data, which violates a requirement of the One Way ANOVA. Also, for the findings on symptoms of depression, a Type I error may have been made, which could have caused an inaccurate rejection of the null hypothesis. Furthermore, for the results of the internalization of problems and emotion regulation strategies, a Type II error could have been made, which may have caused the acceptance of the null hypothesis, when in actuality it is false.

### **Conclusion**

This study was valuable because it allowed for a deeper understanding of how growth and fixed mindsets influence depression symptoms, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies among college students. Because all findings

are contrary to previous literature, more in-depth research should be conducted to determine the influence that mindsets have on the variables explored. In future studies, the method of an experiment may be more adequate and beneficial to determine and more fully understand the impact that mindsets have. If mindsets influence and impact symptoms of mental illness, the internalization of problems, and emotion regulation strategies, it is important to clearly determine this to help ensure that individuals have and maintain positive mental well-being.

**Table 1**  
***Descriptive Statistics for Symptoms of Depression***

Mindset	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Growth	22	4.14	1.13	*3.81
Fixed	22	3.05	1.53	—

\* *p* = .025

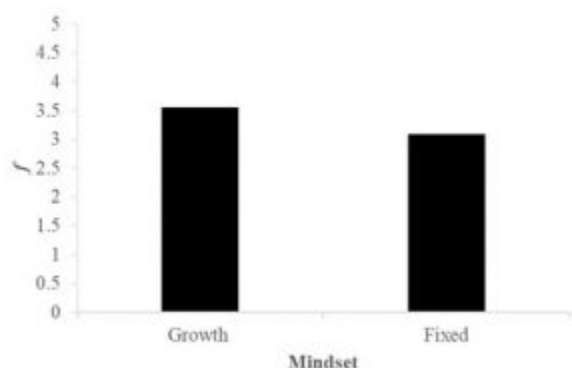
**Table 2**  
***Descriptive Statistics for Positive Emotion Regulation Strategies***

Mindset	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Growth	22	4.14	1.13	*.96
Fixed	22	3.05	1.53	—

\* *p* = .387

**Figure 1**  
***Frequency of the Internalization of Problems***





*Note. There is no significant difference between the internalization of problems and individuals' mindsets ( $p = .441$ ).*

## Appendix A

### Survey Questions on Growth Mindsets Relation to Mental Illness Symptoms, the Internalization of Problems, and Emotion Regulation Strategies

1. I frequently experience one or more of the feelings listed: hopelessness and/or sadness, low self-esteem issues, lack of motivation, and/or have little or no interest or pleasure in completing normal activities.
  - Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree
2. If you experience one or more of the feelings listed above, how difficult does it make your life?
  - Not difficult at all, somewhat difficult, very difficult, extremely difficult
3. I frequently experience one or more of the feelings listed:

nervousness, restlessness, and/or having difficulty controlling how much I worry about things.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

4. If you experience one or more of the feelings listed above, how difficult does it make your life?

- Not difficult at all, somewhat difficult, very difficult, extremely difficult

5. To treat mental health symptoms, I would prefer talk therapy over medications.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

6. I believe, to treat mental health symptoms, medications are necessary.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

7. I rarely talk about my problems or share my concerns with others.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

8. When something goes wrong, I often believe it is my fault.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

9. When I am emotionally upset, to calm myself down, I usually change my thinking.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

10. When I am emotionally upset, I often try to not show my emotions and ignore what is bothering me.

- Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree

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# (2022) Third Place: Ethnography Study of The Effects of Cosplay on Physical Image

*by Savanna Gerlach*

Ever have had the feeling when seeing seen a character in a work of fiction such as video game or an anime and wishing to be able to dress up as them, replicating how they looked? It could whether to show love for the character or because liking how their character design looked. This is essentially what cosplay is. Cosplay, short for costume play, is a hobby that has gain a lot of traction around the 2000s. The hobby is people dressing up as their favorite characters and replicating their appearances. This could be characters from anime, manga, video games and comic books for examples. People often cosplay during conventions such as San Diego Comic Con for example. Cosplay can also be use in photoshoots, both amateur and professional from photographers who specialize in cosplay photos. It has become a very popular hobby that has gained more and more acceptance since it is a hobby open to anyone to join in and nerd culture being more accepted by the general public. I myself first learned of cosplay from a close friend and looking up further info about it online from numerous social media posts and YouTube videos. It ended up piquing my interest. I believe that cosplay does affect how a person sees themselves and how it can be for the positive for how someone views themselves.

The main question for this paper comes from the fact that cosplay is a hobby that is about using one's physical appearance and how they present themselves. Most fictional characters are drawn and

designed in stylized ways such as physical proportions, outfits and hair that is more stylish and hues a little closer outside of reality. This could be for example hair that is not a natural color like blue or a fancy outfit such as long ball gown. The question asked is how cosplay affects how a person sees themselves when in costume. I had asked how it affected how they saw themselves and their own personal experiences with the hobby.

To begin, I needed to find a way to conduct research for information on my question. I decided that since this is based off of people's thoughts and feelings, the best course of action would be to ask cosplayers themselves for their opinions. Plan A was I went on Reddit on the r/cosplayers thread and ACParadise Forums, a forum site dedicated to cosplay. On both sites, I made accounts and posted the following:

*"Hello, I am currently conducting auto ethnography research for one of my college courses in which we write a paper for subculture that is based around a pop culture phenomenon. For my paper, I am asking the following question: How does cosplay effects how you see yourself physically when you are in costume? Please say info on what type of characters you cosplay as and how it effects your own physical perception of yourself."*

However, I ran into complications that prevented me from getting the info I needed. I was unable to get my post approved on Reddit due to the system to prevent spamming and was unable to get help from the mods because they do have many posts to filter through. As for ACParadise, I got nothing though the bottom of the post did say people did see the post. This could be because there was not lot of conventions this season due to current situation and did rely on people on the internet checking the posts.

Given I knew there was a possibility this could happen, I decided to do Plan B which was interviewing cosplayers. I know a few cosplayers from Anime Oasis, a local anime con in Boise, Idaho. Anime Oasis is the main local convention in the area for local cosplayers and other enthusiasts to meet up. The time in between swapping plans also allowed me to better reevaluate what to ask

to get more valuable and relevant information. For the interview, I asked the following questions:

1. How did you get into cosplay?
2. Which type of characters do you mainly cosplay?
3. What draws you towards certain characters?
4. How do you view yourself physically when in costume?
5. What is the general feeling and emotions you get when in costume?

I chose these questions because they do not sound intrusive and are much more polite than what I had typed up for the forum post. I felt also these questions could really help me get the perspective needed. This perspective being how it affects them which ties back to the main question but, also the emotional part of the hobby. I primarily interviewed a cosplayer I know who I will be referring to as Cosplayer A for the sake of anonymity.

From what I could gather from the research is that it can give people a sense of confidence when dressed up as their favorite characters. While cosplayers cannot change things biological physical features, they can still wear cosplay as the character regardless of if they are physically like the character. This could be for example someone cosplaying as a character of the opposite gender. The confidence comes from putting on the costume and stepping out into the public with it. Cosplayers make the choice to dress up as the character regardless of what someone says about them when in costume. It allows them to feel more comfortable in their own body by wearing these costumes. It can be a huge confidence boost for people who may not be sure of how they look. A huge core tenant of the hobby from what I can gather is body positivity and accepting people of all different backgrounds such as gender, ethnicity, and weight. Essentially anyone can join in and not feel afraid to if they are not exactly how the character looks. In fact, cons have panels about spreading the positivity of appreciating your own body when in costume and not being ashamed of it.

To quote Cosplayer A: *“Cosplay brings out a more confident side of me and I overall feel more comfortable with myself. With each*

*new costume or alteration to older ones I feel myself growing as a cosplayer. It's a great feeling."*

I had also once attended a panel that was based around body positivity in the cosplay community and had chatted with the three cosplayers who had ran the panel. They mentioned how they how they don't care if they don't look physically like the character, they feel happy with how they looked when in costume.

Cosplay also allows cosplayers to feel closer to the fictional character that they do cosplay as. Fans of series tend to get attached to the characters and often have a favorite. Cosplay can be a way of showing love to a specific character and or series. It allows this sense of closeness with the character. Pop culture centered around telling a story or being character focused often have the audience become close and attached to the characters. People tend to choose these characters they became attached to throughout the story as way to both honor them and show their love for that character. In a way, it shows love and a new component of interacting with a piece of pop culture by dressing up as said character.

What a person looks for in a costume varies from person to person. Cosplayer A had mentioned that one of the reasons they choose along with liking the character's personality was wondering if they would be comfortable wearing the costume for half a day. Comfort is important since it is still wearing clothing. Some people look for how practical a costume is since wearing a skirt and jacket is much easier to wear than say a big princess gown. Some look for harder costumes as a challenge for them to craft and make. Some characters do wear revealing or suggestive costumes which may be another factor into choosing costumes since everyone has different levels of comfort.

Trying the hobby, myself, I can see this perspective. I am not a super slim person and I do not look like exactly like the characters I chose to cosplay as. However, there was something positive when I did dress up as the character that I got close to when I enjoyed said pop culture item. I one time wore a costume of the character Madoka Kaname from the anime Puella Magi Madoka Magica. The



costume involved wearing a pink frilly dress and a wig of pink pigtails. While initially took some time to fit into the costume, there was this sense of accomplishment and confidence in wearing such a pretty costume and in that moment, I felt like the character. I felt pretty and confident which is always a good feeling to have when presenting oneself physically. I had also really enjoyed said anime and I felt like I was still interacting and engaging with said series even though I had watched every episode of it. Like wearing had me still engaging with said anime.

The message that seems to be sent by it is that cosplay can be a positive experience for those in the hobby. It can be a huge boost to one's confidence to put on a costume and be able to be physically comfortable with both themselves and as the character they are cosplaying as. People do not need to look like the character exactly like them physically to still enjoy the hobby. It's a way to also show love for a pop culture item and the characters in it by being able to engage with the pop culture further even long after they have stopped interacting with it. Fictional characters are designed in ways that usually are distanced from reality so to be able to recreate can be a satisfying experience for someone and help bring out a bolder side with its positive effects.



## PART III

# CRITICAL ANALYSIS



Essays in this category should critically evaluate or analyze a piece of literature, a theatrical performance, a work of visual art, a historical moment, a philosophical argument, a social movement, etc

Patrick Tomasso, Unsplash [https://unsplash.com/photos/Oaqk7qqNh\\_c](https://unsplash.com/photos/Oaqk7qqNh_c)



# (2021) Wicked: The Importance of Upholding Your Morals

*By Jori Brough*

It is often said that there are two sides to every story. In the musical *Wicked*, this is portrayed through the tale of the witches found in *The Wizard of Oz*. It is told from the witches' side instead of Dorothy's, and it paints a vastly different picture than the one we got in their original story. I had the opportunity to personally see this show last year and identified one theme that shone brighter than the rest. While some may disagree, I think the most important message of *Wicked* is to always stand up for what you believe in.

*Wicked* is a musical based off of a book of the same name by Gregory Maguire. In it, we see our two main characters, Elphaba and Glinda meet at Shiz University. They are assigned as roommates and immediately detest one another due to their very obvious differences. While their rocky relationship progresses, Elphaba starts to uncover an evil plot in the land of Oz. She discovers that many of the creatures are losing their ability to speak and are being imprisoned for nothing more than the fact that they are animals. One day, a lion cub is brought to the school in a cage and Elphaba, along with the help of her magic and another student named Fiyoero, rescues the lion cub and releases it back into the wild. This spurs Elphaba to want to speak to the Wizard of Oz, whom she believes can help all of the creatures that are being detained. She begins her journey to the Emerald City with Glinda, now known as Glinda, by her side as her new best friend. However, while at the Emerald City, Elphaba uncovers that the Wizard is responsible for all of the prejudice and abuse against the animals. The Wizard offers to help

grant Elphaba's desires if she joins him, but she refuses because she wants to free the animals. Elphaba runs away from the Wizard and is going to flee the city to avoid capture when she gets into an argument with Glinda. Glinda thinks Elphaba is making a mistake and chooses to stay in the city because she values being popular and having her wishes come true over the needs of others. While Elphaba begins liberating the animals across the country, Glinda has been given the title of "Glinda the Good" and, along with the Wizard's workers, has helped spread rumors about how evil Elphaba is. Fiyero comes from Shiz University to stay at Emerald City and becomes captain of the guard. He leads the search for Elphaba because he doesn't believe the rumors about her and wants to make sure she is safe. Glinda realizes that she has made a mistake and is only bringing more pain to those around her. When Elphaba decides to leave Oz for her own safety, she and Fiyero fake their deaths and leave Glinda a book of spells for her to use to protect Oz. Glinda banishes the Wizard and begins a more just rule in his place.

I'm not the only one who found many great themes throughout this musical. There are many different interpretations, some that agreed and some that didn't. Some people found similar messages to what I did. In a review, Laura Pokedoff says, "This is truly what *Wicked* the musical is about: friendship, identity, and standing up for one's beliefs, even when it seems like the rest of the world doesn't agree with them." (Pokedoff) I concur with the conclusions that Pokedoff came to here. I believe this shows that Pokedoff is able to see that Elphaba standing up for what she believed in was tied into the plot and character development in the show. This included Elphaba standing up to one of the only friends she's ever had and deciding not to discount her own identity or turn away from others who needed her help even though she was now in a position where she was no longer scorned. I think this emphasized how major this theme is in the show.

Other audience members felt that there were different, more important messages in the performance. Matthew J. Palm, a critic for Orlando Sentinel Theater, argues that "the point of the musical

is how citizens can be duped when their rulers feed them misinformation.” (Palm) While I feel that *Wicked* does illustrate the dangers of media manipulation, I believe that message to take a backburner to the strong themes of defending your beliefs. Even at the very beginning of the musical, Elphaba is willing to stand up to authority figures in an attempt to help those she cares about. The theme of disinformation in the news is not even very noticeable until part of the way through the performance. Therefore, I believe that this is not the main theme found in *Wicked*.

And, of course, some found hugely different main messages in *Wicked*. Steve Charing, another reviewer, wrote: “Friendship and trust are the underlying themes as well as prejudice and tolerance. Government corruption also plays a role in the story. And what may appear wicked or good to some may actually be the reverse. As the saying goes, never judge a book by its cover.” (Charing) *Wicked* is in fact, intended to be *The Wizard of Oz* but from the perspective of the witches of Oz and illustrates that there are two sides of the story and unfair assumptions can leave you to believe untrue information. I believe these to be good general life advice but struggle to see many of these being the main themes to take away from this play. There are few characters who show good friendship or trust, the play ends with almost all the characters with just as much prejudice as they started with and, in my opinion, doesn’t show those in a way that many viewers learn from.

Another reviewer, Stanford Friedman, argues that the main takeaway is about living with consequences of our actions: “Life moves forward, and *Wicked* reveals itself to be, more than anything else, a cautionary tale about learning to live with one’s choices.” (Friedman) I don’t find this thought to be accurate because so much of *Wicked* is focused on change. No one in the show makes a mistake that they can’t come back from. Glinda takes over Oz and begins using her power for good, Fiyero learns that he was focused on the wrong things in life, so he changes and becomes better. I would argue that it isn’t about learning to live with your choices as much as it is about living to learn *from* your choices.

There are even some who believe that there is no main moral to be taken away from this show. Joseph Szekeres, a Canadian theater critic, argues that *Wicked* is merely meant as a distraction from the turmoil of the world around us. He writes that he originally saw the show as little more than a rite of passage story for pre-teen and teenaged girls but in the end decided it was intended as a distraction where you could be transported to a world with magic. (Szekeres) I disagree with this thought. While *Wicked* puts on a beautiful and entertaining show, it has many comparisons and lessons that apply to real life. For example, you could take away the lesson of standing up for what you believe or maybe a lesson to not seek only fame and popularity as Glinda learned the hard way. I believe that there is nothing in this show that indicates that it is solely for distraction and entertainment purposes. There are beautiful insights to be learned if you are willing and able to look closely.

I would argue that the main message of *Wicked* is to always stand up for what you believe in. We are able to see this theme many times throughout the musical in multiple characters. First and most prominently, we see it in Elphaba. In the first act, we see her fight to protect anyone who she feels can't protect themselves. The first time we ever see her perform magic is when she is worried about her sister, Nessa Rose. She also risks getting in trouble to release an imprisoned lion cub because she believes that the animals shouldn't be mistreated. This shows her determination and how important it is to Elphaba to be a champion for those around her that need it. Later in the show, she sings a song called "Defying Gravity" with the lyrics: "I'm through accepting limits 'cause someone says they're so, some things I cannot change but 'til I try, I'll never know!" I feel this illustrates how she realizes that she is having to go against everyone and everything she's been taught for what she believes in. It also shows that she realizes she may not succeed but is willing to risk it all to change the world for the better. As this is major character development and a turning point for our main character, I think that *Wicked* makes it clear that this is the message we should take away.



Elphaba isn't the only one that demonstrates this lesson throughout the performance. For example, we also get to see Fiyero adopt this moral. In the beginning, we understand him to be rather hedonistic. However, he joins Elphaba in freeing the lion cub and from there on, we see him begin to uphold those newly found morals. When Elphaba goes into hiding to begin fighting animal imprisonment, Fiyero stands up to Glinda and anyone else who doesn't believe that Elphaba is doing the right thing. This comes to a climax when Glinda and Elphaba get into a heated conflict that puts Elphaba in danger. He puts his position as head guard and his entire life at risk to help defend Elphaba so she can continue fighting for the rights of others.

