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Utah State University Department of English

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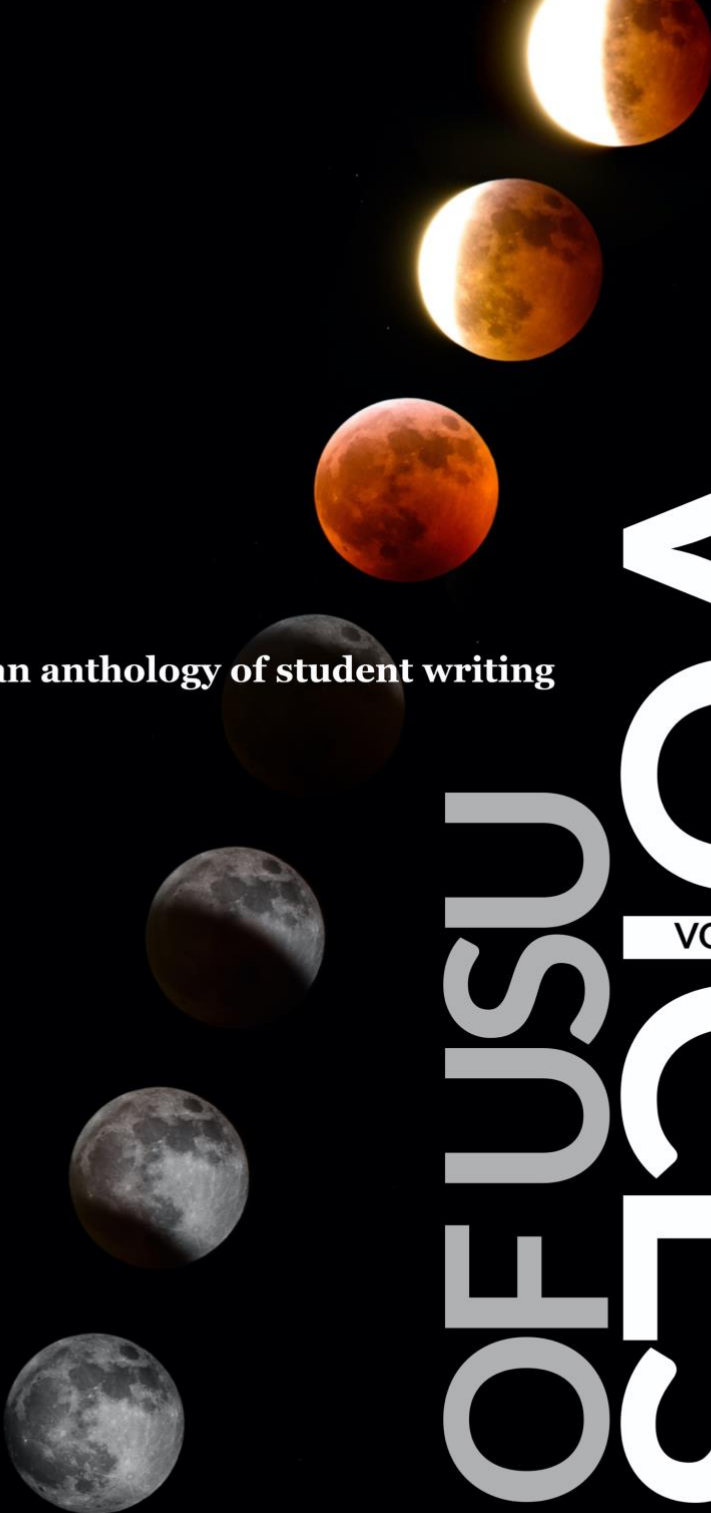
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an anthology of student writing

VOICES  
OF USU  
VOL. 13  
OF USU  
CES



Edited by *Rachel Quistberg*

# **VOICES** *of* usu

An Anthology of *Student Writing*, vol. 13

Utah State University  
Department of English  
2020-2021

Editor: Rachel Quistberg

Design: Rachel Quistberg

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## About This Anthology

This collection represents the voices of your peers, the over 2,000 students who enroll each academic year in Utah State University's second-year composition course, *English 2010, Intermediate Writing: Research Writing in a Persuasive Mode*. The essays you will read in this anthology were both researched and composed before the world faced a global pandemic. The writers most likely did not envision that their essays would be read just the following academic year by fellow students who would continue to face adjustments because of COVID-19.

In addition to the impacts of COVID-19, the summer of 2020 saw a heightened focus on the desperate need to combat systemic racism and to seek social justice. The changes our society currently faces will certainly influence the way we read these essays. We invite you to join their conversations and hope that they will challenge, inspire, and motivate you to produce your best writing.

*Rachel Quistberg*

Editor

# Acknowledgements

Many people make Voices possible. We would first like to thank our student authors. We thank you for having the courage to submit your work, and we are honored to publish it.

This book is only possible through the efforts of our composition faculty. Thank you for encouraging your students to submit their writing.

Our deepest gratitude also goes to USU's English Department and Writing Center staff for their support of this publication.

The previous directors of Voices also deserve a huge thanks for creating and continuing a program that offers students the opportunities to publish and to present their work.

*Susan Andersen (2008-09, 2011-13)*

*John Engler (2008-10, 2014-17)*

*Bonnie Moore (2011-17)*

*Susan Pesti-Strobel (2009-10)*



# Part I: Topics



# Time

*Noah Bailey*



**A** feeling of excitement is in the air as the clock hanging by the whiteboard in the front of the room ticks down second by second. Only six and a half minutes left. I eye around the room, checking on my friend sitting four rows away from me because his last name starts with “A” and mine starts with “B.” He rolls his eyes, clearly just as bored as I am. Our tests lay neatly face down in the corner of our desks, neat not because my friend and I are inherently tidy, but because there’s nothing else to do for the cursed thirty minutes after we bubble in our last answers except to straighten our tables and look up at the clock. Five minutes, forty-seven seconds. Forty-six, forty-five, forty-four, forty-three, forty-two...



*Time. Time. Time time, time time. Time time time. Time... time. Congratulations, you just took five seconds to read the word “time” eleven times. Those are five precious seconds you’ll never get back, and you just handed them to*

me because of some external mandate to read this paper. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia—these are all units of this funny thing called time. *Well duh*, you might be thinking, *where on earth could this be going?* The concept of time is so innate in humans that it defies definition, its meaning so base it doesn't even necessitate description. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines time as “a finite extent or stretch of continued existence,” but that's not what time really means at all (“Time,” def. 1.a). “Time” means pressing the add-thirty-seconds-button four times while microwaving a Hot Pocket. Time means the 47-minute commute through bumper-to-bumper city traffic you make every morning. Time means the excruciating 365 days between your fifth Christmas and your sixth Christmas. Time is time is time. Why box in something with words that is so innately fluid?

Units of time are measured by observable things in nature. One year is measured by one orbit of the Earth around the sun. One day is measured by one complete rotation of the Earth about its axis. One second is measured by the decay of a cesium atom, more or less, but why do we bother to measure these things at all (“Unite of Time”)? The reason is this: although we know that 60 seconds makes a minute, 60 minutes makes an hour, and 24 hours makes a day, time is terribly subjective. Two people sitting in the same lecture hall can feel time flowing in radically different ways. For one person, minutes can pass like hours; for the other, the hours pass by in seconds. Thus, we need some sort of objective metric to measure the passage of events. The idea to measure time in minutes and seconds has been around since the days of the city of Babylon, more than

five-thousand years ago, and yet it's difficult to comprehend functioning without minutes and seconds (Andrews).

Life in three dimensions is terribly boring. It's only the fourth that makes life worth living at all, really, because without time, there can be no change. Without change, there can be no growth, there can be no happiness, there can be no sadness, joy, experience, sensation, ambition, direction. Without time, there can be no change. Without change, there can be no life. That's really why we bother with this concept of "time" at all, because of the inevitable change it accompanies. We don't care why it's two minutes in the microwave to cook a Hot Pocket; we just know that any shorter will produce a soggy and frozen waste, and too much longer will set off the smoke alarm.



*My friend Weston and I* are in a unique situation. To our backs lies a sheer cliff face that we've only just managed to precariously tumble down. In front of us lies even taller cliffs with edges deceptively close to where we're standing. I've only just managed to avoid falling off one of them by grabbing onto an exposed tree root during a rock slide. Beyond the cliff edges sits the objective of our expedition: an impossibly beautiful green. Beautiful because it's complemented by the dull grays and reds of the rock faces, shielding it from outside observers, and impossible because the plant life we see doesn't normally thrive at 13,000 feet above sea level. The lifeblood of the garden—a centuries old glacier—sits adamant in the middle of the

clearing, tiny streams stemming from its base and racing to the lake below. It's a scene like out of a movie. Looking up, the towering Longs Peak casts a chilly shadow over Chasm Lake.

Weston and I begin our descent down the tall, red cliffs. We're the first to take this trail down the mountain, of that I'm absolutely positive. It's far out of the way, in addition to being dangerous. A fall from as high as we're standing will certainly kill us. A half hour passes. Two. Weston and I are finally on solid footing, scooping fresh glacial water right into our thirsty mouths.

I finally take the time to sit and look. The mountain glade is silent, save for the quiet whispers of the streams below us. There are no footprints. There are no white caps from Aquafina bottles casually discarded on the grassy floor. If it were nighttime, I imagine I could look up and see the stars with absolute clarity. The meadow by Chasm Lake stands apart from time, unchanging. The scene I see before me is the same someone hundreds of years earlier could've seen. The meadow is so ancient and yet so young. Weston taps me on the shoulder. Despite my wish to stay and enjoy the scenery, we've got to move on.



*There is a feeling nearly* everyone has felt—the feeling that time is slowing or moving in slow motion. Perhaps time slowed down seconds before a car crash or after a biopsy came back with terminal results. How can an objective metric, like time, slow down? Actually, time isn't slowing

down at all. Neither is the brain speeding up. The sensation of time slowing is an illusion in the brain caused by a surge of adrenaline to the amygdala. Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston ran an interesting experiment “[t]o see if danger makes people experience time in slow motion” (Choi). In the experiment, participants were dropped from great heights while harnessed to ropes. When later surveyed, participants gave estimates of their fall time. The estimated fall times participants suggested were about three times longer than their actual fall times. In order to see if time for these participants was actually “slowing down,” they harnessed displays with the jumpers. These displays would show sets of certain numbers that would change in increasingly short intervals. If perception really increased during moments of danger, scientists postulated, then falling participants would be able to read blinking numbers that were unreadable under normal circumstances. The scientists found that during the fall, participants could discern the numbers no better than if they were on the ground. Thus, they concluded that time does not actually slow down during emergencies. So why do we feel like it does?

Many theories circulate on the subject. The most prominent in the study is that

when a person is scared, a brain area called the amygdala becomes more active, laying down an extra set of memories that go along with those normally taken care of by other parts of the brain. (Choi)

In this way, a person thinks they experienced slow motion because they distinctly remember more of an event.



*The day is November 23, 2014.* It's the first Sunday of Thanksgiving break. It's my freshman year of high school. It hasn't snowed yet, but the air outside is cold and crisp, the kind of air that freezes your lungs as you breathe in. Three hours of church are finally over. I run up to my room, already releasing my tie from my neck as I bound up the stairs two at a time. My suit comes off, and then I'm sprawled in bed. This is peace. No homework, no stress. Outside my window, I hear the honking of geese flying south. There is no noise but my breathing and the sound of nature just outside my room. And crying. Crying? Sobbing more like. Normally, I'd be irritated by the noise, but this time it brings me pause. I crack open my door and peer into the hallway. My mom sits on the stairs, sobbing. I'm not sure why, and she can't tell me either as I try to console her. She's entirely choked up.

Five years later I remember with distinction the moments that followed. The soft carpet suddenly becomes coarse under my feet; the noise of the geese filters out of my observation. Five seconds feel like five minutes. My mom clears her throat and delivers the terrible news. It hits me with a dull thud in my chest, stopping my next heartbeat. On November 23, 2014, my friend died by suicide.



*The universe contains a few inevitabilities, which is why they are so remarkable.* The first: nothing can stop the flow

of time. The second: everyone who lives must one day die. Both seem so intuitive, and yet, the violation of these certainties remains the subjects of our deepest fantasies. *What if?* we all wonder. *What if we could bring back the dead?* wondered Mary Shelley. *What if we could travel through time?* thought H. G. Wells.

Some are so uncomfortable with these inevitabilities that they develop chronophobia, or, the fear of the passage of time. This fear is most common among the elderly and the incarcerated and manifests itself through intense anxiety, a feeling of claustrophobia, excessive rumination, and even depression (Fritscher and Gans). As people close to death realize their own mortality, time becomes the enemy. They fear that time has slipped through their fingers.

Odd perceptions of time aren't abnormal, though. They're quite common, actually. As a person grows older, time seems to go by faster, like it's continually speeding up. Children have a slower perception of time relative to adults, which leads to questions like, "Are we theeeeere yet?" and, "How many more days until my birthday?" Why do kids seem to feel time slower than adults? Steve Taylor, Ph.D., explores two theories: the theory of proportional time and the theory of perceptual time.

Proportional time theory asserts that a person's experience of time is relative to the years that person has lived. Each person experiences a year as relative to their life as a whole (Taylor). Therefore, a ten-year-old experiences a year as 1/10 of their life, or 10% of their total existence,



whereas a sixty-year-old experiences a year as 1/60 of their life, or 1.6% of their total existence. This theory explains the familiar feeling that “time is slipping away.” Perceptual time theory asserts that

the speed of time seems to be largely determined by how much information our minds absorb and process—the more information there is, the slower time goes[.]...[P]erhaps part of the reason why time goes so slowly for children is because of the massive amount of ‘perceptual information’ that they take in from the world around them. (Taylor)



*The following week is full of candlelight vigils, memorial services, talks behind closed doors (“why do you think he did it?”), and the rest of the terrible discomfort that comes with losing someone. I’m personally despondent, unwilling to discuss what’s happened. My mind races in overdrive. What were my last words to him? Is there anything I could’ve done? I’m stuck in the present, desperately wishing I had a time machine to last week. The ruminations in my head are almost debilitating. If I could just go back, if I could only go back...*

If I could go back to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, I’d get in my car and drive to his house. I’d say “hi” to his family. I’d ask where he is; maybe I’d go visit him in his room. I’d beg him to reconsider. But I can’t. I don’t have a time machine. Time is a river, and nobody can swim upstream.



*I'm almost five years from that cold day in November. I can't believe it was that long ago. I remember feeling a similar feeling on the one-year anniversary. The two-year, the three-year. The four-year that was just a few months ago. Each passing year is accompanied by the same disbelief and the same dream: I wish I could go back.*

Sometimes the hardest thing in life is accepting change. Nothing is the same as it was yesterday, and everything will be different tomorrow. Time will move on with or without you if you sit still long enough. Although it can seem an insurmountable task at times, we all must get up and leave the meadow. □

*If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, call the \*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline\* at 800-273-TALK (8255). You can also reach out to the Crisis Text Line, a free, 24/7 confidential text messaging service that provides support to people in crisis when they text 741741.*

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# Standardized Testing: A Discriminatory System

*Annette Vazquez*

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**F**ood stamps, Sub for Santa, fee waivers, squeezing a family of six into houses meant for families of three was less than ideal growing up. It built character, but character does not always get you superlative educational opportunities. It is easy to get stuck in the perpetual cycle of poverty, especially when the current education system disallows underprivileged students to rise through the ranks. It is even easier to get stuck in the cycle when you are a first-generation student, coming from a set of immigrant parents. A particular aspect of the education system that continues to hinder student success and post-secondary instruction is the use of standardized tests, such as the ACT and the SAT, in undergraduate college admission decisions.

My siblings and I all got the same ACT score despite having different grade point averages and collegiate experiences. I started to wonder just how accurate the standardized testing system is and whether it was accurate at all. Were there factors working against us, and if so, are

there factors currently working against thousands of other students with similar backgrounds?

The outdated ideology that a singular test score should dictate a student's post-secondary education is not only outrageous but has become a modern-day example of systematic discrimination within the educational apparatus. Racial minorities, students with disabilities, and students from lower income homes are put at a prodigious disadvantage when they take the SAT, ACT, or both. The monopoly that the ACT and the SAT hold over standardized testing allows those testing franchises to have a stronghold over college admissions. Standardized tests should not be used in undergraduate college admittance determination because of the inequitable nature of the SAT and the ACT.

### ***Cultural Bias***

*In 2019, white American* students on average scored 181 points higher on the SAT than African American students, and 131 points higher than Latino and Hispanic students (Schaeffer). This disparity in scores has been a consistent trend for years, showing that white American students score higher on the SAT than their minority counterparts, but this is no accident.

Cultural bias in test construction has been one of the leading concerns with the SAT since the conception of standardized tests (The African American Policy Forum Writers). Jay Rosner, executive director of the Princeton

Review Foundation found that all 138 questions that were prescreened for the SAT where regularly scored higher on by white students than Black students (Rosner). Rosner saw that any test questions that were scored higher on by Black students than white students were merely thrown out by the testing board. This behavior is inherent discrimination, as instituting questions favoring white students show that test creators either lack cultural adaptation skills or simply do not take cultural adaptation into consideration. This practice promotes a problematic trend: white American students consistently scoring, on average, higher on the SAT than Black students. This trend not only obstructs Black student's college admission rates but their application rates as well because of how significant standardized testing scores are within the admissions system.

The white American student, particularly white students who come from a greater income, tends to be exposed to more stimuli that prepares them for standardized tests than their African American and Latino/Hispanic counterparts, especially if their counterparts are under a certain income threshold (The African American Policy Forum Writers). Experiences, such as going to zoos, museums, vacations, are all a part of a wealthier experience that could potentially expose students to certain vernacular and other information that could be on a standardized test. The students who do not have those experiences are placed at a disadvantage because they do not have the same background in animal terms, cultures, languages, and history. This disadvantage makes it challenging for even well-applied minority

students to do well on the tests, even if they study profusely because standardized exams are formatted in a biased manner. When minority students are applying to colleges, it is unfair that a singular test score from a culturally biased exam is going to control what form of post-secondary education that student will be able to access coming out of high school.

### ***Stereotype Threat***

*Stereotype threat* is a term coined by Joshua Aronson and Claude Steele (1995) after completing extensive research on the impacts of stereotypes on students and how it affects the way they perform on standardized assessments (Aronson). Their research indicated that when a student was aware of a certain stereotype towards their gender or race, it undermined their intellectual ability; those students scored lower on standardized exams. In Aronson and Steele's research, they had a control group where students were told that their race was intellectually substandard to another. Another group was not inflicted by any stereotype, and this group did substantially better than the cluster that had a certain stereotype enforced. This research has been put to the test nearly 300 times in published peer-reviewed journals, and almost all have seen that stereotype threat is a significant factor in the way a student performs on standardized tests (Stroessner and Good).

Marginal groups are regularly discriminated against and often fall victim to stereotype threat. The standardized

testing monsters, the ACT and the SAT, do nothing to mitigate the effects of stereotype threat. The lack of action to combat the negative effects is generally unacknowledged by the general education system, leaving minority students disproportionately at a disadvantage than others. A student may not know that they are identifying with a stereotype, but their subconscious actively perpetuates the essence of the stereotype. When minority students do worse on standardized tests, the scores inherently affect their colligate futures and possible scholarship opportunities. The article “Facts About Race and College Admission” by Jon Marcus explains, “Enrollment in the 468 best-funded and most selective institutions is 77 percent white” (Marcus). This racial gap has barely been remedied over years of educational reform. Not only is diversifying college campuses important for the students who are minorities, but it is important for the development of the establishment itself.

### ***Impacts: Minority Women***

*Minority women tend to* do disproportionately worse on standardized tests in comparison to males of their own race, white women, and especially white males (Connor and Vargyas). According to the article “83 Seconds” by Andrew Hacker,

What Yale, Stanford, and others know is that women make up only 38 percent of the SAT’s 700-plus mathematics pool and 34 percent of the ACT’s 33-plus circle. (Hacker)

Women are portrayed as lesser learners when they do not perform on par with male students, when truthfully there



are an abundance of stereotypes towards women and those stereotypes could be affecting their scores unintentionally. Women are often told they are not as good at math and science than their male counterparts. This discrepancy has hardly changed over the years, but women actually tend to graduate with higher grades in college institutions than men do (FairTest, “SAT, ACT Gender Gaps”). The ACT and the SAT are generally used as tools to deduce how a student will do in their/her/his first year of college, but all it seems to be measuring is how good a student can take a standardized examination.

### ***Impacts: Students with Disabilities***

*Students with disabilities* are a marginalized group also impacted by standardized exams and drop out at almost a 20% higher rate than their classmates (FairTest, “Standardized Testing and Students with Disabilities”). When students with disabilities are not accommodated, their standardized testing scores are going to be affected. There are times when a student is allowed more time to take their standardized exams, but this process could take days, weeks even. When these students are given more time to take their exams, they can often feel inadequate in comparison to their peers because they feel they are not smart enough to do it in the regularly allotted time. When their differences are perpetuated in an educational setting, it can affect their mental health.

Laws are set in place to give individuals with disabilities the fairest setting when they take standardized tests such as the ACT or the SAT, but it is not regulated.

Legislation differs and is implemented in a variety of ways from state to state, and the issue with this is that not all legislation is created equally. When students with disabilities face lack of accommodation or even an unfair amount, those students' scores on a standardized test are radically affected, therefore affecting their future in a collegiate institution. There is no set law that can apply to all schools and districts that could level the playing field for students with disabilities, because looking at these students through a solidly objective lens is redundant. Students with disabilities are being discriminated against by the standardized testing system because these tests are not a fair measuring tool to determine whether any student is "smart" enough to go to a certain institution. Students should have opportunities to work on their own personal goals and skills that will help them in the long-term rather than focusing on a test that only enhances the problems that these pupils face.

