

*Gleanings:*  
A Journal of First-Year Student Writings  
2016-2017



**Basilica di Santa Chiara, Assisi**

# *Gleanings: A Journal of First-Year Student Writing*

Siena College

Volume 7

2016 - 2017

All of the work included in this journal was written by students who were enrolled in Siena's First Year Seminar in 2016 - 2017. This required course prepares students for the intellectual rigors of college life and beyond by building critical thinking and communication skills as well as by fostering creativity and advocacy. Throughout this two-semester seminar, students are encouraged to reflect upon and discuss the vast amounts of reading and writing that they do both inside and outside the classroom. Siena College is committed to showcasing the intellectual and engaging work being accomplished on its campus, so *Gleanings* was created as a means of celebrating some of the finest and most provocative first-year student writing completed each year.

\* \* \* \* \*

While editorial changes have been made to these works-in-progress, they were kept to a minimum in order to preserve the authentic voices of the student authors as well as the integrity of the assignments.

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In the fall of 2016, Siena College freshman, Anndrea Purdy, unexpectedly passed away. It is with great sorrow and respect that the First Year Seminar team would like to acknowledge this heartbreaking loss and commemorate her short life by dedicating this 7th volume of *Gleanings* to Anndrea, whose writing "gleaned" of true reflection and insight, as noted in this honest and beautifully crafted final passage from her heritage unit essay that was submitted just a few days before her untimely passing:

"We are all born with an empty canvas in front of us. Some of us have better paint and higher quality brushes, but what we paint is completely up to us. Although someone had a troubled past filled with misery, despair, and hardships, the future is still unwritten. The pen is in that person's hand; it all depends on what she writes."

Though Siena mourns the loss of this young member of our community, these powerful words will serve as a living memory of Anndrea Purdy, whose positive outlook will forever be an inspiration.



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*The assignment for this project was to research a specific aspect of popular culture and discuss what influence it has on society. In this well-documented essay, the writer examines the psychological and neurological impacts that scary movies can have on children as well as the negative implications that can last into adulthood.*

## **The Effect of Scary Movies on Children**

**By Elizabeth Allegretti**

Dr. Daly – Popular Culture and the Meaning of Life

Most people can remember the first scary movie they ever saw. These scary movies range from *The Wizard of Oz* to *Jaws* or *Poltergeist*, but in most cases, the movie has had a lasting impact on its viewer. Many times fear that originated from the movie never fully goes away. For those who claimed *Jaws* was the first scary movie they saw, forty-three percent reported that the effects from this movie were still ongoing and include nightmares as well as residual anxieties and debilitating fear (Wadley). For many people, their first experience watching a scary movie occurs when they are young and often happens without the knowledge of their parents. Without grown-ups present, children are forced to process the horrifying images they have seen on their own, and unlike adults, kids cannot easily discount and forget about what they have seen. Due to the way children develop, the negative ramifications from watching scary movies can linger long into adulthood, even after people feel they should have been able to overcome these fears. It is often easy to dismiss images and scenes from television and film as being unreal and incapable of having long-term impact, yet these lasting effects commonly occur and illustrate how powerful media can be. However, parental awareness and regulation can minimize the long-term suffering that can ensue from watching inappropriate scary movies at a young age.

In a study done at the University of Wisconsin, only twelve percent of the students claimed that the scary movies they watched growing up had no lingering effects on them. For some students, the effects lasted at least a couple weeks and for others, the effects were still on-going at the time of the study. The most common long-term effects included residual anxiety as well as disturbances in nighttime and waking behaviors. Sleep disruptions most commonly included nightmares or “protective behaviors” in bed. For example, one participant described jumping from her doorway to the bed so that no monsters could grab her. This occurred after viewing *Poltergeist* and continued for about six months. Another student described a nightmare that started after viewing *Jaws* and claimed that it still disrupted his sleep now, decades after he watched it (Cantor “*Mommy, I’m Scared*” 36). The most common disturbances in waking activities included the avoidance of or discomfort with objects that would otherwise be considered nonthreatening. Seventy-five percent of students reported experiencing these waking effects in one way or another (DeGroat). All of this information shows that the effects from scary movies do not always go

away after a few days. While some fears can resolve themselves over time, adults can still feel these effects years after their first exposure.

After watching scary movies, kids become increasingly afraid of what they have seen on the screen. Alone, the images shown in the movies are not frightening, but they are depicted in a way that elicits fear. As one student wrote, "I had a fear of clowns *for years* after, and *to this day* they really scare me" (Cantor "I'll Never Have a Clown in My House" 291). Other kids have expressed ongoing fears of the ocean and other bodies of water even when there is no chance of a shark being present (Cantor "I'll Never Have a Clown in My House" 291). In their accounts, the language used by students shows how the effects are still occurring even though it has been years since they were first exposed to the stimuli. The first student who wrote about his fear of clowns from the movie *It* described how the fear is still affecting him even though he was exposed to the film over a decade ago. The fears created through scary movies are not ones that are easy to overcome. Even as kids get older, these fears do not go away, and the way in which the brain operates when children are young cements these fears and allows them to last even after the mind believes it should no longer be afraid (Sayfan and Lagattuta 822 ).

The youngest viewers experienced the longest lasting effects of watching a scary movie (DeGroat). This occurs in part because children are largely perceptual learners, which differs from adults who tend to be more conceptual learners. Children respond very strongly to visual images as opposed to straight logic or reason. They are most affected by images that are visually grotesque or ugly. This explains, more specifically, the adverse reactions that children have to movies such as *The Wizard of Oz* or *The Incredible Hulk*, which do not seem frightening to adults but are among the scariest for children. Even characters that have a kind nature elicit fear in children who can only respond to what they see visually. Since these visual cues are so strong, it can be very difficult to counteract their fears with logic and other forms of information. Because visual cues stand out the most for children, they also have a difficult time with transformations that can occur in movies. Children do not understand object permanence and become frightened when they see someone become something else (Cantor "I'll Never Have a Clown in My House" 294). In one famous study, children between the ages of three and six were exposed to a friendly cat and then while the cat was turned around, a mask of a vicious dog was placed over the cat's face. Once the cat turned back around, the children believed it had become a dog. Joanne Cantor, Ph.D. explains, "As you might expect, these children showed more fear in the presence of this 'new' animal" (Cantor "*Mommy, I'm Scared*" 82). With a changed appearance, children believe that the person or thing has become something new entirely. In the case of scary movies, the new identity is most likely to be grotesque in appearance, which will cause a fearful reaction in the child. This explains why many children reported being afraid of Bruce Banner in *The Incredible Hulk*. Even though his actions as Banner were helpful, and he acted as a

superhero, once Banner transformed into the Hulk, he became grotesque in appearance and elicited a fear response from children. This fear escalated because changes in a scary movie can be very intense and involve a transformation of the whole body (Cantor "*Mommy, I'm Scared*" 82).

Children also lack the ability to properly decipher between fantasy and reality, which means that they believe what they are seeing on the screen is real and has a high chance of hurting them. Many studies have shown that children lack the ability to decipher between real life and fantasy until they are seven or eight. Young children tend to have cognitive immaturity, which is what gives fiction and make-believe the ability to sensitize them to real dangers (Cantor "*I'll Never Have a Clown in My House*" 295). Before kids are able to understand the distinction between what is real and what is an actor portraying an event, they are unable to comprehend that what they see on television does not actually pose a threat to them. Since children are only able to process what they can see, there is nothing that will assure them that what they are watching cannot harm them in real life. The reality or fantasy status of the depiction will not have any worthwhile effect on the fear it evokes because children cannot fully understand this logic. This is seen in the way children develop fear towards objects or actions that are otherwise considered non-threatening. Before children are able to make these distinctions between real and make-believe, their fear responses make sense. Karen E. Dill-Shackleford conducted a study in which children were shown different television shows and their reactions were monitored. One group was shown an episode from *The Little House on the Prairie* where the family's house burned down. Even though this event only took place on a television screen, the children became increasingly more afraid that their own homes would catch fire. As Dill-Shackleford, noted, "It is adaptive to avoid situations that might harm you. What's interesting from a media psychology perspective is that the children digested the fictional information as realistic and important to apply in their real lives" (70). The children felt that if the event could happen to the people on the screen, it was also an event that could easily happen in their own lives. This further explains why children develop fear towards objects or events depicted in movies. They cannot understand that what they have seen is not real and, therefore, believe that it is a threat likely to hurt them in their own lives.

Exhibiting a fear response becomes a survival mechanism for the child in order to protect against threats that the brain is unable to determine as being not real. Once children are able to decipher between what is real and what is make-believe, they still encounter scary movies that are based on things that could possibly happen. There are a lot of scary movies where villains kidnap or kill their victims. While this is not as likely to happen as it is portrayed in the movies, there is nothing supernatural about a kidnapping, so kids cannot be told that this will definitely not happen in their own lives. The elements of these films are designed to feel real and, thus, intensify a child's fear and awareness of that risk. This creates a feeling of vulnerability and can accentuate pre-existing fears. Older children are more likely to be more afraid of a

threat that has the potential to come true. However, movies with supernatural events can be strong proponents for such fears, too, because no one has been able to definitively discount the supernatural (Cantor and Oliver 230). Even though children are eventually able to create distinctions between what has occurred in real life and what is a plot in a movie, it is still possible to encounter storylines that cannot be discounted as fantastic events. This inability to be reassured against kidnapping or murder can create a stronger fear reaction for children as they view the event as more likely to happen.

Children's reactions to fear tend to be more intense and last longer due to their underdeveloped cerebral cortex. In the brain, the amygdala is known as the fear center, and this is where threatening sights and sounds are received and processed. The amygdala then calls the body to react to the fear, and this triggers the body's fight-or-flight response. Once this is activated, the body remains in a state of fear until higher order processes in the brain respond and tell the body that the danger is not real. It is in the cerebral cortex where this processing takes place, and in children, it is not very well-developed. It is, therefore, not very effective at turning off the fear response produced by the amygdala (Cantor "*Mommy, I'm Scared*" 72). This can cause the child to remain in a state of fear because their brain cannot fully control the fear response, which creates a longer lasting impact of that image or event that caused the fear. When the body is experiencing fear, the longer this reaction lasts, the more intense it will feel in the future as the brain recalls the specific image or event. This is another reason why, along with a child's inability to properly distinguish between what is fantasy and what is reality, children are more scared of horror movies than adults are. When an adult sees a scary image, their cerebral cortex quickly turns off their fight-or-flight response which is able to calm them down, and they understand they are not in real danger. The longer a child's amygdala is active, the more likely the child is to remember the image or event that caused this fear response which will induce a similarly intense reaction each time he or she comes into contact with the stimulant.

Even as children get older, are no longer perceptually bound, and have fully developed cerebral cortices, the images of what affected them when they were younger can still provoke feelings of fear. This is because of the body's implicit emotional memory system, which is activated in order to create the experience of different emotions and to help the body respond accordingly. This system ensures that the memories of things that have endangered us in the past are extremely accurate so that if we encounter something similar to this in the future, we will be prepared to act. Thus, this system serves as a survival mechanism for the body in order to protect against recurring threats. Memories created through the implicit emotional memory system are highly enduring and resistant to change (Cantor "*I'll Never Have a Clown in My House*" 294). Years after coming into contact with the fear, the body will still respond in the way it did when it was first encountered. These unconscious fear memories can potentially stay in the



brain for life and can be very useful, but when these fears were initially created by images in films, it creates a problem. This is because media portrayals are often unrealistic and create unfounded fears that likely will not pose a real threat to a child's life. An example of the implicit memory system at work would be a child being scared while watching the movie *Jaws*. Initial fear reactions that occur while watching this for the first time are stored as implicit fear reactions and become conditioned to the image of the shark, of swimming, or of other images or sounds that are particularly scary. If one of these stimuli, or even thoughts of it, were to be encountered in real life, unconscious reactions would be triggered (Cantor "I'll Never Have a Clown in My House" 295). These subconscious fear reactions occur before the child is able to understand that what he is feeling is fear. Even though a child never had a negative experience with a shark that would cause him to be afraid, the images and sounds depicted in the film were realistic enough to cause a child to believe his own life was at risk. This creates enduring fear as a survival technique, for the mind is unaware the child was never in imminent danger.

Another example of these fear responses occurred among children who were most affected by the movie *Poltergeist*. Joanne Cantor and Mary Beth Oliver describe the fear conditioning response stemming from "images of clowns, trees outside windows, televisions displaying 'snow,' and other images and situations from the film. In spite of knowing that harm from these agents is impossible, these people experience bodily reactions and anxious feelings in response to related images" (Cantor and Oliver 231). These unconscious reactions can occur even after the conscious mind believes it is no longer afraid. Most of the events or images that trigger these fear responses are ones that to most people, or to their conscious brains, would be considered non-threatening (Cantor "*Mommy, I'm Scared*" 56). These enduring implicit memories are the reason why fears linger long after children learn the difference between fantasy and reality. When children encounter something scary, their cerebral cortex cannot turn off the fear response effectively, which then creates longer-lasting and more intense memories to be stored as implicit fear reactions. Once children believe they have gotten over a fear from their childhood, their implicit emotional memory system lasts long enough to carry into adulthood and creates unconscious fear reactions and responses (Cantor and Oliver 231).

Some people might argue that it is important to expose children to scary movies so they can learn that what they are seeing is not real. Critics who believe that children should be allowed to watch scary movies claim that it is important for a child's development to understand that what happens in films does not have the same implications that real life does. It would not be healthy for children to never see this distinction, and they would be less likely to be disturbed by what they see in frightening movies in the future. Some parents believe that kids will be able to sleep better if they are taught that dragons and giants only exist in movies and through special effects. While it is beneficial for there to be an adult

present when children first start watching scary movies in order to provide necessary reassurances, what these critics do not realize is that a child's brain is not developed in a way that allows them to understand these differences even if they are pointed out. Children learn from what they can physically see and cannot make the distinction between something evil in one sense but not in another. For example, once the clown doll in *Poltergeist* comes alive and becomes evil, a connection is forged in the child's mind between clowns and evil. Following this, every time that child encounters a clown in the future, she is reminded of how the clown behaved in the film and is overwhelmed by a feeling of fear. Until children finish developing and can see these distinctions, no amount of reassurances will be able to discount these fears or desensitize them to the grotesque images. While scary movies can have noted health benefits, like increased reflexes and overall awareness, it is important to wait until children are at an age where they can respond to these images effectively and can tell their brains that what they are seeing is not real (Rivera).

Watching scary movies as a young child can have negative ramifications that can continue into adulthood. Even as children get older and their brains finish developing, the implicit emotional memory system ensures that the fear will not be forgotten, which explains why adults are afraid of things that would otherwise be classified as non-threatening. A specific image or sound children encounter when they are young is likely to stay with them long after they believe they have recovered. This explains why fully grown adults are afraid of clowns or will not go into the ocean because they are scared of sharks. Even though these fears are ones that developed at a young age, a child's brain is designed in such a way that allows it to remember and act on these fears even after decades have gone by. Scary movies are created to feed on fears and are, therefore, filled with elements that tend to be most frightening to young children and adolescents. While it would not be possible to prevent kids from watching scary movies altogether, it is important to understand the negative ramifications and impact that media has on children and their overall development. The response that children have towards scary movies shows that they have enduring memories and can explain not only why children exhibit certain fears but also how to calm them. While kids may not be able to fully understand the difference between fantasy and reality, being able to talk with parents would calm their overactive imaginations and manage their fear before it is able to get worse. Children cannot recover from fear in a way that is rational which means the effects from scary movies are ones that can last forever.

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*Using a plethora of sources, the author of this essay methodically outlines the depths of misogyny in both the western and Muslim worlds and presents an inspiring argument for the unification of all women in the battle against the oppression of Muslim women.*

## **Alpha Battles: Unveiling the Secrets of Misogynistic Oppression**

**By Khizra Awan**

Dr. Haas – Women: Their Voices, Their Values, Their Vision

The west and the Muslim world regard Saudi Arabia as the epicenter of Islamic tradition, and the Saudi way of practicing and preaching Islam is seen by the west as the prime example of the backwardness of Islam itself. The mistreatment of women in Saudi Arabia, therefore, becomes the justification for the west's attack on Islam. This attack on Islam incites a defensive Muslim reaction, and this defense heavily rests upon the increased rigid mistreatment of women. When women become the front on which this attack and defense of Islam takes place, a cycle of disrespect for and disregard towards women is created. The ones who swear to champion Muslim women are, in reality, helping to perpetuate the violence conducted against them. Further, the western patriarchy does not have any genuine concern for Muslim women's liberation; its aim is to subjugate all women on its own terms. As patriarchy benefits all men to one degree or another, overcoming it benefits all women. Therefore, genuine unity between Muslim and non-Muslim women is crucial. Women in the Muslim world require the support, not the scorn of western women in order to pursue legal and social progress, and it is crucial for Muslim women to be involved in determining what that progress is. Women must not be distracted by men's efforts to divide them, for in the victory of a Muslim woman is the victory of a western woman, too, because it means the defeat of misogyny regardless of whether it is expressed in Arabic or English.

The western understanding of Muslim women as faceless and nameless victims of religious suppression adds nothing to the alleviation of their struggles; it only adds to their predicament and oppression. They are individual women whose faith is often central to their identity. When all Muslim women are seen only as oppressed, their personal narrative loses power, and it becomes difficult to view them as people. This is a significant factor that contributes to the stripping of power from Muslim women. The power to control one's own narrative is the greatest manifestation of liberation and that is what is taken from Muslim women. Accusing Islam of being the sole oppressor of Muslim women is, in fact, denying an integral part of a Muslim woman's identity, which is her religion. It not only violates her sense of belonging, but also alienates her from any good precedent the west has set in terms of women's movements. This attack on identity and the intrinsic values of Islam also incites a more robust control over Muslim women's bodies and actions. This control is not only assumed by Muslim men, but also by western society. The treatment of women in the Muslim world becomes a lash that only whips Muslim women harder. On the one hand, the Muslim world tries to oppose forced westernization regarding women's

rights and on the other, the west is taken with the task of disallowing Muslim women's concerns to be heard because they are viewed as unintelligent and brainwashed. This power struggle is played out on the battle field that is Muslim women. Land utilized in warfare is always disregarded in the most reprehensible way even if the contending parties claim to be fighting to safeguard it or win it its freedom. There is also something inherently violent and non-consensual about a battle field: it is a land merely used to advance the interests of the powerful. When Islam is attacked, the Muslim world gets defensive without ever profoundly reflecting upon the ways in which women are subjugated under the cover of Islam. It only engages in defending what has been subject to criticism: its treatment of women. That defense comes at a hefty price for these Muslim women. They pay for what the west says regardless of being innocent themselves.

The situation of Saudi women within the kingdom's social and political hierarchies is no doubt appalling, but the idea that Muslim majority countries are the only ones that grossly victimize women is false. If violence against women is attributed to the teachings of Islam, then women in the rest of the world ought to be free of tyranny and political disregard, yet they are not. This idea that religion teaches misogyny is inconsistent because even the non-religious can be hateful men. Culture and the practice of religion are socially constructed phenomena. When a culture and religion are seen as innately evil or good, it makes it easier to think that humans had no hand in perpetuating an evil or creating goodness. The western world is viewed as intrinsically free and ingenuous as Carmen Bin Laden exemplifies in her book, *Inside the Kingdom*, when she notes that "there is much more hypocrisy (in Saudi Arabia) than anywhere in the west."<sup>1</sup> Bin Laden's understanding of western society as pristine is troublesome; it promotes this idea that absolute good exists, and it is only possible within a western framework. No nation of the world is absolved of hateful crimes against women, and no nation in the world is absolved of trying to hide those hateful crimes. However, opposed to the perception of the west as intrinsically free, Islam is viewed as intrinsically regressive. If Islam is violent and humans have no part in practicing it that way, then men who commit violent acts against women are only wrong in following Islam and not because they are treating women in an atrocious manner. Ayaan Hirsi Ali notes in her book, *Infidel*, "This was not just Islam; it was the core of Islam."<sup>2</sup> She says this in regard to the 9/11 attacks in New York City. She attributes terrorism to the teachings of Islam, yet she fails to criticize the violent actions of the particular men involved. She treats religion as if its practice is not subjectively construed, but is an inherent and outright fact. In doing so the real culprit is never held accountable, and it is only ideas that are charged with instigating hate. Hirsi Ali, and likeminded individuals' vehement opposition to Islam itself, takes away from the real origins of male

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<sup>1</sup> Carmen Bin Laden, *Inside the Kingdom: My Life in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Ayaan Ali Hirsi, *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 269.

domination in the realm of religion, society, politics, and economics. It makes it seem like the oppression of women is a Muslim problem, which is not the case.

One must wonder about the true origins of the oppression of women. It is neither religion, nor secularization; rather it is the deeply ingrained feelings of superiority among men. Religion does not make men vile and misogynistic. It is men's misogyny that uses religion as an outlet for their assertive and corrupted power, and it is misogyny that, therefore, undercuts women's efforts to obtain power. David Landes, a history professor at Harvard, argued that "'Girl power' suggests that Muslim men are afraid of empowered western women."<sup>3</sup> However, it is not only Muslim men who are afraid of empowered women. The west, too, has shown tremendous signs of fear of empowered women, especially those who do not follow western ideals, because to produce new methods of control requires tiresome work. The real objective of these seemingly feminist western forces and these seemingly religious men in the Islamic world is to subordinate women through the guise of empowerment and protection. In reality, though, neither of these really cares for the wellbeing of women; they only care if the women do what is expected of them. Carmen Bin Laden explains that "Women don't matter to a Saudi man. Possessing them matters."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the freedom of Muslim women does not matter to the west; only replacing their current model of male-domination with the western model of male domination matters. If the west truly believes that empowered women are scary for extremists, then the gendered Islamophobia<sup>5</sup> it promotes within its media is not a logical strategy towards the liberation of Muslim women. Liberation cannot come out of oppressing the already disadvantaged.

The truth is that the power and influence of western style male domination depends on the creation of anxieties around the Muslim way of male domination. The most numerous victims of hate crimes fueled by uneasiness regarding Islam are women.<sup>6</sup> If women in the west are wary of Muslim women's plight, then they will repeatedly fall into the well-thought-out trap of western patriarchy by participating in the over-sexualization of their own bodies, harmful consumerism, and disunity. In this instance, the language of feminism is appropriated by the western patriarchy to help the imperial profit motives. The real clash is not between those who want to uphold the provisions of human rights for women and those who want to violate women to the last degree. The real clash is between two parties who want to exploit and dominate women, but in different fashions. One power uses the guise of freedom while the other is more blatant in its hatred of women and justifies it by manipulating religion. This conflict perpetuated and created by men is merely a fight to determine the Alpha-male domination model, not a

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<sup>3</sup> David S Landes and Richard A. Landes, "Girl Power," *New Republic*, October 2001, 20-22, EBSCO Full Text (5261379).

<sup>4</sup> Bin Laden, *Inside the Kingdom*, 179.

<sup>5</sup> C. Siddiky, "Gendered Eurocentric Islamophobia and the Western Media," *Academia*, last modified 2007, [http://www.academia.edu/21971589/Gendered\\_Eurocentric\\_Islamophobia\\_and\\_the\\_Western\\_Media](http://www.academia.edu/21971589/Gendered_Eurocentric_Islamophobia_and_the_Western_Media).

<sup>6</sup> Eric Litchblau, "Crimes Against Muslim Americans and Mosques Rise Sharply," *New York Times*, December 17, 2015, [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/us/politics/crimes-against-muslim-americans-and-mosques-rise-sharply.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/us/politics/crimes-against-muslim-americans-and-mosques-rise-sharply.html?_r=0).

fight to empower women. The success of male-domination regardless of its western or Islamic leanings benefits from the disunity it creates amongst women. Its success is furthered by making some women believe that they are better off than the others. Its effectiveness rests primarily on doing so because this creates within women attitudes of complacency or hatred towards the other without meaningful reflection. Complacency ensures the undisrupted upholding of the status quo. Hatred towards the other guarantees disunity, which makes certain the extensive control of male domination. Male domination benefits from the disadvantages of all women, and those who benefit from it actively push for these disadvantages to prevail.

The foundation for male domination is fueled by notions of hyper-masculinity and rests upon the subjugation of women. It can only be dismantled by the women themselves if they are united and inclusive. A film directed by Nadine Labaki called *Where Do We Go Now?*<sup>7</sup> exemplifies the success that can be achieved through the union of women. In the movie, violence breaks out amongst the men of a town made up of diverse religions. The women of the town take it upon themselves to bring peace back to their home. One of the tactics they utilize is hiring Ukrainian dancers to appease the men. The use of sexual appeal as a means of extinguishing a conflict among men of different ideologies showcases that male-domination is sexually motivated. It is a kind of sexual motivation that requires control and this control begins with the power over women's bodies. The film illustrates that the impetus for the fight to become alpha is only to exert control over women. Men will fight one another for this control, but as soon as a majority of them benefit from one thing, it will be the cause of instant unity. Male domination styles may butt heads, but they come together when there is a need because, after all, they seek one thing—control. The conflicts and even the occasional unity between the styles of male domination are harmful only to women.

The most crippling of all oppressions is legal vulnerability. The women of Saudi Arabia in legal regard are perhaps worst of all those who are oppressed. They are never legal adults and are never protected by the law against abusive men in their families. Writers like Lisa Breyer attribute this legal suppression to the teachings of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is important to understand that just as religion can be used as a means of justifying women's oppression, it can be used as a means of furthering legal protection for women. Political expert John Hursh explains in his article "Advancing Women's Rights through Islamic Law" that the correct interpretation of Islamic law has proven successful in providing women in Morocco legal protection and social advancement.<sup>9</sup> This notion of using the offense's strongest argument as one's

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<sup>7</sup> *Where Do We Go Now?*, directed by Nadine Labaki (Cannes, France: Les Films des Tournelles, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Breyer, "The Women of Islam," *Time*, December 2001, 50-56, Academic Search Premier (5566390).