Near the end of the musical, we even got to see this lesson from Glinda. After Elphaba fakes her own death, Glinda confronts the Wizard. She realizes that he had been lying and that he shouldn't rule over the people of Oz. Until this point in the play, Glinda seemed to care more about herself than anyone else. She has seen the effects of what the Wizard has done and chooses to pretend everything is fine in order to be popular with those around her. This is really the first time we have seen her stand up for someone else. She kicks the Wizard out and puts his accomplice in jail. This shows that even the character who ends up playing a villain for most of the play is able to realize that she needs to stand up for what she believes in and stand up for those around her.

So why does it matter? Why should anyone care about the life lessons from this musical or which one should be the main theme? I believe we should care because art is all around us. We can learn from the experiences of others through any type of art, and it can teach us how to avoid the same mistakes. Many of the literary "classics" of our time are focused on what we can do to better our lives or to become greater people. I believe that this is what makes them high art. An article by Jordan Fisher highlights the difference between low art and high art and why we should care about it. In this article, Fisher joins a much larger debate that seems prominent in much of life. He compiles what others have decided

is the difference between high art and low art and we learn that there are many different definitions for what high art should be. One of these definitions speaks of high art as being true to reality, emotional, genuine, and morally serious. (Fisher 476) Personally, I would consider *Wicked* high art based on this definition.

That being said, I don't truly feel that I can presume to call anything "high art" without implying that some other art is "low art". I disapprove of this distinction because I believe that all art brings some sort of value, even if it is just for the artist. I'm not the only one who dislikes this hierarchy of art. Brenda Jo Wright, an author who has studied art for years, has written about this topic. She says, "These conventional distinctions, in the name of universal 'humanistic' standards, perpetuate limited definitions of high art and provide the grounds for discounting and disregarding other art forms." (Bright 2) Like Bright, I also think that when we define art by our own standards, we can close our eyes to some genres of art. Personally, I believe that doing so is a mistake, as we can learn lessons or find many different uses for all kinds of art, and we lose the opportunity to do so if we judge it ahead of time.

In my own life, this message of standing up my beliefs is close to my heart. I am currently working towards a degree in social work for this very reason. I want to work with children in the foster care system because I want to be able to protect the children that can't necessarily stand up for themselves. I have had many people in my life try to warn me that this is an incredibly hard profession, that the foster care system is very flawed, or about how there will always be extra challenges with fostering or adopting children. I have been told numerous times that it might not be a good idea to pursue this job- these comments have only made me want to pursue this career even more. If there are so many people in need of an advocate and some help, how can I just give up because it might be difficult? When I begin to doubt that I could succeed in this job, I see Elphaba as one of many examples of giving a voice to those that don't have one.

I also think that this can be seen in everyone's lives. For example,

this year there have been many protests by those who are standing up for what they believe in. These protests were often dangerous situations for those protesting. However, many were aware of the risks and still chose to attend and support the movement because they believed that having their voice heard was more important. I believe this shows that the main theme from *Wicked* is relevant in our lives today.

In conclusion, there is much speculation about the main theme of *Wicked*, but for me, it is to always stand up for what you believe in. From learning to be a good friend, to the dangers of propaganda in the news, to never judging a book by its cover, there are many lessons that could be found within *Wicked*. Nevertheless, the theme of upholding our morals is seen quite prominently in many of the main characters and throughout the whole plot. We can see how this could be applied in our own lives as well. There is a plethora of examples in the world of defending your beliefs at all times, regardless of whether it is the popular thing to do. I hope that we may have the bravery and strength to stand up for our beliefs, our loved ones, and especially for those who are unable to stand up for themselves.

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# (2021) Second Place: Antisemitism in American Colleges: The Influence of Christian Ideologies in the Twenties and Thirties

*By Avigale Sperry*

The United States has been known as a Christian nation since it was founded in 1775 and one of the bases of its foundation has been the freedom to practice religion. However, America's Protestant origins have often led to religious prejudices that have resulted in violence and unfair treatment in extreme cases. Old antisemitic beliefs about the Jewish people led to discriminatory actions against them in American colleges and universities such as Columbia and Harvard. In the years leading up to World War II, Christian beliefs and ideologies greatly influenced the development of antisemitism in American colleges by reinforcing Protestant, Anglo-Saxon ideals.

Since the first Jewish immigrants came to America, colonists did whatever they could to avoid being around them. Long-held European beliefs about the Jews influenced the New World and while these ideas remained fairly hidden for about a century, both the Civil War and World War I very quickly brought them to the surface as the population made the Jews a scapegoat for mistakes that occurred. As a result, antisemitic acts became increasingly

evident in the education system and often in the colleges and universities of America.

A deep-seated fear of change and the unfamiliar pervaded American citizens by the end of the first World War. Much of the American population feared the Communist party and anything that could lead to the development of this in the U.S. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia brought about “an impact in the United States far out of proportion to any realistic concerns that Americans need have had about socialism and communism replacing the existing political structure.” [1] Several media sources blamed the development of socialism and communism on the Jewish race. In the 1920s and 1930s groundless rumors that the Jews were “leading the charge for a domestic socialist revolution,” circled among anxious Protestants and Catholics.[2] A majority of antisemitic issues arose from the desire to preserve Protestant ideals and values. After the Red Scare, the periodical, Literary Digest, came out naming Jews and Bolsheviks as interchangeable terms.[3] Even businessman accused Jewish peddlers of selling “Bolshevik literature” with their products.<sup>4</sup> Antisemitism was influenced considerably with the publication of the book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Henry Ford’s publication of the *Dearborn Independent* newspaper. Originally published by Russian secret police, it accused the Jews of “secretly plotting a world revolution to undermine Christian civilization,” an accusation that had no proof.<sup>5</sup> It quickly caught on in the U.S. when it was produced in Boston. When it was printed in the *Dearborn Independent*, millions of Americans absorbed the supposed stories of “Jewish vices.”<sup>6</sup> Henry Ford, who owned this newspaper and was an influential and respected man in the U.S., described the common Jew as a “mere huckster, a trader who doesn’t want to produce, but to make something out of what somebody else produces.” [4] Leonard Dinnerstein writes, “the publication of *The Protocols* in the United States in 1920 provided him with a vehicle that brought national attention to his fledgling weekly.” [5] Ford’s antisemitic views were known internationally. Adolf Hitler pinned a picture of Henry Ford in his office and called

him his “inspiration.” [6] Many Americans subscribed to Ford's view of the Jewish people, despite the flawed logic of these claims.

Religious leaders such as William Dudley Pelley and Father Charles Coughlin were proponents of antisemitism in the 1930s. Religious arguments for antisemitism stemmed from the supposed refusal of the Jewish people to accept Jesus Christ and the belief that they had killed him. One Jewish writer believed that antisemitism came from these beliefs, “Basically, in the Christian mind, every Jew bears responsibility for Calvary, precisely as if ever Jew repeated over and over again, in every generation, the crucifixion.” [7] The education system and the Sunday schools reinforced these beliefs in Protestants and Catholics from a young age. Children were taught to refer to the Jews as “Christ-killers” while they themselves were surrounded with terms such as “Church-loving citizens” and “Christian morals.” [8]

William Pelley, the son of a Protestant minister, founded the Silver Legion located in Minnesota in 1933.[9] Sarah Atwood wrote a journal detailing the rise of the Silver Legion, also called the Silver Shirts, and the resulting Jewish action against the organization titled *This List Not Complete*. The Silver Legion was based out of Minnesota and was called one of the “vocal, most wild-eyed, and in some ways most dangerous” out of all the groups like it.[10] William Pelley claimed to have had a vision in which he, “ascended to a heavenly plane and was granted the gifts of clairvoyance and divination.” [11] This spiritualism justified his antisemitic views. While not necessarily religious in nature, Pelley's beliefs definitely influenced the organization and drew groups such as the Protestants and former KKK members.[12] By 1934, the group's membership was thought to be between 75,000 and two million nationally.[13] The Silver Shirts were not a particularly violent group although they published and publicly libeled the Jews. Their rhetoric about the Jews describes them as “at best, unwanted citizens and, at worst, subhuman.” [14]

Protestants were not the only religious group who discriminated against the Jews. Catholic priest, Father Charles Coughlin, had a

reputation for being “a national critic of malevolent and predatory economic forces,” and his radio presence allowed him to reach many Americans with his ideals.<sup>[15]</sup> Although Catholics were also widely oppressed by the Protestants at this time, Coughlin’s hatred of the Jewish people garnered him many followers. A long history of enmity between the Jews and the Catholics influenced his hatred. Both antisemitic Catholics and Protestants followed and listened to Father Coughlin’s speeches on the radio. In spite of his numerous false and vitriolic claims about the Jews, many Americans revered him. As a controversial figure in American society, one of his biographers said that “He was Christ; he was Hitler; he was savior ... he was demagogue.” <sup>[16]</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein writes that, “in December 1938, 45 radio stations carried his weekly address that 3.5 million Americans listened to regularly; another 14 million had heard him at least once.”<sup>[17]</sup> Catholic editorials such as the *Commonweal* and the *Catholic World* criticized Coughlin saying that he did not speak for all of the Catholic religion and that his facts were flawed and promoted antisemitism.<sup>[18]</sup> Not even reprimands from peers stopped him from making complaints about the “Tugwell’s, the Frankfurters, and the rest of the Jews,” who supposedly surrounded President Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>[19]</sup> The results of Father Coughlin’s fame and words led to a greater atmosphere of antisemitism among the citizens of the U.S.

It was the culmination of these beliefs that led to considerable discrimination among the Jews in major colleges and universities. President Lowell of Harvard University became worried about increase in Jewish students because the “percentage of Jewish undergraduates from 6 percent in 1908 to 22 percent in 1922.” <sup>[20]</sup> President Lowell’s idea of a perfect American was a person who was Protestant and he thought that too many Jews enrolled in Harvard might lead to a loss of what it had become as a democratic university.<sup>[21]</sup> Many of the faculty agreed with Lowell’s assumptions of the Jews. When there was an open spot in Harvard’s Board of Overseers, one member wrote a letter to President Lowell asking him not to elect another Jew to the Board saying that “the Jew



is always a Jew first and an American second.”<sup>25</sup> Dean Frederick Keppel of Columbia University worried too about the influx of Jewish undergraduates and was concerned that this might drive away students who came from socially affluent homes.<sup>[22]</sup> Jewish discrimination did not just occur among the faculty, many students took part in it as well. Helen Horowitz writes, “In a world that valued style, the poverty, dress, and rough manners of the immigrants marked them as distinctive and inferior.” <sup>[23]</sup> The narrowmindedness among the students and faculty led to the Jewish students being unable to participate in sports, clubs, and fraternities. Antisemitism also pervaded the Harvard clubs. When a respected family from Philadelphia invited Professor Felix Frankfurter to speak at a prestigious club dinner, many refused to attend on the basis of having to socialize with a Jew.<sup>[24]</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein writes that “the elevated number of Jews at many other American universities was perceived as an invasion that would ultimately undermine both Christian traditions and the social prestige of schools that housed too many of them.” <sup>[25]</sup> The ultimate fear of the colleges and universities was that their Democratic institutions would fall apart as more Jewish immigrants came into America. It was extremely hard for Jews to become faculty in these spaces. English and History were especially hard areas to get into as it was thought “inconceivable for a Jew to transmit or comprehend the culture and traditions of an American Christian society.” <sup>[26]</sup> For President Lowell, the influx so worried him that he limited the number of Jews allowed to enroll in Harvard. Many other universities and colleges followed suit including Princeton, Yale, and Cornell. This resulted in fewer places for Jews to apply for higher education.<sup>[27]</sup> Those who were allowed in were excluded from many activities.

Robert Strauss, who later became the ambassador to the Soviet Union, described his experience at the University of Texas as uneventful, but he discovered his Jewish roots, “which meant that you were ostracized from certain things.”<sup>[28]</sup> The lack of places to enroll led the Jewish people on two occasions to attempt to found

their own college from both a liberal and orthodox standpoint.<sup>[29]</sup> In the 1920s, Jewish fraternities in colleges remained a highly controversial issue. Kirsten Fermaglich writes that, “Although most Gentile fraternities at that time restricted their membership by religion, and thus excluded Jews, Gentile students and administrators attacked Jewish fraternities as unnecessary, undesirable symbols of Jewish insularity.”<sup>[30]</sup> President William Herbert Perry France of Brown University said to a Jewish student that starting a fraternity would “kindle the fires of racial antagonism.”<sup>[31]</sup> It was ironic that college faculty refused to include Jewish students on the basis of preventing racism while by their refusal they enforced their racist and Anglo-Saxon ideas.

Centuries of Christian animosity influenced many of these college and university departments. In the prologue to *Antisemitism in America*, Leonard Dinnerstein writes, “ancestral Christian obsessions with Jews ... have... become an irrevocable part of the American heritage.” <sup>[32]</sup> Although Jewish students were seen as outsiders among other peers and professors, these students sought to gain academic knowledge and “took their classes seriously” compared to their peers.<sup>37</sup> Jewish students suffered both socially and religiously when on campus. When students at Columbia University requested to have the High Holy Days off of school, Professor Young complained that if students “wish to attend a Christian college, let them submit to its requirements or stay away. If I wished to attend a Jewish college, I should go prepared to work on Sundays.” <sup>[33]</sup> The number of Jews flooding into Columbia University distressed the faculty to the point that they decided to produce a solution to this issue. As Columbia University only desired students who came from upper class families and had the social requirements necessary, they sought to cut down on the students applying who had fewer desirable traits. This resulted in modified scholarships and asking questions on admissions forms that included religious affiliation.<sup>[34]</sup> Columbia University also eventually used the SATC and IQ tests as part of their application process to determine student eligibility. Students were accepted

based on the grade they received on the tests. In this way they were able to weed out some of the Jews who were considered undesirable. Many of these tests made the common Jew to be less intelligent than was actually proven.[35] President Lowell thought that the general “clannishness” of Jews contributed to the growth of these students in Harvard.[36] The universities of Michigan and Nebraska advised their students against “associating with Jewish males.” [37]

In 1935, a riot broke out at Michigan State College that showed the depths of antisemitism on campus. Kirsten Fermaglich writes that a “mob of about five hundred MSC students marched on the small local peace rally held across from the college campus.” [38] They harassed the rally with name calling and by hurling rotten food at them. The mob became so heated that they “grabbed five of the rally participants, dragged them across campus, and dumped them in the Red Cedar River.” [39] Coincidentally, the evening before, MSC students went to the Jewish fraternity with the intent to hurl antisemitic threats at the inhabitants. The article claims that these students were trying to dissuade the leaders of the rally from participating.[40] As a conservative college, the students didn't really appreciate the peace rally across campus. Those who started the rally were from the Social Problems Club which pushed for change within the college. With the rise of incoming Jewish students at the campus and the progressive Social Problems Club, there was most certainly tension among faculty and pupils. There was some evidence that leaders and members of the club were of Jewish descent. The night before the rally took place, a smaller mob most likely “shouted antisemitic insults—either in front of a boarding house that welcomed Jewish occupants or in front of the only Jewish fraternity on campus, or both.” [41] There was also evidence that the faculty knew about the action that the mob was going to take against the peace rally. One journal writes that, “this peace meeting is a blind for a radical gathering. The administration of the college will have no objection if other students toss these radicals in the river.” [42] Not only did these students behave violently towards a

peaceful group meeting, but they also discriminated against Jewish students who were a part of the group as well.

Jews have been the subject of discrimination in America since the colonists made their first settlements. While many injustices and acts have been committed against them, antisemitism seemed to decline after World War II. Prior to this, universities and colleges were especially harsh to the Jews. Faculty and student alike ostracized the Jews and made them feel unwelcome on their campuses. In the years leading up to World War II, Christian beliefs and ideologies greatly influenced the development of antisemitism in American colleges by reinforcing Protestant, Anglo-Saxon ideals.

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# (2022) First Place: Opting Out of American History: An Attempt to Hold Onto American Patriotism

*by Montana Keating*

The American education system has worked tirelessly to teach some of the most important and relevant subjects to the nation's youth. This has led to the creation of nationwide standards within its core classes, with the subject of History being no different. History has multiple interpretations and can still technically be taught while avoiding sections of the past. A student could learn all about the American Revolution without technically learning about any key battles, or a teacher could teach about the American Civil War, focusing only on its economic and diplomatic aspects, without properly acknowledging the different connections they have to slavery. While the former isn't typically seen, the latter is becoming more acceptable within certain standards. American Historical standards for teaching history have worked to specifically cut out certain parts of its history in the name of American patriotism. America's youth is now being taught a less accurate version of history because the creators of the standards are working to make America more patriotic by omitting specific atrocities committed by the United States. The events of 1994 encapsulate how the American Council for Basic Education started to cut out specific parts of its history by omitting specific pieces within the standards. The United States worked ferociously to change around the nation's standards for how it taught history— the standards were greeted by a large amount of criticism and opposition from Right-Wing

Conservatives because they “*did not display ‘a decent respect for [the] United States[s] Historical roots in Western Civilization.’*”<sup>[1]</sup> This led to a massive amount of revision in the newly created standards. The first reason, of six points, listed and a major reason for the Council’s rejection was the new standards “presented a negative view of American history.”<sup>[2]</sup> Out of the three hundred ninety-five “original ‘elaborated standards’” two hundred three, fifty-one percent, were changed; of these, forty-four were specifically due to criticism, while the other one hundred fifty-nine were adjusted for accuracy & clarity or removed altogether.<sup>[3]</sup> Within those two hundred three, fifty-three “either add[ed] or omit[ed] specific historical content[s]” with the intention to “present better history.”<sup>[4]</sup> By the end of the revision, Right-Wing Conservatives were pleased with the outcome and were satisfied with the Standards they had created to teach History. At the same time, these newly minted standards had carved out some of the less enjoyable pieces of America’s past, which left an incomplete and inaccurate story of the United States. While the word *patriotism* did not make it into the six specific points as to why the standards were originally rejected, the Council for Basic Education was worried about the American patriotic spirit if the un-revisited standards would have been implemented. Patriotism is a powerful ideal because, “to feel like an ‘American,’ to identify with the ‘United States of America,’ is to feel at once safe and connected.”<sup>[5]</sup> America has harnessed this ideal in an effort to, “establish a ‘we’ that satisfies the longing for connectedness and affiliation.”<sup>[6]</sup> The desire to feel a part of something and connect with others is universal and Patriotism can help answer that desire.<sup>[7]</sup> The United States works to establish this feeling of connection and belonging by boosting patriotic ideals across the nation. With all of this in mind, the Council decided that they could not risk using the original version of the proposed 1994 standards because they believed that the concerns being raised within the six points listed would lead to the nation being less patriotic.<sup>[8]</sup> The problem with this is that some of the points listed were working towards omitting American History.

