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Voices of USU: An Anthology of Student Writing, Vol. 15

Utah State University Department of English

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Utah State University
Department of English
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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*. These writers learned that writing is a process, and they worked diligently to arrive at the final products you will read here. Their writing processes involved drafts, revisions, and careful edits.

The students published in this book were enrolled in the same class that you now attend. They started where you started. They learned, as you will, to seek help from their peers, instructors, and other resources to achieve success in their writing.

This writing class encourages each of you to develop an appreciation for the power of words, research, creation, and persuasion. The publication of this anthology makes that a tangible reality. These essays sometimes are personal, sometimes advocate for change, and sometimes include research—but they each have power in their words. We invite you to join their conversations and hope that they will inspire, challenge, and motivate you to produce your best writing.

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.

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the essays

essays presented in alphabetical order by author last name

Computers vs. Composers: A Modern War on Music

Rebecca Baker

About the Author

Rebecca Baker is from Colorado Springs, Colorado and Seattle, Washington. She is a freshman studying Music with an emphasis in Composition as well as Piano Pedagogy. She loves to do yoga and hike.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I am passionate about composing music, and I remember reading about artificial intelligence creating music and I wanted to know more, so I researched the impact it has on the industry. I think this is an interesting topic because everyone listens to music and this could affect everyone in the future. The hardest part of the writing process was narrowing down resources because all of them were so great, it was difficult to find the most effective sources for different points in the paper. The background information came the easiest and was the simplest to analyze.

This essay was composed in May 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Some of us attend concerts, listen to music as we walk to class, or curate the perfect playlist to listen to in the shower. Others jam to the radio in their car, walk to the music playing in the background of their weekly grocery shopping trip, or stumble upon snippets of songs in stories on Instagram. Music is undeniably all around us, and the influence music has had over the past few centuries on the average person's life has dramatically changed. During Europe's Baroque period (1600-1750), the middle class would hear music on Sundays during church worship. Eventually, the middle class would become more involved in public performance closer to the Classical period (1730-1820). Since then, music has become widely available due to radio, cassette tapes, CDs, and now streaming services right to a smartphone.

In antiquity, music was recited orally, and by 1400, it was recorded on tablets. Handwritten music notation and copying became popular in the 17th century. Printed sheet music became popular in the 19th century, and sheet music became digitized in the late 20th century. The availability of notated music increased heavily as technology advanced. However, since the Renaissance, composers and creators have taken different approaches to using algorithms to generate music. Some composers have used mathematical equations to develop a mathematically tonal atmosphere within the music. For example, Bach (1685-1750) used equations to create his three-part fugues, and Xenakis (1922-2001) used computer computation to create his music. Technology has revolutionized how composers generate music using algorithms by making a tedious process more efficient.

Thousands of different genres of music, millions of music creators, and billions of people who listen to music lead to billions of unique music tastes. However, nearly every listener seeks music that fulfills an emotional connection and expressive reward. Additionally, every song must fill a functional and aesthetic purpose. Not only can someone connect to the music being performed, but one may also connect with the performer and fellow listeners. Because of this, music can fulfill the human need for socialization.

Due to the advancement in technology, the composition and creative processes have been reformed. Technology assists composers in notating and generating music at a more efficient rate. However, with the implementation of this technology in major musical processes, music is at risk of losing its ability to connect people socially and diminishing the creative process. Despite this risk, technology can help a composer thrive in the environment by making it more efficient and forcing more creativity. From these points, the question arises, does music lose its meaning and connection to humanity when technology and computer generation are implemented in major musical processes?

Prominent composers have used algorithmic composition in the past in different ways, but they did the computing by hand as technology had not been an aide. In 1792, Mozart published an algorithmic piece labeled K.

294dK3. This piece was performed using numbered fragments with dice to roll the fragments randomly. Music written in the Renaissance often followed a strictly rule-based system, using isorhythms, which use a repeating rhythmic pattern throughout the piece, as well as using canon, which is generated in a round, such as in the children's song "Row, Row, Row, Your Boat" (Povilioniene 4). Bach's three-voice fugues follow a strict structure and system of rules. The subject is introduced in a soprano voice and then played in the alto, tenor, and bass. While the main subject is being played in any of the voices, the others play a contrasting and independent melody called a counterpoint. Additionally, notes moving in voices must be portrayed as independent by avoiding parallel fifths and octaves in the voices, meaning two parts may not mirror each other. Bach uses a system of rules so strict it is mathematical, like an equation to generate an entire piece using a mere two bars of music as a subject (Povilioniene 4). These examples through the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods demonstrate that composers have been using algorithms written by hand for centuries.

Different models have been used to generate music following Bach's strict set of rules, making it sound like Bach composed the music himself. Some programs require the composer to create a subject and the rest of the voices. Then, the computer program filters out the "unsatisfactory" material, after which the composer corrects and refines the piece. Another program is given the subject and generates the rest of the voices according to the rules. More revolutionary programs can treat Bach's rules as a mathematical equation to be solved. One program, EcoComposer, considers the inputted voice, melodic content, chords, harmonization, independent voices, classical voice leading rules, and aesthetic fulfillment, such as the balance between repetition and variation, through intense computer programming to create a perfect solution to the "4-voice" problem. EvoComposer's creativity and ability to compose allow the program to mimic Bach (Prisco).

Because a computer program can mimic a composer so perfectly if given the necessary attention to detail, the question lingers if the computer may overtake the role of the composer. Frequently, music reflects the raw emotions of a composer and humanity in general. The music reflects this emotion by creating tension through imperfection, such as a note being played on the wrong beat, a note not fitting the chord, or the piece generally sounding atonal, random, and dissonant. The computer program-generated music is at risk of losing its creativity and passion if always generated by numbers and perfect mathematical equations. Additionally, with computer programs becoming more accessible and better funded, computer-generated music will be cheaper to produce compared to paying a composer to create their music. Due to money, the ability to mimic composers, and perfect computation, music risks losing its meaning and connection to humanity if technology and computer generation are implemented in major musical processes. Additionally, the use of technology may diminish the role of the composer or music producer and, in a more extreme case, eliminate them.

Xenakis is an excellent example of modern composers using algorithms, specifically computer programming, to generate music. Xenakis describes a process in which he uses computation to analyze the most "successful" parts of the music he creates that generate an expressive reward and emotional connection, thus revolutionizing the creative process to be more efficient and generally have more quality (Hamman 120). To achieve this effect, Xenakis would analyze the similarities between the music passages that people seemed to enjoy the most. He was also an engineer and appreciated mathematics. Today, many associate math with being highly detailed and structured, leaving no room for creativity. However, Xenakis saw the bridge between geometry and art/music as an opportunity for enthusiasts to appreciate its validity and beauty (Hamman 120). He believed mathematics could find the perfect balance between settling on an idea and being able to elaborate and create, just as a composer would typically consider. Xenakis claimed that using artificial intelligence to compose the more tedious algorithmic fragments of his works allowed him to flourish in creativity rather than having to compute everything himself (Hamman 121). Artificial intelligence and computing can become the base from which composers may flourish in aesthetics and creativity.

Using computers and artificial intelligence has revolutionized the connection between art and mathematics. Additionally, composers have reached a "highly mathematized tonal space" (Povilioniene 16). For instance, Bach's canon from *Musikalisches Offer, BWV*

1019 is highly similar to a Möbius strip found in mathematics. The equation and the canon are similar because they are both, in essence, palindromes. Composer Gary Lee Nelson (1940-present) uses fractal algorithms to create minimalist three-voice compositions. Some composers have used equations and fractions to shift metric accents and thus the beat and sense of pulse in the piece of music. All of these samples are composers using mathematics to generate a creative solution to a proposed problem in the music.

Mozart, Bach, and Xenakis each use algorithms to generate a piece of music. These processes were initially done by hand, and in Xenakis's time, by computer to increase efficiency. Generated music is not much different from humans using algorithms anyways, as computers merely speed up the process of computing. Even in Xenakis's case, who used some artificial intelligence, he could calculate the mathematics of the AI by hand. In considering this, computer-generated music is just what a composer could do by hand, just revolutionized to be more efficient.

Computing the logistics of a piece, such as form, chords, and harmony, eliminates a painstakingly long part of the composition process. For example, if a computer lays a piece's foundation, a composer has the opportunity and time to explore melody. Alternatively, if the computer generates a melody, a composer has the time to spare to explore chords and harmonies. This framework applies to all aspects of creating a piece without considering performance interpretation and cues. Because the computer offers the composer a strict framework, they must be more creative in completing the other aspects of the piece and inserting their interpretation and voice into the work. Laying out different tedious elements of the creative process makes it more efficient, allowing composers to thrive in their creativity.

While a computer program can allow a composer to compose creative pieces more efficiently, the question remains if the computer can take over the role of the composer. Returning to EvoComposer's ability to mimic Bach offers a primary focus for such a discussion. This program is strictly modeled after an existing composer with an established voice and style. Most other computing and algorithmic methods supplement a composer during their creative process. Thus, the software is only successful because it is copying a clearly existing style, so the software is nearly an extension of Bach himself. Now, most composers have a voice and a style, but they are not nearly as strict as Bach's was, so it is safe to assume that modern composers will not be replaced by a computer that can mimic them. Additionally, the program follows a set of rules and guidelines that a composer already followed. The algorithmic program is not likely to be better than a human composer because that composer must program it according to their existing ideas and processes. The algorithm could never produce a piece that is better than what the person creating the algorithm could. However, it could produce more efficiently, so it can be a powerful tool in helping a composer who can describe their composition process in algorithms. The creative process is reformed with advancing technology to help composers become more efficient and innovative in their music.

Xenakis described using algorithms and mathematics in his music because he wanted to understand music on a more fundamental level, such as why certain frequency combinations may be pleasing to the ear. While most performers study the technique of their instrument for years to produce a beautiful, colorful, and expressive sound, Xenakis sought to understand the technique of music and, further, sound itself (Hamman 120). He began to search for the truth in the beauty of music. Michael Hamman explains, "Xenakis sought to engineer a collision between the centripetal force of sonic matter and the centrifugal force of human meditation" (Hamman 120). Essentially, this means he strived to take the material, primarily mathematical, and to make it matter, an actualization and manifestation of the concept through sound. Xenakis describes his creative process by using artificial intelligence, stating it would not be possible to formulate these highly detailed compositions without the help of competition because one would be "bogged" down with quantifying the data by oneself (Hamman 120). Hamman describes the process:

> Programming projects self-referential activity into an all-referential realm, allowing humans to clearly realize (or perhaps knowingly reject) otherwise invisible qualities of their own thinking and activity (122).

He can hone his creativity because artificial intelligence takes care of the tedious parts of computation in algorithmic composition. Returning to the question, does his music still generate an emotional connection and reward? Xenakis's music may still generate connection and reward as he was passionate about achieving the highly mathematical tonal space and studying the bare foundation of sound in his composition. In the case of Xenakis, he recognized the benefits of advancing technology on his creative process, and none of his highly lauded work would be possible without computer generation.

In the past, when music was not recorded, most performances were live and very social events. Since then, music has not lost its social aspect. For example, music is often played in the background at a dinner party, or attending big concerts and festivals is still widely popular. In the past, some participation in the production of music occurred, such as requesting a theme to be improvised or playing duets together on the piano. In modern times, the listener participates by choosing the volume or order of songs when listening. In 2007, De Jaegher H and Di Paolo E researched the connection between music and the listener (Maes 81). They found that music provides the most influence and connection when listeners use their senses and interact socially. An experiment, later called "Soundbikes," was created based on this concept in which two people cycled together. Computer-generated music was produced and played in real-time, depending on their biking patterns. This experiment demonstrated the importance of music affecting multiple senses, such as the physical exertion of cycling and producing music (Maes 91). The Soundbikes experiment also demonstrated the social aspect of participating in music with others, despite the music being created by artificial intelligence. Overall, this study shows that even computer-generated music can have meaning and fulfill a person's need for the social enjoyment of music just as well as a composer can. However, different steps may need to be considered to achieve this.

China is experiencing a need for more composers, but not enough people to fill the demand for music. There has been a higher demand due to the fast production of media and content, such as video games, animation, and video platforms which all require original music (Wang 1). A rising issue is that the high demand for music means more commissions for composers, so the production cost goes up, and only the wealthier companies can afford original music. Because of this issue, a Neural Network algorithm was created to analyze generated music that used artificial intelligence for quality control (Wang 2). This program has the potential to lighten the load that composers bear, such as relieving the tedious work so they may work more creatively, also making the process more efficient. It also can allow non-composers to create their own music more scientifically to ensure the integrity and quality of the music they are producing. This model goes into extreme depth and calculations, so further research must be done to make the program more efficient and genuine. This research ensures that computer-generated music can mimic the emotions composers want a listener to feel, so there will be no loss in quality or intention behind the music.

We have discussed four significant points in considering if music loses its meaning and connection to humanity when technology and computer generation are implemented in major musical processes. One, algorithmic composition has already existed for centuries, and computer programming merely speeds up the process. Two, algorithmic composition and computer generation can allow composers to thrive in their creativity. Third, artificial intelligence can make the process more efficient, thus allowing for greater quality and quantity of music to be produced. Fourth, computer generation can still fulfill an emotional and social connection, leading to no loss of intention behind a song. In these discoveries, it is also recognized that composition will become more accessible to everyone, and more voices and perspectives may be heard. With artificial intelligence, a composer's job is more efficient so that a composer may be less overworked and quality of life and music may increase. In considering the effects of advancements in technology on the human race, Andrew Feenberg says, "We should engender for ourselves a nation of technology that empowers a broader range of human participation, in terms of design, philosophy, education, and application." While most people will continue to listen to their favorite popular songs, computer generation has the potential to affect popular genres of music as well. Advancing technology and computer generation has the potential for increasing meaning and connection to humanity when implemented in major creative musical processes. ❑

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Can You Afford to Survive? The Diabetes Diagnosis

Michelle Bartlett

About the Author

Michelle Bartlett grew up in Tri-Cities, Washington where she spent much of her time dancing, playing the viola, and reading. Michelle is now attending USU where she is majoring in History with an emphasis in Teaching and minoring in Psychology Teaching and Geography Teaching.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about this topic because it is something that has impacted my life for years, as I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes when I was 13-years-old. This is an issue that not only affects me and my family, but millions of diabetics everywhere. I felt like I could have kept writing for pages and pages more, but wanted to highlight the most important ideas.

This essay was composed in April 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

As of 2022, synthetic insulin is one of the most expensive liquids on Earth. Listed at $9,400 per gallon, it is the seventh most expensive behind liquids such as horseshoe crab blood and LSD (RankRed). Of the top 10 most expensive liquids, insulin is the only one that some people need to keep themselves alive. Without insulin, millions worldwide will die, and it is one of the most expensive liquids in the world. In the United States, many people with diabetes, too many, are paying thousands of dollars every month to afford the insulin they need to survive. Despite efforts from the government and individual companies, this issue is devastating lives and needs to be addressed.

To better understand this issue, it is important first to understand what diabetes is and why insulin is necessary. In an article from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a reliable and reputable source that provides information on a wide span of diseases, the author goes through the basics of diabetes and provides a substantial background to understand the issue of the necessity of insulin. Simply put, “Diabetes… affects how your body turns food into energy” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). For a person with diabetes, their body either cannot properly make or cannot properly use its insulin, which allows the body to use its sugar and convert it into energy. While there is no cure, diabetes, “the seventh leading cause of death in the United States,” can be managed through medication, healthy eating, and exercise (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

Type 1 Diabetes, affecting 5-10% of diabetics, is an autoimmune reaction that prevents the pancreas from producing the necessary insulin. Type 2 Diabetes, affecting 90-95% of diabetics, prevents the body from using the insulin it produces and is most often associated with unhealthy weight and lifestyle. Contrary to Type 1, typically diagnosed in childhood and adolescence, Type 2 is primarily diagnosed in adults with an increasingly young population. There are approximately 37.3 million people with diabetes in the United States and approximately 1.6 million people with Type 1 Diabetes in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation). Along with Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes, Gestational Diabetes can also exist during pregnancy. As with the other types of diabetes, the body of a person with gestational diabetes cannot properly use its insulin, resulting in high blood sugars (Mayo Clinic). All Type 1 Diabetics require prescribed insulin and some Type 2 Diabetics (EndocrineWeb). This argument will focus on Type 1 Diabetics because, as previously mentioned, all Type 1 Diabetics need insulin to survive.

Insulin is a necessary hormone produced by the pancreas in normally functioning bodies that

> controls the amount of glucose in your bloodstream at any given moment… helps store glucose in your liver, fat, and muscles… [and] regulates your body’s metabolism of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. (EndocrineWeb)

Without insulin function, the amount of glucose in the bloodstream cannot be controlled, and the body's metabolism cannot be regulated. When the body intakes carbohydrates, fats, and protein through eating, the pancreas releases insulin that absorbs the sugar and allows it to be transformed into energy for the body to use. In the bodies of non-diabetics, specifically non-Type 1 Diabetics, the islets of Langerhans, cells on the pancreas, produce this insulin and the stimulant hormone, glucagon, which stimulates the liver to produce more sugar. The islets of Langerhans of Type 1 Diabetics no longer function, and the diabetic is now responsible for providing the body with insulin and glucagon when necessary.

When a person with diabetes goes without insulin or has insufficient amounts of insulin, the body begins to go into diabetic ketoacidosis, or DKA, a severe medical condition that requires immediate treatment. The body resorts to breaking down the body's fat for energy because of the lack of insulin. Without insulin production or injection of synthetic insulin over an extended period, the body will die. On this, Dr. Silvio Inzucchi, "clinical director of the Yale Diabetes Center," said

I will see that in someone with 0% insulin production, they'll begin to fall ill within 12-24 hours after their last insulin injection, depending on its duration of effect. Within 24-48 hours they'll be in DKA. Beyond that, mortal outcomes would likely occur within days to perhaps a week or two. But I could not see someone surviving much longer than that. (Healthline)

When diabetics cannot afford their insulin and run out of the insulin they need, it is only a matter of hours before they begin to feel the effects. This is not a situation where they can go about their lives feeling slightly ill for a week or two before they can afford their insulin again. It is a matter of life and death.

When scientists discovered the link between diabetes and damaged insulin-producing cells in 1808, they began working on another source of insulin. Their original solution was insulin from cattle and pigs. After it was proven to work in diabetics, it began to be produced and sold in mass quantities. Of course, this new medication came with some side effects that were less than ideal, such as allergic reactions to the drug. Over time, the drug was made safer, but a better solution was still needed. In the 1970s, scientists discovered a way to produce synthetic insulin through recombinant DNA technology. In the case of many other new medications, the companies making it will leave the cheaper and more accessible animal-based products on the market while they introduce the newer and more advanced medications. With insulin, however, this was not the case. Once this new technology was produced, the original animal insulin practically disappeared off the market. While it can be found in some other countries, such as Canada, it cannot be found in the United States. Diabetics in the United States, an estimated 29 million, are left with the option of buying the expensive and more recently developed technology (National Public Radio).

In an article by The Lancet, a website dedicated to maintaining the “highest standards for medical science,” the author reviews the beginnings of insulin production and the early competition in the market (The Lancet). Eli Lilly's insulin prices in 1923 were a mere 3.5% of what they were by 1942. The three companies that produced insulin on the market at the time, Eli Lilly & Co, Sharp and Dohme Inc, and E. R. Squibb & Sons, as well as their executives, were charged with violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, prohibiting "activities that restrict interstate commerce and competition in the marketplace," in July of 1941 because of their price-fixing of insulin (Cornell Law School). By 1946 however, the prices had already risen another 50%. The companies justified this rise with the increasing prices of cattle and pig pancreases, but many speculated that profit gain was the primary culprit (The Lancet).

Now, a three-part oligopoly controls the insulin production industry. An oligopoly is when only a few businesses or corporations have complete or almost complete control over an industry. These three companies, Novo Nordisk, Sanofi, and Eli Lilly & Co, control 96% of the insulin industry by volume and 99% by value (The Lancet).

According to a FiercePharma article written by author Beth Snyder Bulik, who has written many articles for websites such as FiercePharma, Advertising Age, and Endpoints News, some of these corporations have made notable efforts to reduce prices for their customers. After hearing complaints from stakeholders about the lack of affordability of their insulin, Novo Nordisk agreed to develop a plan to make their products more accessible. The company began an emergency supply program where people with diabetes at risk for insulin rationing can get a one-time, one-month supply of insulin. They have also begun the My$99Insulin program, where people with diabetes who meet certain requirements are eligible to pay only $99 for a one-month supply of insulin. Sanofi has a similar $99-per-month subscription plan (FiercePharma).

Despite these efforts, there is still much progress to be made. For example, in an article published in late 2021, "25% of the seven million insulin patients in the United States… struggle with its high costs" (Health Policy Watch). That is approximately 1,750,000 people; some have gone to great lengths to obtain their necessary and life-saving medication.

Only a few years ago, a Tennessee family could not afford their mortgage payments and the insulin their daughter, Ila Adcock, needed to live (The Lancet). They sold their home, one they had built "from the ground up" (FOX 17). This was the length this family had to go to afford the medication their daughter needed to survive. Fortunately, Ila's family is now in a more stable financial situation. Ila's mother, Shannon, shared some of her feelings about the high cost of insulin and how it has affected her family. "She hopes for a day when a diabetic's life expectancy isn't determined by how much is in their wallet" (FOX 17). Unfortunately, this is one of the more fortunate scenarios to result from the lack of access to insulin. Despite resorting to selling their home, the Adcocks ended up better off than many other families in similar predicaments.

In 2017, the lack of access to affordable insulin resulted in the death of 26-year-old Alec Holt. Alec was 24 years old when he was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, which is more on the older end of the spectrum for a diagnosis. The transition into full-time diabetes management "was a big adjustment," but Alec worked to keep his diabetes under control and rose to the challenge (PBS). When he was 26 years old, he moved out of his parents' home and into his own apartment. Alec was aging out of his parents' health insurance and had recently received a raise that would prevent him from receiving help from patient assistant programs or Affordable Care subsidies. He was struggling to afford his insulin, which, without his parents' insurance, cost approximately $1,300, but he chose to ration what he had and not tell his family. He planned to continue like this until he got paid and could afford more insulin. Seven days after his mother, Nicole Smith-Holt, had last seen him, his body was found in his apartment. Because his body was not receiving enough insulin, he went into diabetic ketoacidosis and died shortly after (PBS).

Two years later, in 2019, 21-year-old Jesimya "Jesy" David Scherer-Radcliff suffered the same fate as Holt. In an article written by Jesy's mother, Cindy Boyd, on the blog T1International, we learn that Jesy was first diagnosed at age 10. On April 3, 2019, Jesy called his family and asked them to pick up his insulin prescription from the pharmacy for him. He had run out and resorted to insulin rationing while waiting for his next paycheck and had become incredibly sick in the meantime. His family rushed him to the hospital after seeing his deteriorated condition, and he was able to recover and return home. In June of the same year, he called in sick to work. When his mother found this out, she tried unsuccessfully to contact him throughout the day. By the time she got to his apartment, Jesy's roommate had called 911, but Jesy was already dead. The same month Jesy died due to insulin rationing, four other *known* deaths were due to the same cause.

People with diabetes in the United States resort to insulin rationing for many reasons. When people with diabetes turn 26 years old, they are removed from their parents' insurance and are left to get their own or go without insurance, as was the case in Alec Holt's situation. Others receive pay raises that put them just above the maximum requirement for receiving Affordable Care subsidies, even though they still need the assistance. In many other cases, people with diabetes receive pay cuts that prevent them from affording their medications, similar to what happened to Jesy-Sherer Radcliffe.

These stories are both daunting and terrifying. These people and their families were hard-working and resilient individuals. They were normal people leading normal lives. Unfortunately, these are just three of the countless stories of people who have had to take drastic measures or have died because of the high cost of insulin. And this is not a recent issue. In 1939, 45-year-old Josephine Tomasovic resorted to illegally selling alcohol to have enough money to buy the insulin she needed and was later arrested (The Lancet). Tomasovic's story shows that this is an issue that has been occurring for years.

Insulin and other diabetes-related supplies are frequently sold on the black market because this is the only way they can be accessed for some. Many also resort to traveling outside the country to purchase more affordable insulin. For example, my family and I drove to Surrey in British Columbia, Canada in February of 2020, just before the world shut down for the COVID-19 pandemic. We had yet to meet our annual insurance deductible and needed to buy more insulin. If we were to have purchased a one-month supply at our local pharmacy in the United States, it would have cost us around $1,500 for the insulin alone. By traveling to Canada, we purchased a three-month supply for between $500 and $600. The cost of insulin in Canada was 11% of the cost in the United States. And we are not the only family to have done this. Some will also cross the border into Mexico. According to an article from Kaiser Health News, Michelle Fenner, whose son has Type 1 Diabetes, decided to do just this. To purchase a three-month supply of insulin in the United States, she would have needed to pay around $3,700, while it would cost only $600 in Mexico (Kaiser Health News). Unfortunately, once the COVID-19 shut-downs were in effect, we could not simply drive across the border to purchase insulin because of the border closures. My family and countless others were left to buy insulin solely in the United States at the prices offered at local pharmacies.

Something needs to be done about these issues. Something needs to be done to make insulin more affordable to those who need it to survive. According to Dr. Kevin Riggs, a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University, possible explanations for the high costs are constant efforts to improve insulin and the lack of a generic option (National Public Radio). One way this price reduction may occur is through the production of biosimilars. Insulin patents have begun to expire in recent years. Once these patents expire, other companies can produce insulin that works almost exactly the same as the original and sell it for a significantly lower price. One example is Basaglar, a biosimilar version of Sanofi's long-acting insulin, Lantus. Basaglar functions like Lantus but has a lower sales price than the original. It is important to note that "the FDA does not refer to Basaglar as being a biosimilar" (Prescription Hope). For a medication to be labeled as a biosimilar by the FDA, the original drug must be introduced under the Affordable Care Act, which Lantus was not (Prescription Hope). The price difference between Lantus and Basaglar, without insurance, is $99, with Lantus priced at $425 for five pens and Basaglar priced at $326 for five pens (Prescription Hope). With insurance, however, Basaglar could cost as little as $10 for five pens. While Basaglar is still expensive when paid for without insurance, it is still cheaper than Lantus and is a substantial step in the right direction.

Once more insulin patents expire, there may be increased competition and accessibility to these drugs (The Lancet). However, there may not be as dramatic a price difference as one hopes for. When generic versions are made of other medications on the market, there is often a price reduction of 80%. However, insulin costs might be reduced by 40% (National Public Radio). While this is a significant statistic and improvement, the products are still expensive.

In an article by the Endocrine Society, the authors discuss some ideas of what should be done in terms of legislation. They propose the following policy changes: greater transparency in the industry, "limit[ing] future list price increases," "allow[ing] government negotiation," limiting out-of-pocket costs, eliminating rebates, speeding the process of insulin biosimilar approval, providing current benefit information, and developing a payment plan for those on certain Medicare plans to reduce copays. The article takes a professional and formal stance on the changes it believes should be made.

The issue of high insulin prices needs to be addressed, whether through the production of biosimilars, price-capping legislation, or more emergency supplies. Insulin prices and the lack of legislation surrounding them are affecting millions of diabetics in the United States, and there should not need to be another tragic story to convince others of this. ❑

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Alternatives to the Fast Fashion Frenzy

Jeff Blotter

About the Author

Jeffrey Blotter was born in Centerville, Utah. He is a freshman studying Biology. For fun, Blotter likes to snowboard and hang out with friends.

In His Words: The Author on His Writing

I chose to write about this topic because I have grown up buying from fast fashion companies. As it has become more prevalent, I have wondered what the true ethics are behind it. Then, I wondered if it is unethical, what could I do to find other cheap options while not sacrificing good style. These questions guided my research and produced the essay that I have now.

This essay was composed in April 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

With the rise in popularity of the musical genre K-pop, famous members of the industry have become idols to youth. These K-pop stars are influencers that are looked up to by the young audience of the world. While the actions of these celebrities are mimicked by their followers, the clothing of these celebrities is, likewise, mimicked. In fact, some clothing pieces worn in K-pop music videos experience sell-outs quickly because the popularity of such items skyrockets just after the videos are posted. One such K-pop group, BTS, has risen to this level of influence. However, instead of supporting the typical trend of selling and advertising clothing brands, BTS speaks out against some fashion trends. In their music video "Spring Day," BTS shows the negative in the overproduction and waste of clothing as they are seen performing atop a ginormous pile of clothing waste (Kim). These influencers raise this issue, which to many activists has a primary cause: fast fashion.

Fast fashion is cheap, trendy clothing that takes ideas from celebrities and runways and is put into stores to reach consumers quickly. This rapid spread helps new styles get to the market as soon as possible while still popular. However, consumers often discard articles of these styles after a few wears once the popularity dies down. This practice causes a large consumption of resources and results in fashion being a significant polluter. However, fast fashion has not been around forever. As technology improved, clothing became faster and easier to produce. This easy production opened the doors of fashion to more consumers. By the 1960s, clothing had become a form of self-expression (Rauturier). One major reason that clothing has become faster and cheaper for companies is the movement of production to be large-scale and offshore (Marriott). In the 1990s and 2000s, low-cost fashion climaxed. This era is when fast fashion took over. Companies like H&M started stealing looks and designs from high fashion and reproducing them quicker and cheaper than their competitors, making these styles available to almost anyone. Soon, this methodology caught on (Rauturier).

The methodology of fast fashion has become especially supported by college students. Fast fashion is an easy option for students to dress in the latest styles without overburdening a tight budget. Overall, college students tend to be poor. A study by the American Psychological Association was performed on 43,000 students at various colleges across the U.S. This study showed that 36% of college students have food and housing insecurity as of 2019 (Reppond). While these students do not have enough for these aspects of life, they also may not have enough to wear designer clothes. Meanwhile, fast fashion offers these similar styles at a budgeted cost for these poor students. So, it would be reasonable to buy from and support this industry as a college student.

It has been proven that many college students shop from these fast fashion retailers. In a survey carried out in 2018 by the Deloitte Center for Industry Insights, fast fashion and mass merchants, another form of quick and cheap production, were quite popular amongst families preparing for college. This online survey polled 1,025 U.S. parents preparing their children for college. Though the parents were paying and being polled, the survey showed that students strongly influenced what the parents bought (U.S.). Surveyors asked families from low-, middle-, and high-income households to participate. Each parent was asked in the survey where they preferred to do their back-to-college shopping for their students' clothing. The results of this survey show that just about half of the parents preferred the quick and cheap production of fast fashion and mass merchants, with 22% preferring fast fashion specifically (U.S.). This survey shows that fast fashion is popular, even for college students who have parental support. It does not show, however, the popularity of fast fashion amongst the students that do not have the luxury of this support. Without extra monetary support, the cheap cost of fast fashion may become ever more appealing to the college student. Either way, the fast fashion industry has become a popular choice for college students who tend to need cheaper alternatives for clothing due to money insecurity.

Though fast fashion seems like a logical industry for college students, it should not be supported because it is unethical. With the rise of this method of producing clothing, there has been an increase in clothing consumption, waste, pollution, and worker exploitation. Thus, it is bad for the environment and those working to produce these materials.

Many studies show a significant increase in clothing consumption and waste, proving how unethical fast fashion can be. According to *The Guardian*, consumers buy 60% more clothes than they did fifteen years ago. Shoppers are buying more of this cheap clothing that has half the lifespan (Marriott). With this increase in consumption comes the increase in waste. As styles quickly come in and out, these seemingly new clothes can get thrown out by those trying to keep up with the fashion industry. Even in college, one hears students complain of not being able to wear a shirt or pants because it is out of style now. Once those clothes stop getting worn, they can end up attributing to the waste on the planet.

A lot of this clothing ends up as waste. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, clothing waste more than doubled from 6.47 million tons to 12.97 million tons between 2000 and 2018 ("Textiles: Material-Specific Data"). This data shows that the increase in clothing production and consumption has occurred at the same time as a great increase in waste, as well. Of the 12.97 million tons of clothing waste in 2018, only 1.69 million tons were recycled. Meanwhile, 9.07 million tons ended up in landfills ("Textiles: Material-Specific Data"). The U.S. alone added this much to landfills in just one year. Fast fashion continues to add to the growth of waste within landfills because it supports the overconsumption of clothes. However, the growing landfills are not the only problem that comes with the production, consumption, and waste of fast fashion clothing.

