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# Skunk River Review 2016-2018

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# Composition I



## Bryanna Thompson

My essay was written as an analysis of the episode "Safe Haven" of the television show *Criminal Minds*. To this end, I was hoping to provide evidence that the episode was framed in a very specific way in order to persuade the viewer to believe that the serial killer presented was a byproduct of poor parenting. The analysis allowed me to interact with the source material more intimately and led me to question the extent to which media molds my perceptions of the material without my explicit awareness. This assignment also made me realize that writing a cohesive essay about my observations can help me to recognize connections that I might have otherwise overlooked.

### Raising a Psychopath:

#### The Role of Parenting in the Mental Stability of Children

As the popular quote goes, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." If you were to replace the word "great" with "evil," you would have the very debate that *Criminal Minds* explores as it seeks to understand how killers are created; in the episode "Safe Haven," the argument clearly seems to be that evilness is "thrust upon them."<sup>1</sup> In this case, the killer is a thirteen-year-old boy named Jeremy who has been slaughtering families along the border of Nebraska and Iowa. The episode goes to great lengths to show that Jeremy's psychopathy is a result of poor parenting and that he is merely trying to compensate for his bad home life with revenge. It utilizes several techniques to form the argument that killers are not innately deranged but rather cultivated. The episode repeatedly refers to the murders as

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<sup>1</sup> *Criminal Minds*, "Safe Haven," Season 6, Episode 5, directed by Andy Wolk, written by Jeff Davis, Alicia Kirk, and Rick Dunkle, CBS, aired on October 20, 2010.

payback, it features two key conversations in which characters reveal this message, and it uses another young child, Ellie Spicer, as a direct parallel to Jeremy.

The episode begins with the slaughter of two families, one in Nebraska and one just miles away in Iowa. This begins the FBI's investigation. However, before the agents leave for Iowa, a young girl, Ellie Spicer, enters the office looking for Agent Morgan; he talks to her and finds out that she ran away from her foster home and is being sexually harassed by one of the boys there. Morgan leaves Ellie with Agent Garcia to investigate further.

Right away, the theme of Jeremy's revenge is revealed. We see the scene in which Jeremy plans to kill his second set of victims (the ones that the FBI has just set out to investigate), which shows him flipping through the channels on the television set. He turns it to a station that is playing a song that very clearly proclaims "this is your payback" multiple times. Jeremy then turns up the song's volume. Next, one of the agents notes that the killer has gone "overkill on the mothers." This is the first instance in which the episode tells the viewer whom Jeremy may be trying to "pay back." Following this observation, the team observes that the mothers had been killed slowly and painfully and concludes that the murderer must hate his mother. With this heavy emphasis on revenge, the episode is clearly showing that the murderer is killing due to some sort of situation or experience that he had little to no control over.

Shortly thereafter, Jeremy strikes again and kills a roving reverend. The scene of this crime is where the agents discover that the unsub is probably an adolescent. Meanwhile, Morgan learns that Ellie's foster parents did not even realize that she was missing.

Directly following the killing of the reverend, Jeremy manipulates his way into the home of Nancy Riverton and her kids, as they are his next victims. Nancy asks to call Jeremy's mother

so she can leave her a message about the whereabouts of her son. Jeremy gives her the number of his first victim, which leads the agents to him. They go to Nancy's house to find her kids tied up; the kids tell the agents that their mom convinced Jeremy to leave the house and is driving him home. The agents begin a mad dash to try to find the identity of Jeremy's mother in order to figure out where "home" is. Simultaneously, the viewer sees the conversation that Nancy and Jeremy have while she drives him there.

Nancy reveals the core messages of the episode. Before Nancy and Jeremy left together, she reportedly told him that he was actually a good kid, he had just made a mistake. She goes on to explain this to Jeremy with greater depth. She tells him, "I believe that children are born good. Your feelings are hurt, you're angry. You're acting out. I don't blame you." She also tells him that his mother should not have left him. The first portion of these statements, that people are born good, shows that the episode's ideology is that killers are not innately programmed for killing. Nancy's explanation of Jeremy's feelings acknowledges that his actions are simply reactions to how he was treated. Finally, when she tells Jeremy that she doesn't blame him and that his mother should not have left him, she reveals that she, and therefore the episode itself, believes that Jeremy's upbringing by his mother is truly to blame. Nancy once more reiterates this final point by saying, "I think you need love and attention," and "none of this is your fault." The importance of her messages are highlighted by the fact that she was the only victim that lived; she even was able to save her family due to her conversations with Jeremy. One of the agents later remarks that it was impressive that she was able to do so, further cementing her critical role.

Just in case Nancy's words were not enough to prove that psychopaths are not simply born, but are rather created, the episode chooses to again emphasize these themes in Jeremy's

dramatic and emotional confrontation with his mother. Jeremy holds his little sister at knifepoint and demands that his mother admit that she has always hated him. When she avoids saying it outright, he coerces her by revealing that he heard her during her confession to their priest and tells her to say it again, this time to Jeremy directly. She exposes her fear of him by saying, “I was pregnant with twins. And then one day I wasn’t. The doctor said that one fetus consumed the other.” It is apparent by her rather accusatory tone that she believes Jeremy guilty of murder before his birth. Jeremy asks, as if what he is hearing is unbelievable and painful to hear confirmed, “I wasn’t even born yet and you blamed me?!” This exchange plainly reveals that Jeremy’s mother held a considerable amount of resentment for her son and that the resentment affected her parenting of him for his whole life. She even goes on to say, “Maybe *I made you into a monster* because I hated you when you were inside me” (emphasis mine). Here Jeremy’s mother admits that she may have been the one to turn Jeremy into the killer he has become. However, she also states, “Maybe I knew what you were.” This could be the episode’s way of conceding that Jeremy’s evil *could* have been innate, but it came across more as a way for Jeremy’s mother to lash out at him one more time in the midst of her fear and rage.

While the three previous examples were fairly transparent, there is one more thing that highlights the importance of upbringing and parental guidance. The episode, after all, does not focus only on Jeremy’s criminal activities but also on Ellie Spicer’s escape from her foster home and her eventual reunion with her mother. The episode juxtaposes these two characters in the same episode on purpose. Ellie and Jeremy are simply two sides of the same coin. Both Ellie and Jeremy were abandoned by their mothers and both harbor resentment over their mothers’ choices.

However, they are not without differences. Ellie had a loving father until his death, whereas Jeremy's father also abandoned him. Additionally, Ellie's mother clearly never hated Ellie as Jeremy's mother did him. Lastly, Ellie's mother reclaims her and proves that she never stopped thinking about her and loving her. Thus, Ellie is able to forgive her mother where Jeremy seemingly will never be able to forgive his. The differences between Ellie and Jeremy showcase the importance of their respective upbringings. With their similarities and presence in the same episode, the episode seems to be saying that if Ellie had been mistreated like Jeremy, she might have shared his fate.

Agent Hotchner states near the end of the episode, "Kids are adaptable, but they need somebody they can depend on." It is here that the episode's message seems clearest. Ellie finds support from her father, and later her mother. The end of the episode implies a coming happy life for her to adapt to. However, Jeremy could not depend on his father or mother, as evidenced by his conversations with Nancy and his mother. He copes by becoming a cold-hearted, emotionally unstable killer, intent on taking revenge on his own mother and others as compensation for his unstable home life. While it seems as though Jeremy's mother will be able to have a normal life with her daughter after Jeremy's arrest, the episode blatantly blames at least part of Jeremy's killing spree on her poor parenting.



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Davis, Alicia Kirk, and Rick Dunkle. CBS. Aired on October 20, 2010.



## Joseph Wellman

The intention of this paper is to explain the issues that face American TV journalists today while working under conglomerate owners, and to display how reporting quality has suffered in recent decades. In addition, my essay provides a possible solution: stronger FCC regulation and larger federal subsidies. I wrote this essay with aspiring journalists and the American voter in mind. The assignment taught me how to find a variety of sources on a specific topic through library databases.

As I continued to check out books and read different articles on the topic, new facts were constantly presented to me. Although I always made the argument against media ownership consolidation, I ended up changing the thesis numerous times to reflect my most recent findings and present the strongest argument possible. I practiced sound logic based off of real life examples and elaboration. I studied several different viewpoints regarding this issue, and came out of this assignment more knowledgeable about conglomerates, the way TV news operates, and the history of the American press.