<sup>9</sup> John Hursh, "Advancing Women's Rights Through Islamic Law: The Example of Morocco," *Berkley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice* 27, no. 2 (2012): 252-305, EBSCO.

defense is quite effective. Muslim women are in the best position to know their own oppressors' secrets and weaknesses and thus have underestimated leverage. It only makes sense to facilitate ways for Muslim women to reclaim their narratives and hence their power. Female Muslim scholars of religion and religious law have the most to contribute to the acquisition of liberty and legal protection for Muslim women. This can be achieved through the support of western feminists who are not blinded by their western-ness. Western feminists' suggestions and knowledge can be helpful for Muslim female scholars pushing for justice and equality. However, this advice must be presented as one of the ways of overcoming the set task and not as the only way of acquiring success. Muslim women must be included in determining how to gauge success.

Condemnation of Islam as a perpetuator of violence against women in Muslim countries is not a sufficient action; it is rather the most dangerous form of inaction. It is important to understand the depth with which male domination has taken root in the lives of all women. Only then can women uproot the poisonous weeds of misogyny before they grow tall enough to obscure more truth. Unity among all women—western and Muslim alike—is imperative to avoid women being used as a tool for the furthering of patriarchal motives. Muslim women should not be expected to act like western women and pursue their ideals. Instead, Muslim women must be supported in defining their own identities and what freedom means for them. When Muslim women are supported by western women in their push for justice and equality based on their own religious and social insight, this embodies the defeat of male domination and the true liberation of women.

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*Where Do We Go Now?* Directed by Nadine Labaki. Cannes: Les Films des Tournelles, 2011.



*Using an anecdote to hook the reader and to underscore his clear and bold thesis, the writer of this research-based essay passionately argues for sweeping changes to American policies pertaining to surveillance and privacy.*

## **The United States of Espionage**

**By Matthew Bird**

Dr. Liptak – Trauma in Literature and Film

A man is driving in a car on his way to a town. He is driving on an open strip of highway outside of town lines so no one can see him or hear him. The man decides to roll his windows down, blare his favorite song, and sing at the top of his lungs. After a few minutes the man gets closer to the town. He finally chooses to put his windows up, turn down his music, and to stop singing at the top of his lungs. When is this man himself? Is he himself when he is free to do whatever he chooses, or when he is under the scrutiny of other people? It is safe to assume that humans act differently when they know they are being judged by others. With technology and information-sharing on the rise, some concerned citizens wonder if they should fear a country where there is no such thing as real privacy. The scenario above becomes more of a reality when examining government agencies like the National Security Agency (NSA) and its power. The people running the National Security Agency believe they can justly infringe on Americans' Fourth Amendment rights. They believe they are acting in the interest of protecting everyday American citizens and specifically protecting them from foreign threats. In reality, the NSA infringes on civil liberties; hence, it should be disbanded and surveilling American citizens should require a warrant.

The United States government has been spying on its citizens, especially those with links to foreign threats, since this country's creation due to Art. II, § 1 of the structural Constitution. This clause gives the President of the United States the fundamental duty to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States" (US Const. art. II, sec.1). According to Christopher J. Champion of the *Vanderbilt Law Review*, this implies that "the duty [identified in this clause] is the power to protect our Government against those who would subvert or overthrow it by unlawful means" (2). This means that the President does have the almighty power to protect American citizens as he sees fit, especially against foreign attackers. George Washington, after taking office, "sought to centralize the collection of information within the executive branch" (Champion 2). Washington hired spies and oversaw their operations during his presidency. Centralized collection of information has, therefore, been a tradition since the beginning of American history, but it has fallen under greater scrutiny since the beginning of electronic communications. Now that most of our records are stored online, there is an abundance of information related to national security that the government looks to collect. Larger questions are being raised about how to protect privacy while maintaining national security, and the standard that is set in protecting these rights can be found in the Bill of Rights.

The portion of the Bill of Rights that protects unreasonable search and seizure challenges the power handed to the Executive Branch. The fourth amendment forces the government to obtain a warrant and just cause to intrude on privacy. Although this amendment originally pertained to physical property, questions emerged in the 20th century about how this amendment protects privacy in electronic communications. All of these questions were answered in the landmark case of *Katz vs. United States* in 1967. Katz was arrested for transmitting gambling information from state to state. The only controversy was that his arrest was based on evidence from a conversation in a public telephone booth. This case sparked debate about the interpretation of the Constitution and whether surveillance of electronics should be considered lawful search and seizure. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of Katz and extended the Fourth Amendment's interpretation from a basic protection of physical space to the protection of individual privacy (Champion 3). This case was a major win for civil liberty in the United States. Yet protection of information is not just a right guaranteed domestically; it is also a human right that has been agreed upon internationally.

Privacy is an internationally guaranteed right as agreed upon by the United Nations. Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an international treaty that was signed by all United Nation members, guarantees member countries the right to privacy and unlawful attacks (Sinha 2). This is a guaranteed, basic human right that was agreed upon and willingly signed by the United States, which implies that if the US is collecting and spying on its citizens and other nations' citizens with little to no justification, human rights violations are being committed by the United States government every single day. Over time, this means that the United States could commit millions, billions, or trillions of human rights violations (Sinha 4). Although electronic surveillance should be considered a human rights violation, there is little enforcement of this international law. The United States has yet to explain the legality of its surveillance programs and even though the US government is clearly in violation of international law, it still insists on collecting massive amounts of information.

The United States government seems to have an infatuation with spying on its own citizens. The government's obsession did not just happen overnight; it is a process that began during the Cold War. In 1952, President Truman created the NSA to collect any information that could help defeat the Russians. Its sole purpose was to find information related to the USSR (*America's Surveillance State*). What does not make sense, however, is the fact that the communications being collected about the USSR were citizen-to-citizen and had no connection to Russia at all (Sinha 4). After the Cold War, the NSA continued to collect information and has developed into the largest espionage organization in the world today (*America's Surveillance State*). This espionage is justified by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA). This act was created to combat increasing citizen and legal concerns about privacy and regulation, but the

legislation allows the United States government to conduct electronic surveillance and physical searches as long as it is for foreign intelligence purposes (Champion 1). This law, however, does give the government the power to eavesdrop on the domestic or international communications of citizens with very little judicial oversight. Although this law's purpose was to narrow the government's surveillance, it marks the beginning of the abuse of these powers.

The judicial oversight on communications is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC). This is a "secret" court whose deliberations take place with only government officials present, but whose approval is necessary for the extended surveillance of Americans" (Sinha 6). The FISC's main purpose is to act as a check on the NSA and other government agencies' powers, yet the issue with this is that the court can only address issues when the government goes to the FISC to reveal problems. This is an incredibly weak method to keep the NSA's power to a minimum because the NSA and FISC seem to work hand-in-hand instead of the FISC checking the NSA's power. Failing to work towards its primary objective, the FISC seems to do very little to challenge government overreach. Additionally, there are ways to move around the FISC. While the court can approve a warrant in a matter of hours, it is still legal for the government to spy on a person without a warrant at all. FISA grants the government power to conduct surveillance for 168 hours without any warrant (this extends to 15 days during a time of war) (Sinha 7). Lastly, the court approves the requests with hardly any questions asked. From 1978 to 2001, the government submitted 13,102 requests to the court to eavesdrop on Americans within FISA guidelines. The court requested modifications to two requests and ultimately approved them all. Clearly, the FISC has not rejected enough of these requests to be considered a check on the NSA's powers (Setty 5). This is a perfect example of how government bureaucracy has failed to keep Americans protected. FISC is only an illusion of a check and/or balance on government power, especially since there is no real necessity for the use of warrants.

Mechanisms like the FISC and executive power have only been closely examined after leaked information. As Sudha Setty of the *Stanford Journal of International Law* says:

[The] reliance on sporadic leaks to trigger genuine accountability is structurally problematic. Our reliance on leaks thus far should force us to reconsider the extreme secrecy under which intelligence-gathering programs, like the NSA Metadata Program, are administered, and to consider means by which institutional actors can exert meaningful and regular oversight and control over these programs. (76)

Sudha offers the idea that somehow there is a solution to check the powers of the NSA through "institutional actors," but is this even attainable? Why should the solution for ending government overreach be more government? This sounds like throwing gas on a fire. There are countless government

agencies that have been continuously added to check the NSA's power, but there is still very little oversight. Instead, government agencies have only expanded their collection of information.

While most information gathering works through the FISA, these powers were extended after 9/11 through The USA PATRIOT Act and the PRISM program. In short, The PATRIOT Act is FISA on steroids. The PATRIOT Act amended FISA in a few ways, which allowed roving warrants to be applied to all phones used by a single target, rather than individual phones, and permitted agencies to share information they collected through eavesdropping (Sinha 9). The PATRIOT Act was also the beginning of the NSA's massive Metadata program. This program clumps millions of phone records together and stores a large portion of them. As a former NSA employee put it, "[F]inding useful information is like finding a needle in a haystack. The NSA does not bother to search for the needle, instead it takes the entire haystack" (*America's Surveillance State*). In addition to the USA PATRIOT Act, the PRISM program was created six years after 9/11, and according to reports, it allows the NSA to "tap into a mobile phone and monitor the subscriber's web of communication through his or her email address" (Robis 2). The PRISM Act is an additional extension of the bountiful privileges given by the USA PATRIOT Act. Government personnel are willing to admit that their programs are inefficient, but this Metadata collection program continues today, just on a smaller scale due to the USA FREEDOM Act of 2015 (Setty 4). This makes the "haystack" smaller, but the NSA still insists on taking the entire haystack instead of searching directly for "the needle." This program is not in the best interest of American citizens and has failed in preventing terrorist attacks because of its poor execution. Thus, not only is this collection of information unethical, it appears to be ineffective.

The suspect argument for government surveillance is always about the safety of the American people. Many people feel like there has to be a balance between basic civil liberties and the protection of our democracy. However, is it even safe to assume that the NSA and warrantless government surveillance makes the United States more safe? It is important to note that the government did have information collected about the hijackers before 9/11. The NSA had also collected information on the Boston bombers and the shoe-bomber (*America's Surveillance State*), yet none of this information was able to protect Americans because it was collected in a manner that is nearly impossible to sort through. There is way too much information for one dangerous individual to be located. The NSA hires 30,000 employees and still cannot productively use its increasing technological capabilities to stop potential attacks (*America's Surveillance State*). The fact that the greatest spy organization ever created cannot prevent these large acts of violence is proof of its low value.

Another example of the NSA failing to keep the people of the United States safe is the Snowden leaks that damaged America's relationship with its allies. These leaks proved that the NSA collected information on a total of 122 foreign leaders. The most notable leader being spied on was German Prime

Minister Angela Merkel. The United States had no reason to suspect Merkel of being tied to any terrorist information, nor did it collect information that would prove useful to protecting America in general (*America's Surveillance State*). These leaks damaged the trust that ally nations had in the United States and raised questions about America's values abroad (*America's Surveillance State*). While the US is well-known for policing the world, no country should have to fear that its privacy could be invaded by another nation like the United States. Citizens commonly expect journalists to expose government corruption, but even journalists are fearful of agencies like the NSA (*America's Surveillance State*). While it is safe to assume that these leaks inherently made America less safe and permanently damaged the United States' image, ironically, whistleblowers like Edward Snowden are one of the few checks and balances that challenge the powers of the NSA. Thus, it is obvious that the efficacy of the NSA and the existing procedures for government warrants need to be closely reexamined and revised.

Again, the need for the NSA and The PATRIOT Act, for the most part, has passed. The NSA and FISA were created at a time when the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons pointed at American cities, and The PATRIOT Act was created when all citizens were fearful for their lives. It is safe to say that no terrorist organization poses a threat great enough to justify a Metadata collection program that warrantlessly conducts surveillance on 500 people within the United States and 5,000 to 7,000 people abroad at any given point in time post 9/11 (Sinha 8). At this point in time, most citizens will agree that America is in a much safer place than during the 20th century. Because of the lack of nuclear fallout drills being performed and new bomb shelters being created, it is safe to assume that America is much more secure in the 21st century. However, despite Americans feeling generally safe, the NSA continues to grow in size and shows no sign of slowing down.

The solutions involve dismantling the NSA and the creation of a standard that requires all electronic searches to be conducted with a warrant. Many Americans justly believe that the United States has an obligation to protect the general welfare of its citizens as outlined in the Constitution. This protection would not change; the government was avidly protecting citizens against foreign threats long before the establishment of the NSA. If there is no way for the NSA to act within the bounds of American law and preserve America's sense of liberty, the only solution is complete abolishment. The dismemberment of the NSA would not mean the end of unwarranted searches. That is why it is important to protect the rights of everyday Americans no matter what organization is conducting surveillance. Hence, there is also a necessity for the warrant standard. Although courts have ruled that the executive branch has the power to allow warrantless searches during times of war, this is a dangerous path to travel (Robis 211), for this loose standard violates personal liberties and challenges the power of the judicial branch. As mentioned previously, these warrants can be obtained in just a few hours and are easily approved. The

abolition of the NSA and the creation of requirements for warrants are feasible and would protect basic human rights.

It is common for people to justify government surveillance with the notion that they have nothing to hide. The fact of the matter is that not only does government surveillance infringe on basic property rights, but it also censors citizens without them even realizing it. It is unfair to make a man live under public scrutiny during every moment of the day. Humans need some degree of privacy. It is important to imagine the man driving down a strip of highway as illustrated earlier in this essay. Americans should have the right to live like the man driving outside of town lines. Every person is entitled to some degree of privacy at birth, and Americans should not have to curb their behavior to counteract an intrusive government. It is time for serious political change to be implemented and for politicians to hold the American government accountable. As a protester said during the documentary *America's Surveillance State*, "This is not about right or left, it's about right and wrong."

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*This student writer skillfully argues that the use of body cameras will help mitigate police brutality. Considering various perspectives and issues, the student draws from a journalist's lecture on campus delivered at the time she was collecting material on this topic and incorporates what she learned outside of the classroom into this final FYS research project.*

## **Body Cameras: A Logical Solution to Police Brutality**

**By Kaley Brindisi**

Dr. Liptak – Trauma in Literature and Film

Police brutality is one of the largest and fastest growing controversial social justice concerns that exists today. This issue seems to raise the question of whether the police are correctly and righteously doing their job. These ideals were evident in the case of Michael Brown when he was murdered by Officer Darren Wilson on August 9, 2014. Since this event, there have been growing concerns with police accountability and society's overall trust in law enforcement. The most logical decision to overcome this problem would be to require members of law enforcement to wear body cameras. Incorporating this technology has already begun. As of 2015, the United States has had sixty-three agencies require their police force to wear body cameras (Coudert et al 750). Looking at these numbers, there is clearly a level of acceptance and popularity for them, for there are so many benefits to implementing this technology. When police decide to increase their usage of technology on the job by the means of body cameras, there will be a reduction in police brutality rates because the footage holds police accountable for their actions, providing concrete evidence for any issues that may arise.

Police brutality is most distinctly noticed as a social justice concern when looking at race. In a world that should be improving in terms of race relations, the unfair treatment of black civilians by police has become an increasingly prevalent concern. In March 2017 at Siena College, Shaun King, a writer for the *New York Daily News*, delivered a strong lecture about this issue. King connected police brutality and race relations with the story of Brandon Brooks, a white child, who videotaped the unfair treatment of Dajerria Becton, a fifteen-year-old black female, in a white neighborhood. This incident took place on June 5, 2015. Becton was relentlessly beaten up and thrown to the ground by a white police officer. The child was calling for her mother and pleading for assistance because the officer was hurting her. At one point, a few of her black friends were attempting to get her and leave the neighborhood when the officer pulled a gun on them. Brandon Brooks said that amidst all the chaos, he felt invisible and "privileged" due to his race. Because of this, Brandon took the opportunity to tape what was happening as proof and posted the video online (King). It is unfair that these children were treated so differently due to the color of their skin. The white officer did not harm any of the white children in the neighborhood. Becton was not only physically traumatized when she was pinned to the ground and beaten, but she was also emotionally and socially traumatized. She now must feel secluded and alone since she was specifically targeted by the officer and

was not granted the same rights as Brandon Brooks. Neither Brooks, nor the black children resided in the neighborhood; yet, he was not treated in the same discriminatory manner. As Brooks concluded, he was treated differently by the police force because of his race. This is a prime example, among many others, of how police brutality is a traumatic social justice concern in today's society.

This issue is extremely problematic in that recently there has been a spike in its severity. Shaun King stated that last year 102 fully unarmed black men, women, or children were killed. These civilians were completely innocent and not guilty of any crime. He continued to explain that America has not seen such a high number of such deaths since the twenty-fifth president, William McKinley, in the 1890s. Back then, the deaths were due to lynching. He pointed out these statistics in order to draw a clear comparison. The number of deaths of unarmed black civilians that occurred in the last year was enormously high when comparing them to previous years, and King discussed this point to prove how the issue has, in fact, worsened over time. The best way to stop this growth is to introduce body cameras into police departments. Such technology would not only help decrease police brutality, but it would offer numerous other benefits, too.

When a police officer wears a body camera, the visual and audio evidence can be used to prosecute the guilty party. That camera is right at the scene of an alleged crime and provides concrete evidence to help the prosecution. When a survey was conducted, results showed that ninety-six percent of prosecutors agreed that video evidence improved their ability to prosecute cases ("Considering" 1802). Body cameras could help to provide proof of the real injustice that occurred at the scene, and this concept of proof by video is evident in the story of Marcus Jeter.

The story of how cameras helped to prove Marcus Jeter's innocence was included in an article published in *The Harvard Law Review*. In June 2012, Jeter was arrested for "eluding police, resisting arrest and aggravated assault on an officer" (qtd. in "Considering" 1797). After reviewing the case, one year after Jeter's arrest, additional video evidence from a second camera surfaced proving otherwise. What was depicted in the new video was disturbing. It showed Jeter's car getting hit by a police vehicle, then Jeter sitting in the car with his hands up while the two officers walked to opposite side windows, one with a rifle and the other with a pistol. Next, the officer smashed the driver's side window, dragged Jeter out of the car, threw him to the ground and proceeded to beat him unmercifully ("Considering" 1798). Jeter endured extensive physical trauma. Because of this uncovered footage, he was saved from multiple years in jail, and the officers were held liable for their actions. As a result, "One [cop] retired after pleading guilty to tampering, and two [cops] were arraigned 'on charges of official misconduct, tampering with public records, and false documents and false swearing'" (qtd. in "Considering" 1798). Without this video



evidence, Jeter never would have received the justice he deserved and would have been unfairly imprisoned for actions he never took.

While this video was from a police car dashboard camera, a body camera would have likely produced even better results. The outcome would have been superior because the court could have immediately studied that video as evidence, as opposed to it being uncovered a year later. Additionally, there might have been an auditory conversation that was not picked up by the car camera. Since the body camera would have been right at the scene, the conversation would have been recorded and could have been used as further evidence. Undoubtedly, a body camera would have been beneficial in the case of Marcus Jeter, for the limited video evidence that did exist aided him in his fight for innocence and justice.

There is a sense of transparency with police when their actions are being watched on a camera. A judge agreed with this when she said that “the use of police body-worn cameras would encourage lawful and respectful interactions on the part of the police and the individual being stopped, by providing an overt recording” (Coudert et al 750). Even a judge, a person with high authority, agrees that the recordings on these videos provide clear indications of what happened at the scene. This is also an important and valid point to make because not only would cameras help to improve a police officer’s actions, but the interactions between both the officer and the person being stopped would be more respectful. It is normal for people to act differently when they know that they are being recorded because they are aware that they are being held accountable. This concept holds true on both ends in regard to citizens and law enforcement. The existence of the cameras is a subconscious reminder that officers will be held responsible for their actions.

The first police department to deploy the use of body cameras was Rialto Police Department in California in 2012. It launched a study examining the effects of police body cameras and its correlation to the number of use-of-force incidents. In this study, the department supplied fifty-four police officers with body cameras. The results were remarkable. Overall, there was an “eighty-eight percent decline in complaints against officers” as well as a sixty percent decline in use-of-force incidents (Demetrius and Okwu 2). Looking at these results verifies that police brutality rates do, in fact, decrease when body cameras are utilized. While this is only one study of a small law enforcement unit, just imagine what would happen if every police department implemented the use of this technology into its systems. The results would be incredible. It is no wonder why there is overall support for implementing body cameras.

There is not merely encouragement for body cameras by community members, but police department heads and political figures, such as Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump, all support this technology (McDonald and Bachelder). With this increasing support, it is hard to say that the use of body cameras is a terrible idea. Many protestors at different rallies even claim that they wish there

was footage of police altercations (Jackson 4). This technology would put countless people's minds at ease knowing that they are aware of what happened at the scene. Americans also claimed that "they would be safer if all police officers wore body cameras" ("Considering" 1802). This shows that the technology truly does influence people, for they would feel more comfortable if these cameras were used. If the public were to feel more relaxed and happier with these cameras, this is further reasoning as to why the use of body cameras is beneficial. Because of these numerous benefits, cameras are highly funded on the national and state level.

Barak Obama, during his presidency, federally funded \$263 million for law enforcement to buy body cameras and improve their training ("Considering" 1795). With nearly two hundred US police departments receiving federal funding for body cameras, the money is there. On the state level, in Cincinnati, Ohio, there is a \$6 million fund for 1,050 body cameras and seven years of data storage (McDonald and Bachelder). This money is only for the city of Cincinnati and could be utilized advantageously for their whole police department. Utilizing these funds to incorporate body cameras into law enforcement would be beneficial and worth it in the long run. There would be a decrease in police brutality which could help the public view officers in a more positive light.

In addition to recording instances of misconduct and brutality, body cameras would also depict more positive interactions between police and the community. Since every action at the scene is being recorded, it makes sense that there will be numerous positive collaborations taped as well. This would help the public in its viewing of the police. It is common to have skepticism about police officers' actions while on duty. However, with these cameras recording police interactions, helpful evidence would exist to show that law enforcement should not always be portrayed in a negative light.

While there are countless advantages to using body cameras, there are still people who disagree. One common argument is that this technology is too expensive. Thirty-nine percent of people who participated in a recent survey said that cost was the reason that they were against body cameras ("Police"). However, with the funds that exist on the federal and state levels, finances are not yet a concern. Not only that, but "improvements in technology will undoubtedly make the [. . .] storage of police body camera footage less expensive" ("Police"). Since technology improves in quality as time goes on, this concept only makes sense. It is simply a matter of time before the correct technology is developed to create cheaper cameras, which would, therefore, make price less of a concern. This would help please the people who claim that the cameras are too expensive. However, another main argument against body cameras is that they raise enormous privacy concerns.

Many people claim that confidentiality is a concern since body cameras would record any involved people's actions. However, with the correct privacy laws in place, this should not be an issue either. There

are several departments around the country that have chosen to use body cameras and have these laws set in place. One law that implements these ideals is "Florida's bill, SB248, [that] limit[s] the release of footage captured in 'health care, mental health care or social services' facilities as well as 'at the scene of a medical emergency involving a death or [. . .] an injury that requires transport'" ("Police"). In this case, Florida sets forth specific rules where filming is prohibited. With these pre-set laws, the privacy concerns should be non-existent. Residents of Florida are fully aware that police can film them in places other than those set locations. Another example of privacy rules being set in place is a projected New Hampshire law that demands police wear body cameras but exempts the film footage from public records ("Police"). Since this footage would be restricted from the public, privacy concerns are diminished. All in all, body cameras are highly beneficial and should be implemented in police departments with the appropriate regulations on filming, storage, and access.

Studies have proven that police wearing body cameras are the best solution help decrease police brutality rates. Body cameras would also provide other benefits as well. By law enforcement implementing this technology, relationships between society and the police will improve and important evidence will be collected for prosecution in court cases. It is obvious that body cameras are a viable method to decrease the instances of social injustices related to police brutality.

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*This writer was inspired to read additional prison narratives after studying Piper Kerman's memoir Orange is the New Black in class. Using supplementary quantitative and qualitative research to back up her claims, the student argues that these personal narratives have the power to dispel myths about the incarcerated and reveal important social injustices in the prison system.*

## **The Empowerment of Perspective: Personal Narratives of Female Inmates**

**By Alanna DiFiglia**

Prof. Collins – Narrative: The Inside Story

If you asked an average person to define what a prison is, they would most likely say it is a building in which criminals are held for a certain amount of time, maybe even a lifetime. The average person may not, however, be able to explain what prison life is like for the inmates. The mystery of how prisons operate on a daily basis is, for the most part, ignored by the public due to the stigma attached to the prisoners within. Therefore, the people who know best what being in a prison is like are those who serve time there. An example of such a person is Piper Kerman. In her memoir *Orange is the New Black*, she identifies unpleasant details about her life as an inmate, reflecting on how she was constantly made to feel that she was not an individual. The written words of people like Kerman who discuss their experience of being imprisoned show how personal narratives provide the rest of the world with insight into an otherwise overlooked topic. The imperfections of the system create an unsafe lifestyle inside prison institutions that female prisoners must endure during their incarceration, and this is unjust. Their stories help the average citizen connect to and understand the pain that some of these prisoners suffer. Hearing the stories of inmates enables people to care about their situation in an imperfect system and works to dispel the myths and assumptions about who a prisoner is.

A distinct flaw in the U.S. prison system is its enormous size due to mass incarceration. The article "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie" by Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, released by a nonprofit called Prison Policy Initiative, provides a chart showing extremely high imprisonment rates in the United States. Nick Wing's *Huffington Post* article "America's Horrifying Mass-Incarceration System, In 1 Chart" is based on this chart, and it reveals that the U.S. criminal justice system "now incarcerates more than 2.3 million people" (1). Also, despite making up only 5% of the Earth's population, the U.S. is responsible for 25% of the world's prisoners, with another 7 million on parole (Wing 2). These statistics show the incredible and overbearing number of people who are in prison for various reasons ranging from small misdemeanors to murder. The Prison Policy Initiative article by Wagner and Rabuy assesses the data of the chart, stating, "Almost half a million people are locked up because of a drug offense" (1). This means that a large group of people behind bars are responsible for non-violent drug crimes. Not only does the excessive number of drug arrests affect those responsible, but it can also have a negative consequence in areas with those high drug arrest rates. These neighborhoods have greater police oversight. Therefore not only will

people be more likely to get arrested, but they will also be more likely to get longer sentences in the future because of previous minor drug possession charges (Wagner and Rabuy 3). The U.S. prison system affects those who aren't individually responsible for committing crimes when people live in such communities and are forced to deal with being from a bad neighborhood. People living in these areas tend to have lower job prospects. This proves that the ineffectiveness of the justice system is a problem for every person in the U.S., whether or not it is acknowledged.