In addition to the growth of waste, the companies involved in fast fashion are polluting the environment. With clothing filling landfills, these growing landfills produce more greenhouse gases, significantly contributing to climate change (Vasarhelyi). However, this negative impact of growing landfills is not the only issue with fast fashion companies. To speed up production, said companies are cutting environmental corners, including using toxic textile dyes that pollute clean water globally. They also use polyester from fossil fuels, which means that polyester production is another player in global warming (Rauturier). Quick production of all these clothes pollutes more and more water and air. Worse, it contributes more to global warming. While being harsh on the environment, the fast fashion industry has other problems.

The next issue with fast fashion is the worker exploitation that it entails. Many fast fashion companies have moved to offshore production, where they can take advantage of cheaper labor costs and looser regulations (Marriott). Here, companies force production workers to work in dangerous environments, with low wages and without many human rights (Rauturier). These crowded work environments risk the lives of employees. Doing this allows fast fashion apparel companies to still profit from selling their products at such low costs. These businesses have ensured that the cheaper prices don't hurt them but their laborers. However, something must be done to stop these adverse effects of fast fashion.

On a larger scale, some governments are acting to regulate the fashion industry. According to the news agency NPR, The European Union is producing regulations against fast fashion. The union has claimed that the manufacturing process involved in this business model uses increasing amounts of fossil fuels, contributing to the worsening of the environment. To slow this, the E.U. aims to establish standards for the durability and reusability of clothing. Moreover, bans would be put in place against the destruction of unsold articles of clothing (Hernandez). Though these ideas are still in the proposal stage, the European Union is at least making headway. This progress will hopefully make the fashion industry more ethical and better for the environment. Moreover, the E.U. is not the only group working against the poor ethics of fast fashion.

Another group of individuals taking a stand against fast fashion are celebrities and influencers. For many fast fashion companies, youth make up the largest demographic of consumers. So, these companies have been making advertisements to appeal to this group. While fast fashion companies target young adults, many influencers and celebrities are fighting back. Some of these influencers even take to social media to post about ethical fashion ideas, hoping to inspire their followers to break away from the fast fashion industry (Horton). Celebrities are trying to encourage alternatives to fast fashion as role models for young and college-aged adults. In their same music video, BTS supports the idea of recycling goods when the member Jimin picks up a used pair of sneakers on the beach. Jimin then brings these sneakers with him to the laundromat to clean used clothes, hinting that these sneakers were being saved for further use (Horton). By joining BTS, many performers also push these alternatives, producing music and videos to publicize their messages. Due to this publicity about the poor ethics of fast fashion, youth are starting to understand this. However, they continue to buy from fast fashion companies despite believing against the companies' ethics (Horton).

This continued purchasing of fast fashion raises the issue that some young adults, especially those in college, might not know of good alternatives to fast fashion. Nevertheless, the website "Good on You" offers one solution. According to the website, shoppers can buy from sustainable brands, one of which is the company MUD. MUD jeans are a product that comes from recycled and organic cotton. These jeans can also be recycled back to the company once the wearers are done with them. Also, the company strives to have fair working conditions for its workers (Wolfe). However, the side effect of all this is higher prices. When bought new, many articles of clothing from sustainable brands can be considerably more expensive when compared to those of fast fashion, meaning that the average college student may not be able to afford to buy from these brands directly. Fortunately, there are other options for those who cannot afford to buy from sustainable brands.

The next option to explore is the community of buy-sell-trade groups. These groups have websites where you can buy quality used clothes from others (Fang). The community helps prevent the unnecessary throwing out of quality clothing while providing this clothing at an affordable price to the consumer. A quick search on Google will pull up some websites that offer this. A college student or anyone looking to save money could participate in these groups.

Like buy-sell-trade groups, thrift stores, flea markets, and garage sales are good options for buying used clothing. Common thrift stores in Utah, like Goodwill or Deseret Industries, take donated clothing and other goods. These stores quality check their donations to ensure that they do not sell anything unwearable. Flea markets and garage sales also exhibit these cheaper prices, making all three locations good possibilities for finding affordable clothing.

The next alternatives to fast fashion do not involve buying clothing at all. Besides buying clothing, one can borrow or swap clothes, fix or upcycling clothes, or double-check the closet. Borrowing and swapping clothes with friends or relatives can be a quick solution to change one's style. When looking for a piece to go with one's outfit, borrowing from someone else is a free but temporary fix (Fang). Working with what one already has is also a good practice. Sometimes, a favorite t-shirt or pants might get a rip. Instead of replacing it, a wearer can fix it. If they do not know how to sew, then going to a sewist can be cheaper than buying a new piece altogether. Finally, double-checking the closet can keep one from doing any added work. Awareness of and using all the clothing in the closet or dresser will reduce the need to buy new styles (Fang). Often, wearing what one likes instead of what is trendy will keep them from unneeded additions to the wardrobe. Altogether, these all can be alternatives to buying from the fast fashion industry.

Although fast fashion provides trendy clothing at an affordable price to college students who otherwise may not be able to afford trendy clothing, the industry proves to be unethical. The rise in fast fashion has also caused an increase in clothing consumption, waste, pollution, and worker exploitation. Luckily, governments and celebrities are speaking out against these poor ethics. To avoid contributing to the problems associated with this industry, we, as college students, can buy from more sustainable brands. We can participate in buy-sell-trade groups. We can practice thrifting, go to flea markets and garage sales, and fix or upcycle clothing. We can borrow or swap and double-check the closet for items we already have. By doing so, we can slow the fast fashion frenzy. ❑

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Approaching the Gender Gap in Engineering

Mia Bradshaw

About the Author

Maria Bradshaw (more commonly known as Mia) was born and raised in Orem, Utah. She came to Utah State University to study Environmental Engineering. She loves sports and music, more specifically soccer and piano.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about women in engineering because engineering is my major. This topic is extremely important because in order to solve problems, such as large gender gaps, there needs to be awareness and understanding of the problem first.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses MLA documentation.

In Calculus 2, one of the main topics students study is infinite series. They learn what an infinite series is, the different types, and, much to their dismay, how to test a series. When presented with a question regarding an infinite series, students are required to use one of eight tests to find whether the series diverges or converges. Sometimes, a student may choose a test and start solving the problem only to find that the test is inconclusive. Rather than forcing that test to work, the best strategy is to rewrite the series in a different form to change the method. In other words, it's best to use a different approach to solve the problem.

One of the biggest problems within the engineering field that has persisted for many years is the gender gap between men and women. According to the United States Census, "Women made gains – from 8% of STEM workers in 1970 to 27% in 2019 – but men still dominated the field" (Bureau). While the gap has decreased significantly, women remain the minority by a landslide. There have been increased efforts to diversify the field, including events advertising women in STEM and a larger opportunity for women to study math and science. Yet, the numbers have almost stagnated, only increasing by about 2% since 2017 ("Women in STEM"). Although there is advocacy for women in engineering, the approach needs to change because it currently marginalizes women, and the environment does not allow women to develop in the field. Therefore, engineering loses the advantages that come from diversity, such as increased perspectives in problem-solving situations.

To solve the problem, it is necessary first to understand the problem. When analyzing the gender gap within engineering, it is common to observe how many women are actually joining the field to see if the issue lies within exposure to engineering. P.D. Schreuders, an engineering professor, conducted a study in which he interviewed engineers to explore their views on the field regarding gender. Going into the study, he had a preconceived notion that “the gender gap in science and engineering exists because few women take science and math prior to college” (Schreuders). So, the accepted explanation is that women don’t enter engineering because they don’t take the classes necessary to expose them to the field. Yet, the overarching reason women join the field is that they enjoyed math and science courses in high school (Silbey), meaning that women are not only introduced to math and science but also excel in those areas. Schreuders’ study found that anywhere from 4%-10% more women took science than men. After taking those courses before entering college, women may become interested in pursuing a career that uses the knowledge gained from those subjects, leading them to study engineering.

While increased exposure to math and science is one of the most prominent reasons women join engineering, there are other leading reasons. A group of psychology and education professors conducted a study to investigate why fewer women were in actual engineering careers. After interviewing many women, the professors observed that before deciding to study engineering in college, the women’s families encouraged them to go into the field because they excelled in math and science during high school (Saavedra). Not only are women encouraged by their families to enter the field, but an increased outreach due to Title IX encourages women as well. Title IX is an education amendment to the constitution that dictates that there must be no discrimination based on sex in any education program (U.S.). After this legislation, the engineering field saw a slight increase in diversity (Cater-Steel). Between taking the proper courses to be exposed to engineering in high school and being encouraged by others, there is no apparent shortage of women joining engineering. Therefore it can be reasoned that the gender gap comes from women leaving the field either while studying or after entering their careers.

Rather than continually looking at the lack of women joining as the issue, the focus should shift to other aspects of women in engineering, such as women leaving the field. There are just as many reasons why they leave engineering as there are reasons that they joined it. One of the main reasons women choose to leave engineering is because it did not meet their expectations. Before going into engineering, women often think that they will be helping people through their work. However, further into an engineering major or career shows a greater emphasis on fixing things rather than directly helping people. The focus on material things causes some women to leave because the reality of the workforce does not align with their expectations (Silbey). While the work itself won't change to deal with fewer "things," professors and advisors could clarify what the career would actually entail. With more observation, unmet expectations seem to be one of the more minor causes for women leaving engineering.

Women may also leave the field due to being treated poorly. Joanna Wolfe, a professor in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Carnegie Mellon, conducted a study in which she surveyed women on their experiences throughout their engineering education. One of the findings of this study was that "over half of the engineering undergraduates... reported problems with 'alpha,' or domineering, teammates who dismissed their input or excluded them from participating" (Wolfe). When working with their male counterparts throughout their education, women experienced being ignored and excluded from different projects and research. The women went unheard and were often only given small or secretarial tasks because someone in their group, often a male, would take over the actual problem-solving. These women were not respected during their education, causing some to leave. When women experience exclusion, they often report significant self-doubt and low confidence with little to no reassurance from those around them in the classroom (Wolfe; Rogers). If someone does not feel confident in a field, they will often leave it in pursuit of something they can find real confidence in.

While being treated poorly is a leading cause, perhaps the most significant reason women leave engineering is the environment within the field. The environment is structured in a way that does not allow women to develop unless they are willing to shift their ideals to those of the engineering world. At its base, engineering is a highly logical, research, and project-based field. Those within engineering usually avoid political and feeling-involved issues such as the gender gap (Beddoes). This avoidance is shown when bringing the inclusion of minorities into question is seen as a distraction to the actual work to be done. Engineering also revolves around a core value of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the idea that someone will get to a place of higher power based on their ability and skills. Another key aspect of the environment within engineering is that it is predominantly male, hence the gender gap issue. Because of this, masculine paradigms set the tone within a workspace. A study conducted by a group of sociology professors found that women recognize their marginalization and, after doing so, “respond to their status by adopting the norms and expectations of the majority group” (Seron). Once women acknowledge their low status in engineering, they start accepting this status as well as adopting the characteristics surrounding them. In other words, women will more voluntarily take the secretarial tasks of a project and start depending more entirely on logos to show less emotion. Showing less emotion is beneficial to women because they are seen as weaker when acting in perceived feminine ways (Wolfe).

Besides a predominantly masculine environment, further investigation shows that it is usual for men to stick with men and women to stick with women in group projects because “they are placing a higher value on social comfort and familiarity over wider brainpower and intellectual inputs” (Cater-Steel). It is easier to stick with what’s familiar, and especially for women in engineering, they stick around those they may feel more confident around. This separation between men and women takes away from the ability to problem solve because when people of different backgrounds and statuses work together, there are more perspectives to work with.

When it comes to working within this male dominant, logical, and meritocratic environment, women in engineering have their own approach on how to advocate for themselves in difficult situations with their male colleagues. Another aspect of Joanna Wolfe's study observed the way professional engineers dealt with a coworker who took over projects or ignored them. The undergraduate women who were still interning often avoided confrontation because they were unsure how to communicate the issue. After being in situations like these, "30% of the female professionals... explicitly state that women should avoid mentioning feelings or emotions" because an emotional approach will "put them at odds with [the] engineering ethos of rational decision-making" (Wolfe). When attempting to solve the issue, some women noticed that if they included how they felt when confronting a colleague, their colleague dismissed the issue as irrelevant. In an environment that holds very closely to a logos approach on everything, bringing emotion into the situation downplays the seriousness of a problem. Once the professional women realized this, they devised a structured way of solving these issues. They advised the undergraduate women to establish procedures and goals for a group at the beginning of a project to avoid being excluded from the work. By setting expectations that the whole group agreed on at the beginning, they were respected throughout that project and the projects and research that came afterward.

Alongside women advocating for themselves in engineering, there is an outside approach for advocacy in hopes of decreasing the gender gap. The current approach for advocacy focuses on increasing the awareness of the gender gap and telling women to stand up for themselves and be more confident (Rogers). Kacey Beddoes, a project director who focuses on gender studies and engineering education, wrote an analysis of how the current approach works. One of the main points she makes is how the approach "studies down" on women. She defines the term "studying down" by explaining, "the interventions undertaken and the research based on them have largely ignored social and institutional structures, opting instead to focus on 'fixing' students from underrepresented groups" (Beddoes). Rather than looking at the issues within the field, the minority is the problem. It is unusual for the approach to involve the idea that the majority and institutions allow the gender gap to persist. This concept is similar to the idea that the gender gap exists because not many women are joining the field, yet Schreuders' earlier study found that false. Some women enter engineering, but they are seen as the problem and told to do simple things like gain more confidence to succeed. While this approach did have some effect and continues to introduce engineering to women, it is not enough to close the gender gap because it fails to recognize the problems within the field. So, as students in calculus must change their approach to solving an infinite series, the approach to advocacy for women needs to change as well.

When changing the approach for advocacy and increasing diversity within engineering, one of the biggest arguments against it is that the field has been working fine. It is true that engineering has always been a successful field, and it is a common ideology not to mess with something that is not broken. Nevertheless, the ideas and tools used in engineering are constantly improving and developing, so there is no reason that the type of people who work in the field should remain the same. This isn't to say that anyone who currently works in engineering needs to leave to create space for diversity but that there should be a greater allowance for minorities such as women working in the field as well. There is also the idea inside engineering that diversity will overstep meritocracy (Seron). There is the possibility that an attempt to increase diversity will threaten the reliance on meritocracy. However, it is possible to have a diverse field based on skills and abilities to get somewhere without relying on being a minority. The reward of diversity would be greater than the risks.

That 'reward' would come from increasing diversity, which will provide many benefits to the field as both a major during education and a career. During education, what students gain from that education depends on the work they put into it and the environment that surrounds them. In a study that surveyed students and their perceived gains in knowledge, the conclusion showed that when engineering students had contact with students of different backgrounds, it led to "greater learning gains in domains such as personal/social development, practical competence, and general education" (Strayhorn). The increased diversity allows for more perspectives to work together. When more perspectives work together, not only are more solutions explored, but students also gain more knowledge and growth in different areas. The broader horizon lets new light shed on the situation.

In another study done at Brigham Young University, men and women were put into groups with different ratios of men to women. They were told to decide as a group how to spend a large amount of money. Half of the groups decided based on unanimity, while the other half decided based on majority rule. An analysis of this study found that the groups based on unanimity let the women have more say in how the money was to be spent, while the groups that decided based on majority rule often had a dominant male who convinced everyone else. In addition, the groups that allowed the women to be heard and speak more were significantly more content with their decisions than the other groups (Rogers). So, when more perspectives are heard, a group can come to a decision that's best for more people. The findings of this study also show that basing group decisions on unanimity increases the amount of group participation, which emphasizes the idea discussed earlier that to avoid a single person dominating a project, goals need to be set by the group at the beginning. Although this study focused on the decisions on how to spend money, the principles to be learned from it can apply to any group work in problem-solving situations. Therefore, if engineering were to have more women, the ability to problem solve would significantly increase in research groups.

Engineering has seen a gender gap that has existed for years even after a raised awareness of the problem. The gender gap has persisted due to the environment of the field and the current approach to advocacy for women. The current approach further marginalizes women rather than recognizing the problems within institutions. The environment also does not allow women to thrive and develop unless they are willing to give up their ideals to conform to the logical and meritocratic thinking in the field. Increasing the number of women in engineering would benefit the field, as more diversity will allow for greater problem-solving abilities because there would be more perspectives on problems. Just like a student in a Calculus 2 course needs to change their approach to solving infinite series, the way we approach increasing diversity needs to shift so an actual solution can be found. Not only to fix a gender gap but to improve the field because the best ideas come from broadening horizons, not narrowing them. ❑

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Equality

Trinity Brown

About the Author

Trinity Brown was born in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. She is currently a freshman studying Kinesiology/Pre-Med in hopes of becoming an orthopedic surgeon. Trinity has done gymnastics for 17 years and competes as a gymnast at Utah State. In her free time, Brown likes to spend time with friends and do arts and crafts.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about this topic in order to bring about a sense of awareness. Not just informing others about the life of an African-American female, but shedding a bright light on the mindset and thoughts that may seem vague to others but have the ability to impact an African-American's livelihood. This topic becomes important on a much larger scale within our community because our society constantly promotes equality and an equal opportunity to live life to the fullest, but fails to recognize the disadvantages our country has ingrained within our rules and regulations against people of color. The most challenging thing about writing this essay was diving into the vulnerable part of myself and opening up about what things flow through my head and discussing my past experiences. A part of the essay that I believe needs the most revision is the conclusion/end. My goal is to effectively wrap the essay up by combining everything I discussed previously but also leaving a strong impact on the reader.

This essay was composed in February 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Constantly looking over my shoulder, out of the rear and side view mirrors, being cautious of the pronunciation of each of my words to be sure I am not being targeted solely for the color of my skin. These have become part of my everyday life as an African American woman. Always feeling as if I must walk on eggshells to avoid judgment and being seen as the "angry black woman" while expressing my feelings or defending my beliefs is draining. After years of listening to my parents harp about loving the skin that I am in and embracing my curly hair, I often want to ask: how is it possible to love and accept my skin when the society I live in does not accept it? Despite a world containing approximately 7.5 billion people, all with different mindsets, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and a country whose existence is built purely off of immigrants, we continuously seek to discriminate against people who are more melanated. It is easy to post about advocating for Black Lives Matter and equality of all skin tones on social media. Still, from the perspective of an African American, it becomes hard to believe when you constantly hear about race-based murders and watch your friends and loved ones get beat to their death or singled out because of their skin.

Constant stares, questions, and presumed assumptions about me based on one stereotype have almost become normal. Usage of derogatory slurs and words that target the African American race by others and not receiving punishment for it has become normal.

Systems and structures embedded within the rules and regulations of our society that put Africans at a disadvantage, also known as systemic racism, have been considered normal. The United States of America is known to promote equality, but that cannot be achieved if we continue to turn a blind eye to flaws within the society we live in. The majority of discriminatory behavior stems from ignorance or a lack of understanding of equality. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, equality is *"the quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc."* This definition just barely brushes the surface of what equality essentially is. Equality is about ensuring every individual has an equal and fair chance to make the most of their lives.

My time in high school quite literally resembled the tracks of a roller coaster. There were many ups and downs during my four years there. I went to a private Catholic high school that was predominantly African American, 97 percent to be exact, where the teachers and administrators were predominantly Caucasian, including the school's principal. I constantly heard rumors about the principal not addressing racial comments or slurs being said and sometimes taking part in it, but I had never directly witnessed anything until two months before I graduated. The principal had called a school-wide meeting over zoom, wanting to discuss some of the hate crimes that had taken place recently, along with the Black Lives Matter movement. While in a heated debate where everyone was trying to strongly convey their point of view about the sensitive topic, the principal used the "N" word during her argument. Immediately after hearing what came out of her mouth, I felt a sense of tension fall upon every person on my laptop. A student, our student-body president, then proceeded to inform her that what she said was inappropriate, uncalled for, and racist. The principal, in her defense, explains that she was forced to use the word to get her point across. The issue received no sort of attention from the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. Catholic Schools until recently.

Going to a university that is predominantly Caucasian and participating in a sport for my entire life where I make up the 9% of African Americans that compete as Division 1 gymnasts leave room for lack of equality. Fortunately, I have not experienced any significant attacks against the color of my skin. Still, I have experienced microaggressions about my body while doing Gymnastics, resulting in me receiving an unfair score at a competition. Being told by a judge that I received a deduction in my floor routine for my thighs being too big and running like I run track, one of many stereotypes for African Americans, was when I realized that this would not be my last time hearing these degrading comments. My coach then told me that life is unfair and that you cannot please everyone. If one of the beliefs of equality is that no one should have lesser chances in life because of the way they were born, what they believe, and whether or not they possess a disability, then the way my body is shaped should not affect the result of my performance. Gymnastics has been a major part of my life for sixteen years. Now being a collegiate gymnast in the NCAA, I am beginning to witness and hear more about the racial slurs and comments being made toward some of the African American gymnasts who were my teammates before college, not only from their peers but from their coaches as well. It becomes hard to find the motivation daily to continue to do the sport you love when you are constantly being degraded because of the color of your skin.

Equality is derived from the French word *Equalité,* which descends from the Latin word *Aequalitas*. Originally, equality at its root was synonymous with uniform size and identical shape, essentially referring to an object. As time and mindsets have evolved, the term has as well. We witness equality when each individual is offered the same opportunity and is given the freedom to fully express their talents or differences without being ridiculed for it. Who I am today as an African American individual has been impacted because of the lack of equality I have witnessed in person, on the news, and on social media. There have been instances throughout my life where I wondered if I was a different race would my life be easier, and if I was, would I become more susceptible to obtaining an opportunity because I am not suffocated by the stereotypes and assumptions that come along with being an African American in the United States.

Equality is extremely important to me because it leaves room for people to better contribute to our society in that when people of different cultures, ideas, and traditions are put together, we are essentially able to learn more and pick up new ways of life that could help us prosper as a country. Without this type of diversity, our society would not be as advanced as it is today. I may not look the same, talk the same or interpret the same, but everyone deserves an equal chance at everything life has to give. ❑

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Are Clothes More Than Just Something to Wear?

Natalie Burgoyne

About the Author

Natalie Burgoyne was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. Growing up, she spent most of her time doing gymnastics or running cross country and track. She is a freshman studying Psychology and will soon be going to the Philippines as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. She enjoys art, fashion, and music.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I often have difficulty choosing a topic that I really enjoy, so getting started was the hardest part of my writing process. To overcome this, I brainstormed and thought about all of my interests and hobbies. The one that stuck out to me was my delight in fashion and clothing. I decided to tie it into my studies of Psychology, to more deeply understand how clothing can benefit myself and others.

This essay was composed in April 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

While I was growing up, I would never start a new school year without at least a month's worth of new outfits planned for me to wear.

While I was not necessarily excited to go back to school for the classes or homework, I always found myself overly excited that starting school again meant I could go back-to-school shopping. I would use any excuse I could to get myself a new wardrobe. My mom would take me to the mall, where I could look at all possible options for my new staples. Now, I get this may sound a little obsessive, but it was the way I grew up. Even as a baby, all you would ever see me in was a patterned dress and a small bow in my hair. I guess my mom's enthusiasm for clothing rubbed off on me somewhere along the way.

As my interest in fashion and clothing continues to grow, I realize how much influence it has on my life and daily decisions. In a research-based opinion paper, Emma Feria states, "Getting dressed and spending ridiculous amounts of time trying on outfits has become a grounding ritual of sorts and something that I look forward to each day" (Feria). As Feria says, I spend so much time and energy determining the best outfit for each day or event and what new item I should buy next. While some may see this attention to clothing as a waste of time, energy, or money, I cannot deny all the good that has come from my interest in fashion. There is so much more to clothing than just being something to wear. One of the most vital functions of an outfit, especially for college students, is its ability to boost mood and increase confidence.

College students can benefit significantly from focusing a little more on fashion. This period is very stressful because there are more changes and important decisions to be made than in any other time of life. This stress causes people to be overwhelmed, and sometimes feelings of despair arise. While trying to manage these feelings, college students face vital scenarios such as job interviews, going on dates, passing exams, and making decisions for the future. In some sense, "Getting dressed in the morning is often an overlooked aspect of self-care but can help combat depressive tendencies and in turn become a mindful practice" (Feria). Feria also says, "Getting dressed became a means of grounding myself and preserving my sanity in the midst of confusing and overwhelming circumstances" (Feria). It can take away some of the stress of these situations by helping students grasp one aspect of their lives. It is a reminder to take care of themselves amid chaos. What someone leaves the house wearing can be a game-changer for college students.

As a whole, clothing and getting ready can change the trajectory for the entire day. Feria continues to show how clothes help her by saying,

> When I'm feeling low, a good outfit can help me reclaim control over my own body on a physical and emotional level and give me confidence to go about my day. It allows me to reshape and redefine various facets of my identity as I continuously evolve as a person. (Feria)

There are times when all people feel down or have a negative perception of themselves. Jon Shanfelder, a University of Pennsylvania graduate, mentions the following about dressing nicely: "We are all people with volatile self-esteems that can constantly increase and decrease. Would it be so much of a risk to try this method if you are lacking in self-confidence?" (Shanfelder). The benefits of one changing their clothing may seem minor or insignificant. This can make it easier to choose comfort over everything when a person is not feeling well. However, one study explains,

> Appearing poorly dressed, having messy hair, and having poorly done make-up were all shown to have negative effects on a person's self-esteem, while appearing well dressed, having a good haircut, and having well-done make-up resulted in higher self-esteems. (Shanfelder)

On the days a person feels down, sometimes the best thing they can do is to put a little extra effort into their appearance. Like anyone, when I give in to the temptation of staying in pajamas all day, I tend to feel worse about myself and be significantly less productive that day. Like Shanfelder reasons, this is a low-stake method to boost mood or self-image.

Each person is unique in having a specific way they like to dress or certain clothes they feel most comfortable in. I am most fond of dresses. It is an item of clothing that I feel good and confident in. However, some people despise dresses and would rather stick with a pair of jeans or a nice sweatshirt. The idea of using clothing to boost confidence is not so all people conform to one style. Fashion is personal and can be used as a way of self-expression. Confidence is defined as being sure of something or being able to rely on something fully. So applying this concept to individuals is to be sure of oneself. Feeling comfortable in your skin is necessary. This is why fashion is more about a person embracing their individual style rather than trying to fit in with what others may deem appropriate or trendy. A clothing study from India "found that wearing prestigious fashion brands increased the self-esteem and perceived social status of the women in the sample" (Shanfelder). This is because prestigious fashion brands give off the perception of wealth and status. While I am in no place to stop someone if buying articles from major fashion brands is something they enjoy, it is vital to recognize where our desires come from. Do we genuinely enjoy what we wear, or are we just using it to increase in popularity?

It can take a significant toll on a person when they attempt to look at themselves through the lens of what another individual sees. Feria explains that due to her fear of what she thought others would think of her, she used to dress in baggy and modest clothes in middle school and high school. She elaborates,

> I didn't want to be noticed and despised being the center of attention—two classic symptoms of social anxiety. I was afraid of being judged and felt that wearing 'boring' clothes and blending into the sleep-deprived crowd was the only way to make my existence less awkward, and in turn more tolerable. (Feria)

Just as Emma Feria's experience justifies, "When someone wears something that they don't like, they often become much more self-conscious and worry about what others will think of them" (Eastman). Feria did not feel like herself in the clothing she wore when she was younger, leading her to believe that everyone would judge her. Hayley Eastman, lifestyle reporter and journalism major at Brigham Young University, explains this idea as the spotlight effect. When someone lacks confidence or assuredness in themself, they also lack control over their thoughts and actions. This leads them to believe that everyone they are surrounded by is looking at them with full judgment. "However, it's likely no one will actually notice unless that person shows that they are self-conscious about their appearance" (Eastman). If people are not as outwardly focused as it may seem, then "Why is it that we connect the way we dress with our social status and self-esteem?" (Shanfelder). It could be because we have unrealistic expectations and realities in society. As social media exposure and celebrity dominance grow, it worsens. So often, one's self-image is based on what others think of them. This is not necessarily a bad thing all the time, as long as the focus is kept on what makes one feel comfortable or more confident on an individual basis. When someone is self-assured, it will radiate to others and urge them to have respect for the individual without any doubts or judgments.

Rather than being divisive, clothing can bring people together. Although the cliche is that opposites attract, humans typically get along best with those similar to them. Author and journalist Martin J. Smith states, "Both science and intuition suggest that we choose our friends and romantic partners because we share things in common, such as age, educational level, race, religion, attitudes, and general intelligence" (Smith). People feel comfortable with those similar to them because there is less risk for contention or disagreements. We tend to find people similar to us through fashion styles. Feria states,

> As pretentious as that might sound, fashion is undoubtedly an important part of our lives. It affects how we are perceived and how we carry ourselves. It's a means of reclaiming our identity. (Feria)

What one wears can say a lot about their personality. As humans who make many quick judgments and decisions every day, we are naturally drawn to those whose styles reflect aspects of our personalities. Ju-Young M. Kang, who is involved with apparel product design, states, "For women with similar beliefs, clothing is viewed as a method to meet social and emotional demands" (Kang). It allows people to attach to others emotionally. As Emma Feria says, "Clothes can also aid our sense of belonging, signifying what social or aesthetic subgroups we belong to" (Feria). Through clothes, connections between people with similar interests can be made. This can be helpful in platonic friendships and romantic relationships as individuals need to find people they feel comfortable with and want to spend with. So whether a person is going on a date with someone new or possibly moving to a new area, one way they can seek those they would get along with is through fashion.

Another way boundaries are put on fashion is through the meaning that is given to certain articles or styles of clothes. Feria explains, "This concept is known as 'enclothed cognition,' which refers to the symbolic meaning of fashion and its influence on our mental state" (Feria). The lab coat study by Adam Galinsky and Hajo Adam at Northwestern University is the most well-known example of enclothed cognition. Two groups were assigned a set of intelligence problems and tasks to perform. Then, each group was given a lab coat, where researchers told one group that it was a painter's coat, and the other group was told it was a doctor's coat. The results showed that those who had the "doctor's coats" performed the tasks better and with more precision than those told they had "painter's coats" (Stockum, Jr., and DeCaro). These results come from "the symbolic meaning and physical experience of wearing the coat" (Stockum, Jr., and DeCaro 1). Charles A. Van Stockum, Jr., and Marci S. DeCaro state,

> Specifically, the theory of enclothed cognition posits that the clothes people wear influence their psychological processes by leading the wearer to behave in ways that are consistent with the clothes' popular symbolic meaning. (Stockum, Jr., and DeCaro 3)

Depending on if the situation or meaning is socially perceived as good or bad, the impact of enclothed cognition can be either positive or negative.

Thinking about the idea that confidence comes from self-expression through fashion can alter any of these situations significantly. A job interview or meeting new people allows for honesty on both sides. "Indeed, it has been documented that individuals reinforce their mood and express their feelings through their clothing" (Kang). A first impression can allow the individual and the interviewer to decide whether the relationship would suit both parties. Like Feria says, "In the broadest sense, fashion is empowering and can help us reclaim some control over our first impressions" (Feria). It allows people to demonstrate who they are to others without speaking. This is why people are told to dress one step above the position they are applying for at an interview while also dressing for the mood of the office or job. Carefully choosing clothing shows the authority figure that the interviewee is respectable and values the chance to apply for the job. In the words of Hayley Eastman, "The outcome of a job interview could also be largely determined by attire" (Eastman). If someone shows up to an interview after getting out of bed, they most likely will not land the job. The interviewer wants to ensure they are making the best investment for their company, and one aspect that helps them make that decision is the clothes a person wears.