### **Journalism under Corporate Leadership: Why the American Public Deserves the FCC**

Daily viewers of ABC's morning news program *Good Morning America* are coming to expect long stretches of airtime committed to last night's *Game of Thrones* episode and the latest absurd Donald Trump quote. How and why audiences often accept this type of news is simple. ABC is owned by Disney, a giant corporation known as a conglomerate. Conglomerates are business entities that oversee hundreds of companies in a variety of fields. They are designed for a single purpose: to maximize profit. A news outlet's objective is to arm the public with information about the world around them, so they can make rational decisions in the voting booth. An obvious conflict of interest exists between journalists and their corporate overseers. Yet these two seemingly incompatible aims can coexist, but only with close supervision by a government organization. However, over the past decade the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has favored deregulation of media outlets (Baker 126), a policy that has induced media ownership consolidation and had a negative impact on reporting quality by the major networks. Under conglomerate ownership, sensational headlines proliferate and slanted

story frames result in a dangerous amount of misinformation. Media ownership consolidation erodes the ethics of journalism, and the American government must regulate it in order for a democracy to prosper.

A democracy relies on news to be presented in a clear and analytical way, but corporate owners seeking the bottom line adopt cheap and easy methods, often mixing entertainment with news, a reporting style known as sensationalism. Edward R. Murrow, perhaps America's most iconic broadcast journalist, spoke of the urgent need for newsrooms to separate entertainment and information. Murrow warned that television would become nothing more than "wires and lights in a box" if the two could not be distinguished ("Wires"). Coverage on the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 perfectly displays that broadcast journalism has failed in that distinction. Interviews with Malaysian officials and airline employees would have supplied all the necessary material pertaining to this story in a ten-minute segment. Instead, news executives covered the tragedy like a Hollywood thriller. It became a tale of mystery and suspense, filled not with information, but with twists, turns, and hair-raising headlines.

However, journalists are not entirely to blame; recent research shows that individuals with both high and low sensation-seeking habits prefer news containing sensational elements (Bailey et al. 332). If in fact arousing news content is favored by a majority of the public, networks stand to gain more in providing it. News executives are in daily competition with cartoons, daytime dramas, and action movies. With relaxed FCC regulations, these executives are free to use whatever means necessary to increase ratings. Corporate owners tend to favor sensational elements to draw in an audience because they are more cost effective than investing time and resources into reporting events with careful analysis (Champlin and Knoedler 463). In many instances, travel and source-gathering expenses are cut back by conglomerates. A CEO

would call this streamlining, which is a great way to manage a business, but can be damaging when applied to news reporting. Journalists are limited by cutbacks, and editors trim the substance out of reports in pursuit of sensational angles and higher ratings. Filtered reports focus on the alarming aspects of an event and its immediate aftermath, rather than the underlying reasons an event occurred (El-Hady 153). Information that may help shape a viewer's perspective is sacrificed for marketability, and widespread misinformation follows. How can Americans make informed decisions when important details are intentionally removed from reports? Under conglomerate ownership, sensationalism becomes the default reporting method, and the real story is buried beneath a shocking image or headline. "Infotainment" will always inhibit public debate and stand as a road-block to functioning democracy.

While sensational reporting is by its nature obnoxious, there is a subtle and far more dangerous way conglomerates distort the news—objectivity, journalism's central goal, is becoming an affliction. A so-called fair and balanced approach is more convenient and less costly than investigative reporting, and effectively safeguards against offending viewers (Hedges 209). Networks may choose to give equal air time to both sides of an issue, simply to keep both sides of the political aisle watching. An anchor will bring the same moderate pundits on to the show, and after each side presents a case, it's time to cut to commercial. These segments lack in-depth assessment and fail to raise significant questions about current issues. As columnist James Poniewozik states, "Seeming fair becomes more important than being fair." In this network philosophy, informing the public remains a secondary interest, while seeking the widest possible audience prevails. Research from the 2004 presidential election shows that 55% of coverage was devoted to campaign strategy, while only 13% discussed policy issues (Baym 66). Journalism's purpose is to inform and promote public discussion, and neither purpose is fulfilled by

commenting on a candidate's strategy. Keeping both Kerry and Bush supporters tuned in was the primary goal for media owners in 2004. Their anchors criticized neither candidate and endorsed no platform. In fear of alienating part of their audience, editors directed public attention towards what each candidate must accomplish in order to win, and turned the most pivotal months of the election cycle into sport. When issues surrounding the election were covered, they were placed at the tail end of programs well past prime time hours. In the broadcast business, the position of a segment within the nightly line-up reflects its value (Baym 66). Media owners showed in 2004 that they valued drawing in high viewership numbers over debate. If the illusion of objectivity continues to be a way that conglomerates can boost ratings, and journalists cease to uncover the most accurate reality they can, the American system of government is threatened by ignorance.

Fortunately, the founding fathers perceived this threat. They realized the necessity of a thriving press and helped to create one through subsidies. American presidents in the 18th century provided massive subsidies for news outlets so that newspapers could afford to expand circulation and reduce their dependence on advertising revenue (Cowan and Westphal 133). Lack of subsidies can cause networks to rely completely on advertisement sales, an extremely limited revenue source. Consequently, the quality of their reporting diminishes. Federal grants given to broadcasters in Northern Europe have kept smaller independent news outlets in the market and given rise to analytical reporting (Baker 184). When networks were in part financially supported by government, dependence on advertising revenue dropped. It allowed for the reallocation of resources towards extensive research by journalists. FCC subsidies can also incentivize investigative news segments. The more airtime a network devotes to public affairs programming, the bigger their check from the government. With closer FCC oversight and larger

subsidies, editors can be held accountable for their reporting content, and executives can act on what benefits news quality rather than what brings the highest ad sales.

Many proponents of loose media regulation claim that tougher FCC guidelines will result in the government taking on an authoritarian role within the public sphere. This fear is based on the idea that government oversight is synonymous with government corruption (Thomas 124). North Korea and Russia are powerful examples of state-run media pushing the government's agenda, and how easily a regime can close off access to information. Critics of the FCC rightly claim that "Suppression of news and opinion is not likely to be difficult when official regulation is in place and accepted" (Dunham 62). All government agencies are susceptible to corruption, no matter how paramount the laws or righteous the cause. In the case of overseeing the news media, they may have power to silence opposition and shift public opinion to conform with their aims. Yet these same critics overlook the manipulation of news under conglomerate ownership. Sensationalism and lack of critical reporting are only two of the ways privatized media suppresses information. The question is who will have ultimate control over what the public see and hear: CEOs or congressmen? Avoiding both these evils is easier than it may seem. The separation of powers in American government prevent any individual branch from abusing its authority. A majority of Americans are hesitant to critique or offer effective alternatives to their own government's systems of checks and balances. Why, then, should a different system be imposed on broadcast news networks—who are instrumental in informing the public, and therefore, the functioning of government? Besides, FCC regulations do not pertain to the restriction of news content, only the limitation of ownership by one corporate entity (Baker 127). These laws prevent one group of owners from dominating the market. A stronger FCC is the power check of which broadcast media is in dire need. Even if the FCC did seek to increase their

influence over reports, the American people can rest easy: protests against that behavior and their government's system of checks and balances would quickly amend the problem.

If American democracy is a great social experiment, its hypothesis is this: The common people can direct the actions of their government. The first and perhaps most important research question reads: Can the people be properly equipped with information to direct those actions?

The answer of course is yes, but in the 21st century, it becomes painfully clear that news outlets overseen by conglomerates do not serve this end. Relaxed media regulations create monopolies on information, and where subsidies have been cut back, news quality has suffered. The hope of restoring broadcast journalism to its former prestige rests in regulation by federal agencies.

Increased government grants prompt executives to supply the American people with clear information about issues that affect them, and the FCC must fairly enforce laws to ensure the public interest comes first. Without regulation, media ownership will continue to consolidate, and broadcast journalism will continue to deteriorate. With regulation, the American public will be provided with the broadcast news that they deserve, and the American experiment will prove a workable reality.