### ***Impacts: Poverty and Environmental Racism***

*Students from lower incomes* can come from any background. They could be disabled, a minority, or any gender. Poverty does not discriminate, but the ACT and the SAT do discriminate against those who are impoverished. According to the SAT Group Profile Report, students that came from families making more than \$200,000 a year scored, on average, around 400 points higher than their peers who came from families making less than \$20,000 a year (CollegeBoard). On the ACT, according to a study from

the National Council on Community and Education Partnerships, it was found that only 11% of students whose families made under \$36,000 a year met the ACT standards (Monell). It was also noted that 62% of students who came from families making \$100,000 or more a year did meet their benchmarks. This disparity could be due to a variety of reasons.

Educational disparities in lower income areas are one of the largest issues contributing to the lack of proper education for students who are required to take standardized tests if they want to go to certain institutions (The African American Policy Forum Writers). Underprivileged students already suffer from the potential of cultural bias stemming from the white experience, but what about the cultural bias that assumes that every student has the same access to learning materials as others? Textbooks, technology, adequate teachers, field trips, all differ from school to school. Not all schools are created equally, and not all have the same funding. Wealthier students are more likely able to access better education, supplemental instruction, and helpful materials in comparison to their lower income counterparts, allowing them to do better on standardized tests.

Although any student from any race or ethnicity could come from a lower income home, it is less likely for white families to fall under the low-income definition (Simms et al.). About 25% of white families would be considered low income in 2007, while nearly half of Black and about 63% of Hispanic immigrant families would fall under the low-income definition. Minorities tend to suffer from different

factors such as environmental racism, stereotype threat, and a higher chance of them being lower income, which could affect their test scores (The African American Policy Forum Writers).

Environmental racism is the proven idea that lower income minorities who live in poorer neighborhoods tend to be victims to lower air quality and inadequate drinking water. These environmental influences affect minorities at inconsistent rates and contribute to health problems. These external issues could affect a pupil's ability to learn material, and the problem with this is that minorities are already put at a disadvantage when stereotype threat is accounted for. Despite national attention on these matters, the government continues to allow for systemic discrimination within the educational system by allowing institutions to use standardized tests in admission determination.

### ***Alternatives to Standardized Testing***

*Regardless of the numerous* amounts of sources that prove that the use of standardized tests in regard to college admittance is discriminatory against various factions of students, the argument still remains that standardized tests are a “neutral yardstick” in college admissions (Buckley et al.). In the book *Measuring Success: Testing, Grades, and the Future of College Admissions*, it's argued that standardized tests are important tools for admissions officers to completely gage a student's worthiness of entering into a certain institution. The book states that information relating to college admission testing is

“fragmented and incomplete” (Buckley et al.). They assert that the tests themselves need to be modified but should be continually used because using grades as a base for college admission will not work.

The largest issue with the claims that testing should continue within the literature is that standardized tests affect a disproportionate amount of minority populations as well as disabled students and lower income students. Period. There is no escaping cultural bias, stereotype threat, environmental racism, or poverty. Simply modifying tests over time has proven not to work, because the creators of the tests see trends that are consistent, such as the trend that African Americans do worse on standardized tests (Rosner). There has been virtually nothing done to mitigate the effects of these external issues within the standardized testing system after decades of using them as college admissions tools. Is that supposed to change suddenly? It won't, but there are schools over the years that have chosen to be test-optional, meaning that they don't require students to send in ACT or SAT scores.

In 2019, 1,050 colleges reported as test optional in the United States (FairTest, “Data Show Test-Optional Admissions Successes”). Not only have these colleges mitigated the effects of discriminatory testing, but they have also seen diversity rates at their universities rise. When Hampshire College became test optional, class diversity increased by 10% in two years (Lash). When standardized exam scores are out of the picture and students are allowed to apply to universities through alternative methods, these universities see an increase in

applications from students who are lower income and minorities.

Wake Forest University, a test optional college in North Carolina, saw that their classes had an increase of students of color in their classrooms (FairTest, “Data Show Test-Optional Admissions Successes”). In 2011, Wake Forest University also saw that the number of students who applied that were eligible for Pell grants doubled in the three-year period after doing away with standardized testing scores. This increase in diversity is a general trend among universities that have stopped accepting ACT and SAT test scores.

Alternative admissions methods are creative and allow students to be looked at as something other than a singular test score. At Pitzer for example, ACT/SAT scores were waived if a student graduated in the top tenth of their class and held a 3.5 GPA. Other schools, such as the University of Chicago, allowed students to submit academic-based portfolios. An abundance of unconventional admissions processes could work just as well as standardized tests, if not better. There is no need to lessen the already low chances of a minority, a lower income student, or a disabled student from getting into or applying to college.

## ***Conclusion***

*The ACT and the SAT are outdated examination franchises that no longer need to have control over the college admissions system. It has been proven time and time again*

that standardized exams are not good predictors of a student's first year of college or judge their range of intelligence. The ACT and the SAT measure demographic characteristics, not a student's ability to learn and to succeed in their post-secondary education. A person should not be defined by a singular test score because different students have different capabilities. Admitting more minority students, students with disabilities, and students from lower income backgrounds will sustain and boost university diversity rates. Diversity is not only the key to inclusion, but innovation and knowledge. Different students from different backgrounds can educate others and create a more inclusive and knowledgeable culture at a university.

It's time to stop subjecting students to racist tests. It's time for the government to intervene and put a stop to standardized tests being used as college admissions tools. Educating students and universities on the possibility of test optionality is the first step in creating a nation that has fair college admissions. Calling legislators, talking to people with power in educational settings are also great ways to reach out and possibly make a difference. Doing this could result in the SAT and the ACT no longer taking such a monstrous role in admission systems, therefore creating fair opportunities for students who were undermined before. Systematic discrimination should not exist in today's education system and it's time for equality to persevere. □

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# The Meaning of Woman

*Olivia Hodgson*

—

*“Noelle rolls her eyes. I think her breasts roll in sync with them. Girls’ breasts are so amazing” (Vizzini 356).*

“**W**ow, Liv, you actually look like a girl today!”

I was 16-years-old, and my face went bright red as the locker room erupted in laughter at my teammate’s comment. That game day, I had traded out my usual style of jeans, a baggy tee shirt, and a sports bra for a dress and some fancy push-up thing my mom bought me from Victoria’s Secret. I had even worn mascara, even though I hated that I couldn’t rub my eyes when I had it on. I felt like I was pretending all day, but at least I didn’t look like a boy.

As I got changed, I tried to hide my body so my team wouldn’t see the rest of it, from my broad shoulders and flat chest to my lack of a waist and long, gawky legs. I didn’t want them to know that I never quite grew into my height and that men’s clothes still fit me better than women’s did.

I was embarrassed that I felt more like myself after I changed into my sports bra and warm up tee.

In the movies, the tall girl always gets a makeover before she's seen as anything but a comedic prop, but I didn't want a makeover. If woman means small and curvy and feminine, then I am not a woman.



*“A few days after the president nominated her to the Supreme Court, Ruth Bader Ginsburg received a fax... the classmate recalled that he and his friends had known Ginsburg ‘by her law school nickname, Bitch’... Ginsburg read the fax silently. She then exclaimed ‘Better bitch than mouse!’” (Rosen).*

*“I just don’t understand why a woman would wait until a time convenient for her to come forward about being raped.”*

I was 17-years-old, fists clenched with rage at my government teacher’s remark. We had been discussing Brett Kavanaugh’s recent appointment to the United States’ Supreme Court, and the topic of conversation had changed to Bill Cosby’s court conviction. I raised my hand and argued that going through the court proceedings necessary to convict a rapist is never convenient for any woman, and being raped is even less convenient, but my teacher ignored me. He spoke over me, and when I refused to agree with him, he told me that I was overreacting and needed to calm down. I was furious and couldn’t believe he was treating me

this way. It would have been one thing for him to disagree with me, but he refused to acknowledge that my point of view existed, much less that it had any merit. He didn't ever tell the boys in my class to calm down when they voiced their opinions.

He wanted me to sit back and passively listen, but I wanted to speak. If women are quiet and submissive, then I am not a woman.



*“THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force... Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children” (The Family: A Proclamation to the World).*

*“Sometimes, we have to make hard choices in marriage.”*

I was 17-years-old, and my religious teacher paused and looked around the room, making sure his words had taken the full effect. He had just asked a boy in my class what he would do if, while he was dating a girl, she informed him she couldn't have kids. I felt sick, speed-walked to the bathroom, and tried not to cry until I was alone. My teacher had reduced my entire struggle—the lack of a period, the awkward gynecologist visits, the invasive (and sometimes painful) ultrasounds, the numerous hormone drugs that made me dizzy and nauseous, the tears

shed as I mourned the children I would never have—to a hard choice for a man to make. It hurt.

I didn't want to be a hard choice. If woman means child-bearer, then I am not a woman.



*“According to a report from the National Science Foundation, less than 30% of all U.S. doctoral degrees in mathematics and statistics are awarded to women”  
(Crowell).*

*“Well, actually...”*

I was 18-years-old, and I tried not to roll my eyes. The boy from Calculus fixed me with a condescending smirk, then began to explain to me in a voice that dripped with superiority exactly why his answer was right and mine was wrong. He didn't seem to understand that I had taken the exact same math classes as him, even though I was younger and female. His tone was so patronizing, he seemed to question if I understood the basics of integration. I didn't fight back, though.

My work spoke for itself. When we checked the homework key, my answer was correct. If woman means bad at math, then I am not a woman.



*“Definition of woman: 1a: an adult female person”  
(Merriam-Webster Dictionary).*

*I, like most people*, have spent my entire life bombarded with messages about my gender. I have been taught what I am, and what I cannot be, simply because of the chromosomes in my body. I'm not many of the things I've been told that a woman is, and I am many of the things I've been told that a woman isn't. I'm tall, I'm opinionated, I'm infertile, I'm good at math, and I'm so much more. When I really get down to the basics, though, I check every box. I'm an adult. I identify as female. And, perhaps most importantly, I am a person. All the other things—the cultural expectations and body pressures and stereotypes—don't matter. I am a woman. □

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## ***Rhetorical and Research Notes***

1. My paper is written specifically for people who feel confined to their gender, or for those who don't feel like they fit inside the specific cultural expectations that are "required" for those of their gender. I wanted to help people who fit in this situation to know that they're not alone in feeling this way, and that they're still valid in being who they are. I accomplished this by sharing my own experiences.
2. I wrote an op-ed piece for this assignment. It doesn't provide a clear solution, but it does argue that the cultural definitions of gender aren't as important as they are often made out to be. I want to help other people feel validated with this piece, not just seek to understand my own gender, which made an op-ed a better choice than a personal essay.
3. I incorporated ethos by sharing my own experiences, giving me credibility as a person who has felt like they don't belong in their gender before. I incorporated pathos by sharing how I felt when people made hurtful comments, and by sharing specific details about how I tried to hide my body because I felt like it wasn't right. I incorporated logos by using factual evidence, and by logically explaining in the last paragraph that the simplest definition is the only one that really matters.
4. Research played a large part in my experiment. I mostly used sources that I had already heard of/knew existed, but it was difficult to find the specific ideas I was looking for and wanted to incorporate into my paper. I got help from a librarian at the USU library,



and another librarian at the Logan City Library pointed me in the direction of *It's Kind of a Funny Story* for a goofy quote about women's bodies. I would like to do more research on women in mathematics and on infertility. I read some interesting studies on both that didn't make it into my paper.

5. The first thing I did was brainstorm with a web diagram. I had a central idea: gender, and I wrote down every experience I've had that led me to ponder my own gender. I then came up with a rough outline and looked for quotes that fit with each specific section. When it came to actually writing the paper, it took several different drafts and lots of rearranging to create something I was happy with. I changed the tenses several times and tried out including different quotes and experiences. I think I did well at planning before writing, but I would like to improve on knowing what to cut and save the first time around, instead of deleting and adding things back repeatedly.



# U Is for Utah and Uranium

*Kogan Powell*

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**Y**ou and I meet at the bus stop, and I hand you a block of metal the size of a sugar cube. I then casually comment that the cube is 100% raw uranium; what would your response be? Would you quickly fling it away? Would you be fascinated? Would you think I was a Soviet spy? Here's an interesting fact, if you didn't throw it out, you would be receiving more radiation from the 15 or so people around us, waiting for the bus to arrive, than from that cube in your hand ("Are Our Bodies").

"Radiation" and "nuclear" are big buzz words in our minds. We automatically think of bombs, three-eyed frogs, and maybe even *The Simpsons*. However, despite those unfortunate eyesores on the reputation of atomic energy, the good that nuclear fission has done society far overwhelms the bad and needs to be brought to light. Furthermore, nuclear energy has the potential to continue to meet community needs in the world abroad and here at home in our state of Utah.

The population of Utah is projected to grow by about 1 million people in the next 20 years (Lee). Given that there are only about 3.2 million of us in Utah right now, this is significant (Lee). How will we sustain these newcomers? We could continue building coal plants, natural gas plants or even more wind farms, but I believe that nuclear energy, more than any other source, is our best option to provide safe, clean, and reliable energy for the great state of Utah.

Up until now, discussions about nuclear power in Utah have been scarce, to say the least, but in 2011, a company called NuScale received approval to construct a brand-new type of nuclear reactor in Idaho that is a breakthrough in nuclear technology. Many cities in Cache Valley, Logan included, have contracted for a portion of the power generated by this plant once it is running (which could be as early as 2026). Maybe you're wondering if this is really such a good idea. Or heck, maybe you're wondering if one of these things is even safe to have around. Well, as we'll soon see, there's no reason to fear these marvels of the modern age.

To clear away some of the mists of mystery surrounding "nuclear energy," let's briefly explore the process. Uranium is a metal, like any other metal on earth, and is made of atoms. In the center of an atom, called the nucleus, is where all the protons and neutrons live. Most atoms, say oxygen, carbon and iron, have a pretty stable nucleus with roughly as many protons as neutrons and everyone is happy. For some elements though, like uranium (or even some in our bodies as I mentioned in the beginning), a percentage of their atoms tend to have

unbalanced and unstable nuclei. This unbalance results in little pieces literally flying off the nucleus and the entire thing even splitting in two. This process is what we call nuclear fission. These extra cast away bits of matter or energy are what we call “radiation,” and while there’re several types, for now, just remember that one of these pieces is a neutron. In the early 1930s, we realized that if we stuck enough of these unstable atoms in the same place, the neutrons released from natural atomic splitting or “fission” would slam into neighboring atoms, triggering fission, which then would trigger other fissions, and on and on, resulting is a fission chain reaction.

The most important part of this process is that each atom fission releases not only neutrons, but enormous amounts of heat. Let’s go back to your little cube of uranium (which is hopefully still in your hand) for some perspective. If we were to make that cube (Cole et al.) out of reactor-grade uranium (which has a slightly higher concentration of the unstable atoms, AKA “enriched uranium”), it could produce about as much heat as one ton of coal (“Nuclear Fuel”). In a nuclear plant, many long rods of enriched uranium are bundled together under water. The heat from the fission chain reaction boils the water into steam, and that steam drives a turbine which generates electricity like any other power plant. These plants can go for an incredibly long time without refueling (as much as two to three years), all the while providing enough energy to power several Cache Valley’s worth of people. Surprisingly, this technology has never made it into Utah, perhaps because our cheap and abundant fossil fuel reserves have rendered nuclear uncompetitive, and

perhaps because public perception of nuclear power is stuck on the infamous disasters of Chernobyl and Fukushima. Whatever the reason(s), we have neglected to make nuclear power a part of the state of Utah. Until now.

The good news is, this is about to change in only a few short years. NuScale, a leading company in modern nuclear technology innovation, has developed what are called Small Modular Reactors or SMRs. These incredible feats of engineering essentially condense an entire power plant down to a cylinder about 15 feet wide and 80 feet tall. These contain nearly all the components of traditional nuclear reactors but are small enough to be made in a factory and can, in a simplified sense, be plugged into a facility like batteries in a remote control. NuScale is constructing one of these SMR facilities in Idaho Falls, ID and many cities in Utah, including Logan City have contracted to receive some of the power it will produce. This is a remarkable development, but there are still some, such as the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL) who remain skeptical about whether the benefits of nuclear power really outweigh the costs, touting renewables as the future of Utah (“Small Modular”).

Before we begin any sort of cost-benefit discussion, however, we must define one thing first. Priorities. What are our priorities? I think we can agree that our people come first; we want our people to have peace of mind, and to be safe and healthy. After our people are taken care of, we turn to what surrounds us. We want to responsibly use the many resources Utah has been blessed with. We want our policies and infrastructure to be sustainable, and even

provide a surplus for those additional 1 million people we'll be accommodating in the next few decades. And of course, we want to ensure that comfortable living is affordable. Nuclear power, and particularly NuScale's SMR project, help us ensure that these priorities are met, and here is why.

Let's first talk about the dollar signs. While I concede that given its history, nuclear is at a cost disadvantage; many experts in the field will tell you that a large portion of these costs are due to poor project management and lack of public support and funding. Additionally, since most of the cost of nuclear comes from construction loans (Muller), the current discount rate (essentially the loan interest rate) plays a large part ("Economics of Nuclear"). Once the plant is paid off, however, the electricity is very cheap. Richard A. Muller in his book *Energy for Future Presidents* (which I highly recommend) states that the incredibly low costs of fuel and plant operation allows most facilities to turn around 80% of their revenues into paying off loans. In fact, once you take into account that a nuclear power plant can last for 60 years, while a typical wind and solar farm needs to replace its turbines and solar cells about every 15 years, the net cost can become competitive. To add to all this, current technological innovations are lowering the price significantly. The SMR design from NuScale has been able to cut construction costs by as much as 30% (Botha), and since each module operates independent of the others, you no longer need to shut the entire plant down for maintenance or refueling (a process that otherwise sets plant revenue back significantly).

While these general improvements are exciting, ultimately this boils down to how much you and I would be paying every month in your power bill, right? Well, while NuScale is currently being funded by the Department of Energy (DOE) and others to initially get these projects going, they are able to offer electricity to the grid for an astounding 5.5 cents per kWh (UAMPS). For perspective, the average kWh for most homeowners in Utah (coming mainly from fossil fuels) is between 8 and 14 cents. This is remarkably competitive in today's market.

But what costs are we saving by using nuclear power, how does that affect our people? Recall that "peace of mind for the people of Utah" was one of our listed priorities. Most nuclear power plants can, in a matter of minutes, finetune the output of the reactor with control rods that slide in between the uranium rods. These control rods block neutrons, and so the further down they slide in, the fewer neutrons can get to other uranium atoms, and the slower the chain reaction goes. On the other hand, with renewables, while extracting energy from ongoing and ever-usable sources is very resourceful, they too are under the dictates of mother nature. When the sun does not shine or the wind does not blow, energy must be supplied in another way to fill the gap (usually by means of a backup natural gas or oil generator). Either each renewable energy plant builds its own small army of fossil fuel generators, or major institutions, such as hospitals, who can't afford extended power outages, would have to buy their own. Either way, we risk long periods without power or continue burning fossil fuels to support out carbon free renewables.



Nuclear power solves all of these problems without any additional risk.

Speaking of risk, one fear people have surrounding nuclear is the chance that it could “meltdown and blow up.” There’s a lot of physics involved, but suffice it to say that with our current reactor designs, an actual nuclear meltdown is incredibly unlikely. Literally, everything would have to go wrong. And even if everything did in fact go wrong, it is physically impossible for a reactor to explode like an atomic bomb. Let me say that again, the laws of physics make it impossible for a reactor to explode like an atomic bomb. In fact, SMR reactors are designed to shut down and cool themselves off naturally, even if the power and control systems went down.

However, admittedly in the cases of Chernobyl and Fukushima, everything actually did go wrong, but let’s look at some numbers. Per unit of energy produced, nuclear totally takes the cake for safety, with only 0.04 deaths per TWh (trillion watts). What does that mean? Well, taking fatalities per TWh statistics for other energy sources, if we lined up a coal plant, a hydroelectric plant, a wind farm and our trusty SMR (or other nuclear plant) side by side and ran them for 100 years, we could attribute over 4,000 deaths to coal power, 35 to hydroelectric, and more than three to wind. Meanwhile, our friendly neighborhood SMR plant would have caused about 0.6 fatalities in that whole time (Rose). In addition to all this, it might interest you to know that 7 million people die globally each year due to air pollution (Botha). Maybe you’ve seen the inversions here in Cache Valley on a particularly cold fall afternoon, and

perhaps you have friends or relatives who find it hard to go out on “red days” because of the breathing hazards. But every day we run our SMR power plant, we would be avoiding literally thousands of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions along with other nasty byproducts of fossil fuels.

With environmental preservation as a priority, the main reason anyone is even considering non-fossil fuel energy sources is because of the growing concern of carbon dioxide emissions. One might think that wind and solar are carbon free as you can get, but once you take into consideration manufacturing, construction, and maintenance costs, nuclear energy is actually only behind “land-based” wind farms in terms of net carbon output. In addition to this, both wind and solar farms require the clearing of hundreds of acres of land prior to installation. On average, for every ton of coal burned in a power plant (a coal plant equal to our SMR plant would burn about 5,000 tons per day) (Hanania et al.), three tons of CO<sub>2</sub> are emitted into the atmosphere. In comparison, a nuclear reactor core itself releases zero carbon dioxide during the process of generating electricity, the only CO<sub>2</sub> attributed to a nuclear power plant is from the vehicles and equipment used in construction and occasional maintenance. In fact, there is hardly any waste at all except for heat and spent fuel.