One way I understood the significance of fashion further is through the pandemic. Being a person that enjoys dressing up every day, I was impacted significantly by being at home and having to quarantine. I hardly had a reason to get ready during the day, putting me in a slump. Feria related this to the idea of the meaning of clothing by saying, "This might explain why staying in sweatpants or pajamas all day during the pandemic affected some people's productivity due to its association with laziness or leisure" (Feria). Sweats and comfortable clothes promote unproductivity which caused a lot of people to get stuck in a rut during the pandemic. Once I could finally go out again, I got ready for the day more consistently, and with such, my productivity increased dramatically. Robert Ridge explains, "There definitely can be a connection between how people dress and how they feel. The more you like your appearance, the more confident you can be" (qtd. in Eastman). My experience showed me how much my clothes influence my mood, confidence, and productivity.

Different colors can also change one's mood. Bright and happy colors usually boost one's mood, while darker colors relax and calm a person down. For example, a color like "Yellow tends to elicit feelings of happiness while blue is associated with peacefulness. Any sort of print is also known to have a similar mood boosting effect" (Feria). This effect is due to the psychological response our brains have to specific colors and the meaning given to colors. Knowing this, on days one feels overwhelmed and anxious, they can intentionally choose to change their mood through what they wear. For instance, they could wear something like blue or purple to calm themselves down, or they could go in the opposite direction with something like bright pink or yellow to boost their mood and make them happier. It can also allow for expression: "Clothing can contribute to one's mood because of the notion that colours, materials, textures, patterns, shapes, and artwork inspire individuals" (Kang).

Another example of this is the color red. It is often seen as a statement color because it is bold and catches the attention of those around it. Research has shown that people are naturally drawn to the color red, which is why it tends to be popular at formal events. Black also demands attention, but instead of being flashy, it is seen as

Figure 1: Color-emotion chart displays colors varying from black to green. The emotions, feelings, and moods that correspond with each color are also shown.

sophisticated or classy (fig. 1). Colors can help college students with daily activities as they can change a mood and help with things like presentations or situations that demand authority.

Being the center of attention can cause a lot of anxiety, which is why some individuals stress when a professor announces a new class presentation. Anxiety is also seen in major events like showcases or exams. In these instances, I rely on my clothes to give me the confidence I need. Since middle school, I have lived by the motto, "dress well, test well." It started as a joke, but as I continued to live by it, I began to believe and rely on it. Eastman states, "How people dress could also affect their performance level, whether it be at school or at work" (Eastman). Whenever I have a test or presentation, I dress nicely. Stockum, Jr. and DeCaro explain, "Enclothed cognition represents a specific case of embodied cognition, which recognizes that individuals' psychological processes are influenced by their physical experiences" (Stockum, Jr., and DeCaro 3). Dressing up helps me to boost my confidence and feel more productive rather than if I wear clothes like sweats or leggings. I use fashion to influence my physical experiences and demonstrate that I have credibility and know what I am being tested on or presenting. I tend to rely on colors to help me feel bold and confident, especially in presentations. I find common ground with Shanfelder when he says, "I do this because I think 'dressing nice' is respectable and it also helps boost my self-esteem" (Shanfelder). It helps me to feel good about myself and keep my audience's attention when I present. It resonates with me when Kang says, "Individuals who feel a close connection between clothing and self may use clothing to shape their mood" (Kang). Especially in high-stress situations, clothing and fashion can be used for one's benefit.

Socially, fashion use may seem more directed at women than men. Women are typically more interested in fashion trends and clothing than men are. In one study, "Young women were recruited to participate because they are more likely to be sensitive to their moods than men and thus, more likely to use clothing relative to their mood" (Kang). This notion may be because in society as a whole, "Women have also been shown to place a greater emphasis on their clothing and appearance than men" (Kang). This perception of fashion relates to the media and what people are constantly surrounded by. Some men enjoy clothing, but this hobby and interest in fashion are more often pushed on to girls and women. However, this is still something that all college students can benefit from. Not all people need to or should be invested in fashion like myself or others might be, but it can create a sense of self and make small daily improvements for all individuals if they let it influence them.

Now, this is not a topic that will fix a peace crisis or prevent wars from going on across the world. It will not solve major political and social issues that nations face. It can, however, make a difference in the lives of individuals. It can help college students ace a test or presentation they are stressed about. People who work to make small and seemingly insignificant changes to their wardrobe will live a happier and more confident life. As Kang says, "As soon as clothes are put on the body, they can influence one's mood" (Kang). So what mood will you let yourself have? If you wake up having a bad day, will you let it continue to bring you down, or will you rise above it and put in small efforts to improve your day? I would encourage you to move towards the latter option. You have control. Do not let the influences of others or even yourself bring you down. You have an option. So why not choose clothes? ❑

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Financially **A**rming **F**uture **S**ociety's **A**dults

Abbagale Call

About the Author

Abbagale Call is a hard-working freshman at Utah State University. She is the second oldest of six girls and loves her family more than anything. Abbie loves music and plays multiple instruments, including the flute, piano, organ, and guitar. Abbie is currently working part-time and going to school full-time. She wants to major in English, and study research and fictional writing.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

From the beginning of my college career, I knew I would be in charge of my own tuition. This was a major concern, and in addition to studying to keep up my GPA, I worked since I was 13 at jobs trying to save up to pay for my college. However, when the time came to pay for college, I was $1,000 short. Getting into a payment program would cost another $50, and the frustration of the situation made me research the age of independency on the FAFSA, and how it affects freshmen applying for college. The age of independence on the FAFSA is a very important topic. Not only does it affect me in both my future education and career, but it affects all students that attend colleges across the United States.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses APA documentation.

"Wacky Six!!" My mom yells from across the table. A collective sigh released a mix of relief and disappointment as all the rest of my family collapsed back into their chairs. My sisters swoop in to gather up the cards like vultures, eager to see who discarded the most from their hand. I run back to the computer as I did after every round to religiously check if the Regents Scholarship has received my FAFSA yet. The looming deadline had arrived, but I had submitted it over a month ago. Paying for college had always been a momentous concern of mine because I understood that no help would come from the FAFSA in the form of grants. Although my dad has a well-paying job, with eight mouths to feed, paying for my college loomed out of my parents' price range. The overwhelming stress of a 17-year-old constantly on edge waiting to hear back from scholarships grated on both mine and my parents' nerves. The blue screen of the computer lit up as I wiggled the mouse back and forth across the black granite. The web browser was already pulled up to the Regents account portal. I had one new message in my portal inbox, and I slowly sank down into the plastic chair to read it:

> Dear Abbagale,
> It appears as if you have submitted the wrong year of the FAFSA, and we were unable to process it. Due to this, your scholarship may or may not be revoked; please submit the correct FAFSA as soon as possible. Sincerely, Jeffrey.

Shock. Anger. Frustration. Stress. Hopelessness. All of these feelings had been bubbling up inside me for weeks and now took this moment to explode out. Experiences such as mine are far too common. All across the country college students struggle to pay for their education due to tremendous costs. To help college students all over the U.S., the FAFSA program must lower the independence age from 24 to 18.

To start off, we must understand the FAFSA program and the difference between *independent* and *dependent* students. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. While applying for FAFSA, each student answers a series of questions and submits required tax documents to determine the amount of financial help each applicant will receive. The *independent* and *dependent* status comes into play during this stage. To be independent, many factors and questions must be considered. However, the requirement we will be focusing on for the duration of this paper relates to age. Currently, the age a student can file for independent status begins at 24. When the applicant qualifies as an independent, the FAFSA application looks at the student's income to determine the amount of help they qualify for. On the other hand, filing as *dependent* means that financial questions and financial information for the FAFSA will be the college student's parents, not their own ("For the purpose of applying", 2021).

By requiring students be 24 years old to give them independent status, the FAFSA program forces these students to work prolonged hours. Laura W. Pernda, the executive director of the program AHEAD (Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy), a program made to help students pursue an education no matter the barriers they may face, points out that,

> In the United States today, ... 70 percent to 80 percent of college students are both active in the labor market and formally enrolled in some form of postsecondary education or training. (Perna 2020)

The vast majority of college students must hold down jobs. Students not only need to pay for college, but they also have food, clothes, sanitation products, and school supplies to buy. All these things add up, making one giant problem. Lowering the age of independence could help this problem. If the age of independence changes on FAFSA from 24 to 18, students will be allowed to put their income on the form, instead of their parent's. This change could lead to more grants that go toward the students' education, which in turn provides a decrease in the time college students must spend at work. In a study done in 2020 concerning the number of full-time students holding down a job, scientists found a full-time student from the ages 20-34 worked 21.4 hours a week (Digest of Education Statistics). On average, these working hours add up to three hours a day that students work, when these same students might have the opportunity to study, decompress, or experience college life. In economics, the name used to describe such a thing is *opportunity cost*. Opportunity cost is defined as "the money or other benefits lost when pursuing a particular course of action instead of a mutually-exclusive alternative" (Opportunity Cost). In this specific case, students give up the opportunity to go to activities to pay for college. Many students experience this unjust isolation.

As I interviewed college students at Utah State University, many of the students who work related to this scenario. After getting off a long day at work, these students trudge to their dorm to get in some final studying before the test the next day. As they ride up the elevator, they stand surrounded by people talking about a school sponsored event. After enduring the painful reminder, these overworked students go back to their dorms, and think, “Maybe next time.”

Although some skeptics may object that obtaining a job in early years will help children become adults, I would answer that the majority of young adults get a job for more than just paying for college. A study done by Georgetown University found that 67% of students 16 to 24 already had jobs (Carnevale). In the vast majority of cases, young adults start going to college when they turn 18. More than half of students already having a job two years before college indicates that these 16-year-olds need money for more than just paying for college. Such things can include gas, food, books, and the basics of life, along with any wants the child or young adult desires. As a rite of passage, getting a job helps children become adults. However, students and young adults alike get jobs before college expenses become a reality. When put to good use, this hard-earned money helps students pay for other necessities, ones not covered under college tuition.

In addition, another way that FAFSA might adapt is sending a check directly to the university in question. Any student trying to take advantage of the system will quickly see that this money will only go towards education. By making this money go towards college tuition, books, or housing, it allows FAFSA to not be taken advantage of. By sending a check directly to the school, and allowing the money to only be used to pay for college, the "Free Application for *Student* Financial Aid" (italics added) truly does what their name implies, helping the students get the education they need through financial aid.

In addition, one of the many reasons the age of filing for independence must lower involves all of the hours students spend at work, minimizing studying time. This reduced study time can lead to grades dropping. Perna states, "[I]n 2017, 43 percent of all full-time undergraduate students and 81 percent of part-time students were employed while enrolled" (Perna 2020). The large number of students working shows the amount of hours lost both individually and collectively. Students going to school full-time take more classes, costing them more money. However, these same students, because of the many classes being taken, have less time to work and save money. This leads to a dreadful circle: the more time students work, the less time they have to study, and the less time these students have to study the worse their grades get. Such an imbalance causes grades to drop, and has a correlation with lower grades in universities across America (Carnevale). As students' grades plummet, so do grade-related scholarships. Now, some might say that the amount of days that a student works doesn't matter as long as they set aside time to study. Although this statement has some truth and having a job does not mean that automatically a student's grades plummet, according to the National Center for Education Statistics,

> Among college students working to pay for school expenses, 16 percent of those working 1 to 15 hours per week reported that working had a negative impact on their grades. Thirty percent of college students who worked 16 to 20 hours a week said the same, as did 48 percent who worked 35 hours or more per week. (Digest of Educational Statistics)

According to this study, the more that students work, the more their grades suffer. More than half of students working part-time reported their grades dropping. Grades become essential in college to earn academic scholarships and to get into different educational programs. The majority of colleges require students to have at least a 3.0 GPA to get into a master's program (Franklin University). Overload and lack of study time can cause students to have an ever-dropping GPA. If this declining GPA drops off before students turn 24, they will still qualify as a dependent on FAFSA. This greatly affects the amount of scholarship money students can obtain, and it will affect both personal educational careers, and future career opportunities.

On the other hand, people argue that having a job is beneficial for students, and it helps build character, responsibility, and integrity. In a newspaper article titled "Pave your Own Way! (Then Thank Mom)," Audrey Rock-Richardson, a college student who went to college full-time and paid for it on her own, explains, "Having to juggle tasks forces you to prioritize, a skill she (A fellow full time college student without a job) hadn't learned." (Rock-Richardson, 2000). While the statement that jobs do teach skills people can't learn anywhere else, the benefits simply do not outweigh the negative consequences of overloading already full plates with too much work. A study published in the article “23 Eye-Opening College Student Stress Statistics 2021” claimed “44.9% of college students experience ‘more than average’ levels of stress” and “70% of students stress about their financial situation” (“23 Eye-Opening Statistics”). Stress can have many unwelcome side effects, such as headaches, stomach cramps, grumpiness, tiredness, and even depression (Scott). By adding to students’ stress, the benefits of possessing a job become minimized. The consequences of holding down a job while going to college outweigh any positives.

Yet another reason to drop the independence age to 18 shows in the rates and expenses of all colleges, which continue to increase across America.

> Between 2008–09 and 2017–18, average tuition and fees increased in constant dollars by 36 percent at public four-year institutions ... while median family income rose by only 8 percent. (Perna)

This increase leaves a 28% gap that full-time college students seem expected to bridge with minimum wage incomes. Family support becomes less likely to help with a parent’s salary only increasing 8%. Perna continues, “The maximum federal Pell Grant covered 60 percent of tuition and fees at public four-year institutions in 2018–19, down from 92 percent in 1998–99.” With the previously mentioned fees for colleges all across the U.S. going up at a towering percentage, the FAFSA program simply will not adapt fast enough. Only paying for little over half of students' education will never be adequate, especially considering that in past years FAFSA covered up to 92% of tuition (Perna 2020). Programs like FAFSA expect parents to pay for the students' college. However, with the college rates rising and the financial aid decreasing, this task becomes impossible for many. Furthermore, expecting students to come up with the amount of money to bridge the gap between their low incomes and college costs seems increasingly unjust. By lowering the age of independence, the FAFSA program will have a better idea of the income the majority of students live off while paying for school to distribute more funds fairly and effectively. FAFSA independent age lowering allows students all over to afford to go to the college of their choice and not add the extra financial burden of increasing college tuition and rates.

While reading this paper, people might criticize that if students cannot afford expensive schools, just go to a cheaper college. Financial expert Dave Ramsey even advertises this point, encouraging students to go to cheaper colleges to earn their education instead of focusing on the name or reputation of the school (Leonhardt). Colleges can be stereotyped as "party schools" or "intellectual schools." These labels can impact students' decisions and lead to them picking the more expensive schools based on the "name brand." That being said, Caitlin M. Zaloom, a professor at New York University, asks us as a people to

> Reflect on the assumptions behind these questions, primarily that middle-class and lower-income college students in the United States should not rely on the

> educational system to support them. These responses assume that the United States, the richest democracy in the world, should encourage its young high achievers and their families to focus not on cultivating their youthful talent and figuring out how to contribute to their communities, but rather on cost—on how they, as individuals, will pay the tuition. (Zaloom 2021)

Zaloom highlights one of the many problems with this system. With the cost of college increasing, many students simply cannot afford to attend a state four-year university or a community college, much less a school like Harvard or Yale.

Looking at the assumptions that the FAFSA program makes, such as parents' responsibility to pay for their child's college or that parents can always afford to pay for students' college sheds some light on the unfairness of the situation. In fact, if parents fail to provide their financial information for the student, "the application will be considered rejected" (Student Federal Aid). A rejected application means that these students will not be receiving any financial aid that year.

Not allowing everyone the opportunity to grow their own talents and intelligence only damages our society. Training new, curious, and intelligent minds must be society's first priority. The next generation of scientists have the potential to cure cancer, go to Mars, and create beautiful things. This generation, however, becomes stifled by the prospective debt. In a study conducted in 2012, the

University of Western Cape found that “finance … (is one) of the main factors that affect the enrolment rate of students” (Matsolo 2012). Students see the expenses of college and stop before they even start. If this study, conducted over a decade ago, found that finances were a burden and hindrance to education, this issue will only continue to expand.

On the other hand, many critics will argue that such financial burdens are not detracting from students’ education, but making them care more about their education by putting in blood, sweat, and tears into it. These critics may point out that students who don’t put forth effort in paying for school will not put forth effort learning in school either. Although I agree that the money that individuals pay for college could allows each person to care more about their classes and motivates students to put more work into them, on the other hand, having students work detracts from the student’s opportunity. The purpose of college consists of learning and growing. College develops experiences that help students throughout the rest of their lives, whether in a career or with general knowledge to help the future generation understand the world. College increases in difficulty comparative to high school. Students that want to learn, want to grow, and want to change, will stay in college, regardless of the hardship. The students that did not will drop out. By lowering the FAFSA dependency rate and allowing those that want to attend to do so, experts will see an increase of students wanting to learn, not a decrease, as the students that always wanted to go to college but could never afford it come rushing in.

The FAFSA program must lower the age of independence from 24 to 18 because basing the dispersal of funding on a parent's income that will not contribute to paying for tuition increases the amount the full-time student needs to work. In addition, precious studying hours disappear when students are required to work. Furthermore, colleges become more and more expensive, and little to no change in income or FAFSA makes paying for college a nigh impossible task. To live in the thriving, ever-changing world we live in, education must be a part of everyone's life. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most Powerful weapon we can use to change the world" (Education is the most). We as a community, as peers, and as concerned citizens must fight to arm the future generation. ❑

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Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Through Agricultural Education

Jeremy Case

About the Author

Jeremy Case grew up in Twin Falls, Idaho, where he participated in 4-H and FFA for most of his high school experience. He enjoys riding in equestrian sports, quilting, and photography. At USU, he's a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon, Collegiate 4-H, and the USU Western and English Equestrian Teams. Jeremy is currently a freshman studying Animal, Dairy, and Veterinary Science, Biotechnology Emphasis with minors in Chemistry and Biology.

In His Words: The Author on His Writing

Whenever I presented at my FFA chapter's agricultural education events, I received strange answers about what chickens give us, such as milk and seeds. So, I asked myself, "Why aren't schools prioritizing students knowing where their food comes from like they are the arts or history?" Having been through agricultural education programs myself, I wanted to explore the possibility of requiring these programs, as they develop positive life skills and responsibility aside from agricultural understanding.

This essay was composed in May 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

The smell of wet soil hung tightly in the humid air. Small weeds crept across the concrete path, their leaves reaching up to catch the water from the hose as I carefully watered each plant. The desert sun shone brightly down through the cream panels, warming my back and illuminating each leaf like a stained-glass window. The fans carried a gentle breeze throughout. My jeans brushed against the wood of the tables that are worn smooth by the many years of use from students who cared for this greenhouse before me. I performed the tasks for the day like clockwork: measuring plants, transplanting seedlings, trimming, updating inventory, preparing orders, and ensuring the greenhouse conditions were at homeostasis. *I can't believe this is my last day in class before I graduate.*

For many public high school students, this, unfortunately, is not a common memory. Gymnasiums, whiteboards, calculators, tile floors, class bells, and uniformly arranged rows of desks dominate the mind. Universal public education began in the United States as early as the 1830s with "common schools" that would deliver a liberal education of "the 'three R's' (reading, writing, arithmetic), along with other subjects such as history, geography, grammar, and rhetoric" ("History and Evolution…"). Modern-day public education continues to retain these basic components, preparing students for successful careers in the workforce by developing relevant life skills. General education is the program designed to ensure that

> students hone life skills…including oral and written communication, teamwork and collaboration and problem-solving," which consistently rank amongst the "top life skills valued by employers in the United States and globally. (Crews et al.)

In an attempt to define these critical mathematics and English literacy objectives, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) established the Common Core in 2009 ("About the Standards"). The Common Core is an attempt to federally standardize the skills and knowledge necessary for students to succeed in college or the workforce. Currently, 41 states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have voluntarily adopted the Common Core, establishing a rudimentary set of general education requirements nationally ("About the Standards").

Targeted skills of general education are often evaluated through standardized exams or evaluation rubrics derived from Common Core standards. Current Common Core anchor standards include reading and comprehension of diverse, complex texts; writing argumentative, informative, and narrative texts for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences; research and evidence-based reasoning; and speaking and listening skills ("Common Core State Standards…"). Despite the Common Core emphasizing strong language and mathematical literacy, it fails to develop other life skills that are critical in the workplace, such as leadership and public speaking. In order to ensure that students receive an education that best prepares them for life, secondary schools ought to incorporate additional general education requirements into curricula that target life skill development besides English and mathematical literacy—the unlikely solution being agricultural education.

Agricultural education is a means through which students can explore a variety of subjects within the agricultural industry, from welding to animal science. Agriculture classes are commonly offered as elective or science credits in secondary education systems, and they primarily focus on developing specialized skills via experiential and hands-on learning. As agriculture is a vast field, students can pursue programs and certifications in—but not limited to—plant science, greenhouse management, animal science, livestock management, welding, agribusiness, agricultural mechanics, veterinary medicine, agronomy, forestry, and many more.

However, agricultural education is not only limited to the traditional school environment; extracurricular programming provides applied learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The two primary agricultural youth organizations that supplement curricula in the United States are the 4-H and FFA programs. These organizations allow youth to explore their interests by planning further, executing, and keeping detailed records for a project of their choice. 4-H and FFA projects provide experiential learning for youth in specialized facets of the agricultural industry, often involving responsibility and management of financial resources. Although animal husbandry and market projects are what commonly come to mind, 4-H and FFA offer great opportunities to grow skills in engineering, science, home economics, culinary arts, and public speaking. Further, these agricultural programs encourage youth to participate in community service and leadership positions, with responsibilities of planning, collaboration with stakeholders, communication, conduct of meetings, and community service projects. While both programs provide quality access to agricultural education, 4-H and FFA differ from one another in their structure and realized impacts on youth.

The 4-H Program

The 4-H program is an international youth organization that advocates to "make the best better" through positive youth development and experiential, project-based learning. Founded in 1902 to originally improve farming practices, the organization has grown into a vast "network of more than 6 million youth, 611,800 volunteers, [and] 3,500 professionals" delivered in nearly every county across the United States ("What Is 4-H?"). The success of the 4-H program is founded on the partnership and collaboration of the United States Department of Agriculture, National 4-H Council, and Cooperative Extension.

The structure of the 4-H program begins with the land-grant university of a specific state. For example, Utah State University is the land-grant university for the state of Utah. The land- grant university has an extension office in nearly every county of their respective state, each containing a network of extension and 4-H educators whose mission is to conveniently provide the knowledge and research of the university to their community. The specialization of the extension agents is targeted towards the specific needs of the community, ranging from Family and Consumer Sciences to Agronomy. However, nearly all counties have 4-H Coordinators and 4-H Youth Development Professionals that deliver curriculum from the National 4-H Council to their counties. 4-H club volunteers work closely with extension agents to provide hands-on learning opportunities to their 4-H youth members.

Of course, 4-H primarily takes place as an extracurricular activity outside of normal school hours. This exclusivity tends to limit accessibility for families who may not have the support or financial resources to arrange for after-school commitments. In order to combat this accessibility issue, land-grant universities are beginning to integrate the 4-H program into public schools as actual classes. Offering in-school hours where students can earn credit for agricultural education and involvement is gaining traction in many school districts across the nation. For example, the 4-H Juntos program has recently been launched in a few of Idaho's Twin Falls and Jerome County public schools.

According to Suzann Dolecheck, former Twin Falls County 4-H Youth Development Educator, the Juntos program "provides at-risk…students and their families with the knowledge, skills and resources to ensure high school graduation and increase awareness to postsecondary education opportunities," with the University of Idaho largely focusing on the Latinx community of Southern Idaho and the Native American tribes of Northern Idaho (Dolecheck). The program is funded externally by the CYFAR (Children, Youth and Family at Risk) federal grant as well as through University of Idaho Extension (Dolecheck). 4-H Juntos is integrated into public schools as an actual course taught by a Juntos coordinator from University of Idaho county extension over multiple periods of the school day, making it accessible to those in marginalized and minority communities. Youth receive personalized advising from their coordinator, life skills in classroom activities through 4-H programming, family and community engagement, and access to 4-H summer leadership camps. The fledgling Juntos program is hopefully expected to expand to surrounding counties in the future.

By sowing greater access to agricultural education through the 4-H program as an extracurricular activity and a class students can take, youth can reap life skills more successfully. An Idaho 4-H Impact Study published in the Journal of Extension reports that 4-H youth are more likely to perform well in academia, more likely to hold leadership positions, more likely to acquire independent living skills, and nearly half as likely to engage in risky behaviors compared to their non-4-H counterparts (Goodwin et al.); many of these data showed great statistical significance. Youth participating in the 4-H program tend to obtain valuable life skills more efficiently through the experiential education the 4-H program provides. Thus, agricultural education seems to succeed in facets that the Common Core and general education fail to address.

The National FFA Organization

The National FFA Organization is another primary leader like 4-H that provides youth opportunities in agricultural education. However, the FFA program has already been successfully integrated into the United States public school system as a partner to secondary agricultural education. The National FFA Organization, founded in 1928, currently has "735,038 FFA members, aged 12-21, in 8,817 chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands" in grades 7 to 12 and through college ("Our Membership"). Students enrolled in agricultural education courses take a three-component approach to ensure proper skill and leadership development.

Agricultural education initiative in public schools is founded upon the Three-Component Model: Classroom and Laboratory, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), and FFA ("Agricultural Education"). Students receive education in the classroom and laboratory that lays a foundation for their SAE project, through which they gain specialized skills in an experiential learning process of their choice. Projects range from agricultural science to raising market steers, whose management requires accurate record keeping, financial planning, and writing. The FFA program supplements the classroom and SAE education by providing opportunities for personal growth through competitive events, leadership conventions, career exploration, and service opportunities.

FFA offers two forms of competitive events that target career-relevant and leadership skills: Career Development Events (CDEs) and Leadership Development Events (LDEs). These competitions encompass livestock judging, meats evaluation and technology, veterinary science, floriculture, public speaking, employment skills, agribusiness, and many more. According to a study conducted by Lundry et al. on 30 agricultural education teachers, FFA competitive events are incredibly efficacious for professional and life skill development. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a scale of 0-6 regarding the efficacy of FFA CDEs. The results of Round Two and Three from the study are summarized in the table below:

Skills	% Agreement
Teamwork[a]	89%
Competition[a]	89%
Setting and achieving goals[a]	89%
Time management[a]	89%
Self-motivation[a]	89%
Work ethic[a]	89%
Confidence[a]	89%
Leadership[a]	89%
Dedication[a]	89%
Critical thinking[a]	89%
Decision making[a]	89%
Reasoning[a]	89%
Problem solving[a]	89%
Evaluation[a]	89%
Analysis[a]	89%
Public Relations[b]	87%
Job Readiness[b]	87%
Defending opinions[a]	84%
Social interaction[a]	84%
Creativity[a]	84%
Responsibility[a]	84%
Public speaking/Communication[a]	79%
Higher level thinking skills[a]	79%
Core curriculum[a] (i.e., Science, Math, Literacy)	79%
Technical agriculture skills[a] (i.e., Animal selection, Welding, Plant I.D.)	79%

Note. [a]Statements that reached consensus in round two. [b]Statements that reached consensus in round three.

Figure 1: Benefits of Career Development Events as Perceived by School-Based, Agricultural Education Teachers (Lundry)

The study demonstrates that FFA Career Development Events (CDEs) and Leadership Development Events have positive impact on youth. The high agreement ratings reflect intentional advancement of life skills, such as leadership and teamwork, that the Common Core and general education fail to address. FFA works in conjunction with public agricultural education to ensure that students have access to these opportunities inside and outside of the classroom, allowing students of all socio-economic backgrounds to participate. However, these opportunities are only limited to schools that have the infrastructure to offer agricultural courses.

Discussion

Through the 4-H Program and the National FFA Organization, agricultural education provides immense opportunities for positive youth development and a successful career in the workforce. To provide our students with the best opportunities for a successful life, agricultural education should be incorporated into the general education curriculum.

However, some barriers block agricultural instruction from being integrated into general education programs. Agriculture teacher retention, financial strain, and accessibility between urban and rural communities pose logistical challenges for secondary public schools.

A study by Lemons et al. investigates why agriculture teachers may leave their profession. The study interviewed nine previous teachers, who must have taught for at least one full academic year and have left the profession voluntarily—not due to coercion, termination, or non-renewal. Data analysis revealed five significant reasons for leaving the profession: passions for the profession, alternative opportunities, expectations, retrospective burdens, and people (Lemons et al.). Although passion and previous experience in agricultural education and/or FFA are factors that retain instructors, many "teachers do not receive adequate compensation for the work they do" and lack pre-services that prepare them for their career in agricultural education (Lemons et al.).

Tackling the issue of teacher retention is complex, and no one solution will fit all schools. However, agriculture teachers are essential to maintaining quality programming, as they are the face of agriculture in the classroom and many students' first experience with it. The primary reason for why teachers leave agricultural education lies not in teaching itself, but rather a lack of administrative support. These teachers do not receive proper resources or compensation for their work, resulting in frustration with administration and eventual resignation. Applying for external grants can provide additional resources to agricultural educators, helping relieve strained school budgets. Regarding compensation, schools can offer more benefits to teachers, which can include—but are not limited to—additional vacation days or paid time for chaperoning FFA activities outside of normal school hours.

Besides teacher retention, the addition of agriculture programs could place even more financial strain on school budgets. Hiring more teachers and broadening course offerings could complicate matters in schools without pre-existing agriculture programs. As each district and school allocate fiscal assets differently, the solution to this issue is beyond the scope of this essay. Yet, the positive impact of agricultural education on life skill development is worth the investment in the students' future. Funding does not need to come directly from taxpayer money either; it can be sourced externally via grants and organizations, such as 4-H Juntos in Idaho.

Aside from employment issues and budgeting concerns, accessibility to such programs in schools varies drastically between urban and rural populations. Rural schools tend to have easier access to land, livestock, and facilities to supplement classroom education that urban communities lack. As a result, rural schools tend to already have agricultural programs in place that can readily accommodate a new general education requirement. Therefore, the primary issue lies within urban communities; yet it is these communities whose marginalized groups are in most need of the life skills that agricultural education cultivates.

Animal rearing and crop farming represent only a minor fraction of the vast field of agriculture. Fortunately, this *is* reflected in modern agricultural education. Many facets of agriculture do not require state-of-the-art animal facilities, such as nutrition and soil science. Courses covering these topics can be taught in the classrooms of urban cities with as little as a bag of soil and a microscope. Expanding agricultural programs to urban schools will also provide greater access to 4-H and/or FFA programming, through which youth can gain leadership, financial, and other life skills through their experiential learning platforms. Integrating more affirmative-action agricultural programs into urban general education, like 4-H Juntos, would immensely benefit students of marginalized communities as well.

Of course, we still have a long way to go before agricultural education can be required nationally in general education curricula. The challenges of teacher retention, budgeting, and rural-urban accessibility slow down progress. However, the goal of public education is to develop essential life skills in youth so that they can be successful in the workplace and life.

Public speaking, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving are some of the most highly desired skills in the professional workforce (Crews et al.). Yet, the current general education program fails to target these critical skills. Agricultural education—in conjunction with the 4-H Program and the National FFA Organization—ultimately provides a strong experiential learning platform through which students develop essential life skills that that lack in classroom Common Core. Thus, agricultural education ought to be integrated into general education requirements.

Growing the leaders of the future in our public education system should be a top priority. Despite the financial and accessibility issues, developing the infrastructure to require agricultural education in secondary schools is worth the investment. Before we know it, our students will inherit complicated global challenges like climate change and producing more food with fewer resources. The least we can do is ensure they have the skills necessary to become the leaders of tomorrow. ❑

For more information regarding the 4-H and FFA programs, please visit the following websites:

The 4-H Program: https://4-h.org/

The National FFA Organization: https://www.ffa.org/

Utah State University Extension:
https://extension.usu.edu/

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Is Sex Education Relevant?: The Exclusion of LGBTQ+ Individuals from Curriculum

Addison Concidine

About the Author

Addison Concidine is from Idaho and moved to Utah last year to continue her education at USU. She is a sophomore studying Biology with an emphasis in Human Biology and works in a lab on campus as a research technician. Addison enjoys rock climbing, running, reading, art, and exploring the great outdoors in her free time.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

The writing process for this essay was not very easy. I started out wanting to write about the role of women in Greek mythology but changed topics after doing preliminary research that led me to the issue of sex education and LGBTQ+ students. This topic is important to me because while I am heterosexual, my little sister and other close friends are members of this community. I want to educate people on the importance of inclusive sex education, and the initial research I did opened my eyes to how pervasive this issue is. I had some amazing sources and data, and while the research portion of my process was *intense, I was rewarded with some persuasive facts to back up my claims. I struggled to piece all of my points together but was ultimately able to create a work that I am very proud of and think that so many people could benefit from the research and data I found.*

This essay was composed in November 2021 and uses MLA documentation.