Society tends to brand prisoners as bad people who deserve their punishments, but when one looks at the tough and at times traumatic lives of some of the women in prison, a different side is shown. Much of what goes on in prisons goes unnoticed, and this is partly due to how prisoners are viewed. As criminals, people who are in prison are given ugly and dangerous reputations. While these reputations are sometimes well-earned, not all are. Looking into one's past situations and determining how one's life resulted in a prison sentence would acknowledge that prisoners are actual people who may have simply made a mistake. Wally Lamb, an author who spent time behind bars, understands this concept. In his work as a writing teacher for women at York Correctional Institution in Connecticut, Lamb decided that some stories were worth sharing with the public to convey that there's more to female inmates than the crimes they've committed. His book *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, a collection of autobiographical sketches from his students, reveals the people they are underneath the label of criminal. One personal narrative in Lamb's book is called "Hair Chronicles." The writer, Tabatha Rowley, explains how her childhood in a ghetto area of Connecticut made drugs and alcohol the only escapes from an otherwise unbearable life. Her only protector was her brother Pete, who she recalls "took it upon himself to make me tough and streetwise . . . He taught me how to cop, bag-up, and sell cocaine and weed" (97). Rowley's circumstances forced her to rely on illegal activity to survive. Her story reveals what makes someone a criminal. Charged with assault in the first degree after shooting her boyfriend who had, she said, "shoved [her] to the ground one time too many," Rowley was sentenced to seven years in prison (98). There, she was profiled by a guard who saw her as exceptionally dangerous since she was black, and she was given a disciplinary ticket for possessing her own hair after cutting off her dreadlocks. Rowley states that "no one deserves to be talked down to and assumed valueless - no matter what their positions" (101). Her experience behind bars, a result from her dark past, was just one of many that women face every day. Whether they follow the rules or not, all female prisoners are subjected to being considered nothing more than the scum of the Earth.

The reasons behind how a person ended up in prison are more complicated than stating that they are simply bad people. An article called "The State of Women in Prison" by Vivian Nixon suggests that there are "systematic injustices" that lead to women being imprisoned (2). Many females have, in desperation to feed their families or from mental illnesses and addictions, committed illegal acts.

Information taken from The Sentencing Project, which works to expose problems in the criminal justice system, shows that “nearly half of women in state prisons have not completed high school. Sixty percent were not employed full-time when they were arrested, and nearly 1/3 had been receiving some kind of welfare benefits prior to arrest” (Nixon 2). This brings light to the fact that the women in prison haven’t had the easiest lives and perhaps crime to them meant food in their children’s stomachs and provides the opportunity of seeing female inmates as the people they are. By realizing that a prisoner can be someone who simply made mistakes or did what they did to provide for their loved ones, one can sympathize with their situation and see the uncomfortable and, at times, horrible conditions inside prison as injustice.

Another example that shows the cruelty of the mass incarceration of women is the issue of separating mothers from their children. In the *New York Times* article “Mothers in Prison,” Nicholas Kristof declares that in the U.S. the number of female prisoners, two-thirds of whom are incarcerated for non-violent crimes, continues to go up even though for men the numbers have been dropping (1). The case with women is most serious, Kristof says, because “women are disproportionately likely to be the primary caregivers, and 60 percent of American women in state prisons have children under 18” (2). The children of female inmates also suffer from their mothers being locked away, and they become more likely to be put into foster homes and become criminals themselves. One person interviewed for the article is Alisia Hunter, who tells her story of repeating her mother’s mistakes and landing behind bars. Hunter, who states that she would relapse into drug use each time she was released from prison, had attempted to go to rehab, but under state laws didn’t qualify as having a serious addiction, so her rehabilitation would not be supported financially as it was when she was behind bars (Kristof 2). Kristof explains that “the incarceration of a family member is associated with a 64 percent decline in household assets . . . The 2.6 million American children who have a parent in prison or jail pay an enormous price” (4). On top of the pain of being forced apart from their mothers, the children of imprisoned women lose the lives they had. Also, if they have no other family willing to take care of them for the duration of their mother’s sentences, these children can get lost in the foster care system. This problem could be easily fixed by cutting back on giving women hard time, especially if their crimes weren’t violent, and instead working with alternatives such as a program called Women in Recovery in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Kristof explains how the program works with convicted females and their families. He states that “the two-generation approach” is effective because it provides “counseling, intensive support, coaching on budgeting and conflict resolution, and help getting . . . diplomas, housing, and jobs” (4). The people who complete the program show a reoffend rate of only 4.9%, which proves the effectiveness of the program as an alternative to prison time (Kristof 4). The women in prison who suffer from drug addiction will continue to be prisoners unless the system is reformed and helps them change and have a future for themselves and their families.

Another example of the inefficiency of the criminal justice system in the U.S. is the existence of abusive power systems within prisons. Female inmates are often subjected to sexual and mental abuse and made to believe they are powerless. This injustice that exists inside the criminal justice system does not receive the proper amount of attention, nor are cases of abuse handled fairly. This only further enforces a prisoner's hate for the system and is a form of torment, especially for female inmates who have been sexually assaulted as children, which is approximately 25 percent of women in state prisons (Kristof 3). Women are either bribed or coerced into performing sexual favors for guards who wrongly use their authority over inmates. In "The Rape Victims Silenced by Their Prison Cells," Melissa Jeltsen describes one such instance from McPherson Unit, a women's institute in Arkansas. A woman named Leticia Villarreal recounts how a prison chaplain named Kenneth Dewitt used a program called Principles and Applications for Life to teach subordination to female inmates, mentally enslaving them. He used this program, which offered "quieter and cleaner" living conditions, to coax women into having sex with him (2). Villarreal revealed that "Dewitt would call her to his office every Monday and sexually victimize her, forcing her into oral sex and intercourse. And she wasn't the only one" (Jeltsen 2). He was eventually charged and pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting three female prisoners. The longest case of abuse went on for three and a half years, yet Dewitt was only sentenced to five years in prison. The article focuses on the reaction, or lack of one, to Dewitt receiving such a short sentence. Since an inmate isn't the "perfect victim," society turns its back on these women, who for years stayed silent about the corruption in their prison (Jeltsen 3). This silence will continue until reform takes place to ensure that treatment in prison is fair and abuse-free. Hearing the stories of the women who experience such mistreatment as inmates is essential to identifying the problems of the system.

The brokenness of the criminal justice system is partly due to the fact that the methodology is based upon punishment rather than rehabilitation. Criminals are not encouraged through the correctional system to stop committing crimes; inmates are only taught how to survive in a hostile and unsafe environment. Prisoners form communities and make their own unspoken rules, which leads to greater violence between power rivals. According to Michelle Phelps, who wrote "Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era: The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality in U.S. Prison Programs," there has been a "decline of the rehabilitative ideal . . . . In place of rehabilitation, deterrence and incapacitation became the explicit goals of prison" (34). Prisoners would be much better off with a prison experience that helps them reform themselves and enter society in a better state. The oppressive conditions of prison life only work to fortify the demeaning regulations upon inmates. In *Orange is the New Black* Piper Kerman recalls, "Some days I barely spoke, keeping eyes open and my mouth shut. I was afraid, less of physical violence . . . than of getting cursed out publicly for [f\*\*\*\*\*] up, either breaking a prison rule or a prisoner's rule" (67). The

continuous unease involved in having to watch their backs prevents prisoners from being able to focus on transforming themselves in a positive manner before they are released. Furthermore, some women don't need to be in prison at all. While Kerman's time in a correctional institution did help her learn the severity of her wrongdoing, she was neither dangerous to society nor a bad person. Kerman had successfully detached herself from her reckless past ten years before being arrested and believes "a lengthy term of community service working with addicts on the outside would probably have driven the same truth home and been a hell of a lot more productive for the community" (180). She feels the current criminal justice system lacks "restorative justice" (180). Implementing this into the system would decrease the number of people in prison while allowing them to face up to their wrongdoings. Moving towards more rehabilitative goals has the potential to help fix the criminal justice system.

The cracks in the justice system are seen through the many narratives of women who have spent time inside it. Through their stories, prisoners assist in spreading the truth of the many flaws of prison life. Judging a prisoner as a criminal is easy, but understanding that someone in prison is also a person with a story reveals many more layers of what it means to be a criminal. Listening to their perspectives and taking their emotions to heart brings society one step forward towards correcting the unjust structure of prisons. By adding new approaches within the system, including directing people towards programs and house arrest rather than doing hard time, female inmates have more of a chance to receive much needed help and are able to continue being with their families. The rest of society is affected and, therefore, is just as responsible for promoting a better system.

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*Inspired by the rhetoric and practices of activist Bryan Stevenson, the writer of this expository research essay explores Stevenson's approach to criminal justice reform by analyzing aspects of both his writing and legal advocacy on behalf of children.*

## **Bryan Stevenson: Uncovering Injustice within the American Legal System**

**By Jenna Jewell**

Prof. Glynn – Power and Persuasion

Lawyer, writer, and restorative justice activist Bryan Stevenson stated in a 2012 TED Talk that “We have a system of justice in this country that treats you much better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent” (“Talk About an Injustice”). As Stevenson is quick to note in his 2015 book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, since the early 1900s there has been an intense push in the United States to address crime using punitive measures. In the American Justice System, minority, economically disadvantaged, and mentally ill youth are often given harsher sentences than those who are privileged. Moreover, thousands of young inmates do not receive proper counseling or are cruelly punished, sometimes for crimes that they did not commit (“Children in Prison”). Stevenson reminds us, “You judge the character of a society not by how they treat the rich and the powerful and the privileged, but by how they treat the poor, the condemned, the incarcerated” and goes on to add, “The United States is the only country in the world where we sentence 13-year-old children to die in prison. We have life imprisonment without parole for kids in this country” (“Talk About an Injustice”). At any given time, thousands of children are confined within adult prisons and jails, which make them vulnerable to violence and sexual assault. Stevenson believes that however heinous their crimes, children should never be condemned to die in prison. He argues that they should be given the opportunity to be good citizens and to live the majority of their lives outside of prison. Stevenson created the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) to change American sentencing laws regarding children and to advocate for the legal system to provide young people with counsel who will fight for their rights. In the past two decades, Bryan Stevenson's dedication to eliminating harsh imprisonment and ensuring legal justice for minority, economically disadvantaged, and mentally ill young people has led to the reform of criminal laws involving minors.

Stevenson's efforts are so important because, as author and black rights proponent Toni Morrison once stated, “Certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination” (4). Stevenson is a writer who has given hope to the disadvantaged by spreading the truth about the injustices young people face. In *Just Mercy*, he conveys the truth about the legal system in order to right a moral injustice. He gives the accused voices and distinct personalities and in so doing, encourages his audience to view them as so much more than mere criminals. Stevenson also teaches readers valuable lessons about tolerance when he recounts how

he did not rush to judgment when analyzing cases. Ultimately, Bryan Stevenson proves to be an ideal leader who is often referred to as the “Nelson Mandela of injustice” (“Bryan Stevenson”). He exhibits persistent dedication to his clients and through his writing, establishes a vision of the world in which poverty and minority status do not automatically lead to guilty verdicts in the legal system.

In addition to his role as an author, Stevenson is the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, which has won “major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, countering abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill and aiding children prosecuted as adults” (“Bryan Stevenson”). Through his work, Stevenson shows how children can be mistreated when their race, class, and mental instability factor into their sentences. The Equal Justice Initiative aims to overcome this injustice by “providing legal assistance to juveniles condemned to die in prison; challenging the placement of youth in adult jails and prisons, where they face an elevated risk of assault and sexual violence; and challenging the prosecution of very young children as adults” (“All Children Are Children”).

Through the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), Stevenson has worked to eliminate the placement of juveniles under the age of 18 in adult jail or prison. He has also sought to end the prosecution of any child under the age of 14. As controversial as it may seem, children should not have to live in prison without the chance of parole. In the words of one EJI initiative: “[P]rosecuting underage children as adults is not only incompatible with the capabilities of young children, but also traumatizing, abusive, cruel, and unusual” (“All Children Are Children”). Children who are housed in adult jail or prisons are “five times more likely to be sexually assaulted in adult prisons than in juvenile facilities.” Additionally, children face an increased risk of suicide while in an adult jail or prison. They are “36 times more likely to commit suicide after being housed in an adult jail or prison than children incarcerated in juvenile facilities” (“Children in Adult Prisons”).

Stevenson reminds us that most children do not deserve to be condemned to die in prison based on their juvenile conduct. In *Just Mercy*, he relates the story of Alan Simpson, a former U.S. Senator from Wyoming. Simpson is the perfect example of a juvenile criminal who was able to assimilate into society and become a successful adult. By the age of 17, Simpson was a juvenile felon due to “multiple convictions of arson, theft, aggravated assault, gun violence, and, finally, assaulting a police officer” (Stevenson 271). However, he overcame this record after realizing how traumatizing prison can be after spending one night in jail and two years on probation. Simpson received a second chance as a teenager rather than serving a prison sentence and went on to lead a successful career, serving in the U.S Senate for almost twenty years. One’s true potential in life should not be determined by his or her juvenile delinquency, nor should the

criminal justice system have the power to put children in prison for the rest of their lives. Stevenson reminds us that when we imprison children for life, we miss out on their potential to be good citizens.

Stevenson also argues that children should not be put into adult prisons or jails because children are biologically different from adults and less responsible for their wrongdoing. They are also more likely to be rehabilitated and assimilate into society because, as the Supreme Court ruled in *Miller v. Alabama*, children have “diminished culpability, and heightened capacity for change” (“Children in Prison”). Some argue that issues with imprisonment can be solved by segregating children from adults in jails or prison. In fact, many states do have a policy of segregating children from adults. However, when other inmates see that children have received special privileges, this can easily make youth the targets of violence, both sexual and physical. Consequently, it can be hard for certain prisons to segregate children without putting them into solitary confinement. Stevenson and the EJI fought to end solitary confinement because it is psychological torture for anyone, especially children. The result of this advocacy, as Jessica Lahey notes in “The Steep Costs of Keeping Juveniles in Adult Prisons,” is that “the federal government has taken steps to protect juveniles from being housed with adults through two federal statutes: The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 and the Prison Elimination Act of 2003.” In addition, in January 2016, President Obama announced a ban on solitary confinement for juveniles in the federal prison system.

If prisons and jails cannot successfully separate juveniles from the adult population without putting them in solitary confinement, they should be sent to other facilities that can properly house them. However, this is not the best solution because often the juveniles are moved away from their families and friends, thus losing their support system. Ultimately, “these children lose more than their freedom when they enter adult prisons” (Lahey). They lose out on opportunities that are offered at juvenile detention facilities, such as education and therapy services. They will have to use programs in adult prisons and jails that were not designed for juveniles. This is why it is so essential to reform the criminal justice system.

More often than not, children who are prosecuted as adults suffer from undiagnosed and untreated mental illnesses which is yet another major problem due to their young age and their lack of understanding about their mental health issues. This lack of knowledge only increases the likelihood of impulsive behaviors. In adult jail or prison, impulsive behavior can result in “more aggressive punishment, which can worsen a child’s mental health problems” (“Children in Adult Prisons”). Their undiagnosed mental health issues could account for their behavior and result in prolonged sentences due to misconduct; therefore, the cycle of mistreatment continues.

Trina Garnett, whom Stevenson mentions in *Just Mercy*, is one example of the tragic consequences resulting from undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues. Trina was surrounded by violence in her home in Chester, Pennsylvania. She grew up with an abusive, alcoholic father who would regularly beat

and rape his wife in front of their children. When she was five years old, Trina ingested lighter fluid and accidentally set herself on fire. Also, Trina's father eventually sexually abused her, so she fled. When she sought safety at her older sister's house, her sister's husband sexually assaulted her. Stevenson explains, "The abuse, and the desperate circumstances all exacerbated Trina's emotional and mental health problems" (149). In 1976, at fourteen years old, Trina went inside a friend's home at night, lit matches to guide her way, and accidentally set the house on fire. Trina was arrested, and her appointed lawyer failed to advocate on her behalf. According to Stevenson, "Trina's lawyer failed to file the appropriate motions or present evidence to support an incompetency for Trina. The lawyer, who was subsequently disbarred and jailed for unrelated criminal misconduct, also never challenged the State's decision to try Trina as an adult" (150). Because of inadequate counsel, Trina was ultimately forced to stand trial for second-degree murder as an adult.

The injustice did not stop there. Judge Howard Reed found that Trina had no intent to kill, but, as Stevenson explains, "under Pennsylvania law, he could not take the absence of intent into account during sentencing" (150). Judge Reed also could not consider Trina's age, mental health, and previous abuse because, as Stevenson states, "Pennsylvania sentencing law is inflexible: For those convicted of second-degree murder, mandatory life imprisonment without the possibility of parole was the only sentence." (150). Another major problem is that the age for a person to be considered a juvenile is different in each state. One state may consider a 16-year-old an adult while another state might consider 18 the age of adulthood. Sometimes the statutes do not benefit the juveniles, and when placed in adult prisons, children have an increased risk of abuse. Stevenson testifies to this problem when he writes that Trina ended up being raped by a correctional officer and having his child while in prison. Trina "filed a civil suit against the officer and won \$62,000. The guard appealed, and the Court reversed the verdict because the correctional officer had not been permitted to tell the jury that Trina was in prison for murder" (151). This scenario shows that a violent rape is acceptable if one is in prison for murder. The victim becomes a victim all over again. In this vicious cycle, justice remains unserved, not just for Trina, but for the thousands of others who have been unjustly incarcerated and had to endure similar abusive treatment.

In *Just Mercy*, Stevenson explores the lives of other children like Trina who are stuck inside the prison system, incapable of advocating for their rights. For example, Stevenson describes meeting a young man, Joe Sullivan, and the handling of his case. Joe had been sentenced to life without parole when he was 13; however, he struggled with severe mental disabilities. When Stevenson visited him, Joe's "face was tear stained, and his eyes were red, but he looked up at [Stevenson] and began clapping his hands giddily" (262). Joe created a list of questions for Stevenson. He asked if Stevenson had children, what his favorite

color was, and who his favorite cartoon character was. Joe's mental age was much younger than his actual age, but despite his disabilities, he was sentenced to life in prison. Obviously, this treatment is unjust.

Joe Sullivan's case proves that children should not be sentenced to life without parole in adult jails or prisons. Joe was accused of sexual battery after breaking into a home with two older boys. The older boys received short sentences while Joe, who is severely mentally disabled, was sentenced to die in prison. When the Equal Justice Initiative took on the case, Stevenson noticed that Joe's previous lawyer was disbarred and the evidence that could have exonerated Joe was destroyed. The Equal Justice Initiative petitioned the Florida State Courts about Joe's sentence, but its complaint was dismissed. Not giving up, the Equal Justice Initiative appealed to the United States Supreme Court where Joe's sentence was found unconstitutional.

On June 25, 2012, the United States Supreme Court decided that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger convicted of homicide are unconstitutional. The ruling was a result of Bryan Stevenson's work on the Evan Miller case. In July 2003, Miller, along with an accomplice, killed Cole Cannon by beating Cannon with a baseball bat and burning Cannon's trailer while Cannon was inside. Miller was only 14 years old at the time. In 2004, Miller was to be tried as an adult for capital murder and arson. In 2006, a grand jury indicted Miller, and the jury returned a guilty verdict. The trial court sentenced Miller to a mandatory term of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Miller's lawyers, one of whom was Bryan Stevenson, then appealed the case to a higher court because it violated the 8th amendment. The Supreme Court stated, "Indeed, it is the odd legal rule that does not have some form of exception for children. In that context, it is no surprise that the law relating to society's harshest punishments recognizes such a distinction." ("Miller v. Alabama" 23).

In addition to *Just Mercy* and his work with the Equal Justice Initiative, Stevenson continually speaks throughout the world about injustice. His impact within the United States is astonishing because of how much the EJI has achieved in a short time. Stevenson states during one TED talk: "We cannot be full evolved human beings until we care about human rights and basic dignity" ("Talk About an Injustice"). His lifelong dedication proves that he is a leader for those facing injustice. He not only focuses on race as an issue in our legal system, but he also continually focuses on how justice is often distorted by poverty and mental illness. If the measure of our character is how we deal with the poor, unfairly accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned, then Stevenson is a true restorative justice activist. As he states in *Just Mercy*, "Simply punishing the broken—walking away from them or hiding them from sight—only ensures that they remain broken and we do, too. There is no wholeness outside of our reciprocal humanity" (290). Stevenson makes it clear that we as a society have the power to change our legal system and the biases within it.

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*Carefully considering various perspectives, the author of this essay effectively uses information from a multitude of media experts and scholars to explain the deterioration of the news industry.*

## **The Corrosion of Competition: How the 24-Hour News Cycle Is Destroying Fact**

**By Evan Levesque**

Dr. Daly – Popular Culture and the Meaning of Life

The news media is now facing a grave danger, one it has not yet recognized or begun to fight. Since 1980, this menace has been creating conditions that have systematically corroded both editorial standards and the public trust in the news media. This menace is the 24-hour news cycle and the competition that it fosters. As the markets for media expand, the competition becomes more and more intense, driving newspapers to soften their content, driving television stations to obsession over catastrophes, and driving both television and Internet sources into a wasteland where any type of story may be published, so long as it is released quickly. This rapid expansion and subsequent corrosion of editorial standards has created a new cynicism in the American public toward the very sources that are intended to bring them facts. If left unchecked, the news, if any of it still reflects fact, will be entirely ignored by an increasingly cynical and opinionated public. The 24-hour news cycle, then, has planted the seeds of destruction in the field of journalism.

The rise of the 24-hour news cycle has created a feverish desire for viewership among the news networks and news sources that so many rely upon. It has become so acute that, indeed, it has become corrosive. It must be noted that competition did exist before the rise of the 24-hour news cycle, but its effects took somewhat different forms. In an article published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, journalism professors argue that "most of the studies of newspaper competition before the 1980s found little impact on content" (Lacy et al. 326). However, in 1980 the 24-hour news cycle was created with the advent of CNN. (Cushion 16). Immediately, in order to "provide a sustainable economic model of broadcasting," CNN put an emphasis on visual journalism rather than mere reporting of fact from a studio, according to Journalism professor Stephen Cushion (17). Moreover, the network sought international coverage, creating CNNI in 1985 to expand its reach and advancing to a position of what Columbia University professor Edward Said described as "almost total global hegemony" by 1999. (qtd. in Cushion 20).

The advancement of technology also increases the coverage of certain news networks and types of media in particular markets. For example, the rise of satellite radio has driven the number of news radio stations in a given market from one to thirteen (Dagnes XIV). Moreover, the rise of the Internet and mobile devices has contributed to an explosion in the variety of news sources as well as increased diversity in how that news is consumed. One study found that 45% of respondents received their news from

multiple sources, favoring digital sites (Van Damme et al. 200). Even those who did not regularly read the news favored digital sources, placing the total number of those reliant upon digital sources at 66% of all respondents, compared to 34% who favor traditional newspaper or television sources (Van Damme et al. 200-201). On a broader scale, this trend appears to favor the younger generations. A 2016 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 50% of those aged 18-29 often read news online while only 27% of people in that age range receive news through television (Matsa and Lu). Moreover, among those 30-49 years of age, 49% receive news online (Matsa and Lu). The key 18-49 advertising demographic, then, casts its eyes to the Internet for news in increasingly large numbers, and these rapidly expanding environments create new pressures for news sources.

Some argue that the rapid expansion of the media market has been a positive force. These arguments usually center upon the democratization that the new forms of media provide, especially regarding transparency. Media and Communications professor Michael Karlsson, declares, for example, that audience interaction with the news online leads to the positive result of greater transparency regarding facts (285). Karlsson also claims that the growth of online news sources and the immediacy they provide allows people to see the process of news gathering in real time (289). He argues, then, that the expansion of the online news market forces journalists to be more transparent and interactive, eventually leading to the "revitalization" of journalism through a certain form of transparency (292).

Yet, any benefit Karlsson aims to derive from this expansion remains in the future. Today, the growing fight for immediacy in these growing markets threatens, rather than revitalizes, journalism. As Karlsson admits, too much transparency can be a detriment to journalistic authority, especially if news sites publish contradictory drafts in a rush to get a story out first (292). Moreover, audience members are rarely democratic participants. Journalism experts Stephen Harrington and Brian McNair, in studying the media coverage of the 2011 Brisbane floods, showed that audiences have become "a resource to be managed and leveraged" (50). Likewise, studies have shown that the media conglomerates' desire for profits has influenced the tone of political coverage. Political Scientist Johanna Dunaway's research reveals that corporate-owned or chain newspapers have a 10% higher likelihood of providing negative coverage than a locally owned private one (35).

While these concerns are serious, it is the problems resulting from immediacy that ultimately overshadow the benefits of greater democracy in the current news media. The rush to get a story on the air first has led to the detrimental effects of "liveness." For example, the rise of satellite television has led to the constant use of live footage, which, when coupled with dramatic music, helps create the general feeling of urgency expressed in news coverage, all of which constitute "liveness," as defined by media specialist Akshaya Kumar (539). This creates an environment in which "investigation and interrogation



have been substituted by opinions moderated by the anchor" (539). The use of live coverage often results in journalistic speculation. Cushion speaks of "black holes" created by live cable TV news coverage, where journalists substitute emotional context for fact-based content (17).

The explosion of online content has created an even greater desire for immediacy, further undermining fact and credibility. On September 11, 2001, for example, online news coverage for 18 major mainstream media websites reflected serious lapses in editorial oversight in the desire to rush stories to press. For example, the website for major Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* reported that Los Angeles airport was on fire during the events of 9/11, which was patently false (Salaverría 78). Unidentified sources made statements, and those statements were broadcast as fact (78). *El Mundo's* only response to this was to print an article the next day boasting about how quickly their website broke the 9/11 story (78). False headlines also appeared in German and Argentinian online newspapers as well, without any attribution (78-79). If correction was given in those cases, it was not found to be retrievable (79). Communications professor Kevin G. Barnhurst's comparative study of the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Portland Oregonian* found that those trusted news websites were often unwilling to publish follow-up articles after breaking a particular story (qtd. in Lim 1115). Crucial context was lost due to the desire to break news first. Moreover, the desire for immediacy created by the spread of 24-hour news trends online has created a loss of journalistic originality. In a South Korean study, for example, the 13 major online newspapers all used substantially similar headlines to promote breaking news coverage (Lim 1127). The constant desire for immediacy, then, has led to a collapse of editorial oversight.