So, what about the horror stories of green nuclear sludge climbing out of barrels to take your children? Should we worry about exposure? Well, yes and no. Nuclear waste can be toxic and very dangerous, but only under two conditions, when you are very near it (and I’m

talking using it as home décor), or when it is very fresh. The waste is the remains of nuclear fuel after it has expended most of its useful energy and while its radioactivity decreases exponentially with time, the really nasty stuff termed high level waste (HLW) can still be deadly after thousands of years (“Radioactive Waste”).

Currently, there are extravagant measures taken to ensure that HLW is kept contained. Ultimately, HLW is encased in “dry storage casks” which are absolute marvels of engineering. You can actually find videos of “durability tests” on YouTube involving anything from dropping them from 30 feet in the air, to literally ramming them with a train (both of which they passed, by the way). These casks are then buried hundreds of feet underground to prevent any leakage into ground water or other public resources. Many argue that this isn’t enough, but many analyses have been done showing that these precautions reduce public exposure risk down to very benign levels (Kautsky et al.).

Fears of radiation and radioactive waste have yielded standards of caution that are exaggerated, unnecessary, and can even do more harm than good. Of the 100,000 people evacuated from Fukushima following the reactor failure, more people died from exposure, stress, and accident during evacuation than were killed by the reactor failure and resultant radiation contamination (Muller). Obviously, nuclear waste can be dangerous, which is why we have protocols for disposing of it, but I think it is less dangerous than you might believe. Additionally, as mentioned before, the amount of waste produced by a reactor is actually extremely small, so its volume is

certainly not an issue, at least not when compared to entire solar and wind farms (all containing environmentally toxic chemicals) being scrapped every few decades and replaced. Our society desperately needs to re-evaluate our perspective on nuclear energy and nuclear waste and begin to see them in context.

While nuclear plants in general may be more expensive monetarily than other sources, the problems they solve far outweigh those costs. They are reliable and can be scaled to fit energy needs very easily. The new SMR design has reduced construction costs and have taken safety to a whole new level. Nuclear plants contribute very little waste (whether as radioactive leftovers or greenhouse gasses) and the waste that is produced can more than adequately be dealt with. Nuclear energy is the best option we have to ensure a safe, secure, and reliable future for Utah as we continue to grow and welcome newcomers to our amazing state. While Logan is currently on board to participate in the incredible developments with NuScale, many discussions are still being had. You and I may very well be able to participate in these discussions whether publicly or even with a friend. Go out, learn more. Let's help Utah reap the benefits that this incredible resource has to offer. □

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## It's a Thin Line

*Alyssa Morgan*

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**W**hen I was fifteen-years-old, I was at a family party. The food being served was sandwiches. I personally do not like a sandwich that is not grilled, so I was standing off to the side waiting for everyone else to dish up so I could fill up on barbeque chips and the veggie tray. Something you should know about me is that I have always been a relatively thin person. I have fluctuated from being normal to underweight my whole life, not because of lack of food, but because of my genetics. And on that Sunday afternoon, one of my uncles said something to me that I have never forgotten. As I was waiting my turn, he approached me and stated, “You better go eat something or people will think you are anorexic.” I would have been more shocked except I have had similar comments made to me my whole life. These remarks range from simply stating that I have skinny wrists all the way to questioning if my parents ever fed me. These remarks used to confuse me when I was younger as I had no real control over how I looked. Yet, I found myself hating my scrawny arms and

disapproving of my visible rib cage. I was embarrassed about my appearance.

Everything from your genetics to your last meal has shaped your body into what it is. If everyone looked the same it would be a monotonous world. Nonetheless, everyday people are mocked, ridiculed, and insulted because of their body shape or size. This specific type of bullying is called *body shaming*. While body shaming is often referred to as fat shaming, it is important to remember that it happens to more than just overweight people. National body shaming statistics show that 94% of teenage girls have reported being body shamed, and 65% of teenage boys reported the same thing. However, only 11% to 15% of teenagers are overweight (“Fat Shaming and Body Shaming”). The disparity in these statistics shows us that it is not just people who are obese that are being body shamed. It is a harmful act that makes people insecure and can cause eating disorders. It affects people of all sizes and body shapes and it needs to be stopped.

We are bombarded with how we are supposed to look anytime we turn on a movie or open a magazine. There are entire companies who make their money off of people’s insecurities. A few examples are fad diet organizations, plastic surgery, and fashion magazines. Because these companies care more about their income than their consumers well-being, they do not care if their advertising is making people feel insecure about themselves. Corporations are not going to flat out tell you that you need to change how you look, but they will use phrases like, “A new and improved you!” or “Five easy steps to becoming



beautiful.” This way of advertising indirectly body shames people, by making them think that they are not good enough the way they are. When we see models that do not look like us, we start to shame ourselves since we do not look like these people we consider pretty. Jamie Lampros, in the article “False Advertising, Photoshopping Mars Our Body Image,” explains,

The average female fashion model weighs 120 pounds, but according to the National Center for Health Statistics, the average weight for an American woman is 166. A number that many women see as overweight. (Lampros)

It’s not just extremely thin models that are negatively affecting people either. The National Eating Disorders Association explains,

Most males would like to be lean and muscular, which typically represents the “ideal” male body type. Exposure to unattainable images in the media leads to male body dissatisfaction. (“Eating Disorders in Men and Boys”)

The media has warped our ideas of what a healthy or attractive body looks like. Our brains believe what they see. When people see images of “perfect” people, we tend to think that this is what we are supposed to look like.

It makes things even harder for people to see these models with impossible bodies when they have been photoshopped to the point that the bodies we see really are impossible. These photoshopped images are hurting the general public’s mental and physical health. It is a lie that makes the majority of audiences feel horrible about themselves because they don’t look like the person in the

magazine, when in all reality, the people in the magazine do not even look like themselves (“Body Image in the Media”).

There are several solutions out there to the problems the media is creating with their body shaming. If companies were to stop using photoshop and start using healthy people of different sizes, it would be easier for people to not compare themselves to the models and celebrities they see. One company that has done this, and has seen great results from it, is Dove. The Dove Real Beauty Campaign started in 2004 and was set on helping women see their true beauty. They released several ads showing the harmful effects of photoshop and stopped airbrushing and photoshopping their own ads. Their gross profit in 2004 was \$2.5 billion. Ten years later, their profit increased by \$4 billion (Skene). Stores like JCPenney now have varieties in sizes and models such as plus, petite, and tall sizes. Having these varieties help consumers to be comfortable in their clothes and feel more confident.

Several celebrities, such as Zendaya and Meghan Trainor, have spoken out about images of themselves in the media that have been edited. Letting their fans know what they really look like helps the people they influence realize that they are real people with realistic bodies. Convincing companies to stop photoshopping will be easier when they see that there is a profit to be made in helping people love themselves. If viewing a form of ad or media makes you feel good about yourself, you are going to be more inclined to want to purchase or participate in it. If more companies join in on this trend, then it will help people to realize that

there are different body types out there, and they are beautiful.

Our society has already made some progress when it comes to stopping people from fat shaming others, the only issue is sometimes when we do that we tend to put down thin people. We should never have to put others down to lift someone else up. People have different metabolisms, the process by which our body turns food into energy, and different genetic factors that give us a predisposition to how our bodies will look. The fact of the matter is that some people are going to be skinny while other are not. When people combat fat shaming by saying that thin is unrealistic, it is putting down thin people. Yes, thin is not realistic for everyone, this does not change that some people are going to appear thinner than others. Thin people get made fun of for being thin. Some common names they get called include: scrawny, bony, flat-chested, twig, bean pole, and the list of derogatory terms goes on. Anyone can be body shamed. Everyone is allowed to be insecure. I want to make it clear that I am not saying that skinny shaming and fat shaming are the same thing. They affect people in different ways, but at their core they are both forms of bullying that make people feel insecure about themselves. Each is a subcategory of body shaming and neither is acceptable.

Body shaming can lead to eating disorders. These specific mental conditions are classified as any psychological disorder where the person is participating in disturbing and severe eating habits. Some of the more well-known disorders include Anorexia, Bulimia, and Binge

Eating Disorder. There are several factors that contribute to eating disorders, and it is going to vary from person to person. Genetics and biology play a role, just like with any mental health disorder. Kathleen Smith explains in the article “Eating Disorders in Children 12 and Under: Learn the Warning Signs” that

[e]ating disorders can be heritable, so if a parent, sibling, or another relative of a child has an eating disorder, they are 7-12 times more likely to develop one than a child who does not. (Smith)

Even your personality can affect if you will develop an eating disorder or not. One example of this is how people with perfectionism are more likely to strive for an impossible body size, or have a warped self-image. In the case of Anorexia, no matter how thin the person with the condition gets, they will still see themselves as “fat” (Petre).

Though there are many variables when it comes to the development of eating disorders the most common factor is body shaming. One article discussing body dissatisfaction explained that

[d]issatisfaction with body weight and/or shape is typically at the core of the development of an eating disorder, with attempts made to alter shape, weight or body composition through dietary restriction, over-exercise, or purging. (“Male Body Image and Body Dissatisfaction”)

When people get made fun of for how they look, they tend to want to change the thing that they are insecure about. It is sad how extreme people will go to change their appearance, simply because someone made them feel bad about their appearance.

Another major misconception that comes with body shaming is that it only happens to women. However, men get body shamed too. Most guys are not going to be ripped bodybuilders from superhero movies and romantic comedies. Subsequently, guys can and do have eating disorders as well. Contrary to popular belief, when it comes to eating disorders one in three people who have been diagnosed with an eating disorder is male. The National Eating Disorders Association explains,

In the United States alone, eating disorders will affect 10 million males at some point in their lives.

However, due in large part to cultural bias, they are much less likely to seek treatment for their eating disorder. (“Eating Disorders in Men and Boys”)

Whether it was because of someone directly offending them, or the desire to be society’s version of perfect, boys can also develop eating disorders because of body shaming. Women get a lot more attention in the media when they get body shamed, thus there are also a lot more uplifting messages out there for girls when it comes to loving your body. We need to have just as many campaigns out there to help men love their bodies. If we do not expect every girl to look like Barbie, then we cannot expect every guy to look like Ken.

Nationaleatingdisorders.org is a great resource for anyone struggling with an eating disorder, or just anyone who is struggling with body image. One of the many great quotes on their website states,

Every body is different. We all have different genetic and cultural traits. Even if everyone started eating the same things and did the same amount of

exercise for a whole year, we would not all look the same at the end of the year. This is because each person's genetic inheritance influences their bone structure, body size, shape, and weight differently. ("Every Body is Different")

If we stop body shaming and help more people see that everyone looks different, we will be able to decrease the cases of eating disorders significantly. We can also help by keeping an eye on each other and watching for warning signs of eating disorders. When my uncle accused me of being anorexic, he was far from the truth. Not eating a food because you do not like is very different from counting every calorie, constantly monitoring your weight, and having a distorted body image (Petre). These are real warning signs of an eating disorder. To help people who have already been hurt and changed because of body shaming, we can give them support and make sure that they are getting the treatment they need so they can be healthy.

Weight should be more about healthiness rather than thinness. Just because someone is thin does not mean they are healthy. There is no exact weight you need to be to be considered healthy either. Your Body Mass Index or BMI is one way to figure out the weight range you should try to be in based on your height. Though it does not account for how much fat or muscle is contributing to your weight, it can still be a nice guideline.

Sadly, not everyone is going to be kind. As I have gone through my own struggles with body shaming I have found that no matter how much I try to be other people's versions

of beautiful, it means nothing unless I think of myself as beautiful. I can accept my scrawny arms and visible rib cage as my own form of pretty. We as a society need to help each other love who we are and what we look like. Body shaming is harmful and hurtful. It makes people dislike their bodies and can even cause eating disorders. It happens to everyone, but it doesn't have to. We can do our part to speak kindly to each other, and companies can use a variety of models and stop airbrushing and photoshopping people. These changes will help make the world a better place. □

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# Math Sucks! And Why You Think That

*Madilyn Braunersrither*

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**A**s I was going through a box of my schoolwork from elementary school during my preparations to come up to college, I found an “About Me” book I wrote in kindergarten. On one page, in shaky, scribbled, newly discovered handwriting, it said, “I love math some people don’t.” Being an incoming Mathematics and Statistics Composite major, I first laughed at 6-year-old Madi declaring her love of math and found joy in the idea that I was pursuing what I loved when I was young; however, there was another part of me that couldn’t help but wonder: why, at the age of six, was it already an established fact of life that people hate math? Why did a kindergartener feel the need to justify liking a subject that she and her peers had hardly been exposed to?

The reality is that, in the United States, there is an epidemic of hating math. Overwhelmingly, curriculum writers around the world have emphasized the importance of mathematics, but students and teachers alike continue to abhor the subject in its entirety (Khaliqi). Negative

attitudes toward math and flaws in math education have created a cycle of bitterness toward the subject being projected onto children in their early education, causing this discrepancy in the perceived value of math that's disadvantaging students greatly because they miss out on the incredible learning opportunities math can offer when taught well.

### ***Math Matters***

*A major issue contributing to the widespread distaste of math is that many people do not understand why math matters. Many people will likely never use the trigonometry they learned in high school ever again, but that doesn't mean there isn't value in the process of learning it. Narrowing the value of any subject to the surface of what is being taught can build a case of uselessness for it: *What's the point in writing a research paper about the ethics of cosmetic surgery? Why memorize dates of major events associated with the Age of Enlightenment? What good will it do the average person to understand the process of photosynthesis?* All these things contribute to a better understanding of how the world works. Learning complex mathematics can do the same. Galileo Galilei felt so strongly about this that he proposed that, "In order to understand the universe you must know the language in which it is written, and that language is mathematics."*

Another major reason why learning and understanding math is so important is because math achievement is one of the largest predictors of academic achievement in general. In a study done by special

education professors from University of Sarajevo and Herzegovina University, it was found that success in math is heavily linked to many other cognitive skills, including, “verbal fluency, inhibition control, and visual-motor skill integration” (Memisevic et al.). As students better understand math and have better control over what they are doing in math, those general cognitive skills increase as well, thus improving performance in other subjects. This leads to the conclusion that math doesn’t just teach students how to perform operations and solve for “x;” it’s teaching students how to think and process information.

Additionally, industry is increasingly demanding jobs that have a foundation in mathematics. And not just any jobs, good jobs. In Career Cast’s list of the top ten jobs based on “work environment, income, and stress levels,” eight of the ten required a math background of at least calculus (O’Brien). I’m not advocating that the only viable career path is through mathematics, but students are hesitant to pursue these jobs because they have so much math anxiety (Welsh). Students dismiss these jobs too soon because they don’t have the confidence in their math ability to believe that they could be successful in those fields. Opportunities should not be lost to children because they learned to hate math in elementary school.

Most importantly, math gives students opportunities to practice-problem solving skills. The ability to look at something complex and abstract and work with it until it is a simple answer is incredibly applicable to any field. Math classrooms can be the perfect environment to practice this skill with peers who are working through the same

problems and see how others are working toward finding an answer. For example, this semester I was working on evaluating the definite integral:

$$\int_0^{\pi/2} \cos^4(x) dx$$

Initially, this is complete nonsense, but as I rely on my previous knowledge of what an integral is and what the graph of cosine of  $x$  to the fourth power would even look like, the problem begins to make more sense. Manipulating the problem using trigonometric identities and failing to do so in a way that brings any light to what my first step of evaluating would be, becomes incredibly frustrating. Eventually, after rearranging and noticing patterns, searching through notes, and discussing with classmates, I finally have my integral in a form that I know what to do with:

$$\int_0^{\pi/2} \left( \frac{3}{8} + \frac{1}{2} \cos(2x) + \frac{1}{8} \cos(4x) \right) dx$$

It may not look prettier, but I can now do the actual calculus associated with this math problem, and it works out to a simple answer of about six tenths. By the time I've solved this problem, I haven't just figured out how to evaluate the integral, but I have practiced diligence in working until I have my answer and being creative in doing so. Math is hard, but working through those difficult problems is what makes it so valuable. Through persistence in solving complicated questions, math provides opportunities to learn teamwork, communication, problem-solving, endurance, and analysis skills.

## ***Gaps in The Teaching of Math***

*A main factor contributing to the trend of hating math is sourced in flaws in the teaching of it. How students feel about math becomes fairly established in elementary school, so it's important that teachers are speaking in ways that encourage children and don't vilify the subject (Medoff). One reason why this is so hard to bring to reality is that those who pursue elementary education careers generally have a lower understanding of and regard for the nature of science, which includes mathematics. An observational study found that when comparing the collegiate level math scores of STEM majors, non-STEM majors, and specifically those in Elementary Education, there was a large discrepancy between the typical non-STEM major and those that were going into Elementary Education. Future teachers at that level were more likely to perform worse and to understand why math matters less (Michaluk et al.). This is especially concerning as the individuals who are responsible for laying the foundation of understanding have gaps in their own knowledge. This may be the largest contributor to the epidemic of hating math. As teachers who don't like math teach math, they are going to, even if its subconsciously, project these negative feelings toward math onto their incredibly impressionable, young students and perpetuate the cycle that had already disadvantaged themselves.*

This cycle is perpetuated through the language that teachers use surrounding math that can easily negate growth mindset. It seems obvious, and it would be difficult to find someone that argues against the idea, that students

learn better when they believe that they are capable of learning than when they are discouraged (Medoff). Unfortunately, many teachers, because of their gaps in understanding in mathematics, build up the idea that some people have “math brains” and others don’t. The idea that the children who are able to grasp mathematical concepts earlier have “math brains” is almost always used by teachers in attempt to make the students who are struggling feel better about not understanding; however, this train of thought is nothing but detrimental to students (Kimball). It leads to the idea that however good at math someone is right now is as good as they’ll always be, that there’s no way to improve, and that it isn’t difficult at all for some. It means that any challenge in learning math means you aren’t good at math, and that there is no point in even trying if you aren’t one of the lucky ones with a “math brain.” While fallacious, this type of language surrounding the teaching of math is heavily contributing to math anxiety.

### ***Flaws in Math Curriculum***

*Problems surrounding math in elementary schools* are not only the fault of teachers; there are major flaws in math curriculum that are disadvantaging students. Students are being taught abstract math before they can even think abstractly. Stanford Children’s Health has shown that from the ages from 6-12, humans “develop the ability to think in concrete ways”: combining, separating, ordering, and sorting information. Then, from 12-18, human brains begin to be able to process information in abstract ways: considering new possibilities, forming their own new ideas

and questions, and being aware of the act of thought itself (Packard). The notation surrounding math is often what brings concepts from concrete to abstract in elementary years. For example, showing three-eighths as three parts of something split into eight pieces is completely comprehensible to the typical third grader, when fractions are usually introduced in the United States. However, when a three is put over an eight, and students are expected to be able to manipulate three parts of something split into eight pieces as an idea, it is too much too soon for many. Students should be learning how to manipulate pictures and models, not this notation that their brain cannot fully understand yet. There is plenty of time to introduce notation when it will make more sense. The only time constraint on understanding are the ones put in place by school districts and curriculum writers (Kimball). These six-year ranges in development are also incredibly important to keep in mind, because it reinforces the idea that math ability is not fixed. As students' brains develop, their ability to comprehend math can increase exponentially and at vastly different rates.

Additionally, new concepts in math are hardly ever truly new; it is building upon something taught earlier, and these connections should be emphasized. For example, in prealgebra, students are introduced to binomials and how to multiply two binomials by each other. This is often taught using the strategy “foil,” which stands for first, outer, inner, last. This means you multiply the first term of each binomial, then the outer terms, then the inner terms, then the last terms, and finally, add them all together. Taught as completely new and difficult, this is the exact

same process students use in the second grade when basic arithmetic is taught. If students completely understood multiplication, this wouldn't be such a difficult concept to learn when variables are added in. It's the next step of understanding, not new understanding (Petersen and Hyde). This can be difficult to completely integrate into schools because all teachers are going to teach differently, but math builds upon itself by definition, so teachers should be able to make those connections regardless of the teachers their students have had before.

### ***Solving the Problem***

*Emphasizing connections and understanding*, rather than memorizing equations and formulas, will help shift the focus of math toward problem solving. Students typically are taught to get very specific information, do a formulaic process with said information, and get the correct answer. This isn't doing much for anyone and it can hardly be classified as math. Difficult problems that require students to think, to find connections to what they've been taught, and to try multiple things before they find the right process to use are so much more valuable to the students (Memisevic et al.). Teachers and students alike tend to shy away from such problems for fear of getting frustrated, but when growth mindset is being emphasized and not knowing what to do immediately is embraced as normal, these problems become much less intimidating. They can become fun, or at the very least extremely effective learning tools.



There have been many attempts to address the issue of hating math in the past. Some of the major ones are A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, and the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSSM). A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind were both intended to address issues in the education system as a whole in the United States. Released in the 1980s, A Nation at Risk was the first time the need for formal curriculum and state standards was proposed. Before that, it hadn't been seriously considered that there was a need for those as well as methods to monitor how they were being implemented and to establish teacher accountability through measurement of student understanding. For years, these ideas were discussed and were employed on a state basis in some areas. However, it wasn't until 2001 when No Child Left Behind was passed that nation-wide change was seen. This was the largest and most far reaching education legislation the United States had ever experienced (Khaliqi). States were charged with creating proficiency levels and assessment in math and reading on a yearly basis. Because it was left at the state level, there has been issues with states making purposefully lax standards to reflect that more students are reaching proficiency levels. Then, in 2010, CCSSM was released to mainly target the ways that the United States was failing its students in the study of math (Clements et al.).