Think back to your high school sex education class. What topics did you learn about? Was it all about abstinence and STDs? Did you even learn about sex education? These are questions that many students ask themselves when reflecting on their experiences with the U.S.'s current sex education system. Most students do not receive the information that will give them the ability to form healthy relationships, and minority groups like the LGBTQ+ community are frequently excluded from the curriculum. Only 13 states in the U.S. require that schools teach about sexual orientation, and some do not mandate teaching sex education at all (Estes 617). The lack of information available to all students is appalling, but minority groups like the LGBTQ+ community are affected on a higher level. In the U.S., one in ten students identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer (Garg 1). This important statistic depicts the commonality of LGBTQ+ identities, but instead of these individuals getting information that will help them navigate intimate relationships, LGBTQ+ students are excluded from the conversation, demonized, and shamed. According to research done by Sharon and Richard Hoefer, researchers at the University of Texas at Arlington, as of May 2017, only 12 states require sex education curricula to talk about sexual orientation and three states emphasize that conversations about non-heterosexual relationships should be negative (Hoefer 260). These disparities have adverse impacts on students, and adjusting the curriculum is necessary to provide everyone with the resources they need. Sex education should be modernized to fit the needs of LGBTQ+ students because members of this community are not being included in conversations about sexual health.

To understand how to include LGBTQ+ individuals in sex education, an explanation of how the current sex education curriculum fails students is necessary. As of 2017, less than half of the states in the U.S. require schools to teach about contraceptives (Bodnar et. al. 9). In most states, abstinence is stressed, which is linked to higher rates of STDs, STIs, and teen pregnancy. Abstinence-based sex education does not reduce sexual activity, and it has been demonstrated by the CDC that 86.4% of women and 90.6% of men in the U.S. engage in premarital sex (Hoefer 258). This highlights that many individuals are not receiving a sex education that will benefit them and are entering relationships with limited knowledge about healthy sex practices. In contrast, Bodnar's research demonstrates that comprehensive sex education, which aims to give students the information and tools to make healthy relationship choices, reduces sexual activity and increases the use of contraceptives in young adults (Bodnar et. al. 9).

LGBTQ+ individuals are at more of a disadvantage, as they are less likely than their heteronormative peers to receive comprehensive sex education (Gowen 788). According to one study, 17.9% of 7,000 interviewed LGBTQ+ individuals said their school included information that pertained to them, which demonstrates how exclusive the current system is (Gowen 788). Students that do get information receive advice that pertains only to heteronormative relationships, and queer relationships are often excluded and ignored. This exclusion creates a space where LGBTQ+ students are isolated from the subject matter and do not feel comfortable asking questions or voicing concerns. Because they do not receive pertinent information and do not feel confident asking for help, LGBTQ+ individuals may take part in adverse sexual behaviors, such as engaging in unsafe sex or violating boundaries. In a study by Namrata Garg and Anna Voleman, researchers at the University of Chicago, they found that LGBTQ+ youth take part in adverse behaviors at a higher rate than their heteronormative peers, signaling that the lack of information and support available to them is causing negative effects (Garg).

Along with taking part in adverse behavior, LGBTQ+ youth are pathologized and ignored at higher rates than their heteronormative peers. The exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth is carried out in a few ways. LGBTQ+ individuals are shut out of the conversation through passive silencing, which is "...when LGBTQ discourse was completely absent from sexuality education curricula" (Gowen 791). Students are not given any information that pertains to them and being excluded makes youth feel uncomfortable and alien. This alienation has detrimental effects on their health and makes students feel uninformed and isolated. Another tactic used in schools is active silencing, which is where "...LGBTQ youth were silenced by another" (Gowen 791). When individuals try to ask questions or raise concerns, they are ignored or brushed off, and this dismissal can make students feel unwelcome and undervalued. In some classrooms, students were informed that questions were not allowed, and information on LGBTQ+ issues was not available. Seven states have "No Promo Homo" laws, which prevent teachers from talking positively about LGBTQ+ relationships (Bodnar 22). These laws work directly to exclude and isolate students, resulting in a multitude of negative repercussions.

Many schools focus on a heterocentric curriculum that only pertains to students that engage in male-female relationships. The current sex education system incorrectly assumes that all students are heteronormative and any information about sex and gender that is given is almost exclusively heterocentric. While the information is useful to some, people who engage in non-heterosexual relationships are given guidance that is not pertinent to them and are often not given the chance to ask questions. In interviews, many LGBTQ+ students stated they felt embarrassed or nervous to ask questions and did not even know what they should be asking about. Eight states have implemented policies that specifically stigmatize homosexuality, giving students the idea that homosexuality is morally incorrect, unhealthy, and criminal (Hall 509). Along with that, five states emphasize that sex education should be taught to boys and girls separately, and base teachings on two explicit genders (Hall 509). In most states, the information provided is gendered and classifies students based on male or female gender roles. Anyone who does not fit into these explicit structures is ignored, such as transgender, asexual, and nonbinary individuals (Hobaica et al. 366). Students that only see the information provided in a binary way may struggle with gender dysphoria and have a harder time understanding their identities than those who fit into male-female identities. Transgender individuals struggle with gender dysphoria at higher rates than other students, and "[s]ome mental health symptoms, particularly depression, anxiety, and disordered eating were reported to be connected to gender dysphoria" (Hobaica et al., 371). Dysphoria can cause confusion and delayed treatment for individuals, and can make it so that students are wary of seeking help or treatment.

Not only do LGBTQ+ students face feelings of confusion and dysphoria, they experience higher rates of sexual assault and abuse. According to Namrata Garg, LGBTQ+ youth are three times more likely than their heteronormative peers to experience sexual violence, four times more likely to be forced to have sex, and half as likely to use a condom during sex (Garg). LGBTQ+ individuals also have higher pregnancy and STD/STI rates than heterocentric couples because of the stigmatization that is applied to these relationships (Hall, 507). In schools, between 59% and 84% of LGBTQ+ individuals experience verbal abuse, and 63% of students feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (Snapp, 581). LGBTQ+ students face bullying and harassment at higher rates than their heteronormative peers, and being in exclusive environments is linked to intimidation by peers. Because of the harassment and bullying, LGBTQ+ students are more likely than their heterocentric peers to skip school and miss classes because they do not feel safe. They are also more likely to have lower grades, worse mental health, and "...are at a higher risk for dropping out of school compared to their gender-conforming and straight peers" (Snapp). Excluding LGBTQ+ students from sex education not only impacts their sexual health, but influences their mental health, personal safety, and interactions with peers. Increasing the quantity and quality of LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum positively impacts students' mental health and creates healthy environments where people can grow and learn without fear of harassment or exclusion.

Along with promoting inclusion, comprehensive sex education gives LGBTQ+ studetns the knowledge they need and allows them the confidence to voice their concerns and questions. Inclusive education can be formed in a variety of ways. Information about the spectrum of genders and identities provides students with the resources to self-identify, which prevents harmful behaviors. This pertains to trans, asexual, nonbinary, genderfluid, and other individuals that are usually ignored by sex education curriculum. Including more information about questioning identities and transitioning from one gender to another can provide helpful information to students, and can reduce body dysphoria and harmful practices (Hobaica et al., 378). One other aspect of sex education that should be addressed is anatomy. Many students felt that this is a topic that is overlooked by sex education teachers, and more inclusive information helps students not to feel "embarrassed about their body" (Gowen 796). This is especially important for transitioning individuals, as having access to accurate biological information gives students the confidence to make the best decisions for themselves based on their identities.

LGBTQ+ individuals also benefit from information about contraceptive use. As mentioned before, most sex education curriculum focuses on heterocentric relationships and contraceptive use, if anything is discussed at all. Schools focus on abstinence to prevent pregnancies without giving rational advice to students, and this leaves many students without the resources they need. According to research done by Kris Gowen, “Placing sexual health discussions in the context of STI prevention … would make sexuality education more relevant to a wider group of youth” (Gowen 796). Encouraging conversations about contraceptive use and STD/STI prevention gives students the guidance to make appropriate sexual decisions. Along with contraceptives, students also need information on consent and healthy relationships. When schools include information about consent, boundaries, communication, and other healthy relationship practices, students have higher chances of having successful relationships. Trans individuals significantly benefit from consent curriculum, as they face nonconsensual sex at higher rates than their cisnormative peers (Hobaica et al. 377). These alterations to the current curriculum would give LGBTQ+ students the resources they deserve access to and would benefit heteronormative students as well.

Altering the current curriculum creates a safer environment for all, and students are given the resources they need to have healthy romantic relationships. Including information about consent, the emotions that come with relationships, and mental health benefits students across the board (Hobaica et al. 376). Providing this information gives students the tools to explore conversations about boundaries and pleasure in relationships, topics that can help encourage healthy behavior.

It is also essential that heteronormative students learn about LGBTQ+ issues, as it will increase acceptance and perceived safety in schools. Exposing heterosexual students to different identities and aspects of sex and gender makes them more accepting of LGBTQ+ students and reduces levels of bullying and harassment (Hall 516). Fostering this environment makes schools a safer place for all, and LGBTQ+ individuals can be comfortable and engaged in their studies. This can benefit students' mental health, grades, and relationships with their peers.

On the other hand, some believe that teaching comprehensive, LGBTQ+-inclusive sex education is a waste of time. They argue that talking about sex with students will lead to rises in STDs, teen pregnancies, and deviant behavior, and see any communication about sexual health in a negative light. According to research by Thomas Lickona, a director of Respect and Responsibility at the State University of New York, 63% of sexually active individuals who contracted STDs are under the age of 25 (Lickona 84). This statistic is a warning to parents and educators that sex education is failing young adults, but instead of improving communication, some want to promote “chastity education.” This is a curriculum similar to abstinence education that promotes the idea that students should not take part in any sexual activity before marriage. They argue that contraceptives do not work, talking about sexual orientation leads to adverse behavior, and conversation should be limited to preventing sexual contact (Lickona 88). Proponents of abstinence-based sex education argue that contraceptives, such as condoms, are not fool-proof for preventing pregnancy and emphasize that sex is “...inappropriate or immoral and that abstinence is the only method which is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy and STIs” (Collins 12). Some worry that talking about sexual health and contraceptive use will encourage sexual behavior in youth. Contenders of comprehensive sex education may also argue that teaching students about sexual-self control by promoting “chastity education” will benefit students by increasing “...respect and responsibility to the sexual domain” (Lickona 85).

These points are commonly argued, but it is clear that young adults take part in sexual activities whether or not they are advised against it. As previously demonstrated by the CDC, 86.4% of women and 90.6% of men in the U.S. engage in premarital sex (Hoefer 258). In a study done on a group of students enrolled in a Postponing Sexual Involvement curriculum, it was found that the study had no impact on the “initiation of sex, the frequency of sex, or the number of sexual partners” (Collins 9). Many young adults will be sexually active before marriage and providing them with the resources and information that will lead to healthy relationships and boundaries is crucial. It is better to give students the tools to build healthy habits than to expect they will not be sexually active at all and neglect their needs. Multiple studies show that giving teens information about contraceptives "...does not encourage early sexual activity" (Collins 14). This shows that giving teens information about contraceptives can benefit them greatly by providing them with helpful information, and that there is not an automatic correlation between teaching about contraceptives and earlier sexual behavior. Providing young adults with the resources that they need and including all types of sexual orientations in the curriculum makes all students feel connected and prepared for relationships. Students learn about consent, boundaries, contraceptives, communication, and access to this information prevents STDs, STIs, and teen pregnancies. The idea that conversations about sex directly leads to sexually deviant behavior is outdated and biased, and enforcing these ideas is only leading to more problems.

Everyone needs to be included in the conversation about sexual health if progress is going to be made in improving sex education. Including LGBTQ+ students in the curriculum is crucial, as they are commonly excluded and feel alienated from the subject matter. LGBTQ+ students struggle with bullying, harassment, and have worse perceptions of safety in schools when they are cut out of sex education. They may miss more school, endure negative sexual relationships, and face higher rates of sexual abuse than their peers. These negative outcomes can be avoided. When included in the curriculum, LGBTQ+ students feel more confident, listened to, and comfortable with their peers and partners. They are more likely to be accepted by others, engage in healthy behaviors, and having access to information about gender, sexual orientation, and contraceptives encourages confidence in students. Not only do these topics benefit LGBTQ+ students, but they can also benefit heteronormative students, and increase acceptance and healthy relationships for all. Having access to relevant sex education should be a right, not a privilege, and excluding LGBTQ+ students from the curriculum is causing more harm than good. ❑

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Fairness Creams: An Unfair Business

Amrita Gupta

About the Author

Amrita Gupta was born in Nairobi, Kenya and moved to the United States when she was 21. She is married and is a mother of 2 boys, whom she home-schools. Amrita is pursuing a degree in psychology. Her hobbies include hiking and baking cakes.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

When the BLM movement started in America, it caused waves of protests worldwide. One powerful impact these protests had was on skin-lightening creams in India. By writing this essay, I researched more on the effects of these creams and how they have encouraged colorism in India. I grew up watching these ads, so this topic meant a lot to me.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and used MLA documentation.

My sisters and I gathered in the living room, fighting for our favorite spot around the television. We watched the familiar Indian commercials, but one new advertisement stood out:

> *A couple of girls are auditioning for a dance act. One gets selected to dance while the other is asked to serve as the backstage narrator. The former tells latter, "You are such a skilled dancer. I am surprised that you were not selected." Her friend replies, "With a face as dark as the new moon, whom can I blame?" Her friend hands her a "Fair and Lovely" cream and promises her success. The ad ends with the dance performance and shows the audience captivated by the beauty of the girl narrating the script, now that she has used the cream and is much fairer. She is now the star of the show.*

Like most South Asian girls, I grew up watching skin lightening ads and was very familiar with the pressures to have fair skin. The basic message of the ads is that a light skin tone is desirable, as it will help one be successful in life, career, and even love. In the guise of a "beauty product" these creams have encouraged biases against dark skinned girls and given rise to a culture of "fair skin equals beauty and success," something that is morally wrong.

According to the World Health Organization, "The skin lightening industry is one of the fastest growing beauty industries worldwide and is estimated to be worth US$ 31.2 billion by 2024" (WHO). The popularity of this industry has been steadily increasing in India and represents 50% of the skincare market (WHO). Most users of these skin products are young girls and some start using the creams as early as ten years old (Lui). Skin lightening products work by reducing the concentration of melanin pigment in a person's skin. This pigment protects our skin against the harmful U.V. radiations from the sun (Shah 33). The higher one's melanin count, the darker their skin. The two major factors that determine melanin concentration are genetics and how much time one spends in the sun (Gardner). The body produces melanin when exposed to the sun.

The preference for white skin exists not only in India, but also in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean nations, which also use skin-lightening creams. We find attempts to lighten skin as far back as 475-221 BC (Shah 33). For example, in China, people would swallow crushed pearls and arsenic powder (Shah 33), while in England, Queen Elizabeth I was known for bleaching her face using mercury, giving her a ghostly white appearance. The color white became a symbol of beauty, innocence, and higher social status (Charleston). In Indian history, the preference for lighter skin may have come from the invasions of the Aryans, Moguls, and British in different eras (Shah 33). All three invading peoples were of lighter complexion and favored lighter skinned people, potentially influencing the country's preference for lighter skin tones (Shah 33). Adapting certain viewpoints from outside one's tradition does not necessarily have to be bad. Every culture has its own opinions on standards of beauty. But even if a person wants to aspire to those standards, that does not mean that their life's success depends on it, as depicted in "Fair and Lovely" ads.

What is ironic about India's obsession with whiter-looking skin, is that many of the country's religious icons and exemplars of beauty have dark complexions. For example, one of the most popular deities in Hinduism is Krishna, whose very name means dark and who is regarded as an emblem of beauty. He is depicted in literature and art as having the complexion of a dark bluish raincloud. In temples, one finds images of Krishna made of solid black stone. Krishna is sometimes called "Shyama Sundar," which means the beautiful dark one. The deity Shiva is also depicted with a dark hue, and the name of Goddess Kali literally means "black." Draupadi, a warrior princess, was so beautiful that all the princes competed to win her heart. She is described as dark skinned and is also called "Krishna." These are some of the many examples of dark-skinned heroes that we find in India's sacred texts. In a country where people worship dark complexioned gods and goddesses, we may assume that the ideology that fair skin is beautiful, powerful, and pure was internalized in recent times.

Someone might argue that in the Western world, young women undergo indoor tanning treatments to gain a more glowing, "healthier" looking skin, and that is commonly accepted in our society. Tanning booths also target melanin in the skin, but in the opposite direction: they increase melanin to get the desired skin tone. Tanning also changes a person's skin color and carries the same (if not more) health risks as skin lightening creams. So, what's difference? If by applying makeup or getting a tan, I feel more beautiful and confident, then what is wrong in using skin-lightening creams for the same reasons? All beauty products or cosmetic procedures carry some risks, yet they are happily accepted by society. In the same way, should not skin-lightening products be accepted like any other beauty product?

While this argument may be accepted to a certain extent, we must acknowledge that two wrongs do not make a right. Tanning is potentially very harmful to a person's health. According to the FDA, "the risk of melanoma (cancer) of the skin increases by 75 percent when tanning bed use starts before age 35" (Office of the Commissioner). Medical evidence of the dangers of tanning has led countries around the globe to make tanning under the age of 18 illegal (Netburn). In the U.S., the FDA requires tanning booths to carry a clear warning label of their dangers and many states require a parent's consent for those under 18 (Netburn). Whether tanning booths should be totally banned is a discussion for another time, but when we compare them with skin-lightening creams, we can see the differences in how they are treated. Whereas tanning booths have seen significant global restrictions, especially among young girls, skin-lightening creams are readily available for all ages, and their side effects are never labeled.

As we examine the argument in relation to other beauty products, we find that makeup use and skincare is generally meant to enhance a person's natural beauty, not structurally change their biological or genetic makeup. For example, I have always been conscious of the structure and appearance of my nose. Applying makeup may help me feel and look more beautiful, but it will not alter my nose. If my goal was to *actually* change the shape of my nose, I would need to get professional medical help, even though it is a cosmetic procedure. By going to a medical doctor, I understand the risks of surgery and I will be able to make a better decision on my different options. When it comes to skin color, it should be treated in the same manner. The skin is the largest organ of the human body (Nunez). My skin is something that I was born with and playing around with melanin to change my skin color comes with great risks. Therefore, skin-lightening procedures should only be allowed under the care of a licensed dermatologist.

Compared to other beauty routines or products, skin-lightening creams create colorism and bias. By undergoing plastic surgery, I am not going to get a better job, career, or love. The shape of a person's nose is not the key to all kinds of success, and most beauty companies do not advertise their product as such. In contrast, skin-lightening advertisements in India blatantly amplify the poisonous message of "light skin equals *every* success." Most cosmetic companies, like Unilever, which produces "Fair and Lovely," have their headquarters in a Western country, and they would never dare to advertise their products at home as they do in India. Regardless of when or how colorism started in India, broadcasting a product to "improve" skin tone only adds fuel to the fire and is irresponsible.

Other than social risks, skin-lightening creams contain many harmful chemicals that can cause several side effects. Frequently, these toxic ingredients are not even disclosed in the ingredient list of the commodity. A study carried out in Saudi Arabia found that approximately 18 out of 33 skin-lightening products contained one or more toxic ingredients that in most cases were not listed on the packaging (Al Saleh 195). The most toxic ingredients found were mercury, hydroquinone, and steroids. In most countries, creams containing these ingredients are only available by prescription. Although it may be argued that the quantity of these ingredients is minimal, they are still unsafe for skin application when we take into consideration different usage factors. The Saudi Arabia study concludes that

> many of these ingredients are harmful and pose health risks if we take into account the frequency of application, the duration of practice, area of the body applied, and their use during pregnancy and/or periods of lactation. (Al Saleh 195)

According to "Fair and Lovely" packaging directions, their product must be applied twice a day, until the desired result is achieved. They do not provide information on when to stop using the cream.

If these creams are used over long periods of time and over large surfaces of the body, possible side effects include, "patchy hyper- or hypopigmentation, skin atrophy, stretch marks and delayed wound healing." The creams "can also mask or, on the contrary, promote or reactivate skin infections. Cases of skin cancer have also been attributed to skin-lightening cosmetics" (PubMed). We know melanin is meant to protect the skin against the sun, and if the goal of skin lightening creams is to decrease this pigment, it is only common sense that eventually there will be adverse reactions, such as increased risk of skin cancer.

Giant multinational brands such as Unilever are free of such illegal toxic chemicals and claim that their products do not aim to lighten skin but only "improve skin health and protect skin from external aggressors, UV rays and environmental pollution" (Unilever). Yet when we see their ads (until very recently), their toxic message is loud and clear. One such ad by "Fair and Lovely" got their parent company Unilever into hot water:

> In the ad, a dark-skinned daughter hears her father lament the family's low economic status. After she starts to use 'Fair and Lovely,' her skin becomes visibly lighter, she lands a higher-paid job as a flight attendant, and the family's circumstances improve. This commercial marked a more aggressive era in the marketing of colorism. (Vijaya)

Unilever was ultimately forced to withdraw the ad after receiving severe backlash from the public. This is not the only instance when these companies have received push back. In 2020, the South Asian community around the world protested skin-lightening creams and demanded that companies, such as "Fair and Lovely," take responsibility for their contribution to colorism in the country. This pressure from the public compelled the company to change its name to "Glow and Lovely" (Jones). Unilever also removed shade guides that were inserted in packaging to help consumers keep track of their progress in lightening their skin (Jones).

Changing the name of a company, dropping shade guides, and making colorism less obvious in ads does not change the motivation of these companies, nor does it change the ingredients of the product. Companies continue to market and sell a product that decreases melanin without medical supervision, has potential side effects, and encourages colorism in societies. Simply banning certain brands due to health concerns is also not enough. The bigger threat that these creams pose is the psychological effects they have on young women around the globe. Women are made to feel that their self-worth and success depend only on their skin color, something they were born with. Making these products completely illegal may not be possible, but at least there should be restrictions on their accessibility. These products should not be sold freely in the market but should be available only through prescription by a dermatologist.

As I look back at my 12-year-old self, watching the "Fair and Lovely" ad, I remember not being disturbed by it. I thought it was normal to aspire for beauty in this way. I was fortunate that I grew up in a family where all four sisters were of different shades, and we were protected from the idea of changing our skin color, but this is not the case for countless girls around the world. A global effort must be made to remove skin lightening products from the market and restrict their use to the supervision of a dermatologist. If we do not take this drastic step, then these profit-seeking companies will continue to encourage young women to change their skin tone and, in this way, increase colorism in India. At this very moment, some girl somewhere may be watching a skin-lightening ad and internalizing the idea that no matter how hard she works and how beautiful she looks, she will never attain success unless she becomes a few shades fairer. This unfair business must be stopped. ❑

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Human Trafficking in the United States: What Can YOU Do to Help?

Morgan Holbrook

About the Author

Morgan Holbrook was born in Walnut Creek, California and moved to Provo, Utah when she was eleven-years-old. She is a junior studying to be a nurse. She loves all things active, including running, skiing, roller-skating, and volleyball.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about human trafficking because I met a young girl who had been rescued from a trafficking situation within the last year. I knew little about its prevalence in the united states or how I could make a difference and thought that most people could use more knowledge on the subject. As I researched I felt it critical to find accurate statistics of trafficking cases, trustworthy anti-trafficking organizations, and current legislation or facts that apply to us now in 2021.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses MLA documentation.

We have heard the stories; we have seen the signs in the airport bathrooms: "Get Help, call 888-3737-888 if you are a victim of human trafficking." We have even watched it in the theaters during Marvel Studios' recent release, *Black Widow*, and the cinematic series *Taken*, featuring a father fighting to save his victim daughter. We know what human trafficking is, and we are aware that it is happening in the world; however, many people do not believe it is happening around them, or that they can do anything to make a difference.

I went twenty-one years without meeting anyone that—to my knowledge—was a victim of human trafficking. The first victim I met was a thirteen-year-old at a small government-run girl's home in Costa Rica; I had been volunteering there just over two weeks when one of the girls started to open up about her past. It was heartbreaking, hearing her story. Her first exposure into that sick world was from her parents; they sold her for a few extra bucks. She was passed around from place to place until she was finally rescued and placed in the home where I met her. Forty girls between the ages 12 and 18 were in that orphanage with similar stories, and I have since learned that over 20,000 cases of human trafficking are reported in the United States every year. By learning to recognize the signs of human trafficking, how to properly report it, and through supporting anti-trafficking organizations, we can help decrease the number of human trafficking cases per year.

Human trafficking is defined as

> the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain labor or commercial sex. Commercial sex is defined as the exchange of any sexual act for something of value, including money, shelter, or protection. (Gibbs et al.)

Lack of reporting makes it difficult to provide accurate numbers of human trafficking instances; in fact, many victims never come forward due to fear of their traffickers or law enforcement. Although one's intuition may say that law enforcement will protect the victims, several hundred cases exist of victims being penalized for underage drinking or use of illegal substances during their time as a victim (Reid et al.). Despite the issue of underreporting, at any given time approximately eight million children and adolescents are victimized in juvenile human trafficking globally. Nearly six million of these youth are involved in labor trafficking while two million are exploited for commercial sex activities (Reid et al.).

Rates of human trafficking increase during economic crisis. For example, during the recession of 2008, human trafficking cases in the United States skyrocketed (Charles). As people lose their jobs, money becomes scarce, and people become desperate, and they are driven to do all they can to get by. Black markets thrive in these circumstances, and people become more willing to sell what is illegal to obtain any form of income. These circumstances lead to people selling not only themselves, but it also leads to parents selling their children or other family members for monetary compensation. It is estimated that up to 44% of all trafficking survivors were originally involved through a family member (Raphael). In early 2020, due to the wide-ranging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States suffered the highest rates of unemployment since the Great Depression. The national average for unemployment reached 14.8% in April of 2020, with some states reaching up to 29%, and unfortunately, this recent financial crisis has caused an increase in the amount of human trafficking seen in the United States ("Current Unemployment Rates"). From December of 2019 to December of 2020, the city of Los Angeles experienced a 185% rise in human trafficking cases (Nzinga). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in funds from government organizations against human trafficking towards financial relief programs instead (Hansler).

It is difficult to comprehend the greatness of this issue when many lack personal experiences or witnesses of these events. Utah is often thought of as a safe place, or a "bubble," some people may say, that is separated from the dark and terrible things happening worldwide, including human trafficking. However, because Utah is geographically positioned at the "crossroads of the West," it is theorized that thousands of trafficking victims are transported through the state, and hundreds are victimized within the state itself ("Be the One in Utah's Fight against Human Trafficking"). Human trafficking is a market that thrives in the background and the shadows. If we do what we can to bring it to light, we could significantly decrease the amount of trafficking in our communities. Every person can do at least four things: 1) get informed, 2) pay attention, 3) report human trafficking, and 4) support anti-trafficking efforts ("Human Trafficking Archives").

Getting informed requires educating ourselves and those around us about the abundance of human trafficking in our community and how to recognize it. In a study done by Alliant International University, 70% of people incorrectly stereotype what victims of human trafficking look like (Clagett). It is not possible to describe a single profile of either a human trafficker or a human trafficking victim. Everyone may be at risk—regardless of their age, race, or gender identity—of becoming a victim. However, through extensive research done based on the statistics of various states' reported trafficking cases, characteristics of a person's life may make them more susceptible to being captured and involved in trafficking.

A study focusing on profiling human trafficking victims states that 75% of victims have experienced some form of childhood maltreatment, the greater part of these also having been previously involved in the child welfare system (Baird et al.). It is estimated that globally, 70% of victims are under the age of 18, and 65% of victims are female ("Global Report of Trafficking in Persons"). In Utah, on the other hand, the statistics vary from the global average. Utah remains consistent with the world in that about 68% of victims are females, however, it is estimated that human trafficking victims being transported through Utah are 81% adults and only 19% youths ("Human Trafficking is Happening in Utah"). Additionally, the Be the One campaign in Utah has identified some common indicators of a trafficking victims:

- Recruited with false promises

- Signs of untreated illness or injuries
- Juvenile exchanging sex acts to meet basic needs
- Works excessive hours for little or no pay
- Does not have possession of legal/travel documents
- Controlled/restricted communication/fearful
- Older boyfriend/girlfriend/companion
- Unable to speak separately or alone
- Allegedly owes money to employer
- Tattoos/branding on the neck and/or lower back
- Possession of unusual items such as hotel keys

Another identifier of a trafficking victim is watching for a child who looks fearful, uncomfortable, or cowers in the presence of their adult guardian (Gerassi et al.). Often people imagine a trafficker as an offensive looking man. This stereotype often holds true in the United States; however, in a report done by the United Nations from information gathered from 155 countries, women trafficking women is of greater prevalence in countries such as Georgia and Latvia, reaching up to 86% of reported cases ("Global Report of Trafficking in Persons"). Therefore, although many traffickers may fit under a certain stereotype, it is important to remember that not all questionable looking men are traffickers, and not all women are innocent. It is more accurate to look for indicators in behavior, such as the victims looking scared or the traffickers looking controlling, than it is to just look for trafficking instances solely based on appearances.

After becoming more aware of the prevalence of human trafficking in the United States and what to look for in victims, the next steps are to pay attention to what you see and report anything suspicious. Utah's Be the One campaign states that "traffickers rely on the general public not asking questions, not recognizing red flags, and simply looking the other way" ("Be the One in Utah's Fight against Human Trafficking"). It is our responsibility to recognize potential human trafficking situations and report them immediately; even if we are not positive that it is a human trafficking situation, it is better to report it and be wrong than leave it unreported and risk somebody's life.

In order to report a human trafficking situation or call in a tip, the United States Department of Homeland Security says that for the safety of the public as well as the victim, you should not confront a trafficker nor alert the victim of your activity. If you recognize human trafficking identifiers in a situation, the best course of action is to immediately call 911, Federal law enforcement (866-347-2423), or the National Human Trafficking hotline (888-373-7888). Another option is to text "HELP" or "INFO" to BeFree (233733) or Google "ICE tip form" and fill out the information on their reporting document ("What is Human Trafficking?"). While speaking to a trained human trafficking advocate on the phone they will ask you questions regarding the situation you are observing and about yourself to ensure the tip they are receiving is legitimate. They will then follow a course of action to locate and take care of the situation at hand, resources such as safety planning and emotional support will then be provided to the person who called in the tip if desired. It is estimated that only 14-18% of trafficking instances get reported ("Gaps in Reporting Human Trafficking"), increasing this number to even 50% could save thousands of victims each year.

In addition to being aware of and reporting possible trafficking instances, it is also important to support anti-trafficking campaigns and organizations. The Blue Campaign is a national government organization under the Department of Homeland Security that is designed to educate the public of human trafficking and how to properly respond. They have dedicated January 11th as #WearBlueDay. Blue is the national color of human trafficking, and they promote wearing blue and sharing it on social media at least this one day a year to raise awareness of trafficking in America ("What is Human Trafficking?"). In Utah, the Be the One Campaign provides multiple ways for the community to help fight human trafficking. In addition to raising awareness and educating the public, they also provide opportunities for citizens to volunteer, organize fundraisers, donate to anti-trafficking organizations, become a mentor to a young person in need, or the opportunity to meet with and/or write public officials concerning trafficking in Utah ("Be the One in Utah's Fight against Human Trafficking").