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## Composition II



### Amy Eldridge

We were asked to write an academic analysis of a concern or problem regarding an aspect of popular culture, then overview existing solutions for the problem and provide our own solutions. We broke down the paper by doing a draft of the problem side of the paper and getting feedback, and then writing a complete draft of both our problem and solution sides of our paper followed by more feedback from the professor. Within the paper, we were asked to use at least six secondary sources and cite them within our text as well. The paper was followed by an eight-to-ten-minute presentation where we informed our class about our topic and the solution we found.

### Alternatives That Will Soon Replace Animal Testing

Over 100 million animals such as mice, cats, dogs, and rabbits are killed each year in the U.S. in the use of chemical testing (PETA). They could be used for biology lessons, drug testing, and medical training, but probably the most unnecessary form of animal testing is that related to cosmetic testing. Companies perform these tests on animals to develop and use new, untested ingredients in their cosmetic products. By testing these ingredients, they are able to see how safe the ingredient will be to put in their products. Experimenting on animals is a dated and unnecessary form of testing for any kind of company to use. The worst part about the situation with animal testing is that in the United States, it is not made illegal by the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (The Humane Society). Animal testing being used for something as unnecessary as beauty products needs to be outlawed and replaced with an alternative method to achieve safety standards for beauty products.

As previously stated, over 100 million animals die each year from this gruesome form of testing to support our beauty brands' needs for profit. Before the deaths of these animals, a number of them are forced to inhale toxic fumes or immobilized in restraint devices for hours; some experience holes being drilled into their skulls or having their spinal cords crushed; and

some even have their skin burned off while conscious. These animals' conditions before, during, and after testing are horrible. They are kept in cages where they are socially isolated and psychologically traumatized. Some of the most commonly performed tests on mice, rats, rabbits, and guinea pigs include skin and eye irritation tests that involve chemicals being put on open skin and eyes while the animal is restrained, force-feeding that can last up to months, and lethal dose tests in which animals are forced to swallow large amounts of a chemical to determine if it can lead to death (The Humane Society). Many people may not know the extent of the gruesome testing that is done on small animals, which may be a major reason why it hasn't been outlawed.

Although there have been many efforts by beauty brands to change their methods of testing to cruelty-free, some brands have found ways to convince their buyers their products are cruelty-free when in fact they are not. Being vegan, someone who doesn't eat or use animal products, is something that has been becoming more popular in society. This has resulted not only in new food products, but also beauty products. Popular high-end and drugstore makeup brands such as Too Faced, Urban Decay, Tarte, and NYX, and dozens more, have all announced that their products are cruelty-free (Ellin). Some of these brands that didn't used to be cruelty-free have stopped testing on animals either for the reason of marketing and/or for moral reasons. Even with this improvement, there is still a problem with some beauty brands falsely labeling their products. Some products labeled "all-natural" can sometimes fool a shopper into thinking they are buying a brand that doesn't test on animals (Ellin). Another issue with labeling is that "cruelty-free" and "not testing on animals" don't always mean the same thing. Depending on the state, some companies are allowed to set their own standards on what they want "cruelty-free" to mean (MSPCA). Without standards set throughout the U.S to outlaw all kinds of animal testing, companies will find ways to sneak around the rules, such as testing in a foreign country where

laws aren't yet set, or relying on other companies to test on animals to avoid getting labeled the conductor of the testing.

Luckily, innovations in science have created alternative methods for animal testing that are often cheaper, quicker, and more effective. One alternative that has been introduced to the cosmetic industry is cell cultures. This involves growing human and animal cells in a laboratory which can be used to see biological effects, disease processes, and drug metabolism. These cells can even mimic the lung, heart, kidney and gut, allowing these tests not to require an animal (Cruelty Free International). Another alternative that has been introduced is instead of using animal tissue, tissues and transplants donated from human volunteers and surgeries can be used to replace animals in the irritation tests that are commonly performed on rabbits (Cruelty Free International). The last and probably most obvious alternative to animal testing is to just use ingredients that don't need to be tested whatsoever. These alternative ways of testing would not only lower the number of animals that die every year because of testing, but would also modernize the ways cosmetic companies make sure products are safe.

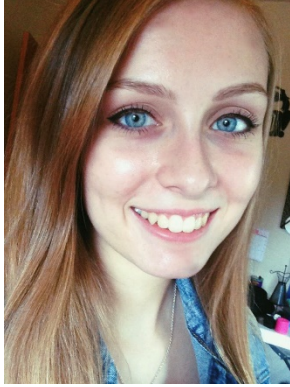
Many organizations have been formed to bring awareness to the issue of animal testing, such as the Humane Cosmetic Act and Cruelty Free International, just to name a couple. One company that has brought some serious attention to the public eye is Lush cosmetics, which is a cruelty-free company that makes handmade bath and body products. To help combat animal abuse, Jacqueline Traide volunteered to be displayed in the front window of one of Lush's stores in London (UK). She wanted to show the public the shocking performance to draw attention to the pain and cruelty animals experience in laboratories. To do this, she was restrained and had her mouth clamped open while experiencing cosmetics being dropped into her eyes, being given injections, and even having parts of her head shaved while sitting in the window for a total of 10

hours straight (Harris). There were mixed reactions to the performance; some claimed the show was “a bit too real.” A campaign manager of Lush said, “The ironic thing is that if it was a beagle in the window and we were doing all these things to it, we’d have the police and RSPCA here in minutes” (Harris). The only difference between this experiment on a human versus one on an animal is that the animal would die. This performance showed the reality of what’s happening in laboratories in so many places, and the public needed to be reminded of it.

The biggest issue with animal testing is that many people don’t know it’s happening or know the extent of the tests being done. In order for the issue of unfair animal testing to be addressed, people need to not only know what’s happening but perhaps see what’s happening. It’s unfair for animals to suffer in order to have beauty products available to us. These tests are usually done in order to establish safety for humans; however, in the process, the tests either leave the animals dead or close to it. It takes no more than looking at a list of cruelty-free beauty brands to change your next beauty purchase. Some of these brands are not only cruelty-free but organic, natural, and even sometimes cheaper. Everyone has their own opinion on whether testing on animals for medical reasons is right or not, but for the purpose of beauty brands, animal testing is not only a dated practice but also highly unnecessary.

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## **Savannah Maynard**

The purpose of my research paper was to inform readers about the role of community college within higher education, and to inform them about the benefits of attending community college. My intended audience was students or prospective students who are not familiar with the advantages of community college, or who may be on the fence about pursuing a college education. In completing this assignment, I have learned that one of the most important aspects of research writing is to present only factual information and omit any opinion or personal viewpoint. While writing, I practiced choosing relevant information from each source and using it to support my claim, and I feel that my ability to do so has since improved. I can say with confidence that my ability to search for and choose reliable sources has also improved. I learned to take a broad assignment prompt and narrow it down to a specific topic to research. For my sources, I consulted two documentaries that were shown in class and two database articles.

### **Community College: A Chance at Success for the “Have-Nots”**

In today’s America, when it comes to higher education, it has become a case of the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Society today pushes the idea that all paths to true success begin the same: by graduating from college and obtaining a four-year degree. Although a four-year degree may aid in achieving one’s educational and career goals, it is by no means the only way to become successful. Many people instead choose to attend community college to accomplish their ambitions, and often do so with great success. To people who would otherwise lack the means to pursue higher education, community and technical colleges provide significant opportunities through specialized vocational training, a smooth transition from high school to college, and low tuition costs.