When done correctly, the teaching of patriotism can be beneficial for the nation, *“if we teach it narrowly as jingoistic, uncritical self-praise of our nation, then such instruction is wrong... it would be indoctrination rather than education.”*<sup>[9]</sup> While the idea of teaching Patriotism has grown and changed over the years, its main principle has always been to encourage students to be more active within America and its ideals.<sup>[10]</sup> While America doesn't have to cut out pieces of its history from its standards, this has become the easiest way to increase national pride and overall patriotism. It's impossible to foster real patriotism without learning about the previous generations and the sacrifices made, *“students must learn too about the failings of our democracy, about the denials of freedom and justice that blight out history.”*<sup>[11]</sup> People who want to increase patriotism within the nation recognize this, *“to love one's country does not require one to ignore its faults.”*<sup>12</sup> The American patriot has to look at the nation with a critical eye, with a desire to see the nation changed for the better.

As the standards work to specifically cut out certain parts of American History, there is a very distinct pattern in whose stories remain, but the most recent revision of the standards saw many connections between race, ethnicity, and diversity whittled down.<sup>[12]</sup> There cannot be a discussion about Historical standards without talking about the races that are discriminated against and ignored within America. Race is a subject that is often ignored within classrooms. <sup>[13]</sup> Even when the standards permit the open teaching of such sensitive subjects, like slavery and lynching, teachers often shy away from direct conversations because they're worried about conflicting values within the classroom held by students.<sup>[14]</sup> The History of Native Americans is also specifically targeted by the standards because currently, *“American Indians histories reveal education in motion and under duress.”*<sup>[15]</sup> The way in which educators teach the History of Native Americans is so limited that few Americans have a real idea of what happened to the Native Americans— their history usually starts in the seventeenth century and then just has the more colorful pieces of history

peppered throughout.[16] All these ideas must come together if there's going to be a genuine discussion about the American Historical standards and the History it ignores within the United States.

By omitting specific parts of American history from the History standards and classrooms, American students aren't learning enough about their nation's past. Currently, the standards that surround Native Americans work to legitimize the conquest of the Americas instead of teaching about Native American's achievements and history.[17] The United States has, "*idealized prominent American Indians, such as Sacagawea and Pocahontas, who satisfy multicultural infusion concerns... [who] sustain a master narrative of racial reconciliation.*"[18] while also "*Vaporiz[ing] resistance leaders like Tecumseh and Chief Sitting Bull who can be appropriated as symbols of tragic nobility in the face of the inevitable march of European American Westward settlement and technological progress.*"[19] America is not teaching an accurate History of Native Americans living within the nation— doing that would risk the American youth's patriotic ideologies. Even though the American History curriculum and standards have partly worked to do a better job at incorporating Native Americans into their work, a full, clear, and honest picture still hasn't been painted.

Washington and Arizona are two of the states that have the most comprehensive standards which work to directly incorporate Native Americans into their standards, but both still fall short of anything truly meaningful.[20] Arizona's standards, "*focus[ed] on the historic[al] contributions of American Indians individuals and groups as... [they] fit into a progressive master narrative of national development.*"[22] This meant that specific achievements made by Native American's made it into a teacher's lesson, while the tragic parts of their past and the atrocities committed by America against the Native Peoples were swept under the rug.[21] They still wanted students to know that America had never been perfect, but "*the country is perpetually trending toward...perfection.*"[22] The word perfection can easily be replaced by patriotic and the idea would

still stand just the same. Arizona's standards for third graders have lumped Native American segregation into a way to see how the modern world is shaped, without talking about what led to that segregation.[23] Only teaching the achievements of a group to make the standards seem more inclusive will boost someone's patriotic ideals about their nation if they don't also know or understand the wrongs committed. By cutting out certain pieces of Native History from the standards, America can look like a more favorable nation all around. Washington took a different approach— they wanted to focus in on many of the local tribes in the area. Many of the content standards revolved around local case studies, which were meant to help students explore larger conflicts and ideals.[24] While this can truly boost local knowledge of Native American struggles and ideologies, *“by focusing so intently on the details of the ‘case,’ students will be unable to connect the details to the larger American political, economic, social, and cultural context that shaped these events.”*[25] These kinds of standards allow students to learn about their local history, which can bring up unpatriotic feelings, while also causing a disconnect between the larger and more significant Historical narrative that students must learn so they can have the clearest picture of American History. The specific standards state that fourth graders will be able to “explain how the events of Washington state history contributed to the different perspectives between native and non-native people.”[26]

Causing this disconnect ensures that even if a full and comprehensive story is told about America and its poor treatment of Native Americans for most of history, most students will not feel the full effect— which allows for patriotic ideals to remain easier. At this point, the standards in both states are letting down the youth living there because they are not *“promoting critical thinking about American Indian-European American relations in U.S. history”* which makes for a less honest and truthful version of America's history.[27]

In its attempt to increase patriotism, the standards for American History have also targeted the history of Africans and African Americans. Specifically, the subject of slavery is usually watered

down as much as possible considering it's one of America's most horrific blemishes. The nation was born with the idea *"that all men are created equal"* while standing on the backs of enslaved Africans. The standards watered down the suffering and horrors of slavery, as they worked to turn the American colonies into a heroic struggle for white colonizers.<sup>[28]</sup> In many cases, this just ends with Africans being seen as victims in the slave trade while *"black students experience embarrassment and shame."*<sup>[29]</sup> When this single ideal is presented to students, misunderstandings about history can thrive and patriotism has the chance to increase. Students who don't learn that race is a construct within our society, one that was created to justify the enslavement of Africans, will only ever see these people as victims or even traitors for selling out their own people. <sup>[30]</sup> A majority of the current Historical standards don't allow teachers to teach the diverse and important details, for instance, *"people's identities were connected to kin or ethnic groups, not to an overarching connection of being part of one big African family."*<sup>[31]</sup> A detail like this can help students realize that Africans were never selling out their kin because the idea of race simply didn't exist—this can also help any African American students in the room feel less like an overarching victim.<sup>34</sup> In turn, this would also allow for a more diverse and open conversation about what it means to be an American in modern times—it can make understanding the actions of their ancestors easier— but not necessarily forgivable. <sup>[32]</sup> While America's standards currently lack on many levels, they don't have to stay that way; there are ways to incorporate some of the most horrific parts of American history into the ideas of American patriotism. If the standards are altered and loosened, then classrooms can have more protrusive and honest conversations about American History. For instance, a teacher can *"facilitate classroom conversations on race that deepen academic curriculum,"* while talking about something as horrific as the slave trade. <sup>[33]</sup> This situation could allow an invaluable chance for students to see the pitfalls of America, to talk about how things have changed while discussing what can be done to ensure a brighter future.

Conversations like this help disrupt inequalities and work to build a better nation, it's easier for someone to love their country when they don't feel like it's against them.[34]

One of the other outcomes of the standards not being true to American History is that it makes the subject of History as a whole, into a less important and less valued topic. Teachers struggle to get the same kind of attention that math and reading classes get, even when they continue to point out how fewer students are coming in prepared for more advanced History classes.[35] The History standards are meant to prepare students as they move up in the grades: instead, it's working to create a false narrative, which makes it harder to teach a subject truthfully.[36] If the standards' intended goal was to cut out large portions of America's History so Patriotism could be increased, then it backfired when it comes to respect & believability. As people come to learn the truth about the United States' past, they will come to distrust what they learned in their history classes. Students need to understand the "value of history" but cutting out specific sections of America's History won't allow them to truly gain an understanding of that value. [37]

Ultimately, the thing holding back American patriotism is its unwillingness to talk about America's hard often problematic past. There doesn't need to be a specific class, dedicated to increasing the patriotic ideals of the nation, there just needs to be an open, honest, and, most importantly, critical conversation about its history.[38] The History standards have dug in though and believe that the best way to handle the problem, is to simply bury the problem.

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# (2022) Second Place: *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and the Creation of Self

by Rachel Roberts

*Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward is a novel that follows the creation and recreation of each of its main characters' identities. Each character, Leonie, Jojo, and Richie, struggle with understanding who they are and their places in the world. Leonie struggles to mediate between her obligations as a mother and her desires as a person. Jojo is growing up in a world that has both high and low expectations for him based on the color of his skin. Richie is the ghost of a young boy struggling to understand his death and his place in the universe at large. Each character undergoes a 'creation of self' which Jerome Bruner describes in his essay, "*The Narrative Creation of Self*."

In Bruner's essay he explains, quite beautifully, that our image of ourselves is not static, but a constantly changing narrative. As Bruner put it, "(T)here is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there to be portrayed in words. Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter and do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future." (Bruner 5) This idea helps the reader gain a better understanding of Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as a story not just of a family struggling to understand each other, but as individuals struggling to understand themselves. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is about self-construction and knowing who we truly are, and it teaches the reader that to be truly whole a person needs not only to know

themselves, but to be recognized for themselves and that sometimes we hurt the ones we love. Leonie is a young black woman who is dating a white man who at the beginning of the novel is still in prison. Leonie and this young man, Michael, are both drug users; ironically while Michael seems to use drugs to block out his ghosts, Leonie uses drugs to contact her ghosts.

Leonie's brother, Given, who was murdered by Michael's cousin, appears to Leonie whenever she gets high. Given's ghost seems to inhabit a form of self-making, as although his ghost is clarified as real in the novel, it can also be read as a metaphor for Leonie's conscience. Leonie sees Given almost every time she takes drugs, a self-destructive action, and notably even sees his apparition when making love with Michael, who is a bad influence on her. Given's apparition is a sign that she knows she should do better but lacks the ability to do so. Despite her actions Leonie does want to be a good mother, such as when she tries to give her daughter an herbal remedy, or denying an herbal abortion when she first became pregnant; however, her lack of skill as a parent and her self absorbed nature prevents her success in this. However, like most humans, Leonie doesn't see the failings in herself. *"Surely, if our selves were transparent to us, we would have no need to tell ourselves about them."* (Bruner 2) Leonie tries to be a good mother, but she doesn't realize how her actions, such as her recreational use of drugs, affects her children. Ultimately this ignorance is what prevents her from living a good life and becoming a whole person.

Jojo, Leonie's son, is thirteen at the start of the novel, so the idea of self-making is most obvious in his character as he becomes an adult. Jojo experiences a sort of 'rite of passage' throughout the novel; as Bruner says on rites of passage, *"(T)hey are often sufficiently painful or taxing to get the idea across. (...) The rite of passage not only encourages but legitimates change."* (Bruner 45) Jojo's rite of passage from childhood into adulthood is muddled somewhat, due to the fact that he is forced to take on many adult responsibilities that his parents ignore. Jojo acts a bit like a parent with his little sister and later is forced to act as a guide for the ghost

Richie. However, out of all the characters, Jojo seems to be the most well-adjusted. Thanks to the care and love his grandparents give him Jojo has a strong base for self-narration, struggling with normal self-doubts a person of his age would have. Despite Jojo's struggles he is the most complete main character in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* because of the love and understanding his grandparents provide.

Richie is the ghost of a young boy who simply wants to 'pass on' to whatever is supposed to come after. Since Richie was so young when he died, about twelve years old, he never had the chance to discover who he really was in life. A part of Bruner's essay which sheds light on Richie's character would be this, "*Individuals who have lost the ability to construct narratives have lost their selves.*" (Young and Saver, 1995) *The construction of selfhood, it seems, cannot proceed without a capacity to narrate.*" (Bruner 54) As a ghost Richie has no real control in the world anymore and he can't discover who he is by himself. Like a broken needle Richie can no longer complete the tapestry of his soul. In the novel Richie seeks to discover the nature of his death hoping that that knowledge will set his soul free to move on. However, upon learning the truth, that his father figure, River (Jojo's grandfather), killed him to keep Richie from being lynched, Richie is still unable to pass on, still haunting Jojo years later. While this is dark there still might be hope for Richie. "*Once we are equipped with that capacity, then we can produce a selfhood that joins us with others, which permits us to hark back selectively to our past while shaping ourselves for the possibilities of an imagined future.*" (Bruner 55) Knowledge of Richie's past may not have set him free, but when Kayla sings at the end of the novel his spirit finally seems to be able to let go with this acknowledgment of his suffering. Richie has been identified as a whole human being by someone and this has given him the last piece he needed to feel like a whole person and be set free.

There is also the main theme of the novel: sometimes we have to hurt the ones we love in order to protect them. A mild example of this would be when Jojo forced his little sister Kayla to throw up an herbal remedy Leonie had given her to keep her from being

poisoned. This example is used to set up the idea to the reader that occasionally causing a form of pain to our loved ones is necessary in order to spare them greater harm. This idea is fully explored with the reveal of River's (Jojo's grandfather) involvement in Richie's death. While killing Richie was a haunting moment for River it was the only thing, he could do to keep Richie from being killed in an even more brutal lynching. Just like Jojo forcing his sister to vomit, River was forced to hurt someone he loved to save them from even more pain. A note should be made here that there is a difference between the necessary actions of Jojo, River, and Leonie's inadvertent cruelties. Both Jojo and River hurt a loved one out of selflessness and a desire to keep further pain from falling on them; Leonie, on the other hand, hurts Jojo and his sister Kayla out of selfishness and ignorance.

In conclusion, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is about self-construction and knowing who we truly are, and it teaches the reader that to be truly whole a person needs not only to know themselves, but to be recognized for themselves and that sometimes we hurt the ones we love. The novel presents us with three different characters, all in different stages of self-making: Leonie who doesn't seem to want to know herself, Jojo who, despite his young age, seems to have a good understanding of himself, and Richie who died before he had a chance to know himself. As the story progresses each character either finds themselves or chooses to remain ignorant. Also, the message that sometimes we need to hurt those we love is poignantly displayed by a haunting story. Overall *Sing, Unburied, Sing* has something to offer every reader.

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# (2022) Third Place: Why International Institutions Fail: The Struggle for Water Rights in West Africa

*by Kevin Chase*

The Nile River supplies water for many countries in the West African region, primarily Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. These three countries rely on the water supplied by the Blue Nile River and have so for thousands of years; this resource is vital to their survival. In the last twenty years, the countries of West Africa have been plagued with civil war, economic hardship, and drought. The Nile River is more important than ever to revive shattered economies and strengthen new governments. The need for the Nile Rivers' water has created tension between Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia. The Nile River is essential for nations in West Africa to live and prosper. Debate over the allocation of water causes disagreement between countries over its proper usage. Negotiations have been ongoing for years and have yet to settle on a way that satisfies each side. Many international institutions, including the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and the US, have been involved in negotiations. Resource disputes can have major economic and political repercussions that can easily escalate into a military matter. It is the goal of this paper to prove why international institutions have failed to resolve resource conflicts in West Africa. In addition, it aims to show that international institutions could never reach a form of "peace" in this region using mediation, policy, or cooperation.

## **GERD Background:**

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has been under construction since 2011 and is located on the Blue Nile River. The main Nile River is fed by two separate rivers, the Blue and White Nile. The Blue Nile starts in Ethiopia and flows down into Sudan, where it meets the White Nile near Sudan's capital city of Khartoum. The main Nile River is formed and flows down through Egypt and ends at the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile supplies the necessary water to support these countries' economically and politically. It is not the first time the Nile Rivers' water has sparked an issue of resource conflict.



*It is important to highlight just how vital this river is to each nation-state involved and for many, this is their primary water source. How did the GERD project create such a conflict, and why have negotiations been ongoing since 2011? The answer lies within the relative gains each country hope to attain at the negotiation table.*

### **Ethiopian Interests:**

Above all things, the Ethiopian government wants to use the GERD to address widespread poverty in the region and supply millions with more reliable electricity. In 2018 Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power following decades of authoritarianism and the country's domination by the Tigrayan minority ethnic group.