However, some journalists, like Tom Brokaw, defend live coverage, saying that live footage is constantly replayed so that "all members of the audience have . . . a chance to see it" (qtd. in Doane 232). Yet, live footage can serve to bind an audience to a certain format, such as television. The repetition of live footage on a particular format reminds viewers that this format was the one that allowed them to witness the extraordinary events as though they had actually been there (Doane 232). Moreover, this defense does not acknowledge viewers who are already watching, as UC Berkeley professor of media and Culture, Mary Ann Doane, explains, who are then forced to "confront catastrophe over and over again" (230). Therefore, the act of playing live footage is not necessarily one of simply disseminating information. Networks stand to gain audiences through the exploitation and sensational impact of such live footage, and, for all of Brokaw's claims, his network continued to broadcast footage of the Challenger explosion, which he was speaking in reference to, at least once every half hour even several hours after the event had taken place ("The Challenger Disaster"). Moreover, Brokaw also broadcast footage of the prior Apollo 1 disaster and conducted interviews with a psychiatrist who emphasized the trauma that witnessing the event was sure to have on children, which was then immediately followed by a rebroadcast of the explosion ("The

Challenger Disaster"). The totality of this, taking place three hours after the initial reports of the event, cannot be interpreted as mere information, but rather as sensationalism.

Trivialization and sensationalism are necessary by-products of this desire for immediacy brought about by 24-hour news cycle competition. A typical expression of this competition comes from *BuzzFeed* editor in chief Ben Smith. He states that while a story about Ukraine might receive tens of thousands of views, a list of cute animals might be seen by tens of millions. ("The Joy of Scrolling"). It is also no wonder that his site features headlines about how one's breakfast influences one's choice of favorite animal alongside stories about Syria. Smith claims that this is because "no one reads wire stories" ("Joy of Scrolling"). Another manifestation of this competition for viewers is the emotion-driven sensationalism of the facts to connect an audience to a story. This can be seen in the nature of news coverage after the September 11, 2001 attacks. A study of television news coverage found that a process known as "framing" was used to draw in and hold audiences to a certain television network. Framing constitutes the reduction of news stories to basic emotional elements instead of cold facts (Monahan 46). This often creates a situation in which facts are ignored in favor of sheer emotional content (Cushion 17). In the case of September 11, emotional narratives were created, and stories were reframed to create the desire for retribution in the form of war. This was especially evident on 24-hour networks such as CNN and FOX. A classic victimization narrative was created, and thus American public discourse was limited to a response to this narrative (Monahan 65). Instead of allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions, the 24-hour networks drew them for their viewers, creating an undue influence over them. The news media has, then, occasionally been driven beyond reporting and toward influencing, an unjust role for an impartial purveyor of fact to play.

With facts undermined and destroyed at every turn, an attitude of bitter cynicism has arisen in the viewing public toward these news organizations. A Pew Research poll found that only 22% of respondents at most had "a lot" of trust in any news organization (Matsa and Lu). This may not be dire, since, according to Matsa and Lu, an average of 80% of respondents had at least some trust in news organizations. However, this is still reflective of a decline in the public's perception of news sources' reliability. Moreover, the collapse of the reporting of unvarnished fact in order to gain an advantage in immediacy and audience has made television news, according to Professor Geoffrey Baym, Chair of the Media and Communications Department at Temple University, "another style of reality TV" (qtd. in Nolan 134). Indeed, there may well be, as media specialist David Nolan, argues, "a fundamental collapse of the distinction between politics and entertainment" (Nolan 134). It is no wonder, then, that the public also derives humor and satire from its news sources in increasingly large numbers. These satires, such as *The Daily Show*, draw from "remnant normative expectations" of news behavior, but use these norms to

highlight how the democratic ideals of the news and, indeed, of the world at large have been hollowed out (Nolan 134).

Jeffrey P. Jones, executive director of the Peabody Awards program for distinguished and meritorious service by American media and professor of entertainment and media studies, for one, is gravely concerned about this. He explained the irony of a satirical program taking the news media to task for its shallow reporting of the facts: in 2004, *The Daily Show's* coverage of a presidential address focused on how artificial the 24-hour news coverage of the speech was, and how CNN had, in effect, recast the speech as a "sports contest" (Jones 167). This is distressing because, as media analysts Bruce Williams and Michael Delli Carpini point out, it creates a media world in which "the political relevance of a cartoon character like Lisa Simpson is as important as the professional norms of Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, or Peter Jennings" (qtd. in Holbert 438). Moreover, these satires take on the same influence that the news media once had with the public, especially among those with lower levels of education. According to R. Lance Holbert, chair of the department of strategic communication at Temple University, "[T]hose low in political knowledge shift their perceptions of a presidential candidate in line with the tenor of jokes being told in late night monologues" (Holbert 441). This response to the artificiality of journalism today is indeed a product of the conditions that the 24-hour news cycle has created. The decline of fact-based reporting due to competition and viewership concerns has correspondingly led to a blurring of the lines between news and entertainment and a rise in public consumption of satirical news sources, perhaps reflecting a deeper cynicism toward the news at large.

The attitudes created by the expanding 24-hour media market have contributed to the corrosion of journalistic values at large. News coverage is now under intense pressure to be immediate and under such pressure, facts lose out to emotion and editorial integrity collapses. The public response has been to mock the fading stars of journalistic integrity as they retreat into twilight, all the while consuming satire and losing trust in news media institutions. To get audiences, news organizations have influenced and corrupted coverage in unconscionable ways. It seems, then, that news has already become a new form of reality TV. If a further slide toward fiction is not arrested, factual reporting may disappear from our discourse entirely.

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*The students in this section were asked to explore a technology from the digital age and discuss its current and future impact. Using clear examples, the writer of this expository research essay explains how nanotechnology will continue to be instrumental in the shaping of the medical world.*

## **Nanotechnology in the Medical Field**

**By Matthew LoBiondo**

Prof. Dennis Tamburello, O.F.M. – Technology and Society

As little as fifteen years ago, the use of nanotechnology in medicine was considered science fiction. Today, scientists are on the brink of changing the world and the future of medicine using nanotechnology, which, as defined by a journalist who specializes in science, technology, and health, is “the science of manipulating materials on an atomic or molecular scale, especially to build microscopic devices” (Koprowski x). Nanomedicine is the application of nanotechnology to the medical field. The intention of this technology is to interact with the body at subcellular scales with a high degree of specificity (Singh and Singh). Although the technology is used in a limited manner today, there are several nanomedical devices undergoing clinical trials that should be widely used in a few years. Nanomedicine has the potential to greatly reduce the side effects of drugs, decrease the recovery time needed after surgery, and could possibly even cure cancer. When nanotechnology and nanomedicine reach their full potential, the effectiveness of and efficiency in the medical field will be greatly enhanced, and the entire medical industry will be revolutionized.

Before the implementation of nanotechnology a few years ago, scientists couldn’t research elements smaller than cells or the organelles located inside of these cells. Although scientists could see these smaller elements in the cell, they could not perform any type of valid or conclusive experiments because they did not have the proper technology. In 1959, the Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman was the first scientist to hypothesize the concept of nanotechnology. He predicted that in the near future, scientists would be researching and performing experiments on a much smaller scale (Webster 3). Nanotechnology is the manipulation of individual molecules or atoms at a scale of one billionth of a meter and is performed with those that are anywhere from 100 to 10,000 times smaller than a human cell (Koprowski x). This new field of nanotechnology is already so impactful in science because for the first time in history, practitioners in almost every scientific field are coming together to perfect it. Chemists, biologists, physicists, and mathematicians will all be included in this new discipline.

Nanotechnology became more widely used at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when iron oxide nanoparticles were employed to help treat anemia, and they helped with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) (Duncan and Gaspar). These discoveries pushed scientists to find more and more uses for nanotechnology and nanomedicine, a more specific application of nanotechnology. Nanomedicine makes it

possible for drugs to impact the body at a molecular, rather than cellular level, which makes them more efficient than the drugs that are used today. This is because current medicines have to travel through much of the body before reaching the target area. Unfortunately, while these drugs pass through the body, they affect parts that they were not designed to impact. This is one of the reasons for large doses of drugs being prescribed as well as for patients experiencing so many side effects. By using nanotechnology, new drugs can be developed – ones that are able to interact with the body at a much higher degree of specificity than most current medicines.

Given its predicted precision and once nanomedicines are perfected, they will work much more effectively and efficiently, while at the same time greatly reducing the amount of typical side effects (Koprowski 17). Studies have shown that drugs can be targeted to one specific location: “[D]rug carriers have walls that are just 5-10 atoms thick and the inner drug-filled cell is usually 50-100 nanometers wide. When they detect signs of the disease, thin wires in their walls emit an electrical pulse which causes the walls to dissolve and the drug to be released” (El Sayed Zaki 4). Through the use of nanotechnology, drug side effects and doses would be greatly reduced, for a drug would not affect other areas of the body since it has a targeted release. Thus, delivery is far more effective and requires less medicine to be used (El Sayed Zaki 4). There are already drugs on the market that use this technology. Emend, which helps cancer patients feel less nauseous during chemotherapy, as well as Rapamune, which stops the body from rejecting an implanted organ, are just two examples of medications that are utilizing the benefits of nanotechnology. Nanomedicine is extremely impactful on patients today and is sure to continue to become more influential in the medical community over the next few years. As this technology improves, the efficiency and effectiveness of these drugs is expected to skyrocket.

Orthopedics is another promising area where nanotechnology can make an impact. For example, nanotechnology helped with the creation of nanobones, which consists of a small scaffolding of carbon nanotubes in an area where there is a broken or weak bone. Bone cells are able to grow into this scaffolding, thus increasing the strength of the injured bones. This could be a much more preferred method for bone repairs since current methods usually use bone grafting, which requires surgery to other areas in order to create a culture of new bone (Koprowski 112). Nanobones would not only reduce the amount of surgery a patient needs but would also decrease the time he or she needs to heal. Dr. Laura Zanello, who researched nanobones at the University of California, Riverside, claims: “The most fascinating part [of nanobones] was that they will not only grow and proliferate, but they secrete a bone matrix” (Fields). This is important because the bone matrix allows bone cells to fuse together; therefore, it is less likely the body will reject the nanotubes. The application of the nanobones will significantly help

many victims of bone injuries, for it will greatly increase successful outcomes and decrease patients' recovery time.

Perhaps the most exciting potential for nanomedicine is its application to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The possibilities nanotechnology has to improve the medical field's ability to detect, prevent, and possibly cure cancer, is causing excitement within the science community. Quantum dots is a nanotechnology currently being researched and used in diagnosing and locating diseases, including cancer, and has proven to be more effective than traditional means of finding diseases. According to researchers at Stanford University, quantum dots are "based on small, nano-crystal creations made from the same materials as computer chips. These structures help produce high-resolution, multicolored images of single molecules. The structures flow throughout the body, pinpointing diseases or likely diseased tissues" (Koprowski 97). In the late 1990s, anticancer antibodies were dismissed as a possible cure for cancer because they were too large to reach the cancer cells. Today, although the technology is still being developed, it is believed that anticancer antibodies could soon be small enough to effectively penetrate a tumor and destroy it (Duncan and Gaspar). These nano-sized antibodies would be able to target and destroy cancer cells while barely affecting healthy cells in the area. Cancer is one of the deadliest diseases across the world, and there needs to be a cure. Nanotechnology has the potential to provide that cure and, in the process, save millions of people and billions of dollars. If nanotechnology were to cure cancer, the medical field would never be the same.

In addition to drug therapies and cancer research being impacted by nanotechnologies, the future of surgery will be affected as well. For example, implantable devices such as blood-pressure sensors, insulin pumps, and intracranial devices might do things such as oversee brain or neuron function during surgery. Quantum dots, as discussed earlier, can be used in surgery as well by fluorescently lighting up the affected tissue during an operation, which is a technique called near-infrared imaging (NII). More specifically, during a surgery to remove a cancerous tumor, the tumor would have the appearance of a different color, so the doctor would know exactly which parts he or she needed to remove. NII could potentially help surgeons only focus on the diseased areas of the body, which would reduce the number of mistakes during surgery as well as decrease the recovery time for patients (Asiyanbola and Soboyejo 161). The medical field desperately needs new ways to perform operations in order to limit the negative effects that surgery has on patients. Nanosurgery utilizes lasers and non-tools, such as nano-tweezers, and these new technologies are also capable of reducing patient recovery time because high precision surgery decreases the amount of bodily space on which the doctors need to operate. Because less of the patient's body would be operated on, he or she would be able to recover much faster (Reddy 14685). Overall, near-infrared imaging along with nanosurgery techniques and tools can greatly improve patient outcomes.

In conclusion, the potential and possibilities of nanomedicine will soon be realized. It is already changing health care and the medical field and is closing in on making technology that has always been considered science fiction, a reality. Things such as drug delivery, bone treatment, cancer care, and surgery will soon be streamlined and made far more efficient and effective than they are today. The overall health of the entire human race could greatly improve because of nanotechnology. The future of medicine is nanotechnology, and the future is coming quickly.

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*Relying on scholarship and empathy, the author of this social justice essay persuasively argues that the most successful reentry programs for prisoners are the ones that start preparing inmates prior to their release.*

## **Rebuilding Life after Incarceration and Practices that May Help**

**By Desiree Nestor**

Prof. Rody-Wright - Incarceration

Life in prison differs greatly from life on the outside. When men and women are incarcerated, they must adapt to their new environment, which creates a wedge between them and society. While in prison, inmates' lives get frozen in time. Their careers and educations are put on hold, and their familial relationships are strained as a result of many barriers, all of which contribute to the mental and emotional stress that comes with the prison environment. Upon release, previously incarcerated individuals face difficulties finding employment because of the discriminatory tendencies of employers and a lack of experience or gaps in their resumes. Inmates also struggle with rebuilding relationships that have deteriorated throughout their incarcerations. Research shows that getting job training and having family contact while in prison helps inmates deal with mental stress both in prison and also during the grueling process of reentry, which also helps them to rebuild their lives post-incarceration.<sup>1</sup> Around 95% of those in state prisons right now will eventually be released,<sup>2</sup> creating a need for transition programs both in and outside of prisons. Such programs help former inmates to build a stable foundation in society and decrease their chances of recidivating.

The starting point for inmates when rebuilding their lives during reentry often begins with employment. Without employment and a steady income, paying for housing or medical care becomes impossible and increases the possibility of recidivism. However, because of the stigma around previously incarcerated individuals, finding employment becomes an extremely difficult and drawn out process. As one former inmate put it, "Right now, more important than anything, I need a full time job . . . It's hard to get hired as a felon . . . nobody is going to hire somebody who is dirty and doesn't have a change of clothes."<sup>3</sup> Reentering society is challenging enough, and employers' reluctance to hire previously incarcerated individuals prohibits them from reaching their full potential and becoming productive members of society. In their research, business professors C.W. Von Bergen and Martin S. Bressler found that inmates face several other discriminatory setbacks, including difficulties in "finding a spouse, receiving

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<sup>1</sup> Shira E. Gordon, "Solitary Confinement, Public Safety, and Recidivism," *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 47, no. 2 (2014): 495-524, <http://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=mjlr>.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Hughes and Doris James Wilson, "Reentry Trends in the United States: Inmates Returning to the Community After Spending Time in Prison," Bureau of Justice, last modified July 17, 2017, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ingrid A. Binswanger et al., "'From the Prison Door Right to the Sidewalk, Everything Went Downhill:' A Qualitative Study of Health Experiences of Recently Released Inmates," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 34, no.4 (2011): 249-255, doi: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2011.07.002.

funding to attend a university, finding rental housing, and quality healthcare.”<sup>4</sup> Out of all these challenges, however, unemployment holds individuals back the most because it determines so many other aspects of life. One’s employment determines where they can afford to live, the college they can afford to attend, the kind of medical care they can afford, and so on. Unfortunately, employers are often reluctant to hire individuals who have been convicted of crimes, creating a massive roadblock for their post-incarceration journey.

However, recent progress in the Ban the Box campaign has begun to slightly alleviate the process of finding employment for previously incarcerated individuals. The Ban the Box campaign, passed in over 100 cities and counties, prevents employers from asking individuals about their criminal history on a job application prior to the interview.<sup>5</sup> Removing the box from the application form helps formerly incarcerated men and women get their feet in the door and increases their chances of getting an interview, as opposed to having their applications immediately thrown out because of an unfortunate past. This practice gives second chances to individuals working at rebuilding their lives. Not only is giving inmates a better chance at gaining employment good for recidivism rates, but it also demonstrates the Franciscan value of social justice because it prevents discrimination and promotes forgiveness and second chances. Despite this, however, 60-75% percent of former inmates still cannot find work in their first twelve months out of prison,<sup>6</sup> prohibiting them from forming a foundation for their lives. For this reason alone, an increase in the number of transition and job programs available to inmates after their release is vital.

To assist former inmates with finding employment during reentry, preparation for the job search process should begin while in prison. Providing inmates with job training and other basic skills increases their chances of finding employment. Furthermore, as our society becomes increasingly dependent on technology, inmates should receive access to technology to prepare them for the rapid changes in the technological world. It is important for inmates to have access to technology used in daily life. According to Doris Wells, a writer and editor at the National Institute of Justice, phones, laptops, and computers can help inmates develop “skills in using the internet, including creating email accounts; using search engines; filling out electronic forms; and formatting resumes and cover letters.”<sup>7</sup> Skills like these are necessary for anyone on the job market and little to no time should be spent on learning them during reentry when they could have been taught during incarceration. This is because after their release, several other tasks occupy former inmates’ time. These include finding medical care and housing, searching for a job, and fulfilling parole requirements. Not only does productive training and education in prisons help inmates make

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<sup>4</sup> C.W. Von Bergen and Martin S. Bressler, “Ban the Box: Protecting Employer Rights While Improving Opportunities for Job Seekers,” *Employee Relations Law Journal* 42, no.1 (2016): 26-50, Business Source Premier.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Doris Wells, “Training and Preparing Inmates for Post-Prison Employment,” *Corrections Today* 76, no. 6 (2014): 18-19, Academic OneFile.

effective use of their time in prison, but their employment once released creates stability, routine, and purpose, decreasing the likelihood of recidivism.

To increase an inmate's chance of finding employment, the process must start inside prison. Education classes and other forms of job training can somewhat increase inmates' appeal to employers and jumpstart the job search. Certain jobs in prison, such as supervised laundry and food service, are beneficial to inmates in that they occupy their time and provide opportunities to earn money, but they do not supply inmates with as much experience as other more applicable jobs. A popular program called Traditional Industries (TI), for example, allows inmates to work in a supervised area manufacturing anything from license plates to road signs and clothing to furniture.<sup>8</sup> Although these jobs may help those in prison obtain factory jobs after their release, they do not provide assistance with skills that would further prepare them for the actual job search during their reentry, like writing cover letters and building resumes.

An alternative to TI employment, promoted by analysts at the National Institute of Justice, is Prison Industry Enhancement Program (PIECP), which "allows inmates to work for a private employer in a 'free world' occupation and earn the prevailing wage."<sup>9</sup> Unlike other programs, PIECP provides inmates with useful and versatile experience in a real work setting. Researchers found that "PIECP participants found jobs more quickly and held them longer than did their counterparts in the TI and OTW [other than work] groups."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in a study of previously incarcerated individuals during the first quarter post-release, 55% of those who worked for PIECP found employment in the first quarter, while only about 40% of those in other programs found employment.<sup>11</sup> This data demonstrates the effectiveness of real world training. Considering that one of the purposes of prison is to rehabilitate, inmates should be prepared to work in jobs that will provide them with necessary experience that can be used after their incarceration. A study done by the National Institute of Justice found that employers "emphasized that an offender with prior experience would increase that applicant's chances of getting an interview."<sup>12</sup> Other forms of useful real world preparation include programs that offer education and General Education Development (GED) classes. Even if inmates had no job training but participated in classes with the intention of earning a degree or took GED classes, it was found that "[t]hose who participated in vocational training were 28 percent more likely to be employed after release from prison than those who did not receive such training."<sup>13</sup> The value of an education cannot be underestimated. Employers may be reluctant to hire previously incarcerated individuals, but it is evident that if inmates spend their time in

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<sup>8</sup> Marilyn C. Moses and Cindy J. Smith, "Factories Behind Fences: Do Prison 'Real Work' Programs Work," *Corrections Today* 69, no. 6 (2007): 102-105, Academic OneFile.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>12</sup> Wells, "Training," 19.

<sup>13</sup> "Education and Vocational Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism, Improves Job Outlook," RAND Corporation, last modified August 22, 2013, <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2013/08/22.html>.

prison receiving an education and strengthening their resumes, they will have a better chance of finding employment. Employment truly helps inmates with creating a foundation for their lives post-incarceration, and the more stability they have, the less likely it is that they will return to prison.

Support from and contact with family and friends on the outside also has positive effects on recidivism. Having a strong support system during reentry reduces the likelihood of behaviors that lead to recidivism, and contact with family can help ease the psychological stress inmates face while in prison, which also helps them when they are released. In prison, it is nearly impossible to form new relationships with people on the outside; therefore, it is important that inmates have the ability to maintain and strengthen the relationships they already have with their family and friends. However, the inability to do this often leads to high levels of stress and depression.<sup>14</sup> Research found that familial support, though, can help inmates to “[produce] a sense of personal space and a connection to the outside world through their visitors.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, upon their reentry many former inmates report staying with their family or friends,<sup>16</sup> emphasizing just how important maintaining relationships is for the reentry process.

Knowing that family and friends will be there for support after release can make the reentry period less daunting. Not only did a study find that prison visitation can decrease recidivism rates by 13% and technical violations by 25%,<sup>17</sup> it was also found that “when the visits were more frequent, closer to the release date, and involved a variety of friends and family members, [the] recidivism risk was further lowered.”<sup>18</sup> The type of contact available to inmates affects recidivism rates as well. Letters and phone calls seem to have the least effect while in-person visits had somewhat higher effects, and conjugal visits and furloughs had the highest effect.<sup>19</sup> However, only a select few inmates receive the privilege of conjugal visits and furloughs. Infractions can strip inmates of their visitation rights, and inmates in solitary don’t have visitation rights at all, not even letters. Research shows that frequent family contact helps inmates with “the development of prosocial, rather than criminal identity that may facilitate distance from crime.”<sup>20</sup> This is especially important for the reentry process when inmates must separate themselves from the practices that landed them in jail. Because visitation often has a positive effect on recidivism, greater efforts to make visitation more accessible to inmates as well as their families should be made in the upcoming years. For example, technology, such as Skype, could be used for long distance contact.

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<sup>14</sup> Danielle Wallace et al., “Examining the Role of Familial Support During Prison and After Release on Post-Incarceration Mental Health,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 60, no. 1 (2016): 3-20, PsycINFO.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Meghan M. Mitchell et al., “The Effect of Prison Visitation on Reentry Success: A Meta-analysis,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 47, no. 1 (2016): 74-83, doi: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2016.07.006.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

Despite the positive effects of familial support on recidivism, inmates and their loved ones still struggle to connect. Many inmates come from poor backgrounds, making it stressful and costly for their loved ones to make the trip to visit them. In the state of New York, a bus to a local prison costs about \$40 round trip and this bus, researchers note, also “takes more than 8 hours to arrive, costing families valuable time and resources.”<sup>21</sup> When going to visit an inmate, a person might have to miss an entire day of work, which may not be an option for families who live paycheck to paycheck. Other factors that complicate the process include the strict policies that visitors have to be aware of such as rules regarding fees (e.g., for processing background checks), security and searches, proper attire, visitor restrictions (e.g., no criminal record), and visiting hours.<sup>22</sup> Keeping track of all these rules and regulations is not only strenuous, but can discourage people from visiting. Lastly, visitation is only based on how good an inmate behaves, even though family contact may actually be what they need to help them through a difficult or stressful time. Inmates in solitary lose their visitation rights, phone rights, and even their rights to letters. This is especially harmful to inmates with mental illnesses who are much more likely to be placed in solitary. Men and women in prison should not lose their rights to contact their families. Moreover, since it has been proven that family contact decreases recidivism, it should be made as accessible as possible.

Having contact with friends and family is especially important for the mental health of inmates. Studies show that the hectic, overcrowded environment in prison leads to a decrease in mental health among inmates, especially those who enter prison with a serious mental illness. Family contact is important because knowing that others believe in them and have an interest in their well-being helps prisoners cope with the daily stressors that come with being in prison, as well as the many obstacles they face once they are released.<sup>23</sup> In a study of offenders who had serious mental illness, researchers discovered that “the level of and maintenance of visitation in prison and social support pre- and post-release was positively associated with an enhanced quality of life.”<sup>24</sup> Lastly, inmates with serious mental illness who make up 16% of the U.S. prison population,<sup>25</sup> are four times more likely than inmates of the general population to be placed in solitary confinement,<sup>26</sup> meaning they are stripped of their visitors’ rights completely. This policy only further damages the mental health of inmates and also increases the likelihood of recidivism once released.

Unfortunately, inmates with serious mental illness frequently get placed in solitary confinement because guards see them as threats. However, the symptoms of certain mental illnesses make it difficult for inmates to conform to prison rules, and it has been found that inmates with untreated mental illness

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<sup>21</sup> Wallace, “Examining,” 8.

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, “The Effect of Prison,” 78.

<sup>23</sup> Wallace, “Examining,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon, “Solitary Confinement,” 497.

often receive “disciplinary write-ups for behaviors associated with their symptoms.”<sup>27</sup> The legitimacy of the symptoms of their mental illnesses gets overlooked because of the scarcity of mental health care available. Some prisons evaluate prisoners’ mental health about every ninety days; however, if the prisoner is in solitary confinement, which is four times more likely for those with a mental illness, they do not receive the evaluation.<sup>28</sup> This practice only further pushes mentally ill inmates aside, treating them as trouble makers who do not deserve equal care, even when they are most in need of it. The northern District of California once compared placing a mentally ill inmate in solitary to putting an asthmatic in a place with little air.<sup>29</sup> The continuation of this practice of placing inmates with mental illness in solitary confinement may lead to an increase in recidivism rates because it excludes them from their social support systems and exacerbates their illness. The worse an inmate’s mental health gets, the harder it will be for him/her during reentry, when trying to readjust to society.