The face of community college is not at all the same as that of a typical four-year university. Rather, it features a wide variety of courses and course types, including vocational and technical programs, as well as regular lecture and lab classes. However, in the article, “The Value of a College Education: Is a Four-Year Degree the Only Path to a Secure Future?” Thomas

Billitteri states that a fair amount of students today are simply not predisposed to complete and do well with college-level material. In the documentary *Discounted Dreams: High Hopes and Harsh Realities at America's Community Colleges*, James Lisante, a professional chef, explains, "We've all been told that part of the great American dream is to grow up to be a doctor and a dentist and a lawyer. But we're not all cut out for that academic life" (6). This is where the importance of vocational and technical programs is most significant. Some students choose to enroll in vocational and technical programs at a community college because they take a short amount of time to complete, usually two years or less, and are designed to equip students with the skills they need in order to enter directly into the workforce. Four-year undergraduate programs at state universities typically do not have the same guarantee. Lisante also asserts, "There's a lot of very good paying jobs, professions out there where you don't need a four year college diploma" (6). He is correct; some of the well-paying jobs to which he is referring that do not require a four-year degree include web developer, dental hygienist, civil engineer technician, and nurse, among others. In fact, sixty percent of registered nurses in the United States today were trained through a community college vocational program (*Discounted Dreams* 3). Essentially, these types of programs provide an alternative opportunity for success to people who are not necessarily "cut out" for college-level work. In other words, it allows people who are not academically skilled to achieve the same level of success, or better, as those who are.

One of the main advantages of vocational and technical programs is that they do not require as much time to complete as four-year undergraduate programs. The length of each program varies, but they typically range from about six months to two years at a community college. These short programs are beneficial to most community college students, especially nontraditional students who may work full-time and have children. Many nontraditional students



make the decision to go back to school in order to pursue a career that pays better than their current one. Similarly, some nontraditional students are people who once had stable, well-paying careers, but lost their jobs due to circumstances out of their control. For instance, Dave Rynders, one of the interviewees in *Discounted Dreams*, used to be a carpenter with a steady career and great pay. Unfortunately, he suffered an injury on the job and was forced to quit. He then realized he had “no other skills to fall back on” (*Discounted Dreams* 3), so he chose to pursue a nursing career through a training program at his local community college. Had he chosen instead to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a university, he likely would have struggled without a steady career for the four years, or more, that it would take to complete the degree program. As Nancy Shulock, a university professor, remarks, “Changing careers is so much more frequent than it was before. And the community colleges are ideally positioned for that” (*Discounted Dreams* 3). For students like Rynders who are currently struggling to make ends meet and have no marketable skills, short vocational and technical programs help them to obtain secure, well-paying jobs as quickly as possible.

On a different note, there are many recent high school graduates who aspire to obtain a four-year degree, but have not been adequately prepared for the rigorous curriculum of university courses (Billitteri). For those who do find themselves unprepared, completing two years of community college coursework before enrolling in a university may be the best path. Most community colleges offer a two-year liberal arts degree program that is designed to transfer and apply towards a four-year undergraduate degree at a university. The benefits of these transfer programs abound, especially for recent high school graduates. One of the most significant benefits is small class sizes. In her article, “The Perks of Community College,” Amy Smith explains that most community college classes consist of only fifteen to twenty-five students.

Small class sizes provide a more comfortable and familiar atmosphere to recent high school graduates, who are used to small classrooms, which can help them adjust quickly to the college setting and focus more on their coursework. As a result of a small student-to-instructor ratio, students are able to get one-on-one help from their instructor, which allows them to better understand the material and perform well in class. Additionally, because of the low student population and small community on campus, students are able to meet others and make connections more easily than they would at a large university. This makes it simple to develop a social network, which is important in order to establish a career. In essence, attending two years of community college after high school provides students with a small, comfortable atmosphere in which they can adjust and become accustomed to college work and expectations before enrolling in a four-year university to complete their degree, thus making a smooth transition.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant advantages of attending community college rather than a four-year university is its low cost. It is no secret that attending college is an enormous investment, especially today, when college tuition rates are at an all-time high. Unfortunately, this is the largest barrier for many underprivileged Americans who wish to attend college but simply do not have the means. However, although there is still a price, attending community college is considerably more affordable than a four-year university. The average yearly cost of tuition and fees at a community college in the United States is \$2,544. This is almost six times less than that of a public four-year university, over ten times less than an out-of-state four-year university, and fourteen times less than a private four-year college (Billitteri). This makes obtaining a degree or certification feasible for low-income students and students who are not eligible to receive financial aid. It is also beneficial to recent high school graduates who

plan to attend community college for two years and then transfer to a four-year university and graduate with as little debt as possible.

As a result of the skyrocketing cost of a college education, most students end up with an outrageous amount of student loan debt by the time they graduate from a four-year institution. The total amount of student loan debt in the United States now stands at over \$1 trillion, and the average four-year university student graduates with over \$25,000 in debt (*Ivory Tower*). This debt becomes an even bigger problem when college graduates are unable to find a job, one for which they prepared for four years or longer, after finishing school. However, students who choose instead to attend community college typically do not suffer with the burden of such massive debt after graduation. The majority of community college graduates even manage to avoid debt completely: “Sixty-two percent of those graduating with associate degrees from two-year public institutions had no debt” (Billitteri). Not to mention the job placement rate for community college graduates is significantly higher than that of four-year university graduates. The opportunity to have zero debt after completing a degree or certification program is one of the many aspects that make community college an attractive option for prospective students nationwide.

In summation, community college is the pathway to success for individuals who do not have the time, aptitude, or money necessary to attend a four-year university. At community colleges, these students are given the opportunities of specially-designed technical and vocational programs, an easy progression from high school to a four-year institution, and reasonable tuition and fees. Consequently, community college graduates often find themselves just as, if not more, successful in the long run as those who attend four-year universities.

Through the many opportunities that community college provides, the “have-nots” are granted the freedom to become the “haves.”

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## **Ashlee Osier**

My purpose was to inform readers about the numerous benefits community colleges offer individuals who are pursuing the American Dream. This essay is written for every individual wishing to attend higher education in addition to those who are unsure about continuing their education after high school. My primary focus in this assignment was supporting my claim with evidence through documentation as well as my own knowledge and community college experiences. While drafting this documented essay, I learned the importance of finding credible sources that support my claim and integrating those sources in a smooth, effective manner. I created a succinct thesis statement that I supported throughout my paper with numerous reasons and documented evidence. The most prominent aspect of writing I became aware of was the importance of finding reliable sources. Without quality sources, a paper lacks ethos since an argument cannot be effectively supported with evidence and reasoning without credibility. I practiced writing in MLA format, creating a concise thesis statement, locating credible sources from CQ Researcher, and providing in-text citations and a works cited page.

### **The Role of Community Colleges in Helping Students Achieve the American Dream**

Is pursuing higher education a worthwhile step towards achieving the American dream? Today, many high school students disagree about whether attending college will actually better enable them to accomplish their dreams. Some argue that one simply cannot become successful if he or she does not attend a four-year college after high school. Many individuals often follow in their parents' footsteps, focusing on exceeding expectations without opening their minds to other possibilities. Others who have family members who have never attended college believe that pursuing higher education is not even a realistic option. They may have learned from their parents that they can use skills learned from prior experiences to find a stable job or maybe even become an entrepreneur. Though there are many pros and cons to both viewpoints, there is an alternative solution that could potentially be even more beneficial: community college. Community colleges play a huge role in providing individuals the tools necessary to achieve the

American dream by offering individuals a variety of programs, providing an affordable option, and having smaller campuses than universities.

The American dream is a very important theme not just for those born in the United States, but also for immigrants or refugees dreaming of a better life. The American dream can be defined in numerous ways, but it is clear that everyone living the American dream is granted opportunity, freedom, and happiness. Many argue that to achieve this dream, one must attend college to gain the knowledge necessary to enter a particular workforce; without this experience, it may be difficult for a person to become successful.

Differing from large universities and ivy-league schools, community colleges offer numerous programs of study to assist individuals in achieving the American dream. Offering acceptance to virtually any individual seeking an education after high school, community colleges provide students the chance to begin or continue their higher education experience. The main benefit of attending community college is that there are various options available. Whether a person aspires to become an electrician or a doctor, there is a place for everyone. Students can earn a certificate, diploma, associate's degree, or even just transfer credits to a four-year institution.

Community college is the perfect place to complete vocational programs that provide individuals with the training necessary for a particular job. Completing hands-on training, a student gains the skills required for a particular job and is ready to enter the workforce after just a couple of years of school. There are many vocational skills in high demand today, so the importance of community college is extremely high since universities do not offer these programs to their students. In the documentary *Discounted Dreams*, James Lisante is attending culinary school and agrees that community college has helped him achieve the American dream:

“We’ve all been . . .told that part of the great American dream is to grow up to be a doctor and a dentist and a lawyer. But we’re not all cut out for that academic life. And there’s a lot of very good paying jobs, professions out there where you don’t need a four year college diploma” (6). Many of these skills will also earn a person a decent starting wage, so the vocational option is a very smart choice since it places individuals into the workforce immediately after the program is completed. This effectively provides individuals with the financial security necessary for them to achieve the American dream.