There are also programs designed to help victims after they have been rescued or escaped from their traffickers, nearly 100% of victims suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, anxiety, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, addiction, and a variety of other physical and psychological ailments for the rest of their lives (Hemmert). Jennifer O'Brien, a researcher who interviewed several human trafficking victims, found that they all agreed their experiences as a victim made it extremely difficult to cultivate healthy relationships with anyone after escaping their trafficker (O'Brien). Across the nation, there are many government-run and privately owned care facilities for human trafficking victims, however, Utah currently has none. A team of anti-trafficking advocates in Utah are now working hard to open the Aspen House: Utah's first ever non-profit home for human trafficking victims to live and thrive in a safe, nurturing environment ("Aspen Magdalene House"). We can help support organizations like this by giving monetary donations of any size, allowing them to continue providing their services without cost to those in need.

Another effective way to show support for human trafficking victims is by being aware of local legislators who advocate for victims of human trafficking and support bills that help victims and enact greater punishment for traffickers (Barclay). In 2003, only two states had legislation aimed at combatting human trafficking; as of 2012, all 50 states have legislation for this purpose (Farrell et al.). However, some states have passed laws that are more effective at increasing the arrest and prosecution rates of human trafficking suspects. Utah is one of the states paving the way for better anti-trafficking legislation. In March of 2021, Utah Governor Spencer J. Cox signed bill S.B. 117, amending the current legislation so that human trafficking is now considered a first-degree felony rather than a second-degree felony ("S.B. 117 Human Smuggling Amendments"). By being aware of what local legislators support and what bills are being decided on in our community, we can vote for and show support towards anti-trafficking campaigns and platforms.

Human trafficking is a growing problem that has received more attention over the last several decades. Over 20,000 cases are reported every year within the United States, and researchers estimate that only 14-18% of cases our reported, meaning there could be over 150,000 actual cases happening annually ("Gaps in Reporting Human Trafficking"). Although it seems to be a daunting task and many people feel it does not affect their social circle or that they cannot make a difference, everyone can make a positive impact in their community by learning to recognize the identifiers of human trafficking, report them when seen, and through supporting anti-trafficking organizations and legislation in their area. The human trafficking business thrives in the shadows and has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic and taken advantage of the nation's suffering economy. By recognizing identifiers such as having inexplicable injuries, a controlling partner, or the inability to speak alone, citizens can report these observations to a reliable source, such as federal law enforcement or the national human trafficking hotline. An increase of reporting would bring this criminal act into the light and could have the power to decrease human trafficking cases nationwide. Additionally, being aware of and supporting anti-trafficking organizations and legislators in our local state can help to prevent trafficking cases, and care for victims after they have been rescued. Through individual courage and uniting as a community, we can help save lives. ❑

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I Don't Like My Nose and You Don't Have to Like Yours Either

Rebecca Ivans

About the Author

Rebecca Ivans was born in Lexington, Kentucky and moved to Logan, Utah when she was very little. She is a sophomore studying Political Science and Environmental Studies. For fun, Ivans enjoys embroidery and hiking.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about this topic because it is something I care deeply about, and it is outside of my comfort zone. I have never written so personally for an academic paper before this, so I had to step outside of myself and remember why I chose to write about this: to help others change their own mindsets.

This essay composed in May 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

"You are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed. And you are beautiful" (Bloom). Author Amy Bloom supplies an example of the brain's apparent tendency, or even necessity, to equate imperfections to beauty for things to be considered worthwhile. Many people, particularly teenagers and young adults, struggle with negative body image and ideas surrounding self-perception. Recently, a movement surrounding body positivity has taken the discussion surrounding body image by storm. The word "beautiful" is frequently used to assuage feelings of inadequacy in those struggling with their body image- but why? Why do we need to be considered beautiful to be worthwhile?

Why do we try to force ourselves to like what we see each time we look into a mirror? Why do we crave being told things like, "you have such pretty eyes," or "I wish I could do as many pushups as you"? When is it that we will realize that the most genuine compliment you can give someone is not that you like their hair or clear skin or how big their biceps are, but that you like *them*? That you just like them, regardless of how they look or what their body can do? Your worth is not in what you look like. Your worth is completely untethered from how many pushups you can do or even if your liver's functional. Everyone else's worth is outside of those things, too. *Your body is the least interesting thing about you.* Body positivity, however, doesn't seem to agree. Overemphasis on our bodies and their functions allows the cycle of feelings of inadequacy to begin again.

Thus, body positivity isn't the answer to our body issues. Instead, we should make it a point to focus on *body neutrality*, or the recognition that we all have bodies, and their appearance or capabilities are not what give them their worth (Fuller). The fact that they house what is truly

important about us does. We, as a society, need to stop emphasizing how we look or what we can do and instead on how comfortable and healthy we feel. It should be noted that there is no one universal definition of comfort or health, just like there is not one for beauty. Both words can mean something entirely different for people and still be creditable indicators of general happiness.

To understand one of the central flaws within the body positivity movement, one must first understand the central concept surrounding it that became so insidious in the first place: beauty. Societies worldwide have placed a particular emphasis on beauty virtually since their inception. Of course, ideals of beauty or attractiveness have never been universal; but in contemporary times, the Western model of both is widely accepted across the globe. In women, beauty ideals are generally as follows: a slim physique, long, shiny hair, clear skin, Anglo-Saxon features, and little to no body hair (Turner). Body positivity's original intent was to argue that these features are not the only ones that ought to be considered beautiful; instead, all bodies of all shapes and sizes should be regarded as "beautiful."

While body positivity's push for inclusivity is undoubtedly admirable, the push was in the wrong direction. Author Daisy Maldonado explains this concept in her article, "The Body Positivity Movement is Focused on All the Wrong Things." Body positivity's central tenant is that "all bodies are beautiful." The most critical flaw with this concept is that it ignores its audience: all bodies are beautiful, *but to who?* Who defines what beauty is? Why use that adjective in the first place? Instead, we ought to operate under the assumption that all bodies are *worthy*. Worthy of respect, kindness, and benevolence. "Worth" has a much less negative impact on the psyche than "beauty" does. While, of course, worth can indicate a monetary value, which obviously cannot be applied to a human body, its limits of definition are not as narrow as that of beauty.

Body positivity's harm and the overemphasis on beauty or attractiveness are not limited to women. The body positivity movement also fails men. While the movement has admittedly made strides in popularizing confident, non-beauty-standard-conforming women like Lizzo and Ashley Graham, men are not offered any similar improvement. In an interview with GQ, actor Jonah Hill, who is widely revered as an "unlikely street style icon," discusses how he still faces immense amounts of criticism for his weight and appearance despite being praised for his clothing: "even now, I'll overhear someone discussing my place in the fashion world or whatever, and people are like, 'That guy? The schlubby guy from Superbad?'" Throughout the rest of the article, Hill expresses his frustration that he can be called things like a "style icon" or "one of Hollywood's most fashionable," but there is always a caveat attached to those labels. He feels they arise because he does not fit the male beauty standard of being tall and visibly muscular (Hore-Thorburn). Unfortunately, at least as it is utilized in mass media, it appears that the body positivity movement only goes skin deep.

Ashley Graham is one of the world's most famous plus-size models. Graham reached supermodel status in 2016, shortly after publicly denouncing how heavily the fashion modeling industry ostracizes people, including some of the industry's most celebrated models. Their bodies do not align with the beauty standard at that time. Graham is widely celebrated for her efforts to reform the modeling industry and for all she has accomplished regarding more inclusive sizing being introduced in popular clothing brands. Unfortunately, although Graham is considered a champion of the body positivity movement, ironically, many people just can't seem to value her past what she's been fighting to remove from the center of her work: her appearance. The actual execution of the body positivity movement falls short of its intention.

If we are to embrace body neutrality successfully, we must recognize that another tenant of body positivity is misleading, if not at times downright incorrect: our bodies' capabilities do not contribute to its worth and value. On a website created for those suffering from eating disorders, author Baxter Ekern explains the idea of body functionality as a form of being body positive. Ekern introduces readers to methods they can use to appreciate their body's functionality, such as the ability to walk to work, communicate ideas, or digest food. The methods Ekern encourages readers to try to help them celebrate their body's functions are daily practices, such as journaling, "joyful" body movements such as dancing, and eating foods that one enjoys (Ekern).

While there is merit to these ideas, and they have helped people, including myself, the focus on body functionality can isolate those with non-typical abilities, people with chronic illnesses, and those who struggle with their health. For example, I have a close friend, Brooklyn, who suffers from an array of health issues. Her kidneys are essentially nonfunctional, she's tethered to a feeding tube, and she cannot eat the majority of foods I enjoy regularly. During a long car ride, I was discussing this idea with Brooklyn, and I described to her how although I do not always like the way that I look, I am grateful to my body for helping me do my favorite things: go on hikes, walk around my college's campus, and cuddle with my pets. Brooklyn's response to my soliloquy was succinct and deeply impactful to my mentality. "Lucky you. I don't like how my body looks *or* what it does. I'm glad that works for you, but I can't think about what my body can or can't do without getting angry."

Brooklyn is not the only person with chronic illness who shares similar sentiments. While there is no doubt that methods of thinking and practices such as mindfulness that help people feel more comfortable with their bodies are incredibly worthwhile, we must be careful not to project this language and thinking onto other people. Authors Lisa Legault and

Anise Sago illustrates this concept in their journal article, "When Body Positivity Falls Flat: Divergent Effects of Body Acceptance Messages That Support vs. Undermine Basic Psychological Needs." Using self-pressuring language, like "I like my body," or forcing ourselves to be grateful for our bodies can have negative impacts (Legault & Sago).

Legault and Sago advocate for an alternative that fits in quite nicely with body neutrality; instead of telling ourselves that we *must* be grateful for our bodies or forcing ourselves to point out features of our appearance that we like, we should focus on self-acceptance. Messages like, "I don't like how my nose looks, and that's okay. My nose has nothing to do with my worth as a person." Or "I cannot run a marathon, and that is just fine. My inability to run a marathon does not detract from my value." Focusing on accepting our feelings about ourselves yields much better results and makes room for building self-confidence than arbitrarily stating positive messages targeted towards ourselves (Legault & Sago).

Our bodies are our homes, our vehicles that transport us through our daily lives. They are the only thing that is promised to us from the day we are born to the day we die. Thus, if given something so permanent, our biggest priority should be to find *comfort* in our bodies, not fussing over their appearance or abilities. At your funeral, what do you want people to talk about? What do you want to be remembered for? That you had a tiny waist? How handsome your face was? How attractive you were? When I am eulogized, I hope that I am remembered for the qualities of my soul, like kindness, generosity, and courage. Not for the things about me that can only be seen at face value. You are worth so much more than what the world sees as you walk by. You are worth love, respect, and kindness because of *who you are,* not what your body says about you. ❑

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Social Media and National Parks: Our Duty to Travel Responsibly

Jessica John

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses MLA documentation.

In 1901, John Muir, the Father of National Parks, said that

> thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. (Muir)

Despite being said well over a century ago, Muir's statement holds more truth than ever today. National Parks have been a staple of American outdoor recreation since the beginning of their introduction. Nonetheless, technological advances, the slew of Covid-19 anxieties, and our everyday fast paced society have driven people to nature in record numbers. Though nature has been a constant, it hasn't been unaffected by the vast changes our society has undergone, including the exponentially increasing influence of social media. In 2015, Instagram had 370 million annual users, and Facebook had 1.49 billion annual users (Facebook, and Statista). This data also shows that in the five short years between 2015 and 2020, those numbers skyrocketed. Instagram experienced an increase of 538.2 million people, giving them 908.2 million annual users. Similarly, Facebook experienced an increase of 1.3 billion people, landing them at 2.79 billion annual users (Facebook, and Statista). As social media has grown and strengthened its presence in our culture, it has become a key factor in multiple facets of decision making. A Gallup Poll in 2014 found that 62% of Americans felt that social media had no influence on their purchases at all, but that number has been completely overturned in recent years, with 73% of teens reporting that social media is the best way to advertise products and promotions to them (Barysevich). In addition to everyday consumer decisions, social media has completely transformed the way people decide on and plan travel. Whether it is finding the perfect destination or posting our own vacation pictures, social media has made it easier than ever to find the best trip possible. In 2017, published communications researcher Dr. Rizki Briandana developed a multi-phase cycle that details how social media is involved in our travel decisions. Focused particularly on platforms based on photo sharing such as Instagram and Facebook, the cycle involves interaction and collaboration in the first phase and content sharing in the second phase (Figure 1).

In the first phase, the emphasis on information collection and evaluation by image highlights social media's influence on how people decide where they want to travel. The speed at which information and photos can spread through social media has increased exposure to previously isolated destinations, including those of National Parks, at an unprecedented rate, altering many historical travel patterns. As it is being currently utilized, increased social media usage is doing more harm than good when it comes to National Parks and other protected lands.

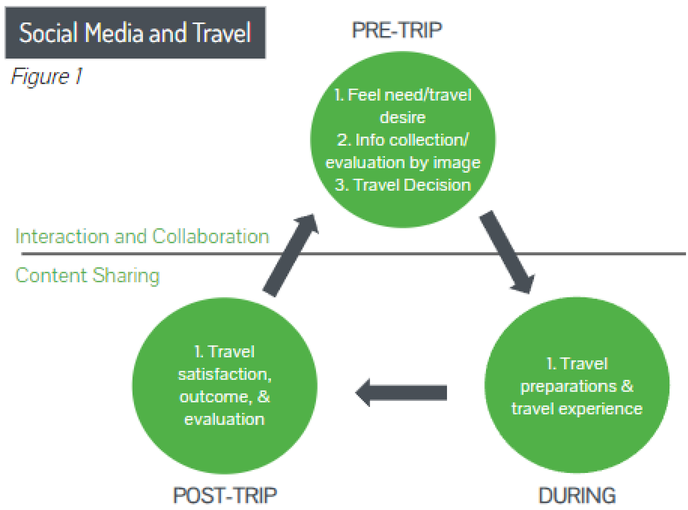

Figure 1. Social Media and Travel

Like most things in the age of technology, National Parks have been experiencing extensive changes. Overcrowding has moved to the forefront of the slew of problems facing our National Parks. Multiple parks, including Yellowstone, Zion, and the Grand Tetons have set monthly visitation records this year. Zion, for example, blew their previous monthly record of 595,000 visitors in June of 2019 out of the water in June of 2021 with 676,000 visitors that month (Associated Press). The Parks system is not equipped to handle high influxes of visitors. The infrastructure is out of date, they are often understaffed, and the parks simply lack the space. The overcrowding has prompted concerns over the safety of visitors, staff, and even the wildlife. During the summer of 2021, "Arches national park had to close its gate more than 120 times this summer alone when parking lots filled up, creating a safety hazard for emergency vehicles," making high volume days that much more dangerous (Gammon). Increased visitation may come from a variety of changes in our present day culture, but a prominent one is social media. As it is being currently utilized, increased social media usage is doing more harm than good when it comes to its effects on National Parks and other protected lands.

To begin with, social media travel inspiration accounts play a significant role in increasing visitation to National Parks and other protected lands. Back in 2014, my dad, grandmother, brother, and I decided to hike into the Grand Canyon to camp in Havasupai. Our reservation was booked during monsoon season, and at the time, you could abandon your reservation for a full refund or simply reschedule for a later date. Because of this, when the forecast showed rain, the entire hike and much of the falls themselves were free of other tourists. However, Havasupai quickly lost its status as a hidden gem as travel Instagram accounts gained traction. With its picturesque teal waters, Havasupai appeared front and center on countless travel inspiration Instagram accounts and bucket list travel blogs, including @havasupaifalls, a travel inspiration account with over 41,000 followers. In turn with this increase in exposure and photo-sharing, visitation to Havasupai started skyrocketing. Reservations are no longer refundable and the waitlists have seen dramatic increases. This is not an isolated phenomenon. Stunning, almost too good to be true photos of travel inspiration from locations all around the United States and even the world go viral across Instagram regularly. Kanarraville Falls, just south of Zion, is considered a victim of social media's influence. Charlotte Simmonds with the Guardian stated that the falls were "once a hidden gem but now featured in countless Instagram posts." She also noted the way the stream banks are experiencing extreme erosion and are consistently littered with trash due to increases in tourists and hikers who saw the Kanarraville Falls on social media. These accounts serve as highly effective advertisements to the billions of social media users searching for travel destinations. Some argue that travel centered social media is not a negative factor, but rather a positive information center that allows more people to experience America's beautiful places. While this is certainly true, this aspect of social media's impact is misused, as well as underutilized. When encouraging travel to these places based solely on aesthetics, uninformed tourism increases. The lands in

National Parks are protected for a reason, meaning that travel to these areas often require more research and information than other vacations. Because this research tends to be lacking when travel is decided upon based solely on social media, it has numerous side effects that are damaging to the protected lands in National Parks.

Social media's influence on the increasing tourism to National Parks has generated and escalated the sustainability issues many of them are facing. The dramatic influx in tourism that led to overcrowding has caused substantial increases in pollution in National Parks. A study conducted by researchers at Iowa State found that ozone levels in 33 of the largest National Parks in the United States "were statistically indistinguishable from those of the 20 largest U.S. metropolitan areas" (Keiser et al.). The packed parking lots and backed up roads in National Parks are not simply a hassle for visitors now, but are worsening the air quality in the lands we are trying to preserve. While climate change is a global issue, research shows that National Parks "bear the disproportionate brunt of global warming" (Simmonds, et al). The Park Service is not equipped to keep up with the environmental challenges. The infrastructure was last fully updated in the 1960s, leaving the parks woefully unprepared for the increased crowds and environmental challenges. For example, Havasupai is particularly susceptible to flash floods. These floods are highly detrimental and leave the waterfalls and river in a very fragile and unstable condition, so as influxes of hikers and tourists increase foot traffic and further degrade the fragile soil. In addition to the worsening environmental impacts, the chief spokesperson for the National Park Service, Jenny Anzelmo-Sarles, has noted that the more visitors the parks see, the more graffiti, litter, and careless behavior they see (Gammon). Not only does this cause problems for the preservation of the parks themselves, but it also poses issues for the towns that surround them. Water pollution and other contaminants from influxes of tourists has affected the people of surrounding towns. To this, there is an argument that the economic benefits from increasing tourism in National Parks outweigh the ecological harm, especially considering the fact that much of the revenue generated goes back into the National Parks System. However, social media's influence has caused the increase in visitation to rise so much that even with the extra revenue, the maintenance crews cannot keep up with the rate of pollution and overcrowding. Additionally, the economic benefits do not have to come at the cost of conservation, which was a large goal of establishing National Parks. Revenue can be maintained, and even increased, through reservation systems, standard entry fees, and private philanthropy. The prominent pollution from overcrowding in the parks proves just how powerful social media is, especially when it is being improperly utilized.

Social media-driven overcrowding is not only dangerous to the preservation of the National Parks themselves, but also to the tourists themselves. Uneducated tourists and higher crowds have led to higher numbers of preventable accidents, including dehydration, fatal falls, dangerous animal encounters, and simply careless behavior. A study on accidents and accountability in National Parks by environmental communications researcher Dr. Rickard found that each year, approximately 6,000 visitors of National Parks suffer serious injuries or fatalities. Additionally, the National Park service responds to over 14,000 emergency medical events and 4,000 search and rescues nationwide (Rickard). Because social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook focus largely on sharing photos, many of the tourists who chose their destinations based on aesthetic photos are largely uneducated on the areas they are visiting. Dr. Rickard's study found that there tends to be a "perception of invulnerability" and "exaggerated sense of control" in tourists that can increase accidents. When most of our information is gathered through social media and there are such dramatic lines and waits, it is easy to forget that National Parks are still wild lands and not a natural Disneyland. This misconception about the nature of National Parks deflects the blame from our own carelessness as tourists and unfairly places it on the National Park Service and park rangers themselves. During an interview I conducted with the hosts of the popular "National Park After Dark" podcast, Cassie Yahnian and Danielle LaRock, they discussed how the public reacts to accidents in National Parks. LaRock and Yahnian noted that there is a strong perception of National Parks as a controlled environment, when in reality they are some of the only "true wild places" left. LaRock cited social media as a huge driving factor for this false sense of security, recalling a story of tourists attempting to sue the National Park Service after a tragic bear attack, with the tourists' family arguing that dangerous animals should be fenced in. However, the victims were uneducated and disregarded signs posting advice on proper camping location and practices in the park.

While accidents and fatalities in National Parks are not new, they have been increasing as the parks become more crowded. In Yosemite alone, there has been a "90% increase in vehicle accidents, a 60% bump in calls for ambulance services and a 130% rise in searches and rescues," putting a severe strain on park staff and resources (Simmonds). In addition to outdated infrastructure and clogged roads, the overcrowding National Park Service staff and park rangers are severely overwhelmed by the influx of tourists. Park rangers are severely overwhelmed, trying to manage the park logistics, rowdy tourists, and the influx in accidents. Due to budget restrictions, staffing has stayed the same, even in spite of the swelling visitation rates. Very few park rangers are fully specified in one area of park management; most rangers are expected to be equipped to handle parking, traffic control, rescues, preservation and conservation, and more, meaning that they are stretched thin. As tourists, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves on these areas in order to preserve them in the pristine state they were meant to be, rather than expect to come into a highly controlled, regulated environment. That is simply not the nature of our National Parks.

Furthermore, in addition to increasing exposure to a lot of our National Parks, social media creates a drive for finding the "perfect picture." Many of the photos on social media of these scenic destinations are unrealistic, whether that includes editing, photoshop, or rare circumstances, but their beauty has caused many tourists to seek out these photos themselves. The search for these photos has driven tourists to the scenic National Parks in droves, which contributes to both overcrowding and an increase in preventable accidents. In 2018, Meenakshi Moorthy and Vishnu Viswanath fell to their deaths in Yosemite National Park while taking a selfie on a cliffside 1,000 feet above the floor of the valley (McCormick, Safi). Maschelle Zia, manager of Horseshoe Bend, stated that "social media is the number one driver" and that "people don't come here for solitude–they are looking for the iconic photo" (Simmonds). The hosts of "National Park After Dark" described the changes they've seen over the years as regular visitors of the parks across the country. When LaRock first began visiting National Parks, any pictures there were taken on digital cameras. The crowds were significantly smaller than the ones we see today, stating that the appearance of cellphones seemed to go hand in hand with the drastic crowd increases (John). Geotagging, or using GPS to pin the exact location photos on social media were taken, has increased the problematic search for the perfect picture, by allowing others to track the spot and flooding it with phone-toting tourists. However, geotagged social media posts have also benefited the parks in some ways. There is an argument for the positive benefits of social media through its use as a form of citizen science. Social media posts have allowed environmental scientists to analyze greenness in seasonal cycles of vegetation across National Parks with a "95% confidence level" in areas that lack significant high quality monitoring systems (Silva). It is inarguable that social media has proved to be a powerful data collection tool and a vessel for citizen science. It has provided data on tourist behaviors, as well as the flora and fauna of the parks. However, increased tourism increased preventable erosion, encroaching, and trampling of said flora and fauna. Its data can certainly be used for study and conservation, but the benefits don't currently outweigh the environmental damages National Parks are experiencing due to increased, social media motivated tourism.

Our National Parks are suffering. Our love for them is causing their degradation. What can be done? There are numerous proposed solutions, though not always popular. The most effective solution we have available at this time is placing tighter capacities on the amount of visitors allowed into each park at a time. The capacities should be specifically tailored to each park based on size and environmental stability, as well as the busy and slow seasons. During slow seasons, National Parks should tighten the capacity limits to allow for natural regeneration, as well as for man-powered restoration and conservation efforts, which would allow them to be better prepared for the busy seasons. Furthermore, we have already established that social media has a powerful influence over tourists visiting these protected lands. This capacity for education and influence is severely underutilized, and it can be used to increase knowledge of safe, responsible, and sustainable practices in National Parks. Many of the National Parks Instagram accounts already include safety and travel tips in their captions, and this can be easily applied to travel inspiration accounts and blogs. As travelers and tourists ourselves, we can also spread awareness about safety tips or places to properly educate ourselves in order to create safer trips both for ourselves and our environment. Danielle LaRock and Cassie Yahnian focus on adding safety tips and advice about proper practices into their podcast after their story, hoping to educate their audience and to establish relatability. In the wise words of Cassie Yahnian: “the first step is getting people to care, and when they care, good things come into play.” We have the power to influence the fate of protected lands in the United States. The immense power of social media is quite literally at our fingertips, and we have a responsibility to use its influence for good. In a world faced by the horrific effects of climate change, protecting these wild places is more important than ever. So despite the fact that as it is being currently utilized, increased social media usage is doing more harm than good when it comes to National Parks, it has the potential to create lasting and positive environmental change. ❑

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Mobilizing Civil Society on Native Reservations

Chris Marshall

About the Author

Chris Marshall is a sophomore in the Professional Pilot Program. They were born in Winfield, Illinois but spent most of their time living in San Antonio, TX. They aim to become one of the only Jewish, non-binary airline pilots. Chris is involved with the Honors Program at Utah State and is a DJ for Aggie Radio.

In Their Words: The Author on Their Writing

In February 2022, I attended the Student Conference on Religion in the Public Sphere, which was held by BYU. During that conference, I learned about the disenfranchisement that Native Americans face, especially when it comes to voting. That conference inspired me to write this essay, as this is a huge issue that's not commonly talked about. I was able to use current sources, such as lawsuits still ongoing and news about the upcoming 2022 election to really build the strength of my essay.

This essay was composed in May 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Could you imagine filling out a vote-by-mail ballot at the post office instead of going home to fill it out? What about receiving the ballot too late? Well, that is a reality in the Navajo Nation. First-class mail could take up to ten days to reach St. Johns, the county seat of Apache County, Arizona, which is near the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation in Arizona, spread over 18,000 square miles, only has 27 post office locations. Some of the postal offices are open for several hours a day. This space is comparable to New Jersey, which covers 8,723 square miles and has over 500 post offices, only having 13 post offices covering the entire state (Astor; "USPS"). Not being able to receive the ballot on time or having limited access to postal offices are just two examples of roadblocks that make it hard for Native Americans to vote. There shouldn't be any roadblocks that prevent Native Americans from voting, as voting is a civil right. Congress must pass H.R.5008, the Native American Voting Rights Act of 2021, to protect Native Americans' civil rights.

Meet Darlene Yazzie, who is a member of the Navajo Nation living in Dennehotso, AZ. The town of Dennehotso has a couple of churches, a market, a school, and a Navajo chapter house, which contains a post office. However, that post office is ten miles away from Yazzies's home. It takes a long time for mail to reach that post office, as it takes ten days to reach the county seat of St. Johns, which is 200 miles away from Dennehotso. When Yazzie voted in Arizona's primary election during the 2020 election, she filled out the ballot at the post office instead of her home. Her son tried bringing the ballot home but couldn't return the ballot in time due to the limited post office hours (Astor).

To demonstrate the problems with mail in the Navajo Nation, Four Directions, a Native American voter rights group, tried sending mail from different post offices in the Navajo Nation. None of the first-class mail reached the county recorder's office in less than six days. As mail-in ballots are usually sent to the county recorder's office, that is a significant issue. In comparison, mail sent from the city of Scottsdale reached the Maricopa County office in 18 hours (Astor). Six days is a lot more time than 18 hours, especially when it comes to voting. In addition, because of the ruralness of the Navajo Nation, there are fewer postal workers to deliver mail, and some areas take special equipment to reach.

Well, if mail-in voting doesn't work well, what about in-person voting? Let's meet some more people who live in the Navajo Nation or other reservations: Agnes Laughter, Thomas Poor Bear, and Naomi White, and see what issues they have faced. Laughter lives in Chilchinbeto, AZ, which is 170 miles away from Flagstaff, AZ. When Arizona passed a law requiring voter identification, she couldn't vote in 2006 because she had no identification. White, who resides outside of the town of Window Rock, AZ, wasn't assigned to a voter precinct during the 2006 election. The reason? She didn't have a home address, so her physical address was considered too obscure. As a result, she couldn't even vote via absentee ballot.

Poor Bear isn't a member of the Navajo Nation like everyone else mentioned so far. Instead, he is a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe in Wanblee, SD. For him to vote, he has to travel 30 miles each way to the town of Kadoka. 22% of Native American households lack a car in Jackson County, where Wanblee and Kadoka are located. After he filed a lawsuit, a satellite voter registration office was opened in Wanblee ("Securing Indian Voter Rights" 1731). These stories are just a small percentage of issues Native Americans face when it comes to voting. There are plenty of stories left untold.

Before 1924, Native Americans weren't even considered citizens in the United States. They would have to cut off all ties to their tribe to be regarded as citizens. However, in 1924, that changed with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act. When that act was passed, all Native Americans became citizens of the United States. However, that was not enough. States still denied the right to vote to Native Americans by using discriminatory practices such as poll taxes and literacy tests (Ferguson-Bohnee 1103-1104). In Arizona, the Arizona Supreme Court stated that because Native Americans were under guardianship by the federal government, they were not eligible to vote under the Arizona Constitution, which states that people under guardianship were not eligible to vote (Ferguson-Bohnee 1108-1109).

During World War II, Native Americans were drafted. The United States government used members of the Navajo and Hopi tribes to send coded messages. The Navajo and Hopi Code Talkers were essential to military victories such as Iwo Jima. When the Native Americans returned from the war, fighting for freedom, they still had no right to vote in Arizona. The Native Americans couldn't even vote if they lived off the reservation, had a job off the reservation, and served in the military.

During the 1940 census, Native Americans comprised 11.5% of Arizona's population, which made them the largest minority. With them being unrepresented in elections, something had to change. In 1948, Frank Harrison and Harry Austin, members of the Yavapai Nation, filed a lawsuit to reverse the Arizona Supreme Court's decision not to allow Native Americans to vote. As a result, the Arizona Supreme Court reversed its decision, and Native Americans could legally vote (Ferguson-Bohnee 1109-1111). It's a bit ironic how Native Americans could fight in the war for freedom, but their freedoms at home were limited. Thankfully, Harrison and Austin's lawsuit opened a new door of possibilities for Native Americans. However, that was not enough. There were still barriers that discriminated against the Native Americans in Arizona.

Even though the Native Americans could legally vote, many couldn't vote due to barriers in language and literacy. Arizona law stated that to vote, one would have to be able to read the constitution in English and write their name. Because many Native Americans couldn't write or read English, many were ineligible to vote. Some Native Americans could vote, but approximately 85% of Native Americans did not read or write in English. Schools weren't given enough resources to teach Native American children how to read or write, so there was no opportunity for the illiteracy rate to decrease. However, in the 1960s and the 1970s, federal laws were passed that banned the literacy test. Native Americans could finally vote (Ferguson-Bohnee 1112).

The Voting Rights Act, passed in 1965, guaranteed the right to vote for Native Americans. The Voting Rights Act made it illegal to use discriminator practices, such as literacy tests and poll taxes. It also enforced the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (“15th Amendment”; “Voting Rights Act”). Even though the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment gave the right to vote to all citizens, the Voting Rights Act enforced the Fifteenth Amendment so states couldn’t bypass the Amendment. Utah and Maine were the last states to recognize the right to vote for Native Americans (Hedgpeth).

However, Arizona found a way to bypass the Voting Rights Act. They could still use a literacy test for voter registration because they claimed it was not discriminatory, as everyone had to take it regardless of race. However, in the 1970s, Congress and the Supreme Court prohibited the use of literacy tests, and in 1975, a new Voting Rights Act was passed that permanently banned literacy tests (Ferguson-Bohnee 1112-1115). Even though Native Americans became citizens in 1924, they couldn’t even register to vote until 1948, and even then, most of them couldn’t vote until the 1970s. Even today, 50 years later, there are still barriers.

In 2004, Proposition 200 was passed in Arizona. This proposition required voters to present either government-issued photo identification or two forms of identification. Those two forms of identification could include: "current utility bill, bank or credit union statement, Indian census card, property tax statement, tribal enrollment card, tribal identification, vehicle insurance card, or a recorder's certificate" (Ferguson-Bohnee 1125). With Proposition 200, Native Americans with a tribal identification with only their name could vote using a provisional ballot. However, the Navajo Nation didn't provide tribal identification at that time. Navajo citizens didn't need an identification to vote in tribal elections or to access places on the reservation. Instead, they were identified by a kinship system. Once the Navajo Nation started issuing tribal identifications, they were limited to those that could afford the $17 fee and could travel to Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation (Ferguson-Bohnee 1125-1126). Even though the Voters Right Act prohibited discrimination in voting, states still use identification requirements to disenfranchise voters. In Arizona's case, it used identification requirements to disenfranchise Native American voters, who might not be able to obtain the identification required to vote.