The goal of the Common Core State Standards in Math was to look at other countries who consistently perform better in math, and to implement their strategies of teaching math into American schools. One of the largest problems the creators of CCSSM found in U.S. teaching of

mathematics is that it's a "mile wide and an inch deep"—students are expected to know so much, but don't fully understand much of anything (Khaliqi). The Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) showed that Common Core was generally successful in aligning intended curriculum with that of more successful countries. An accepted way to measure implemented curriculum have not been fully developed yet, so not much can be said on the effectiveness of this alignment. However, it was interesting that there were a couple places where Common Core completely missed the mark, where increasing focus on a specific component of one subject could shift student scores by 4-7 points in the positive direction conveying that continual study and adjustment of curriculum is critical to improvement (Clements et al.).

Parents tend to be cautious and bitter toward major changes in curriculum. I know that when I was learning how to multiply, my parents became extremely frustrated with all the "new math." It's easy to feel that the way that you learned is the best, but being aware that there is a problem in the way math is being taught and that changes to math are for the benefit of students is so important to allow positive change to happen. As change in curriculum is coupled with increased responsibility placed on teachers to discuss math in ways that develops and maintains a growth mindset, this epidemic of hating math can steadily recover.

## **Conclusion**

*Students should be given* the space to develop their academic interests throughout their formative years, and they can be given that as schools emphasize why math matters through teacher accountability and updated curriculum. It's fine that "I love math. Some people don't." It just shouldn't be decided at the age of six. □

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# Zebra

*Kiersten Stapley*



*“When you hear hoofbeats, think of horses, not zebras.” (“Why the Zebra?”)*



I press my feet into the ground, knees locked, hips pulled out, back upright, abdomen clenched in, shoulders down, one hand gently gracing the pine bar to my left while the other delicately rests in front of me, and my chin tilts slightly upward. I inhale. A cracking sound disrupts the familiar tune of classical music with each pli . My face grows warm as I feel the eyes in the room turning my direction when we complete the exercise. Thus begins our daily ritual.

We migrate away from the walls, our feet sliding against the vinyl floor as we form three distinct, uniform lines facing the mirror. Like soldiers, we await our next instruction standing in the

same stance, wearing the same uniform, hair pulled into the same style. But one of the soldiers in this battalion stands out. Although I told my instructor that I wear black leggings to protect my uniform pink tights from snags pulled by the Velcro on the braces that decorate my lower body, the real reason is to conceal both the erratic bruises which pepper my limbs and the stark stretch marks that caress my hips and snake down to my knees and show through the tights.

The music changes, and our lines condense to one side of the room. Three by three, we leap into the air, pushing our legs higher with each jump. On my final landing, I feel my unbraced ankle jolt out of place and slam onto the ground. My concerned peers offer to help me up. Instead, I scooch toward the back of the room, excusing myself as I rest my body under a bar.



*When learning about diagnostics* and differential diagnoses, medical students are often taught the phrase “when you hear hoofbeats, think of horses, not zebras” (“Why the Zebra?”, Evans and Rafi). In this metaphor, the “hoofbeats” represent the symptoms of a patient, for example, maybe a short, mild cough. “Horses” symbolize common diagnoses, whereas



“zebras” are rare diagnoses. In our cough example, a “horse” might be something like a common cold while a zebra would be tuberculosis, a rarity in the modernized Western world. While the metaphor seems logical in our scenario, medical “zebras” do exist. In fact, they are more common than both society and medical professionals sometimes realize.

According to the Orphan Drug Act of 1983, rare conditions affect fewer than 200,000 people in the United States (“RARE Facts”). The European Union defines a rare disease as affecting less than one in two thousand people (“Commision of the European Communities”). However, although rare conditions individually affect a vast minority of individuals, when the over 7,000 rare diseases are combined, they affect at least an estimated 25 to 30 million people in the United States; or one in ten Americans. In fact, worldwide, there are more patients with rare diseases than the number of cancer and HIV/AIDS patients combined (“RARE Facts”). Despite the large number of rare disease patients, it takes, on average, over eight years to receive an accurate diagnosis for a rare disease, and even then, only 5 percent of all rare diseases have an FDA-approved treatment (“FAQs about Rare Diseases,” Office of the Commissioner).

Many rare disease patients, or “zebras,” never receive a diagnosis or are misdiagnosed with a more

common condition due to both the scarcity of accurate information on rare diseases and because many symptoms of rare diseases mimic those found in more common ones (Budysh et al.). Some zebras even refer to their diagnostic journey as an “odyssey” because of the difficulty and lengthy amount of time it takes in getting a diagnosis (Office of the Commissioner).



*“Kiersten?”*

I nod my head. A figure takes me to a back room where I exchange my warm sweater and thick jeans for a flimsy, cotton gown speckled with a tacky, outdated pattern. I feel a familiar breeze of stale hospital air rush through the open back of my gown, tickling my spine and chilling my neck. A different figure returns to the room and escorts me to a chair, my feet sticking to the cold linoleum floor with each step. On the counter next to me rests a packaged set I know all too well. My stomach drops. Two more attendants enter, one opening the package and handing its contents to the other.

“Are you right or left-handed?”

“Right.”

The attendant grabs my left arm.

“My right arm is better for these things though.”

As she switches sides, I flip my forearm up, revealing a network of bruises and scars around my inner elbow. Although I look like a junkie, my canvas of colorful contusions come from the barrage of inconclusive blood tests taken and IVs received from the various scopes I had over the last year.

Near the machine, an attendant hands me a set of headphones and a button which I grab with the hand near my IV line.

“Push it if you need anything – lots of people get severe claustrophobia in these.”

I lay on a cold metal table and slide into the belly of the machine, my nose nearly brushing its top. The machine roars and trembles, getting louder with each instructed breathing interval. Deafened by the noise, I hold my breath, hoping to confirm the Crohn’s disease diagnosis I was given earlier.



*The Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes* are a group of rare genetic connective tissue disorders generally

characterized by joint hypermobility (or colloquially, “double-jointedness”), skin hyperextensibility (stretchy skin), and tissue fragility (“What Are the Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes?”). Of the thirteen subtypes, type III, or the hypermobile type, is the most common, affecting around one in five thousand individuals. It is also the only type without an identifiable gene, which makes it harder to diagnose (Tinkle et al.).

Additionally, the symptoms of Ehlers-Danlos, and especially the hypermobile variant, mimic the symptoms of other more common diseases such as Lupus, Lyme disease, Sjogren’s, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Fibromyalgia, to name a few (Tinkle et al.). Many EDSers get their symptoms brushed off by health professionals as being attributed to anxiety, depression, or hypochondria because the symptoms are so widespread and seemingly erratic. This is also in part due to the fact that lab testing usually yields negative results (Budysh et al., Evans and Rafi).

Because EDS is a rare disease and often misdiagnosed, the Ehlers-Danlos society has adopted the zebra – in reference to the diagnostic metaphor – as the official mascot/symbol for the Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes (“Why the Zebra?”).



*Ultimately, it was not* an MRI or blood test that gave me a diagnosis. Rather, it took me seeing a rheumatologist to be diagnosed with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS) along with its more common comorbidity Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS). It would be my second rare disease diagnosis, the prior being narcolepsy. A few years later, I would be diagnosed with Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS): another rare disease that goes hand-in-hand with hEDS and POTS.

When the doctor first gave me the symptoms list for hEDS, it read like a checklist of nearly everything that was wrong with me and validated what I had been experiencing; even the things I was told to be “too young” or “didn’t look sick enough” to have. hEDS explains why I have chronic joint pain and clicking despite only being in my late teens. It explains why I dislocate and subluxate my joints on a regular basis with very little trauma afterward. It explains why I would get injured so easily. It explains why I had extreme stretch marks despite not gaining nearly enough weight to justify them. It explains why I used to be so spatially awkward and clumsy before having dance training. It explains why it takes longer for me to heal from minor cuts and why I bruise more easily than my peers. It explains why certain oral anesthetics do not have any effect on me. It explains

my random headaches, my dizziness, even my soft, “velvety” skin – a trademark symptom of EDS. In fact, it was hEDS, not Crohn’s Disease, to blame for my gastrointestinal problems and ulcers – which came back “normal” on lab results.



“...*there is no cure,*” the doctor continues.

“Is there any medicine I can take?”

He shakes his head.

“The only thing you can do is try to manage the symptoms with physical therapy.”

My father and the rheumatologist continue the conversation, but I zone out of it in disbelief, staring at the multicolored linoleum floor. I thought that having a diagnosis would magically make everything better. That there would be a cure – some pill or procedure to end it all – or at least medicinal treatment for my disease. But there is none. All I have is physical therapy and the validation that what I am going through is not in my head.

“Time to go Kierst,” My father beckons for me.

I sigh, shifting my weight. Crinkles from the parchment paper sticking to my thighs interrupt the deafening hum of fluorescent lights. I stand up, gripping the bench for support as the room spins around me.

As we drive home, I press my knees into my chest, leaning my head against the window. I watch the brick and concrete cityscape of Kansas City slowly morph into lush trees and count the poles from the power lines as we pass by.

“One, two...”

How am I going to live with this disease? Why isn't there a cure or treatment like there is for every other disease I've heard of?

“...three, four...”

I can't possibly spend the rest of my life in this much pain. If it's this bad now, what is it going to be like when I'm older and supposed to have health problems?

“...five, six...”

If hEDS is a genetic disease, then why doesn't mom or dad have it? What does this mean for my

future children? Can I still have children without dire consequences?

“...seven, eight...”

Will I still be able to dance? There are people with hEDS that have to use a wheelchair. Will that be me? I don't want to stop. I don't want to give it up. I can't give it up.

“...nine...”

I can feel the warmth in my cheeks and pressure in my head build up. I blink. The telephone poles in front of my eyes grow blurry and the window fogs up by my face.

“...ten”



*The majority of rare diseases severely disable their sufferers and limit life; with one in three pediatric rare disease patients not making it past their fifth birthday (“RARE Facts”). Fortunately for me, hEDS should not shorten my life, and I have not been severely disabled by it, as I have seen with other hEDS sufferers. But I am still disabled. There are many things that I know I will physically be unable to do. It took me years to come to terms with the fact that I am*



not able to do some of the things my peers do and that my life is going to be different because I am a zebra – and that is okay.

I wish that this story had a fairy-tale ending like all the viral “inspirational” medical stories we read about. But it does not. Until there is more research and funding towards hEDS (Schieppati et al.), I am stuck with this incurable, untreatable genetic disorder the rest of my life—and that is okay.

I went through physical therapy, which helped to prevent my knees from constantly partially and fully dislocating. But my body could not keep up with daily ballet and dance rehearsals in addition to going to Irish dance practices and competitions. So, I quit ballet—and that is okay.

Although I have learned how to deal with chronic pain, I still have bad days. I must take a concoction of pills daily that would make an eighty-year-old swoon to help with some of the secondary comorbid conditions. I am constantly told that I “don’t look sick” and “am too young” to be in this much pain and have what I have. I injure myself more easily than my peers, which sometimes means fully dislocating my hip while tying my shoes or dislocating a rib in my sleep—and that is okay.

In high school, my grades suffered because I had undiagnosed and untreated narcolepsy for the first two years and then dealt with the repercussions of hEDS for the rest. Both conditions are zebras, and had I not been fortunate enough to have doctors that had faith that the hoofbeats they heard were from zebras I would not be where I am today.

To me, the word “zebra” embodies both the rare disease and EDS communities and our fight to make ourselves heard in a world where people do not listen. Being a zebra means adjusting your lifestyle around your disease because nobody else will. Sometimes it means being your own support system because over half of rare diseases have no society or support groups, and it can be difficult for non-zebras to understand what it is like being a zebra. Being a zebra means being your own advocate because you feel alone with your rare condition.

Except, you are not. I have three rare diseases; one of which even uses the zebra as its mascot. I am one of the one in ten.

I am a zebra.



*“Treble and a back, up and treble and a back, up and...”*

I pound my feet into the ground, then gracefully lift them to click my heels in front of my face.

“Higher, Kiersten, I know you can do it.”

My dance teacher’s voice echoes throughout the room amongst the melody of hard shoes rhythmically drumming against the floor. I stare into the mirror, breathless, and finish my treble exercises with a strong click. The Celtic music stops. I glance at my peers. Mis-matched poodle socks, hard shoes mummified in worn electrical tape, various tie-dye shirts from Feisannna (Irish dance competitions), and athletic shorts appear to be the practice uniform of competitive Irish dancers around the world – a far cry from the tight hair buns, sleek black leotards, and pristine pink tights I wore as a ballet dancer. And this time, I match the uniform of my fellow dancers – exposing all the insecurities I once had from my illnesses; I wear my stretch marks like battle scars; I unmasked my legs, a vibrant purple from the circulation issues my POTS causes; I bare my arms, red and covered in hives from my mast cell disease. It took years of hard work and emotional strife, but I finally learned to embrace my identity as a zebra. □

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# Aggressive Driving: Social Construct or Absolute Matter

*Sybil Forsberg*

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**V**iolence is an incredibly complex phenomenon that has spiked the interest of psychologists for decades. Whether a situation having to do with violence includes bullying, murder, or domestic attributes, the context and conditions regarding violence may vary depending on the circumstance. Because of this variation, not one situation is ever the same. In the event that one dives deeper into the subject of violence, they will find there are many subtopics regarding this occurrence. One of these is aggressive driving, or road rage. Aggressive driving is a multifaceted form of violent anger that occurs when drivers become upset. The term was coined in the mid 1980s and has become a common household phrase that is still used to this day. Road rage is such a composite phenomenon that it is not influenced by one single element. In fact, it occurs because of various psychological, social, and cultural factors.

Road rage is significant because it is the cause of many accidents on the road. In regards to a societal level, it causes accidents and crashes, and on a psychological level it triggers heightened emotions within individual drivers and even the passengers in each car involved. The impact on drivers and others is problematic because these heightened emotions can lead to psychological or physical trauma. It is important to note that consistency plays a major role when discussing road rage. Quite a few articles address this issue, explaining it by saying something along the lines of ‘road rage is too broad a term to be researched’. In science, certain vocabulary should be defined before real research can begin, in order to allow a study or hypothesis to be validated by subsequent experiments. As such, “the terms road rage and aggressive driving are extremely vast, making research or studies in regards to the terms extremely hard to be executed” (Sansone and Sansone). In addition, each incident of road rage is circumstantial, so each person’s interpretation of the occurrence will be different. Therefore, many scientists and researchers believe that before concrete research can be found, the terms need to be simplified or permanently defined. Because of this, every study defines road rage and aggressive driving specific to their research topic. In the event that one was to create a solution to minimize the effects of road rage, the terms would need to be defined in a more definite way. Although this may be true, the broad term is suitable for the purpose of this research; to decipher the overarching origins that give rise to road rage.

It may be true that most people resort to expressions of road rage such as horn honking or yelling because that is



the only way drivers feel they have the ability to communicate with one another. When researching the social aspects of road rage, one will discover that the car's horn was originally put in place to curb accidents and reduce the side effects of anger on the road. But while the car's horn is obviously placed in each vehicle as a mechanism to warn other drivers, in aggressive driving scenarios in this day and age, drivers use it excessively or inappropriately. As a matter of fact, researchers have concluded that many forms of violence stem from threatened egotism. In the article "Narcissism & Aggression" by George Schreer, the author identified various forms of violence such as gang activity, murders, and rape, and connected them to road rage by a common factor: threatened egotism. As such, this factor is one of the biggest causes of much of America's violence today.

Another social factor that causes aggressive driving is the growing population in United States. Because of this, there are more people on the roads today than there were fifty or even twenty-five years ago. A growing population leads to more road rage incidents, which attributes to more psychological problems in America's society.

A psychological explanation for road rage is that emotions are amplified during any sort of interaction on the road, which in turn become more likely to cause problems such as accidents or trauma. A particularly interesting article by Ing-Marie Johnsson, "Matching In-Car Voice with Driver State," outlined a study that had to do with this very subject. In the study, a car was programmed to speak to the driver. Volunteers were asked

to go on a countryside road trip, while the automated voice inside the car would speak to the subjects as they drove. Before embarking on their trip, the volunteers' emotions were heightened, meaning they were made extremely calm or agitated. The automated voice was programmed to either match the tone of the driver's voice or take on the opposite tone. Johnsson explains, "The end result of the study was that in the case where the automated voice matched the driver's tone, accidents were cut in half!" (Johnsson et al.). This proves that empathy can decrease the chances of car accidents where heightened emotions are involved. Although this is not a fool-proof way to eliminate road rage, it certainly has the ability to help with overcoming many of the accidents that stem from aggressive driving.

Another source stated it is also possible that situational triggers such as bumper stickers or weapons can make anger-prone people's emotions flare, and therefore play a role in aggressive driving. The study explains, "In the event that an incident occurs on the roads, these situational triggers can anger one or more drivers involved and the episode can be blown out of proportion" (Stephens and Ohtsuka). The bumper stickers generally apply to some political issue, so this social aspect is very plausible.

These sources are viable reasons as to why aggressive driving occurs, but it also appears that road rage has become a sort of social construct. The study continues, "It is commonly accepted that anger prone drivers are also more aggressive drivers" (Stephens and Ohtsuka). The combination of a growing population and the rapidly

increasing rates of violence in this country go hand in hand to explain aggressive driving. Although it is very possible that the term road rage has been severely exaggerated to become more of a social construct than many people realize, there is no doubt that it is an ongoing problem. It is true that many things in this day and age are situational, and road rage does not fall short of this category. Each incident of aggressive driving is so circumstantial, just like the term road rage, so it is hard to define and therefore difficult to make sense of. There are so many different factors that can potentially trigger road rage that it is hard to determine whether or not eliminating some of these factors will reduce it.

Emotions play a significant role in aggressive driving. A few sources suggested that road rage triggers an emotional response. When these situations occur, the drivers involved would respond as if the act of violence was a personal threat against themselves. This causes a more intense response than if the person did not get offended or feel emotionally threatened. In effect, the incident is much worse than it was to begin with. Barry Elliott explains, “The person retaliates with their emotions, usually in a physical way” (Elliott). These aggressive driving habits are likely to create optimism bias and illusion of control. Optimism bias is the tendency to underestimate the likelihood of experiencing harmful events. In the event that an individual is unrealistically optimistic about any driving scenario, they will be less careful with their own driving and more trusting in the driving abilities of others. Drivers who have optimism bias may be less likely to consider the negative impact of their aggressive driving behavior

because they feel they are less likely to experience negative outcomes, as opposed to other drivers. Obviously, this creates a higher chance that the individual will get in some sort of accident.

Similarly, illusion of control is the propensity to see chances of success as higher than expected. Stephens explains, “People with a high illusion of control tend to falsely attribute a positive chance outcome to their own skill” (Stephens and Ohtsuka). Attributing ‘good driving’ experiences to the fact that one is a good driver, even if this may not necessarily be the case, will cause more illusion of control, and the psychological phenomenon just keeps growing. Although this theory behind road rage is plausible and it is fairly obvious that there is a correlation between the two, the hypothesis that road rage stems from heightened emotions may not be developed enough to determine a propensity for aggressive driving.

Another possible causation for road rage is that it derives from bad driving habits. In fact, Elliott explains that “the most frequently cited reason on record for road rage is bad driving habits” (Elliott). The article “Road Rage: Media Hype or Serious Road Safety Issue” stated that the person who is responding to an incident will react as if the careless driving is a personal attack on them, which results in even poorer driving. This correlates to the theory that road rage stems from heightened emotions because the offender responds emotionally and then makes a rash decision, which aggravates the already harmful event (Elliott). Oftentimes, people firmly believe they are good at

driving and simply blame anything that happens on everything else involved, not themselves.

Another strong argument was brought to the table by Amanda Stephens in her article “Cognitive Biases in Aggressive Drivers.” She said that road rage stems from certain personality traits and talked about different types of motivation, also known as different types of personalities, that may have something to do with aggressive behavior. If a person is more controlling by nature, they may have a tendency to be more aggressive when on the road. Just like the theory in regard to narcissism, more controlling people may feel that their self-esteem is being threatened and will retaliate as such. The “Big-Truck stereotype” strongly correlates with this theory. It is a common stereotype that males with big trucks are full of themselves and stuck up. In addition, it is also typical of the stereotype to assume that these types of people love their trucks. This theory elucidates the impression that in the case one of these stereotypical truck drivers feels threatened by another driver, they will take it personally. They might feel as though their car is being threatened, therefore they are threatened. This situation will make the incident of road rage much worse. As a matter of fact, a fair amount of research reflected this theory that different personality traits strongly affect aggressive driving. In lieu with Stephen’s theory, George Schreer stated, “Narcissistic and controlling people are more likely to approach events with their ‘self esteem on the line’” (Schreer).

The study by Amanda Stephens measured specific personality traits that were very common amongst this American culture, such as hostility and trait anger. Hostility is aggressiveness specifically towards inanimate objects and trait anger includes the various intensities of anger. By measuring these characteristics, the observationalists were able to determine positive correlations between the hostile traits and aggressive driving behaviors. There were other personality characteristics measured in this study such as venturesomeness and impulsivity, but the correlations between these and aggressive driving were neither strong nor significant enough to be included in the final results of the scale. Although it is a valid assumption that these two traits, venturesomeness and impulsivity, could have a high chance of influencing road rage, they are simply not developed enough to be able to determine propensity for it.