Those wishing to earn a degree higher than an associate’s can also benefit from beginning their education at the community college level. In their journal article “Why Community College Students Make Successful Transfer Students,” David Urso and John Sygielski describe the situation of a transfer student: “Tony graduated with honors that spring and transferred all of his coursework to his out-of-state university . . . Two years later, Tony again graduated with honors and had been accepted into a top-tier law school to pursue a future in environment law” (14). At community college, students can complete their general education requirements and then transfer to a four-year institution to focus on their major. Credits completed at community colleges usually easily transfer to other institutions, so the process is very simple. This gives students the opportunity to begin the first step in reaching their American dream.

Breaking down the barriers that prevent many individuals from achieving the American dream, community colleges also offer an affordable option to those unable to invest a large amount of money into their education. Many people might not even consider attending college if there were not a cheaper option, so this is an obvious reason why many individuals choose to attend community college. Students spend only a fraction of the tuition they would pay at



universities or private colleges, so no matter what a person's financial background is, community college is the most reasonable option to save money.

Compared to a university, community college provides students a quality education at a lower cost. Instead of wasting a large amount of money on credits at universities, students can choose general education classes that interest them for a fraction of the cost. In his article "The Value of a College Education," Thomas J. Billitten informs readers about how financially devastating four-year colleges are: "At the same time, four years of college demands a steep investment that may take years to recoup. In-state tuition, fees and room and board at a public four-year college now average \$15,213 per year, up 5.9 percent in a year, though student aid often lowers the tab. At private schools, the bill — not counting any aid — runs \$35,636 per year, up 4.3 percent in a year" (par. 14). Since most people cannot attend a four-year college without accumulating a mountain of debt, community college is a better option. This option also assists students in determining what areas of study interest them so they can choose a major and potential career that they enjoy. This exploring of options is a huge benefit, since many students change their major a few times during their academic career; this is another reason many students are burdened with a large amount of debt when they attend universities.

Many students choose to attend a larger university or private college in the hope of getting actively involved in their school. Although there are more options available at larger universities, there are still numerous options available at community colleges that cost students little or nothing to join. Though these groups and organizations may be smaller than ones at other colleges, they still provide students with quality experiences. Urso and Sygielski confirm this in their journal article "Why Community College Students Make Successful Transfer Students:" "The 400,000 individuals who graduate annually from community colleges have the opportunity

to become involved in their college governments, student clubs and associations, churches, local elementary and high schools, and in a wide variety of local civic and social organizations” (15). Many community colleges have business organizations, like Phi Beta Lambda, and honor societies, like Phi Theta Kappa. These groups effectively help students build their personal leadership skills, community involvement, and academic success while offering numerous transfer scholarships.

In addition to providing a variety of programs of study at a small cost, community colleges have smaller campuses. In the long run, this is very beneficial to students trying to achieve the American dream. Since the campuses at community colleges are small, class sizes are also smaller. This provides students the opportunity to actively interact with professors and classmates rather than simply attending class and listening to lectures.

Class sizes at community colleges are very small, which helps build the confidence of individuals. While a course at a university may contain three hundred students, the same course at a community college may only contain thirty students. In her newspaper article “The Perks of Community College,” Amy Smith validates this fact: “As a freshman in a four-year program, you might feel lost in a sea of dancers. Community colleges offer smaller class sizes of about 15 to 25 students and allow a ton of flexibility with scheduling” (68). The size of community colleges reassures students and gives them freedom to become acquainted with every person in the class rather than just those sitting around them. Since the student-teacher ratio is so small, the ability to have in-class discussions is strengthened. At universities, active discussions may be difficult; answers may either have to be randomly shouted out or submitted on an online discussion board. This takes away from the learning experience, making it difficult for students to benefit from a lecture when they cannot participate in discussions.

Since campuses at community colleges are small, there are fewer teachers who are researchers. This point gives students the ability to seek assistance from their professors not only during class, but outside of class. Instructors at community colleges have office hours so students can walk in any time they need help. Building connections with teachers is essential for many individuals wishing to achieve the American dream. In his article “Community Colleges: The (Often) Rocky Path to the American Dream,” John Merrow discusses pros and cons to community college. In this article, a community college professor describes his role as a faculty member: “I’m also a mentor, a best friend, a counselor—many things besides an educator” (19). By having a small enough campus, professors can get to know their students and actively witness the work they do in and outside of the classroom. When a student needs a recommendation, professors are able to attest to the individual’s strengths. Many instructors at universities are researchers, so their time spent teaching and interacting with students is decreased.

Community college education provides individuals with the opportunity to achieve the American dream in many ways. By offering numerous programs, making tuition affordable for everyone, and having a more tight-knit atmosphere, community colleges give students the tools necessary to build their version of the American dream. Many people do not believe that they will benefit from a college education, but community colleges challenge this belief. Without community colleges, many Americans today would be struggling to live the American dream.

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## **Elizabeth Petersen**

With this writing assignment, I was tasked to create present potential solutions to a problem. Echo chambers have been a growing problem since the dawn of social media, and had been discussed more frequently at the time of the assignment because of the election results. I thought this would be the perfect time to help those who might not know much about the Internet and social media to learn more about these: how they work, how they affect us, why they need to change, and how we could take a few steps to implement changes to make our online interactions better for all of us.

### **Is that you, Facebook? It's me, Echo Chamber.**

The Internet is a place that was once colloquially referred to as the information superhighway. It is a place for people to socialize, meet new people, and get news information. What happens, though, when the news and information is automatically tailored for the user based on what the companies know about them? On the surface, this might sound like a good idea. They can bring the most relevant information to the user so the user can spend less time searching. However, more than ever, people are noticing what is being referred to as an “echo chamber effect” or “filter bubble” online: users are only seeing information tailored for them, filtering out diversity of opinion and information in their feeds and creating an actual and metaphorical divide. Despite this, there are steps both the user and social media providers can take to bridge this gap and end the echoes.

Today, many people around the world utilize social media daily. Social media is not only designed for users to come together to communicate as friends, but also as a place to learn new information. Per the *News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016* report from Pew Research Center, up to 62% of adults in the U.S. get their news from social media, most notably the popular social media site Facebook. Yet how does Facebook decide what content the user will

see on their news feed? This is done through algorithms. Merriam-Webster defines an algorithm as “A set of rules a machine (especially a computer) follows to achieve a particular goal.” Josh Constine of TechCrunch offers a great elaboration on how Facebook algorithms operate in his article, “How Facebook News Feed Works.” Every like, comment, share, click, even the words a user posts on social media are recorded and used to determine what content the user would want to see more of and what ads to send them. This is done to encourage what is referred to as user “engagement,” which means how much a person uses the website and engages with the content and services. This includes helping Facebook earn their keep through ad revenue (Constine). In another TechCrunch article by Anna Escher titled “How Facebook can Escape the Echo Chamber,” she notes that in the third quarter of 2016 alone, Facebook has earned \$7B in revenue through user engagement.

There’s a lot of content on the Internet, and the ability to tailor content to our needs can be useful. With Facebook, what the user sees will depend on who posted it, how other people have engaged with it, what type of post it is, and when it was posted (Constine). The more we engage with certain types of posts or people, the more they will show up in our feed, and the more similar posts will show up. However, the way we interact with our feed can create what is either known as a “filter bubble” or “echo chamber effect”. The words are similar, with slightly different meanings. Filter bubble refers directly to the action of the algorithm, as in the filtering of content, and the echo chamber effect is what happens because of it (Bakshy et al. 1). As the algorithm records a user’s clicks, likes, shares, their interactions with their friends and pages that they like, these computations will begin to show less and less of opposing or alternate points of view. Eli Praiser, author of *The Filter Bubble* and speaker at TED Talk "Beware Online 'Filter

Bubbles," noticed how the more he clicked links with liberal points of view, the more his conservative friends seemingly disappeared from his newsfeed, without his asking.