Going back to Agnes Laughter's story, she had voted in all elections after becoming eligible to vote. Yet, she couldn't vote in the 2006 election because she lacked the required identification due to the passage of Proposition 200. When she went to the polling station in Chilchinbeto, AZ, she was recognized by Mary Yazzie, a poll worker, as they are both members of the Red-Running-into-the-Water maternal clan. However, that wasn't enough. She had to leave and couldn't vote. She didn't have photo identification, and she didn't have two alternate forms of identification. This situation is one faced by many members of the Navajo Nation. In 2008, more types of identifications were added to the acceptable list, but some Navajo members still lacked those identifications (Ferguson-Bohnee 1127-1131). Even though Native Americans could finally vote thanks to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, voter identification laws added an additional roadblock to voting. Voter identification laws make it harder for Native Americans to vote, as they would have to obtain the forms of identification required.

Native Americans in the Navajo Nation aren't the only ones to suffer from voting roadblocks. In North Dakota, the Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa Indians and the Spirit Lake Tribe filed a lawsuit against North Dakota's election official due to gerrymandering that would silence the Native American voice in elections. The plaintiffs claim that a newly drawn map violated the Voting Rights Act by placing the Native voters into just one subdistrict while placing them into two districts with white voters who would vote against Native American candidates. For the map to comply with the Voting Rights Act, it would have to place the two tribes into one district, creating a majority. That would allow Native Americans to elect candidates to the House and the Senate (Woodward). This lawsuit is still ongoing.

On August 13, 2021, H.R.5008, otherwise known as the Frank Harrison, Elizabeth Peratrovich, and Miguel

Trujillo Native American Voting Rights Act of 2021, was introduced onto the floor of the House. This bill would expand voter registration agencies, increase polling sites, expand early voting, provide ballot boxes, allow tribal identification, and expand bilingual voting accessibility. With this bill, a task force will be started that will focus on increasing registration, turnout, education, and accessibility for Native American voters ("H.R.5008"). The Native American Voter Rights Act was added to the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act on October 5, 2021 ("Native American Voter Rights Act"). Congress needs to focus on passing this bill, especially with the 2022 election coming up soon. This bill will allow for Native Americans' voices to be heard and more civil liberties for both Native and non-Native Americans.

During the 2020 election, Native American voters were impactful on flipping Arizona and Wisconsin from Republican to Democrat states. Now, with the 2022 midterms upcoming, the Native American vote could potentially have a significant impact on the results. Often, Native Americans don't vote based on the party but by who they think will improve Native American life the most. While most midterms have lower voter turnout than presidential elections, the turnout among Native American voters in 2022 could increase due to local candidates' impact (Sanchez). As the Native American Voting Rights Act and the Voting Rights Advancement Act are currently stalled in Congress, the 2022 election could see Native American voters voting for those who would support the acts. These acts would significantly impact Native

American voter turnout in elections and reduce roadblocks to voting,

For the entire history of the United States, there has been discrimination against Native Americans. Native Americans didn't become citizens until 1924 and couldn't fully vote until the 1960s and the 1970s. Now, even if Native Americans can legally vote, there are still roadblocks, such as not being able to receive ballots on time or reach a polling site. We must do more to allow Native Americans to vote and mobilize civil society on their reservations. Passing the Native American Voter Rights Act and the Voting Rights Advancement Act will allow for roadblocks to be broken. It would allow for Native Americans to finally be able to vote and take part in civil society like any other citizen. ❑

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Dual Immersion: Arguments from a Guinea Pig

Melody Nelson

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About the Author

Melody Nelson was born and raised in the Salt Lake Valley, Utah. She is a freshman at Utah State University majoring in Biology and minoring in Chinese. She loves to sing, read, and ski and hopes to become a doctor one day.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I wanted to write about this topic not only because I grew up in the program, but also because the state is evaluating whether the program should continue. The Chinese Dual Immersion program has been a central part of my life and I want the program to continue. It was such a fun and unique experience for me and I would not be where I am today without it. It was difficult to find research about Dual Immersion because the program is still so young, but I was able to conduct several interviews to support my argument.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses MLA documentation

When I was six years old, I started learning Mandarin Chinese. Along with 60 other students in the program, we were the first class in Utah of Dual Immersion students: the guinea pigs. I remember my parents asking if I wanted to learn Chinese and being thrilled to learn something exciting. Little did I know how much that decision would change my life. At first, it was to understand my teacher and learn how to write characters. I remember how good I felt when after two years, I finally started to catch on and was able to understand when she spoke to us. I remember when people from Deseret news came into our classroom and filmed us learning Chinese. I remember struggling to learn my multiplication tables in Chinese but having no problem when I had to say them in English.

Most Americans don't know a foreign language, but growing up learning a second foreign language my parents don't know, I got lots of questions about it. It was unique. I learned to love the culture, music, and people. I love meeting people, speaking to them in a foreign language, and connecting with them. Chinese became not only a second language but my second home. The state of Utah should continue to expand and improve Dual Immersion programs in Utah because it would benefit Utah in a variety of different ways.

Dual Immersion is a program in the 1st through 6th grades that immerses students in another language for half of the day and English for the other half of the day. The program technically ends in 6th grade, but the students may continue learning the language in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades in hour classes instead of half the day until they take their Language AP test in 9th grade. An AP language class had been the highest level language class available in the US until Dual Immersion started. Dual Immersion programs opened the door to college Concurrent Enrollment language courses in high school in Utah. Once students pass the AP test in their target language, Bridge program courses are available for the rest of high school.

The human brain remains a mystery despite everything scientists have discovered in the last century. After some poorly executed studies throughout the 1920s to 1950s, it was thought that learning a second language makes an individual less intelligent. As seen in the book *Bilingualism and Mental Development*, they believed the mother tongue was superior, and learning a second language lowered intelligence, as children had their test scores drop when they knew a second language (Smith). These studies are not realized today as researchers discovered the poor test scores of the children in those studies had more to do with the environment they were raised in during war than the fact that they knew a second language. It has since been proven wrong that learning a second language will not lower intelligence but instead increase intelligence (although how much is still debated). Even so, there’s an abundance of new exciting research revealing how speaking a second language can change the brain, especially in children and the elderly. The process of learning is all about creating new brain pathways for the brain to remember that information. Learning two languages improves the brain in stimulating ways scientists still try to understand.

First and foremost, bilingualism improves executive function. Executive function is when the brain decides what to focus on and what information to use. According to Ramin Skibba, an astrophysicist and science writer, when someone speaks another language, they must manage interference and choose between the two vocabulary and grammar systems to speak a sentence. Therefore, people who speak another language will be better at focusing and doing multiple tasks at once. Speaking another language increases the speed of the brain as it chooses tasks. There are many ways to improve executive function in the brain, but none are as effective as speaking two languages.

Bilingualism also changes the brain's structure as it creates new pathways that were not there before—because of this, learning a second language has a more significant advantage as a child and can even increase test scores. Contrary to popular belief, it's not true that it's easier to learn another language as a child. Children are in the process of creating new signaling pathways in the brain, while adults already have the pathways they need. Nonetheless, this does not mean adults can't form new pathways. Children have flexible brains, but it has to do with the schooling environment. Adults have jobs and less time to dedicate to learning a language than children in school do. The mental advantage of teaching a second language to children is that they have the time to learn and the flexibility to grasp new concepts better (Skibba). Once a person reaches adulthood, the difference between monolinguals and bilinguals, along with the advantage from childhood, disappears.

Furthermore, new research suggests that using a second language daily can benefit the brain later in life. As stated in the *Annual Review of Linguistics*, a journal that covers significant discoveries in linguistics, "bilinguals present symptoms comparable to monolinguals with more-intact brains." (Antoniou). Their data indicated two people of the same age could have different levels of neurodegeneration depending on whether they were monolingual or bilingual. This evidence suggests speaking a second language could compensate for neurodegeneration linked to Alzheimer's disease. In addition, learning a second language when an individual is old or already knows one as they age can help keep their memory intact. In short, learning a second language can improve brain function when someone is young and old. Dual Immersion has the advantage of teaching someone a language when they are young that they can use for the rest of their lives. Someone who was in Dual Immersion has those extra pathways already created and doesn't need to compensate for neurodegeneration as they age by learning a new language.

In addition, the Dual Immersion program creates incredible opportunities for students in college and their future careers. When the state of Utah created the Dual Immersion program, its goal was to help create opportunities for students and increase the likelihood of their success. The Dual Immersion program leads directly into the college Bridge courses in high school after the AP test. As a result, high school students can access 3000-level upper-division college classes as early as sophomores through bridge courses. This is a unique opportunity because no other upper-division courses are offered through concurrent enrollment, which is only offered to juniors and seniors. A Utah System of Higher education study found that "Low-income students who participate in concurrent enrollment are almost twice as likely to attend college than low-income students who do not participate in concurrent enrollment" (Do Concurrent Enrollment Courses Impact College Participation). The increase they discovered is phenomenal and should not be disregarded. Attending college increases the chances of success, and if the state of Utah can increase the likelihood of students--especially lower-income students--going to college, it should do it. Although there are several Concurrent Enrollment Dual Immersion gives direct access to college courses in high school and thus increases the chance of participating students going to college and succeeding.

The Dual Immersion program can increase the likelihood of them going to college and give them opportunities in their future careers and better colleges. Of course, not all students who graduate from Dual Immersion and Bridge programs will use their second language in their careers, but it will open the doors for many new careers. Compared to the rest of the world, the United States is behind, and few Americans can speak a second language. According to the article Why Don't Americans Know More Foreign Languages? from *Babbel magazine*,

> 26 percent of American adults were capable of holding a conversation in another language. But less than 1 percent are actually proficient in a language they

> studied in a US classroom, even though 93 percent of US high schools were offering foreign language courses as of 2008. (Koyfman)

This exposes not only how few Americans know a second language overall but how inadequate our education system currently is at teaching a second language. As you can imagine, it's rare for an American to speak a second language fluently. Not enough qualified people know a second language to fill positions in private businesses and the military. Knowing a second language fluently creates opportunities in translation for private businesses and the military because there are not many people who can fill those positions. It also can increase a student's chances of getting into a better college because it makes them a more competitive applicant. Because the Dual Immersion program is still young, there are not many students from the Dual Immersion programs in their careers, and it may take more years before Utah begins to see its effects, but it will undoubtedly be there.

In the last few years, I have seen the fruits of the Dual Immersion program in my life. Through the Dual Immersion and Bridge program, I took Chinese 3116, 3117, and 3118 in high school at the University of Utah. By the time I graduated, I only needed one to two classes to finish a minor in Chinese. The long-term opportunities from speaking a second language are why my parents placed me in the Dual Immersion program in the first place. I can only imagine how speaking Chinese will help when I apply for medical school and when I become a doctor.

As I previously discussed, learning a second language can boost the brain and help students succeed in school. Because the Dual Immersion program begins in first grade, students have an early start in learning a language. In the US, most students start taking language classes in junior high and high school. Very few, if any, can make it to the AP level in their chosen language; if they do, it would most likely be during their senior year. With the Dual Immersion program, students are not only at AP level during their freshman year of high school, but most likely college level. The study “Learner Performance in Mandarin Immersion and High School World Language Programs: A Comparison” for the *Foreign Language Annals* found that 5th and 6th graders “slightly outperformed the comparison high school group in reading” (Xu et al.). Students in elementary could not only compete with but outperform in some areas students much older than them. Even if students dropped out of the Dual Immersion program without finishing, they would still have language skills closer to high schoolers. With the Dual Immersion program, elementary school students succeed better than their peers in high school in learning a second language. From what scientists know, we can presume that learning a second language makes one smarter. This gives students an advantage while they are young and a greater chance of success while in school.

There is also tangible evidence that learning a second language through Dual Immersion programs helps students score higher in English. More importantly, it had an even greater impact on English Language learners. A study conducted by Rand Corporation, a company dedicated to research and analysis, determined that Dual Immersion programs not only "improved reading in English, but increased English proficiency for English learners…and did not come at the cost of performance in mathematics or science." (Steele). Because learning a second language has benefits for the brain and increases intelligence in children, it naturally would help them succeed in school. Anything that can help students begin succeeding at a young age and beyond should be pursued. Because the US is a melting pot of immigrants, there are many English learners, and helping English language learners succeed is a huge concern. Dual Immersion programs work the best as they learn English and their native language at the same time, instead of suppressing their native language.

I have seen how being in the Dual Immersion program encouraged me to succeed. Because I spoke Chinese fluently, I was able to become the World Language Sterling Scholar of my high school. Since I mastered a second language, especially one as hard as Chinese, I was more confident and tried more challenging classes later in high school. It's worth noting that the students in the Chinese Dual Immersion program with me also made up the majority of honors and AP classes when we got to junior high and high school. About half of the Sterling Scholars of my high school were also from the Dual Immersion program.

Finally, the Dual Immersion program helps students become better world citizens. The United States has traditionally been isolated by oceans on either side and thus lags in teaching second languages. But in our increasingly international world, learning about other cultures and languages is now more critical than ever. A study from the journal *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* argued that a "high level of multilingualism and multiculturalism represents the kind of enduring socio-cultural influence that can shape personality" (Dewaele and Wei). Essentially, this means that when someone learns a new language, they are more open-minded and have a higher tolerance for ambiguity. Ambiguity is when there is uncertainty about something. Specifically, knowing a second language makes someone more tolerant of uncertainty. This skill could make someone less anxious when confronted with challenging or new situations or new people and can communicate more easily. They are more comfortable with what they don't know and open to learning new things. As the United States strives for peace with other countries, it's crucial to increase tolerance of new people and cultures.

Despite the many benefits of the Dual Immersion program, many arguable concerns remain. Is a Dual Immersion program the best way to spend state money when it only benefits a few students? Is the program succeeding when so few make it to high school and many drop out earlier before they reach the Bridge program? According to Dr. Jill Landes-Lee, the head of the Utah bridge Program, to fund the program, the state of Utah spends 10% of public taxpayer money to support the schools with bridge and Dual immersion programs and to hire teachers. Utah state money should be spent wisely in a way that will help all students of the state succeed. Because the programs are limited and can only accept as many students as they have teachers, Dual Immersion programs are not available to everyone right now. According to an article from EducationWeek, there is also a shortage of quality teachers for Dual Immersion programs(Liebtag and Haugen). As more states get Dual Immersion programs and more languages are studied, there are fewer teachers to fill the crucial positions. So why should Utah spend the money to find those teachers when it will only benefit even fewer? While this is true, the program's benefits are worth the cost. It will take some time to adjust to the increased demand for teachers and adjust schools to the programs, but eventually, there will be a strong base of Dual Immersion programs in the state that will increase the number of people that know a second language. There is immense potential in how Dual Immersion programs will impact the state and the rest of the nation. To keep up with the increasingly international world, Americans will have to learn other languages, and what better way to do that than a Dual Immersion program? Learning a language for only junior high and high school has proven insufficient to become fluent, and most students consider it a waste of time. Learning a second language at a young age gives them time to adjust and grow in the language to become truly fluent in it.

But what happens if a student drops out early? Or doesn't pass the AP test and can't take the college classes? Wouldn't that be a waste? To answer this, I interviewed a friend who didn't pass the test after taking it twice. Even though she didn't pass the AP test, she said learning Chinese allowed her to speak to a broader range of people, and she loves speaking to those she meets. Learning the language made her appreciate their culture and pushed her out of her boundaries. She said if she had started later in life, she probably wouldn't have learned Chinese because it's such a complex language. Instead, starting young helped her grow into it and be around hard-working students. Even without passing the AP test, learning the language still has benefits (Bagley). It can help push students and encourage them to work even harder.

Because of the multiple benefits of the program claim, Utah should continue to expand and improve Dual Immersion programs in the state of Utah. The Chinese Dual Immersion program shaped my life. I would not be where I am without it. And I want to give others the opportunities and fun I have had. ❑

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Religious Absolutism: A Potentially Dangerous Parenting Style

Isaac Niu

About the Author

Isaac Niu was born in Gilbert, Arizona and moved to Logan, Utah to attend USU. He is currently studying Biochemistry and plans to be an orthodontist when he finishes school. Niu's hobbies consist of snowboarding and playing Rocket League.

In His Words: The Author on His Writing

This topic is something that has interested me for the past three years or so. I've noticed many different effects of religion in my own life and especially in the lives of my friends and those around me growing up. I have often wondered how I would like to raise my own future children. My essay serves as a warning to religious parents about some negative effects that result from a parenting style that I've seen far too often in my life.

This essay was composed in May 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Religion has been a significant factor in people's culture and beliefs throughout most recorded human existence. Some of the earliest records that we have of different societies around the world are thought to show religious behavior and dedication. Any persisting religion has been taught from generation to generation, and this tradition has continued until today. While people's beliefs vary much more extensively in present America than they ever have, the importance of establishing common values in a family persists. However, some religious parents are too focused on whether or not their child strictly follows the rules of their religion, letting this focus take precedence over the healthy development of their children. This behavior can be referred to as religious absolutism, which can negatively impact a child while they are developing. While religion can be an excellent tool for teaching moral values to children, prioritizing religious beliefs over healthy development can be detrimental to a child's upbringing. Religious parents should recognize the benefits of having common family moral values while being wary of the negative impacts of unhealthy enforcement of religious tradition.

Religion exists in many forms and can be perceived differently by many people. What is considered religious by some may not be deemed religious by others. While exploring this complex concept, Dr. Saroglou determined that being religious entails

> holding a set of beliefs about transcendent entities… having self-transcendent, emotional experiences… exerting self-control to behave in

> accordance with [certain social norms] … or identifying and affiliating with a certain community or tradition. (McKay 449)

It could be argued that almost everybody falls under some of these categories, even if they are not theistically religious in any way. Whether it be through belief in a god, a search for personal growth through meditation, or the practice of a particular moral code, all of these behaviors qualify as religious to some extent. In general, the concept of religious absolutism can apply to almost all systems of belief, including atheism.

No matter the religion that a parent chooses to teach their kids to practice, it is important that a family has shared values. When common values are taught consistently throughout a child's development, this allows for a strong foundation that a child can rely on when making difficult decisions. Dr. Shonna Waters talks about more benefits of having consistent family values in a blog post, saying, "When parents or guardians follow a set of clear values, [children] have clarity on what is right and wrong. Values give them structure and boundaries within which they can thrive" (Waters). By clearly establishing the guidelines for what a child should value, they can learn and develop in a stable environment, leading to higher success in developing important skills. In contrast, when a child is raised without consistent parental behavior, "the child learns that they can't count on their caregivers' rules and expectations. This can cause aggression, hostility, complacency, confusion, unruliness, and/or passivity" (Ceder). When these behaviors are seen in children, that indicates a lack of skill in understanding or reacting to the world around them. A parenting style that establishes family values can help avoid these issues by creating a stable learning environment for children.

Religion can be a great tool in establishing this family structure. According to a 2019 survey conducted with U.S. teens aged 13-17 and one parent of each teen, 48% of teens say they have all of the same beliefs as their parent, with only 8% of teen respondents saying that they had "quite different" beliefs compared to their parent. While parents typically have stronger religious beliefs than their adolescent children (Sciupac), the fact that about half of teens share all of the same beliefs demonstrates the effectiveness of religion in establishing common moral values between parents and their children.

This pattern can be further understood when analyzing its trends with different family dynamics. In 1996, Dr. Scott Myers performed a study examining how different factors could impact the inheritance of religiosity from parent to offspring. One of the observed trends was that "parents with different levels of religious beliefs may have more difficulty transmitting their religiosity than parents with similar religious commitments" (Myers). This trend likely has much to do with the fact that a lack of clarity and consistency in the morals taught can lead to confusion about what is right and wrong in a child. When parents disagree on what to teach their children, this can lead to some developmental issues seen in inconsistent family environments, which may be related to the increased difficulty in transmitting religiosity to offspring.

This does not mean that parents cannot disagree regarding actual religion, but the moral values they teach should align with one another.

Not only is religion a great way to establish common moral values in a family, but it generally results in different moral values compared to non-religious lifestyles. In fact, according to a study done in 2019, within a group of survey respondents ages 18 to 83, respondents self-identifying as religious were more likely to endorse the five moral foundations that psychologists most commonly study: care, fairness, ingroup loyalty, authority, and purity (Schwadel). This study, alongside the fact that religion can be a great way to establish common moral values within a family, demonstrates the benefit of having some religion or common ideology when it comes to raising a family.

While establishing common beliefs within a family can reap many benefits, using religion to do so can quickly turn into a religiously absolutistic parenting style, from which many issues can arise. It is unhealthy for a parent to disregard their child's needs and prioritize their own expectations for them, and religion is no exception. Often when a parent exhibits this parenting style, it can be detrimental to the parent-child relationship, negatively affecting the child's development. In a 19-year study following kids aged 13 to 32, it was found that children with more controlling parents were less likely to be in a romantic relationship or have academic achievements (Feder). A statistical decrease in the probability of a child achieving these things indicates the considerable negative implications of controlling parenting on a child's ability to adapt. Dr. Emily Loeb explicitly talks about this effect. She says, “perceived parental psychological control in early adolescence potentially undermines autonomy so as to lead to less favorable outcomes well into adulthood” (Loeb 158). As can be seen, a controlling parent style alone can greatly impact a child’s development and outcomes as an adult. Still, the role of religion in religious absolutism may have even more significant consequences.

An organized religion can change the ideology of a person in very drastic ways. This is because of the nature of organized religion, which only can survive if it can change a person’s behavior to spread itself in some way, often by encouraging parents to teach it to their children. Dr. Bobby Azarian analyzes this idea, comparing the survival of religion to natural selection. He says, “Successful ideas are those that are best able to spread themselves, while those that fail to self-replicate go extinct. In this way, some religious ideologies persist while others fade into oblivion” (Azarian). For a religion to survive, it must change a person’s ideas and actions to replicate itself. This change can be beneficial or disadvantageous to those that practice the religion. Harmful effects are most often seen in groups of people who take their religion too radically. Azarian speaks on how this could come to be, noting that

> religious fundamentalism—which refers to the belief in the absolute authority of a religious text or leaders—is almost never good for an individual. This is primarily because fundamentalism discourages logical reasoning or scientific evidence

> that challenges its scripture, making it inherently maladaptive. (Azarian)

Countless examples have been witnessed throughout history of how religion has driven people to do immoral things, with the Crusades being a good example. While being too strict about religion in parenting is not very comparable to the Crusades, this example shows the extent of power that religion can have on the behaviors of an individual or group.

This way of thinking about religion may explain a trend found in a study done in 2018, where third graders were assessed based on standardized test scores and ratings from their teachers. In the study, Dr. John Bartowski reports that third graders with a more religious background typically performed worse in science, math, and reading tasks (Bartowski). This relationship may result from the religious fundamentalism that Dr. Azarian speaks of. When what children are taught in school contradicts religion, it may be more difficult for a child raised religiously to understand. For example, a child may have issues grasping a concept such as evolution when they've been taught about the creation of man differently in their religious background. This problem may be avoided by teaching children to be open to different concepts instead of focusing on religion alone.

When it comes to religious beliefs, many parents overestimate their child's commitment to the religion they were raised in. In a survey completed by *Pew Research Center*, 69% of parents overestimated how important religion is to their teens (Sciupac). A difference in perception of the importance of religion can very quickly lead to conflict between a parent and their adolescent. During these intrafamilial religious conflicts, it is important that the parent avoid fundamentally defending their religion before considering the needs of their child. According to Dr. Susan Branje, conflict can be a tool for reorganizing parent-child relationships "when parents and adolescents can switch flexibly between a range of positive and negative emotions" (Branje). If, in conflicts with a child, a parent is non-negotiable and does not vary emotionally, this can be extremely detrimental to the parent-child relationship. It is unhealthy for a parent to do so when in religious conflict with a child, and avoiding this behavior is vital to developing successful characteristics in children.

There is a delicate balance between being consistent when teaching what morals your children should value and holding them too strictly to that standard. A Christian mom who runs the family blog *They Didn't Come with a Manual* explores the difficulty of this relationship in one of their posts, saying,

> Our beliefs and rules come from a source that we may not like to question and it can feel as though so much is at stake (…heaven or hell). We can feel so strongly about adherence to it that it easily becomes a battle ground with our children who will very likely have a different view than we do. (Parenting and Religion)

Most parents have the best interest of their children in mind at all times, and sometimes it seems that doing whatever it takes to align their children with their religious viewpoints would be the best thing. However, it is important to realize this is not the case because doing so can lead to many developmental issues that follow children well into adulthood. A self-proclaimed agnostic owner of a parenting blog, Sumitha Bhandarkar, puts it well when she says that no matter the form of religion, "It is extremely important... to prepare [your children] with a strong foundation of your faith, standing on which they can choose for themselves what they want to believe in" (Bhandarkar). If parents do their best to consistently teach and guide their children with what they have come to know is right and then accept their child for whoever they come to be, that creates an ideal environment under which a child can thrive and grow.

Overall, while religion is of varying importance in people's lives, we all have a code of morals that we live our lives by. When raising children, this moral code is undoubtedly what should be taught to our children, but we cannot let our religion blind us from what is most important: our children. By focusing on our children as individuals, we want the best for them instead of viewing them as what we wish they would be religiously; the question of how important religion should be when raising children becomes evident. While religion can be an excellent tool for teaching children moral values and establishing uniformity in a family environment, it should not take precedence before the needs of a child. ❑

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Happiness, Sadness, and an Avoidance

Carissa Olson Crowton

About the Author

Carissa Olson Crowton grew up in a small town called Grangeville, Idaho. She lived on a farm there until she moved in with her wonderful grandparents at the age of 18. After serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, she began attending USU. While exploring majors, she met her amazing husband. She is currently pursuing Music Therapy. In her free time, she enjoys singing and admiring animation with her husband.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I think avoidance is a huge problem in student culture. I wanted to write about this because I had learned how detrimental avoidance was and how difficult it was to change. I wanted to make it easier for students to switch to more effective habits. I originally struggled with the thesis and direction for this essay, but with the suggestion of thesis seeking from my professor, the paper came together much easier.

This essay was composed in November 2021 and uses APA documentation.

I scroll through my phone, waiting for a sign. My final paper sits unfinished on my HP laptop. It's due tomorrow, but I can't bring myself to finish it. I look around the room, searching for anything that needs to be done in the house. I see the dishes piling up in my tiny sink and think to myself that I need to wash them for lunch. It's 1:00 PM. I get up from my comfortable brown couch and put on my purple rubber gloves. I've done it. I've effectively rationalized not finishing my essay by finding literally anything else to do of barely equal urgency and importance. Fast forward. It's 11:00 PM. I feel the intense anxiety and weight of my previous procrastination come to a head. I open my laptop and the Word document that holds my final paper. I can stall no longer, and I settle down for a long, intensive, late-night writing spree prompted only by the impending deadline of 11:00 AM the next morning. Seven pages, 12 hours, my laptop, high anxiety, inspiration, and me.

Many students can relate to this experience. Avoiding things can be considered a common practice in student culture and sometimes even worn as a badge of honor. "How was your night last night?" "Well, I watched a movie, played games with friends, and wrote my final paper." "THE WHOLE THING?" "Yep!" [insert smug smile]. This is a typical conversation regarding finishing assignments last minute. Of course, not all students procrastinate their assignments, but many still avoid other important things. These things could include anything that instills a feeling of dread. For some, this is calling their parents and for others, mopping the floor. For still more, it's exercising, eating healthy, replying to text messages, and feeling emotions from painful relationships. The list could go on and on. Each person's triggers for avoidant behavior are unique and instill strong feelings that the person does not wish to feel. This reaction is understandable, but most people can agree that it is not always effective. Sometimes we can get away with avoidant behavior, but sometimes these choices have dire consequences. Sometimes this means getting a lower grade that costs you your overall GPA, losing friendships, and experiencing high anxiety levels.

Some people have the opposite problem. These people take on so much that they experience burnout and engage so much in things that it hinders them from doing their best. For these people, they may still be using avoidant behavior, but for feelings that drive them to be over-involved in things. These feelings could be the fear of missing good opportunities, disappointing others or oneself, or even avoiding the possibility of a label "lazy" by family members or friends. These behaviors can also have dire consequences, such as turning in lower quality assignments, exhausting friendships, and still experiencing high levels of anxiety.

Avoidance can even affect our mood and perceptions of how happy we are. To understand this relationship, we must understand how overall feelings work, namely that we experience life through a comparative lens. This means you cannot have your desired feelings without experiencing your undesired feelings. "Good" feelings only feel good because they are a relief or resolution from "bad" feelings (even though there are no such things as good or bad feelings, we just tend to label them that way). In other words, people can't feel happy without feeling sad. If avoiding sadness or other unpleasant emotions becomes standard practice for someone, they will feel a reduction in happiness. This type of avoidance can come from people who used to feel an extreme amount of unpleasant emotions and wish to avoid this same pain or those who know they have never experienced the extreme emotions that others have and therefore fear having to experience them.

"Let's watch a movie." I want to cry, but I nod. I try to shut out the pain of hurtful memories and focus on the moment. The opening credits come on. My husband puts his arm around me, and I snuggle into his soft shoulder. I silently fade into a pit of worry. I try to silence the thoughts that I may have seen my abusive ex at the store while getting the bread—the beautiful animation scrolls across the screen. Though the emotional wounds still eat away at me, I refocus my attention and don't speak.

Avoidance can be counterproductive in many ways. But if avoiding is so unhelpful, why do we tend to do it? At its heart, people tend to avoid because avoidance is a coping mechanism. In short, whenever our brain perceives a threat, we unconsciously engage in a coping mechanism. Even though a test can seem silly to be perceived as a threat, it makes overall logical sense when we consider our brain's overall goal to survive. For example, we know our grade depends on the assignment, our later income depends on our grade, and our later life depends on our income. Suddenly a huge snowball effect has occurred that lets your brain know that the test is important and that failure would not benefit your survival.

There are many coping mechanisms at our brain's disposal. Avoidant and approach coping are two of the most prominent. Avoidance coping is characterized by avoiding a stressor rather than interacting with it. This avoidance can span many areas and can apply to changing what you do to avoid thinking about something, feeling something, or doing something hard (Scott, 2021). Conversely, approach coping refers to when a person faces a problem head-on and accepts everything entailed (Scott, 2021).

We can see how all the examples in the first few paragraphs dealt with avoidant coping. Avoidance coping is considered "maladaptive" because it does not typically accomplish the overall goal a person needs or wants to achieve (Scott, 2021). The use of avoidant coping has also been linked to increased anxiety or "distress symptoms" that amount to more than would have been experienced during solely dealing with a stressor. Yet, it is often used. While this frequency of use may not apply to everyone, many students often use avoidance coping. This frequent use is sometimes perplexing because avoidant coping does not always yield the best results, as described above.

Approach coping is another mechanism that yields better results, but it is rarely used when it really counts. This can be due to many factors. Two main factors are how a person sees a threat and their ability to respond to it. These are called appraisals of self-efficacy and appraisals of threat. “Appraisals of self-efficacy” refer to the belief that you assign to a stressor about whether you as a person have the ability to work through it (Donald et al., 2017). The “appraisal of threat” refers to how a person perceives a stressor regarding how much it is a threat to them. This refers to how much it will impact their life, meaning their survival, and whether it will be in a negative way (Donald et al., 2017)

When it comes to self-efficacy appraisals, there is a common trend that those who feel they can reliably work through a stressor are more likely to use an approach motive. The idea states that if you feel more confident in an area, you will be more likely to tackle the problem than run from it. Conversely, if a person thinks they cannot reach a goal, they are less likely to try but instead avoid it (Donald et al., 2017). Approach coping reduces stress and is typically more effective than avoidant coping. In this way, higher self-efficacy appraisals can be beneficial to an individual.