"Abiy promised to build bridges spanning ethnic fault lines, cultivate an inclusive nationwide identity, and open up the political space." (Mbaku, 2020) According to the World Bank, Ethiopia's population was approximately 112 million as of

2019 and continues to grow steadily. In 2011 30% of Ethiopia's population sat below the poverty line, and as of 2018, only 44.98% of the population had access to electricity. (World Bank, 2019) Ethiopia wants to use the natural resources of its country to solve these

nationwide issues. Inspired Ethiopians at home and abroad, donated much of the projects starting funds. The GERD has sparked a wave of national pride, Ethiopians now view the dam as a symbol for their nation and continue pushing the government to finish the GERD project. The Ethiopian government has also shown continued interest in sharing information with Sudan and Egypt. During times of drought Ethiopia plans to use the dam to manage the allocation of the Nile rivers waters. (Mbaku, 2020) An offer to exchange information is vital because it shows that Ethiopia wants to use the dam to have a broader effect on the region. Ethiopia has also shown that while it will share information about the dam, it wants complete control of the GERD's operation and management. When the flow of the Nile drops to 35-40 B.C.M. per year, which constitutes a drought, and Egypt has asked Ethiopia to sign into legislation that it will release water from the GERD reservoir when those levels are reached. Ethiopia responded that it dealt with drought situations flexibly and would not agree to that compromise. (EgyptToday, 2021) Ethiopia also started filling the dam early in mid-July of 2020 prior to an agreement between the three countries. Ethiopia feels, however, that it was unfairly represented in the current water treaties set in place in 1959 called the Nile Basin Initiative. This legislation allocated all the Nile rivers water to Egypt and Sudan and afforded little to no water to upstream riparian states. (Mbaku, 2020) The Nile Basin Initiative also afforded Egypt veto power over future Nile River projects. Ethiopia feels as if they are drawing the short straw every time and are not being allowed their proper rights to their country's natural resources. (Mbaku, 2020)

#### ***Sudanese Interests:***

The Sudanese government has seen the potential for domestic development with the GERD but has many concerns. The first issue expressed is of direct national security regarding the ramifications if the GERD dam were to break for any reason. A breach in the dam would cause massive flooding throughout the country, including Sudan's capital city Khartoum. Khartoum is one of the most heavily populated cities in the country, and a breach would devastate the

Sudanese population, economy, and infrastructure. Secondly, Sudan is also concerned that the dam could make it more difficult for the government to manage its development projects in the future. This is a significant concern as Ethiopia will now influence Sudan's hydroelectric projects and other infrastructure developments. Sudan's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Yasir Abbas, has said he *"feared a lack of coordination and data exchange from Ethiopia."* (SciDev.net) A professor of water resources at the National Center for Water Research, Mohamed Dawoud, stated, *"The Sudanese Dams are relatively small, in the case of an abundance of water, or a sudden flood that necessitates the release of large quantities of water, it is possible that the Sudanese Dams will not bear this pressure and collapse."* (SciDev.Net)

The Sudanese are open to more hydroelectric developments, but a resolution has not yet been reached on filling the GERD; thus, these problems continue. Minister Yasir Abbas has every reason to question Ethiopia's honesty in cooperation as the premature filling of the GERD was solely in Ethiopia's' interest. Sudan has not made any military threats throughout this entire conflict and has stayed away from any hostile threats. Egypt has focused on negotiation but has also made multiple threats of potential military intervention.

### ***Egyptian Interests:***

*"At its core, the Egyptian identity is the Nile,"* (Mbaku, 2021) because of that, Egyptians have and always will fight for the Nile water rights tooth and nail. In 2020 the Egyptian Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs put a message on social media stating, *"More than 40 million Egyptians are facing the threat of drought and thirst... The cause of water shortage is Ethiopia building a dam five times bigger than it needs."* (Mbaku, 2020) The idea of Ethiopia threatening Egyptian livelihoods has outraged most of the population, and many have encouraged the government to intervene with military action if necessary. From the realist perspective, Egypt would have every right to do so, as they see their state afflicted by an outside force.

The conflict over the Nile has created a wave of Egyptian national

pride as the entire population of Egypt relies on the Nile Rivers' water. The Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources of Egypt, Mohamed Abdel, stated in an interview, *"Data exchange is a step that follows reaching an agreement. We have not reached an agreement on data exchange... If they have good intentions, we shall make the agreement go into force right away, and then, exchange data and experience, and work together."* (Tawil, 2021) Minister Abdel expressed that the reason they are unable to reach an agreement on information sharing is due to "unilateral acts, and it can be expected to happen in the long-run." (Tawil, 2021) Unilateral acts such as the two fillings of the GERD reservoir that went against the wishes of Egypt and Sudan. Minister Abdel also claimed, *"we are actually following all data on the dam filling and have more data than Ethiopia has... such data is easy to acquire."* (Tawil, 2021) Egypt has suspicions about Ethiopia's integrity to uphold its end of the deal if complications arise.

Due to the increase in flash droughts attributed to global warming over the last twenty years, Egypt has made several adjustments to help conserve water and release pressure on dams. Egypt *"built rainwater harvest dams and wastewater treatment plants, lined canals, rationalized water use, introduced smart and modern irrigation systems, explored and managed underground water."*(Sowers, 2021) As well as adjustments to specific crops that require a large amount of water such as bananas and sugar cane. All this is to fight against the rapidly changing climate for the ecosystem to be able to sustain a "shock." Three scenarios Egypt has laid out as possibly having a negative effect are a filling during a drought, filling in time of a medium flood, and filling in time of the high flood. Each one of these scenarios directly affects Egyptian and Sudanese dams. Egypt continues to push for negotiations with Ethiopia but fear that Ethiopia is more concerned with their personal advancement than the region and other riparian states. Again, Egypt has also threatened military action, indirectly green-lit by the United States back in 2019.

This resource dispute can easily become a military matter

because economic harm can directly affect the military of a nation-state. Since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Egypt has seen itself in an identity crisis, and while the government has not moved forward with military intervention, nationalistic ideals have driven some of the Egyptian population to take matters into their own hands. In 2020 Foreign Policy posted an article titled *“The Egyptian-Ethiopian Water War has Begun,”* which talks about a group called “Cyber\_Horus” who hacked into over a dozen Ethiopian government websites. Cyber\_Horus displayed a message to the Ethiopian population stating, *“If the river’s level drops, let all the Pharaoh’s soldiers hurry... Prepare the Ethiopian people for the wrath of the Pharaohs.”* (Mersie, 2020) Egyptians and Ethiopians have now started battles online via social media platforms gathering support for both sides and raising awareness about the GERD project. In September of 2020, an Egyptian immigrant activist named Hamdy al-Azazy reported Egyptian citizens and authorities harassing Ethiopian refugees. (Mersie, 2020) This brushes on the idea of identity theory and internal identity because for Egyptians, their identity is the Nile. Egyptians mistreat Ethiopian refugees because they see them as outsiders and a threat to their internal identity.

### **Key Issues Blocking Negotiations:**

The main three issues holding negotiating back are: first, a lack of trust in information sharing between the three nations. Secondly, Ethiopia will not agree to any proposal put forth by Egypt and Sudan on when and how to fill the GERD. Finally, the Ethiopian government does not wish for any outside actors to be involved in the negotiations, while Egypt and Sudan have appealed to the AU, UN, EU, and the US, Ethiopia is ready to move forward with this project and has the full backing of its citizenry. Ethiopia rejected the Sudanese proposal to involve the UN, EU, and US as of April 6, 2021. Egypt’s Foreign Ministry stated, *“This position reveals once again Ethiopia’s lack of political will to negotiate in good faith.”* (Al Jazeera, 2021) Ethiopia feels that these actors do not fairly represent Ethiopian interest, and Ethiopia has already violated UN international law, *“codified in the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of*

*the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses*” (Atlantic Council, 2020) by filling the dam before setting agreeable terms. In November of 2019, Ethiopia again rejected Sudan and Egypt’s proposal to fill the dam. (Atlantic Council, 2020) In April, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia stated they would begin the second filing of the GERD in autumn of 2020, which led Egypt to formally complain to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in May. The countries pleaded that the negotiations continue before they experience any negative backlash. Later in June, Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister announced the filling would begin in July, which escalated matters significantly. Egypt reacted by filing a request for intervention with the UNSC and sent two letters voicing their growing concerns. In one of these letters, Sudan also voiced their deep concerns, “*citing very high risk to the lives of millions of Sudanese.*” (Atlantic Council, 2020)

There is no natural end in sight, and as the parties involved continue to disagree, no new initiatives have been brought forth to end the GERD dispute. Only the AU is recognized as active negotiators in the meetings where the UN, EU, and US have all been observers to the mediations. In 2019 the US was an active negotiator until the AU felt that the US was doing more harm than good in terms of reaching peace in the region. President Trump stated on a conference call, “*If Ethiopia builds that Dam, Egypt will have no choice but to blow the thing up.*” (Foreign Policy, 2020) One important thing to note is the interest of these outside actors in negotiations.

Egypt plays a pivotal role in international trade in the West African region and provides trade routes via the Suez Canal for Arab oil to Europe and the US. From a realist point of view, it is the individual incentives that push international institutions to intervene in international conflicts. For most countries and individual’s money is the primary motivation, and the oil from the Middle East and West Africa is very profitable. Looking at the article published by John Mearsheimer titled “*The False Promise of international institutions,*” the author highlights that nation states



aim to secure their survival above everyone else. Countries will not negotiate and cooperate unless a personal incentive is involved.

### **Distrust Amongst States:**

The relative gains of each country have been laid out and examined. Using the model of analysis by John Mearsheimer, this paper aims to dive further and analyze the different situations that prohibit long term resource stability in West Africa. The first issue that will be difficult to overcome is the lack of trust between these nation-states and the outside actors helping with negotiations. *"States regard each other with suspicion...(and) they anticipate danger."* (Mearsheimer, 1994) The events of April 6, 2021, when Ethiopia denied the proposition put forth by Sudan to involve the EN, UN, and the US, made tensions proliferate between these nation-states. This evidence is supported when Egypt's Foreign Ministry states, *"This position reveals once again Ethiopia's lack of political will to negotiate in good faith."* (Al Jazeera, 2021) This also confirms "Sudan's Minister Yasir Abbas's" fear when he claimed, "he feared a lack of coordination and data exchange from Ethiopia." (SciDev.net) Mearsheimer points out that there is little trust among states, and to survive, one must always be suspicious of other states and reluctant to trust them.

Egypt lacks trust in Ethiopia regarding information sharing about the GERD dam. Minister Mohamed Abdel from Egypt, commented on the quantity of data Egypt had over Ethiopia on their hydroelectric development project. He claimed Egypt was able to transparently gather data on the GERD, giving Egypt further insight to Ethiopia's hydroelectric developments. Ethiopia has also shown that it does not care if an agreement is reached as, it has already started filling the dam twice. This brings up the fear of cheating among states, one of the most significant flaws of international institutions in realism.

### **Fear of Cheating:**

John Mearsheimer claimed that *"States in a realist world are concerned with the balance of power, so they must be motivated primarily by relative gains concerns when considering cooperation."*

(Mearsheimer, 1994) When concerns of cheating arise, and a state feels their relative gain needs are not being met, distrust can arise. From Ethiopia's standpoint, they have never been fairly represented in negotiations dating back to 1929 during the first water resource treaty titled the "Anglo-Egyptian Treaty." During this, British colonists represented Egyptian interests, and therefore Ethiopia was unfairly represented. Then in 1959, during the "Nile Basin Initiative," Ethiopia's interests were overlooked once again. Mearsheimer states that while liberal institutions do have ways to cheat economically in negotiations, economic issues can quickly become military ones when economic hardship directly affects military power. While one might be concerned about cheating on a political-economic front and have ways around that, the possibility of military force being used cannot be ignored. Egypt's actions show that they can and will use military might if they must.

This is only part of why this conflict seems to have no end. Relative gains considerations do not make cooperation impossible; instead, they can pose a severe impediment to cooperation and must be considered when developing a cooperation theory among states. Liberal institutions may attain a form of temporary peace at some point, but liberal institutionalism does not define what peace is; it only provides a road map on how to get there. Because there is no comprehensible way to eradicate the distrust between these nation-states, any form of peace will always be subject to a possible conflict.

### **"Peace" Is Impossible:**

The article "Sharing the Nile: Egypt, Ethiopia and the Geo-Politics of Water" talks about the rapid climate change in the West-African region and the significant impacts it has caused. Egypt's first concern was filling the GERD during a time of drought. *"When drought does come, it can bring hardship, food insecurity, and often a disaster, due to lack of water storage and alternative livelihoods."* (Milas, 2013) Many nations share this resource, eleven to be exact, and approximately 300 million people are dependent on the river every day. The concerns on Sudanese dams in a high flood area are

that their dams may collapse under the pressure if a large amount of water is needed to be released. The article *"Egypt points to flaws in Renaissance Dam,"* published in March of 2021, expands even more on the possible ramifications on the climate and natural resources. The author talks about a significant crisis in Sudan points to the consequences of the GERD project when Ethiopia started filling the dam without notifying the Sudanese government. (MiddleEastMonitor, 2021) During the peak drought season, Sudan was forced to drain many of its major dams, which resulted in drinking water being turned off in their capital city of Khartoum and irregular riverbed sediments thickening, harming riverside homes and farms. The following months resulted in many unpredictable floods. Water scarcity is also a considerable problem as Ismail Serageldin stated, *"the Arab world, for example, has about 5 percent of the world's population, but only 1 percent of the water."* (Serageldin, 2009) There has also been discussion on who is best fit to oversee these negotiations to satisfy everyone. In an article published by ISSUAFRICA titled *"The AU's role beyond the GERD negotiations,"* the author quotes the South African president and head of the AU Cyril Ramaphosa, who said we need *"African solutions to African problems."* (Yihun, 2014) This is very important to consider as the AU is the only "outside" group that is actively participating in negotiations up to this point. Mostly the AU has only been able to keep the situation from escalating to a military issue through negotiation, especially after the 2019 event regarding President Trump and his comments on the issue.

Applying the realist perspective to this dispute shows how each nation-state's actions are directly linked to their incentive, and this includes international institutions as well. Each country has a goal, and this analysis shows how and why each country wants to achieve it. From these articles, we can also see that tension and distrust in the region already exist, and many could argue that there is no real way to rebuild that trust once it has been betrayed. This, along with the forever lingering concerns of the effects on the region's natural resources and the danger to Egypt and Sudan's hydroelectric dams.

As it stands, Ethiopia communicates with good intentions but shows through action how little it regards Sudan and Egypt. Both Egypt and Sudan have been guilty of shorting other riparian states in previous negotiations. Lastly, Ethiopia will be reluctant to work with the EU, US, and the UN for two reasons. First, they also know well that these institutions only participate for their gain. Secondly, Ethiopia has already violated UN international law and would possibly be punished for that in a negotiation overseen by the UN. The construction of the GERD and its disputes is a prime example that highlights the flaws of liberal institutionalism and solidifies the realist theory that nation-states act according to their self-interests.

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## PART IV

# LITERATURE-BASED RESEARCH

This section features research essays analyzing published sources. Authors must follow documentation styles specific to their disciplines. Essays should not exceed 20 pages.





# (2021) First Place: Election Interference: An Evolving Strategic Situation

*By Andrew Rose*

While democratic government is a commonplace geopolitical model today, there are still some states dedicated to the erosion of democratic values. Perhaps there is no pillar more integral to a functioning democracy than free elections. One of the best ways to compromise that foundation is through election interference. This practice, which can involve cyber-attacks on a variety of targets, the dispersal of ‘fake News’ and the co-option of stateside actors, has recently become a topic of much discussion. It is, in fact, too far ranging a concept to tackle in one place. The many disparate appearances which interference takes on, as well as its many potential trajectories complicate any study of the matter. A completely comprehensive survey will not be undertaken here.

Firstly, what exactly election interference is must be defined. The exactness is what makes this a demanding task. When it is accomplished, it should be clear what harm interference can really do. The next point of exploration is one that becomes increasingly complex depending upon one’s worldview and political affiliation: what can be done about it?

As a destabilizing tool, election interference has been deployed with increasing dexterity by numerous international actors. While most modern states have offensive and defensive cyber tools in their arsenals, there are only a select handful which use cyber meddling to interfere in elections and other democratic processes. China, North Korea, and Iran all engage in cyber meddling and

election interference, although with sometimes diverging methods and disparate goals in mind.

It should be stated clearly that despite the plethora of cyber tools common to interference, not all interference is perpetrated via cyber means and there are many offensive cyber capabilities which do not constitute election interference. This review will not detail all cyberoperations, but it will attempt to clarify the extent of interference and its body of tactics. As it is a rapidly ballooning field of research, only Russia's efforts will be discussed at length here. Interference typically has three kinds of outcomes, these being 1) to manipulate votes 2) to manipulate voters and 3) to undermine voter confidence; while no U.S. votes have ever been directly manipulated (as far as we can observe) the tandem goals of manipulating voters and undermining voter confidence have certainly been met.

Targeted states cannot wholly neutralize sustained efforts at interference but there is a wide array of mitigating strategies that has proven successful. These strategies (for the sake of brevity, only Canada's response will be summarized here) when compared with the strategic response of the U.S. may reveal strengths as well as weaknesses in our defense against election interference. The evolving strategic threat of foreign interference requires an evolved defensive strategy if the threat is to be effectively mitigated.

### **Russian Strategy**

Information manipulation has always been a tactic of authoritarian regimes and illiberal governments. Ever since the advent of the printing press, unscrupulous statesmen have sought to exercise control over the various narratives consumed by their people. Every revolution in information and communication technology—from the invention of the telegraph to the first computers—has altered the art of information manipulation. The creation of the internet was no different. Even as society wavers on the cusp of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) era, there remains a significant struggle to understand the penetrating influence of the world wide web. While its virtues are undeniable, its dark potentialities have become increasingly troubling with time.

Perhaps there is no regime more well-equipped to comprehend these dark potentialities than Russia and no statesman living more unscrupulous than Vladimir Putin.

Putin's strategy of covert information warfare is founded on the Gerasimov Doctrine, named for the Chief of the General Staff (Russian Armed Forces), General Valery Gerasimov. His Doctrine, which calls for a kind of 'hybrid warfare' involving cyber capabilities and propaganda, remains a government-wide policy even in peacetime. This doctrine is couched in a larger foreign policy doctrine named after Yevgeny Primakov. Students of Russian history will recognize Primakov not only as a powerful politician and diplomat but also as the man who oversaw the KGB's near-seamless transition into the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service). The Primakov Doctrine calls for Russian supremacy in the post-Soviet sphere of influence and a strong oppositional stance towards both U.S. power and the expansion of NATO.<sup>[1]</sup>

A report from the Center for a New American Security explains how Russia has always, at least in its two most recent iterations, been quick to acquaint itself with new manipulation tactics and capabilities:

*"While propaganda has long been a part of the Kremlin's arsenal—playing a prominent role throughout the Cold War—Russia's conflict with Georgia in 2008 marked an important turning point in the Kremlin's use of information warfare. The Kremlin perceived that Russia lost the battle over the narrative of events in Georgia, underscoring for Moscow the importance of being able to advance Russia's worldview."*<sup>[2]</sup>

The Georgian-Russian War, despite its brevity, was the first time cyber capabilities were used in a context of warfare.<sup>[3]</sup> After a swift victory and a negotiated ceasefire Russian troops continued to occupy Russian speaking sectors of Georgia, disregarding the terms of the ceasefire.<sup>[4]</sup> Despite being able to claim victory the Kremlin felt that their control of international perceptions, especially online, was compromised and immediately set about improving Russia's information warfare capabilities.