A cultural aspect of aggressive driving includes toxic personality traits bred over the years in American culture. The article “Measuring Road Rage: Development of the Propensity for Angry Driving Scale” by Jason DePasquale outlined a few other potential cultural factors. Researchers developed the scale in order to determine which individuals most needed help curbing their road rage and to conduct further research about aggressive driving. The study determined that “aggressive driving incidents have risen 51% since the 1990’s and they continue to rise about 7% per year” (DePasquale et al.). Although it is unclear whether the incidents are growing more common because the American population is growing at such a fast rate and therefore there are more drivers on the road, or if

Americans as a collective whole are becoming a angrier society.

Overall, this research yielded indeterminate yet specific results. By dividing the articles into separate categories, various psychological, social, and cultural reasons became evident. In spite of the fact that a few of these theories may explain road rage the best, such as heightened emotion and certain personality trait explanations, there is certainly not one specific answer that states why aggressive driving occurs. A few sources stated it ought to be possible to reduce road rage levels by creating higher driving standards or teaching people to better control their emotions. But, none were able to come up with a solution to rid the roads of aggressive driving. And because there is not one single explanation, it can be concluded that there is not one single solution. Increased knowledge about aggressive driving can help researchers to have further understanding in regards to it and eventually resolve factors that lead to road rage. Researchers may also use their knowledge to curb aggressive driving and decrease the numbers of aggressive driving related accidents that happen on the roads. □

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# “I Have A Dream Today:” How the Civil Rights Movement Lives On

*Jessica Hahn*

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**O**n August 28, 1963, thousands gathered at the steps of the Lincoln Monument in Washington D.C. to hear the words of Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King’s, “I Have a Dream” speech entered into the hearts and minds of millions that day and continues to stand as a beacon of hope to Americans today. King’s dream relied on equality, justice, and brotherly love. Defiant to the status quo, King served unyieldingly as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). His goal, and the goal of many, was to desegregate America, combat racism, and diminish poverty in order to create “a nation where they [our children] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” (King). This noble cry for justice and equality for all inspired a nation and a world. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech created a crowning moment in the CRM.

The movement began in the 1950s, concentrated mostly in the South, where black citizens began to organize into groups with the goal of creating an environment where social change was possible. The CRM was centered on non-violent protests with the purpose of drawing attention to the goals of integrating the nation, providing equality for all Americans regardless of race, and doing away with racist thought that had long plagued our nation's history. King eloquently outlines these goals in his speech, thereby making these aims of the CRM his personal dream for our nation.

Americans everywhere adopted this dream and worked through blood and tears to see legislation passed which provided them basic rights as citizens. They had previously been denied these rights through clauses like "separate but equal" and loopholes such as literacy tests. Kenneth Andrews and Sarah Gaby explain in a study that the CRM was highly effective with its strategy for social change that caused federal legislation to be passed. Their analysis showed that the work done by civil rights activists was influential, to say the least (Andrews and Gaby 510). Without the influence protestors made on the local level, laws that allowed for so many benefits would never have been passed. The progress made in the last fifty years is exceptional. However, we would be a blind nation if we were to believe that Dr. King's dream has been completely fulfilled. In regard to the end of legal segregation, America has seen King's dream come to fruition. However, King's dream has not been fully realized and we must continue to progress toward the one of the levels of inequalities that remain: we must end racist thought.

There's no doubt that the CRM left a positive impact, but it was by no means the end-all. In his speech, Dr. King explains,

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until justice emerges. (King)

Our nation continues to “shake” because the criteria outlined throughout his speech has yet to be fulfilled. Gary Younge, in an article for *The Nation* magazine, presents a statistic that proves racism still dictates much in the lives of black Americans: “Conversely, over half of whites believe that civil rights for blacks has ‘greatly improved’ in their lifetime, compared to just 29 percent of blacks,” as well as, “whites are four times as likely as blacks to believe that America has achieved racial equality” (17). These figures express an idea that the problems America has with race remain below the surface. While de jure discrimination is outlawed, the de facto consequences ail black Americans now.

Our current comprehension of racism is the result of an evolution of discrimination. To understand racism in America, it's important to know where it came from and how it expanded. When European colonies began importing Africans to serve as slaves in the Americas, it was more for economic reasons than for racial reasons. Africans were sold by other Africans to Europeans because it was convenient trade and because tribes had a long history of enslaving individuals from other tribes. Systemic racism began, in part, as a result of the slave trade. Over decades,

slave owners found ways to dehumanize black slaves in order to maintain control over slave populations that greatly outnumbered the white masters and overseers. Dehumanizing techniques soon became commonplace, and before long, white was superior to black, at least in the minds of oppressors. Shackles, beatings, and brutalization were the lives of black slaves.

Despite the American ideal that all people are created equal, black slaves were not equal. For decades after the beginning years of the United States, black Americans were considered only three-fifths of a person. The Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments allocated blacks' rights that they had been deprived of for centuries. But this victory also gave rise to lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan. Blacks weren't enslaved, but they were segregated. Racism embedded deeply into American culture. While most black citizens had the right to vote, Southern blacks were prevented from voting due to unfair tests and laws, such as Jim Crow laws, that hindered voter registration. Meanwhile, Northern blacks refrained from voting simply because they felt their vote would never matter. Luckily, the CRM provided the backdrop for change that the nation so desperately needed.

Today we see racism in ways that are comparably subtle. Racism is found in our educational system, our criminal justice/prison system, and our police system. Tahseen Shams, a researcher in the humanities department at UCLA, researched racism in America, and in regards to education she explains,

Teachers, unaware of acting in racist ways, unintentionally perpetrate existing inequalities by awarding the already privileged (wealthy White students) and penalize the already oppressed (poor Black students) because of schools' meritocratic structure. Racialized moments in classrooms accumulate to produce racist patterns of unequal treatment. (286)

Pre-existing, unconscious racial thought prevents black and minority students from reaching the same potential that white students are afforded.

Regarding our criminal justice system, Shams explains that while the ratios of drug dealers and users between races is fairly even, the number of black men jailed is 20-50 times higher than that of white men. Also, "by disproportionately incarcerating Blacks in prisons, the government is systematically locking away a huge proportion of Blacks from mainstream society and economy, consequently gridlocking them into permanent second-class citizen status" (Shams 286). Whether or not the number of blacks in our prison system is a conscious form of racism is difficult to measure and decide definitively, yet the fact remains that when so much of a population is seen as criminal, it's no wonder people find it easy to stereotype black citizens as dangerous.

This stereotype feeds directly into the racial problems we face today with police and police brutality. Police brutality has been a hot topic in America over the past few years. In 2013, a young, unarmed black man, Michael Brown, was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.

His death sparked an unprecedented reaction from around the nation. This event of police brutality pushed the organization of what is now known as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Other acts of police brutality toward black citizens have fueled this movement as they draw attention to racial inequality at the hands of discriminatory police officers. These are not unlike the CRM's tactics, which used newspapers and cameras to publicize the cruelty they faced. Police brutality may not be unlike the evidence portrayed regarding teachers. Officers may have preconceived ideas from societal norms, thus causing police to perceive a black man as a threat before rationally determining the potential dangers that may or may not be present. The problem America has with racial thought has nothing to do with assigning individual blame, and more to do with how ideals are rooted in society and culture.

The racial problems we face today are incredibly complex and no one solution can fix the vast number of issues before us. Race issues now occur in spheres that can't be controlled by government as effectively as we've experienced in the past. One example is social mobility. In 1980, Stuart A. Gabriel and Gary D. Painter began a 20-year study on how socioeconomic levels in black and other minority groups affected where they chose to live. At the beginning of their study, they estimated that residential segregation would diminish as the socioeconomic levels increased. However, when they returned in 2000, they found that the numbers were staggeringly different than anticipated. According to Gabriel and Painter, "while black location choice in 2000 was relatively more dispersed than

in 1980, it remained remarkably concentrated” (809). The dispersal rate was nothing like they had believed it would be, showing that residential segregation was still prevalent. Despite climbing the socioeconomic ladder, Black, Latino, and immigrant populations remained in the same geographic area. By not dispersing to new areas, they still attend the same low budget schools that are unable to provide great opportunities for social improvement.

Gabriel and Painter’s study also points out that people don’t move out of what are considered “rougher neighborhoods” because as families live in circumstances comparable with people similar to them, they feel more comfortable. Commonly, the desire for comfort isn’t frowned upon, especially in social situations. Peter Grier and James N. Thurman wrote an article for the *Christian Science Monitor* after interviewing teenagers who were mostly white but included several minority groups in Denver and who shockingly aren’t appalled by the notion of “separate but equal,” a phrase that justified segregation. In fact, many of these youth supported the idea that as long as all were given an equal opportunity, they believe there’s no reason not to allow more segregation between different ethnicities. In exploring these surprising opinions, the authors explain, “Sticking with your own doesn’t necessarily equal animosity toward others” (Grier and Thurman), a thought shared by the students. This idea, the students would explain, comes from education about race. With this education they believe they are able to look beyond prejudice, yet still believe that a separate but equal environment would not be toxic to social integration. Statistics from a poll the interviewers conducted show that

60% think that racial integration helps black students to do better, but 68% believe that more funding to minority schools would better serve black students' educations. Their reasoning is that students will learn better when they are with people culturally similar to them (Grier and Thurman). It isn't a horrible argument, but an argument that has proved false in the past. Dr. King's hope was to integrate America, that "one day...little black boys and girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and girls as sisters and brothers" (King). Living apart from one another isn't fulfilling the potential America has to use its diversity of human thought and experience to its best advantage. We need to change our thinking from racial thought to productive thought. The CRM laid the groundwork for us to step out of our comfort zones and build a more accepting future.

As previously mentioned, there's no one perfect way to defeat racist thought, but thankfully that hasn't stopped groups from trying. Fredrick C. Harris dubbed the BLM movement the next CRM (34). The BLM movement is taking hold in the country as they, "demand that American society reconsider[s] how it values black lives" (Harris 34). With social media as a microphone, BLM participants seek to encourage Americans to understand black humanity. They put a heavy emphasis on humanity and beg people to understand that "black lives matter because they are lives" (Harris 37) not because they want to place a greater value on black lives than on white lives. The resounding message of the BLM movement is equality: equality for blacks, women, homosexuals, and other oppressed minorities. Harris quotes Malcolm X when saying they wanted to



come up with a program that would make the world see that our problem was no longer a Negro problem or an American problem but a human problem (qtd. in Harris 39).

The Black Lives Matter movement has a foothold for change, and with their success, America might see less racist thought and more acceptance. However, this movement faces heavy debate about whether the BLM movement is something the American public should be concerned about. But beyond the debate, the movement's ideals are important to American development and shouldn't be ignored. Whether someone joins this group or other groups like it, it is up to them as an individual. But all Americans need to adopt the attitude of standing up for life and equality of life. Personal initiative is the first step in the process of change.

Initiative can also be taken beginning with childhood education. In a study done by John H. Bickford III, he assesses how children's literature misrepresents historical figures and events of the CRM. He discusses how the books that portray an integral part of our nation's history often water-down the content to be less expressive of violent events and lack explanation of many significant events before, during, and after the CRM of the 1960s. He expresses, "if the story is to be told, the literature should not leave young readers with only half-truths to grasp" (Bickford 702). By further explaining the importance and significance of the CRM beginning at a young age, children could be more likely to grow up to enact further policy that allows for equality to continue. They will also be more accepting and tolerant of people who look and act

differently, thereby increasing the gap between the American public and racist thought.

Using children's literature and education to better prepare children for society would result in students unlike the group in Denver. Instead, students would be educated to seek diversity and wouldn't see the merit in separating ethnic groups to acquire social comfort. The goal isn't just to end racist thought—though that is an essential and monumental step—the goal is to go beyond tolerance and hopefully create a nation that invites differences and uses that variety to enrich the country.

The change we seek will happen on a large scale, as well as on a small scale. Whether it be nationwide movements that draw attention to discrimination until minds are changed or through teaching young minds more completely, change is possible. In his speech, Dr. King acknowledges this possibility, which is why his words have remained in the hearts of Americans long after he spoke those words. Change is possible because it is necessary. But it will never happen unless we accept that we still have a problem, seek to understand the issue, and change ourselves as individuals first and then as a society to encourage real equality for all Americans. The Civil Rights Movement did not end fifty years ago, it continues to struggle and will continue to struggle until we will do as Dr. King said and “join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!” □

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# **Part II**

## **In Conversation: LANGUAGE**



# Losing Our Language: Guam's Native and Endangered Language

*Anavae Remetio*

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**A**bout thirteen years ago I moved to Utah from a little island in the Pacific called Guam. I was born on Guam, and I lived there until I was about five-years-old and even attended a preschool there. Moving to the States was a drastic change for me and my mom because we had never lived off the island, and we left a lot of family back home on the island as well, including my grandparents. But because they had a lot of grandkids living in Utah, they would come to visit every once in a while.

When they did come to visit they often brought back food and treats from Guam that we could not find in the States. They also would speak to each other in Chamorro, the native language on Guam, a language neither my parents nor I learned how to speak. When I was younger, I never really questioned why it was that the kids never

learned the language my grandparents were speaking or really cared very much about it, but as I began to get older, I started to wish I had learned to speak Chamorro and wondered why I never got the chance to learn it. At times it was upsetting that the language never got passed down to my generation. For the most part, most of my parents' generation could understand what was being said, but not speak fluently, and I could not even do that. All I know is little fragments and phrases for words like "hello" or "thank you." Many Chamorro kids my age have a similar experience when it comes to the Chamorro language. Our grandparents' generation did not have the opportunity to pass down the language to their children, and this has endangered the language.

The Chamorro language was changed so much and is now being used significantly less than it was in the past because it was not passed down to the younger generations of Chamorro people due to the colonization and changes in society on the island. Because the language was not passed down, it has become an endangered language which is a problem because this means Guam is at risk of losing a significant part of the culture. The preservation of Chamorro should be the goal for the island.

According to the Linguistic Society of America, an endangered language is one that is at risk of becoming extinct, meaning that the language will fall out of use and cease to be spoken. This means that newer generations are not learning to speak their native languages and so it will die along with the last speaker of the language. Often languages are not being passed down to the next



generations of speakers because they are being overshadowed by languages that are more widely spoken, like English or Spanish. This process is happening to many languages around the world, especially to minority languages, primarily due to genocide or pressure to give up native languages. The people of Guam, known as Chamorros, were pressured to give up or change their language when different groups of people colonized the island.

Guam was colonized many times, but the first group that came to the island was the Spanish. The island was discovered by Ferdinand Magellan, but was not colonized until a Spanish priest came to the island to convert the Chamorro people to Catholicism. The Spanish military eventually took over the conversion of the Chamorro people. The Spanish brought new traditions to the Chamorro people, resulting in a loss of many of the old traditions, beliefs, and stories that the native Chamorros had before the Spanish came to the island. In addition to bringing the Spanish culture to Guam, the colonizers also brought diseases that Chamorro people had not been exposed to prior to the Spanish coming. These diseases led to the deaths of thousands of native Chamorro people, leaving a fraction of native Chamorro speakers on the island to keep the original culture and history of the island (Herman).

Colonization on the island impacted the culture on Guam, but it also had an immense impact on the language. According to *The Smithsonian*, “Today, the Chamorro language retains its traditional grammar, but 55 percent of

the vocabulary borrows from Spanish” (Herman). Over half of the Chamorro language is comprised of Spanish words. Because of Spanish colonization on Guam, Chamorro is vastly different than what it once was. The overwhelming presence of the Spanish colonizers on Guam made a great impact on the vocabulary of Chamorro, blending the two languages and ultimately changing the way Chamorro is spoken.

Chamorro was changed so much because the Spanish stayed on Guam for a long time and integrated themselves into life on Guam. However, eventually the Spanish would surrender the colony to the United States, who took control over the island after the Spanish-American War (Little). Once the U.S. was in possession of Guam, control was given to the naval authorities. During this time, Chamorro people were not treated as citizens. They had no representatives in the government and no access to any of the judicial system (Bevacqua). In addition, General Order no. 12 was placed over the island, pertaining to the education system on the island. This order placed the U.S. government in control of the education system and introduced English into every school (Campbell). Children in school would begin to receive their education in English. General Order no. 12 was the beginning of English becoming a part of all aspects of life on Guam, and English would continuously progress on Guam until the U.S. lost governance of the island.

Japan took over the island during World War II. Japan took a more brutal and forceful reign over the island, which would lead to the killing of a large amount of the

Chamorro people (Kuper). Their tragic deaths meant less Chamorros to pass on the Chamorro legacies and culture. However, Japan's rule over Guam was ended early when the U.S. fought to take back the island under their rule once again.

The U.S. came back to Guam and freed the Chamorro people from World War II Japanese rule. The Chamorro people were living under significantly better conditions after the U.S. made it back to the island, however, this would mean going back to the policies that the U.S. had in place before the Japanese Occupation. The education system would be run by the U.S. government with English-only policies within schools. My grandfather, Antonio Flores, was going to school during this time and experienced the English-only policies that were put in place at the time. In schools, students were taught in English and were required to speak English. Children were punished with fines if they were caught speaking Chamorro as a means to enforce the rule. Education began to move away from Chamorro, and society moved along with it.

As time went on, the American military brought more and more Americans to the island, to the point that more English speakers lived there than Chamorro speakers. So, when my grandparents' generation was old enough to be parents themselves, they realized that English had become the language that was primarily used on the island, and that it would be beneficial for their children to speak English. It was not that parents did not want to pass down the language, but English was being spoken significantly more often than Chamorro. English was beginning to be

found not just in education, but in the music, entertainment, and conversation on the island. Society on the island created an environment on Guam that did not support Chamorro. This environment meant that Chamorro would have to take a step back for English (Flores).

With Chamorro fading out of use, Chamorro culture would also take a hit. Language and culture are linked to each other. Language is a form of communication comprised of the historical and cultural background for people. Language offers insights to a society's point of view of life (Jiang 328). Through language, people experience culture through art forms such as poetry and music, or expressions, humor, or conversational styles. All of these experiences would be vastly different if in another language (Woodbury). It connects people to those that came before them because it gives the future generation a style of communication that was customized and fitted to the people who spoke that language. And with every new generation that the language gets passed to, new words, phrases, and styles will be formed, which will be passed to the generation after them and the same process will happen again and again. Through language, we pass down characteristics that were unique to the people that spoke the language before us, and we form new characteristics, which will hopefully be passed on to the next generation of speakers. To lose a language, means to lose all those unique factors that were put into it. Those unique factors that were put into the language are bits of the culture that they were formed in. Language communicates those bits of cultural information through linguistic uniqueness. This strong

connection between culture and language highlights how important it is that Chamorro is recognized as an endangered language so that changes may continue to be made to save the language from going extinct. Preserving the language will preserve the cultural connections that come with it.

It could be argued that because Chamorro is only spoken by a minority amount of people, it is not a useful enough language to keep around. It is true that there is only a small amount of people that are Chamorro and the language would most likely not be spoken outside of the Chamorro population, so of course it would be advantageous to know the English language. However, while English is useful for easy communication with a large amount of people, it is essential to continue the use of smaller languages in order to promote linguistic and cultural diversity. Diversity in culture and language opens the door to new ideas, and linguistic diversity especially helps linguists understand the possibilities and limits, similarities and differences, and cultural information that comes along with language and how it pertains to the world developing around it. When languages are lost, it limits our abilities to obtain this vital information and closes the doors to new ideas that can come from different ways of thinking and communicating (Woodbury). By supporting the preservation of Chamorro, it also promotes this need for diversity by keeping another language alive.

In order to support the preservation of Chamorro, changes need to be made. Children learn languages easiest when they are young so in many cases it is beneficial to

start teaching children a second language, in this case Chamorro, while they are starting or about to start school and allowing them to continue to practice. So of course, it is important that Chamorro be integrated into the school system to begin teaching kids how to speak their language, but that should not be the only place Chamorro is used. Chamorro should also be used in the home and throughout the community, workplace and businesses, and everyday life in general in order for the language to be revived successfully (Salas). Guam needs to start encouraging the use of the Chamorro language in all aspects of Chamorro people's lives.

The Chamorro language is a vital part of Chamorro culture, and to let the language become extinct means to lose a huge and integral part of Chamorro culture. Guam has been through so many hardships and losses throughout its history. It would be a tragedy for Chamorro culture to take another loss when there is still a possibility that it can be saved. □

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# Language Endangerment: Losing the Symbolic Web of Culture

*Janelle Reid*

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**I**t is incredibly easy to assume one language is superior to another because more people speak it. About a month ago, I overheard part of a phone conversation; the caller looked down in frustration at her phone as she had to dial a number to continue, saying, “I shouldn’t have to press ‘1’ to continue in English. We live in America; you should assume I want English.” We may think it harmless to have such thoughts, or even that we are correct in assuming people should assimilate to the majority language, but it is exactly this kind of thinking that leads to language endangerment, and eventually, extinction.

Of the 6,000 plus languages in the world, about half of them are endangered of becoming extinct (Austin and Sallabank 313; Turin 846). Lisa Evans, writer for *The*



*Guardian*, documented over 2,000 endangered languages and 244 languages that are already extinct (Evans). Of the endangered languages, she placed them into four categories based on the transmission rate (how quickly the language is shared). She offers this key for understanding the severity of endangerment:

- ▶ *Vulnerable*: most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
- ▶ *Definitely endangered*: children no longer learn the language as a *mother tongue* in the home
- ▶ *Severely endangered*: language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
- ▶ *Critically endangered*: the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
- ▶ *Extinct*: there are no speakers left (Evans)

Note how nowhere in this “key” does it list a specific number of speakers required to bump it into the next stage. Instead, it deals with whether or not people are learning it and what percentage of the population fits into this category.