For threat appraisals, if a person sees a stressor as something that could negatively impact them, they will likely attempt to avoid it. This is a basic form of protection that we are all prone to and is natural and normal. However, this behavior leads to avoidant coping and doesn’t allow a problem to be solved in the best way. This means that tasks of lower importance to one’s life are more likely to be engaged due to the greater likelihood of approach coping being activated in a less threatening situation.

This information explains why many college students would procrastinate on an assignment. College is about learning new things, accomplishing feats you've never achieved, and improving upon established abilities. It makes sense then that many students may have a lower self-efficacy appraisal for certain assignments and be prone to use avoidant coping in response to that stressor. Additionally, as a final weighs heavily on a grade, this may be exacerbated further by the threat appraisal that their paper is a threat to a currently good grade. Again, this will lead someone to an avoidant coping mechanism. However, some students seem to tackle many new things with vigor. They may be avoiding other feelings that would come if they did poorly in school, which overrule their self-efficacy or threat appraisals related to the assignment. Still, another possibility is that they are engaging in approach coping.

In these instances, approach coping would lead to more favorable results than avoidant coping. Ironically, the avoidant coping mechanism becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which a student doesn't do as well as hoped and affirms their low self-efficacy and threat appraisals. With approach coping, however, people are more likely to make improvements they may not have assumed they could and get an even higher grade. This approach will increase self-efficacy beliefs and diminish the worries of higher threats. If a student continues to engage in avoidant coping, they may experience the opposite and lose whatever joy they may have had in learning, growing, and improving. Sometimes, it may be as if a student can't bring themselves to stop engaging in avoidant coping even though they are aware that it could be hurting their case. This situation would suggest that anyone on a downward streak has little hope of recovering, and those who get ahead stay ahead. However, an equalizing factor may be more manageable for some that will impact whether a person engages in approach coping or not.

This equalizing factor refers to how a person relates to their stressor, specifically their thoughts. “Cognitive defusion” is one such way of relating to stress-related thoughts. This refers to how far a person is psychologically from their thoughts. If a person is cognitively “defused,” they can put distance between themself and their thoughts. They can see their thoughts just as thoughts and not as themselves. They then can evaluate and react to the thoughts rather than being controlled by them. Researchers have found that if a person is “defused,” they are more likely to engage in approach coping than avoidant coping regardless of their threat or self-efficacy appraisals. This means that if students can relate to their thoughts to evaluate and react to these thoughts, they will be more likely to engage in approach behaviors.

An example of this would be if a student has to prepare for an exam and feels dread about it, they can look at their thoughts, see what is causing the feeling, and evaluate whether that thought conveys truth or not. Our fears are often valid, but the actions we feel we need to take may be extreme. For example, a music major may need to practice their instrument but doesn’t want to. They may recognize that a recurrent thought surrounding practicing messes up a certain phrase. Knowing this will make them feel less capable; they may want to avoid the task. However, if a student can evaluate that thought, they will find that messing up that phrase does not mean they are less capable, but instead that they are capable of improving and will improve if they practice. There may still be some undesirable feelings left behind, but many will fade away just from a simple evaluation of a thought. Thus, practicing being "defused" can help students feel better about the task and avoid the anxiety and lesser product that would have come from avoidant coping.

With this information, many students could engage in more learning opportunities, live a fuller life, and experience more happiness. While this could become a reality for some students, the tendency to overdo it and engage in so many things that one becomes exhausted is a concern that could come with a mindset of "doing more is better." While this can be true for people who actively avoid so many things that they start to feel a reduction in happiness because of an avoidance of hurt, it can be harmful for those who do so much that they can't perform well. For these people, doing less is more of the answer they are looking for to be effective.

The key in these circumstances is to have a sense of equity and balance. In an overall emotional realm, this can be understood much better. The idea is to feel an overall sense of happiness in life. Two extreme consequences can come from not engaging in enough activities or too many. First, if there is too much avoidance and not enough engagement, there is an absence of feelings of sadness, struggle, and pain. Sometimes, we think this is the ultimate goal because it means we will not feel any negative feelings. The problem with this idea is that we feel emotions comparatively. Therefore, we will not feel joy if we do not feel sadness. To feel the relief of struggle, we must experience a struggle first. The other struggle with engaging in too many activities is that it will often lead to too much struggle, so much that one cannot perform well. In this way, one must find the balance of doing enough that there is a struggle to find relief and joy while not taking on so much struggle that it becomes maladaptive. If this is done, a person will be able to feel a sense of overall happiness. While a person may also feel more difficult emotions, many would argue that feeling difficult emotions followed by desired emotions is preferable to no feelings. This is evidenced by a common symptom of major depressive disorder. Many with this mental illness will go to therapy to attempt to regain any feeling at all, not just happiness (Gotter, 2018).

For some with mental illness, coming to this state of a life filled with more happiness may be more difficult than for neurotypical people. However, research has shown that engagement in avoidant coping increases undesirable symptoms while approach coping decreases them. In this way, practicing cognitive defusion may help relieve symptoms and contribute to a happier life.

Overall, avoidant coping mechanisms can be detrimental to a student's grades, mental health, and relationships. Even though many know this, it is still likely that students will at some point engage in avoidant behaviors. This is due to the novelty of the tasks students may need to accomplish at this time in their life combined with their self-efficacy and threat appraisals. Luckily, students can change this likelihood of using avoidance over approach coping by engaging in more cognitive defusion. Once this is done and approach coping becomes easier for a student, the final step is to develop a sense of balance between approach and avoidant coping mechanisms. This strategy will allow enough struggle to feel happiness without burning a student out. Ultimately, this will lead to a happier and more fulfilling life.

I look over at my husband, the pain of an abusive relationship with a previous partner stuck in my mind. He pulls me in. Warmth. I cry into his chest, and he holds me tighter. Love. The pain of past hurt begins to melt away. I breathe deeply, letting all my emotion leave me with each exhale. I feel the weight slowly lifting from my chest. I remember every sharp word, every figurative knife twisted in my heart. I feel all the sadness and hurt those experiences caused, ones I have avoided for years. Finally, they all come out in the safety and security of the arms of my love. In time, I begin to feel better. A sense of relief washes over me. It's over. I finally look up into my husband's eyes. Compassion. Caring. Hope. I feel the joy of a better love and a happier circumstance. We smile. I am happy. ❑

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Hunger

Leah Schill

About the Author

Leah Schill is from Mountain View, California. She is an upcoming junior studying Social Work. Leah enjoys thrifting, going for walks, and listening to music. She is very passionate about mental health.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write this essay as a form of therapy for me. I have been in intensive outpatient for an eating disorder over the past year and it has been one of the most difficult, yet rewarding experiences of my life. Learning to hand over control is a really scary thing to do, but it can really be worth it. Being vulnerable is a hard thing to do and is something that people of all ages can relate to. It was easy for me to write about my experiences now that I am able to see my situation from the other side. I hope this essay helps people who are struggling with their mental health gain courage to get the help that they need.

This essay composed in February 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Five, six, seven, eight. My breath begins to hurry as I pirouette again and again. I've been training for this for weeks. I can't fail her now. *Come on Leah, push yourself. Mom is watching. Ms. Sarah is watching. Everyone is watching you*. I glissade across the floor and strike my final arabesque. I finished. But I'm not content with the minute and thirty-second variation I had just exerted all of my energy into. The usual critics were dished to me: turn out, stretch, don't forget to point your feet. I never once got the correction to remember to smile. I always would. I smile through just about anything. Ballet had been the love of my life. Until it wasn't.

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One foot after the other, I stepped onto the scale. I said a prayer and closed my eyes. I needed this work to finally pay off. I was down to 500 calories a day. It seemed like enough to me. Thoughts rushed through my mind as I waited for the scale to calculate my worth. And suddenly, there it was. Tears began to well. My mind quickly ran through everything I had eaten that day, as well as trying to carefully calculate the caloric intake of each food. I had messed up. I wasn't good enough today. No one was home. I locked the bathroom door and knew what I had to do. But I couldn't do it. As I tried and tried to purge, my eyes began to well with tears. I couldn't do it. And in my mind, that just meant that I wasn't good enough. I stopped suddenly when I heard the garage door begin to open. I was quick to wipe away the tears, brush my teeth, and put on a smile.

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The day I met Dan Yang, was one of the worst days of my life. In early 2020, My therapist had recommended I see a psychiatrist. My life was perfect at the time. I had a guy who was really into me. Friends, for the first time in my high school career. And an ounce of popularity that I had been praying for every night since I was 10. Not to mention, I thought looked great. I was on top of the world. I was unstoppable. Mom didn't have quite the same opinion. She had noticed a change in me. As if a switch had been flicked, and her once happy and vivacious Leah was now lost and nowhere to be seen. We drove the 10 minutes to Bay Area Clinical Associates. I remember parking near the train station and walking around the corner; feet trembling and heart beginning to increase its pace. I arrived at the office and went to the bathroom. The room was filled with a pale blue paint; with the light from a single window pouring in. It was beautiful, in a simplistic yet semi-depressing way. I looked at myself in the mirror, body checked, took a few deep breaths, and stopped. I remember I had planned my "perfect" outfit. I had to look good to meet my louring fate. An hour later I would walk into that same bathroom with a tear-stained face. I was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety that day. 10mg of Fluoxetine (an antidepressant) was prescribed to me. I felt numb. I was struck with a sense of disbelief. How could *I,* happy, always smiling Leah, be taxed with this? I drove to school that day and couldn't hold back my tears. I began to hate my brain. As if I didn't already hate every part of myself.

***

Although mental illness doesn't have a face, I don't think anyone would initially place it with me. I am a well-off, upper-middle-class, white girl with a once positive outlook on life. I had a happy childhood, filled with love and support from the people around me. But as I've been through what I have been through, I've learned that mental illness isn't picky when it chooses the people it affects. Young and old, rich or poor; it doesn't matter. When it chose me, I was heartbroken. My ever-present smile became less and less familiar with the new Leah. The newly diagnosed Leah.

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“Hunger”, is a term we are all familiar with. It's that feeling you get when you forgot to eat breakfast, or when you left your snack at home. But “hunger”, is also a lot more than that. There are two definitions of the word. The more familiar, a noun, is a “compelling need or desire for food” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). And the other, a verb, “to have a strong desire”. Both definitions pertain to my story. Literal hunger is a feeling we all know and hate. The aching of your stomach is accompanied by the appetite for something delicious to fill that void. Your insides churn and growl as you wait until you can rush home for a meal. But hunger in terms of desire is another emotion that we’ve all probably felt as well. We yearn for things in our life; material things, feelings, places. It's human nature to want more in life.

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For the past seven years of my life, I have struggled with a variety of eating disorders that have now morphed into Anorexia Nervosa. I’m not alone in this struggle. According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD), “9% of the U.S. population, or 28.8 million Americans, will have an eating disorder in their lifetime” (ANAD.org). This jarring statistic is an unfortunate reality, that is a result of a variety of terrible factors. Adding to the list, I have also been diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, Anxiety, and PTSD. I used to wear these labels like a chain around my neck. Ashamed, embarrassed, and scared, could all describe how I used to be. For the longest time, I let these diagnoses, these terms, define who I was. Last winter I was put into an intensive outpatient program for my Anorexia. This involved therapy two times a week, working with a dietician, countless group therapy sessions, countless meds, weekly vital check-ins with a nurse practitioner, and lots of talking about how I felt. The smile that I always had plastered on my face began to fade as I started to realize the consequences that my illness had taken on my body.

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The hardest part of all of this has been the feeling that I am a burden to people. I desire to get better not just for myself, but for the people I care about, and who knows what I am dealing with. The first time I harmed myself, I told my mom, whilst shaking in fear of what she would say. She bandaged me up and told me that it would be okay; fear in her voice. Later that day, my little sister and I were laying in my bed, when she noticed the bandaids creeping out from under my sweatshirt, strategically placed to cover the pain I had tried my best to inflict on my wrists. She began to cry. That was one of the worst feelings I have ever felt. You couldn't find a smile on me for a long time.

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Amidst all of this, I kept going. I graduated high school and completed a year and a half of college. To my own amazement, I have made it pretty far. While my literal hunger pertained during my recovery, a new type of hunger was discovered. The hunger for peace with my mind and body. I think the day my mindset switched, was the day I shared my story to a group therapy I was in. We worked to challenge all of the rules about food and our bodies that had been ingrained in our brains from media and culture since day one. It hurt to do this, but it made me hungry for a Leah that is confident and in love with herself; not a Leah who is doing everything in her power to tear herself down. Being a part of a group of people who struggle to love and accept themselves was life-changing. It made me not feel alone and it helped me learn to lean on others for support. My fake smile soon morphed into one that was genuine.

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I am exhausted from fighting this. I always want to give up. But I don't. I know I am fighting for something bigger than myself. Here I am. Stronger than ever. Looking at life through a new, deeper perspective. I am in the middle of an outpatient program. I've been in therapy, group therapy, met with many different doctors and nurses, been on countless different drugs, and now I'm happy to say that I see a silver lining in all the mess. I still hold back tears and plaster on fake smiles now and then. But I'm hungry for more in my life. I'm hungry for a sense of normalcy and to be comfortable in my own skin. Not once, since I first developed my eating disorder had I loved my body. But now I am starting to. ❑

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Letter Concerning Self-Efficacy

Alayna Smith

About the Author

Alayna Smith was raised in Utah, and is a freshman studying Piano Performance and Food Science. She has a passion for good food (making it and understanding how it works), music (making and teaching it), and language (with the eventual goal of becoming a fluent polyglot!).

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

The idea of self-efficacy has become important to me as I have listened to close friends and relatives admit how dumb they feel. This mindset is baffling to see in people with the same resources/family background as myself. I want to understand the difference between our mindsets in order to learn how to bridge the gap. I believe that anyone willing to adjust their mindset has the opportunity to achieve their aspirations as well.

This essay was composed in May 2022 and uses APA documentation.

To all individuals with a stake in raising the next generation, We have a problem. Countless recent studies and even more anecdotes have brought to the world's attention how prolific mental illness and lowered feelings of self-efficacy have become. Throughout my high school experience, I often saw the overall student body separated by what appeared to be two mindsets, as observed by their language: the AP student crowd and those who were not AP students. Generally, AP students self-identified by sticking with those in their AP classes, forming cliques that would fuel their momentum to continue doing so. On the other hand, I observed others who didn't consider themselves AP students justifying their lack of effort toward an assignment or problem with "well, I'm not an AP student ." Over the course of my three years in high school, these same "non-AP students" repeated this phrase, and some seemed to put less effort into the non-academic aspects of their life as well. I do not believe that "non-AP students" are less capable of solving problems than the alleged "AP students." Instead, the issue is self-efficacy. Whether you or someone you care for has an interest in pursuing the academic mountains of the world or not, everyone should have an equal opportunity to develop confidence in their ability to achieve what they set out to do. It will improve every individual's quality of life and create a world full of people with higher social, academic, human, cultural, and even financial capital. To better understand how self-efficacy works, I've researched what I believe to be the roots of self-efficacy. So, what is self-efficacy, what influences its development, and how can we take the initiative to build it in our mental attitude and encourage it in those we love?

As described by Albert Bandura, the psychologist who coined the term self-efficacy, it is the belief in one's ability to accomplish what they set out to do (Bandura, et al. 1996).

> Such beliefs influence aspirations and strength of goal commitments, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, quality of analytic thinking, causal attributions for successes and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression. (Bandura, et al. 1996)

So, self-efficacy contributes to the success of lofty aspirations and is instrumental in staving off stress and depression. Bandura continues to detail in his study how the most significant influences on one's self-efficacy are 1) individual mindset, 2) parental support, and 3) outside social circles.

The individual's role in developing self-efficacy is seen in the way they approach goals, their type of motivation, and the grit they exercise. Three general approaches to goals facilitate and shape one's self-efficacy (Alhadabi, et al. 2020): Mastery Oriented (MO), Academic Goal Oriented (AGO), and Avoidance Goals (AG). Those who approach goals with a Mastery Oriented mindset seek a deep understanding, are motivated intrinsically, feel satisfied with challenging problems, and have the highest self-efficacy. Those with an Academic Goal Oriented mindset tend to work for grades, engage in surface-level learning, have a lower motivation to tackle hard problems than MOs, and fear judgment. As a result, they tend to have a lower self-efficacy as well. The Avoidance Goal mindset is driven by fear. Those with this mindset avoid hard things and often genuinely ask themselves, “Can I do this?” an outright manifestation of low self-efficacy. Alhadabi’s research shows that those with the MO mindset correlate positively with overall enjoyment and negatively with anxiety and boredom. While it’s highly unlikely that anyone operates 100% under only one of these three mindsets, perhaps the frequency and quality of our goal-setting can be easily adjusted. As we strive to learn for overall mastery instead of for extrinsic rewards, with no fear for what others will think, we are also building our self-efficacy.

Motivation can be categorized by the desire for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. A study following collegiate aviation students found that those intrinsically motivated to complete the degree were also more likely to succeed in the program (Stiggins, 2009). On the flip side, those driven by extrinsic rewards like salary, position, or security were less committed (one might say they had less grit) and therefore had a higher likelihood of dropping. The idea that intrinsic motivation can play a role as a propensity factor that may increase actual achievement is backed by Zhu’s research (Zhu, et al., 2019). Those students who were more willing to learn learned more as one might expect. This created a feedback loop as the earlier achievement from learning what they were willing to learn motivated them to learn more. Thus, it seems that those who choose to learn for the sake of learning or trying something new for the sake of trying to create a higher chance of being genuinely efficacious at whatever they set their hearts to. In other words, self-efficacy is developed by intrinsic motivation, which leads to actual efficacy.

Let's talk about grit. The construct of grit consists of two dimensions: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest (Alhadabi, et al., 2020). Research discovers that grit and self-efficacy are equally influential in the learning experience. This equal influence means that the belief that one can succeed is just as important as the work it takes to succeed. As self-efficacy is involved in the intrinsic motivation that leads to efficacy later down the line, this is a reasonable conclusion. As an influence, the more grit one has devoted to solving something, the more self-efficacy they develop as a result of a similar feedback loop related to intrinsic motivation, as discussed earlier. Thus, it is clear that one's grit is indirectly involved in the process of developing and maintaining self-efficacy.

Another major factor of self-efficacy as children grow up is parental support. This support is generally accounted for in two ways, emotional and aspirational support often described with the term parental efficacy and various types of capital as resources for their child's development. Parental efficacy can be measured by ability (Zhu, et al. 2019) and capital support (Bandura, et al. 1996). According to Zhu, for parents who were more academically successful, it was more likely that their child was academically successful. This translating efficacy, as Bandura calls it, plays a significant role in self-efficacy. When parents can solve certain problems, their children develop the mindset that they can, which eventually translates to actual efficacy. On a similar note, parental support increases a child's likelihood of being resilient. Along with more resiliency, children whose parents were more efficacious tended to have higher aspirations for themselves; this is generally because the parent has high aspirations for their child. This promotes an optimistic mindset and, along with that, more grit to achieve those goals.

Capital support is another major parental factor. Zhu's study, focusing on over 5,000 Chinese children's at-home learning in relation to early numeracy, found that the more home support a child had, the more resilient they were in academic settings and social ones. This home support was identified by means of financial, cultural, human, and social capital. This could mean more readily-available books, higher social circles of other academically successful connections, more exposure to the knowledge and values of a particular culture, and overall human life value. While this data generally correlates to higher self-efficacy, it is not Zhu's conclusion that the higher financial capital was directly related. Instead, he found that those within a higher socioeconomic position generally had more time to spend with their kids. This is something better understood by an interview I recently conducted with a first-generation Hispanic-American (E. Cifuentes, 2022). She explained that often she sees low socioeconomic status families in which the mother and father work 80+ hours a week trying to make enough to support their family. In this situation, one or both parents cannot spend a significant amount of time with their kids in school. In this situation, she sees two stances on education: help the family survive or get an education. In her family, education is pushed vehemently as the most important goal. Her parents both work jobs, but they hope their children can get an education so they don't have to work the same kind of labor that they do. In other instances, Bandura's research observed that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had lower aspirations for their children. This lack of drive and support influenced their child's self-efficacy more so than a lack of resources. Whether a parent believes their child is capable of succeeding or not plays a significant role in how a child builds goals and sees themself succeeding in the future.

Social circles also play an essential role in an individual's self-efficacy. Their roles in guidance and belongingness can either build or degrade an individual's self-efficacy. According to the study by Stiggins, those students willing to go and converse with their teachers build a better mindset for success in an academic setting. Similarly, the students that spent more time with their teachers, or sought out help in some way, felt more academically capable than those not comfortable seeking help. But why don't others seek help? In my interview with Cifuentes, she recounted a vivid 8th grade experience in which she and two other non-white classmates were denied help on the same math problem as two other white peers were given help. Until then, Cifuentes had never felt discriminated against academically by a teacher. In another setting, one of her high school classmates blurted his confusion at her desire to get her Master's degree, insisting he thought she'd be a maid. From a combination of these experiences and many like it, Cifuentes started to feel that not only did her teachers not wholly understand the social pressure she felt to prove others wrong, but they were aiding it. As a committee leader of Latinos In Action, a club dedicated to helping Latinos build confidence in their lifelong roles as leaders, Cifuentes's experiences were reaffirmed as others had experienced similar pressures. She recounted how having teachers and peers that tried to understand her and support her in her goals was important for her self-efficacy. Thus, it is everyone's responsibility to keep an open mind when interacting with those from different racial groups than their own, encouraging community growth. In this way, teachers and peers have the power to help their fellow students build self-efficacy. Being able to connect with teachers, peers, and other scholars is key to developing self-efficacy.

On another note, outside social circles contribute to belongingness. In a large-scale study, students in Israel were surveyed to determine how social climate affects academic self-efficacy (Zysberg, et al., 2021). The results showed that the more students felt that they belonged and had good interpersonal relations, the higher their self-efficacy. This study also gathered demographics to see any correlation between family income, ethnicity, age, sex, etc., and academic performance and self-efficacy. Yet, none of these factors were statistically significant in the end; this indicates that our social connections play an important role in developing one's self-efficacy. Bandura's research backs this idea further as he found that students who are considerate of peers perceive school as more conducive to learning; in contrast, those doubting their intellectual self-efficacy tended to gravitate to similar others. The social climate that people create and interact with plays a heavy role in first facilitating feelings of self-efficacy and then exponentially contributing to that efficacy as people continue to develop relationships and feed off the self-efficacy of others. I experienced this, starting with the high school track team. At first, I was extremely socially and physically overwhelmed, as I had never competed in running sports. As a result, I felt awkward and incapable. Yet, my brother and some of his friends mercifully took me under their wing, and we created good friendships. Not only did these friendships help me feel more comfortable going to practice, but they also inspired me; I felt comfortable watching their technique, asking about my own, and receiving input. As an indirect result of that feeling of belongingness, my own skill in my events improved as well. Social environments play a huge role in supporting and cultivating self-efficacy.

Now that we've delved into contributing factors, let's briefly discuss the outcomes of high self-efficacy. Just as self-efficacy translates to parent to child, child to parent, and peer to peer, it will inevitably play a role in one's future family members and close circles (Bandura, et al. 1996). This influence makes sense since parental efficacy makes a difference currently in children—why not in future generations? Most of the social outcomes Bandura describes speak to a higher sense of maturity, which self-efficacy evokes: a higher ability to resist peer pressure, higher commitment to moral behavior, peer acceptance, prosocialness, and low despondency. These social outcomes show that self-efficacy goes beyond grades and academic success but reaches the core of an individual's behavior. Any individual who sticks to a moral code and successfully resists peer pressure benefits the community. Self-efficacy is a virtue that should be developed.

So, what are actionable items to develop this self-efficacy? First, individuals can strive to make and keep higher expectations from themselves; setting high aspirations and providing/receiving support to those around them will dramatically change one's mindset and, in turn, develop higher self-efficacy. As discussed earlier, one can tailor their goals to be set on mastery instead of academic measures of success (or any other extrinsic reward for that matter). To develop the habit of proactivity significant to MO people, the Circle of Influence 30+ day challenge, as put forth by American educator Stephen R. Covey effectively shifts one's paradigm. This challenge is something I recently started putting into practice, literally. As a Music Major, productive piano practice is essential to academic and professional success. For the last month, I have made an effort to remove all unnecessary distractions (ahem, my phone!) from the room during a session; in this way, I have been taking responsibility for my practice time, making an effort to control how effective the practice itself is; this change has made all the difference in my focus and attention to detail. This is just one of a myriad of day-to-day opportunities to exercise our self-control to build our self-efficacy. Finally, to develop the prosocial nature and positive social interaction associated with those with self-efficacy, surround yourself with those you admire. As two inspiring multi-millionaires, Jim Rohn and Robert Kiyosaki, put it, "[Y]ou are the average of the five people you spend the most of your time with." As an addendum to that statement, the perspectives you listen to also count, as could be provided via podcast, book, channel, blog, etc. Give yourself a better chance for growth by surrounding yourself with those that take you out of your comfort zone instead of falling into the AG mindset. Spend time with people who think in a way that you admire, and get to know those in your neighborhood, classroom, family, and internet circles who have accomplished or are accomplishing what you aspire to do. If you want to develop self-efficacy, surround yourself with efficacious people.

As individuals and parents strive to develop personal self-efficacy, generations are statistically more likely to develop higher self-efficacy. You can influence your personal and outside social circles' self-efficacy as you choose to build grit and intrinsic motivation and set goals that aim for mastery. Personal efforts like that will combat the pervading theory that one must be "an AP student" to succeed at whatever one puts their mind to. More importantly, it will open up individuals of all backgrounds to the success that they hold in their perception of the world through what we know as self-efficacy. ❑

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I Say Gay: The Many Benefits of LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Education

Asa Strain

About the Author

Asa Strain was born in Provo, Utah but grew up in Laie, Hawaii. They are a sophomore studying Sociology and Criminal Law. Asa identifies as Non-Binary and leaves their sexuality unlabeled. They enjoy reading, writing, and analyzing fiction!

In Their Words: The Author on Their Writing

I chose my topic as I heard more and more people debating the "Don't Say Gay" bill, I was deeply concerned by the misinformation I saw. I wanted to help dispel some of the misconceptions around LGBTQIA+ inclusive education and explain my perspective as someone who was once a queer student. I spent a lot of time researching other countries experiences with inclusive learning and how it impacted the environment and health of primary schools.

This essay was composed in April 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

Who did you know in elementary school? Who did you see? Did you see little boys in blues and reds and little girls with skirts and dolls? Who were your teachers, and what did they look like? If your education was like mine, and like most in America, you were taught through representation the roles and expectations of the gender binary and the expectations of heteronormativity. I was eight-years-old when I realized I was different. My elementary school's dress code asked that girls were skirts and had pretty but plain hair ties. The boys wore tennis shoes and polo shirts, and they weren't allowed long hair. And then there was me, masquerading as a girl with dainty flats and collar shirts with round sleeves and lace collars. People told me I was a girl, that someday I would be a mom, and I would grow into a lovely woman. Something about womanhood made me miserable. No one seemed to understand something I had always known, that I was not a girl.

In 2022, several bills were introduced and passed through state legislation regarding LGBTQIA+ rights, many of them targeting schools and children. Out of all these bills, a certain one has received a national spotlight; it is not unique, with several other states having similar bills in action, drafted, or under debate. This bill has been dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" bill. Its nickname comes from the most debated section of the bill, meant to prevent discussions surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community in elementary classrooms. Section three of Florida's controversial bill 1557 reads:

> Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade three or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards. (Florida House of Representatives Bill 1557)

This section would disallow teachers from teaching or even presenting anything regarding the LGBTQIA+ community but in broad terms, leaving a discomforting amount of room for interpretation of what is "appropriate" in the eyes of the state and the schools. Following Florida, in April of 2022, Alabama signed its own "Don't Say Gay" bill, and it remains a heavy topic of conversation among Americans. I intend to answer several questions many people have regarding this bill. Firstly, what is the true intention of the lawmakers who signed this bill to law? Secondly, what are the fears people have around gender and sexuality inclusive learning, why is it needed, and what does inclusive learning look like?

The vague wording of this bill presents several issues, the bill forbids discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity, which has confused many who have read it. Professor Charles Copeland from the University of Miami School of Law is quoted by *The Washington Post* on the wording of bill 1557:

> Vagueness is deployed for certain purposes. People aren't vague just because they're ignorant... Sometimes they're intentionally vague to move the

> site of where the political fight is going to take place. (Hesse)

While the bill does not mention the word gay, it bans all conversations regarding sexuality and gender. As Copeland suggests, this allows them to fight the LGBTQIA+ community without enacting a blatantly prejudiced law. If Florida meant to apply the law indiscriminately as it is written, this would prevent discussion of any gender or sexuality, including cisgender and straight. However, that is not the case, as the discourse around the bill has been made clear.

There is a lot of opposition to representing LGBTQIA+ people in schools, and most of the forces against inclusive learning have several misconceptions about what LGBTQIA+ education looks like. Professors of Education and Sociology from various colleges in Canada ran a nationwide study supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In their research, they spoke to several teachers and administrators about their experiences teaching and discussing LGBTQIA+ topics in their classrooms. Only 20% of teachers reported they felt their children were too young to be introduced to the LGBTQIA+ community, but 83% said they feared teaching these subjects for various reasons, the main one being reported was community backlash. This study found that teachers reported that "parents felt the material was not 'age-appropriate' for elementary school children" (Meyer et. al). The assumption that discussing matters LGBTQIA+ is not appropriate for children comes from the misconception that anything involved in the community is inherently sexual. This misconception is shared by the supporters and those involved in the making of Bill 1557.

At the signing of the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis remarked, “We will make sure that parents can send their kids to school to get an education, not an indoctrination.” He then followed up by claiming those who protest the bill are “sexualizing kids,” as reported by Mellissa Block from NPR (Block). Many people, such as DeSantis, seem to correlate the LGBTQIA+ community with hypersexuality and assume that talking about being gay or trans is inherently inappropriate for school. However, this is untrue and a harmful perception of the LGBQTIA+ community.

Block interviewed teachers who expressed concerns about what this bill means, some questioned how it would be affected by students with same-sex parents. One teacher, Ms. Stephens, asks, “[W]hen I talk about families in my classroom, am I going to be violating this law because the children were having discussions about what their family looks like?” (qtd. in Block). Block found many teachers called this bill an “attack on education” and have risen in protest against it (*refer to fig. 1)* (Block). This bill was made to protect children, but what it is doing will cause immeasurable harm to thousands of students. What this bill aims to ban is accepting and inclusive learning, something that is needed in America’s schools. Gender and sexuality inclusive learning is not sexual nor is it indoctrination; it is allowing students to be themselves. It includes reading books with LGBTQIA+ characters or seeing pride flags in a classroom. This learning includes allowing teachers and students to share their pronouns and represent non-traditional families. Gender and sexuality inclusive education are about giving teachers, parents, students, and faculty permission to "say gay." Gender and sexuality inclusive education is not harmful, nor is it sexual, instead it can be life-saving and protect LGBTQIA+ kids from alienation and anguish.

Figure 2. Teachers in Florida protesting the "Don't Say Gay" bill.

The consequences of the "Don't Say Gay Bill" could be fatal. LGBTQIA+ youth are already at high risk of suicide and feelings of depression and isolation. The Trevor Project's survey found that 42% of LGBTQIA+ students aged 13 to 17 considered suicide in 2021, and 20% attempted to end their life. The Trevor Project found when students had an affirming place, such as school, they were less likely to consider self-harm (Payley). LGBTQIA+ children already feel isolated, and bills like 1557 increase these feelings, putting them at a higher risk of depression and even suicide. While lawmakers are concerned about myths of sexualization, LGBTQIA+ kids are in despair and many are dying. The number one concern and focus of legislation regarding schools should be the safety and well-being of all students, regardless of gender and sexuality.

Professors in Canada who studied the positive effects of LGBTQIA+ clubs and school activities reported that "[s]chools can be hostile places and sites of victimization for sexual and gender minority youth. Subtle interpersonal sanctions can also manifest in social and emotional isolation" (Bain and Podmore). The "subtle interpersonal sections" mentioned by these professors are heteronormative and binary restrictive terms and representations that Florida classrooms are now bound to. These restrictions will only increase depression among LGBTQIA+ students and thus put them at higher risks of suicide and self-harm. Teaching representation and inclusiveness is not only suicide prevention, but it benefits all children in education.