The reader may recall that Russia has since gone on to annex another bordering territory (in the Crimea) after a remarkably similar but more efficient campaign.<sup>[5]</sup> The evolving information landscape of the 21st Century, brought about in part by the internet, has convinced many states— Russia chief among them—to manipulate not only their own populations, but also diaspora communities and foreign citizens of adversarial states. Russia has the overarching strategy to justify interference, it has practical experience and no qualms about interfering. So, what does modern election interference really look like?

### **Russian Interference Tactics**

As has been noted, there are three broad kinds of outcomes typically sought when interfering in a target state's elections or other democratic processes. At the risk of being repetitive they are to 1) manipulate votes 2) manipulate voters and 3) to undermine voter confidence. Each outcome typically involves multiple tactics and there are many tactics which may contribute to the success of multiple outcomes.

While Russia has successfully manipulated online vote counts in the past (2014 Ukrainian Presidential Election) there is no evidence that they have attempted this when interfering in U.S. elections.<sup>[6]</sup> One may wonder why, since tech conferences have shown that many voting machines currently in use in the U.S. can be compromised by even inexperienced hackers with relative ease. For one, this kind of security breach would constitute a significant escalation—an explicit violation of international law on Russia's part.<sup>[7]</sup> Perhaps it is also partly because Russia has found so much success in achieving the other two outcomes by exploiting existing social divisions and sowing doubt via relatively weak platform infrastructures and willing stateside actors. It should be mentioned that while official vote tallies have not been compromised, voter rolls and official election websites have been successfully targeted before.

Since as early as 2014 the Kremlin has pumped money, disinformation, and inflammatory rhetoric into nearly every social

media platform via state-controlled media outlets, troll-farms, and shadow organizations. Some favored tactics are to play up racial divisions, spread conspiracy theories and to organize mutually antagonistic protests. All these tactics are designed to serve an overarching strategy. That is, to sow confusion and undermine faith in the democratic system. Most states witnessed attempted hacks of their electoral systems in 2016. Internal documents from Hillary Clinton's campaign were successfully hacked and published. The DNC also had internal documents published in the run-up to the election.<sup>[8]</sup> Those committing acts of interference are often peripheral actors whose links to the Russian state can be challenging to confirm. Most clues, however, point either directly or indirectly to the influence of the Kremlin and other Russian intelligence/security ministries.

One episode from the 2016 presidential election obscured the then-emerging issue of interference. On July 27th, candidate Donald Trump appeared to plead directly to Russia while he addressed a crowd at a campaign event in Florida. Looking into the camera, he said "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing" (referencing deleted emails from Hillary Clinton's private server). Later that day, operatives of GRU (Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate) attempted to hack email accounts connected with Clinton's personal office.<sup>[9]</sup> Whether or not a candidate publicly asks for foreign interference, the public appearance of doing so—sarcastic or not—serves to cloud the real danger posed by interference.

Kremlin-backed operations learned a lot from 2016. While the overall strategy remains largely the same, tactics have shifted to provide even more deniability. According to a 2019 report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "Russia has reduced original content creation in favor of amplifying authentic U.S. voices online to better obfuscate the extent of their interference."<sup>[10]</sup> It has become increasingly apparent that there are a multitude of 'authentic U.S. voices' that are all too eager to echo the propaganda and intentionally divisive rhetoric peddled by

the Kremlin. Which of these voices are conscious of their alignment remains troublingly unclear.

Another disconcerting development can be found in the rising popularity of artificial intelligence as a weapon for waging information warfare. ‘Deep-fakes’ (altered video content which can convince the undiscerning eye) have swarmed social media platforms with misleading material for a few years now. Advances in AI have made the production of deep fakes a much easier task, and technology has become obtainable everywhere.

All the tactics employed by Russia have been relatively subtle, but they have also posed real threats to the smooth continuation of the democratic process and the sway of democratic values. In 2020, Russia’s playbook for interference expanded upon proven tactics and introduced unfamiliar tactics. Their overarching strategy remains the same but the means to implement that desired end are evolving right alongside the information landscape.

### **U.S. in the Wake of 2016 Interference**

Ever since the facts of foreign election interference became clear to the public, the issue has become a cultural flashpoint and, in many ways, a partisan slugfest. During the 2016 election, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell initially declined to cooperate with the White House when it came to publicizing the facts of interference. Nearly out of options, President Obama confronted Vladimir Putin privately at a summit.

As a last resort, a public statement on Russian Interference was released in October, rather late in the campaign season. In December of 2016, several Russian diplomats, accused of spying, were expelled and their facilities were seized. Numerous punitive sanctions were also levelled by the Obama administration before the transition of power.<sup>[11]</sup>

After the election was over, many Republicans were quick to claim that Russian election interference had not been significant enough to influence the results. Conversely, many Democrats quickly seized upon initial findings in order to question the legitimacy of Trump’s election to the presidency.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Russia denied all

accusations of interference. At this point, the definitions of interference were nowhere near cohesive, and the timeline of events was still far from comprehensive. A self-published report from 2020 detailing case studies of foreign interference in Asia made this clarification: “...because accusations of foreign interference often...have political implications and evidence is often murky, nations who are accused of foreign interference, as well as domestic actors who have been accused of being complicit in foreign interference, often contend that they have been wrongly accused.”<sup>[12]</sup> Sufficient evidence is paramount when levelling accusations and denials of wrongdoing are, by no means, sufficient evidence for exoneration.

In 2017, not long after the Director of the FBI (James Comey) was fired, the Department of Justice appointed a special counsel to oversee an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. There were reports that the President was stopped, by his own subordinates, from ending the investigation prematurely. In March of 2019, the LA Times reported that “Mueller and his team ultimately charged 34 individuals, including 25 Russians. Seven people pleaded guilty, including several in Trump’s inner orbit.” <sup>[13]</sup> The former President’s willingness to pardon his associates and/or downplay their convictions did not help to ease confusion or division around the issue.

Aside from dozens of indictments and numerous follow-up investigations, the final report produced by the special counsel detailed some of the Russian interference operations that transpired either during 2016, or in the few years prior. The American Constitution Society provided this bullet point analysis of the special counsel’s election interference findings:

- Russian interference in the 2016 election was “sweeping and systemic.”
- Major attack avenues included a social media “information warfare” campaign that “favored” candidate Trump and the hacking of Clinton campaign-related databases and release of

stolen materials through Russian-created entities and Wikileaks.

- Russia also targeted databases in many states related to administering elections gaining access to information for millions of registered voters.<sup>16</sup>

While the special counsel did not indict any American citizens for conspiracy or collusion, the findings specified that the President could not be exonerated from the charges of obstruction of justice. The President's attempts to shut down the investigation had become a central pillar of the investigation.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **A Divided Response**

As has been hinted at, there was much disagreement as to how to respond to the new strategic threat presented by election interference. As has been alluded to above, the President's finances and ties to Russia, as well as his uncouth behavior during the campaign, came under intense and immediate scrutiny. Support for the President, as he deflected allegations and prompted investigations, fell mostly along party lines. This partisan dispute is still a feature of the ongoing debate around interference and deterrence.

A 2017 report from the Air University Press sums up the position of the U.S. (at the time) in regard to interference rather nicely: "Current US strategy falls short on several key attributes necessary for effective deterrence...deterrence by denial is a passive strategy—and insufficient on its own to achieve cyber deterrence."<sup>[15]</sup> Denial of any sort, whether it be wholesale or piecemeal, ultimately compromises efforts at real deterrence. Denial will not just muddle strategies for cyber deterrence. It actively hinders most of the mitigating strategies for deterring future interference.

Most actors, however, did not retreat to outright denial and both sides came to agree on certain points, such as levelling sanctions, holding social media platforms into account, and increasing federal funding for voting infrastructure. Significant discord arises when



the severity of sanctions, the correct way to hold platforms accountable and/or the amount of funding are debated.

While President Trump initially approved sanctions on Russian individuals and organizations, his administration drew bipartisan criticism from both houses of Congress for lifting sanctions on Oleg Deripaska (an oligarch with ties to Vladimir Putin & Paul Manafort) in 2019.<sup>[16]</sup> Democrats on the hill found the rationalizations of the Treasury Department (which oversees the implementation of sanctions) unconvincing and criticized any show of leniency towards the shadowy billionaire.<sup>[17]</sup> Lifting sanctions—that have been placed in retaliation for interference—inevitably colors the responsive strategy as inconsistent.

Republicans have consistently disagreed with Democrats about how exactly to hold social media companies to account. Tech and media giants, including officers representing Facebook, Twitter and more recently Google, have testified before Senate committee's multiple times since 2016. They've been grilled on their ability to combat fake news as well as their methods therein and the transparency of those methods. While Democrats have largely insisted on greater transparency for advertising policies and more fact-checking, Republicans have echoed the President, claiming that internet platforms 'censor' conservative voices more than others.<sup>[18]</sup> Voices from either party strongly support reforming Section 230, which governs internet platform liability. Reforms look completely different depending upon the side one finds themselves aligned with. The former President also voiced significant frustration with Section 230 while he held office.<sup>[19]</sup>

Both parties more-or-less agree on increasing funding for voting infrastructure, but disagreements tend to center on the amount and priority of funding. In 2016, there hadn't been federal funding allocated for election upgrades/security since HAVA (Help America Vote Act, 2002).<sup>[20]</sup> Several bipartisan bills dealing with election security were introduced in Congress from 2017-2019. Most of those bills have not cleared both chambers.<sup>[21]</sup> In 2019 Congress appropriated \$380 million for the U.S. Election Assistance

Commission to disburse to the states and passed the DETER Act which denied visas for election meddlers.[\[22\]](#) Federal funding of elections remains a point of legislative contention.

Despite some important compromises being made in the past four years, disagreements seem to have weighed more heavily on public opinion. In 2020, Pew Research found that “Americans have become less confident that the federal government is making serious efforts to protect U.S. elections from hacking and other technological threats. Since October 2018, the share of Americans who say this has declined from 55% to 47%.” [\[23\]](#)[\[24\]](#) As the threat persists and waxes in strength, many political leaders complicate matters, and more people are losing confidence in the response to interference.

### **Traditional & Social Media Response**

It is plain to see that media outlets, regardless of medium, have an integral role to play in combating election interference. A 2020 report from CSIS concerning Russian and Chinese interference came to this conclusion: “A vibrant free press has proven to be critical...in exposing the full extent of malign interference activities by foreign authoritarian governments and launching national debates around how to best respond...Democracies with high trust in traditional media appear less vulnerable to information manipulation...” [\[25\]](#) While President Trump is inclined to inhabit and influence the airwaves, he and his slew of press secretaries frequently labeled critical and objective press stories as ‘fake news.’ Does this reflect a distrust of traditional media or has trust been purposely eroded? Or perhaps both?

Social media is a relatively new occurrence in the information landscape. It seems safe to say that much misinformation and disinformation (information which is accidentally misleading or purposely misleading), whether originating from foreign sources or being amplified by them, appears on such platforms. Because social media was not originally conceived of as an alternative source of news, the reckoning has been labored and slow moving. Much has been made of increased congressional oversight and various

internal changes, but many question the sincerity and efficacy of these incremental shifts. A 2020 report from New America summarized the state of things like this:

*“Since 2016, internet platforms have instituted a range of policies and practices that seek to identify and curb the spread of election-related misinformation and disinformation. However, experts and users have little confidence in the efficacy of these measures...there is still a significant lack of transparency around how these platforms are creating and implementing these policies, sparking concerns that these policies are not being implemented consistently and are ineffective. In addition, this has also raised concerns that platforms may be prioritizing profit over the safeguarding of user rights and the electoral process.”* [26]

Platforms that have banned political advertising outright would almost certainly deny that they are prioritizing profit, yet it can be questioned whether their approach is helpful to the larger situation or merely helpful in limiting their own liability.

While there is no question that platforms have stepped up their efforts to clamp down on manipulated information, there remain glaring and manifold loopholes even among the most powerful players. A recent example of one of these loopholes was detailed in an NPR article by Shannon Bond:

*“Facebook...users shared a screenshot of a tweet claiming, falsely, that President Trump was deliberately infected with COVID-19 by “the left.” Facebook overlaid a warning label on some versions of the post, saying independent fact-checkers determined it was “false information,” and linking to a USA Today article debunking the claim. But Facebook did not apply the same label to versions of the message that were nearly identical, except with different backgrounds or cropping’s...nearly 42% [of misleading posts], were not labeled, even though they contained claims that had been debunked.”* [27]

Even as Mr. Zuckerberg and other internet moguls defend the capacity of their platforms to combat fake news—even as their efforts have been doubled and apparently redoubled—manipulated (and often malicious) information still manages to find a welcoming

home on a platform meant to foster networking. These platforms do just that on a scale that used to be unimaginable.

### **Voting Infrastructure & Civil Society**

Another considerable obstacle to mitigating the effects of interference is improving voting infrastructure. The administration of U.S. elections, including federal elections, is left up to the states. While some states have uniform voting systems and updated voting technology, others have patchwork voting systems and outdated voting technology. According to a 2019 analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice, there were at least eight states that would still have paperless balloting in 2020. That same analysis also noted that many states still do not mandate post-election audits before certification of results.[\[28\]](#) While these gaps in the system do not necessarily jeopardize the overall security of elections, they do lend themselves somewhat to popular doubts about the integrity of the process.

One major hurdle to improving infrastructure is the absence of concerted leadership, as Kamarck and West point out in their book, *Dirty Tricks in the Digital Age*: “State and federal governments are stepping up to the problem of cybersecurity in American elections, but they are doing so within their existing authorities and without executive or congressional leadership.”[\[29\]](#) For instance, in August then-President Trump threatened to sabotage funding for mail-in balloting (something integral to voting infrastructure, especially mid-pandemic) before recharacterizing his statements.[\[30\]](#) He continues to claim, on a related note and without evidence, that there are vast infrastructural loopholes which allowed for widespread voter fraud to occur in the 2020 presidential election.[\[31\]](#) Such posturing renders the improvement of infrastructure a needlessly fraught process.

When the head of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), a nonpartisan official tasked with securing elections, confirmed the security of voting infrastructure in a joint statement, he was fired for making supposedly inaccurate statements.[\[32\]](#) According to a contemporaneous PolitiFact fact-check no

“substantial or coherent” evidence was provided by the Trump Administration as to how the CISA statement was inaccurate.<sup>[33]</sup> There are not a few improvements to be made before the effects of interference can be allayed, but suggesting the entire system is rotten to the core, without a substantial foundation, serves to complicate efforts at structural upkeep and borders on actual interference, albeit of a domestic flavor.

A productive strategy to counter election meddling includes the forceful rebuttal of misinformation and disinformation about voting infrastructure. For a rebuttal to be potent, it must be delivered in a coordinated and cooperative fashion. Even a single voice of contradiction will undermine the effect of the rebuttal. As a report from the Army Cyber Institute makes clear, a fruitful response to election meddling requires significant levels of coordination, not only within government, but also with private parties and elements of civil society:

*“If states aim to reduce their vulnerabilities and contrast cyber threats such as cyber election meddling...The identification of further preventive efforts, in terms of strengthening cyber defense capabilities to protect electoral processes, is a topic that merits further discussion...states have to think in terms of integrated strategies which cannot avoid the involvement of international law, but, at the same time, must require the active intervention of other disciplines.”<sup>[34]</sup>*

While much of American civil society (i.e. institutions of education, advocacy, and business) have responded to the need for a coordinated rebuttal, not all relevant players are willing to cooperate. Efforts to integrate strategies across the board are all too easily hamstrung by vocal dissent.

The internet moguls are changing their approaches measure by measure, yet the information landscape may change quicker. Institutions of education and research have shed light on the topic (perhaps it has never been so well lit) and yet the very meaning of ‘fake news’ remains a matter of public controversy. Technological advancements provide for greater coordination and a more

meaningful rebuttal in terms of cyber defense and safeguarding infrastructure, and yet these gains may be ultimately inconsequential. U.S. civil society has its fair share of interference disavowers/enablers, and such attitudes even seem to have taken entire portions of the federal government hostage for a time (sans the intel community). The dissent within civil society would likely not be as meaningful if there were not viewpoints within government to lend them legitimacy. Can the words and actions of leaders really undercut the success of a cooperative response?

### **Leadership in a Coordinated Response**

One essential factor of coordinating to prevent foreign interference (and mitigate its effects) is clear and consistent leadership. Has this outcome proved evasive or attainable? Another excerpt from *Dirty Tricks in the Digital Age* reads: “From the very beginning of his presidency, Donald Trump has denied or downplayed Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign. He has at various times dismissed the entire idea as a hoax, as fake news, or as an excuse by Democrats for why they lost the election. At other times, he has proclaimed his innocence vis-à-vis Russian campaign interference.” [35] Said declarations of innocence recall the elaboration on accused domestic actors mentioned in the *Case Studies of Foreign Interference in Asia* (pg. 8). Consider the Trump Administration’s near-categorical dismissal of Russian interference reporting in contrast to their selective amplification of Chinese Interference news (detailed on pgs. 17, 18). A consistent leadership approach in combating foreign interference seems to have been a rather evasive proposition in 2020.