Previously incarcerated individuals face a great deal of obstacles, and those with mental illness face another set of obstacles surrounding managing their mental health. Upon their release, they do not have jobs and, therefore, they do not have healthcare, which decreases their likelihood of getting the medication needed to manage their mental health. Formerly incarcerated individuals are often sent to clinics where they must wait hours to be seen and then maybe even months before they can actually receive their medications.<sup>30</sup> A former inmate even questioned why inmates who have serious mental illness and experience audible and visual hallucinations are expected to “sit down there and wait day after day to be seen [by a mental health professional].”<sup>31</sup>

Solitary confinement not only negatively affects those with mental illnesses; it can actually cause mental illness. A recent study identified social pathologies believed to be caused by solitary confinement. These include: an increase in dependency on the prison environment; a decrease in a sense of structure, purpose, and self; a fear of social interactions; and an increase in general frustration.<sup>32</sup> All of these symptoms contribute to inmates’ success on the outside. In a study done on the overall reentry process for all inmates, it was noted that those who self-identified as having mental illnesses described a worsening of their symptoms after release from prison, with increased paranoia and fear.<sup>33</sup> One participant in the study even said, “I avoid crowds altogether. Period. I don’t like to go nowhere where there is going to be a whole lot of people around me cause [sic] I can’t watch them all once . . . I think it’s making me worse. I’m

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 497.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 498.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 499.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, “The Effect of Prison,” 81.

<sup>31</sup> Binswanger, “From the Prison Door,” 250.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon, “Solitary Confinement,” 523.

<sup>33</sup> Binswanger, “From the Prison Door,” 252.

extremely paranoid.”<sup>34</sup> The overall conclusion of this study was that correctional, medical and mental health providers must develop transition plans for patients being released along with the providers who will care for them upon their reentry back into the community.<sup>35</sup> Society stigmatizes those with mental illness, so when previously incarcerated individuals with mental illness are released, the obstacles they face are doubled. Transition programs will hopefully help former inmates to better readjust to their new environments.

A conviction, no matter how long the sentence, creates various kinds of obstacles in someone’s life. While in prison, the mental health, physical health, familial relationships, and education of inmates often suffer. During reentry, previously incarcerated individuals practically walk around with a scarlet letter on their chests, facing biases when seeking out employment, housing, healthcare, and so on. Transition programs both inside and outside of prison should be widely available because over 90% of those in U.S. prisons will eventually be released. The programs should revolve around what is most important to the stability of formerly incarcerated individuals and measures that have been proven to make the reentry process as smooth as possible. This preparation not only gives inmates a second chance at life, but also allows them to give back to the community and be productive members of society.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 252.

*While acknowledging that the United States military has made progress with the way it views and handles sexual assault, this writer calls for bolder changes to the reporting process in this well-written investigative essay.*

## **The Broken Chain of Command**

**By Kathleen O'Toole**

Dr. Liptak – Trauma in Literature and Film

The United States military is one of the most respected and honored organizations in the world, but it also camouflages poor working conditions that allow sexual misconduct to take place. Over the past few decades, a variety of sexual assault scandals have occurred due to these inept conditions. Although sexual assault in the military has received more media exposure in recent years, the supposed number of assaults has not drastically changed due to the small portion of assaults actually getting reported. In 2012, studies estimate 26,000 enlisted members of the military encountered some type of nonconsensual sexual contact while only 3,300 reports were recorded by the Department of Defense (DOD) (“Sexual Assault in the Military”). This illustrates the flawed and unjust process of reporting sexual assault which also prohibits victims from disclosing the identity of their assailant. At the center of this corrupt system are commanding officers and the military’s chain of command. Eliminating all of the ranking officers in the chain of command from the sexual assault reporting process in the military will increase the number of sexual assault reports and provide justice to the victims.

The current reporting process for sexual misconduct in the military still provides loopholes for perpetrators to get away with their crimes unharmed. When the DOD began to acknowledge that sexual assault was a major problem within its organization in 2005, it created the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) organization. SAPR provides medical services and a completely confidential system of reporting sexual abuse for anyone who is enlisted in the armed forces (Skiba and Durham iv). This organization brought the pressing issue of sexual assault to the forefront of the military, and the DOD clearly took a positive step concerning this issue. By making a separate organization in the military, the DOD showed that sexual assault is a serious issue that would no longer be taken lightly.

Also in 2005, the DOD made two separate reporting processes available to survivors which are still in use today. One option for the victims is unrestricted reporting which is similar to the process enforced before 2005. This procedure is described as “a process where a service member discloses that he or she is the victim of sexual assault, without requesting confidentiality from the Chain of Command” (Skiba and Durham iv). With this option, the victim also receives specialized health services through the SAPR and a legal investigation beginning with the notification of his or her commanding officer (CO). This process does not collect many reports because not everyone feels comfortable with their personal horrific business travelling up the chain of command. Some people in the military do not think that their commanding



officer can be trusted with handling this sensitive information. Others feel like the military's values discourage testimony against fellow soldiers and that doing so would jeopardize a victim's reputation or career (Skiba and Durham iv). These hesitations are derived from subordinate soldiers' lack of confidence that their commanding officer will protect them. Commanding officers are the main reason survivors refuse to report their attack and, thus, the reason the DOD created a second reporting process.

The alternative option is restricted reporting where all interactions are handled through the confidentiality of SAPR. This excludes any law involvement and "allows the victim to confidentially disclose the details of the assault and to receive medical treatment, counseling, and advocacy without automatically triggering an official investigation" (Skiba and Durham v). This procedure gives victims immediate assistance and makes them feel more comfortable about accepting this help. Those who have been abused have the ability to confidentially seek out the services of SAPR and receive physical and psychiatric help. With unrestricted reporting, victims have to report their assault to their commanding officer in order to receive any sort of treatment. However, the new restricted process does not require the victim to use the CO as a middle person because victims can take the matter directly to SAPR without notifying any superiors. This benefits victims who don't want their personal business mixed in their workplace, don't trust that they would be respected and defended by their CO and other higher ranking officers, or don't wish to pursue a long trial consisting of their tragic memories. While some victims might believe restricted reporting is an appealing option, in the long run, it proves to be harmful to themselves and the community they live in. With the restricted option, survivors have to continue their jobs working alongside their assaulter and pretend that nothing has happened (Stander and Thomsen 22). The perpetrator will never be brought to justice for what he or she did because with this option, there is no investigation to collect evidence or witnesses for a trial. The abuser also has the ability to continue to prey on other members of the military or the original victim. If the victim ever decides that s/he wants to charge the assaulter, the chances of ever going to trial are slim because of all the evidence that was lost after the first hours of the assault. Instead of creating an entire reporting procedure that does not have the ability to legally solve sexual assault environments, the military should just remove commanding officers from the equation completely. This way, survivors would be more likely to bring their assailants to trial without fear of retribution from ranking officers.

Superior officers in the military are not typical workplace bosses. The entire hierarchical system forces subordinate soldiers to completely obey and honor the above ranks and invites commanding officers to abuse their position of power. This military environment, it has been shown, condones "the use of authority to pressure a subordinate into sexual contact" (Stander and Thomsen 21). These commanding officers have complete control over everything that goes on in their unit, whether it is military related or

personal, and this includes being in charge of reporting any sexual assaults. The complete control commanding officers are given grants them far too much power to manipulate the sexual assault reporting process.

The most notable instance of COs manipulating the system is when they are the perpetrators. Recently, it was recorded that “about 40 percent of victims in a study indicated that the perpetrator was their ranking officer” (Chemaly). This is an apparent conflict of interest because a person in the military who has been sexually assaulted is encouraged to tell the commanding officer, but the victim obviously cannot tell the abuser that s/he has been abused. Even if the abuser is not the victim’s direct commanding officer, there is little chance the CO will want to risk his/her standings by accusing another high ranking official. Because subordinate soldiers are taught that their higher ups are to be honored and respected, victims are frightened to say anything negative about them. This is problematic if the perpetrator of a sexual assault is a ranking officer. This was the case for Trina McDonald who was raped multiple times by several different superior officers (Chemaly). McDonald was forced into silence because the perpetrators were in her chain of command and more respected due to rank. This hierarchal system discourages victims from coming forth about their assault because of the institutional tradition that a certain group of people in the military have the ability to get unjust advantages. This hierarchy has always been a major part of military culture for as long as wars have been fought, and it is extremely improbable that this structure will be eliminated from the armed forces in the future. The honor that is associated with a commanding officer’s position is often thought of as a validation of the commanding officer’s claim. This arrangement is designed to insure soldiers do not go against their superiors and gives ranking officials the perfect opportunity to abuse the system.

Commanding officers also have the ability to ignore reports they get from their soldiers if it benefits the CO’s own interest. For example, if a commanding officer sends a sexual report up the chain of command for trial, the CO is admitting that s/he has in some way failed at monitoring their assigned military unit (Chemaly). There is no way that a CO, who is engaged in a career that is surrounded by the appearance of strength and respect, would want to willingly prove that s/he has done something wrong, nor does s/he want to show weakness to his/her peers. In order to protect themselves, some commanding officers use nonjudicial punishments on accused attackers to keep the reports off their own records (Isikoff). This commonly occurs because a CO does not want anything to tarnish his or her reputation. It is unfair to have high ranking officials involved with this process because it is extremely difficult for them to be objective in such situations when their careers are on the line.

Superior officers and the chain of command can also take advantage of the system in order to maintain the polished reputation of their high ranking officers and the entire United States military

structure. They do this by completely ignoring the issue of sexual assault within the military or by pushing the matter as far out of sight as possible. The values of loyalty, brotherhood, and protection of fellow soldiers and the DOD are imbedded within the soul of the military. While these values are the reason that the military is so well-respected in this country, they also can be used to justify the actions superior officers take in order to cover up a sexual assault accusation. These codes can sometimes evoke an institutional tolerance or attitude regarding sexual assault and covering up an abuse or crime can be seen as necessary for healthy fraternity (Chemaly). It can be thought in the military that protecting a fellow soldier from legal trouble is upholding the fraternity values within the branch. These commanding officers can be blinded by the ideals the military has forced upon them and are left with a twisted understanding of basic moral values and beliefs that allegedly benefit the military organization.

There are hundreds of cases where commanding officers block reports from continuing up the chain of command in order to save the order and the reputation of the military. This was the circumstance for Mary Gallagher who was raped in 2009 and reported it to her commanding officer. Gallagher maintains that his “only response was to reassign her assailant and tell her ‘this stuff happens’” (Isikoff). This tactic of moving perpetrators from base to base after being accused is very common because it keeps the reports out of the books and keeps the severity of the issue out of the public view. In these instances, the problem is just moved, for the assailant has the ability to continue the abuse. The comment, “this stuff happens” indicates that sexual assault is not a rare occurrence in the military, and this entire incident shows that some high ranking officials feel it is more important to protect the stability of the military than it is to protect the safety of their subordinates.

Another incident where the protection of the military’s “image” was paramount to the protection of its service members was when Marine Corporal Sarah Albertson was raped by her superior officer. When she reported this to her commanding officer, he did not do anything to help her. The attacker was never officially accused or brought to trial, and Albertson had to endure working alongside him. The only response that she got from her commanding officer was that “I needed to suck it up...and respect the rank he deserves” (Isikoff). By accusing a superior officer in the military, lower ranking soldiers might start to doubt the leadership and integrity of their commanding officers, which could spark chaos throughout the armed forces. This instance shows that for some high ranking officers, maintaining the order in the military holds a greater importance than giving the victims in their unit the help and justice they deserve. The reality of the matter is that the armed forces receive more funding than almost all organizations in the U.S. This large amount of funding is given by the American people because they trust the military with protecting their citizens from the evil of the world. If a plethora of sexual assault charges are reported, then the American people might be revolted at the evil that is occurring in the most respected organization

in the U.S. and lose their trust in the military. But in efforts to preserve the image of the military, high ranking officers sometimes use their power to let perpetrators walk free and, by default, punish the survivors. The commanding officer's ability to make accusations disappear is the reason why thousands of assaults are not on record and why some victims do not even bother trying to report them.

While some survivors choose not to report their assault because they feel nothing would be done, others choose not to report out of fear that they will receive negative consequences from their chain of command. In 2013, it was found that "62 percent victims who reported went through some type of retaliation" (Chemaly). This retaliation can come in the forms of harassment, stalking, threatening, demotion, and physical assault ("Sexual Assault in the Military"). The most common reason why survivors do not report their attack is because they fear their career will be jeopardized because commanding officers have total authority over their subordinates' jobs. These known results of a victim's treatment after reporting is enough to discourage thousands of victims each year from reporting their assaults. Commanding officers have complete control over their unit, so they obtain the power to minimize or maximize the amount of retaliation at will ("Sexual Assault in the Military"). This means that commanding officers are held responsible for a majority of the negative retaliation survivors receive, and these actions commonly scare victims into not reporting and, thus, not receiving the justice they deserve.

While the amount of power given to commanding officers might seem like an invitation to manipulate the system, there are some people who believe that the power of the CO is a necessity for stability in the military structure. There are many who think that preserving the commanding officer as the central point of contact in regard to sexual assault cases is imperative to the military order. Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey said that "reducing the command responsibility could adversely affect the ability of the commander to enforce professional standards" (Herb). Dempsey makes the argument that if COs are not in charge of something as important as sexual assault, then they should not be in charge of any important military procedure. The military structure works when subordinates trust their COs with everything. If commanding officers are proven to be untrustworthy with sexual assault, what else can they not be trusted with? The system would be in chaos. While this is an acceptable point, Dempsey does not mention that the majority of sexual assault victims already lack confidence in their commanding officers. The whole reason most attacks go unreported is because survivors do not trust that their CO will not retaliate against them, that their CO can handle their personal information responsibly, or that their CO will actually help them go to trial. Dempsey's concern that soldiers will lose respect for and trust in their CO is already the reality of the situation. By giving commanding officers less power, subordinates might be more apt to trust that commanding officers will not take advantage of their positions.

Clearly, the main reason for the low number of sexual assault reports in the United States military is the position and power that commanding officers have over the process. If an organization that is separate from the military chain of command, such as SAPR, was in charge of all sexual assault reporting, superior officers would not have the ability to misuse their power at the expense of the survivors. This impartial reporting process would finally get the victims a fair trial so that they could achieve justice for the heinous trauma they have endured.

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*Inspired by the memoir Girl, Interrupted, this author researched gender issues in the field of psychology and uses specific and relevant sources to back up her claim that patriarchal practices and standards continue to thwart gender equality in present day.*

## **Mind Control: Psychology Is Killing Our Women**

**By Karla Perez**

Dr. Haas – Women: Their Voices, Their Values, Their Vision

Men have held significant power in academia and, therefore, have ensured their own recognition while women have yet to gain acknowledgement for their contributions. Psychology is one particular field that still lags behind when it comes to recognizing female contributions. This is significant because the validity of male scholars' findings about women is questionable, as men and women do not share the same experiences. Since Western societies popularize the works and discoveries of male psychologists, even when it comes to studies on women, gendered assumptions continue to persist in psychology. The continual reverence for and referral to the gender-biased work produced by male psychologists as well as the lack of acknowledgement for the contributions of female psychologists are detrimental not only to women, but to society as a whole. The gendered notions instilled in the foundation of psychology serve as a tool to maintain the sexist objectives of the patriarchy and will, therefore, only further inhibit the progress toward gender equality.

The general public rarely questions the validity and objectiveness of scientific findings. However, in order for science and society to progress, it must be acknowledged that scientific statements and supposed facts can be skewed and sexist. These biases are especially present due to the under-representation of female contributors in the sciences, and in this particular case, psychology. As stated by professor of gender and sexuality studies Mari Ruti, in *The Age of Scientific Sexism*, “[E]ven the best male thinkers of the Western tradition—from Plato to Hegel to Kant to Nietzsche to Freud—tended to become a little obtuse whenever they started talking about women.”<sup>1</sup> For example, in the Electra Complex, Carl Jung proposed the idea that girls experience psychosexual competition with their mother for possession of their father. This shows that even the most brilliant minds found it difficult to transcend the gender stereotypes of their eras, which is why academic contributions from both male and female psychologists should be popularized to balance out perspective and rationale.<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud's penis envy theory and Karen Horney's opposing womb envy theory demonstrate that the validity of male scholars' findings is questionable and, therefore, the findings of female scholars must also be acknowledged for equilibrium. In his popular penis envy theory, Freud argued that girls and women envied their male counterparts for

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<sup>1</sup> Mari Ruti, *The Age of Scientific Sexism: How Evolutionary Psychology Promotes Gender Profiling and Fans the Battle of the Sexes* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

having penises.<sup>3</sup> Horney argued that men envied women's ability to bear children.<sup>4</sup> Since subjective theories developed by men such as Freud have gained more fame than those of women like Horney, gender assumptions that benefit men have continued to exist in psychology. Moreover, such gendered assumptions influence not just psychologists' thinking, but that of the wide audience they reach.

A modern-day female who has also been silenced in her field is Paula Caplan. Caplan, a well-respected psychologist and Harvard graduate, states that "the processes of creating psychiatric diagnoses are unregulated and are not solidly scientific."<sup>5</sup> She claims that high quality research was ignored if it did not support what the most influential Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and American Psychological Association (APA) representatives promoted as truth.<sup>6</sup> From the simple fact that the psychiatric diagnoses based on the DSM and APA are unregulated, it can be inferred that biases are present in the field of psychology. Without regulation, diagnoses are entirely up to the individual psychiatrist and thus rest, at least in part, on that psychiatrist's personal perspective and opinions. Caplan also shared that, despite her many attempts at raising awareness within the APA on the harm people experience as a result of unregulated psychiatric diagnoses, leaders have done nothing to prevent and redress that harm.<sup>7</sup> According to Caplan, who has worked directly with the DSM and APA, "[T]he APA, publisher of the DSM, is a lobby group whose primary concern is not the welfare of people who seek out help from the mental system, but rather the influence and income of the members and the APA itself."<sup>8</sup> Caplan, a highly qualified psychologist and researcher, brought to light issues in the field of psychology that would greatly benefit the well-being of patients and, particularly, women. However, her work still remains unacknowledged by the heads of the APA and, therefore, the general public remains ignorant of the gendered biases affecting them.

Women, in comparison to men, receive the most psychiatric diagnoses and, therefore, the most misdiagnoses.<sup>9</sup> The impacts attached to these misdiagnoses are extremely detrimental. For example, in a research study on the misdiagnosis of bipolar disorder, psychiatrists Muhammad Rajput and Tanvir Singh noted that "69 percent of patients with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed initially and more than one-third remained misdiagnosed for 10 years or more."<sup>10</sup> Since women experience bipolar disorder differently than men (the cycle of severe depression and manic high tends to be significantly shorter for women<sup>11</sup>),

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor Kubota, "Is Penis Envy Real?" Live Science, last modified May 7, 2016, <http://www.livescience.com/54682-is-penis-envy-real.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher L. Heffner, "Karen Horney's Feminine Psychology," AllPsych, last modified 2017, <https://allpsych.com/personalitysynopsis/horney/>.

<sup>5</sup> Paula Caplan, "Watch the Stories of Harm the APA Refused to Hear: Introduction by Paula J. Caplan," Paula Caplan, November 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mihEgmfQKA>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> James Ball, "Women 40% More Likely Than Men to Develop Mental Illness, Study Finds," *The Guardian*, May 22, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/may/22/women-men-mental-illness-study>.

<sup>10</sup> Tanvir Singh and Muhammad Rajput, "Misdiagnosis of Bipolar Disorder," *Psychiatry* 3, no.10 (2006): 57–63. PsycINFO.

<sup>11</sup> "Bipolar Disorder Statistics," Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, last modified 2016, [http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education\\_statistics\\_bipolar\\_disorder](http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education_statistics_bipolar_disorder).

such misdiagnoses have serious consequences, including women not receiving the treatment they actually need. At the same time, since women are diagnosed more often than men (often because they seek treatment more often than men), being identified by their psychological disorder also has negative repercussions. Caplan reported stories of people “who were given a mild label, but were nevertheless classified as mentally disordered and therefore, lost custody of their children, jobs, and health insurance.”<sup>12</sup> The subjectivity, the biases, and the inadequacy present in the entire field of psychology are dominating the minds and lives of millions of American women, so it can only be inferred that they serve as a tool to maintain the sexist objectives of the patriarchy. Women are mistreated via psychological misdiagnoses, and they are mistreated by the widely accepted gendered assumptions that serve as the foundation for the study of the mind. Gender equality will never be attained if women are deceived into believing they are unstable and, therefore, hindered from participating in the fight for equality.

A woman directly affected by a misdiagnosis and prevented from advocating for equal rights is author Susanna Kaysen. Kaysen, labeled with bipolar disorder in the 1960s, revisited her original diagnosis after twenty-five years in her memoir *Girl, Interrupted* and realized that her life course was disrupted by the over-analysis of her mild actions. Kaysen states that the psychological profile developed at the time was a “fairly accurate portrait of her at eighteen, minus a few quirks like reckless driving and eating binges.”<sup>13</sup> It was an “accurate [depiction of her] but it was not profound [enough to be considered a mental illness].”<sup>14</sup> She feels she was misdiagnosed. Kaysen, in reviewing the DSM, realized that her adolescent behavior fit the definition of borderline personality disorder, rather than that of bipolar disorder. Kaysen’s misdiagnosis of bipolar disorder, commonly diagnosed in women, is representative of the skewed DSM and the APA system of thought it rests upon. She does not claim that she was healthy, but rather that her diagnosis was not the sum of a personality. In other words, Kaysen posed the idea that if examined outside the scope of mental illness, her behaviors could have been excused as typical or harmless. Instead, she argues that because she was female, her behaviors were viewed through a psychological lens that automatically defined her as deviant. The gendered notions tied to the diagnoses of women have led to common misdiagnoses such as bipolar disorder that hold women, like Kaysen, back.

Kaysen also shares direct experiences that demonstrate the unethical gender biases of clinical and psychiatric psychology. Due to her diagnosis, she was institutionalized at an all-girls mental hospital. In saying that “freedom was the price of privacy,” Kaysen describes her realization that the only private area in the ward was the seclusion room.<sup>15</sup> It was the only place where a patient could detach themselves from the relentless watch of nurses and the oppressive feeling of the wards. The girls were only granted access

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<sup>12</sup>Caplan, “Watch the Stories of Harm the APA Refused to Hear.”

<sup>13</sup>Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (New York: Random House, 1993), 153.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>15</sup>Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*, 47.



to the seclusion room, or the privacy room, when they appeared to be hysterical. It was in her best interest, then, if she wanted privacy or to get away from it all, to act hysterically. While this can be construed as a manipulative ploy which plays into a particular gender bias that characterizes women as hysterical, being sent to the seclusion room reinforces the authorities' beliefs that the individual is, indeed, psychologically impaired and justifiably institutionalized. This goes to show how complex and dehumanizing gender biased psychiatric treatment can be for female patients.

To quantify just how gender biased their colleagues are, psychologists Hana Smitková and Andrej Kuruc conducted research on ambivalent sexism in psychotherapy and counseling in Slovakia. In their study, 88 female and 13 male counselors and psychotherapists completed a questionnaire that focused on testing the extent to which male and female psychotherapists believe sexist stereotypes. The results confirmed that among both male and female therapists and counselors, sexist notions were prevalent.<sup>16</sup> The fact that female psychologists expounded sexist beliefs indicates the extent to which the gendered biases of the field itself have influenced its practitioners. According to Smitková and Kuruc, “[T]hese prejudices can significantly affect the therapeutic process and for the client, therapy may become harmful.”<sup>17</sup> There is an urgent need to sensitize and train therapists and counselors, as well as their supervisors concerning gender issues, with the aim to reveal their own gender biases and change them.<sup>18</sup> If the APA acted upon the research findings of female psychologists like Paula Caplan, psychotherapists would have better training on gender issues. However, because Caplan went against the accepted sexist norms of the APA, her work and her voice were ignored. Unfortunately, female psychologists who oppose the APA continue to be silenced and thus the DSM continues to perpetuate gender bias.

Despite the clear and evident sexism in the field, some still argue that there is no sexism within the field of psychology. Lee Jussim, a social psychologist who has written books on stereotypes and prejudice for over thirty years, disagreed with a female colleague about sexism within social psychology.<sup>19</sup> Jussim believes that there is no inherent sexism in psychology and that if women participated in psychology conferences, their research would be heard and acknowledged. One such conference began, however, by “highlighting data indicating that such discussions have, so far, been largely dominated by men.”<sup>20</sup> Jussim said that he heard this analysis as insinuating what he saw as untrue—“that the merits of arguments hinge on the demographics of those making them, and that somehow women are disadvantaged within social

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<sup>16</sup>Hana Smitková and Andrej Kuruc, "Ambivalent Sexism Model in Psychotherapy and Counseling in Slovakia," *Česká A Slovenská Psychiatrie* 108, no. 1 (2012), doi:10.1037/t00700-000.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Lee Jussim, "Sexism and Other Biases in Social Psychology," *Psychology Today*, March 10, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/rabble-rouser/201503/sexism-and-other-biases-in-social-psychology>.

<sup>20</sup>Jussim, "Sexism and Other Biases."

psychological discussions of science.”<sup>21</sup> Jussim argues that female psychologists have the option to participate in such conferences, share their works and opinions, and to, therefore, be heard. However, his colleague, Simine Vazire, disagreed. She has participated in conferences, but this does not change the parameters of the discussions, which are still determined by men. Jussim, it seems, is blind to his own privilege as a male psychologist. It is in his own best interest to deny that women are at a disadvantage. Moreover, Jussim’s point weakens when considering the work of underrepresented female psychologists, like Paula Caplan, who, for example, have presented their research findings at psychology conferences but have had their voices ignored.