As mentioned above, LGBTQIA+ students are at high risk, representation and inclusion positively benefit their health and make school a place where they can be themselves without fear of repercussion or bullying. Andy K. Steck and David Perry from the Department of Education and Teacher Development at the University of La Verne interviewed administrators from their local schools regarding gender and sexuality inclusive learning. They quote some of their interviews, saying:

> Students need to feel safe, need to feel welcomed... The kids have said, "I know what teachers are accepting and what teachers aren't and which classrooms are safe spaces"....Your bottom line mission is to get students to achieve, to graduate and be good, healthy citizens. It's not going to happen if you have an environment of separation, of hate, of disdain, that's unsafe and not secure. (Steck and Perry 7)

Allowing teachers to be vocal and visible allies or members of the LGBTQIA+ community makes it easier for children to know that they are accepted and safe at school, something that Bill 1557 forbids. The second quote puts this struggle into perspective, that the schools are there to help the children be healthy in society, not force them to change for it.

LGBTQIA+ students are not the only ones who benefit from inclusive environments at school, studies show that gender and sexuality inclusive learning is beneficial to all students. Cisgender and heterosexual students have also been positively affected by a culture of acceptance in schools. Doctors of education and sociology, Wendelien Vantieghem and Mieke Van Houtte, find that LGBTQIA+ students have substantially more interpersonal struggles with students than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. They studied the impact that acceptance at school had on all students, finding that not just

LGBTQIA+ students were happier, but their cisgender and heterosexual classmates felt the effects by saying they were happier with their school environment (Vantieghem and Van Houtte). In their study, Vantieghem and Van Houtte found that cisgender boys were happier and less likely to bully or be bullied when they didn't feel pressure to conform to binary gender standards. Gender-inclusive learning includes allowing students to express themselves, without feeling they need to follow any binary rules.

This inclusive environment impacts children of all genders. Mr. Tell Williams is an openly gay preschool teacher who has gained popularity on TikTok. He does his best to break down gender binaries by allowing his students to use any toys, no matter their gender. He also wears nail polish as an active way of showing that boys can express themselves in ways that are not traditionally masculine. In a video, Williams speaks about students who were mocked for wearing nail polish, he began painting his nails to show support, he reflects on his experience at seeing the excitement from all his students saying it was "like my nails painted gave them permission to be whoever they wanted to be." Small steps, like Mr. Williams, help make schools a place where students can accept themselves without fear of mockery.

Teachers who made an effort to foster a safe and accepting environment were life-changing and saving for me, even when I wasn't out. In ninth grade I was at my peak of discomfort with my gender. Entering high school and being exposed to dating while going through puberty induced extreme body and gender discomfort, known as dysphoria. While I was not out at the time, I recall a few teachers who made an effort to make their classrooms a safe and inclusive environment. One such teacher often spoke to me about my love of musicals and acting before the school day began; she was the first teacher I confided in regarding my discomfort with being perceived as a woman. Later in the school year, this teacher handed me a bookmark she found on a trip. The bookmark in question had a cross-dressing actress, famous for her male roles as well as her same-sex relationships. While I have long since lost the bookmark she gave me, I remember the feeling of visibility I had at that moment. I knew that my teacher saw me, even though I had told no one about my identity. I was unsure if she understood how much that gesture meant to me, but I received clarity years later when I came out and she said with a smile, "Remember the bookmark? I know."

While made with an intent to protect children, the "Don't Say Gay" Bill does the opposite. Bill 1557 is fueled by misinformation around gender and sexuality inclusive education and perpetuates the false perception that the LGBTQIA+ community is inappropriate. This bill and the precedent it sets puts LGBTQIA+ students at risk while removing from Florida's education system of opportunities to learn self-expression and acceptance for themselves and others. "Don't Say Gay" bills those rob LGBTQIA+ people of visibility. As a queer adult, I worry about the future this will bring the children in America. What are we teaching when we ban diversity from our schools? What will happen to the children unsafe at home, and who cannot find safety at school? How many more LGBTQIA+ youth will face depression and suicide, and when will the states begin to protect them? ❑

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The Potential of Cyclical Fashion

Jorlee Tripp

About the Author

Jorlee Tripp has lived in Cache Valley her whole life and absolutely loves it. She is particularly close with her (not so) little sister, Kaitlin, and enjoys geeking out over books with her. Tripp enjoys sewing, playing piano, and hiking with her friends. She aspires to visit 50 counties, run a marathon, and publish a book. Jorlee hopes you are having a good day.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I love historical fashion, so this topic really spoke to me in the way it connected history to now. Despite loving my topic and being super excited about all that I had learned, I wrote my first draft and kinda hated it. Through kind peers reviewing my words and lots of work trying clarify my ideas, I was able to shape that first draft into something that is, I think, much better.

This essay was composed in December 2021 and uses MLA format

It is nearly 2022. Society has evolved from more primitive days, technology has developed further than ever before, and fashion? Well, for fashion, we've gone back in time and revived trends from 30, 40, even 50 years ago to rule as our current mainstream. As humanity continues on in daring pursuits and leaps forward with advancements our ancestors never would have dreamed of, the progression of fashion has more or less halted and changed direction. Our parents shudder as they see the bell-bottom jeans, band tees, and jean jackets they once wore now in the closets of their children. Surely this sort of vintage throwback has never happened before, right?

Well, not exactly. Fashion historians have examined trends in historical clothing of many places, periods, and peoples. What they have found is that as fashion trends change, new styles often—if not always—take inspiration from previous eras. But there are differences between the recycling fashions of the past and of now. The first of these is that where previously styles and elements were used every couple of centuries, they are now brought back within a decade or two. The second is best said by Karolina Zebrowska, a YouTuber whose expertise is historical fashion: "Most of the time the 'twist' was actually the center of the look and the 'historical inspiration' was just like a little spice scattered on top" ("The Problem" 3:30-3:45). Now, it is more the other way around.

While recycling fashion trends can be beneficial, the way in which the fashion cycle is speeding up is not good and can, potentially, lead to chaos in the fashion world. We can use this critical point in history as a turning point to create better fashion. Cyclical fashion refers to the general repeat of clothing trends several years after it was initially popular, often with some twist to make it more applicable to the current population. In modern times, this echo is called recycled fashion; recycled fashion in this sense does not concern the physical clothes that are reused, but rather the ideas that dictate trends. These ideas are then converted into clothes that become available in stores and online.

Historically, the cyclical borrowing of fashion tended to be "quite wide" ("The Problem" 4:35) because trends moved at a much slower rate and took longer to come back into fashion. In the 20th century, there was a general rule of 20-30 years between trends, but earlier periods didn't have a set time span before trends came back. For example, 1880s women's wear took inspiration from the 1500s and 1600s, a 300-400-year gap, while 1910s styles mirror early 1800s dresses, only 100 years apart ("The Problem" 4:54). While the cycle time varied historically, it still provided enough time between styles and added enough innovation that the style felt new. This contrast to now when we have an "actual previous style but sort of updated" ("The Problem" 5:45-5:47) come back into fashion soon enough that most of the population remembers when it was originally popular. Not only does this quick cycle cause fashion to seem repetitive and boring, it causes clothing to be manufactured in huge quantities to fit the current trend, then thrown out shortly after there is a new trend. Clothes are not given enough time to fulfill their purpose before being added to the tons of garbage in landfills.

This process of quickly producing, selling, and moving on to new clothes is called "fast fashion." The clothes produced are inexpensive, which appeals to those who wish to buy new clothes frequently. Because of the cheapness of the production, these clothes don't last. Unlike more durable clothes of earlier periods which can be worn for years, the outcome of such rapid construction is that they often don't survive long enough to be worn for more than a season. This rapid turnaround is great for fashion industries, from whom you have to buy more, but awful for everyone else. Fast fashion is a huge contributor to humanity's negative impact on the environment. Whether it be fabric dye infecting rivers, factories polluting air quality, or low-grade clothing piling up in dumpsters, the massive scale on which fast fashion companies manufacture clothing to make and fit current trends cannot be ignored when examining environmental issues. "According to Coresight, [Shein, a large online clothing company] adds an average of 2,800 new styles to its website each week" (Hanbury), and it has released new styles in high volumes since the company started in 2018. This is an incredible amount of clothing being produced, which leads to incredible amounts of waste and pollution.

With the availability of so many new styles, current styles become outdated quickly. Mina Le explains,

> In a trend cycle there's typically five stages: the introduction, the rise, the culmination, the decline and then obsolescence…[now] the introduction, the rise and culmination all get squished into one step, severely shortening the length of the trend cycle. ("Tiktok" 11:59-12:15)

Social media influencers, especially on TikTok, are catalysts to the cycle quickening. Influencers feel pressure to be "ahead" of trends, so the people behind the accounts jump to the next new thing and leave any trends that aren't the most current thing completely behind. Mina Le calls these micro-trends ("TikTok" 10:00-14:50). These are trends that don't reach lasting levels of fame but rather, die out quickly and are left in the dust and in the landfill.

As climate change and environmental issues become more recognized, many have turned to second-hand or thrift shops to give clothes a longer life before being dumped in a landfill. Nearly all of what is found in these thrift shops, such as Goodwill, Savers, or the Deseret Industries are "vintage" clothing from the last part of the 20th century. Social media influencers who care about the environment (and/or their following) started using what was available in shops of pre-owned clothes and the masses followed. What resulted was the vintage trend. The "vintage" style, which basically refers to anything that resembles clothing pre-2000, has shifted recently. Just a few years ago, vintage had the connotation of 1940s-60s. Now, the media is portraying a more 70s/80s/90s view of the word as stylish.

Along with caring for the environment, the popularity of aesthetics have added fuel to the flame. Modern aesthetics are descriptions of a certain look or feel that is rather easily identified and differs from general trends. Perhaps the most well-known aesthetic is called Dark Academia. At its core, Dark Academia is a love of knowledge, including a fascination with Latin, poetry, and boarding schools, all with a brown tint and the smell of books over it. Think

Dead Poet's Society and you're on the right track. Other common aesthetics include Cottagecore—a wistful longing for simple and beautiful cottage life in the country. Grunge—which is exactly how it sounds. Minimalist, Indy, and many, many more.

Teens and young adults generally rule the fashion world; interestingly, they have only been the center of fashion since the 1960s ("Fashionable" 7:55-8:10). This demographic has entered into a tough world and stories make the past seem much better than now. Dressing in the "vintage" aesthetic reminds them of a simpler time, or even a time when people stood up for what they believed in. Perhaps donning clothing reminiscent of that time helps those of this time to feel like they can stand up, or make life wonderful, too.

But we have to wonder: now that the vintage style has been established, what comes next? After all, if "it's all been done before" and "there are no new ideas," then where can fashion possibly go from here? It's a question many have. In the comment section of Karolina Zebrowska's video *Here's Why Being 'Fashionable' Is a Pretty Modern Concept*, a commenter, "Beth," said, "I do wonder, if we've just been lazily recycling fashions since the 70s, when [are we] gonna get bored[?] And where on earth things can even go next…. Pre 70s? Completely new?" (Zebrowska).

Tiera Glasgow, an enthusiast of unconventional fashion, believes "they're gonna make some new stuff up. For example, wearing a bra as a shirt is a very 'in' thing right now and that is not a rotation" (Glasgow). She has confidence that there are new ideas. Others are not so confident as to how far those ideas will go.

> When it comes to minimalistic, simple garments, there's only so much you can work with. You can't go more minimalistic than a tank top. Because then you just- you're just getting naked and that's not fashion, that's just nature. ("The Problem" 6:20-6:35)

As time has gone on, clothing has generally followed a pattern of simplification, especially after the 1900s. Because we have reached such a simple state, it creates a question as to what comes next.

Donatella Versace, a queen of fashion, said,

> When something never changes, it's not relevant anymore, and the most important thing is to keep fashion relevant… Fashion helps a man or a woman to feel better, to feel stronger, and to feel relevant in some way… How to do that is another discussion. (Hyland)

Fashion had been the same for a while. Then, to become relevant, we started recycling clothes to address our effect on the climate. More recently, we had to address COVID-19 and the way in which that affected our trends.

While the pandemic has passed its peak, the virus certainly left our world changed in many ways, one of those being fashion. Isabelle Slone, writing for *Elle* magazine, wrote the following:

I'm hardly the only fashion enthusiast who has turned to incongruous outfits to get through trying times. The Instagram account @wfhfits (Working From Home Fits), where people submit images of what they're wearing to, yes, work from home, has amassed over 24,000 followers for its haute-deranged aesthetic. Among those featured are individuals… flaunting extraterrestrial sunglasses, marabou-trimmed pajamas, and lacy vintage slips. If the words of RuPaul—"You're born naked, and the rest is drag"—are any indication, people have dropped the facade of straitlaced convention and embraced dressing for themselves… It's less about an imperative to look good and more about finding the joy in fashion. If quarantine has given us anything, it's the permission to finally dress however we [very] well please. (Slone)

We've realized that the way things have been are not the way they need to always be. We might not need to do all our work in a traditional work building, we can do classes on Zoom instead of in a school, and we can certainly dress for ourselves rather than for others.

Drew Watson, a student at Utah State University said, "Bathrobes smack. [M]ake it a trend" (Watson), which reflects the sentiment that many people are tired of pointless trends. "The fact that things cycle means someone is telling us what's cute and what's not when in reality a lot of trendy things aren't cute and a lot of non-trendy things are" (Glasgow).

It isn't possible to eliminate trends from society, nor are they a completely bad thing. The *Psychology Today* article "The Science Behind Why People Follow the Crowd" explains these two points. It states, "Early humans who formed groups were more likely to survive" (Henderson). We follow trends because we are psychologically programmed to follow as a safety mechanism. That is why if we tried to completely remove trends from fashion, it wouldn't work; we would naturally begin to mimic one another again. The article also discusses an interesting principle shared by Alfred North Whitehead: "Civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them" (Henderson). In other words, if we can spend less mental energy in one area, we can devote it to another. So, if we follow trends, it allows us to put more effort into advancements in other fields, like those referenced earlier. The problem, then, is not that we are following trends, but rather that trends have become too hard to follow and are diverting mental energy from other areas.

Thus, we have come to a critical point in history where we can make fashion better. *Better* is a broad and rather subjective word, so let's specify what "better fashion" means. Better fashion is more sustainable, more for the individual, and more conscious. "[Fashion] is not necessarily a sign of indulgence. It's a statement of belief in the power of beauty to lift the spirit. Fashion is created for the future, and that implies faith in that future" (Friedman). Fast fashion is not sustainable and we've recognized that. That's why we've turned to vintage fashion. What comes after the vintage trend dies out is still not completely clear, but it is clear that people care about the sustainability of their clothes.

> Now, not 100 percent of fashion can be sustainable. It isn't possible to do 100 percent. Also, the most sustainable things are very, very expensive. We have a large range of customers, and we have to think of a young customer with not much money. But… step by step, we will get to a point when the environmental impact of fashion will be drastically reduced. (Hyland)

Despite fast fashion still ruling the fashion world, the general population is becoming more aware of its negative effect. They are willing to look for sustainable items, which is the first step toward fashion that means something again—towards something timeless.

> Timeless fashion is fashion that holds its value and can be worn and reworn. It can also be sold and resold. It does not become passé in a matter of days. In the short term this could be painful, though the short term is already full of pain. In the long term it will help solve problems, including that of sustainability. (Friedman)

If we are using clothes as more than their basic function of covering nakedness, then we could ideally be using them to say something about ourselves. Historically, being fashionable was only for aristocracy and clergy. Laws against common folk dressing nicely existed from medieval times to the 17th century. So, as Karolina Zebrowska explains, our concept of using our clothes to display ourselves is a new idea ("Fashionable"). People have things they want to say about themselves. We can see that through aesthetics and other derivatives of mainstream trends. As Donatella Versace believes, "[W]e should be more free to create in the moment we have the idea" (qtd. in Hyland), rather than being a slave to the societal rules of fashion. Fashion has the potential to be "a more reflective, concerned, attentive, creative process that is not determined solely by commerce, the market, and trends" (MADMuseum).

Trends and their cycles are unavoidable. But if we must have them, we can prevent chaos by being mindful and conscious of the effect the cycles have. We can take control of the cycles and widen them, maybe even to 100 years (roaring 2020s, anyone?), giving time to appreciate trends before they are gone and allowing time for thought. Only then can we have true creativity, innovation, and satisfaction on a wide scale in fashion.

Recycling fashion trends can be beneficial. It helps the environment and gives clothing more purpose which, in turn, helps us to respect clothes more. The speed of the fashion cycle, however, needs to slow down in order for the benefits of second-hand shopping to outweigh any of the harms done by the sickening speed of fast fashion. What specifically is coming next in fashion is unclear, but we can use this opportunity to make "better fashion." Once clothing was only used to cover our bodies, and that basic function is the same today. But now society has a concept of fashion, which is much more than simple coverage. “Dress is a way to signal the dawning of a new age” (Friedman). Striving for sustainability, working to make fashion more personal, and widening the fashion cycle will create “better fashion.” Let’s make it the new trend, shall we? ❑

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Social Media and Politics: Polarizing America

Sarah Young

About the Author

Sarah Young was born and raised in Boise, Idaho until she moved to Logan, Utah to attend Utah State University when she was 18 years old. She is currently a sophomore studying English and plans to attend law school upon completion of her Bachelor's degree. Sarah currently works at the library on campus and for fun, she plays on the Utah State women's rugby team, as well as enjoys going on walks.

In Her Words: The Author on Her Writing

I chose to write about this topic because I'm sad and tired seeing how my peers interact with each other—people are mean. As I conducted my research, the Pew Research Center provided me with the most compelling and accessible information, as well as a multitude of articles pulled from the USU Library databases. I used a synthesis matrix to combine my research and from there, the essay sort of put itself together.

This essay composed in April 2022 and uses MLA documentation.

I was having a conversation with my younger sister a month or two ago about politics. It was a conversation that contained eerily similar complaints to ones that I have seen and heard many times in the comment sections of TikToks, in Instagram captions, and posted to countless Facebook stories. This conversation started as most conversations do when it comes to politics, with feelings of anger. My sister was telling me about how an old family friend—a good, kind boy she'd spent her childhood with—was a Republican. Now this may seem like a small inconsequential fact about this boy, but to my 16-year-old sister, finding out he was a Republican (a party she couldn't accurately describe if her life depended on it) was like finding out he was a monster. I wish I was exaggerating, but she was genuinely crushed by the news. I asked her why she cared and she responded with—and this is a direct quote—"Cuz Republicans, conservatives, whatever, are the scum of the earth." I was astonished. We both knew this boy our entire lives and she had loved him wholeheartedly up until that day. Yet all it took for her to change her mind about his character, values, and even place in society was his political affiliation. I bring up this story because it encapsulates a growing fear I have. My fear is that it has become all too easy and all too common to hate people who have differing beliefs than our own. This fear didn't start with that conversation with my sister, though. As I said prior, comments like hers are ones I have read all over social media about any and everything political. And so more accurately, my fear is that this ease of hate, accompanied by a myriad of negative mindsets and actions, has been emphasized, encouraged, and fortified by the use of social media.

Social media was created with a vision of growing democracy, a new and improved network of communication with friends, family, work, and the world in general; it was meant to be a resource and a tool for progress and positive change. Many scholars argue that the presence of social media in the world has done a lot of good. And they're right; social media has exponentially increased the amount of easily available information, it's a hub for creating and developing relationships, and it's a great form of cheap, simple entertainment. The purpose of this essay is not to argue that social media is inherently bad. The concern and problem needing to be discussed is rooted in the fact that social media has also become one of the dominant resources for sharing and receiving news in our society. In fact, according to a survey conducted in the summer of 2021 by the Pew Research Center, about 48%, or nearly half, of all adults living in the U.S. say they get their news off of social media at least "often" (Walker). It's an undeniable fact that news in the U.S. is widely received and shared on a variety of social media platforms because social media has become less of an option for communication and more of a monopoly over it.

Social media use for news is not the only statistic on the rise in recent years. The United States seems to have divided and dug itself into trenches of harsh, unrelenting polarization across political parties. Specifically, and most notably between the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as politically conservative versus liberal citizens. It's gotten to the point that popular news media stations like Fox News and CNN cover and write more about anti-opposing party propaganda than the actual news; there is almost nowhere unbiased to turn for facts, stories, and information that isn't laced with traces of partisan hatred. This lack of credibility in the typical news media is a huge cause for concern, especially when considering the effects of it. People are constantly hearing subtle and obvious hate speech about the other half of the entire country and it has pitted U.S. citizens against each other on a new and surprising level.

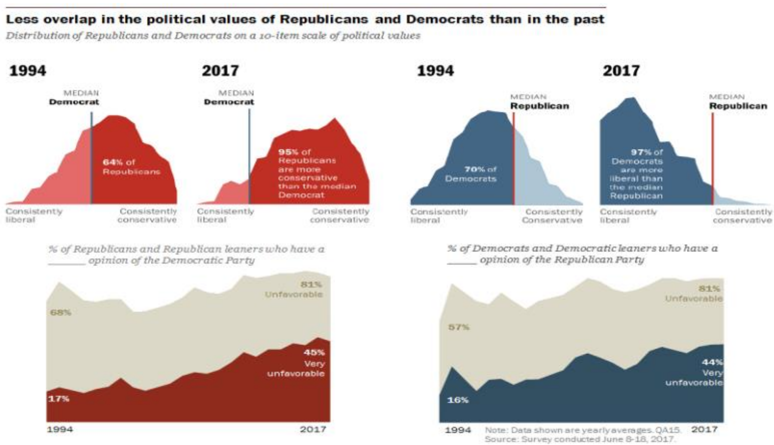

Figure 1. Original charts from Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (October 2017)

The image above shows a comparison of overlap in political values between Democrats and Republicans as well as the percentages of opinion regarding the opposing party (refer to Figure 1). The data shows significantly less overlap between political values with numbers jumping from 64%

of Republicans showing consistently conservative beliefs in 1994 to 95% in 2017. The same was observed for Democrats voting liberally. In 1994, 70% showed liberal values and the percent only increased in the following years, jumping all the way up to 97% in 2017. Even more concerning than this loss of overlap and mutual understanding is the data showing that in 2017, almost half of all Democrats and Republicans reported having a "very unfavorable" opinion of the opposing party and over 80% reported an "unfavorable" one. The animosity felt between political parties in this country is unquestionable. However, it does beg the question of causality and possible influences. These questions are what prompted my research into how social media has impacted political polarization in the United States. Throughout my research, I found many sources discussing a multitude of opinions and research done; however, it proved difficult acquiring empirical evidence because polarization is based on human emotion and that is always tricky to capture. Regardless of this difficulty, I discovered four main impacts that were consistent throughout my resources and findings: Social media has created an echo chamber effect on its users, aided in the arousal of problematic viewpoints, fake news, and an overall increase in the dehumanization of peers.

Social media is built according to such an algorithm that users are able to self-select the information they want to see. This ability is one of the many favorite aspects of social media; it can be an entirely personalized experience, making it an excellent source for entertainment. However, this personalized experience contributes to polarization in a powerful way. In "How

Social Media Shapes Polarization," an essay mainly about how social media has negatively impacted society and individual cognition and the nuances surrounding the use and effects of algorithms on social media platforms, the authors explain,

. . . different platforms may facilitate different types of polarization . . . Some platforms' algorithms seem to amplify content that affirms one's social identity and pre-existing beliefs. For instance, Facebook's news feed seems to increasingly align content with cues about users' political ideology. (Van)

The authors were discussing in this paragraph how individual algorithms are slightly different in how they affect polarization, but they all do in some way. One key way in which algorithms work to polarize people is by aiding in the creation of echo chambers. The term *echo chamber* refers to the effect of self-selecting the information one sees on their social media feed. These effects, as shown by a study done in 2010 by the Department of Psychology at the New School for Social Research in New York, include the creation of tight-knit groups who share congruent beliefs, the fostering of polarized values in such groups, intensified reactions/responses to moral disagreeances, and an overall reduction in openness and willingness to hear divergent opinions (Carpenter). The insulation from opposing points of view is a recipe for polarization and stringent isolation of beliefs and values because there is no room left for the consideration of alternative ideas.

Beliefs and values are entirely individualistic and so there is, to some degree, room for the creation of positive ingroups and a sense of duty and loyalty within such groups. However, it is impossible to fully grasp an issue or idea with only personal beliefs and research as one's evidence. It is also all too easy to get caught up in the storm of fake news present on social media and have said beliefs be misconstrued and distorted in such a way that progress and learning become hindered even further. Fake news is any false or misleading information that is created to be shared with a purpose in mind. The purpose is typically to gain money or to wound/uplift someone's reputation. It's been said that "[p]artisan polarization is the primary psychological motivation behind political fake news sharing on Twitter" (Osmundsen). Polarization and fake news media are inevitably linked. In fact, in 2021, social media was recognized as "the least trustworthy news source worldwide," yet well over half of all Facebook and Twitter users reported using those respective platforms "regularly" as their source for news (Djordjevic).

The article, "Does the Internet Make the World Worse? Depression, Aggression, and Polarization in the Social Media Age" discusses the overall impact social media has had on users and consumers since its inception in the early 2000s. The authors explore questions surrounding how social media has increased suicide rates and depression in multiple countries, how it has made users more aggressive towards each other, and most importantly for this discussion, how social media has contributed to political polarization. The authors presented many interesting points and claims regarding self-reinforcement ("echo chamber" effects experienced by users), data surrounding extreme viewpoints and their amount of interaction and followers, as well as the incentives surrounding the spread of fake news and propaganda. The author, Christopher Ferguson, specifically noted documented incentives, by means of campaign donations, for politicians to spread more extreme views, propaganda, and false information (Ferguson). The impact of not only the internet being filled with false facts, but of political machines promoting this spread of fake news is detrimental to society to say the very least. In fact, according to Berta García-Orosa, the author of "Disinformation, Social Media, Bots, and Astroturfing: The Fourth Wave of Digital Democracy," there is a huge "cause for concern about the manipulation of citizens, especially around elections and referendums, through the creation of artificial public opinion that could provoke chaos and conflict in politics" (García-Orosa). The normality of fake news on social media paired with abuse of this normality from politicians has a direct, intentional, and divisive effect on polarization in the U.S.

In the same vein, problematic viewpoints, specifically data-deficient and extreme ones, spread widely and quickly on social media. Underqualified people, as well as those harboring extreme views, can post whatever and whenever they want with little to no repercussions. These beliefs are shared and then none-the-wiser users are subjected to it, and oftentimes people take what they see at face value and adopt the same or similar beliefs. In fact, data suggests that politicians who display the most extreme views on social media, also have the highest number of followers (Ferguson). This shows that extreme views have an extremely high likelihood of being shared across media platforms and are even incentivized in a way by the algorithms' promotion of content that has a high number of views, or content creators who have a high number of viewers. According to a study done on nearly three million different social media posts, the posts that were about a political opposition were more likely to be shared than those about a political friend—especially if said post reflected "animosity" toward that opposition (Van). Viewers who have most likely found themselves in an echo chamber of their own. According to the authors of "Political Polarization and Moral Outrage on Social Media,"

> . . . the prevalence of one sided arguments and the marginalization of deviant views may facilitate the expression of increasingly extreme viewpoints. Perceptions of community consensus may foster the emergence of tight knit group identities and embolden extreme members to speak up. (Yarchi 5)

The authors are essentially saying here that users isolated by echo chambers have a high tendency toward joining insulated groups who are oftentimes prone to the extremes.

Finally, when considering all of the prior mentioned impacts on polarization, there is one final impact that they all contribute to: the dehumanization of one's peers. Specifically referring to online incivility and an overall lack of empathy shown, as well as received. Research shows that as interactions between politically opposed groups become rare, there is a congruent effect of eroding respect and empathy for members of those groups or any other outsiders (Yarchi 5). Unfortunately, this means that there is a severe loss in effective, bipartisan communication between U.S. citizens, as well as between politicians. Not only is there a loss of communication, there is the loss of empathy and respect. People are downright inhumane to others online and the reason behind why this occurs is put simply and accurately here: ". . . expressing outrage is easy online because the target of the outrage need not be present, the potential for retaliation is minimal, and distant targets inspire less empathic concern" (Carpenter).

Polarization in the U.S. is at an all-time high and has only been on the rise since the creation and popular adoption of social media. Social media acts as an unreliable, intoxicating, and destructive method of communication. The possibilities for psychological damage and distortion are nearly endless and so it really is no wonder this country has become so divided. Of course, social media has its redeeming qualities when it comes to entertainment, but it also has wreaked havoc on public opinion, intelligence, and humanity, which cannot and should not be ignored. Because of the way social media is built and functions, it is the individual responsibility of all users to take the information and stories they hear on these platforms with a grain of salt; to not take what they see at face value and to make active attempts at understanding the views of others and accepting them as humans capable and deserving of their own beliefs. Moral of the story: Don't be like my sister. ❑

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PERFECT

Scarlet Noorlander

This essay was composed in January 2021.

What's your name?; tell me about yourself; wow, you're perfect; ***i hate being called perfect;*** why don't you have a boyfriend?; wow, you're so perfect; ***you don't know me***; talk to me; hang out with me; laugh with me; go out with me; just be your perfect self; spend time with me- when I want you to; reach out to me, but don't expect a quick reply; smile- you have a beautiful smile; call me, i miss you; share your feelings with me, but only the ones I want to hear; will you sing to me? you have the perfect voice; wow, you really are perfect; i hope you aren't crazy; stay perfect- don't change anything; message me first, just don't appear desperate; ask me out—if I feel like it I'll show up; why are you so upset?; don't be angry, only crazy girls get angry; be interesting, but not too interesting—I can't have you overshadow me; what did I do to deserve you?; you're such an angel; you're gorgeous, don't show it off too much though, or the other guys will start looking at you; don't be jealous; you're mine but you're just too perfect for me to let anyone know—you're just too perfect for me to stay; ***do you even hear yourself?;*** don't be so emotional; you're being dramatic, i didn't even do anything; it's fine I forgive you; stop overthinking everything; good; you are perfect after all; i'm here for you; you know you can tell me anything; ***I keep my emotions in so I won't get hurt again;*** that's bad!; you shouldn't hide your feelings; God gave us feelings to express them; you already know that though because you're MY angel; you can do anything; have ambitions but don't share them with me- stay the blank canvas that I can paint any colors I want; smile- you're happy remember?; why are you acting differently?; that's not who you are; ***when you're put on a pedestal you have a long way to fall;*** don't worry about things so much; ***how can I not?;*** don't try to figure out what i'm feeling; ***do you even know what you're feeling?;*** don't talk to him; ***why should it matter?***; don't argue with me; ***don't try to control me, then;*** don't contradict me; ***that's ironic;*** don't sass me; ***wh-what sass?;*** don't make things so complicated; ***it takes two to tango, pal;*** don't tell me we're just friends; ***but that's what YOU just said;*** don't be too clingy; don't try to pretend you don't like me; don't move on; don't forget about me; don't cramp my style; don't walk away from me; don't expect so much; don't EVER give me an ultimatum; ***what's the point in playing a game i'm gonna lose?***; don't call me out; don't get other people involved; don't start acting crazy like the other guys told me you would; ; ***don't, don't, don't… so what do you want?;*** you know I love you; I love everything about you- your long blonde hair, your big blue eyes, your flawless smile; you always know exactly what to say; you always know when I need your help; I don't know what else to say you're just PERFECT; ***you and I both know I am not perfect--don't put that on me it's too much pressure;*** But you are perfect, you're perfect for me, so please don't ever change; ***DON'T. call. me. perfect****;* *blah blah blah blah blah* FUNNY; *blah blah blah blah* SMART *blah blah blah*; what would i do without you *blah blah blah*; i'm so blessed to have you *blah blah blah*; *blah blah blah* TALENTED; you're everything i've ever wanted; ***BLAH BLAH BLAH;*** you'd make the perfect trophy wife; HAHA just kidding, don't get crazy; i've never felt this way; please don't ever leave me; don't give up on me; you CAN'T possibly expect me to be perfect? ❑

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