Algorithms are determining what information users do and do not want to see for them, without their knowledge. Instead of a users' beliefs being challenged by a variety of different viewpoints, they become reinforced with a feedback loop of information. A recently released study called "Echo Chambers on Facebook" looked at communities of people interested in science pages compared to conspiracy theory pages, and found that both groups were very highly polarized. They found that despite these parties being very different in opinion, they tended to act very similarly in how they collected together with others of like-mind. This polarization and closed-off grouping reinforces the natural tendency to look for information that matches with their preferred belief set, also known as confirmation bias. Simultaneously they would easily reject any new information that might possibly be perceived as contesting that belief (Quattrociocchi et al. 14). Thus, instead of free exchange, users have become entrapped both by their own biases and by the algorithms that fed them.

Facebook continues to grow in popularity and usage, with 67% of U.S. adults using it. If two-thirds of these users rely on Facebook as a main source of news and information, this equals to about 44% of the general population (Gottfried and Shearer 1). Political views are not being changed, challenged, or discussed in depth across groups; rather, they are being echoed and enforced amongst those already of like mind. This was displayed in another Pew Research Study on 2016 U.S. election politics and social media users. Only 20% of these users reported modifying or changed their stance on a political issue because of social media, while a staggering 82% say that it had never changed their opinion on a candidate, and 79% say it had never

changed their opinion on a political issue. Oftentimes the ones whose opinions had been changed directed their judgements in a more pessimistic view (Anderson 1).

Attitudes and opinions of a more negative, hostile, and isolationist nature in the virtual world can have a real and damaging effect on the outside world. Reporter German Lopez from Vox Media reports in a December 7<sup>th</sup> 2016 article titled “Pizzagate, the fake news conspiracy theory that led a gunman to DC’s Comet Ping Pong, explained” about how a man in Washington D.C. walked into a pizzeria with an assault rifle to fire a few shots before being subdued. His intent was to investigate a conspiracy theory that was spread online through various social media outlets, including Facebook, called “Pizzagate.” This theory was born online and expanded through these segregated groups, and then was picked up by fake news outlets, where it multiplied exponentially. Fake news outlets are websites that purposefully share fictionalized news stories with the intent to make ad revenue money from clicks and shares via viral content, regardless of the legitimacy of the content. Fake news is a large contributor to the echo chamber effect and is a large problem on Facebook. This could be observed in the last three months leading up to the election, when fake news stories received more total engagement than mainstream news stories (Lopez).

To burst filter bubbles and end our echo chambers, steps must be taken on both the side of the user and the provider. This is especially true because of how the algorithms on Facebook work. A report titled “Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook” demonstrated that users influence what they see based on their group of “Friends” and the media they engage with. Users can open this variety up by keeping a wider circle of friend groups, and interacting with more diverse media. This will influence the algorithms at work to bring more variety of content to the user. Other factors that will bring more diversity to the user include



“Saving” a story for later or turning on notifications for a post (Constine). Users will also need to keep in mind that interacting with inflammatory and purposefully false media content can also bring more of this content to them as well. These posts can be scrolled past and ignored, reported as false through the report function, or hidden via the “Hide Post” function. These methods can help the user see fewer of these types of posts in their news feed (Constine). Users must also take the time to double check the address of the story they click, and double check their sources. By taking the time to understand how these algorithms work with their actions, users can open up the amount of content they interact with daily. Users must fight the echo chamber by expanding their media consumption outside of their current scope of social media. They can also put pressure on the companies who provide these services for them as well.

In addition to the user taking their own steps, Facebook must take responsibility to change how these algorithms work and influence their users. It has been shown that social media has a clear and demonstrable effect on how users interact with the world at large. The average user does not have a knowledge of algorithms or how they work and influence their feed. One feature Facebook could add is a filter to see different friends’ posts based on how they politically identify. For example, a liberal identified person could click a filter and see what friends who identify as conservative or moderate are sharing (Escher). Currently, when a user clicks an article, they will often see suggested articles of a similar nature displayed below it. Facebook could also add in suggested articles of opposing viewpoints. Facebook also displays trending topics to their users, based on the number of shares. These links are often rife with disreputable sources. These were once carefully filtered and written by hand to ensure veracity. If Facebook returned to this practice, it would reduce the amount of fake news circulating on the site. The company should recall that many of their users prioritize the website for following their families

and friends. Keeping this in mind, reducing the amount of page and ad content in comparison to friend posts in a person's news feed would be a simple change in their algorithm.

Fighting back against filter bubbles and echo chambers on social media will be a long and difficult process. Studies on social media are notoriously difficult to do, due to their size and the anonymity of the users. Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that what we see and interact with on social media has a real and tangible effect on how we think and how we interact with the world. With social in-groups growing more polarized and hostile, it is becoming imperative that individuals seek out challenging viewpoints on their own. Facebook and their ilk must also take their own responsibility in bursting these bubbles. The Internet has been idealized as a place of free and open communication, but this is not the case. It is a place that has been tailored for each user in the name of ad revenue. During his lecture at TED2011, Eli Prager implored social media creators, "...We really need you to make sure that these algorithms have encoded in them a sense of the public life, a sense of civic responsibility." He continues to say that the way it is set up now leaves us isolated in a "web of one." People grow through shared connection and communication, and that is what will end echo chambers.

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## Humanities



### Deann Irlmeier

I wrote this essay as my fall Honors project for my Encounters in Humanities class. My professor, Maria Cochran, worked with me outside of class to develop this paper. The goal was to complete a research paper about a topic that related to my major, business, and the humanities class. I chose to write about the economy during the Renaissance period. I wanted to learn more about the ways that the economy influenced the growth and development of the arts and sciences. The intended readers of this research paper were my professor and other scholars in the economic and humanities fields. I learned that this type of writing can be dry and devoid of common language, so I strived to make the paper a more readable, understandable format than most works published on these topics. I also worked to cite many sources, which is crucial to all research papers. Through this paper, I have learned more about integrating logical transitions throughout my paper so that ideas flow from one to the next. It is important to have a “road map” for readers to follow in order to create a logical, well-constructed research paper. I also improved my in-text MLA citation skills.

### **Economy: Florence, Italy in the Renaissance**

The Renaissance was a time of great innovations and creativity that occurred during the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a rebirth of literature and the arts after a long period of medieval stagnation. Humanity achieved amazing heights in a variety of areas from art to engineering. Most scholarship on the Renaissance covers the masterpieces that were produced, but rarely focuses on the economy that allowed these accomplishments. During the Renaissance the economy flourished, but what facilitated this growth and how did it influence the flourishing of the arts? This paper maintains that in Florence, Italy, the birthplace of Renaissance, such factors as the devastating epidemic of the bubonic plague, the decrease in taxation, the development of global trade and exploration, and, finally, the invention of the printing press were the greatest catalysts for the economy. These factors allowed economic growth and increased funding of the arts through banking, bottegas, and art sponsorship.

In the late Middle Ages, Florence was a dirty place. They didn't have sewers, so their sewage and garbage were in the streets, which contributed to the easy spread of infectious diseases and helped the spread of the plague. The Plague interrupted trade and business because people were quickly dying. Victims of the plague began to grow puss pockets or buboes, their body would begin to turn black, and they died within a few days of contracting the disease. These sudden, horrific deaths struck fear into many people and began to unravel society. The plague caused a turn from the Catholic teachings and initially a downturn in the economy because people were dying quickly and without discrimination. People began to doubt their faith because not only the sinful people were dying, but also the devoutly religious. The poor, working class died in mass numbers, which reduced the number of laborers. When the plague ended, workers who survived had many job choices, but the market had a workforce shortage. Peasants and workers no longer settled for work on farms.

Many peasants from the countryside moved to cities to find higher paying jobs, which sparked urbanization and a turn from serfdom and feudalism. When workers had more options and alternatives, they were less willing to settle for low-paying, back-breaking jobs. Workers in France and England fought for worker rights and higher wages by protesting for the first time in Europe's history. Through the Plague and Hundred Years' War, medieval order and the economy were uprooted because half of Europe's population had disappeared. As people began to question the church, they questioned the teachings about wealth and power as well. They no longer felt the need to limit their possessions and money. This caused an increase in demand for goods and increased consumerism. People began to buy more items and invest their wealth in exploration and trade. Trade allowed new markets to develop, like the cloth trade, which increased revenues

for Florentines and allowed them to reinvest their money. These increases in trade in the independent, competitive city-states of Italy created flourishing economies (Fiero 7, 19, 41).