It is undeniable that the lack of recognition of the work of female psychologists and the persistent popularization of biased male works significantly hinder the field of psychology. The mentally stable and functioning women of society continue to be harmed by the misdiagnoses and treatments proposed by the DSM and APA. The DSM and APA, predominantly lead by men, have been disregarding the harm women experience due to their gendered theories, which can only mean that the DSM and APA are tied to the patriarchy and (perhaps unintentionally) aim to keep women suppressed. The field of psychology, with its gender biases, lack of female recognition, and oppressive objectives, will continue to keep women at a low status in society by controlling their minds and self-perception in a direct way, which is why immediate action by those affected and those aware of the problem must be taken.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

*Blending references to personal experience with obtained scholarly research, this writer shows that video games, an unconventional form of narrative, have great power to motivate and instruct.*

## The Underappreciated Art

By Gregory Sileo

Prof. Collins – Narrative: The Inside Story

Many hours of my life have been consumed by a much stronger, more intelligent, and much more heroic version of myself. One who runs towards the fire-breathing turtle with spikes on his shell in order to save the love of my life, a princess. One who instantaneously becomes a soldier in order to save the world from the impending alien invasion. One who fights off the horde of mutant robots attempting to take over the world. While the examples presented could be my interpretations of a variety of the novels I have read, they are actually depictions of myself in some of the video games I have played. Video games present an unconventional form of narrative in the sense that the players get to decide their fate. This narrative provides an underappreciated amount of motivation to the players. With such intriguing narrative, it's no wonder video games have become such a popular medium.

Video games have evolved tremendously from games of little to no narrative being presented to the players to what they are today. Jonathan Ostenson, English teacher and author of the article "Exploring the Boundaries of Narrative: Video Games in the English Classroom," states: "Video games have come a long way from the days of *Pong* and *Pac-Man*, and not just in terms of graphical complexity. The games of today have come to rely more and more on the elements of fiction in their design, and they represent unexplored territory in studying the nature and impact of narrative (71). Ostenson argues that video games have evolved into more of a narrative-based gaming system rather than the original, strict game-only types like *Pac-man*. Video games today allow players to indulge in narrative-rich type of games like the *Mario* franchise from Nintendo. These narratively rich games have the potential to motivate players into doing things that were dreaded by previous generations, like learning a disliked subject in school.

Ostenson believes that there is a place for video games in the English classroom because of the intriguing narrative that these games present. He began his class one day by playing an online fantasy-themed game called *Zork*. In this computer-based game, the player is provided with a variety of choices on what to command the virtual player to do. Whether it is "go north" or "read leaflet," the player gets to choose the path that the virtual player takes. The player in this type of game is creating their own plot because they get to decide what happens next. When Ostenson had the class participate in the choosing of which path to take, he noticed that even the quietest and unmotivated students suddenly began to show excitement towards playing the game. In reality, these students were subconsciously partaking in a good

narrative. A couple of students even took the time to make maps of the supposed setting in order to discover the alternate narratives that are available to the players. The narrative in video games helps to motivate people to do things they otherwise would not want to do, like indulge in a good narrative in the case of Ostenson's class.

This high motivation level to discover what could happen next in the narrative has great potential not only in the English classroom but in other classes, too. Lakshmi Menon, professor at the University of Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi, explores the potential for educational learning through narrative in video games in his article "History First-hand: Memory, the Player and the Video Game Narrative in the *Assassin's Creed* Games." Menon delves into the *Assassin's Creed* games and discovers the potential for educational purposes that these games present. The *Assassin's Creed* games are about a person whose ancestors were assassins, and now this virtual player gets to relive the memories left by them. The virtual player has ancestors who were pirates, Renaissance merchants, or even Revolutionary War heroes. While playing these games, the player gets to explore their environment while also staying on the main path of the mission or narrative. A player could choose to play a variety of side missions that are also present or just stay on the normal path. No two players will have the same experience playing this game, and thus no two narratives are the same.

These games allow for many educational advantages. Since the narrative is based on a certain time period, the Italian Renaissance for example, the game includes real life events that actually happened at that time. Famous people of the time like Niccolo Machiavelli and the Medici family are presented in the narrative, and the player is compelled to learn about the influential lives that these people lived. Menon argues that the games are "[c]reating for the player a more immersive experience of the era through the convergence of visual imagery with musical cues" (110). He is saying that these games provide the player with a visual representation of historic times, just like any textbook or lecture could do. Menon also argues that games like this could be made about other historical topics and with the help of the narrative, the students would be much more motivated to learn about the time period than they usually are. Students would be learning without even realizing that they are doing so. With such educational advantages, it is quite surprising that video games are not integrated into classrooms today.

The problem with allowing video games into educational places like the classroom is that they are not typically designed to fit within the time constraints of the classroom. It took me personally about 30 hours to complete one of the *Assassin's Creed* games that taught me about the Italian Renaissance. Unfortunately, the classroom time allotted for this topic was only 15 hours. While I did learn a tremendous amount about the Italian Renaissance that I had no knowledge of before, there just is not enough time provided for this topic in a classroom. Due to the small amount of time allotted per subject, the video

games that are used in today's classrooms lack the sufficient amount of narrative needed in order to properly motivate the students to want to complete the learning mission. Video game companies need to be able to find the line between not enough narrative and too much narrative for video games to successfully fit into the time constraints of the classroom.

Teachers and professors alike often underestimate the amount of narrative needed in an educational game. Natalia Padilla-Zea, Professor at the University of Granada and author of the article "Modeling Storytelling to be used in Educational Video Games," along with some of her colleagues, wrote about the current video games in the classroom and the lack of motivation students have towards them. She argues that the reason these educational video games are unsuccessful is because "[t]hey are focused on the elements that define the video game rather than on the very important issue of introducing the storytelling into the design process" (1). Throughout the article, Padilla-Zea discusses the underlying importance of the narrative in video games because without the narrative, there is very little motivation for anyone to want to complete the game.

Daniel Bormann and Tobias Greitemeyer, researchers at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau, Germany and co-authors of the research article "Immersed in Virtual Worlds and Minds: Effects of In-Game Storytelling on Immersion, Need Satisfaction, and Affective Theory of Mind," also believe in the importance of narrative in the motivation for completing video games. The two men conducted a study of 112 undergraduate students placed in one of three groups. The first two groups were told to play the game *Gone Home*, a narrative rich game in which the protagonist is an American college student who goes home after studying a year abroad and discovers that her family is missing. It is the player's job to find out what happened to the family with the few clues the game provides. One group out of the two that played *Gone Home* was told to play the game normally, and the second group was told to ignore the narrative that the game presents. The third group in the study was told to play the game *Against the Wall*, a narrative poor game in which the player's only objective is to climb a wall by interacting with moving bricks. The test subjects were allowed to play the game for 20 minutes before a Player Experience of Need Satisfaction (PENS) test was administered. A PENS test is traditionally used by game designers to determine the likelihood of a consumer purchasing a game before it is introduced to the market. The test determines the levels of immersion and overall competence of the player by asking the players a series of questions about the game and asking them to rate certain aspects of the game on a scale from 1 to 7. The higher the PENS score, the more likely people will buy the game.

The results were just what the researchers were expecting to see. Bormann and Greitemeyer concluded there to be an overall P-value of less than .05, which allows them to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a direct correlation between the level of narrative present by a video game and

the PENS overall score. Much to the surprise of the researchers, though, the  $R^2$  value for this experiment came out to .1, meaning that the correlation is not linear but most likely exponential or at least quadratic. To put this in simpler terms, the data suggests that the amount of narrative presented in a video game does not directly correspond to the PENS score but rather an increase in one tends to present an increase in the other over time. In the end, the authors state, "The present study provides the first evidence that narrative elements in video games may have an impact on the players" (650). With their first experiment showing promising results, the experimenters will do further studies on the topic in order to discover what power the narrative holds in video games. This study presents evidence about the importance of narrative in video games.

The underlying importance of narrative in video games is also blatantly present to Luke Arnott, a professor at the University of Ontario and author of the article "Unraveling Braid: Puzzle Games and Storytelling in the Imperative Mood." Arnott talks about the presence of narrative in all types of video games, even some deemed puzzle games like the popular Facebook game *Words With Friends*. He argues, "The kind of spatial text that puzzlers read does not describe actions or situations . . . It is rather, a rhetoric based on instruction or command" and that it is "storytelling in the imperative mood" (434). Arnott is saying that these types of games do not have the traditional narratives that most novels or video games do but rather a different type of narrative.

Arnott defines a narrative as having a definite beginning, a conflict, and a definite end. *Words With Friends*, for example, begins when one player fearlessly challenges another to a battle, a battle of words. Then, there is the conflict. The protagonist, the challenger, needs to score more points than the antagonist, the other player. The protagonist in this narrative is forced to complete a series of challenges to get higher-scoring words than that of the antagonist to complete his or her quest and finally defeat the opponent. Once the conflict is over, like most narratives, there is a definite ending, thus even video games deemed puzzle games still have narrative present. The narrative in video games is often not seen by many people because it is not the traditional sense of narrative that people are used to.

With an increased knowledge of the importance of the narrative in video games, society can make great strides in education and health care. It is important for people who are getting older to actively use their brains in order to decrease the possibility of developing diseases like Alzheimer's. If video game design companies were to increase the amount of narrative for these puzzle games, then people might be more apt to play them to stay in good health. Take *Candy Crush*, for example. My mother has been playing every day for the past three or four years, and I could never understand why. After reading all these articles, I can recognize the narrative presented in a puzzle game and now I, too, am curious to see what happens when she finally reaches the end, successfully crushing all of the candy that there is to crush. If

game designers were to make a game where the player needs to complete a crossword puzzle for every space their little character moves towards, or rather an end goal of something big, then it would motivate people to play it more. The same thing can be said about education, especially in early education. Maybe a student needs to finish a certain amount of math in order to save the baby turtles from the evil seagull. Or maybe the student needs to learn how to type fast enough to win a race against an evil monster. The opportunities are endless with video games, and educators have noticeably underappreciated the amount of good that video games could do for society. Our leaders in education need to see the possible benefits of video games, thanks to the narrative that these games present. All those countless hours I have spent playing video games in my childhood were spent lost in a world full of narratives. I could never have imagined the power of the narratives that controlled me.

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*The writer of this research-based essay carefully outlines how and why the training of athletes' brains is equally important to building their physical strength.*

## **Coaching the Brain: The Importance of Coaches Training the Minds of their Athletes**

**By Collin Timony**

Dr. Haas - Sports

Coaches have, since the dawn of sports, striven to develop the top player or star team that can beat the rest of the competition with ease. In order to achieve this goal, they focus on building the physical strength and skill of their players. However, coaches are misguided in their efforts to focus only on an athlete's physical ability because doing so does not bring out an athlete's full potential. Coaches, specifically those training young athletes, need to focus on training the minds of their athletes rather than physical skill in order to make their players the best they can be. By focusing on training the brain, one can unlock hidden physical abilities that cannot be realized through physical training alone. Some of these abilities are an increased capacity for suffering (or pain tolerance), increased cardiovascular ability, and increased mental health. If coaches continue to ignore the minds of their athletes, they will suffer from conditions such as increased physical and mental fatigue, depression, addiction, and other issues that are detrimental to an individual's wellbeing. Not training their brains is ending an athlete's career before it begins.

To prevent the conditions mentioned above and allow coaches to unlock their athletes' full potential, coaches need to understand how the brain works. The most common phrase a person thinks of when they hear about not using the brain to its fullest is that humans only use 10% of their brain. While this may seem like humans' brains are inefficient, this saying is actually false. Humans use 100% of their brain; the 10% people think of is referring to conscious thought. The brain is set up so that most of it is involved in the transmission of signals to areas of the brain where actual processing happens. The aspect that coaches need to understand, and where the hidden potential of the brain comes from, is the fact that the brain is the master regulator. The brain controls the whole body without the individual consciously thinking about it. People do not think about the temperature of their body or food moving through the digestive tract, but the brain regulates these things and more without their conscious awareness. While controlling the body, the brain ensures that it does not go outside what it deems safe parameters. An example of this is the fact that a person could bite off their finger as easily as a piece of a carrot, but the brain sends signals telling the body not to do so. The same thing happens with muscle movement and how not all muscles move or work at the same time because that would risk the muscle tearing away from the bone. In short, the body has the ability to do things the brain does not allow it to do. While these are drastic examples, the fact of the matter is that by learning to control this regulation, one can increase his



or her physical abilities within healthy bounds. This simply means that a person can broaden the area at which the brain regulates bodily functions in order to improve one's ability in sports.

One of the most common results of the brain trying to regulate the body is pain. Pain is one of the major regulators as it is a way to notify the conscious part of the brain that something may go wrong or is wrong. However, the important thing to realize about pain is that it is temporary; pain subsides and the brain and body no longer see the issue as a problem. Part of the reason for this, as Jo Marchant, a geneticist and medical micro-biologist points out, is that peoples' "brains only have a certain capacity for attention;" the brain has limited storage for information at any given time.<sup>1</sup> Since it needs to perform so many different functions, the brain disregards things it deems unimportant in order to focus on other areas. Understanding this phenomenon, athletes can actually expand their pain tolerance in order to increase their endurance and resilience in a game; they can learn to forget about small, non-essential feelings of pain and fatigue in order to perform better for longer periods of time. The way this works, according to Marchant, is that "if you've got something that's really commanding your attention, there's less attention left over for experiencing the pain."<sup>2</sup> Having the mind focus on an activity (sports in this case) can distract the body from feeling pain, as long as that pain is not too severe. Marchant shows how the brain can be distracted from pain with an experiment that consisted of her putting her feet into a box of unbearably hot water, once without any distractions and once while engaged in a snow-and-iced-themed immersive video game which was created for burn victims. In the first instance, she reports "a very intense burning pain on [her] foot," but when she was playing the immersive video game, she barely noticed the pain.<sup>3</sup> This experiment helps prove that distracting the brain from pain is, in fact, possible. Athletes should take advantage of Marchant's experimental findings and learn how to focus their brains more effectively. Coaches, in particular, need to take a look at this phenomenon and realize the importance of training the mind in order to keep athletes focused on the game instead of minor pains. When speaking about ignoring pain, however, this does not mean to distract from serious injuries, such as a sprained ankle or broken bone; it is meant simply as way to manage fatigue or soreness in order to increase a player's endurance for longer periods of time. Coaches and athletes understand this concept of mind over matter to a certain extent when they think of an athlete in *the zone*.

The zone is this period of intense focus on the task at hand when nothing can interrupt the person and how they are performing. This phenomenon is most commonly talked about in sports when the athlete is fully invested in the game. When this happens, the player does not notice the fatigue they are going through or the tiredness of their muscles because all they notice is what is going on in the game. Every

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<sup>1</sup> Jo Marchant, "How Meditation, Placebos and Virtual Reality Help Power 'Mind Over Body,'" National Public Radio, January 26, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/healthshots/2016/01/26/464372009/how-meditation-placebos-and-virtual-reality-help-power-mind-over-body>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

athlete has experienced this when a half hour after the game, they feel how sore their body really is. This focus is what coaches need to train their athletes, especially younger athletes, to do. In order to accomplish this, they can begin doing different concentration exercises such as meditation, counting backwards, or simply focusing on a single object for a certain period of time. By having athletes do these exercises, they continuously expand their ability to focus, which will not only help them in sports, but outside of them as well, such as in academics. This increase in focus especially helps when coaches are training younger athletes who lack a significant attention span because it allows them to concentrate more and take up more information in sports (and academics, too) early on, which puts them in front of their nonathletic counterparts.

While training athletes to focus is important to unlock more endurance, another idea coaches need to understand about training the brain is the importance of positive reinforcement. The mental state of an athlete, especially at a young age, is vitally important to their performance and their mental health; a depressed athlete will normally not perform well during a game, especially with a coach who yells at their players. Simply said by Steve Brennan, a specialist in mental toughness, "if you think you can, or if you think you can't, either way you're right."<sup>4</sup> A player's attitude toward a game will impact how they play and this attitude can rely heavily on the atmosphere of the game. What coaches need to understand is that they must be positive with their athletes in order to get the best out of them. By positively reinforcing their players, a coach can not only strengthen the player-coach bond, but also the team's bond, which will allow the team to be more cohesive. Positive reinforcement helps decrease stress levels, increases cardiovascular output, builds trust, and increases enjoyment of the game. The last benefit is most important in regards to lower-level coaches who teach the youngest athletes because promoting enjoyment increases the number of kids who continue to play and possibly become professionals. Being positive with little kids makes them love the sport while a coach who always puts their player down will make the kid resent the sport and want to quit. Therefore, positive reinforcement is essential for the success of sports as a whole because it keeps kids in the game.

In addition to continuing to play, positive reinforcement increases the cardiovascular output of an athlete. A study conducted by psychologists from Harvard (Jeremy Jamieson and Matthew Nock) and a psychiatrist from University of California-San Francisco (Wendy Mendes) that was published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, found that reappraising arousal improves cardiovascular and cognitive responses to stress.<sup>5</sup> By telling the body that it can do something when placed under stress, the body will actually perform the task more efficiently than if the stress was ignored. The study itself consisted of three

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas S. Looney, "Mental Toughness Wins Out," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 31, 1998, <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy P. Jamieson, Matthew K. Nock, and Wendy Berry Mendes, "Mind Over Matter: Reappraising Arousal Improves Cardiovascular and Cognitive Responses to Stress," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 141, no. 3 (2012): 417-422, doi: 10.1037/a0025719.

different test groups that were put through physically stressful tasks, such as running. A control group was told nothing, another group was told to ignore arousal (increased heart rate and breathing), and the last group was told to reappraise arousal as a sign of the body doing what it was supposed to. What the researchers found was that reappraising arousal had a significant increase in CO<sub>2</sub> output compared to the control and the second (ignoring) group, which means that the third group had an increase in efficiency of respiration compared to the other groups. The reappraisal group also had a decrease in cardiovascular interference compared to the other groups.<sup>6</sup> All of this information points out that patting one's self on the back, so to speak, actually increases the efficiency of that person's lungs as well as decreases the effort of the heart. This allows athletes to be more efficient in their breathing and allows them to endure more. By having an athlete give themselves a compliment while they are playing, they are actually making themselves a stronger and better athlete.

Again, this study reveals just how the simple act of positive reinforcement can actually significantly increase an athlete's abilities. Having a coach understand this concept will allow them to teach their athletes to be positive about how they are doing out on the field. Even if they feel fatigued, they can compliment themselves, and this could bring them back into the game. In order for a coach to go about doing this, they simply need to encourage their athletes as well as give constructive criticism. This works on two levels: the coach is positively reinforcing the athlete and, at the same time, he or she is modeling the behavior they want the athlete to adopt. Ideally, an athlete should receive external positive reinforcement from the coach as well as internal positive reinforcement from themselves in order to perform athletically at the optimum level. A coach, specifically at the lower level, needs to complement their players on what they are doing right in order to boost their mental health and, in turn, their physical ability.

Training the minds of athletes is essential to an athlete's mental health and their physical ability. While this may seem like a daunting task for coaches because everyone's mind is unique, it is no different than training the body. Different people work well with different physical workouts and have different physical abilities; it is no different when it comes to people's brains. What a coach needs to do is understand these differences and work with them just as they would with physical ones. In order to do this, a coach simply needs to do multiple different kinds of mental training exercises just as they encourage multiple different physical training regimens. One should not have a team only meditate to train their concentration and expect it to work for everyone; they need to do things like focusing on an object for a certain amount of time or counting backwards or any other focus training exercise. The same idea applies to positive reinforcement because everyone reacts to different things; a simple "good job" will not work

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 417- 422.

on every player. A coach must know his or her players and what motivates each one of them. Coming to terms with the differences among athletes will allow the coach to build not only better athletes individually, but build a better team as well.

A coach's duty is to create the best player or team possible with the athletes they have. They are entrusted to train the athletes until they become the best they can be and that includes training their brains. Focusing only on physical training will not allow an athlete to reach his or her full potential. Instead, a coach needs to understand the brain and how it can be trained to increase endurance and thus the physical output of a player. By doing so, a coach opens up more abilities that an athlete may never have otherwise realized or achieved. This idea is especially essential for lower-level coaches as this is when athletes are learning the fundamentals of not only the sport, but life. By training an athlete's brain at a young age, a coach increases the number of players in a sport, how good those players are, and how many go on to be professionals. Learning to train an athlete's brain will keep the sports industry flourishing and raise it to new heights all while helping the individual on and off the field.

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*For their final fall essay, students in this section were asked to write about how society's view of death has changed throughout history. Using specific examples, this writer reveals that advancements in medicine have significantly impacted attitudes about death and argues that society needs to "normalize dying" and recognize it as "a natural part of life."*

## **Can the Western World Regain an Acceptance of Death?**

**By Adelaide Buerkle**

Prof. Allegretti – Exploring Death to Save Your Life

Few people like to discuss death. It is a taboo subject and though every human being will die one day, most people prefer to ignore this fact for as long as possible. We do this because we greatly value our lives and have often experienced feelings of grief and sadness when people whom we know die. Through their years of experience working with hospice patients, Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley discovered that the people who feel comfortable with death and the idea of their own death are often those who have spent time with other people at the end of their lives and know the process of dying (59). These people are comfortable being around death because they are exposed to things that the rest of society in the Western world is not. Most people have little to no experience being around dying people, and this makes them unwilling to accept death as a part of life. It is necessary to normalize dying and to reverse the denial of death that is present in most Western cultures. In the United States, society has begun to shift so that people have a greater understanding of the dying process, but more needs to be done to regain all that has been lost by generations of people who have ignored death.

There are many reasons why death began to be less of a recognized part of our lives, the most prevalent being the dawn of the technological age and the medicalization of every aspect of people's lives. When there were few doctors and fewer hospitals, the ill would often remain in their houses, surrounded by their families who cared for them according to the doctor's instructions. The family members and friends were around the dying person until they died, and because of this, they were able to understand what was happening to their loved ones and witness the stages of the dying process. When the person approached the end of their life, the medical care that the doctor had been advising turned to comforting the person and trying to ease their suffering, not prolonging their life and making them suffer more.

The current approach to medical care has detrimental effects on the person dying and on the people closest to them. For example, in today's society most family members want doctors to do everything possible to prolong a person's life, even if it causes them more suffering. Today's medical care also lacks the holistic approach to treatment that existed before the industrialization of medicine. Doctors now treat individual parts of a person's body, not the entire being. The body is thought of as a machine with parts that need to be fixed, and this is damaging to the person as a whole because they are deprived of spiritual and emotional care, which allows the person to evaluate their life and become comfortable

with the knowledge that they will die. The medical care common in most areas of the Western world has resulted in a longer lifespan, but this has also caused people to be anxious when faced with the idea of their death and to feel a great amount of sadness and grief when they are forced to leave their life (Schillace 160). Dr. Brandy Shillace, who studies medical history, states that “facing mortality is generally a distant and somewhat vague proposition” because people expect that medicine will be able to solve all of their ailments and that this makes them unprepared to die (27).

As noted earlier, when sick people remained in the home, their family was still able to spend time with them and see what was happening to them. When hospitals became more common and people started going to the doctor’s office instead of the doctor coming to their house, however, the people needing medical treatment were removed from their home and their loved ones. Their families were forced to only see them during short visiting hours and under the supervision of hospital staff, which strained the relationships between the dying person and the people close to them. When the families are not able to be constantly around the patient, they have less of an understanding of what is happening to their loved one and how the treatment is affecting them. They also miss out on valuable time spent with the dying person that they could use to better understand their situation and their wishes for after they die. Again, current medical practices can negatively impact both the dying and their loved ones.

Hospice care, however, can help both the dying person and their families, for it allows the sick person to remain in their home, surrounded by family and friends until they die. Many people find that this greatly helps the grieving process (Callanan and Kelley 71). When the family is able to be a part of their loved one’s care until the end of their life, they are familiar with their treatment and how they feel about their life ending. There will still be sorrow and grief when the person dies, but knowing that they helped to make the dying person comfortable and happy in their own home can be comforting. The hospice nurses also help the family and the dying person to understand the dying process. They provide holistic care, meaning that they care for the person’s spiritual and emotional health as well as their physical health. A person who is dying often feels that they did not accomplish all that they wanted to, that their death is coming too early and speaking to others about their fear of death helps ease it in some cases. This shows the importance of palliative care, where not only the patient’s body is helped, but their emotional and spiritual health are also taken into consideration. By paying attention to a patient’s emotional state, anxiety and depression are lessened, and they are more accepting of what is happening to them (Callanan and Kelley 91). Hospice care is a return to the era of the sick being treated in their homes, with the advantage of modern medicine, and it helps families to be a part of their loved one’s last months. It accepts the idea that the person will die and provides guidance for how to deal with this knowledge.

What happens after a person dies also influences how most people think of death. In most Western societies, the dead are buried in caskets or coffins to separate them from the earth. This separation from the ground shows how humans are reluctant to accept that we are part of nature and return to nature when we die. Green burials are a way that society is returning to acceptance that all humans are a part of nature and follow the same path as other natural things: we are born, we live, and we die. When a body is allowed to be directly in the earth, it symbolizes a return to where it came from and where all living things eventually end up. People may be wary of a green burial because they are used to the traditional funeral setting, but it is possible to have a green burial and a traditional memorial. Funeral traditions provide a framework for those in mourning, and these rituals give examples of the “right way” to mourn. Most people consider them to be the only proper way to honor their deceased; however, it is possible to create a unique ritual that represents the unique identity of the person who has died while still engaging in traditional mourning rituals (Schillace 192). A good ritual is one that helps to heal those in the wake of someone dying, and memorials to these people should be as varied as the deceased themselves. Memorials should be prepared by those who were familiar with the dead person, often close friends and family, to ensure that the memorial accurately represents the person that it is intended to honor. The practice of handing over funeral preparations to a funeral director or funeral home further alienates those who knew the dead person by following outdated traditions and almost cookie-cutter ceremonies to remember the deceased. By being a part of the funeral process, family members can help to decide how they want their loved one to be remembered and can begin to heal.