A thematic brief on the congressional investigations of Donald Trump from the think tank Third Way confirms the complicating patterns displayed by the President:

*“President Trump’s governing style deviates dramatically from the approaches followed by his predecessors. His propensity to ask for foreign interference in American Elections, lack of transparency, erratic decision making, political retaliation and potential self-dealing has led to over 300 House congressional hearings and more*

than 900 oversight letters into his actions. It has also resulted in federal criminal investigations into Trump associates, and criminal and civil investigations in New York state, where the Trump Organization is headquartered...While Republicans have focused their complaints on minor procedural flaws within the investigations, they have been unable to disprove the main allegations against the president: that he sought and accepted assistance from foreign governments for his personal and political benefit, obstructed investigations into those allegations, and been personally self-enriched at the taxpayers' expense."[\[36\]](#)

The former President's reactions to election interference are striking when juxtaposed with the above allegations. He has even availed himself of one of the favored tactics of the Kremlin, that is, to sow doubt about the integrity of elections. Unrealistic doubts expressed by even one leader, especially one so powerful, can place a cloud of uncertainty around a larger issue. This has unavoidable ramifications for any democratic society.

A recent AP-Norc Poll found that most Americans are at least "somewhat concerned" about the possibility of foreign interference in this year's election. Their findings continue:

"Austin Wright, an assistant professor at the University of Chicago's Harris School, said it was striking that Americans are not more concerned by the threat of foreign interference given the range of dangers. He suggested that may have to do with domestic concerns currently occupying public attention, and with the fact that some American leaders — including Trump — are themselves working to undermine confidence in the election. The August intelligence assessment that outlined ongoing Russian interference also noted that China regards Trump as unpredictable, prefers that he lose to Biden and has been working to shape the U.S. policy environment. Trump has seized on that finding as he and several other senior administration officials have tried to make the case that Beijing is the more assertive adversary. Trump has repeatedly maintained that China is working to defeat him, though Microsoft noted in a blog

post last month that among those targeted by Chinese state-backed hackers are people associated with the Biden campaign.” [37]

Campaigns were being targeted by foreign adversaries and at least one candidate actively sowed confusion—it’s no wonder most Americans were worried. Is it possible that the top-down proliferation of incertitude has lessened the impact of foreign interference news?

According to an analysis provided by the Washington Post, whistleblower Brian Murphy—a senior DHS official—alleged that department officials enjoined him to shift the focus of his assessments of foreign interference to states other than Russia:

*“In mid-May 2020,’ the complaint reads, ‘Mr. Wolf instructed Mr. Murphy to cease providing intelligence assessments on the threat of Russian interference in the United States, and instead start reporting on interference activities by China and Iran.’ The instructions, Wolf allegedly said, came from Robert C. O’Brien, Trump’s top aide on national security...”*

The analysis goes on to paraphrase and quote William Evanina, the Director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center. He added some clarity to Russia and China’s divergent goals and strategies:

*“In early August, more detail was added by Evanina: China actually hoped that Trump would lose the election given his ‘unpredictable’ nature. China wasn’t trying to shape voter outcomes specifically, however, while Russia was. ‘We assess that Russia is using a range of measures to primarily denigrate former vice president Biden and what it sees as an anti-Russia establishment,’ Evanina said at the time.” [38]*

Even though the former President and his top administration officials recognized some instances of interference, they muddled the seriousness of the threat and complicated the work that counters it when they cherry picked conclusions.

One of the essential elements of prevention and mitigation is sharing all findings publicly, when deemed necessary. Arbitrarily deeming some findings pertinent and others not, and then



publicizing the former before full governmental coordination, is questionable. As the chief executive of the federal government, the president has substantial power to set the standards for the federal response to election interference.

### **Summary of the Canadian Situation**

To put the U.S. response in perspective, let's briefly consider the approach taken by a close neighbor and ally, Canada. After Russia interfered in the federal elections of 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government was determined to prepare for a repeat in 2019. Some journalists and conservative politicians questioned why Trudeau's government wasn't more transparent with the details of Russian interference.[\[39\]](#) There are many similarities between the situation of the U.S. and that of Canada with regards to interference. Russia used many of the same tactics in Canada for many of the same reasons they would make use of those tactics a year later in the U.S. While the methods of transparency utilized by the two countries are divergent, the outcomes are similar in the way they produce confusion and consternation.

Canada's response differed from that of the U.S. in many other respects. A 2019 article from Politico confirmed that Canadian measures went further than U.S. measures in exacting transparency on advertising from social media platforms. It also reported "In January 2017, Trudeau appointed Karina Gould to a cabinet position with a new mandate: to work with the intelligence community to protect the election [2019] against cyberattacks..." The article also details the functions of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, a project headed by bureaucrats which is supposed to alert "both political parties" as well as the public to foreign interference.

While there are non-partisan bureaucrats tasked with sounding alarms in the U.S., their statements are often misapplied or dismissed for plainly partisan purposes. No cabinet positions or special committees have been created in the U.S. specifically to address the issue of election meddling. Where Canadian leadership tends to defer to its intelligence services and other nonpartisan institutions when informing policymakers and the public, U.S.

leadership had a habit of suppressing or amplifying specific findings (as mentioned above) for partisan positioning.

A 2020 report detailing the comprehensive Canadian response to interference in their 2019 federal elections contains the following excerpt:

*“The composition of the Canadian House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform was made public online, with brief explainers on the objectives and scope of the Special Committee...(Bill C-76) was introduced to safeguard Canadians’ trust in democratic processes and increase public participation in democratic activities...The Canadian government has heavily advocated for greater regulation of social media platforms, leading to greater communication with them, and the platforms have so far been responsive to government concerns. The CSC has also advocated for increased algorithmic transparency by social media companies.”* [\[40\]](#)

Bill C-76 reformed Canadian elections in several ways. Aside from adjustments aimed at preventing foreign interference, the window for campaigning was shortened and spending limits for campaigns were prescribed. Regulations to restrict campaign spending and to impel the use of a Canadian bank account pertained only to political third parties.[\[41\]](#)

Clear and consistent executive leadership, a commitment to reform and a non-partisan approach have successfully safeguarded Canadian elections and faith in democratic values. The withholding approach to governmental transparency, and its effects on Canadian discourse, provide lessons on the importance of forthcoming and consistent transparency.

### **Conclusion**

Free and fair elections are an essential component of the democratic process. Any attempt to interfere with the integrity of the election process poses a strategic threat. As information technology evolves over time, so does the threat. A successful response to interference cannot be 1) mired in partisan debate 2) cannot lack genuine transparency and 3) cannot be uncoordinated

or inconsistent. The efficacy of any given response is surely tied to these three things and to its capacity for evolution.

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# (2021) Second Place: Analysis of Counterfactual Thought Patterns of Repeat Criminal Offenders

*By Sunny Braithwaite, Emma Bowman, Iisha Sivals*

## **Abstract**

Counterfactual thinking, or imagining alternate realities, has effects on our mood and behavior (Roese, 1994). Criminals with repeat offenses engage in counterfactual thinking, which has implications for law enforcement and crime prevention. Thoughtfulness, regret levels, and risk aversion of criminals can determine how many preparative counterfactual thoughts criminals will have (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Mungan & Klick, 2016; Schmidt & Van der Linden, 2009). We found that repeat offenders commonly engage in upward and subtractive counterfactual thoughts, especially those who have committed violent crimes. We suggest that future research further illuminates the connection between repeat criminal behavior and counterfactual thoughts to prevent future crimes.

**Keywords:** counterfactual thinking, alternate realities, mood, behavior, criminals, offenders, law enforcement, crime, risk, crime prevention

Across 30 states, about two-thirds of individuals released from prison reoffended and were arrested within 3 years of release, and three-quarters reoffended and were arrested within 5 years (Durose et al., 2014). Understanding the counterfactual thought patterns of criminal offenders can help determine courses of action for both law enforcement, and those attempting to help repeat offenders

change their behavior. Reducing the number of repeat offenders reduces crime rates (Celuch et al., 2015), which makes our communities safer. We set out to answer the question: what is the counterfactual thought pattern of repeat criminal offenders?

To examine the counterfactual thought pattern of repeat criminal offenders, we must first define what it means to be a criminal. A criminal is a person who engages in illegal activities (McDermott & Langdon, 2014). To be identified as a criminal insinuates that an individual has done something that is considered a crime. Crime is defined as a violation of anything under the law or social regulation (Akutaev & Magomedov, 2016). Criminal history and age are the two biggest predictors of recidivism, or repeat offenses, according to Walters and Lowenkamp (2016).

Counterfactual thinking involves considering alternate realities about the past and is often used when an event does not go as planned (Roese, 1994), such as being arrested for a crime. Roese (1994) categorized counterfactual thoughts by their structure and direction and described their respective functions. Counterfactual thoughts that are additive include an imaginary detail added by the person having the counterfactual thought, and those considered subtractive involve removing a detail to change the outcome of an event or situation (Byrne, 2015). Additionally, Roese (1994) states that direction of counterfactual thoughts can be upward or downward. Upward counterfactual thoughts contain imagined realities that turn out better than the real event; downward counterfactual thoughts contain imagined realities that turn out worse than the real event. Counterfactual thinking can prompt emotions, help us to understand past events, decide what to change in the future, and can change how people judge the morality of each other's actions (Byrne, 2015). Counterfactual thinking also influences decision making in unethical situations, with potential consequences often being a determinant factor (Celuch et al., 2015).

Considering the preparative function of counterfactual thinking, Roese (1994) found that people who thought about a negative event using upward counterfactual thinking were more likely to set

intentions to do something different in the future, demonstrating the preparative function. He also found that downward counterfactual thoughts made people feel better than upward counterfactual thoughts, which supports the affective function. Frosch et al. (2015) found that people are more likely to generate counterfactuals about events that they felt they had some degree of control over, rather than something that was out of their control.

Counterfactual thoughts can be generated about multiple aspects of past events. Frosch et al. (2015) identified a cause as an event that brings about an outcome, and an enabler as something or someone that made the negative outcome possible. Rather than focusing on the cause, counterfactual thoughts are often focused on the enabler of the negative outcome for an event, according to Frosch et al. In the case of criminals, this could mean that instead of reasoning that they should not have committed a crime, they create counterfactuals about what caused them to be caught. Additionally, when engaging in counterfactual thinking, people try to undo socially unacceptable behaviors (Frosch et al., 2015), which has implications for how we assign blame. Macrae et al. (1993) found that counterfactual thoughts changed the way that people judged the perpetrators and victims of fictional burglaries.

Schmidt and Van der Linden (2009) found those who perform actions that are hasty, or not well thought out, are more likely to have increased counterfactual thinking and some of the negative emotions associated with it. This can lead to an increase in regret, shame, guilt, and counterfactual thoughts (Schmidt & Van der Linden, 2009). Schmidt and Van der Linden suggest that those who are more impulsive may be prone to regret their actions.

There is always a certain amount of risk involved in committing crimes. The level of risk that a criminal takes on depends on what they stand to gain from the crime, versus what consequences they might face, like jail time for example (Mungan & Klick, 2016). The threat of punishment is observed in the planning of a crime, and unforeseen complications may induce more frequent counterfactual thoughts if the criminal is unsuccessful (Celuch et

al., 2015). This would cause preparative, upward counterfactual thoughts to determine what could be changed to commit the crime successfully in the future.

When a criminal is caught, empathy for the criminal decreases and severity of punishment increases (Robbennolt & Sobus, 1997). This can lead to an increase in the criminal's desire for success and more careful planning. The criminal's personal regret combined with the risk of the operation would be the foundation for their future crimes (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995), with increasing amounts of counterfactual thought each time they are caught. If the potential benefit outweighs the threat of punishment, the crime is committed. In the current criminal justice system, the best way to prevent recidivism is to increase penalties for repeat offenders (Mungan & Klick, 2016).

Although personal differences and experiences vary, repeat criminal offenders can engage in preparative counterfactual thinking after they repeat a crime. Regret, risk, and thoughtfulness are all factors in how they execute a crime, with the success of their actions determining how many counterfactual thoughts they generate afterward in preparation for their next offense (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Mungan & Klick, 2016; Schmidt & Van der Linden, 2009). Understanding a repeat offender's process in learning from their mistakes can help law enforcement determine the changes the criminal might make in committing their next crime and lead to potential prevention.

Researchers and journalists have sought to understand the criminal mind for years. Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer is one of the most prolific serial killers in American history. Also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal, Dahmer was convicted for the sexual assaults and murders of 17 young men from 1978-1991. Years after he committed these crimes, Dahmer sat down to talk about why he did. During his interview, Dahmer expressed how struggling with his sexual identity as a homosexual male was a difficult process for him. Dahmer went on to talk about how his crimes were sexually motivated due to his struggle with his sexual identity. When asked

what he would do differently Dahmer replied, “I wish it would go away, I wish there was some way to completely get rid of these compulsive thoughts I had.” Dahmer ended the interview by expressing his feelings of remorse and sorrow for his victims (Paulson, 2018). Dahmer implies that without his struggle with his sexual identity and the compulsive thoughts he experienced, he would not have committed his crimes. This subtractive counterfactual thought process is further implied by the regret he felt for his actions.

Theodore Robert Bundy, also known as Ted Bundy, was an American serial killer who was convicted of the rape, kidnap, and murder of several young women during the 1970s. Less than 24 hours before Bundy was due to be executed, he sat down for his final interview to discuss his crimes. Bundy explained that early in life he was exposed to the world of pornography. Bundy went on to discuss how in the pornography he viewed, there was a large depiction of violence against women. Bundy expressed that his addiction to these violent pornographic films largely motivated his criminal behaviors. Bundy was asked how his life would have been different if he had not been predisposed to this type of hardcore pornography and replied with a counterfactual thought. Bundy replied by saying that if he had not watched the aggressive pornography at a young age his life would have been better, and he would not have committed the crimes he did against those women (Key, 2018). This counterfactual thought about whether Bundy would have committed the crimes if he had not been exposed to aggressive pornography at a young age is both upward and subtractive.

We also interviewed an individual that has a criminal record but not a history of violence. We spoke with Samuel Sivels; a 28-year-old male currently incarcerated at the Ada County Jail. Sivels has a long outstanding criminal history that began during adolescence. He caught his first felony charge at the age of thirteen for robbing an armored car. By the age of seventeen, Sivels had charges for grand theft auto, theft, vandalism, possession of marijuana, disturbing the peace, rioting, and more. In total, Sivels has over 100



charges in the last 15 years. When we sat down with Sivels, we asked him what caused him to head down this path of committing crimes.

He said, *"Growing up, I was around drugs and crime a lot and I just kinda fell into it."* We then asked Sivels what his first thoughts were after he was caught committing a crime.

He responded, *"I can truly say now I am tired of being an addict and doing the same shit over and over again. I let all the females and drugs consume me. I wish I could go back and tell myself to stop doing all the stupid shit I was doing. I thought I was doing right the last time I got out, but I wasn't, and I regret it"* (Samuel Sivels, personal communication, April 21, 2020).

According to his comments, Sivels showed signs of upward counterfactual thinking.

What is the counterfactual thought pattern of repeat criminal offenders? After reviewing the literature on counterfactual thoughts, and the thoughts of repeat criminal offenders, we concluded that criminals tend to have increased counterfactual thoughts post-crime. We determined that criminals are more likely to have upward and subtractive counterfactual thoughts. This is likely because those who commit crimes think about how the outcome of their crime would be different if certain factors had not contributed to them being caught. This process could be utilized to imagine the alternate reality of never having committed the crimes to begin with, as we see with Bundy and Dahmer.

Counterfactual thoughts vary in type and the way they manifest based on individual circumstances. In our research, we found a lack of data linking repeat criminal offenders and counterfactual thoughts. Future research involving those who have committed crimes as participants would help add clarification to this topic, especially if how counterfactual thoughts influenced the criminals' perception of their crime was taken into consideration. According to Dunbar (2020), there is growing support in the U.S. for investment in preventative and rehabilitation services as opposed to increased investment in law enforcement. We can see from the counterfactual thoughts expressed by Dahmer and Bundy that early

intervention and mental health treatment for children and young adults is necessary. Additional research into the counterfactual thoughts of repeat criminal offenders could help support these preventative and rehabilitation services and increase their success rates.

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# (2022) First Place: Instagram's Influence on Young Adults: The Negative Impact on Mental Health

*by Sawyer Ellis, Craig Peterson, Gordy Brown, Damien Perez,  
& Monica Zumpano*

## **Abstract**

Young adults are in a critical phase of life finding their identity and their place in society. An estimated 72% of young adults ages 18 to 30 use social media (Nesi, 2020). Social media has been proven to affect young adults both physically and mentally (Nesi, 2020). Since social media has been created, mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety have steadily increased among active users (Mojtabai et al., 2016). Body dysmorphia and anorexia nervosa affect both males' and females' perceptions of their bodies, leading to feelings of inadequacy (Hong et al., 2020). This often leaves individuals vulnerable to these mental illnesses, causing feelings of insecurity and depression (Mojtabai et al., 2016). Young adults tend to rely on digital filters and succumb to false ideals of beauty (Hong et al., 2020). Having constant access to social media means that these short-term outcomes will become more severe over time.

**Keywords:** Instagram, mental health, eating disorder, young adults, influencers

## **Instagram's Influence on Young Adults:**

### **The Negative Impact on Mental Health**

Social media's presence has exploded since its conception in the early 2000s. Instagram and its sister company Tik Tok have gained

nearly 800 million users since 2020 (Logrieco et al., 2021). More than 72% of young adults in the US have Instagram accounts (Nesi, 2020). With social media playing an extensive role in young adults' lives, the impact it has on mental health is a major concern. Instagram's reach is perpetuated by influencers who promote product marketing and create falsehoods through curated images and videos. Studies have shown that individuals that spend significant time on Instagram have a higher likelihood of mental health disorders (Alsaidan et al., 2020).