This economic development not only began from the devastation of the Plague, but also multiple wars between city-states. During the beginning of the fifteenth century, Florence, a city-state, waged many wars with the neighboring city-states. Due to the numerous wars, the taxes were high to maintain Florence's military might. These taxes were especially costly for the wealthy. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, however, Florence was less involved in wars, so taxes decreased significantly. The tax break boosted business. The state then began to make most of its money from indirect taxes, also known as gabelles. Gabelles were the main source of public revenue in Florence and included sales and excise taxes. Although it was the same rate for everyone, much like sales taxes today in the United States, in economics, sales tax is considered regressive because the poor spends a larger percent of their income on essential goods than the rich, thus a larger percent of their income is subject to sales tax than the rich. While considered unfair by the critics, the change in taxation helped to increase market activities and boost the economy (Goldthwaite 508-511).

Decreased taxes led to an increase in public income and resulted in an influx in trade. Spice traders began to advertise their spices to increase demand so that spices, like salt and pepper, came to be necessities rather than luxuries. Florence became a trade hub for commodities like spices and fabrics. During times of war in other countries, Florence welcomed refugees who were skilled silk-weavers from Lucca, so silk trade became a large asset for Florence. As the economy picked up, people flocked to the city from the neighboring cities and countries. Constantinople, Florence's main economic competitor, could no longer rival with Florence's growth and diversity due to the influx of newcomers and their new skills (Jardine 60, 76).

Florence was not rich in natural resources, but it was rich in entrepreneurialism. For example, the city thrived in the cloth trade although they had to import most of the goods to make the cloths. As the merchants traveled for resources, they also gathered knowledge about foreign lands. Enriched with the new knowledge of the world, Florentines became more inquisitive and daring. Florence gambled a lot. Although, gambling was not allowed by the church, many people partook in it. This also transferred into their willingness to gamble on new ideas and investors' willingness to gamble on new artists (Weiner 120).

The risks Florence took nurtured the highest levels of creativity and imagination. Without risk, there is often little reward. Florentines recognized that, took big risks and invested in new goods and commodities. Since Florence was a trade hub, people from exotic foreign lands often travelled through Florence, enriching the culture with new, outside influences. The wealthy Florentines were materialistic people. They wanted to use their money to beautify their surroundings through funding art. The rich spent large amounts of money to acquire rare possessions and even funded explorations. To afford these lavish goods, people borrowed money from bankers which created a new branch of banking, loan banking, and gave a boost to the banking industry in general (Jardine 77, 93). In this way, Florence's artistic creativity was intertwined with business through ideas like loans, double-entry accounting, and maritime insurance, which were all created during the Italian Renaissance and used to this day.

The printing press was also one of these monumental inventions. Although it was invented in Germany around 1440, the printing press quickly became popular throughout Europe. The Bible was the most popular printed text when the press was first invented. The invention allowed the Bible to be printed significantly cheaper than ever before, so people started to have their own copies in their homes. Previously, bibles were costly and only found in



churches and monasteries. The printing press also helped to form new religions because Martin Luther used it to mass publish his Ninety-Five Theses and German versions of the Bible to allow more people to read it and spread his criticisms of the Catholic church (Sayre 267).

The printing press allowed new ideas like this to travel quickly because scholars and musicians could now mass produce their works to be read and performed in other countries (Sayre 269). Since books could be mass produced with the printing press and sold at lower costs, the public could now afford to buy them and acquire more knowledge. The demand for books remained steady throughout the Renaissance and were one of their most expensive treasures, largely because they were handwritten until recently, and the printing press was still new (Jardine 151-156).

Banking also expanded and gained new branches. Florentines were the first to make an international currency, called the florin. Bankers also began to create contracts for repayment so that traders did not have to carry large amounts of coin with them on their travels. During the Renaissance, bankers started to charge interest and make large profits through loans. The largest family in the banking business in Italy was the Medici family (Goldthwaite 107-108). The Medici banking family's wealth was largely attributed to Constantinople's extensive trading where they also had offices. They owned banking offices across Italy and were the bank for the papacy. Many members of the Medici family were popes themselves and commissioned artists to decorate their churches and monasteries (Sayre 232). The Medici family not only gave artists money, but also encouraged them to take risks and be innovative. Without the worry of money, artists had more time to create. Such Renaissance giants as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Sandro Botticelli were all supported and mentored by the Medici family. The funding of artists was common then and was perhaps the main reason that art flourished. Commissioning an

artist also gave citizens prestige and provided a legacy for them to be remembered by. The arts were funded by the church, upper middle-class patrons, guilds, and anyone who had the means to gain their family prestige through a commission (Fiero 43).

Along with getting support through sponsorship, artists received financial support and mentorship in bottegas. Bottegas were art factories of the Renaissance. They were not like today's art studios, however, but more like sweat shops where apprentices often started out by cleaning up and making paints for the artists before creating anything of their own. Leonardo da Vinci was among the famous artists who began his apprenticeship in a bottega from early childhood. Artists, like modern-day interns, would be learning from their mentors, often for years before creating their own independent work.

Through sponsorship and bottegas, the arts had the means to flourish. As with many works of genius, money is a vital factor. One of the keys to the Renaissance was the funding of the humanities, which was possible thanks to a prospering economy. People had the means to help the arts blossom. These were not the days of "starving artists." The most notable supporters of the arts were the Medici banking family who induced many of these creative geniuses by paying the artists' costs of living, so they could fully devote their time to their creative endeavors. War, illness, taxation, trade, exploration, and the printing press all culminated into a boost for the economy during the Renaissance. These factors created a platform for wealthy families to fund promising artists and push their limits, which fueled the period's creative atmosphere.

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## Literature



### Ashlee Klimpel

My goal is to have readers identify with the theme of redemption righteousness through the evidence proved by the two works of literature, *Wit* by Margaret Edson and “A Father’s Story” by Andre Dubus. I wrote this expository essay for readers who want to discover a potential way to make up for past mistakes and to realize that what is most important in their lives are the people around them instead of idols such as education or wealth. This was also intended to a prediction as to how people respond to tragedies and cope with them. In addition, the four structures of this essay involved an introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. I learned that using MLA page citations for text was less interruptive than in-text citations. Furthermore, I practiced utilizing hooks, formulating a strong thesis, and structuring paragraphs logically and in a way that allowed me to effectively juxtapose the two pieces of literature that I analyzed. Expository essays are written to explain and not persuade the readers, so I did not write it in second person. I chose to have a more objective and less biased tone by implementing an omniscient viewpoint within the essay.

### Redemption Righteousness

In a mood of dry sarcasm, Luke Ripley begins his confessions to God, “Unless you kill me on the way to church, then I trust that you will receive me” (Dubus 17). The main character in “A Father’s Story,” Luke Ripley, is worried about his actions and whether he did the right thing just as the main character in *Wit*, Vivian Bearing, questions her own actions. Both characters engage in redemption righteousness, which is the vigorous and continuous struggle to define and analyze one’s own actions from an omniscient perspective that is proficient at delivering the final answer. Redemption righteousness will first be delved into from identifying the main characters’ climatic struggles or regrets; then, the characters will be compared to see how each sought righteousness; lastly, the role of redemption will be explained using those findings.