It is not possible to completely change societal norms in an instant. It takes time for people to warm to the idea of changing their perspectives, especially on something as monumental as death. But there are small things that individuals can do to change how they view mortality, and this will make it possible for the rest of their society to change its views as well. The most important thing that can be done to end the stigma about death is to talk about it. Because death is such a taboo subject, people tend to avoid discussing it or even thinking about it, and this does much more harm than people realize. When people do not talk about what they wish to happen while they are dying, it leaves their family confused and helpless if there is a situation in which the person cannot make their own decisions. Completing forms such as the Five Wishes and Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment helps families know what someone wants to happen to them in the event of an emergency (Schillace 159). Not talking to loved ones about what a person wants to happen could result in more suffering if something life-threatening were to happen because they would not know what the dying person wanted. This can cause a dying person’s suffering to be prolonged much longer than they wanted it to be because their family wants to keep them alive for a longer time, even though they will die in the near future anyway.

In the words of Brandy Shillace, “Death need not be a solo affair” (190). Though we all come in and out of this world on our own, we do not need to suffer alone. A person who is dying often feels regretful, anxious, and fearful. Speaking to others about their pending death helps ease these feelings in some cases. A person’s thoughts about their death mirror their thoughts about their life. If they are content with how they have lived their life, they will be accepting of the knowledge that they will die. Many generations of ignoring the fact that dying is a natural part of life has changed the way that people think about death and life, and this way of thinking causes people to be unwilling to accept the fact that they will eventually die. Discussing death and a person’s final wishes can be beneficial to both the person and their loved ones who will be responsible for them should they be unable to make their own decisions.

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*This writer of this personal essay, who plans to be a math teacher, reveals how the movie Freedom Writers impacted her views on privilege and influenced her work as an Urban Scholars mentor.*

## Teaching to Change the World

By Stephanie Cambrea

Prof. Collins – Story to Screen

I have always taken for granted the fact I received a high-quality education when I was growing up. I did not earn the right to this education; instead, it was handed to me because I have privilege in society. Although I was ignorant about this before, this fact became evident to me as a result of watching the film *Freedom Writers* in my Freshman Seminar class and my participation in the Urban Scholars program at Siena College. Everyone has an equal right to education, but too often teachers get in the way of this by making false judgements about their students. Teachers may not realize how their words and actions affect the confidence level of the children they teach. Demonstrating faith in all students will help them to believe in themselves. Instead of giving up on them as many do in the movie, teachers need to forget about stereotypes and show support and encouragement for every student. Young people will not be able to travel down the road to success unless their teachers are willing to lead and guide them along the way.

Unlike the students in the film *Freedom Writers*, I attended a suburban, predominantly white high school and never thought about how everyone was not as fortunate as I was. All of my teachers had high expectations of me, as well as their other students. They were available for those who needed extra help, and students were constantly encouraged to try their best and challenge themselves. Advanced Placement courses were abundantly offered, and I did not hesitate to sign up for them. I credit the success I had in these classes to the great teachers I had. However, my high school experience is very different from that of the students in the movie *Freedom Writers*. This film, which is based on a true story, opened my eyes to the reality of the educational experiences for students at Woodrow Wilson High School. They are predominantly minority students, and their teachers automatically have low expectations of them due to false stereotypes. This is why teachers are not willing to provide these students with adequate reading materials; they believe there is no point in spending money on books that the students will not care for or be able to read anyway. Overall, the teachers do not feel it is worth their energy to spend time helping these students get an education. Sadly, the attitude they have towards minority students has a big influence on how these students view their own education and themselves. One of the students in the film, Tito, states, "Nobody cares what I do. Why should I bother coming to school?" (*Freedom Writers*) Teachers at this high school do not believe students are capable of achieving anything in life, which affects their self-esteem. As a result, the kids stop believing in themselves and eventually give up on school. This

has a negative impact on them because it limits them from reaching their full potential. It is not until new teacher, Erin Gruwell, comes along that someone starts standing up for this issue and fights to change it.

Ms. Gruwell's attitude reveals that teachers truly can make a difference in their students' lives. Even though none of the other teachers ever really tried to teach the students, she is willing to do whatever it takes to educate them. She realizes that the best way to do this is to connect the course material to the everyday lives of the students in order to keep them more interested in learning. Most of the class has to deal with extremely difficult circumstances outside of school, so Ms. Gruwell provides them all with journals to write in every day to release their fears and frustrations. Everyone has a story that deserves to be heard, including her students. All of the students complete this project as they write about the hardships they have had to deal with, and they embrace this assignment since it relates to their own lives. Likewise, Ms. Gruwell finds books for her class to read that reveal struggles similar to theirs. By selecting stories with characters that have gone through these experiences, the students become more engaged in what they are reading. Ms. Gruwell is able to get her class excited about reading for the first time. This is when the change in the students' attitudes about school becomes evident, and they begin to understand that they are capable of great things. If Ms. Gruwell was not so determined to educate her students, it would have been easy for them to give up and go down the wrong path. Through hard work and dedication, Ms. Gruwell is able to have a positive influence on the lives of her students, unlike one of the other faculty members at the school, who remarks, "You can't make someone want education" (*Freedom Writers*). The truth is you can make someone want an education as long as you do not ignore them in class and show them they are important, which is exactly what Ms. Gruwell did. This is a lesson that needs to be taken away from this film and applied to real life situations.

After watching *Freedom Writers*, I realized there are many parallels between the students in the film and the students in Siena's Urban Scholars program. Through this program, middle school students in the Albany area are bussed in from inner city schools to attend classes that are taught on Siena's campus. In the morning, students take math or science -based classes, followed by a liberal arts class in the afternoon. The classes are designed to challenge students and teach them about critical thinking, teamwork, and perseverance in the classroom. Siena College students serve as mentors to these children, who benefit from the many opportunities offered by the program. It is the mentors' job to be like Ms. Gruwell and show these students that we believe in them and that they belong in the classroom, no matter what their story is.

In our class, a new project we initiated was developing a curriculum where students got to build their own computer to take home after the last class. Allowing the students to work hands-on with the computers and take all the pieces apart made them eager to learn about all the parts and what each one

does. The sooner they got their computers working, the sooner they could start using them. Each week they would ask when they would be able to take their computers home, as they were very anxious to complete the project. Just like Ms. Gruwell, we found an educational activity that got everyone excited about learning and proved to students that when they put in the hard work, they get successful results. As we were helping the students fix their computers, we could tell that they were pleased to have people around to answer their questions. Also, whenever they got a question wrong, students seemed surprised that we told them to keep trying as opposed to allowing them to give up. These actions motivated the students to persevere and reminded them that they are important. .

One of my favorite parts of being in this program was forming relationships with the children it serves. Every week, one girl would smile when she saw me and give me a hug. As happy as she was to see me, I was just as happy to see her and the rest of the class. Other students would smile at me also, give me high-fives, and start talking to me about how their week had been. By interacting with students during class, we made them enthusiastic about coming each week. The mentors were looking forward to attending class as much as everyone else. Being a mentor in this program made it clear to me that effective teachers are committed to their students, which allows them to create strong student-teacher bonds. Students need to know that teachers care about them and have confidence in their ability in order for them to do well in school. The more excited students are about school, the more they are willing to learn. The Urban Scholars program is a big step towards eliminating the learning gap that exists for students in the classroom. Dedicated teachers like Ms. Gruwell are also needed to provide all students with the high quality education they deserve and to act as role models in students' lives.

In my opinion, *Freedom Writers* is not just a movie; it is a reality that emphasizes one of the major issues regarding education in the United States. Students and teachers all across the country can relate to the theme of the film. The public school system is where people are still not given truly equal opportunities, which is why programs like Siena College's Urban Scholars program are so critical. Social justice is all about fighting to put an end to these advantages and disadvantages in society. In order for everyone to reach their full potential, people need to understand that stereotypes should not dictate the future of students, and they need to start focusing on students as individuals. People with privilege have the power to help those who do not usually get the most out of their educational experience in the classroom, and such people can truly make a difference in the students' lives. When I become a teacher in the future, I hope to continue to be a part of this change.

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*In this focused thesis-driven analysis, the writer adroitly uses sources from the unit on the Natural World.*

## **Can Nature and Man Co-Exist?**

**By Brianna Davis**

Dr. Richardson – The 80s: Big Hair and Big Business

Is there a specific way that we should regard nature? The ancient Stoics believed that humans were governed by the cosmos and by divine beings, but the popular beliefs of the Stoics dramatically decreased in popularity as the Scientific Revolution gave birth to a new philosophical era of Modernity. The Moderns had a better understanding of the universe in regards to science, allowing them to view nature as something that is predictable and able to be controlled by people. Humans were then positioned at the top of the hierarchy of power, replacing the spot previously occupied by nature and divinity during the Stoic era. As a global community of individuals who inhabit the earth and depend on its environmental conditions for survival, we should use our growing knowledge of science and technology to improve and maintain the quality of Earth's environment. Thus, we must return to the Stoics' concern for the Earth's condition while utilizing Modern technology and scientific understanding of the universe.

From the start of the Scientific Revolution to the present day, there have been many significant discoveries and innovations that have enhanced our understanding of the world as well as improved human life on Earth. Technology has helped us to do our jobs more efficiently, obtain and share information more easily, and do advanced calculations more quickly. Through technology, we continue to make discoveries about the species and materials found on Earth as well as matter beyond our planet and solar system. Innovation and the resulting progression of our knowledge of the universe have helped us advance our societies; however, this era of impressive technology and machinery has changed the way humans think as a whole and has at times negatively affected nature. Today, students are taught the many different laws of science established by the Moderns and thus regard the natural world as predictable and sometimes even controllable. In her essay "The Death of Nature," Carolyn Merchant identifies the changes in mentality as society became more advanced and states, "In the mechanical world, order was redefined to mean the predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world. Order and power together constituted control" (Merchant 272). Moderns understood the world as an assembly of equations and objects each behaving predictably and interacting predictably as a whole. Gaining vast knowledge and understanding of the universe allowed humans to have control and power over nature. Through technological advances and discoveries, the Moderns have developed an in-depth knowledge of nature; however, they regard the natural world as an environment they can control. If we, as a global society, continue to maintain the Moderns' perspective that we are superior to the Earth and that our own needs

are more important than the Earth's condition, then environmental issues such as global warming and pollution will continue to harm the natural world and humans as well. Humans rely on the Earth's resources and environment to survive. Therefore, if people continue to ignore the well-being of the Earth in order to fulfill their own personal needs and wants, the environment's condition will continue to deteriorate, which will necessarily impact humanity negatively.

Although the Moderns are more technologically advanced than the ancient Stoics, their view of nature is not better than that of the Stoics. The Modernist perspective on nature allows humanity to be given priority over everything else, including the cosmos. The Stoics treated the Earth as precious since they believed divine being(s) created the universe. Francis of Assisi reflects the beliefs of the Stoics in "The Canticle of the Creatures" when he prays, "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs" (Francis of Assisi 9). Saint Francis respected and treasured the Earth and viewed nature as beautiful because it was created by God. The Stoics treated nature with more admiration than the Moderns who regard nature through more scientific and factual lenses. A compromise between the two perspectives is needed to improve the Earth's environmental state. An individual does not necessarily have to be spiritual or religious in order to put the needs of the Earth before their own; therefore, part of the compromise is extracting the Stoics' respect for the cosmos within a secular framework. The second part of the compromise is to utilize the Moderns' knowledge and technology while adopting the Stoics' concern for environmental conditions. Although the Stoics possess the best perspective when regarding the Earth, they were very religious and belonged to a society that was less technologically developed than Modern communities. People today would find transitioning to ancient Stoicism incredibly difficult; they would not want to give up their beliefs or their scientific and technological advancements. Therefore, we need a compromise that allows for Modern technology and knowledge along with learning how to treat the Earth's condition with the utmost importance.

The Moderns give humanity priority over nature, but this does not imply they intentionally want to negatively affect or harm nature. Still, it is best for society to regard nature as the Stoics did. By ensuring that nature's well-being is society's main concern above its own desires, the proper moral treatment of the Earth is guaranteed, helping prevent the deterioration of the environment in which we live. Evidence shows that the Earth is improving in some aspects and deteriorating in others as proven when Terry Anderson states in "Environmental Quality" that despite humans currently manufacturing greater amounts of paper products than in the past and that overall, Amazon deforestation is about 14 percent. Anderson concludes, "Global forest cover has remained quite stable since the middle of the twentieth century" (2). Nature has been affected by humans, but it is not deteriorating at alarming rates. An ancient Stoic looking

at this data would be greatly distressed because even though the slow deforestation of the Amazon is generating profits and useful materials for humanity, it is harming the Earth. If people collectively regard nature through the eyes of the Stoics but maintained their faith in technology and science, then they would look for ways to make sure activities harming nature were changed and the Earth would thus be improved as a whole. Although it is uncertain whether or not the Earth is actually dying due to the presence of humans, it is best to view the natural world as a Stoic. It is best to take great caution when regarding the Earth's condition. As a global society, we should adopt the environmentally conscious perspective of the ancient Stoics while continuing to employ the benefits of Modern knowledge and technology.

People today should share the Stoics' respect and admiration for nature while not necessarily adopting their beliefs in the divine, but they also must maintain some of the knowledge and technologies developed by the Moderns. The Moderns were able to understand the universe and how its elements interact. This knowledge has the potential to significantly help Earth and assist in the coexistence of humans and nature. It is through technology that humans have the potential to continue living comfortably without harming the natural environment in which they exist. Gregg Easterbrook discusses the benefits of having advanced technology and knowledge in *A Moment on the Earth* as he declares, "[Soon] women and men should be able to build a network of comet and asteroid detectors, linked to missiles or laser that would push off course any dangerous objects headed toward Earth" (64). Our current and growing knowledge on the movement of objects in space may help us protect Earth in the future. The vast knowledge obtained by the Moderns can significantly improve the current state of Earth and the natural world and therefore people need to hold on to the positive aspects of both systems of thought.

When regarding the natural world, people should share the beliefs of the ancient Stoics while maintaining the knowledge and technology of the Moderns. With this mentality, humans and the cosmos have the potential to coexist without harming nature or even without the cosmos harming humans. The extent to which we should balance these Stoic and Modernistic qualities is blurry. We must use our judgment and our own moral compasses to determine our actions regarding the Earth's environmental conditions. If humans are to continue living on this Earth, they must keep nature alive and healthy.

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*For this essay about the assigned summer reading, the author analyzes a scene from The Circle. Through his adept use of metaphor in his analysis, the writer demonstrates how people can be easily manipulated.*

## **The Master and the Puppet**

**By Alexander Ferrer**

Prof. Barranca – Media and Society

In the book *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, the main character, Mae Holland, is a college graduate who is living a very dull life before she quits her job to work at The Circle. Annie, Mae's old college roommate, puts in a good word for Mae, and she soon becomes one of the head people in the Customer Experience department, which deals with issues and questions, somewhat like customer service. At The Circle, there are several different departments that work together in hopes of connecting everything and everyone. Mae starts off as a person who is very conservative about her privacy. As the story progresses, however, she and Eamon Bailey, one of the founders of The Circle, have a heart to heart about her juvenile and clandestine act of stealing a kayak. Unfortunately for Mae, what was supposed to be an activity to get away from all the stresses of her family turns into a life lesson. Her meeting with Bailey confirms the whole purpose of The Circle, which is to eliminate secrets, which, Bailey explains, "are the enablers of antisocial, immoral and destructive behavior" (Eggers 291). As we analyze this scene, we learn that Bailey is an excellent manipulator who is able to make even the silliest ideas seem logical. For this reason, he is the master and Mae, who will do anything to keep her job at The Circle, is his puppet.

The scene opens with Mae sitting at her desk working "feverishly" as she tries to do something "visible to demonstrate her commitment to the company" (Eggers 279). Here we notice that Mae is in a moment of distress. In the span of 24 hours, she has been arrested, set free, called into Dan's office (Dan is her direct supervisor), and now will be meeting with one of the most powerful men in the company, all because she wanted to have a little adventure on a kayak. While inside Bailey's favorite room, Mae is asked if she had ever seen anything of the sort. Mae, having already been there, does not want to tell Bailey that she once snuck into his office without his knowing with Annie, so she replies with "not remotely" (Eggers 280). Here we notice Bailey's eye twitch, symbolizing his knowledge of Mae's fib and his distaste for when people tell lies.

As the conversation continues, Bailey asks one of the most important questions the scene has to offer: "Would you have behaved differently if you had known about the SeeChange cameras at the marina?" (Eggers 282). Notice first that it is Bailey, and not Dan or Annie, who is holding this conversation with Mae. Since Bailey is one of the senior people at The Circle, Mae really has no choice at this point but to agree with everything Bailey says if she wants to keep her job. They continue on as if a father was

scolding his child about taking a cookie from the cookie jar before dinner, and Mae's responses to Bailey are "I wouldn't have done what I did" and "I'm so ashamed I want to puke" (Eggers 282).

In this part of the scene, Mae cannot seem to figure out where Bailey is trying to lead the conversation. Fearing for her job, she feels as if there is very little hope of her staying at The Circle after what she has done, and she tells Bailey that she would "do anything to make this up" to him (Eggers 283). With a smile on his face, Bailey knows that all he has to do is pull the strings and she will follow. Bailey uses Mae's vulnerability to his advantage as he then asks her to explain when a secret is a good thing. As Mae thinks about situations where secrets are good, Bailey interrupts Mae at the first sign of doubt and spins the conversation so that Mae is unable to argue with him. This is how he guides conversations in his favor, making people think that what he is saying is right and what they are trying to argue is wrong. In essence, this is how he manipulates Mae into thinking all secrets are bad and that we should never have them, ever.

Another manipulation technique Bailey uses is his ability to talk and hold the conversation in his court. He controls the flow of the dialogue, he decides when it is Mae's turn to speak, and he sets the tone and directs Mae with questions that are so common sense that it would be foolish of her to disagree with him. One of the best examples of this is when Bailey and Mae are talking about national security. Bailey is arguing that nations should become completely transparent. Mae does not agree initially, so Bailey spins the conversation and makes it seem obvious that the "only time we're in danger is when we don't know the plans or motives of the countries we are supposed to be at odds with" (Eggers 288). This seems logical, right? It does to Bailey, and now to Mae it does as well.

Bailey also uses extreme examples to prove his points that invading personal privacy is a good thing. As the conversation about transparency really starts to kick into full gear, Mae's doubts about the plan are hushed when she is asked, "Would the guy down the hall view porn if he knew he was being watched?" (Eggers 291) In order to control Mae's responses, he again uses an example that seems to have an obvious answer and also reflects the very reason why she was in his office at that moment—that she would not have taken the kayak if she knew people could see her do it.

Since the conversation between Bailey and Mae is timed so perfectly by Bailey, Mae really has no choice but to agree with whatever he says; however, can we really blame her for that? Mae loves working at The Circle. It has become her dream job and doing anything to jeopardize that would just be crazy. This makes Mae vulnerable to doing things she may not totally agree with, such as having no secrets. Also, Bailey is a master at manipulation and conversation. With all of his skills, techniques, and power, there is nothing he can't sell; nothing he says is going to be rejected. This scene has great impact on the reader, for it shows that people are most susceptible to those who have the ability to speak in a persuasive manner.



Today, this can be seen in social media and marketing. We are constantly being told what we should and shouldn't like or buy based on celebrities' promotion of products. It's almost as if celebrities make choices for us, which is the same concept with Bailey and Mae. All Bailey has to do is pull his strings and Mae will follow, which is exactly why Mae is now Bailey's puppet.

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*After reading "The Mercies" by Ann Patchett and an excerpt of The Little Way of Ruthie Leming by Rod Dreher, students discussed writers' techniques for engaging readers while recounting very personal stories. Their next task was to compose a personal narrative about someone with whom they have/had a significant personal connection. This writer uses sensual language to describe her close relationship with "Downstairs Grandma."*

## **A Lasting Love**

**By Erica Foley**

Dr. Shideler - Relationships

I remember her scent. The moment you'd step foot beyond the kitchen and into her room, fleeing aromas of toast and eggs left your nostrils and in danced the petals of roses and the powder from her skin. My great grandmother, Celeste Zorolla Foley, was the oldest person I've ever known. She was also the most joyful. While she was living, she had nine great grandchildren from one of her sons - my poppy - and we all had a special name for her. We called her "Downstairs Grandma" because she lived in a first-floor retirement home apartment at the time when the first cousin, Gregory, was born. He began to call her that, and the name has stuck ever since then. At eighty-seven years old, if she wasn't going out to lunch with a family member, she was sitting in her armchair in the new room my uncles had built for her at my grandparents' house, watching the Hallmark Channel. She did it all with a smile on her face and a puzzle by her side. The unforgettable smile of hers remains in my memory as a reminder of all things beautiful in this life and that true beauty has defeated many battles with all things ugly.

I spent many years at my grandparents' home, from when I was a baby while my parents were working, up until I was old enough to attend kindergarten. I would sit there bored most of the time, not knowing what to do when my great grandmother wasn't home to spend time with me. My favorite days were when she was home and ready to watch a movie or put a puzzle together with me. Her room was always clean: white bed sheets spread out without wrinkles, her tiny glass trinkets and antique jewelry in their places or in their boxes, unmoved since she had first set them up. Not a speck of dust was seen, and each picture of her dearest loved ones sparkled clean every day. Her smell, though, is what stays with me. Reminiscing on the comfort of my great grandmother's hair and skin reminds me of what it felt like to be in her arms. The sweet, sweet aroma of fresh lilacs and honey dew lay thick inside of my nasal cavity and made me feel safe and loved.

I would take my seat next to her chair, behind the little table with the puzzle on it, and I would tell her I would do my best to get all of the corner pieces together. She would always put on "Little House on the Prairie" because she knew how much I adored it. Although there were countless days spent like this - just my great grandmother and I with the television on and our hands at work fitting puzzle piece by puzzle piece together - they are all blurred in my mind as one singular day. I could tell that she admired me the same way I admired her, and the same way a caterpillar relies on its cocoon in order to bloom. My great

grandmother allowed me a safe place to feel myself, knowing I'd always have her there to love me. At the time, I was unaware of the great losses she experienced earlier in life. For me, she was stability; she was what I wanted life to be.

The memory always plays back in my head the same exact way, with the same nostalgic scent.

"Hi, Downstairs Gram!"

"There's my girl"

She would draw out the word "girl" with her voice, as the biggest smile appeared on her face and her eyes squinted. I'd lean in to kiss her, and her soft hands held my cheeks each time.

"Oh, I just love you."

"I love you too, Gram."

The rest of the visit plays out in my head in silence, with me working on a farm puzzle and her long pink finger nails trying to pick up pieces to add to my pile of corner and end pieces. Even though I don't remember all of what was said every day that I spent with her, every moment there made me feel at home and loved. I noticed that my great grandmother liked me coming around, and this made me feel very connected to her. There are days I find myself longing for one more hour with her, putting together a puzzle.

At times my great grandmother forgot all of the cousins' names. When she did, she would call us "Suzie." In her defense, there were nine of us, and we were hardly a fraction of all of her grandchildren. We laughed at my great grandmother calling us "Suzie," and it's something we still joke about when we gather at family dinners. Often, all of us stood back-to-back with her to see if we were almost as tall as she was. Her expression was always the same as we approached her height: shocked, with her mouth open and eyes bulged. I don't think any one of us realized that although we all knew we would one day outgrow our great grandmother in stature, not one of us could or will outgrow her spirit. Because of that, we all know what it truly means to love and be loved.

Her spirit was something that radiated beyond the walls of her room and still does today. Time went on. I spent less and less time with my great grandmother because of school, but she seemed to stay with me each and every day. When I was scared or when I was questioning what decision to make in a situation, I would always think to myself, "What would Downstairs Gram think about this?" Something my great grandmother told me one evening stuck with me, though. One night in her room, I held my great grandmother's hands, and she looked at me and said, "My girl. I love all of ya's, but you're my favorite. You'll always be my girl." I knew then and now that she loved all of us equally. But regardless, it showed me that she, too, felt the connection I did with her, and I knew then how much she cherished our time together. I think it's what I needed when I was younger, considering I was usually lonesome and often had

a hard time making friends with other kids my age. I finally felt appreciated for being simply me, and perhaps she felt the same way.

My great grandmother valued spending time with the people she loved. She grew up in foster care at a young age because her mother died, and her father - a poor Italian immigrant who couldn't make ends meet - couldn't afford to take care of all of his children. My great grandmother was separated from her father and siblings. She grew up in various homes, her heart miles away with those she longed to be with. One afternoon at my grandparents' house, she showed me a large, framed picture of the boat that her parents traveled on from Italy to the United States that had all of the passengers' signatures underneath it. As she told me her heartbreaking story of growing up without her family by her side, my admiration for her grew. Such a strong, loving woman went through atrocities I cannot imagine experiencing or recovering from. I believe that the obstacles and instability she faced growing up molded her into a woman who recognized grief and pain but who always sought to bring about the opposite in the world on a day-to-day basis. I admired my great grandmother even more after realizing that she, the most gentle and caring person I'd ever known, had once been greeted by the world's greatest sorrows in her childhood. She was kind and welcoming to everyone she came in contact with and held on to her positive attitude. Whether I am thinking of my great grandmother or singing her praises to another, I realize everything that sits in my memory - her smile, her scent, her nicknames and knick-knacks - are all what makes her still so special in my life now and in the future. She truly was, and will forever be, my guardian angel.

*For their first writing assignment in the fall semester, students in this section were asked to write about Dave Eggers's novel The Circle, which was the required summer reading. This writer shares some provocative observations when comparing the setting and characters in the fictional work to the campus and the students at Siena College.*

## **Siena is The Circle**

**By Brianna Getty**

Dr. Woolbright - War

I hear a buzz and look up from my book. I pick up my phone and see an email notification from Siena. I click on it and type in my passcode, curious to see what it's about. It's another survey from Siena. I've already filled out five surveys on everything from housing to possible careers, and I wonder why I have to fill out another one. However, I grudgingly proceed to fill out this one—the longest of them yet—on sexual, drug, and alcohol abuse. I finally set down my phone, stretch, and resume reading the assigned book, only to realize that in the paragraph I was reading, the protagonist, Mae, was filling out a survey, too. This was just the beginning of my realization that Siena is The Circle.

In fact, the similarities run much deeper. Siena and The Circle collect data about their students and workers, respectively, using many of the same methods. Siena collects financial information through the FAFSA forms students fill out. The Circle obtained similar information on its workers because all financial and credit card transactions went through The Circle. Also, both institutions have extensive knowledge about where residents go on campus, what they eat, their interests, and the goods they buy. At Siena, most of this information is collected via Saint Cards, which students have to scan to get food, enter buildings, and attend events. These Saint Cards must be carried at all times or else students could get in trouble. Similarly, The Circle installed people with microchips to keep track of their location, health, and countless other statistics. Dave Eggers spends a lot of time explaining the extent of information that is collected by The Circle. Siena College is essentially using technology to monitor its students the way The Circle monitored its employees.