### **Social Expectations & Pressures**

Young adults' social media relationships vary from people they are close with, to people they have never met before. These profound relationships can lead to social comparisons among people (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Social comparison theory focuses on the idea that individuals gain accurate self-evaluations by comparing themselves to others (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). The way people portray themselves on social media is only part of a person's story. It is not the full picture of a person's life or their reality. Social media users generally decide how they want to be perceived and post images or videos that establish their false identity (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Editing images can skew comparison by using filters to enhance the positive attributes of a person's life or self. In essence, social expectations promote social comparison theory and are responsible for the rise in mental health disorders (Nesi, 2020; Stein et al., 2021). Specifically, mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety have steadily risen (Mojtabai et al., 2016). It has been reported that, in ages 18-30, 93% of respondents said they were harmed emotionally on a social media site, and 51% reported suicidal thoughts after a social media interaction (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Along with this, suicide rates in ages 10-24 increased 56% from 2007 to 2017 (Nesi, 2020). Research has hypothesized that the increase in suicide rates is caused by social media usage. That there is a correlation between time spent on social media and mental health disorders (Nesi, 2020).

Social media can strengthen mental problems due to its wide

range of use and easy accessibility. Social cultivation theory hypothesizes that frequent exposure to social media can distort a person's perception of the world (Stein et al., 2021). In 2018, 45% of adolescents reported spending a majority of their time online, while 72% of adolescents used at least one Instagram account (Nesi, 2020). Many people can feel social pressure to create a social media account simply because peers have one (Stein et al., 2021). Always being bombarded with new social media content can lead to higher exposure to negative content. This is problematic and impacts mental health poorly because the material is not consciously registered (Stein et al., 2021). In other words, users can not differentiate what is real and not real. Instagram influencers can unknowingly promote this unconscious thought and can change users' behavior by the content they post.

### **Influencers**

One of Instagram's primary sources of marketing is its use of influencers. An influencer is a word-of-mouth paid advocate that uses product placement marketing in their videos for monetary gain (De Veirman et al., 2017; Vogel et al., 2020). To be an Instagram influencer, one must have a network of followers that trust their brand (De Veirman et al., 2017). An influencer creates brand trust by who they are following and their follower count (De Veirman et al., 2017). For example, if an influencer follows a few accounts, they are deemed untrustworthy. The account could be a possible fraud, or the influencer is not returning the favor of following fans and marketing accounts (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Research primarily focuses on how influencers negatively impact social media users, particularly adolescents engaging with Instagram and Tik Tok video advertisements (Logrieco et al., 2021). Social media platform Tik Tok was created in 2016 and has over 800 million users. Twenty percent of these users are minors (Logrieco et al., 2021). Tik Tok video advertisements have promoted anorexia otherwise noted as "pro-ana" by either advocating supplements or unprofessional advice to lose weight (Logrieco et al., 2021). In one investigation, a 14-year-old teenage girl was diagnosed with

anorexia nervosa. She denied suicidal idealization but subsequently confessed that Tik Tok advertisements inspired her to lose an unhealthy amount of weight. It was not by supplements but through increasing physical exercise and reducing caloric intake (Logrieco et al., 2021). Her weight loss journey created negative self-perception and thereafter resulted in self-harm. These results open the door to advertisement disclosures and why it is vital to incorporate them into an influencer's ad. Otherwise, adolescents are left to presume that their peers are partaking in the same risky challenges, as the case study illustrates (Logrieco et al., 2021). Many Instagram influencers are guilty of using filters to enhance their body image to increase follower count. False advertisements lead to false beauty ideals and therefore can directly impact one's mental health.

### **Selfies, Filters, and Unrealistic Beauty Ideals**

A selfie is a picture that social media users take of themselves and post to their desired platforms. This is usually done with a mobile phone or a webcam. Selfies are a visual representation of oneself that can reflect their feelings and emotions, which is very popular among users (Hong et al., 2020). The mere reason for posting a selfie is to invite attention, be accepted by others, and obtain self-worth from others' reactions (Hong et al., 2020).

Filters are tools that allow users to add to or alter their photos for the most favorable outcome without professional software (Hong et al., 2020). Moreover, Instagram makes it easy to change and edit selfies that are posted with added filters or stickers (Hong et al., 2020). Instagram influences people's views on "ideal" body image by embellishing the vision of physical beauty, regarding fitness, makeup, fashion, and dietary content (Stein et al., 2021). Extreme self-presentations such as filtered photos may result in an inadequate representation of oneself (Stein et al., 2021). Individuals that rely heavily on filters to enhance their self-presentation only receive increased attention and praise from their peers if the altered image is believable and not an extreme misrepresentation of themselves (Hong et al., 2020). Regardless of how much effort a user

strives to glamorize themselves; efforts are only worthy if they are acknowledged by others.

### **Mental Health Disorders**

Excessive social media use coincides with symptoms of depression, lack of confidence, escalated anxiety, extreme body dissatisfaction, and low perception of physical attractiveness (Stein et al., 2021). Depression is defined as a mood disorder associated with sadness, lack of activity, trouble with cognitive ability, changes in appetite and sleep habits, feelings of hopelessness, despondency, and occasional thoughts of suicide (APA, n.d.-b). Anxiety is defined as anxiousness or nervousness over impending or anticipated troubles, leading to avoidance of people and places (APA, n.d.-a).

Frequent Instagram use was directly connected with depressive symptoms and negatively connected with social comparison, highlighting the findings of Instagram use being connected to poor psychological wellness due to social comparison (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Instagram motivates people to partake in social comparison due to their focus on visual (photo/video) content in lieu of written content, resulting in negative outcomes (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Recent analysis shows that Instagram exploits fitspiration and thinspiration, glamorizing a toned and wholesome appearance (Stein et al., 2021). Moreover, fit and thinspiration posts have unfavorable effects on adolescents causing unrealistic beauty goals and eating disorders.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a mental disorder that causes the patient to believe there is something severely flawed with either a specific body part or general appearance and causes a significant amount of torment (Himanshu et al., 2020). Other factors include repetitive behaviors (e.g., skin picking, mirror-gazing, excessive grooming) or mental acts such as constant comparison along with preoccupation causing significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The symptoms of BDD differ between sexes. In females, there is more discontent about body fat, facial hair, height, and complexion. While body image, height, and hair loss are the



highest concerns for men (Himanshu et al., 2020). Although there is a significant difference between BDD and anorexia, research classifies the two under body image disorders (Phillipou et al., 2019).

A study conducted in 2015 confirmed that adolescents who use Instagram more often have a higher chance of developing not only depressive feelings, but also body image disorders 6 months later (Lup et al., 2015). Understanding BDD makes it easier to see the correlation that it has with social media. The problem lies when young adults compare themselves to models and influencers that have gotten to where they are today based solely on their filtered looks. Constantly being exposed to content of idealistic beauty and fitness standards over a long period of time could be harmful to young adults as comparing themselves to these ideals is unrealistic (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Anorexia nervosa (i.e., anorexia), is an eating disorder that is defined by abnormally low body weight that is fueled by an immense fear of gaining weight (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Anorexia affects millions of young adults all over the world. A recent study found that searches for pro-eating disorder content are performed millions of times a year by using specific keywords (e.g., pro-ana, pro-anorexia, pro-ED, pro thinspo, thin, and pro-acceptance; Levine, 2012). Symptoms of anorexia range from appearance-related (e.g., extreme weight loss, thin appearance, thinning hair, and yellowish skin) to severe health risks (e.g., abnormal blood count, irregular heart rhythms, and swelling of arms and legs; Mayo Clinic, 2021). What normally starts as a trend or temporary solution to body dissatisfaction can lead to dangerous health risks as symptoms increase in severity over time.

A study conducted in 2016 found that social media use was associated with an increased risk of anorexia by promoting thin ideals and facilitating access to communities of people involved in anorexic behaviors (Sidani et al., 2016). Social media sites are aware of the issue and have since been taking steps towards combating the increase in body image disorders, such as anorexia, associated with their sites. Major social media platforms, such as Instagram

and Facebook, have attempted to limit the exposure of the recent uprise in pro-anorexia-related content, such as the recent banning of hashtags “thinspiration” and “thinspo” (Sidani et al.,2016).

### **Conclusion**

Studies have shown that individuals that spend significant time on Instagram have a higher likelihood of mental health disorders (Alsaidan et al., 2020). Social media has been proven to affect young adults both physically, and mentally (Nesi, 2020). A significant number of young adult social media users rely on filters and unrealistic beauty standards that lead to extreme body dissatisfaction which is affecting mental health (Stein et al., 2021). This aligns with social comparison theory as people use social media to make self-evaluations by comparing themselves to others. We have concluded through our research that increased social media activity does in fact have a negative impact on young adults’ mental and physical health.

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# (2022) Second Place: Unhealthy School Food is Worsening the Obesity Epidemic in America

*by Jamie Hudson*

“Our school serves really low-quality food. When you look at it, it makes you want to throw up in your mouth” (Patten & Hudson). Over 4.8 billion school lunches were served to students in the U.S. in FY 2019 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Looking at the average food served each day, it is no wonder this generation of children is expected to live shorter lives than their parents. Heavily processed, greasy, and sugar filled foods are given to children who depend on the food to fuel their bodies and minds. The growing obesity epidemic is a national health crisis (Center for Disease Control and Prevention), and schools have both a responsibility and great opportunity to make a huge positive impact on the health of the children they serve. Parents, school staff, and each school state board of education must take this crisis seriously and demand immediate changes.

First, this essay will examine average food served in U.S. schools. Next, nutrition requirements for school meals and lack of accountability are examined. Then arguments against these changes due to cost are discussed. The arguments are contrasted with a school that implemented healthy changes despite funding limitations. Lastly, resources for parents, school staff, and concerned parties are provided to advocate for better school nutrition. Significant improvements in funding, kitchen staff education, and school district accountability could enable schools

throughout the country to serve healthy meals to students and improve the worsening obesity epidemic in America.

### **School Food and Nutrition Issues**

We must care for the health and wellness of the next generation, and by not providing each student with nutritious food at school, schools are worsening the obesity epidemic. The CDC states that obesity-related health conditions are among the leading causes of preventable death. In the U.S. 14.4 million individuals between 2-19 years old are considered obese (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Covering all issues with food served in individual schools across the U.S. is beyond the grasp of this essay, but overarching problems and examples are provided from public schools in Meridian, Idaho.

### **Average School Food Options**

We must care for the health and wellness of the next generation, and by not providing each student with nutritious food at school, schools are worsening the obesity epidemic. The CDC states that obesity-related health conditions are among the leading causes of preventable death. In the U.S. 14.4 million individuals between 2-19 years old are considered obese (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Covering all issues with food served in individual schools across the U.S. is beyond the grasp of this essay, but overarching problems and examples are provided from public schools in Meridian, Idaho. Uncrustables and then another option, depends on the day.



Fig. 2 Jillian Patten. *Stuffwich* (2021). Cell Phone Image. Meridian, ID.

Jill, a high school student and life-long Meridian, Idaho resident, grew up in the public school system. When asked about school food she said

“We get very little portions of food, like the same that we have gotten since kindergarten. And only two

options are given, always Uncrustables and then another option, depends on the day. I do remember that they give us a bag of chips every day and either chocolate milk in a tiny carton or regular milk and little juice cups. Sometimes they give us like a tiny cup of canned green beans or four pieces of broccoli or carrots. Vending machines have few options and are always pretty empty” (Patten & Hudson).

Online menus for her high school show breakfast options like Fat Cat Scone, Pop Tarts, Muffin Tops, Mini Cinnis, chocolate milk and Maple Madness Waffles (School Nutrition Services / Secondary Menus). Lunch options include “stuffwich,” pizza rippers, cheeseburgers, stuffed cheese breadstick, chicken nuggets, Uncrustable sandwiches, and chicken & gravy (School Nutrition Services / Secondary Menus). While not an exhaustive list, this shows many highly processed food options served to students.



*Fig. 1 Jillian Patten. School Vending Machine (2021). Cell phone image. Meridian, ID.*

Online menus for local elementary schools have similar options: Pop Tarts, Mini Cinnis, Bar ZZ Birthday Cake, chocolate milk, and Raisels (School Nutrition Services / Elementary Menus). These sugar-filled options are not healthy ways to fuel a child for a day of learning. Beans, since they are a legume, are even considered a vegetable in lunch options to cover nutrition requirements (Hudson & Erpenbach). Cheeseburgers, sloppy joes, corn dogs, pizza, chicken and gravy, chicken

nuggets, and stuffwiches are lunch options throughout the month (School Nutrition Services /Elementary Menus).

These examples reflect issues at public schools across the nation, as seen on sites like [NPR: This is what America's school lunches really look like](#) (Godoy), and at Patterson High School in NJ, where a pastime is "[label that lunch](#)" (YouTube). Searching "*bad U.S. school lunch*" on YouTube highlights more unhealthy school lunches. Comments on these videos provide additional perspective:

"This is why I bring my own [food] to school. No way would I drink expired milk."

"Finally, people understand that my lunch is made from rat droppings."

"Bro imagine being the 'unfortunate' kid and this is the only meal you can have for the day."

"Bruh, at this point I feel like if they shipped prison food to feed kids at school it would look WAY better, heck might even have a bit of flavor or even taste good at this point." "It's scientifically proved being fed well improves your physical wellbeing, mental health, and work performance. How do they expect children to perform well in school with these meals!?" (YouTube)

Consuming these unhealthy foods puts children at risk for numerous health issues, including obesity.

### **Dangers of Ultra-Processed Foods and Excessive Sugar Intake**

A national health survey found that "high intake of added sugars increases the risk of weight gain, excessive body weight and obesity; type 2 diabetes; higher serum triglycerides and high blood cholesterol; higher blood pressure and hypertension; stroke; coronary heart disease; cancer... A strong linear relationship was found between the dietary contribution of ultra processed foods and the dietary content of added sugars." It defines ultra-processed foods as "industrial formulations which, besides salt, sugar, oils and fats, include substances not used in culinary preparations, in particular additives used to imitate sensorial qualities of minimally processed foods and their culinary preparations." This study



suggests that because almost 60% of calories and 90% of added sugars consumed in the U.S. come from ultra-processed foods, limiting these foods in the U.S. diet would be highly effective in reducing sugar consumption. The study encourages replacing ultra-processed foods with minimally processed and freshly prepared foods including fruits, nuts, whole grains, and vegetables (Martínez Steele et al.).

Another article regarding childhood obesity states that solutions will only be effective if there are sustainable improvements in children's knowledge about health, if they have access to nutritious foods and beverages, and if unhealthy food choices are discouraged. The article says school, community, and legislative actions to encourage healthier choices for children are necessary to battle this nation-wide health crisis (Rogers, Robert et al). Healthy alternatives must replace unhealthy options throughout schools in the U.S. to help reverse the growing obesity epidemic in our nation's children.

### **School Food Regulations and Policies are Not Enough**

Unhealthy school food options should not be commonplace when regulations specify the types of food to be served in U.S. schools. In providing results of a school health policies study, the CDC stated that “To monitor progress in each of these areas, it is critical to measure periodically the extent to which schools and school districts nationwide have policies and practices in place that address these components” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). All schools in the U.S. should be held accountable for the food they serve.

### **Meal Program Regulations**

The CDC states that “Schools are in a unique position to promote healthy behaviors. Most US children spend an average of 6 to 7 hours a day at school, which is a large part of their waking hours” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Many children eat breakfast and lunch at school, and some lower income families qualify for weekend food bags. In an email interview with a teacher who wished to remain anonymous, she wrote, “I’m a teacher, so my

heart goes out to some of our families who I know are struggling. I've seen students panic on Friday afternoon if they don't think they are going to receive their weekend food bag (a small handful of families are getting this). Frankly, it's not even very healthy. Very carb and preservative heavy" (Anonymous & Hudson). The CDC claims that school meal programs provide students with balanced meals meeting federal nutrition standards and include a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Meals are supposed to have limits on the saturated fat and sodium contents, as well as minimum and maximum calorie levels (Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

The Idaho State Department of Education website details requirements for the federally funded and state administered School Breakfast Program. It claims to provide nutritionally balanced breakfasts to children each day. Guidelines also state that hash browns can be offered in place of fruit if two cups per week of non-starchy vegetables are also offered. The website says, "*Upon state agency administrative review, menus must be determined to meet the current nutrient standards*" (Idaho State Department of Education). Pop Tarts and chocolate milk are not a balanced meal and should never be considered a nutritious breakfast for a child. There must be accountability to ensure healthy food is served.

### **Accountability**

Stories from students and parents expressing outrage at unhealthy food being served to students can be found on news outlets, websites, and YouTube. Inside Edition showed parents in Patterson, NJ, appalled after seeing images of moldy food and expired milk being served to their children. One parent said that they have enough to worry about for their children, and raw, uncooked, inedible food shouldn't be one of them (YouTube).

CNBC asked viewers how a slice of Domino's pizza meets USDA guidelines, and the answer was "money, lots and lots of money." They also questioned how one school provides inedible food for \$1.25, and another can provide a healthy meal at the same cost. In 2017, 4.9 billion lunches were served at a cost of \$13.6 billion. In the

video, Robert Doar, who administered food assistance programs in NYC under Mayor Bloomberg, said,

“It is true that the interests here are not only what’s best for low-income families, but the other interests are also the various providers of the food. This is true of anything we do in government, anytime the Federal government is extending significant dollars on a product, people that sell that product you’re gonna be interested in maximizing that spending.”