Each rising conflict that afflicts Luke and Vivian poses a need for an immediate and swift response with potentially faulty actions occurring as a result. In “A Father’s Story,” Luke’s daughter became drunk after visiting with her friends and drove herself home. Unable to think straight, she hit a man with her car and killed him. Upon finding out, Luke was forced to agonize between the choice of keeping the law of his faith or protecting his beloved daughter. This decision-making process was portrayed in an extreme way due to the book setting up how devoted to his religious principles Luke was over the majority of the story’s plot. Despite this devotion, he ultimately decided to cover up the accident and pretend that it never occurred. Similarly, Vivian’s own climactic conflict between her emotions and intellectual decisions was set up throughout *Wit*. She had the option of allowing others to become close to her, which she wanted emotionally but believed to be illogical due to her terminal illness. Vivian thought that letting others become close to her would make her feel weak and beaten. She wanted to die knowing that she fought every moment and did not let any vulnerabilities ruin her pride. However, she discovered that she could not fight everything by herself and that she needed to rely on others sometimes. She realized that her decisions in life had all been geared towards furthering her education and others, but experiencing cancer made all of her efforts over her lifetime appear insignificant. Just as Vivian was devoted to her education, Luke was devoted to his religion. Once each of them gave up that thing for which they worked toward their whole life, they each had to find a reason that justified that decision.

Wrestling with that reason led both to develop a sense of righteousness. Both Vivian and Luke discovered their righteousness through an “outside” perspective and then derived a sense of judgment from this interaction. Often times, righteousness is what is considered the morally right thing to do in others’ eyes. Luke was surrounded by family his entire life, so he valued their

judgement more than the judgement of his culture. His clarity came from seeing his family safe from harm. He thought, "...when I was able to judge but without anger...decided how they must act, or found reasons after their actions, but they needed to find them, to believe they were living by them, instead of the awful solitude of the heart" (Dubus 17). He also discovered that guilt would destroy him, so he had to find this justice in his actions, or else his life would waste away without meaning. Discovering who he was and what he stood for took an entire life's journey, but by the end of the story, he understood it and was at peace. Vivian also experienced a similar realization when she spoke with Susie, her nurse. Susie's own sense of righteousness came from empathy and a desire to understand others in the heart and not in the appearance. One line from Susie especially indicates this: "Well, they [the doctors] like to save lives. So anything's okay, as long as life continues. It doesn't matter if you're hooked up to a million machines...they always want to know more things" (Edson 68). After this remark, the next page and a half is dedicated to Susie's concern and understanding about Vivian's desire to die. With Susie's help, Vivian began to fit her sense of justice from its prior schema of self-focused strength and eye-for-an-eye justice to the new schema that Susie demonstrated, involving sympathy and relying on others for strength. The dying professor ultimately learned that not every decision must be completely on the shoulders of one person. Both Vivian and Luke were finally able to understand righteousness not as a universal good moral ideal, but rather as formed through the ideals of the people in their lives closest to them.

Lastly, the redemption that was sought came through a second chance, which did not necessarily mean reincarnation or an afterlife. The second chance that both Luke and Vivian received came from new opportunities to bring happiness to others and create value in others' lives. After Vivian learned that she was going to die soon, she did her best to bring a smile to her

nurse, Susie. The happiness that she brought to Susie filled that guilty void in Vivian's heart. Vivian said, "Now is a time for simplicity. Now is a time for, dare I say it, kindness" (Edson 68). A similar second change occurred in Luke's life when he chose not to send his daughter to court for her actions. He saw relief and love reflected in his daughter's manner when she hugged him and cried afterwards. He wanted her to remain innocent of the murder and decided not to ruin her young life by calling the police. Both characters saw that their changed actions affected their loved ones in a positive way, and that realization brought healing to both of their souls.

In conclusion, in both "A Father's Story" and *Wit*, redemption righteousness was the seeking of a clear judgment that could spark a sense satisfaction and justice in one's life. Vivian Bearing and Luke Ripley both sought and found redemption righteousness as a result of a tragedy. Vivian discovered that righteousness can change depending on the circumstance and was able to adapt to this moral dilemma. Luke found a way to cope with his conflicting sense of righteousness in order to gain a peace of mind and value in his existence. Regardless of the source of the traumatic event that each character faced, both characters had to find reasons that justified their responses to the chaos of their lives. Redemption was prevalent in both stories when the characters saw their loved ones benefit as an outcome of their righteousness seeking. This outcome left both Luke and Vivian with a new sense of purpose and an overall higher sense of self-satisfaction. As Luke explained when reflecting on his past life, "Their [people's] reasons were never as good or as bad as their actions, but they needed to find them," (Dubus 17).

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## Zachary Walther

I was responding to the following prompt:

Produce a 2-4 page paper analyzing a major theme in *Fun Home*. Your paper should make use of or reference one of the theoretical approaches we discussed in class (feminist, gender, psychoanalytic, or formalist), one of the literary devices we discussed (motifs, juxtaposition, metaphor, or metonymy), one of the literary texts that Bechdel references in *Fun Home*, and both the text and images contained in the graphic novel.

### **Blind Faith in a Cover and the *Blind Faith* Album Cover**

Throughout her memoir and graphic novel *Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel uses lots of creative license to tell an excellent story that sometimes blurs the lines between fact and fiction. This paper focuses on Bechdel's use of metaphors and motifs; more specifically, it examines Bechdel's use of an album cover from the band Blind Faith, which may itself be a commentary on people's ability to accept a claim on blind faith, even when the signs indicate that the claim being made is actually a cover for another, deeper reality.

Chapter four of the graphic novel contained themes both of hiding and of transformation. This is the chapter in which the Blind Faith album appears (Bechdel 95, Top Frame). Something that is important to know is that Allison Bechdel's father, Bruce, died mysteriously when hit by a truck. Bruce's death was officially an accident; however, Allison believes her father committed suicide. From the discussions we had in our LIT 101 class, I came to understand that the chapter is suggesting that the meaning of things can get lost in translation. For example, we discussed in class that snakes are often coded as feminine in literature even though they are so obviously phallic in appearance. Given that information, the frame on the bottom of page 89 in which Alison's father is shown to have been jumping away from a snake (and into the path of the truck that killed him) might represent him trying to run away from his own feminine tendencies. Her

father jumping away from the snake may also represent him running away from women in general. Maybe he hates women. His relationship with Allison's mother could be evidence of that. His jumping away from the snake may also represent him being ashamed of his homosexual tendencies and running away from that.

Chapter four also demonstrates Bechdel's use of creative license to get her message across. In it, Bechdel's father brings Roy, their baby sitter (a teenage boy whom, throughout the story, Bechdel's father seems to be seducing), beers and an album by the band Blind Faith. Since I'm familiar with the Blind Faith album, I googled it, and I discovered that the cover art used in the book was the cover art used in the UK release of the album. The UK cover art shows a nude young girl whose age is debatable (though no one believes she is over 18). According to the album's Wikipedia page, the cover art shown in the book was not available in the United States (Thorgerson and Powell 29).

It is this detail--the fact that it would have been difficult for Bruce to own the version of the album portrayed in the graphic novel--that makes me wonder how much of the story is creative license. I am reminded of the writing approach of Hunter S. Thompson, who would cover news stories but then turn the stories into dramatic, semi-fictional masterpieces. I believe Bechdel is doing something similar. At first, when I saw this frame, I thought Allison's father was presenting their babysitter alcohol and an image of a naked lady (who turns out to be 11, according to Wikipedia) holding something phallic in an attempt to rile up the baby sitter sexually. After realizing that the girl on the Blind Faith album cover is so young, I pick up a vibe of pedophilic intent from Bechdel's father (Thorgerson and Powell 29). After all, Bechdel's father was a victim of pedophilia himself, as oftentimes pedophiles have been. I wonder if Alison

Bechdel chose the UK version of the album cover to hint that her father was a pedophile.

Regardless of whether that was her intent, the suggestion comes across.

Bechdel's choice to use the UK version of that album cover instead of the US version is very thought-provoking. Did the event she depicts in this frame actually happen? Did her memory fill in the blanks that it was this particular version of the album that Bruce gave Roy? Did she simply choose the album cover that best fit the information and emotion she was trying to portray? Is it fiction that makes the story better? These are things I am left wondering.

When I discussed this with my instructor, she presented the idea that perhaps the frame was a metaphor for accepting another cover in the story with blind faith. Of course, the cover I am referring to would be the facade Alison's father created of a happy home to cover up for his homosexuality and pedophilia. This possibility honestly blew my mind. If, in fact, this is what Bechdel is doing, the only word I can think of to describe it is genius, because it gives the reader a hint of Alison's struggle to come to terms with the fact that the understanding she had of her father when she was a child, an understanding based on blind faith, was actually built on an elaborate lie.

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