Charted in Table 1 are a few of Evan’s documented languages:

<i>Name in English</i>	<i>Number of speakers</i>	<i>Degree of Endangerment</i>
<i>Sicilian</i>	<i>5,000,000</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>
<i>Belarusian</i>	<i>4,000,000</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>
<i>Lalo</i>	<i>400,000</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>
<i>Lombard</i>	<i>3,500,000</i>	<i>Definitely Endangered</i>
<i>Kangdi</i>	<i>1,700,000</i>	<i>Definitely Endangered</i>
<i>Moksha</i>	<i>200,000</i>	<i>Definitely Endangered</i>
<i>Languedocian</i>	<i>500,000</i>	<i>Severely Endangered</i>
<i>Nafusi</i>	<i>240,000</i>	<i>Severely Endangered</i>
<i>Maricopa</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Severely Endangered</i>
<i>Koraga</i>	<i>16,665</i>	<i>Critically Endangered</i>
<i>Pangvali</i>	<i>16,285</i>	<i>Critically Endangered</i>
<i>Xiri</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>Critically Endangered</i>
<i>Aasax</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Extinct</i>
<i>Rangkas</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Extinct</i>
<i>Singa</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Extinct</i>

*Table 1. Lisa Evans documents endangered languages (Evans).*

Because the degree of endangerment deals with transmission rate rather than the number of speakers, you may notice the numbers do not appear to line up. For instance, among the critically endangered languages, some, such as Koraga, have fewer than 20,000 speakers, while Xiri has just 87 speakers. Some severely endangered languages, such as Maricopa, fall right between these numbers. As younger generations stop learning their culture's language, that language becomes endangered, and eventually, extinct.

So why is this a problem? Why should we care if languages are disappearing? The answer is simple: we should care because of the abundance of knowledge and life connected to those languages. Although having one global language by eliminating others has the promise of unity and free trade of ideas, in reality, by limiting our language use, we actually minimize our ethnic horizons rather than broaden them. The pros of having a diverse language base far outweigh the projected positive outcomes gained by allowing that diversity to be lost. The harmful effects of language extinction include culture loss, forgotten traditions and ideas, lost knowledge, and imposed superiority among the preferred language users. Culture is so intertwined with language that if we lose even one language, we have lost an entire world of culture, ideas, beliefs, and knowledge.

### ***Importance of Language***

*Language is one way we account for our many cultures. Cultures naturally have different languages, and even if two*

cultures share a language, their dialects will differ. Physical barriers divide languages; additionally, people create and adapt words into their way of life. Language guides how we function in society and helps us figure out how we fit into our surrounding society. Every language has multiple words for several singular ideas or concepts to provide clarity.

English has only one word for *uncle*, whether it is your mother or father's brother or brother-in-law. Further distinction for these kin is not required. However, in the Australian language, Kayardild, a critically endangered language with eight speakers, the uncles on the mother and father's side are known by different names (Evans; Anderson 49). The different names help distinguish what roles the corresponding uncles perform. An example of this in the English language is found in the performance of weddings. The maid of honor holds a higher prestige with bigger responsibilities than any of the bridesmaids. Calling her "the maid of honor" rather than "bridesmaid" helps wedding guests understand her important role. Language discerns the different roles each member plays in society and "without the support of language, the speakers themselves may lose track of distinctions that were once central to their community and its social life" (Anderson 50). Different words for differing statuses with disparate connotations help us know which roles we may or may not perform.

Societal roles are not the only important factor language plays in a community. Language guides and allows many different ways of thinking. Cultures have an

abundance of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge, not found elsewhere, because they lead different lives, which leads to new discoveries and developments. A culture's background or history impacts thinking a great deal. The foundations of a country, how it was set up, the governmental system, and the evolution of a culture all shape how people see the world, and in turn, guide their thoughts. Different cultures and places, with particular languages and connotations attached to their words, are exposed to varying experiences, and with those, ideas. When we lose languages, "[we're] losing concepts that have been refined over millennia" (Harrison). Years and years of cultural history have passed down through generations, shaping the values of a society, creating various ideas and beliefs throughout the world. Only upon hearing every side of an issue can one truly make an unbiased decision; why would cultural ideas be any different when considering the ways of the world? "Language diversity is an insurance against the extinction of ideas and knowledge" (Harrison).

Diverse ways of thinking in the world lead to otherwise unimaginable ideas. The Sapir-Whorf thesis is "the idea that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language" (Macionis 71). This does not mean everyone in a society thinks the same thoughts; their thoughts are limited by what they know of the world, and their knowledge of the world is limited by language. By limiting language, we limit thought—the very thing that sets us apart from animals. When we "view language through the lens of thought, "we can better understand other cultures, along with our own" (Turin 861). The more languages we allow to coexist with our own, the more

diverse our pool of thought is. Diversified language facilitates our abilities to have assorted ideas and knowledge.

Just as losing language causes us to “[lose] concepts that have been refined over millennia,” it also causes us to lose knowledge “refined over millennia” (Harrison). Saving languages has “great potential for increasing our awareness of systems of knowledge and ways of being in the world” (Perley 138). This knowledge is not widely available among the world because “languages convey unique forms of cultural knowledge,” which are not readily available or relevant to other cultures (Turin 849). That does not make such knowledge any less useful, especially for science. One may easily think a culture, unintegrated into the larger world, holds little or no value in the world as a whole, but just the opposite is true. Stephen R. Anderson, a professor of linguistics at Yale, argues that small, traditional cultures have immeasurable value in science:

Languages spoken by small and historically isolated groups may preserve knowledge of the natural world that can be of immense value....Traditional cultures [have]...a familiarity with the curative and medicinal uses of various local plants and other substances... [many of which] are unknown to science outside the region.... The loss of a traditional language generally entails loss of access to this knowledge base (Anderson 45).

Not only would we lose refined ideas and culture by allowing languages to become extinct, but we would also lose a wide range of knowledge.

If we let languages die in the hopes of creating one universal language, or in the belief that it is not worth the time and energy spent to save languages, we will lose access to worlds of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge. Language is not merely having the ability to talk amongst ourselves and to communicate with our friends and family; “language is the thread that weaves members of a society into the symbolic web we call culture” (Macionis 113). Without language, we lose our heritage, traditions, and culture. Without culture, we lose our identity and place in the world.

### ***Rebuttal: A Unified Language***

*If we allow languages to become extinct, the hope is that we will have one universal language, and we will live in a utopia where everyone understands everyone. Time spent preserving languages could be spent learning one global language (Casnocha). The internet may even aid in this, crossing physical barriers and helping everyone learn one language. With the extensive availability of certain languages, it may seem better if we allow one language to take over the world, provide us with one universal language, and the vision of easy communication. However, people will still create and adapt words to fit into their way of life. Over time, there will be several dialects, so different they might as well be different languages (Anderson 23-4). And then, what would we have gained? Nothing, but the loss of knowledge, indefinite cultures, infinite ideas, and beliefs. People will lose their sense of belonging in society, with their societal roles unclear. So why force a dominant language onto another culture under the false belief that it will help?*

## ***Conclusion: Diversity Through Language***

*We should not learn* new languages solely to communicate with our friends and family—we already do that. Rather, we should learn new languages to broaden our horizons and to communicate with a new culture of people. It is important that upon becoming “grammatically adult” in a language, we do not remain “a cultural child, with no real sense of what [is] locally relevant, resonant, and meaningful” (Turin 862). Upon learning a language, we should not merely understand the words but understand their meaning and the culture associated with it. This will ensure a culture’s ideas, beliefs, and values do not become extinct.

We can become multilingual, and by doing that, we will become multicultural as well. Languages are not a “zero-sum game” where only one language can survive at the expense of another (Anderson 9). Some people may get stuck in the mindset of, “We live in America; speak English,” or “My language is superior to yours; assimilate and forget your heritage.” People may believe the economically advantageous language should be the only existing language in their region, when in truth, many languages can exist in harmony and provide diverse benefits. Languages and cultures are incommensurable.

Rather than minimizing our horizons by draining the language pool, let us broaden them by embracing new languages and cultures. About half of the world’s languages are in danger of extinction (Turin 846). This means half of the world’s cultures, ideas, and knowledge also face extinction. We need to take action against this now; once a



language is extinct, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to bring it back in its entirety. We may be able to revive the language's words, but not its cultural ties. "Once the language dies, access to everything it embodies dies with it" (Anderson 47). If we do not act now, "future generations will no longer have this choice" (Anderson 47). In order to act against language endangerment, we must first change our attitude regarding the languages targeted for endangerment. "Attitudes to language are of key importance" (Austin and Sallabank 313). The attitude of language superiority or inferiority leads people to stop learning and encourages the discontinuance of a minority language, pushing it into extinction. "Attitude change is essentially a cognitive activity yet is formulated through social activity" (Austin and Sallabank 314). Majority speakers believe "majority rules" and the minority needs to conform. We need to act against the masses who believe they are superior. We must not get stuck in the mindset of, "We live in America; speak English," but rather adopt the mindset, "We live in America; embrace your culture and join the melting pot." We must remember that every person matters, every culture matters, and every language matters.

We can help to save languages by not assuming language superiority or inferiority. In assuming language superiority, we assume cultural superiority, saying we are better than they. Do not allow this kind of thinking to aid in the loss of a culture. In a utopian world, it may seem nice to have one language, but this line of thought fails to recognize how the harmful effects of losing languages far outweigh any potential benefits. Once we recognize the

benefits of keeping minority languages, that attitude can begin to change and aid in saving languages, cultures, and ideas. Keeping as many languages alive as possible is beneficial, not just to the speakers of that endangered language, but to the entire web of people that language may touch. □

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# Only 7% of the World Can Read This

*Carson Gibbs*



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**L**anguage is the foundation of civilization. It is the glue that holds a people together. It is the first weapon drawn in a conflict and is what is used to end it. We live in the world of globalization and opportunity. Never before have we been able to reach out, touch, and influence the lives of millions as we can in this day and age. For a world of peace and cooperation in which communication and the interchange of ideas will have their fullest development, we need the ability to communicate with each other. By itself, the world with its many languages will never bring about such an existence.

As time and technology have progressed, humans and our communications between each other have done the opposite. The Congress of Vienna was convened in 1815 by the four European powers which had defeated Napoleon, and French was the sole language used at that Congress. This use of a single language set the tone for all foreign

diplomats across the world to learn French so that international policies and laws could be discussed and implemented without confusion. Jump forward 100 years to the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919; both French and English were used. Another 100 years puts us in our modern world where currently at United Nations meetings five languages are in official use: English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. Mario Pei explains why this use of five languages is still problematic, “Progression from one to five languages is a symbol not of progress, but of intellectual retrogression and growing ignorance” (Pei). We are jumping forward in ways that our ancestors could barely dream of, yet somehow, we are becoming more arrogant and going backwards in our effort to understand one another.

Currently, over 7,000 official languages are spread over 195 countries. If all of those languages were split across each country evenly, that would equate to each country containing over 35 languages each. Language barriers are a constant problem. There is a 99.9% chance that you will run into someone and have a language barrier. Despite how educated or skilled one might be, language barriers are often the leading causes of not being hired by a company, receiving proper services such as health care, getting lost, getting scammed, and much more. Language barriers also prevent proper reporting of rape, abuse, fraud, and theft (Armas). However, there is a solution. What can be done to lower, and ultimately eliminate, language barriers is the creation and use of an international language. Implementing an international auxiliary language will not only simplify our lives, but bring us closer

together as a human race as we will have a greater understanding with each other.

Many readers are probably wondering, “Well, isn’t English already the international language of the world?” When looking at sheer numbers, Mandarin is the most spoken language today. Spanish is the second most widely spoken language, and English is barely third with French and Hindi following closely behind. However, it takes more than raw numbers to make a lingua franca. Thanks to the British Empire, native English speakers are sprinkled across the globe with roots in some of the most influential regions in our current global climate. As the world grew with the rise of technology, English became more and more important as it was one of the leaders in economic growth during the time of the Industrial Revolution (Pei). That trend has continued to the present day, where English is the language of the technologies connecting us all together. Most languages have merely adopted terms such as “the Internet,” “text,” or “hashtag” instead of creating a new word for them in their own tongue. English is also an important language of pop culture, such as movies, music, and sport. It is easy to assume that such a prominent cultural and technological language has cemented its importance in the international community. (Castaldo)

However, a quick look at history will show how fallible English is as an international bridge. By 1818, it was a requirement for all international diplomats to speak French so that meetings could be conducted in an easily recognized and mutual language. Nearly a century later, the rise of German power led schools and universities in the

U.S. to drop many of their French classes and make German mandatory. However, German soon dropped from schools after World War I, which quickly prompted those educational institutions to burn their German grammar and vocabulary books in an act of defiance against the German machine. In modern times, the news has sparked talk about whether China's economic rise would mean that Mandarin could rival English as a global language. Such fluidity in major global correspondence leads to problems for a number of reasons. (Shenton, Sapir, and Jespersen)

Tsedal Neeley, an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Harvard Business School, conducted multiple studies on the effects of languages in a work environment. Neeley interviewed several of these businesses with the hopes of gaining more insight to language barriers in those settings. She found that during meetings, employees with limited background in the language that the meeting was conducted in hesitated to speak up, even if they had legitimate insights to share. "I become red, and I sweat, and I think to myself, Wow, everybody is looking at me, so I should not make any mistakes," said one employee. "If you cannot express your ideas because you lack language skills, the collaboration becomes a nightmare. You lose interest to continue," said another. Even worse, they began to distrust the native speakers within their own company. "We need to be extra cautious, because the Americans' mastery of the language may lead them to take advantage of us and try to fool us," said one worker about colleagues in a U.S. branch where English was not their first language. (Castaldo)

Experiences like these are becoming more commonplace as the ability to develop businesses on a global scale is easier than ever. Global operations force different countries, cultures, and backgrounds to communicate across all forms of platforms, ranging from texts to video chat. If the two cannot evoke understanding between each other, then it will be difficult to accomplish even the most rudimentary of goals. Another study in Germany also concluded that language barriers are causing problems. After interviewing German employees on their feelings on having their meetings in English, the group came to a simple conclusion: “The German employee felt uncomfortable speaking in a large group, and found it difficult to interject. By the time she had formulated her point, the conversation had moved on” (Peterson).

The answer to these problems is one that has been debated for years, but the solution is simple. Countries, capitals, and leaders of the world need to come together to choose and/or create an international language. Such a meeting would have a significant historical impact. Anciently, languages were imposed when armies of opposing nations took over and forced their beliefs, laws, and languages upon the defeated people, and the conqueror’s language became the one of trade in that empire. However, in our modern age, such barbaric means are unnecessary, but it will be just as effective when it increases trade, friendship and understanding between nations on an individual level.

An international auxiliary language would most likely be more effective as a constructed language, and not a



natural one such as English or Spanish. Humans have proven time and time again that national and personal pride will lead to disagreement and protest. The likelihood of a combined consensus of the world nations on a natural language being chosen is laughable (Pei). Inconsistencies, irregular structure patterns, and exceptions to rules in natural languages could also form significant problems. For an international language to be taken seriously and implemented around the world, it will need to be simple to learn for everyone and not be surrounded with national pride. According to the Foreign Service Institute, studies have shown that many students choose not to take a foreign language if the required proficiency of learning takes more than 44 weeks (1,100 hours) before achieving a level of proficiency for speaking (Peterson).

The foundation of the entire system would be by immersing students by natural speaking processes to the world's generations from kindergarten on to high school graduation or the country's equivalent. No one beyond that age will be forced to learn the international tongue. At that age, it would be up to the student to decide if they want to continue that education. Those who have already graduated at the time of implementation will probably ask, "Is the international language not for us?" To answer that, it is if you want it, it is not if you don't. The international language should be viewed primarily as something of the world of the future, for those children and their children's children from whom so many fine words flow, but on behalf of whom so little is ever done. Because the children will be taught at a younger age, retaining the information will be much easier, and if they decide to continue into the

international scene, they can easily become masters of it. Otherwise, it will simply be a useful tool to be used should any language barriers arise in their future, which is highly likely given they have a 99.9% chance of it happening.

It would be unfair, and even bordering on the edge of unethical, to try to force this world tongue upon all the adult generations of today. In addition, it would be impractical and nearly impossible. Let the adults of today do as they please, whether they choose to learn it or not, and spark endless possibilities for the children of tomorrow.

Writers across the world might prefer the new medium, which would give them access to world markets without needing dozens of difficult and expensive translations that would only be understood to a piecemeal of the world. Not only could their books be loved by the author's neighbors, but the entire world population would be given access to something that they would have had to wait years for. This idea is an old one. In 1320 CE, Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* in Italian because he felt that it would reach more people. Today it is considered one of the greatest literary pieces of all time ("The Divine Comedy"). Advertisers might prefer an international language for the same reasons. The Tobler Swiss Milk Chocolate company has advertised extensively in Ido, a constructed international language, providing evidence that an international language is not only effective for advertising but is also an excellent source of a profit (Shenton, Sapir, and Jespersen).

Despite all the benefits associated with such a generous gift, many may not wish for such an idea to become reality. The use of an international language is not to replace natural tongues, such as Tagalog, Vietnamese, or Japanese, but to be used as a tool on the international market. Realistically, looking ahead, national languages will live on for centuries, but their use will tend to be more and more restricted. Ultimately, they will turn into cultural artifacts of a more primeval and violent world, like the ancient Egyptian and Old Norse of today. Should this frighten us? Consider that languages are forever changing and that the English of 700 years ago would strike the more present-day speaker dumbfounded and lost in its translation. Languages are fluid in nature as they transverse time. In five centuries, the languages of today will be unrecognizable.

Let us do a favor for the upcoming generations so that strife caused by miscommunications does not happen to them. Give them a gift that will aid in the bonding of friendships that are transcontinental for millennia. We live in a world that is constantly evolving for the better. There are machines that can send the ideas of anyone across the globe at the click of a button. We have come together in science by standardizing measurement for time, weight, and mass. Let us now prepare to take the next step to sharing ideas in a new kind of way and see how far our language will take us. □

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# **Part II**

**In Conversation: ART**



# Art in Education

*Madeline Clarkson*

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**A**s a child, I would see art that mesmerized me: oil paintings of Native Americans hunting, of pioneers going across the Great Plains, and of the Biblical hero, Queen Esther. Something about these paintings made me want to be better, braver, and more noble—and that is saying a lot for a little girl whose greatest love at the time was playing in the dirt. As it turns out, I saw this art all around me because my great-great aunt, Minerva Teichert, was the artist who painted them. A daughter of immigrant parents—German Jews who had fled Germany in the 1800s—Minerva took her artistic abilities and made it into something respected, informative, moving, which helped support her large family. Minerva Teichert symbolized that one’s artistic abilities should be valued and promoted, especially as a woman in the early twentieth-century.

As the world we live in enters an age of increased technology and perceived progress, we tend to see regression in art education in the public-school system. An emphasis on more students focusing their education in

mathematics and science, together with the ever-present budget cuts, results in many schools' art programs being eliminated entirely. Even though numerous studies prove the incredible benefits of the arts in a student's educational success, our current system is not reflecting that reality (Bush). If schools can emphasize the typical core curriculum that is reinforced with the influence of the arts, students across the country—and the country itself—will see immediate and long-term benefits.

One issue in determining how much focus the arts should receive is whether and how it fits into the current and future workforce and whether it helps the world deal with the present problems at hand. The world that is becoming more digital, modern, and automated every day presents us with technical problems that need technical answers. There is no doubt that society needs more engineers, scientists, and mathematicians to solve these problems accurately and quickly. These solutions, it can be argued, are not artistic matters of emotion and expression. The world needs to cure disease more than it needs to decorate walls in a stylish fashion. The world seems to believe that a social emphasis on an education in the arts simply will not provide a profitable return on its investment. On the other hand, it seems easier to understand that subsidizing the science and technology of STEM programs will not only provide a greater benefit to society, but provides a more tangible and immediate benefit to the students: these jobs are simply in greater demand and pay better, on average. This belief and this practice are not only incorrect in many ways, it is also short-sighted, as it ignores the immeasurable benefit the

arts can have on people who ultimately decide not to pursue it as a career. Those who do pursue art not only can make a living—and a good one—but add enormous value to the world and the economy.

Freelance art work may not provide the financial security and stability as, for example, an electrical engineering job. But, there are many stable and profitable jobs in the world that are necessary for its smooth functioning that rely on proficiency in the arts. The available jobs for artists are countless, whether it's in teaching, freelance work, or for big corporations. For example, in this highly digital age, it is easy for consumers, clients, and patients to be distracted. Companies of every type need highly trained graphic designers who can create a digital image for their business, ensuring that their product or service does not get lost in the white noise of the busy world. Every website, program, or app on our computers, tablets, and phones are designed by art graduates. If these products are not visually appealing and pleasing to use, they will simply disappear.