The video detailed a product catalog of frozen foods Tyson designed specifically for school cafeterias. They explained that the USDA lists fries as a vegetable, and some cafeterias still consider pizza sauce as a vegetable. Domino’s pizza has a Smart Rewards program where schools can earn purchase points to trade in for swag and cafeteria equipment (YouTube). The health of children appears less important than making money.

### **Healthy Food is Too Expensive and Won’t Make a Difference**

Some people argue that schools cannot be expected to solve the obesity epidemic. The cost for healthier food is too high, there aren’t enough staff to make food from scratch, and kids won’t eat healthier food. When former First Lady Michelle Obama fought for stricter regulations and schools began to serve more fruits and vegetables, some schools noticed an increase in healthier food intake, but also an increase in food thrown away (YouTube). Can schools afford nutritious food students will eat?

### **The Budget is Too Small**

Dan Giusti created meals costing over a hundred dollars a person as the former head chef of Noma. He now runs a group called Brigade that teaches cooking from scratch to school cafeterias around the country, still with the budget of \$1.25 per meal. Discussing school meals, he said, “It’s almost like it’s this rite of passage, like as a student in an institution like it’s just what you get, you get lousy food” (YouTube).

Chef Ann Cooper was the director of food services for Boulder

Valley School District in Colorado and created her own foundation to provide solutions for parents and schools to advocate for healthy student meals. She understands budget struggles, saying changing school food may be the hardest job she ever had. Her website has free tools to help concerned individuals advocate for change and raises money to put salad bars in schools to help bring healthier options to schools that have difficulty affording it (Cooper). Changing school food will not be a quick fix, nor easy, but can happen even on small budgets.

### **Schools Cannot Make a Difference**

Another argument is that schools cannot improve the obesity epidemic by providing healthier food. Children learn habits at home and may throw away healthier options they are served. Why should schools go through the effort and cost of changing their menu offerings if kids will not eat it? Programs are popping up across the nation to reverse kids' negative attitudes toward healthy food. Some have successfully shown students how and why to make healthier choices.

One example is Slow Food USA, which “aims to reconnect youth with their food by teaching them how to grow, cook and enjoy real food” (Slow Food USA). While many health habits are formed in the home, the CDC states,

“Students in the United States engage in behaviors that place them at risk for the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among youth and adults. These behaviors often are established during childhood and adolescence and extend into adulthood; therefore, it is important to prevent such behaviors at an early age. Because schools have direct contact with more than 95 percent of our nation's young people aged 5-17 years, they play a critical role in promoting the health and safety of young people and helping them establish lifelong healthy behavior patterns” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

There are hurdles to overcome when fighting for healthier food in

schools, but change is possible, and schools CAN make a significant impact.

### **What Does Healthy, Affordable School Food Look Like?**

At Compass Public Charter School in Meridian, Idaho, nutritious and appetizing food is made on a tight budget. The school purchased new equipment to help provide more healthy options to students. The images provided rival many restaurant level menus and were created by staff that truly care about the students they serve.

### **How One School Provides Healthy Meals on a Budget**



*Fig. 3 Aalisa Erpenbach. Compass Charter School Falafel Lunch (2021). Cell phone image. Meridian, ID.*

Aalisa, a kitchen assistant at Compass, provided insight for how schools can make a huge impact. She said the director listens to staff's meal suggestions and ideas and student health is highly valued. Four years ago, they were in a smaller building, no one really cared about the food, and they didn't have enough staff to make improvements. Two years later they moved into a new building and hired additional staff. Now kitchen staff can cook and prep for the next day, producing most meals from

scratch. With extra money provided by the Free Lunch Program, they purchase more vegetables and a variety of fruits including peaches, nectarines, kiwis, strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries.

They purchased more kitchen equipment like a large food processor, knives, cutting boards, food warmers, and salad bars. Items made from scratch include whole grain pizza crust and tomato sauce, Pico de Gallo, and muffins with seasonal ingredients.



Fig. 4 Aalisa Erpenbach. Compass Charter School Bruschetta Pizza Lunch (2021). Cell phone image. Meridian, ID.

Aalisa enjoys creating new options and walks around getting feedback directly from students. Middle and high schoolers have healthier menus because most upper classmen enjoy them.

Veggie bowls with rice are popular, and once the kids try it, they usually like it. Options include taco day with roasted veggies, vegan buddha bowls, handmade veggie burgers, baked potatoes, Thai curry, falafels, bruschetta pizza, mandarin orange salad, and taco salad in hand-pressed taco shells. Older students enjoy

ethnic, diverse varieties not normally found at schools (Erpenbach & Hudson).

When asked for improvement ideas, Aalisa said, “There are so many things. I wish overly processed food weren’t so popular and wasn’t served to students. I wish we made everything from scratch.” She believes young kids eat less variety due to learned behaviors. “Parent think, ‘My kid won’t eat this, so I won’t even bother’ or it takes too much work to prep and fight kids to eat it. Fast food is easier.”

She said schools choose the food options and some pick what is easy rather than healthy. She notes that elementary kids eat more fruits like apples and oranges if they are sliced, which takes kitchen staff prep time. If given a larger budget, she would love to make chicken nuggets from scratch so “*they had real chicken*” and would be healthier for students. She doesn’t believe nutritious foods are much more expensive, but preparation requires more staff.



Fig. 5 Aalisa Erpenbach. Compass Charter School Lunches (2021). Cell phone image. Meridian, ID.

Aalisa teaches Nutrition and Foods at Compass and assists with Intro to Culinary and Advanced Culinary. She said having these classes, especially for younger students and their parents, could help kids be more adventurous with food choices. She hopes the new foods learned at school encourage students to ask for more healthy options at home. As Erpenbach and Hudson observe, “Kids are more willing

to try things than people think they are. I think having other kids try things with them is more important than their parents telling them to eat it. They’re more willing to try it when other kids are trying it than parents saying, ‘You should eat it’” (Erpenbach & Hudson). Stories like this prove change is possible, even on a tight budget.

### **Change is Within Our Reach**

The average food served to students across the U.S. is ultra-processed, filled with excess sugar, dangerous for their health, and worsening the obesity epidemic. Current regulations do not ensure students receive the nutritious food they need at school. Schools must hire staff that care and provide them with necessary tools to create nutritious meals. Without action from parents and concerned citizens, this change is unlikely to occur.

Please visit The Chef Ann Foundation, <https://www.chefannfoundation.org>, which provides free toolkits with information for approaching local school districts to advocate for healthier student meals. To support this initiative and bring salad bars to needy schools, they also have a donation page. Nourishing meals and nutrition education can help students develop healthy eating habits and benefit them for the rest of their life (Cooper).

Schools must provide healthier meals to have healthier students, and change must start now.

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# (2022) Third Place: Reconstructing Slave Labor: Prison Systems In The Jim Crow South

*by Amanda Moorhouse*

The Reconstruction Era began a revolutionary change in the United States and launched a significant chapter in American history, the start of the civil rights movement. The southern states were an agrarian economy and relied heavily on the use of slave labor for the production of cotton, rice, and tobacco. Following the end of the Civil War and emancipation of slaves, many white southerners began to fear that the agricultural economy of the South would collapse. Former Confederate states revised their existing slave laws into Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, enforcing labor contracts and racial segregation. Should any freedman fail to adhere to any of these laws they would be imprisoned and subsequently hired-out to work off their crime of being Black. After the abolition of slavery and the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment, the Southern States began to develop new ways to recreate a slave society through the use of prisons and chain gangs.

The twelve years following the abolition of slavery, former slaves made great strides toward economic, social, and political growth. Historian Eric Foner described the progress as, “the most radical development of the Reconstruction years, a massive experiment in interracial democracy without precedent in the history of this or any other country that abolished slavery in the nineteenth century.”<sup>[1]</sup> Though seemingly emancipated from the bondage of slavery, the transformation into free laborers and equal citizens for

Blacks was neither linear nor without strife. A coalition of white industrialists, businessmen, merchants, and planters known as Redeemers, sought to undo any promises of equality in the Reconstruction.<sup>[2]</sup> As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, the “slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”<sup>[3]</sup> The efforts to keep Blacks subservient and racially inferior especially in the Post Bellum South, motivated southern whites to explore constitutional loopholes and profit in multiple capacities from the mass incarceration of black men, women, and children.

Southern States were economically motivated to imprison Blacks to work plantations, railways, and mines. Slavery made the agricultural-based economy of the Antebellum South a powerful force in the cotton market. The loss of the Civil War devastated the wealth of this cash crop and many others.<sup>[4]</sup> The Thirteenth Amendment made involuntary servitude a constitutional violation, with the exception of punishment for a crime. Exploiting this provision in the constitution came the birth of the convict leasing program through southern penal reform. Civil Rights advocate Jaron Browne observed that, “An extensive prison system was developed in the interest of maintaining the racial and economic relationship of slavery.”<sup>[5]</sup> With the aid of Redeemers and profiteering industrialists, a new way to continue economic growth from the bound backs of black Americans was developed.

The end of the Civil War and ensuing emancipation of slaves greatly affected the agricultural economy of the south. New systems of labor quickly began to take the place of slavery in the form of sharecropping, wherein plantation owners would enter into contracts with former slaves to continue working their farms for free rent and little pay. Sharecropping was primarily to the benefit of the white plantation owner and would keep the Black laborer indebted to their previous masters, leading to concerns of the freedom and independence they had hoped to achieve after emancipation.<sup>[6]</sup> White plantation owners strongly upheld the belief that their farms would only be successful if they retained

their free labor. Journalist and renowned author Douglas Blackmon explained that, “coercion and restraint remained the bedrock of success in the cotton economy-and the cornerstone of all wealth generated from it.”<sup>[7]</sup> The ambitions of former slaves to become equal members of society, and the economic desperation of Southern whites would lead to the Southern States to enact a series of laws to re-subjugate Blacks.

Black Codes and later Jim Crow laws, held Blacks under a legal microscope, requiring them to sign labor contracts or be imprisoned for vagrancy. Former slaves had the choice to work in often unfair and backbreaking labor for little pay or be leased out by Southern prisons for no pay and even worse conditions. Women and children were not exempt from the enumerating laws in Black Codes that kept them tied to their owners; they too were exploited through convict leasing programs. The terms convicts and Negroes were used interchangeably in several reports of the period.<sup>[8]</sup> Through this new system, white plantation owners paid an average \$25,000 a year to the state, in exchange for a laborer in the form of a prisoner, to live and work on their farms under their complete control.<sup>9</sup> The lucrative business once found in slave labor, created monetary incentives for states and counties to convict Black Americans, and caused a significant increase in the prison population following the Civil War. Unlike slavery, employers had only a relatively small investment in convict laborers, with very little reason to treat them well.

Private companies and contractors also utilized convict leasing programs, by paying the state a fee for felony offenders to work in mines, railways and lumber yards and assumed total control over their lives, welfare and working bodies. Black convicts were often burdened with a fine for violation of Black Codes plus a thirty-day stint of hard labor. The inability to pay the array of fees and fines would lead to the thirty-day term being extended for the purposes of paying the debt the criminal now owed the State.<sup>[9]</sup> The fine to prison loop often allowed the companies leasing convicts to absolve themselves of concerns about workers' longevity. In an

effort to prevent economic collapse, the South adapted to the new laws present in the Reconstruction and profited off the Jim Crow carceral regimes.

It wasn't until miners and other laborers began to complain that the competition of free labor was too great and often led to loss of job security or fair wages, that the convict leasing program was redesigned into the contract labor program. The contract labor program still generated revenue from prisoners, but from inside the prison rather than outside. Tennessee and Alabama prisons housed industrialized factories and sewing shops in tandem with female felons. Many women spent life sentences sewing and spinning for the state, making pillowcases, hosiery, roller towels and union suits.<sup>[10]</sup> As convict leasing was phased out, men were put to work in what could be described as the most brutal form of forced labor, Chain Gangs. For over one hundred years after the abolition of slavery, prisoners were shackled and worked alongside roads under the threat of gunpoint, whips, and torture, all resembling the chattel slavery that preceded.<sup>[11]</sup> This new form of prison labor, more closely aligned with the idea that social control was an incentive to the mass incarceration of Black Americans.

Convict labor, debt peonage, and extrajudicial lynching ensured societal hierarchy for white citizens in the Post Bellum South. Christopher Adamson of York University described that the foundation of this need to maintain racial and social control, derived from fear. Adamson explained, "One way of accounting for the functional similarity between the two systems is to realize that both slaves and ex-slaves were 'problem populations,' and one of the paradoxes which characterize problem populations is that they represent both a potential threat to the existing system of government, and class rule, and a potential resource."<sup>[12]</sup> Southern whites simply did not know how to live equally among their Black neighbors who they deemed racially inferior, and as Adamson surmised former slaves were, "both a threat to social relations and a useful resource, a dangerous population which stood in need of control but also a welcome source of manpower."<sup>[13]</sup> Fear was a

powerful force and motivating factor to keep Blacks acquiescent. As former slaves continued to progress through the process of building schools, churches, and social organizations, while also vigorously fighting for political participation, a broad coalition of Redeemers used informal and state-sponsored forms of violence and repression to suppress any gains made during Reconstruction.<sup>[14]</sup>

Lynching provided a sense of white unanimity and social control in a culture where demographics and power structures were under the threat of changing. Prior to abolition, slaves were publicly whipped or even murdered in order to evoke submission through fear and to suppress any thought or threat of insurrection. Historian Richard C. Wade described the lash law, “no other penalty carried the same meaning or so embodied the social relations of the peculiar institution. The lash in the white hand on the black back was a symbol of bondage recognized by both races.”<sup>[15]</sup> Punishment as a public spectacle was not retired with slavery; instead, terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist carried on the tradition. Lynching’s were common in the South; in fact, Southern Newspapers reported at least [3,442] public lynchings from 1882 up to 1950.<sup>[16]</sup> A lynching was often celebrated, and souvenirs or postcards quickly became a widespread production, a display of racial domination. One such postcard depicts the horrific torture and murder of a Black man in Waco, Texas named Jesse Washington.<sup>[17]</sup> A proud bystander or possibly a participator in the lynching of Jesse Washington, signed the back of the postcard, “This is the barbecue we had last night...” the front of the postcard bearing visual evidence of the abhorrent crime committed by the lynch mob.<sup>[18]</sup> Lynching was typically reserved for the most heinous offenses: rebellion, arson, burglary, and assaulting a white woman, would certainly end in the death of the offender, whether that be extrajudicial or sentenced by the courts. Lynching only began to decline when separate but equal laws went into effect and legal segregation was enforced.<sup>20</sup> Black citizens walked a narrow line with very limited freedoms and several laws exclusive to their

race, sustained on one side by the State and the other by white supremacy.

In a revival of slavery, convicts were often auctioned off like livestock further enabling white supremacy. Slaves were typically sold and separated from their families as a punishment for insubordination. The convict-leasing program adapted this manipulative tactic of control. One report in *The Washington Bee* examined Florida's practice of public auctions where convicts were sold to the highest bidder for up to four years of forced labor for minor offenses, like stealing eggs.<sup>[19]</sup> An article in *The Evening Times*, explained that it was necessary for convicts to work so that they could learn to be working members of society.<sup>[20]</sup> Contemporary slavery through imprisonment continued the ideology that Blacks were less than human and did so with more deception and sophistication than its historical counterpart.

Mass incarceration aided in the ambitions of ex-confederate States to strip newly freed slaves of any strident political discourse. Those who had fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War had engaged in an act of treason and were denied the right to vote subsequent of levying war on the United States. Following the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, which freed slaves, the Fourteenth Amendment was passed in 1868, giving Blacks the right to vote. Many southern whites held a lot of resentment toward any person who they deemed racially inferior to them to have rights that they did not. An 1867 article published in *The Daily Courier* argued that the "white voters are either disfranchised or voiceless" and because of this, "The white race of the soil has been treated as aliens and strangers in their own land"<sup>[21]</sup> The resentment of whites toward Blacks for being disenfranchised led to the mass incarceration of Black citizens as a means to stifle sociopolitical progress.

Southern States ratified their laws to include a clause that would prohibit convicts from voting, also known as felony disenfranchisement. Though the Fifteenth Amendment was written to be free of any oppression based on race, Southern States quickly

sought out opportunities to create escape clauses rejecting all aspects of egalitarianism. November 29, 1902, Ohio's state constitution was amended in Article IV section 4, "The legislature shall have full power to exclude from the privilege of voting... any person convicted of bribery, perjury, or otherwise infamous crime."<sup>[22]</sup> The State of Louisiana followed suit and specifically targeted former slaves by making a change to their state laws; barred from voting are those "under interdiction" or "under conviction of any crime punishable with hard labor."<sup>[23]</sup> Accusing, convicting and sentencing Black citizens could all be done in less than a day in a southern courtroom, further preventing black citizenship and equality as promised under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. According to Douglas Blackmon, in his book *"Slavery by Another Name,"* the choices made by Southern white supremacists after abolition, "explained more about the current state of American life, black and white, than the antebellum slavery that preceded."<sup>[24]</sup> While the Federal Constitution progressively made steps toward equal rights regardless of race, the Southern States were politically motivated to keep Black citizens incarcerated and away from the ballot boxes.

Though the South was certainly regarded as being progressive; the attempts to adapt rather than change was far more prevalent. Swiftly redesigning slavery into indentured servitude through sharecropping or by incarcerating black citizens for trivial offenses kept the Southern States afloat economically. Efforts to keep newly freed slaves from accessing their right to vote through violence and terroristic attacks allowed racist politics to stand and laws preventing Blacks from reaching equal citizenship to stay in place. Ostensibly developed as a social solution, forced labor through convict leasing programs in Southern prison systems was simply a devious plot to keep Blacks racially inferior. Even when attempts were made to prevent the Southern states from oppressing their Black citizens, they replaced slave laws with Black codes, lynching with segregation, convict leasing with brutal chain gangs and chattel slavery with the reformed Southern prison system.



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