This idea that art uses is not new. For centuries, buildings are beautiful and inviting because of passionate designers working hand in hand with engineers to make our day-to-day life both functional and easy on the eyes. Anybody who has seen the 142-foot dome of the Pantheon in Rome or the of London's Tower Bridge knows that beauty and function can go hand-in-hand ("Rome's Pantheon"). In today's world where individuality and expression are so important, we can express ourselves daily through clothing practically—and sometimes literally—



picked for us by clothing designers. These clothes are designed for looks, function, comfort, and use. Our homes feel like home, a place of safety and refuge, because of cozy rugs and paintings and photographs meticulously worked on by artists. Your favorite mug, your (current) style of haircut, your favorite song—these are all things that artists have poured their souls into perfecting so that they could make your life better and happier. These benefits may seem trivial to some. But they provide a vibrancy to life that—if left to its own devices—could become mechanical and dull. The focus of STEM is on necessary and noble pursuits, but it is the creativity and beauty that artists provide that make those pursuits an enjoyable thing to do. If anything, I believe that those taught to embrace their creativity are better workers and problem-solvers, which makes them better job candidates.

The assumption that those proficient in art can't solve modern day problems is false. Fran Smith explains,

Years of research show that [art is] closely linked to almost everything that we as a nation say we want for our children and demand from our schools: academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement, and equitable opportunity. (Smith)

I believe that the core issue surrounding disdain towards art is the simple fact that we have been engineered as a society to underappreciate and undervalue art. This leads to biased opinions and stigmas surrounding the art community. Perhaps the reason that there are not as many career paths for artists is that the arts are not appreciated as they should be.

A very prevalent example of how art is not being given the recognition it deserves is manifest in the way many schools handle budget cuts. From 2008 to 2016, 80% of schools around the nation were subject to some form of budget cuts (McDonald). The economic realities of less money and more students puts very difficult decisions into the hands of individual school districts and results in some very shocking statistics. In 2009, “only 3% of schools allocated funds for dance, and only 4% offered theatre” (McDonald). Fortunately, this drastic change hardly applied to the music and visual art programs, which remained in the 85% to 95% range (McDonald). The introduction of the Common Core Standards Act in 2010 (“Common Core State Standards Initiative”) pushed schools to emphasize math and science programs with the hope that it would ultimately help students have a better chance of success in college. It was assumed that funneling more money towards these core classes would improve test scores more efficiently than providing materials and resources for classes in the arts.

However, studies have shown that art classes improve students’ skills beyond the studio. Jen McDonald explains, “[S]tudents that took four years of art classes scored... 91 points higher on their SAT tests” (McDonald). Though this correlation does not necessarily mean causation, it seems to be more than coincidence. Studying the arts may not necessarily make a student smarter, but it can teach problem solving skills, motivate them to try hard in school, require self-discipline and focus, and stimulate areas of the brain that are not touched by typical academic studies.

A study done in 12 schools on the East Coast in 1999 shows that not only did students involved in the arts receive higher test scores, their quality of schooling, and that of their teachers, was a much more positive experience (“10 Studies on the Importance of Art in Education”). Teachers reported that their students were more cooperative and had a much happier classroom experience. Another study done in 2019 by Brian Kisida and Daniel H. Bowen, professors at the University of Missouri and the Texas A&M University, respectively, found that schools with higher involvement in the arts had to take less disciplinary action with students, had improved standardized test scores, and had students who expressed more compassion towards their fellow classmates on a daily basis (Kisida and Bowen).

Additionally, Johns Hopkins researchers found that participation in the arts, and specifically music, can essentially rewire the brain in a beneficial way. Those students who spent their four years of high school being trained regularly in music “were found to have changes in their brain structures helping them transfer their motor skills to similar areas” (“10 Studies on the Importance of Art in Education”). In the same study, students that focused on a specific art form throughout schooling had increased attention throughout all classes and had improved IQ scores (“10 Studies on the Importance of Art in Education”). These studies show that the correlation may be closer to causation; the arts can have a positive effect on the development of a student in that student’s social and academic life.

The problem-solving skills learned in art and music classes, while their value may not be monetary, are still in primary and secondary schooling. In my personal experience, participation in these classes had a great benefit to me. Inspired in part by my aunt Minerva's life and art, I took art classes every time I had space in my schedule. I was inspired by music and have played the cello and piano since I was nine-years-old. These classes and activities were a respite from the daily stresses of school and life and gave me time to decompress and work a different side of my brain. They gave me opportunities to serve, creating artwork or music for the less fortunate or homebound. They gave a richness to my life that I would not have found if I only studied math and science.

Often in sports, athletes do cross training. Football players take dance classes and runners swim laps. While those activities don't obviously correspond with their designated sport, they work different parts of the brain and body that will ultimately help those athletes in a competition.

The same applies to schooling. While in orchestra class, even though I wasn't doing algebra, I was constantly counting beats and subdividing measures into multiple fractions. I found that my music was mathematical as the whole steps and half steps of my scales corresponded to ratios and harmonic frequencies that are studied in physics. In many ways, math was musical, and music was mathematical. Because of my unique and creative way of dealing with questions, I earned sufficient scores to receive a full-ride academic scholarship to my first choice of

college. I believe—and I say this with the strongest conviction—that I did well academically because I was involved in the arts.

Just like me, there are many students out there who have a stronger tendency towards skills associated with the right hemisphere of their brain. The fact of the matter is, nearly a third of the United States population is right-brained (Hidvegi). We have two hemispheres in our brains, a right and a left. The left side is the side that is analytical, logical, and has very linear thinking. The right side of our brain, an entire *half* of our brain, is imaginative, holistic thinking, and encapsulated in one word. Can you guess it? Art! Art is so important to humanity that half of our whole intellectual engine—that thing that separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom—is devoted to it.

Creativity is an innate quality found within humans. Kisida and Bowen explained in their 2019 study that

[a]lmost as soon as motor skills are developed, children communicate through artistic expression. The arts challenge us with different points of view, compel us to empathize with “others, and give us the opportunity to reflect on the human condition. (Kisida and Bowen)

From the time a child can pick up a crayon they want to create art. From the moment that they first hear a piano, all they want to do it bang on it and make music. Art is an intuitive, natural tendency for humankind, and schools who prioritize it have shown the benefits it has on students. While math and science are important, art has been proven to be a key to a student’s success. Genius fictional teacher

John Keating, created by screenwriter Tom Schulman in his semi-autobiographical screenplay, *Dead Poets Society*, shares a thought that when schools keep the arts in mind, they are rewarded with positive results:

[M]edicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. (Schulman)

While math and science are important, students need drive, something to inspire, something to live for. That is what art gives them.

We could survive without all what are sometimes offensively deemed as the “fruity, creative” (Gregory et al.) art classes, such as painting and film. But it is the lessons of problem-solving, awareness, and creativity that we could potentially learn from those classes that are important. We need to make a transition in schooling to incorporate art, or in other words, creativity. Realistically, with budget cuts, it is difficult to keep everything we want afloat, but art is one thing that can be applied everywhere without necessarily needing a class. Instead of painting stills of fruit all day, students can come together to paint a mural depicting and advocating for unity and tolerance in the community. Instead of having music programs having performances solely for parents, they could hold a fundraiser concert for the local food bank or play at an assisted living center. So, while we may be forced to take funds away from art, we should divert those funds towards other creative areas. The education system must value creativity in schooling. This could definitely be changed to better fit the needs of the world, however. Art education

can make a shift from individual expression to societal *application*. If the arts and STEM can come together, we could build the ultimate education system and create a dynamic model of success based on hard science and the creativity that gives that science meaning and application.

Pablo Picasso once said “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.” This “problem” could easily be fixed. It’s not going to happen all at once, but it can happen if schools will simply bring creativity back to the table, little by little. I have managed to preserve the artist within me, and the benefits have been innumerable. If schools will do this, students will become more passionate, harder workers, and ultimately build up a world that is worth living in. □

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# We Keep Art

*Emmy Heywood*

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**M**olly Neuner, age eleven, waltzes into Portland’s King Middle School sporting a tank top and “#IAMNOTADISTRACTION” sharpied in black down her arms. More girls join her, wearing athletic shorts, short skirts, leggings, and tank tops, and various other dress code violations, all with the “#” inked onto their skin. Why? In protest of the school’s dress code; these girls were sick of dress code policies that labeled them as “distractions” (Waugh). The middle schoolers grabbed national headlines across the country, prompting policy changes within their school and fueling questions about the value of dress codes; what are they for? Body shaming young girl’s into conforming with patriarchal constructs of female sexuality? Probably, but we are going to redirect that thought into a discussion of censorship. Dress codes are a form of censorship. Censorship has two functions: to either protect the rights of the person being censored, or to protect the rest of us from corruption (Isaacs and Isaacs). King Middle School’s dress code is either protecting young girls from exploitation, or the rest of the student body/faculty from

corruption, that is “distraction.” When enforcing dress codes, one needs to be sure they aren’t using it as an excuse to infringe upon the rights of a targeted group of people, such as young women.

When censoring art, the same rules apply to the artist and the viewer’s right to free expression and interpretation respectively. Imagine Michelangelo’s David chilling in the Galleria dell’Accademia with #IAMNOTADISTRACTION sharpied on his arms. My senior year of high school, I had some friends go on a school-sponsored trip to Europe, and at least one of them came back scandalized by the lack of clothing sculpted, painted, and displayed in the museums they walked through—my friend’s interpretations of the art classified it just shy of pornography. Food for thought: is there a difference between Boticelli’s Venus and a Playboy magazine? If the morality of nude art can be proved, should it or should it not be censored? Why has nude art been censored in the past?

In an attempt to answer these and other thought-provoking questions orbiting the not-so-holy trinity of art-nudity-censorship, this essay will first appeal to the Sistine Chapel frescoes in an attempt to address factors in the socio-cultural equations determining the morality of nude art. From there, we will take a closer look at our own morals, and why censorship is the best way to force them upon others. Finally, we will move to the meat and potatoes of my argument: the need for freedom of expression and interpretation, and education as a possible solution to the discomfort caused by nude art. This essay supports spontaneous solutions rather than authoritarian

ensorship for whatever perceived morality issues arise with nude art. People's freedom of choice should be respected, and filtration should continue to be dependent on social variables. I advocate for deeper reflection on the viewing of art, the strengthening of artistic freedom of expression and the viewer's right to freely interpret. Hopefully, the discussion will provoke thought on the complexity of defining art, the role censorship has played in enforcing morals, and the need for more careful reflection on our own reactions to "uncomfortable truths" (Taylor). First stop: Sistine Chapel.

At any given time in history, artists have scandalized their viewers with edgy pieces, especially those involving the nude figure. What factors play a role in determining the morality of the nude figure? Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel in the mid-16th century, inciting a storm of critique and opposition due to the liberal use of the nude figure in his portrayals of religious events. The Sistine Chapel involves nine scenes with a grand total of 343 figures, all in various stages of exposure. 12,000 square feet of scenage with 343 figures in 343 variations of the birthday suit. That's a lot of flesh exposed to the pious eye; his contemporary audience amounted to little more than 500 clergy (Kedmey).

Some say if the painting is an incentive to action rather than a contemplative experience, it loses its artistic character. Others say if the nude art is sensual, it is admirable, but if sexual, it's not; one carries emotion and love where the other is based on action and sex. Part of the flak Michelangelo received was because of the

provocativeness of his figures. Some deemed them arousing and sexual. As one art historian says,

These figures revel in their bodies....They hug and they embrace and they flex and they pose. They're not going, "Oh my goodness, it's so uncomfortable, all these muscles." They love their bodies, you can tell.

(Keyney)

Bold move, Michelangelo. Many in his audience were offended by the unapologetic immodesty flaunted by his figures; subject matter played a big role in the frescoes' perceived morality.

Time often improves the cultural value of art, raising its moral value as well; Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel was controversial at the time, but given nearly 500 years, viewers have adjusted to the temperature of its steamy connotations, and it is now viewed by nearly everyone as a masterpiece.

The medium also impacts perceived morality. Nudity represented in painting or sculpture gives the viewer more distance from the subject than say, a photograph, even if the subject matter is the same. The greater the perceived distance, the better the perceived morality. The Sistine Chapel frescoes reach a max distance of 68 feet away from viewers, making the distance between the subject and the viewers literal. This could help explain why the frescoes have not been razed to the ground in the name of chastity quite yet.

Status of the artist also plays a factor. Michelangelo was an established artist at the time of the Sistine Chapel,

and his credibility as an artist helped his case. Plus, he got away with painting annoying clerical critics as devils, which is a bonus of being a respected artist; if the right people think you are good, you can insult whoever you want in the name of artistic expression.

Sensuality, time, medium, and credibility all play in the individual's interpretation of the Sistine Chapel. Those are just a few of the many factors that weigh into the various interpretations of nude art; others include class, artistic intent, and audience. Two pieces of art depicting the same subject matter can be given different moral values based on any of these factors. With so many criteria, how does one nail down the slippery idea of "moral"? If the morality of art is determined by contextual variables, how does censorship protect morality? Are our interpretations of nude art chained to our socio-cultural backgrounds? Probably, but this essay is going to redirect that thought into a discussion of moralism, which is how we individually interpret nude art's value for ourselves. Viewing nude art can make us more aware of ourselves and our own morals. To censor nude art because of its corruptive influence would be to assume the morals of the viewer, to moralize art.

Nicola Beisel, assistant professor of Sociology at Northwestern University writes an article titled, "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, the Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude," which analyzes

the controversy that arose in New York City in the late nineteenth century when an eminent art dealer was arrested by Anthony Comstock, leader of the New

York Society for the Suppression of Vice, for selling photographic reproductions of nude paintings. (Beisel)

Both the censorship supporters and the censorship critics were from the same social class, but the critics' interpretation was more appealing than the supporters, so the free-art values won out and Comstock became synonymous with prudery. Beisel eventually concludes that "the meaning imputed to events or objects invokes the construction of a self," giving power to an interpretation (Beisel). So, when viewing nude art, one who sees it as immoral may be constructing a self-image that relies on purity and modesty. One who views nude art unabashedly could be constructing a pretentious self-image, casting themselves as the cultured and mature art connoisseur who can handle such things. Patricia Anderson brings up the point that "the nude has always been an expression of mankind's self-awareness" (Anderson). Viewing nude art isn't about losing innocence or corrupting your thoughts—it can be about becoming more aware of yourself, your body, your emotions, or your own morals and values.

In contrast, philosopher Craig Taylor argues in his article, "Art and Moralism," that censorship is an evasion of moral reflection:

The moraliser wants to know what the work is about so that he can respond (morally) appropriately, but we may only come to understand the meaning (or meanings) of a work through our responses to it... whatever they may be. (Taylor)

Sometimes art has no clear moral purpose, and that ambiguity freaks people out, but it is within the complexity

and nuance of our own response to those uncomfortable truths that we begin to question the reasons for our own moral judgments (Taylor). Censorship is dangerous because it assumes morals and forces judgments onto individuals. It is good to have standards and to evaluate things according to our own beliefs, “but good people in the matter of what they hate can go badly wrong, especially when that hate is directed against the representation of uncomfortable truths” (Taylor). The heavy-handed wielder of censorship must be careful where they point their chaste nose, for morality resides with beauty in the eye of the beholder.

Now that we have discussed socio-cultural factors that help us determine the morality of a given art piece and emphasized the need to view nude art with reflection and not censorship in mind, let’s move onto the main argument: Nude art should not be blanket labeled as “corruptive” or “inappropriate.” It should not be censored. Art is a fundamental freedom of expression, walking hand-in-hand with the equally vital freedom of interpretation.

Art is all about diversity. Each artist strives to convey something unique and different, to develop a style. Even within specific disciplines, artistic intent differs. Philip Pearlstein, an accomplished realist painter exhibiting regularly since 1954 recalled a painter’s discussion group he was a part of in New York. All the artists were interested in “working from the figure,” but they differed in their approaches:

those who felt it was a vehicle for emotional expression, who were called the “guts” and others who



saw it as a return to Renaissance tradition, who were called the “heads” for their intellectual approach. (Pearlstein)

Pearlstein’s description shows the diversity of artistic interpretation even within the narrower field of figural representation. Pearlstein goes on to explain the “censorship by exclusion” he and others experienced from various galleries, museums, and critics due to their art-style (Pearlstein). The opposition experienced by Pearlstein provides traction for artistic expression; art is not about supplying public demand or catering towards public interests, it’s about the artist. Censorship within the art family is one thing, but state-sponsored censorship actually squashes artistic expression and limits the diversity of expression. Nudity is a form of artistic expression, whether a vehicle for emotions or a revival of Renaissance tradition, it deserves appreciation and respect.

Plato’s allegory of the cave can be used to illustrate the power of interpretation. Imagine a cold, metal collar chafes against your neck, immobilizing you, keeping your eyes fixed on the dark space in front of you. Chained in pitch black, with your head locked onto the dark space in front of you, you watch the world go by: A light from behind throws black shapes into relief on the wall in front of you, and these shadows are your reality. Then it happens. You are released from the cave, and you see the world—the real world—for the first time. As your eyes adjust to the warm light, you realize the world you had known in the cave wasn’t real at all, it was created by figures standing behind you holding shapes in front of a fire. Your world was shadows projected

onto a cave wall. Eager to share your liberation, you descend back to the cave to help those still chained to the shadows, but they refuse to believe in life outside the cave. The prisoners are captive to the shadows, not only physically, but mentally. They are their reality. This intense little story is my version of Plato's cave, a warning against the powers of art and artists. The shadows, or art, only had power over you because the cave society gave them power over you (Plato). We can apply Plato's allegory to nude paintings; when it comes down to it, these artworks are oil, pigment, and canvas. They are not reality, they only have meaning because we give them meaning. We as viewers imbue them with power.

This confusion of representation and reality is often a contributing factor in the decision to censor nude art. 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish kings censored nude paintings because they confused image with reality, saw representation of nude women and equated female flesh with sin. This confusion of representation as reality is not singular to Spanish kings; many modern viewers follow the logic that pornography is immoral, pornography is naked people, nude art depicts a naked person, thus the art is pornographic and therefore immoral. J.A. Tomlinson argues the Spanish monarchs thought naked women whether in-person or in-painting, "offended a divinely ordained cosmology" (Tomlinson). Even though paintings of nude figures are not nude figures, viewer's make the connection so powerfully that censorship is thought necessary. By censoring nude art, we are limiting viewers to a single, narrow interpretation: that of a naked human, which is designated by the censor as vile, sinful, lustful, and

corruptive, something that is fundamentally wrong, and something that corrupts the viewer upon seeing. However, as seen in Phillip Pearlstein's discussion group, there are more ways to view a nude painting; if one does not wish to be emotionally affected, one can still appreciate the traditional techniques of Renaissance tradition. Freedom of interpretation is strangled by the labels censorship brands onto nude paintings.

What saved the nude paintings in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spain was the limited audience who could view them. Kept by the first Court Painter, only those who could appreciate the higher qualities of the painting and ignore the subject matter were allowed to view them (Tomlinson). This is not the only time in history that the context of the nude painting decides its morality; in New York, August Muller was arrested for selling photocopies of a nude painting because he was "degrading" the art by taking it from the museums to the streets (Beisel). I think of this as the "high school" mind basis for censorship; high schoolers can turn anything into an innuendo. They are constantly grinning, giggling, guffawing at drawings on the board, or making off-hand comments, and other innocent circumstances. Censorship in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spain and 19<sup>th</sup>-century New York was founded on the principle that the masses had high school immaturity; they couldn't be trusted to appreciate art, only to ogle over the sexual connotations of a figure in the nude. Again, this is restricting interpretation. If someone wants to appreciate nude art for the emotions it conveys, even if those emotions are sexual, that is within their rights. On the other hand, if someone wants to appreciate a painting for the artistic techniques used and

the brilliance of the artist, that is within their rights. Freedom of interpretation is the viewer's right to see what they wish to see, to imbue a painting with whatever power they wish to give it over themselves.

Some in the art world question the supposed "immorality" of nude art, even if it contains obvious sexual innuendo. As Donald Richardson asks in his article, "What is Art?", why are we "so concerned about the representation of the natural naked body and the most natural of all natural acts—that of procreation?" (Richardson). Why hide that under the metaphorical bushel? Just as context played a role in morality historically, context determines appropriateness today: the human body isn't censored in an anatomy class, and sexual reproduction is not overlooked in a health class. Can the contextual filter be placed over nude art, rendering it "moral" within an educational setting?

There's a lot of appeal in the logic. By allowing young artists a safe environment within school to freely express themselves and experiment with different art forms, we are allowing them to develop a diversity of thoughts, opinions, approaches, styles, and interpretations. The human body is not something that needs to be censored, hid under a bushel. Freedom of expression through nude art forms within the educational context of school could destigmatize working with the nude, allowing young artists to become more comfortable in their own skins and styles. Additionally, historical context could be provided for nude art, informing artistic interpretations on a touchy subject. Works of art from the past should not be excluded from

education because they are “immoral.” Expanding young artist’s freedom of interpretation through learning will secure appreciation for past artworks in the future, ensuring the survival of art.

At my high school, one of the best AP art students was Essie Hunt. Essie painted an incredible self-portrait, a collage of nature and herself. Our art teacher hung it in the display case in the hallway of our high school, and within an hour was asked to take it down, because Essie had painted herself nude. Essie reminds me of Molly Neude. As discussed at the beginning of this essay, Neude was able to impact her school’s dress codes by standing up for her rights. Just as Molly Neude sharpied hashtags on her arms to defend her right to express herself through dress, Essie was defending her right to freely express herself through art. By not censoring art, by evaluating our own values and reactions to art, by preserving freedom of expression, we ensure the freedom of interpretation. We keep diversity and controversy. We keep the Essie Hunts of the world. We keep the Molly Neudes. We keep art. □

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# **Part II**

## **In Conversation: Mental Wellness**





# Young Minds: Addressing Mental Health in Schools

*Madelyn Lundberg*

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**H**ow often do you turn on the news and hear about a tragic event that is linked to someone having a mental illness? It seems that almost every time you switch on the TV there is news covering a heartbreaking story often due to an individual suffering from poor mental health. What if we could take steps to prevent some of these difficulties and tragedies from occurring? What if we could help improve mental health to decrease the chance of individuals performing hurtful actions? How could we do this? The answer lies in part in our schools. Schools should be required to include mental health education in their curricula. Through the use of sound evidence, research and examples, this paper highlights the seriousness of the mental health crisis among children and youth in the United States. In addition, it will offer solutions schools should implement, which will teach children strategies to cope with various mental health challenges. Specifically, it shows that through a combined effort between teachers, mental health

professionals, and parents, students' mental health can be improved, thus leaving students better prepared for their futures and more capable of making a positive impact on their communities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (IBIS). So, do American children really struggle with mental health? One in five American children and youth between the ages of three and 17, have a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder (Snow and McFadden). To make matters worse, 80% of those children are not receiving the treatment that they need (ACMH). Mental health challenges are also beginning to occur earlier and earlier in children. Research done by the Child Mind Institute shows that about half of all mental illnesses begin before the age of 14 (Walker). Poor mental health can have numerous negative effects on children. Not only does it affect their success in school, but it also affects their ability to function at home and in the community. Children who experience mental illnesses also have a greater risk for adult onset chronic heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, as well as increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system (Dryden-Edwards). There is a mental health crisis among children in the United States, and we need to take action now to decrease the number of youth who struggle with mental health. The World Health Organization states, “there is no health without mental health” (World Health Organization). If our children and

youth are not mentally healthy, they are not physically healthy and their abilities to positively influence and impact our society is impaired. However, if we start now, we can act to prepare our children to successfully face the mental health challenges that they will encounter.

Because school is where children are educated and spend the greater part of their day, it is logical that school is where we should educate children about mental health. Currently, only nine states have legislation that requires their schools to include mental health education in their curricula, and about 20 states list mental health education in their standards (Lubell and Snow). However, just listing mental health in their standards is not enough. Standards are not requirements, and schools are not necessarily held accountable if they do not adequately teach mental health education in their classrooms. The remaining states don't have legislation or list mental health education in their standards. Curriculum improving student mental health should be a priority in every state.

This mental health education can be taught in the classroom in a variety of ways. One of the ways is through direct instruction where the teacher provides information about specific mental health disorders. Part of this instruction would be to have class discussions where ideas and input are gathered. For example, a teacher could ask how many students have ever felt stressed, then proceed by the students offering input about how they feel when they are stressed. This type of discussion can help the teacher better understand how the students are feeling, as well as help classmates recognize people feel stress and it is

normal to feel that way sometimes. Discussions can also help students get various ideas for how they can deal with stress effectively. It is important to note that the goal of the curriculum is not to teach elementary- and middle school-aged children about severe mental illnesses. Rather, its focus is on teaching children about the illnesses and challenges most commonly experienced by individuals in their age group, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and grief (CDC).

Openly talking about and discussing the mental health challenges students are experiencing can help reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Many people become embarrassed or ashamed if they feel they need to attend counseling or therapy. Often, people place a negative stigma on others if they know they have seen a therapist. But, going to see a counselor or therapist when an individual is feeling sad or overwhelmed, should be as normal as going to the doctor when they have the flu. Children should be taught that if they feel like something is wrong or not normal, it is okay to talk to someone, and they need to talk to someone (Mental Health America). By discussing mental health, children can recognize many people struggle with stress, anxiety, depression, and grief, and if they themselves are struggling with a mental health challenge, they are not alone.

Another way that mental health education can be taught in schools is by teaching children coping strategies. These strategies can be implemented at various times throughout the entire day. The previously mentioned classroom discussions assist the teacher in being more

aware of the mental health needs of their students. These discussions would allow them to incorporate strategies throughout the day to help students cope with mental health challenges. In fact, research shows that mental health interventions that are integrated into the regular curriculum are the most effective (Hinton). The implementation of these strategies could be something as simple as leading the class in relaxation and breathing exercises before a test to help reduce testing anxiety. Research shows that physical exercise is another strategy that can be used to combat a variety of mental illnesses (Dryden-Edwards). One way that teachers can incorporate this strategy in their classroom is to have students do something simple and easy, such as jumping jacks. By teaching students simple strategies while they are young, students are provided with tools they can use to cope with mental health challenges they may encounter later in life.

In July 2018, New York became the first state to require mental health education for students through the School Mental Health (SMH) program (Barile). Since the implementation of the SMH program, schools in New York have seen great success. In Merrick, New York at Chatterton School, discussions about mental health are very common. Teachers lead discussions about mental health with their students, and together they come up with ideas on how to deal with certain mental health challenges, such as stress and anxiety. The class also participates in simple strategies, such as relaxation and breathing exercises (Lubell and Snow). The students understand the importance of learning about mental health as well as learning strategies to cope with challenges. In an interview,

one student said, “[W]hen you encounter it, you need to know what it is...if you didn't know how to deal with stress, you would just be stressed out all the time” (qtd. in Lubell and Snow). Andrea McCabe, a teacher at Chatterton School, said the program is making a difference and also pointed out that talking about mental health helps the students recognize that they are not alone. She said, “Often, it’s like the elephant in a room. It’s something that they feel like, ‘Oh, it’s only me,’” she added, “Letting them know that they’re not alone, and it is something that unfortunately exists, is so important.” (qtd. in Lubell and Snow). Schools in New York have implemented programs to help improve mental health among their students, and it is working. Students are becoming more educated about common mental illnesses. They are learning strategies that they can use to deal with mental health challenges, as well as recognizing that many people struggle with mental illness and it is important to talk about it and get help when needed.

Mental health diseases are the most common diseases of childhood. It is estimated that more children have a mental health disorder than all the children with cancer, AIDS, or diabetes combined (Child Mind Institute). In contrast to these diseases, mental illnesses can be treated! Unfortunately, many children do not have access to the treatment they need. Amanda Sanchez, the leader of a study at Florida International University, found that mental health services provided by teachers and school staff can significantly reduce mental health problems experienced by elementary-age students. Sanchez noted that there are several reasons why students are not able to

receive mental health care. She said, “Many families face barriers to traditional mental health services in a clinic setting—these barriers can include issues related to cost, transportation, or stigma” (Hinton). Staffing qualified psychologists in schools can help ensure that students have access to treatment. It is estimated that the current ratio of school psychologists to students is one for every 1,482 students. This is not adequate! The mental health care resources available to children at school are extremely limited. By staffing qualified psychologists, schools will be able to provide students with mental health care services when they need them.

A possible concern with implementing mental health education in schools is that teachers already struggle to teach current curriculums, and adding one more element for them to teach would be extremely overwhelming (Hinton). A variety of factors may contribute to overloaded teachers. Many teachers reported feeling overwhelmed due to factors such as bad behavior in classrooms, high emphasis on standardized test scores, and having to spend much time in trainings and meetings (“Top 3 Causes of Teacher Stress”). This is a reasonable concern, as research shows that 46% of teachers reported feeling high levels of stress on a daily basis (Turner). Overwhelmed and stressed teachers can prove to be very problematic because when teachers are stressed, it can negatively affect the performance of their students (“Top 3 Causes of Teacher Stress”). However, one way that this concern could be combatted is by sharing the responsibility of mental health improvement between teachers, psychologists, and parents. Having qualified psychologists at school provides

an additional resource for teachers to turn to for help and advice in addressing the mental health needs of their students. Schools could also hold workshops for parents to provide information on how to recognize if their child is struggling with a mental health disorder and ways to help them, as well as provide information about the resources available to students. By partnering with parents and school psychologists, the demands of helping students with mental health on teachers can be reduced.

Another possible concern with requiring mental health education in schools is that hiring qualified psychologists to help in addressing mental health challenges among youth, as well as training teachers, will be very costly and schools just don't have the funding to provide these resources (Dikel). Funding is a reasonable concern because staffing a psychologist is expensive and training teachers would also cost schools money. Research shows that schools have a desire to provide mental health services to their students but report not being able to do so because of a lack of funding (Hansen). However, grants and federal aid goes unclaimed each year that could potentially be used by schools to fund mental health programs. Regardless, it is clear that many students in America are struggling with mental illnesses, and if we want to improve their mental health, we should not let cost be the driving force.

An example of federal aid that could be used by schools to improve mental health is the Teacher and Student Success Act (TSSA). The TSSA was signed into law in April 2019 and provides a way for millions of dollars to



be sent directly to Utah schools towards improving student achievement (Cortez). This funding can be allocated towards whatever the individual school feels would be most beneficial for its students. Sunrise Elementary, a local school in Cache County School District, received funding via TSSA. After much discussion with parents and teachers, the school decided that the received funding needed to go towards improving student mental health. Derek Beer, the principal of Sunrise Elementary said, “We had a part-time counselor, but the thing is, students don’t just have issues every other day. We were lacking” (qtd. in Pace). The school has used some of the received funding to hire a full-time counselor to address students’ mental health concerns. The counselor currently meets with 105 students individually. Of those 105 students, 75 were self-referrals. Beer said, “This has been such a great thing at our school” (qtd. in Pace). It has only been about four months since these changes were made, and already the school has seen great success. This example shows that there is funding available to schools if they make an effort to receive access to it. Additionally, it shows that there are many students who suffer from mental health challenges, many of whom recognize it themselves. When schools use funding to provide students with the proper mental health care resources, they are able to receive the support they need.

Theresa Nguyen, the vice president of policy and programs at Mental Health America said, “We can’t wait until a student is at a crisis state. Like diabetes or cancer, you should never wait until stage 4 to intervene” (qtd. in Walker). It is so important that we act now to combat the mental health crisis facing children and youth. Just as we

educate children in English, writing, math, and science, we need to educate them in mental health. As we do, they will become equipped with knowledge and skills and be more prepared to deal with mental health challenges now and in their futures. Even if some students don't struggle with a mental illness currently, statistics show there is a good chance that at some point in their lives either they themselves will experience a mental health challenge or someone close to them will. Due to the seriousness of the current mental health crisis facing our children, schools should be required to include mental health education in their curriculums. Discussions about mental health and the teaching of coping strategies can assist students in overcoming mental health challenges they may encounter. Through a combined effort between teachers, parents, and mental health professionals, students' mental health can be improved, leaving students better prepared for their futures and more capable of making a positive impact on their communities. □

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# Hope for a More Resilient Generation: Addressing Mental Health in Schools

*Katie White*

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**S**eptember 2013. *My arm hurts. The pain is worse when I look at it, so I stare ahead at the carpet.*

*“Katie, is this okay? Not too tight?” The high school counselor is wrapping gauze around the diagonal cut directly in the middle of my left forearm. I shake my head; it’s not too tight. The principal’s been standing in the doorway, then finally realizes he ought to shut the door.*

*He sets the tone for our meeting, “That’ll have to be stitched. I called your mom, and she’s on her way here.” The counselor gently asks me questions as the principal, a man in his 60s, continues to stare at me as if I’m in here for unruly behavior.*

*The counselor asks his last question, “Why are you doing this?” He motions to the other pink scars resulting from what my therapist calls non-suicidal self-injury. I don’t know exactly why. I just know how I feel. I don’t believe these men will understand. They don’t know how a panic attack feels like being knocked down by a wave when you’re out playing in the ocean. It slams into you like a concrete mattress that conforms to your body. The oxygen in your lungs is expelled all at once to make room for the water flooding in through your nose. Your body rolls, involuntarily, like a wave, head tucking, shoulders following. Your abdomen is tight, crunching into your front-flip, and knees pull in toward your chest. Your mind is a flurry of adrenaline, as you are sure you are going to drown. Just in time, the ocean spits you onto the shore, and you cough up salty fish water. You’re unsure you can move, let alone walk. Your body is a sandbag of weight. Everything hurts like you haven’t known you could hurt. The principal, the counselor, they don’t understand how, when I cut, the pain, the guilt, the anger, they all stop, at least, for a little bit. I wasn’t always this way. Here, in Duchesne, they don’t understand that either. They didn’t know me before the depression and cutting.*

*Both men are staring at me, waiting for an answer. “I don’t know. I was just mad. I did something stupid last night, and I was mad at myself, I guess.”*

I moved to Duchesne, Utah in October 2012, just a few months before my 17th birthday. Even though I felt isolated and alone in an unfamiliar rural town, I was not alone in my struggles. When I got tired of wearing cardigans and

long-sleeved shirts every day, my peers began to ask me about my scars. I told them the truth. The truth broke down the stigma and many divulged that they, too, had felt depressed or anxious at one time or another. Some, like me, had used self-injury as a method of coping or had experienced suicidal thoughts. Within 18 months of each other, two beautiful, young girls in our school district completed suicide, devastating the community.

The youth mental health crisis reaches beyond the rural fields of Duchesne County. In the United States one in five youth suffer from a mental health disorder, including social, emotional and behavioral conditions (Malti 14). Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth, ages ten to fourteen, and the second leading cause of death for youth, ages fifteen to twenty-four. “Half of all mental illness begins by age 14... Despite effective treatment, there are long delays— sometimes decades— between the first appearance of symptoms and when people get help” (“Mental Health”). In fact, it’s estimated that nearly 80% of children who need mental health services will not receive them (Anderson). “Mental health—an essential part of children’s overall health—has a complex interactive relationship with their physical health and their ability to succeed in school, at work and in society.” (“Children’s Mental Health”). Without support and treatment, youth are at greater risk for school failure (Malti 14). Some have estimated that half of the students with a mental illness will drop out of high school because of the anxiety they suffer, as well as their social challenges, and difficulty focusing (Gold). Even those enrolled in



special education drop out at a rate of 37%, “the highest dropout rate of any disability group” (“Mental Health”).

How do we respond to the youth mental health crisis? Students often spend more time at school than they do at home. By changing the school climate, we can better support and improve student health. This can be accomplished in several ways: by increasing the amount of mental health services offered at schools; by teaching students skills that will help them to develop resilience; by creating strong networks of social supports that include peers, teachers, parents, and community members; and by restructuring curriculums to emphasize academic engagement over standardized testing, including the use of pull-in services rather than pull-out services to destigmatize special education and improve the students’ quality of education.

All students can benefit from learning skills that will help them become more resilient adults. Resilience is “the ability of an individual to develop and succeed despite adversity” (Noam 33). Research has shown common protective factors and traits among people who have overcome “higher trauma load or chronic severe adversity” (Horn 120). The most important protective factors reported are, consistent parenting and positive bonds with caregivers, strong social supports, and a shared sense of values (Horn 120). Common traits seen in these resilient individuals include, self-discipline, emotional regulation capacity, appropriate use of humor, altruism, and the ability to harness social supports (Horn 122). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration has also identified several key protective factors that make individuals more resilient to behavioral health problems such as, positive self-image, self-control, and social competence (“Prevention of Substance Abuse”). Developing resilience to adversity reduces the risk that students might use “morbid form[s] of self-help” such as non-suicidal self-injury, aggression toward others (such as bullying), use of alcohol or drugs, and food restriction or self-induced purging to cope with traumas and stressors (Peterson 21).

To foster resiliency in students, schools need to implement more collaboration with programs that place a heavy focus on developing resiliency in youth. Programs such as RALLY (Responsive Advocacy for Life and Learning in Youth) work with kids by focusing on their various levels of development. RALLY uses early identification to determine each child’s strengths and weaknesses so they can help them develop the resiliency skills they lack. RALLY focuses on “the child’s inherent ability to move forward” rather than viewing them through “the lens of problems” (Noam 37; Malti 20). Another model, The Resilient Classroom, uses PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) to encourage the development of resilience. By taking the approach of establishing resiliency at a young age, we are preparing children to be successful in adapting to their circumstances when they face adversity.

Addressing the fundamental human need to connect with others supports the mental health of developing children and increases their academic potential. Tina Malti

explains, “A healthy child is much more likely to be academically successful, and an academically successful child is more likely to be mentally healthy” (16). Feelings of accomplishment and success are vital to mental health. Thus, it is important that schools work with students to ensure that their intellectual needs are being met. Many schools try to meet the special needs of students by using pull-out services or placing them in a special education program (Noam 42). Pull-out services often compete with instructional time and further the stigma surrounding mental health and special education needs (Atkins; Noam 43). Some school programs have started to use pull-in services instead. The Resilient Classroom believes that mental health support systems do not need to fall outside of the classroom (Doll 137). In fact, they “emphasize natural supports like teachers, friends and families as the principle source of socioemotional support for students” (Doll 137). Social supports are one of the key protective factors that aid a person in becoming resilient. For example, after the second Lebanese war, a school intervention invited “children to share and seek support from peers; participating children demonstrated a decrease in PTSD symptoms and greater adaptive functioning” (Horn 124). The SEYLE (Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe) intervention study showed that teaching students about mental health and suicide prevention also cultivated peer understanding and support (Wasserman 1). De-stigmatizing mental health problems and creating peer support helps students feel more comfortable reaching out for help when they are in need (Wasserman 2). RALLY brings a network of services

to schools so that students who would usually be pulled-out can “remain in their regular environments and achieve success” (Noam 43). When students are connected to each other, they are better able to work together and learn from each other.

Pull-in services contribute to the positive environment of academic engagement. Education reform has put intense emphasis on report cards, standardized state testing, and unrealistic goals for academic gains for so long that “students were coached to pass tests rather than taught a rich curriculum to prepare them for life in the 21st century” (Bentsen 2). Instead of focusing on standardized testing, schools should be focused on engaged learning. The Resilient Classroom model emphasizes academic engagement as an indicator of success in school (Doll 137). Some indicators of academic engagement are,

on-task behavior... completing assignments, complying with teacher requests, seeking help when appropriate, volunteering to answer questions, and engaging in assigned tasks....Students who also strive for knowledge, set personal goals for success, and regulate their concentration and effort will show even higher levels of school success. (Doll 137)

This focus in school teaches students the skills needed to be effective learners, thus preparing them to be more successful adults.

With every proposal comes the question of funding—however, we must consider what mental health problems are currently costing us. Depression is now the leading cause of disability worldwide and largely contributes to the

overall global burden of disease (“Depression”). Speaking specifically about the United States, 18.5% of adults experience any mental illness in a given year (“Mental Health”). 46% of homeless adults staying in shelters “live with severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders” (“Mental Health”). In a special report given by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, it was reported that more than half of all prison and jail inmates have a mental health condition (James 1); 70% of youth in juvenile justice systems have a mental health disorder, as well (“Mental Health”). Mood disorders are now the third most common cause of hospitalization for people aged 18-44 (“Mental Health”). Altogether, “serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year” (“Mental Health”). Taking preventive measures by developing a more resilient generation will cut costs and ensure a more hopeful future for our nation.

The government has poured money into education reform for two decades, reform that has seen little progress (Malti 17). We have the means to fund an integration of mental health and education in public schools; we just haven’t been putting that money toward effective programs and services. On the state level, many policy makers struggle to understand their state’s funding formula, this makes it “difficult for them to determine what changes are needed to encourage innovation” (Griffith 1). While each state has a different system, they do have many similarities, and once those similarities are understood, it becomes more comprehensible what a state’s formula is capable or incapable of doing (Griffith 2). Still, funding depends on what we prioritize. Once parents, schools, politicians, and

other stakeholders care about mental health, change will happen (Wasserman 10).

It wasn't until I was 21-years-old that I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The trauma I experienced occurred when I was 13-years-old; my teachers were aware that a significant event had occurred, and they noticed changes in my behavior thereafter, changes that resulted in Cs instead of As on tests and a parent-teacher conference regarding defiant behavior in class. I know my teachers cared deeply for me. But, as Principal John Hurley explained in an interview with PBS News Hour, most teachers' training in mental health is one chapter in a book that they cover in one day (Gold). Mental illness is complicated with all sorts of confounding factors. The one thing research has unequivocally shown is that early intervention can reduce severity of the condition.

Unfortunately, I did not receive early intervention. But I fought hard to overcome my depression and anxiety. In my experience, recovery is not perpetual. It is a constant effort, involving ups and downs and small steps forward that eventually take you the distance. RALLY explains, "[T]he ability to develop and succeed despite adversity... is not stable, but rather continuously changes and develops in interaction with an individual's social context" (Noam 34). For the first time, I am receiving treatment for symptoms of post-traumatic stress thanks to Utah State University's Counseling and Psychological Services. Though I have had periods of stability and healing in the past, for the first time in five years, I can see a real and attainable future for myself. My family relationships are

healing; I am gathering new social supports; I am successful in my full-time job as a manager; and I am loving every moment I spend on campus, learning and engaging with course materials.

I can tell you how a good day feels like being in the ocean in the hot summertime with your friends; how the sun warms your whole soul, while the water cools your skin; how the water takes the weight from your body and cradles you. You are present here and now. You and your friends all hold hands in a chain, facing the tides as they roll in and time the perfect jump, so you can roll with the wave. You smile until your face hurts from laughing. And if a wave does knock you under, you still have your friend's hand in yours to pull you up.

As adults, we know pain is inevitable. But suffering is optional (Mager). Addressing mental health problems eases the burden on both individuals and society. Research has shown us how to combat the youth mental health crisis, through increased mental health services in schools, development of resilience, strong systems of social support, and increased focus on academic engagement. These improvements will yield positive change. By implementing them in schools we have hope for a more resilient generation and a brighter future for our nation. □

*If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, call the \*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline\* at 800-273-TALK (8255). You can also reach out to the Crisis Text Line, a free, 24/7 confidential text messaging*

*service that provides support to people in crisis when they text 741741.*

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