Not only is technology similarly used to keep track of people, but the setting of the novel seems very much like a college campus. The physical surroundings of both campuses are perfectly manicured. In The Circle there are dining places, stores, and entertainment on site aimed to keep the workers busy and on campus, and Mae's first impression is that the campus is "vast and rambling, wild with pacific color, and yet the smallest detail had been carefully considered" (1). Siena's environment is also carefully calculated to be comfortable and pleasing to students and parents. On campus, there are many dining places, stores, and dorms. When I tell people I go to Siena, often the first thing they comment on is how beautiful the campus is. An especially important connection is that Eggers made the decision to call The Circle's grounds and buildings "a campus," which is typically what colleges call their property.

The people who enjoy the campuses have much in common as well. The occupants of both institutions are young and eager to succeed. In *The Circle*, many of the workers are right out of college, and are excited to work there. They use social media and host parties. Siena is similar because the student body is comprised of young adults who come here to gain the knowledge they need to succeed. These students are excited to be in a new place with other people the same age and engage in social media, parties, and events together. These students are especially vulnerable because they are young and impressionable. They conform to their peers' and the institution's expectations without questioning the motives behind such expectations. In both places there are very few people who are older than twenty or thirty. Both places are seen as a place for young and vibrant people who are bursting with enthusiasm and new ideas. The author of *The Circle* seems to be pointing out the gullibility and naïveté of both populations, which makes them more accepting of the stringent guidelines imposed by authority.

Both institutions take the original ideas the residents come up with and encourage them to present them publicly. Siena encourages its students to go to science fairs, meetings, and conventions to show off how great the college is and to win acclaim for the school. At *The Circle*, new ideas are brought to the founders, who often adopt the concepts and begin publicizing and developing them for the company's use. In both situations, the people who come up with these ideas receive money, grants, and acclaim. While these ideas often profit the young workers and inventors, they often are more beneficial to the institutions they work for. The novel reflects the collegiate system of encouraging young workers to innovate for the institution's profit.

Work keeps people busy around the clock both at *The Circle* and in colleges. Just as students spend many hours completing their schoolwork, at *The Circle*, Mae worked all hours of the day to get her PartiRank up. In describing her feelings after working all day to boost her rank, Eggers wrote, "She felt a profound sense of accomplishment and possibility that was accompanied, in short order, by a near-complete sense of exhaustion. It was almost midnight and she needed sleep" (192). These feelings are common in both *Circle* workers and in college students, as college students are also constantly ranked. The workload only increases as time goes on as well. Mae began with only one screen to keep track of, but gradually more screens and tasks were added to her workload. Similarly, work for college classes seemingly starts out simple but generally works toward difficult and stressful term papers and final exams. In both institutions, rankings are constantly used to motivate the residents to conform to the standards of the authority figures. With all the emphasis on numerically measured output, Eggers seemed to be pointing out the actual lack of creative thought and emphasis on quantity rather than quality. Usually, employees at *The Circle* were focused on getting work done efficiently and earning high scores. However, they had strict constraints and very little time to do it, so their responses were often very similar. This is

close to the way colleges are run because many students have strict guidelines and deadlines, which renders them incapable of doing their best work. Arguably, Eggers's negative view of the strict standards stems from observing the rigidity imposed upon students at colleges.

To distract from the ceaseless workload, entertainment is used to keep students and workers engaged with the institution and on campus. Workers attended many events and parties at The Circle, but this entertainment was yet another requirement. At Siena, there are many events to keep students busy and out of trouble. This serves to keep students constantly entertained so they have very little time to question the aspects of their day to day life. Participation in these events is highly encouraged, both at Siena and at The Circle. To keep up with expectations regarding the events and the workload, residents of both must stay up late. Their attention is, therefore, always engaged with campus. Eventually, these places become one of the only topics of thought, conversation, and activity in residents' minds. When this happens in the novel, the institution engulfs the life of the residents, and they become an inextricable part of The Circle.

Siena assigned this book thinking that students need to be warned about the dangers of using too much technology. Professors believe this book represents a future that is possible if *students* don't take action and stop their extreme dependency on technology. However, they fail to realize that the purpose of *The Circle* wasn't just to show the possible consequences of overusing technology. It was aimed at colleges like Siena that unwittingly use techniques that exchange originality and independence for conformity and contentment. Siena is The Circle. The issue is that many professors, students, and staff either ignore the problem or fail to recognize it in the first place. If people wish to stop these Circle-like behaviors, they must become less like Mae and more like Ty and Mercer, who both recognized and addressed the problem. If Siena wants to reverse this trend and encourage creative, self-actualized students, they have the right resources—teachers and students—to solve this problem, but first the collegiate authorities must heed Eggers' warning and recognize that this is, indeed, a problem.

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*Students at Greene Correctional Facility were asked to describe a time when they felt overwhelmed and to consider the lessons they learned from that situation. In this honest and introspective essay, the writer reflects upon a difficult time in his adolescence and shares his story of personal growth and understanding while skillfully including references to three course texts.*

## **Open-Minded**

**By Matthew Guglielmoni**

Prof. Rody-Wright - Incarceration

As humans, we strive to control the environments we find ourselves in, but the funny thing is that the terrain never remains the same. Just when we think we have quantified our surroundings, familiarized the unfamiliar, or made known the unknown, we are thrust into new situations. This is a part of life: the constant struggle to maintain a modicum of control over our ever-changing world. I have experienced this during different periods in my life: first, upon entering high school, a foreign landscape where I felt out of place, and later, during various times of my incarceration. We are forced to adapt to different environments in a variety of ways. By combining our experiences with the lessons we glean from the experiences of others, we can adapt in a dignified, open-minded manner that allows us to maintain some control.

The first time I was placed in an environment where I felt overwhelmed involved my simultaneous initiation into adolescence and high school. I was in a high school where the typical student's affluence allowed his wants and needs to be indistinguishable. This culture was far removed from the one in which I had grown up, where everything we had was earned through hard work. This culture shock was coupled with an adolescent's constantly confused ideas about what to feel and whom to feel it towards. I walked the line of trying to be accepted by my peers and respected by my elders. Some of my peers seemed to look down upon me for what they perceived as my low economic status. I, in turn, viewed them all as an arrogant, condescending, and over-privileged enemy. I was ignorant to the fact that by seeing myself as different, I allowed others only to notice those differences and ignore our similarities. In my effort to emphasize that I was not like them, I acted out, alienated potential friends, and disappointed my elders. To impress some peers, I found myself in a few physical altercations with those I saw as my foes. However, far from impressing my peers, I further alienated them. In addition, I found myself sitting in the Dean's office, facing possible expulsion, and thus jeopardizing my future. I realized it was time for a change. Only by making the choice to accept who I truly was rather than conforming to the expectations of others, could I be accepted by my peers and also accept them, in turn. This marked a change for the better in my development as a human; however, life is ever-changing and control never stays in our grasp for long.



The second major time in my life when my environment spiraled out of my control was during my incarceration. I have been pressured to join gangs to avoid physical harm or to cause harm to others. I have been asked to oppress my peers by denying them food or stealing their property. I have learned many new things during this time, but I have also used lessons from past experiences to help navigate this environment. Entering this place paralleled my prior experience regarding my understanding that, ultimately, the choice of submission is mine. Life is a series of choices and decisions; the paths we choose determine not only where we arrive, but also the path we travel. In the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl states:

The last of the human freedoms [is] – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether or not you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom . . . In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person a prisoner became was the result of an inner decision (66).

Frankl shows us that while the situations we find ourselves in might not always be up to us, the way we respond to them is. I decided to make choices in school, and this I carried over to my new environment. I also brought with me my self-esteem, my self-worth. I fought to attain it and would not allow it to be taken from me. In order to make hard choices and still live with ourselves, we must maintain dignity.

Laura Hillenbrand, in *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*, hits on the very essence of what dignity means and the importance it has upon our resilience. "Dignity," she says, is the "self-respect and sense of self-worth, the innermost armament of the soul [that] lies at the heart of humanness; to be deprived of it is to be dehumanized, to be cleaved from, and cast below, mankind" (182). Dignity is how we portray ourselves to the world around us. Dignity is how we see ourselves and how others see us. Hillenbrand goes on to state that "without dignity, identity is erased" (182-183) because if we do not respect ourselves, how can we demand respect from others? In my prior experience, I was able to attain dignity and with dignity, understand my own identity. I have carried that sense of identity with me throughout my incarceration.

Understanding who I am has allowed me to be comfortable with looking for the good in others. I try to see the best in myself and in others, too. The ability to change and redeem ourselves can be our best quality. Nelson Mandela highlights this when he says, "I always tried to be decent to the warders in my section; hostility is self-defeating . . . it was ANC [African National Congress] policy to try to educate all people, even our enemies; we believed that all men, even prison service warders, were capable of change" (418). Mandela believed that even his oppressors could change. My earlier experiences in life

taught me that by refusing to judge others, we create an environment where we might also be free from judgment. In prison, I realized that if I wanted the world to see in me the ability to change and become a better person, I must remain open-minded to that capability in others – not only those I like, but also those I do not. We are measured not by how we treat our friends, but by the compassion we have for our enemies. I will see in others the change I would like to see in myself.

Life offers us many different environments—some pleasant, others not so much. It is the ability to exert a modicum of control over that ever-changing environment that allows for the living of a dignified life. Every day, every hour, the choice to exert that control is in our power. We must learn to differentiate between the choices we have the ability to make, and the ones that we have the obligation to make. For by understanding our obligations, we can truly gain that control. In order to accomplish this, we must maintain an open mind so that we might learn from our own experiences as well as the experiences of others. We must understand who we truly are because who we are determines where we are in relation to the world around us. By understanding ourselves in relation to others, we are better able to exercise that small, yet vital, control over our environment. Only by making these dignified choices, may we live a full and satisfying life.

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*In this candid letter to the author of an essay read for class, the writer artfully uses textual evidence and personal experience to explore the complex issues pertaining to privilege.*

## Checking My Privilege: A Swing and a Miss

By Baran Karimi-Hakak

Dr. Liptak – Trauma in Literature and Film

Dear Mr. Fortgang,

The following is a letter to you as well as to the supporters and admirers of your 2014 essay “Checking my Privilege: Character as the Basis of Privilege.” I would like to begin by applauding you for being published when you were just a freshman at Princeton, and I would like to take a moment and appreciate the fact that you took the time to introduce and support your beliefs in the form of a story concerning your grandparents. However, I would like to say that you have made a number of severe errors. Mr. Fortgang, when you say that the problem with “calling someone out” on their privilege is that “you don’t know what their struggles have been, what they may have gone through” (Fortgang), you make an excellent and valid point. Yet you go on to say that “it was their [your grandparents’] privilege to come to a country that grants equal protection under the law to its citizens, that cares not about religion or race, but the content of your character” (Fortgang). In this claim you are demonstrably wrong. Even in our modern America, not all people are judged solely on their “character.” The purpose of this letter is to clearly and specifically identify the meaning of “privilege.” Privilege is not a single structure that can be applied or removed from one's overall identity, but rather it can be divided and separated to fit where relevant. Therefore, privilege can be assigned to an individual aspect (or aspects) of a person's identity without automatically applying to the entire individual.

In 1988, Dr. Peggy McIntosh wrote a personal account, much like your own, Mr. Fortgang, of her understanding and experience regarding the relationship between white privilege and male privilege, both of which are covered in your more general overview of “privilege.” The very essence of her paper “White Privilege and Male Privilege” furthers my claim that privilege is malleable and can be worked to fit specific human traits. Dr. McIntosh creates a list of ways in which she has experienced the benefit of white privilege. She also reveals how she has suffered at the hands of male privilege, affirming that while she is privileged by her skin color, she is oppressed by her gender (73-75). This balance of having/lacking privilege is one you are familiar with, even if you're unaware of it, Mr. Fortgang. In the case of your grandparents, you write that your “grandfather and his brother had to flee their home as teenagers when the Nazis invaded Poland” (Fortgang). Here, you are suggesting that they were oppressed because of their religion. Then they came to America, where they were oppressed due to their lack of English and wealth. However, you go on to explain that your grandparents “obtained citizenship, learned the language and met each other [. . .] They worked hard enough to raise four children, and to send them to Jewish school and eventually City College” (Fortgang). Through hard work and dedication, your grandparents achieved “the American Dream.” They and their children live full lives, judged only by their character and not by their background. Here we establish that the oppression, and later the privilege, that your family faced were dependent on malleable factors.

If I may, Mr. Fortgang, I would like to tell *you* a story. This story is similar to your own. It is about two Iranians, fleeing from a hateful new regime. These two individuals wind up in America with no money and

no English, exactly like your grandparents. Through dedication and hard work they, too, achieve the "American Dream." They settle down in the suburbs of upstate New York with their twin daughters and a little dog named Snowball. However, in this story, the two Iranian-Americans are held in custody for four hours while their bags and backgrounds are checked by airport security during an attempt to go on a family vacation to Hawaii. In this story, they are stopped and searched by the police once every few months for no acceptable reason. Your family and mine both achieved great things, Mr. Fortgang - even in the face of oppression. I am privileged, as are you, to have grown up in the United States of America, to be receiving an education, and to have the means to even pursue an education in the first place. We may both have these privileges, but your family is white, and that is one privilege my family does not have.

If you need further description, Mr. Fortgang, about what exactly privilege is and how it can be applied to a certain aspect of one person and not to all, please consider this point from Dr. McIntosh's list regarding the privileges she receives as a white person. She claims, "If I have low credibility as a leader, I can be sure that my race is not the problem" (75). Though this is a specific example, what McIntosh is saying here is that generally her own personal imperfections or undesired behaviors have no reflection on the entire white race. In this and other examples, she is receiving a privilege and avoiding a means of oppression that people of other races face regularly. We see this form of privilege in common social interactions involving racial stereotyping. We also see this done, however, through gender stereotyping. McIntosh acknowledges, as do I, that her undesirable behavior won't be automatically applied to her entire race; however, she and I both also acknowledge that it may be applied to her gender. This is just one example of McIntosh's "split-privilege," or the benefit she receives as a white person as well as the simultaneous disadvantages bestowed upon her as a woman. This proves that one person can be privileged while still being oppressed.

Further regarding your use of the word "privilege" as a solid and unmovable characteristic of identity, I somewhat agree with your thesis, Mr. Fortgang. In your essay you write, "I do condemn them [the ones who "check" Fortgang's privilege] for diminishing everything I have personally accomplished, all the hard work I have done in my life, and for ascribing all the fruit I reap not to the seeds I sow but to some invisible patron saint of all white maleness who places it out for me before I even arrive" (Fortgang). You claim that if some people have been announced to have "privilege" based on their positions in the world (i.e. their race, gender), their achievements become invalid due to the fact that somehow, somewhere back in our ancestral lineage, we have all been oppressed. Therefore, you say, all people have privilege and all people have been oppressed, and that all contemporary oppressed peoples can obtain privilege. I agree that oppressed people can achieve privilege, and at that point they may no longer be oppressed in that specific area of their identity because my own experience with classism confirms this. People can shed or acquire certain privileges or oppressions while still maintaining others.

If I may, I would like to include a second personal account to further explain the reasons behind my conditional agreement of your claim. I have a friend who is very dear to me. As a white male he is familiar, as are you, with the phrase "check your privilege." During a casual discussion with him about the importance of education in modern day America, I was surprised when he told me to check my privilege. My friend places just as much value on education as I do, Mr. Fortgang, and he is even smarter than I am. Still, unlike me, he pursued no further education after high school. At first I argued with him, telling him that I had no privilege to check, that I am a Middle-Eastern woman who faces oppression on a daily basis, and he is a white man who has known no oppression at all. Upon further discussion, I realized I was wrong.

I stood with him, in my huge apartment that my parents pay for, wearing designer clothes that my parents bought me, discussing a topic I was covering in a private college course that had come at no expense to me. I realized that in some areas, I am even more privileged than he is. I have a wealthy family to support me, whereas he had to support not only himself, but his family as well. This opened my eyes to the fact that while one may seem to be at a clear advantage in our modern society, there are many privileges that cannot be identified by one's genetics.

This idea of privilege via wealth is the main focus of the book, *Class: Power, Privilege, and Influence in the United States*. For your convenience, I would like to include the authors' specification of the term "class": "Class may be correctly referred to as the status an individual or group achieves by virtue of its economic strength, the influence among other groups, and the power to affect change in its community of choice" (Brantley et al. 37). Through this definition, we can hopefully both agree that class does bring about a certain amount of privilege, as it is referred to as something that carries with it wealth, social influence, and power. Similar to Dr. McIntosh's piece, this book also contains lists of how one faces class privilege and what those with privilege (referred to by the authors as "dominant group members") can do in order to "even the playing field for those who lack class privilege" (Brantley et al. 38). This source serves two purposes for us in our discussion of privilege, the first being that it allows us to identify privileges that come with a characteristic that is not genetic or permanent. Secondly, it clarifies that while you are correct in stating that privilege is something that can be obtained and at which point absolves a person of his or her oppression, it also makes us aware that one privileged characteristic does not cleanse the whole of oppression.

I feel I need to stress that while class privilege is different from racial or gender-dependent privilege in that it can be applied and removed from an individual throughout a lifetime as one's socioeconomic status changes, it is still a privilege. This further proves that privilege is not permanent, nor is it absolute. Privileges are like living, breathing beings that can change and evolve. They come and go freely from aspects of one's identity, or even at times from the individual as a whole.

Now, with acknowledgment to class privilege, I agree with you. My parents were oppressed, and like your grandparents, they prospered through hard work and dedication. So yes, my family has been oppressed, and I have been oppressed. But my parents have achieved privilege in classism, and I have inherited that privilege myself. Yes, Mr. Fortgang, I am privileged in wealth, and that does take away from my achievements in which my class background is a factor. But, as I am attempting to point out to you, it does not take away from my overall achievements as a human being. I am privileged, yet I am also oppressed. Privilege is not black and white; it is not a simple structure. Privileges are layered throughout an individual's identity. Like Dr. McIntosh, I understand myself to be a member of both groups, the over-privileged and the underprivileged. The validity and existence of a "dual-membership" raises again the question of your privilege, Mr. Fortgang. If you and your family can be considered both privileged and oppressed, then your objections to suggestions of "checking your privilege" are not supported. You argue that your accomplishments are being unfairly disregarded due to your race and gender; however, we now have sufficient evidence to assume that only the achievements made in which your genealogy was a key advantage are lessened in credibility.

At this point, readers may have their reservations about whether or not my understanding and reasoning is sound. You and your supporters, Mr. Fortgang, might be skeptical about my definition of the term

“privilege,” and you may believe a person’s identity to be a solid unit. One may question my claim by asking: “If an individual is privileged in one aspect of their lives won’t that privilege be attached to them always?”. If you are labeled privileged as a man, Mr. Fortgang, won’t you always be seen as privileged? Won’t that male privilege be applied to you for as long as you live? It’s not difficult to see why some may be confused by my argument. The answer is not a simple one. The answer to that question is both yes and no. Yes, Mr. Fortgang, as a man in this day and age, you will always be privileged by your gender. However, it is possible that at some point in your lifetime you will be simultaneously at a disadvantage because of your class, because of your language, because of your political party, because of any number of factors. So while you likely will always carry male privilege with you, at times you may also be a victim to the privilege of others. In this way, your privilege is not bulletproof; it is not absolute. It is simply a benefit, but one that does not guarantee success.

You, as well as the rest of us, must learn to recognize privilege and its effects. We must all train ourselves in identifying this unpredictable thing. In order to achieve the America that your grandparent thought they had found—the land that cares not about race or religion, the land that grants equal protection, equal rights, and equal opportunity—we must teach ourselves to know when we are in the ever-changing presence of privilege. If I may repeat myself once again, Mr. Fortgang, privilege is not a symbol you can attach wholly and indefinitely to any one identity. It is not a sign you can pin on a person that reads, “In all things I am privileged.” It is pieces of a puzzle – a puzzle that spells out the value of money, of that Y chromosome, of blonde hair and blue eyes. You must assign these pieces only where and when they are applicable in a person’s life. You must not permanently brand someone as advantaged, and you must not disregard the term privilege all together.

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*For this essay, students were asked to develop a clear thesis in response to the question, "What is our heritage of war?". Referring to material from a contemporary book, the story of St. Francis, a poem from World War I, and a recent blockbuster film, the writer of this essay offers a compelling critique of the way war has been mythologized in American culture.*

## The Great American Myth

By Kaitlynn Kennedy-Loos

Dr. Woolbright - War

In American culture, soldiers are revered as heroes, the epitome of goodness and honor. Serving in the armed forces is a level of excellence many young people aspire to reach and many parents encourage their children to strive for. Dying for one's country signifies heroism and greatness. Accepted by the American public and perpetuated by the media is the mythic version of war that romanticizes soldiers and justifies senseless cruelty.

In *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, Chris Hedges wrestles with the concepts of mythic reality and sensory reality and argues that sensory reality, not mythic reality, is the true nature of war. He describes sensory reality as seeing events for what they are. Sensory reality allows one to see war as messy and addresses the crimes against humanity that occur during wartime. Sensory reality doesn't allow us to justify the mindless killing of other human beings, and it is for this reason sensory reality isn't appealing. It will show us an innocent civilian who was murdered in the crossfire instead of a savage enemy who was vanquished by an American hero. But the most important concept outlined by Hedges is not the contrast between myth and truth; it is the underlying reasoning behind why this contrast exists. Why, as rational creatures that have an immense understanding of the physical world and its black and white issues, must we create a "myth of war"? Why do we not only accept, but encourage the blurring of the line between what is real and what is imagined? There are two reasons, each manifested in the works *American Sniper* (2014) and "Dulce et Decorum Est."

The first reason behind why we create mythic war has to do with greed. For the same reason that directors put nude scenes in movies, human beings exaggerate war stories. It sells. Chris Hedges calls warfare a business. Clint Eastwood made over \$337 million from *American Sniper* in the United States alone. The film attracted so many because of the glorified image of Chris Kyle that Eastwood created. If, during the film's promotion, Eastwood didn't paint Kyle as a hero who single-handedly made Americans safer, would the film have done as well? Given that most Americans tend to ignore the harsh truths of war, the answer is probably "no." Hedges asserts that sensory reporting does not sell papers or boost ratings while mythic reporting does. Kyle himself was guilty of exaggerating his kill count in an attempt to live up to his title: The Legend. He left his wife and children four times to serve the myth that he was saving his country. His thinking resembles that of St. Francis who, before beginning a life of poverty and service, had

an obsession with knighthood. He believed it was the most honorable position a man could occupy, and it led him to battlefields where he witnessed horrific sights he never forgot. Chris Hedges' theory of mythic war is extremely useful because it sheds light on the harmful habit of romanticizing soldiers. The "American hero" stereotype will continue to inspire Hollywood blockbusters with gross historical inaccuracies, and this will continue to corroborate the positive image Americans have of soldiers.

The second reason we accept mythic war is because it weighs lighter on our consciences. It's easy to accept the act of warfare under the pretense that its purpose is to better the world, to create a safer, freer world for our children. Chris Hedges describes mythic war as fighting absolutes and vanquishing darkness. Mythic war creates a black and white scenario, like a film with a good guy and a bad guy. The bad guy, of course, is always the group or country that does not practice the same democratic principles as the United States. Creating a clear enemy that everyone can strongly unite against makes it simple to root for your country, your team. The heroic narrative perpetuated by the media and Hollywood is manipulative and, therefore, easy to get behind. Hedges explains, "The potency of myth is that it allows us to make sense of mayhem and violent death. It gives a justification to what is often nothing more than gross human cruelty and stupidity" (4). Yet, young men and women still fall for the media's ploy.

In "Dulce et Decorum Est," Wilfred Owen gives this phenomenon a title: "the old lie" (27). The lie consists of ascribing the persona of *American Sniper's* Chris Kyle to the armed forces as a whole and using it to inspire other young men to follow his lead. In reality, being a combat soldier is more like the events in Owen's poem, which tells a story about soldiers in the midst of a battle during World War I. Contrary to the *American Sniper* stereotype of an American soldier-- brawny, fearless, and brave-- Owen describes weak, desperate, fearful men: "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge, / Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs" (1-3). The men are not charging into battle looking for glory; they are turning away in search of safety. They fall under a mustard gas attack, and one individual doesn't manage to get his gas mask on in time. Owen uses horrifying imagery that is characteristic of sensory war when he writes, "If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs" (21-22). He manages to paint a picture that is graphic and devastating, one that would make aspiring soldiers turn away from the job. Owen clearly rejects the tradition of encouraging youth to join the army when he makes this powerful declaration:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori. (25-28)



By Owen declaring that the “old lie” means “sweet and fitting to die for one’s country” (Owen), he is denying society’s romanticized version of war in exchange for a realistic one: sensory war.

Our heritage of war is a romanticized myth that justifies human cruelty and benefits the media. We, as Americans, are only exposed to the side of war that encourages us to root for our country. As outlined in *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, the prospect of vanquishing darkness and spreading democracy is what drives our acceptance of constant warfare. If we were shown graphic images of soldiers suffocating like in “Dulce et Decorum Est,” our opinion of war would be entirely different. We would fight for its end, not its continuation. We are spoon fed the myth of war and an idea of the stereotypical American hero by a media that profits off of our ignorance, as evident in the outstanding amount of money made by *American Sniper* despite its inaccuracies. Realizing that war is not what we are shown by Hollywood is the first step toward putting an end to it, and this is why the distinction between sensory war and mythic war is important.

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*In this eloquent and compassionate essay, the student aptly applies ideas from a foundational text about PTSD to her thesis-driven analysis of two war stories.*

## **The Calamity of Social Ignorance**

**By Clare Nee**

Dr. Liptak – Trauma in Literature and Film

The human experience is characterized by an ongoing cycle of incalculable changes, and how individuals respond to these changes will ultimately sculpt the substructure of their identity. Ideological perceptions are shaped and transmitted through heritage which produces the socio-cultural views that arbitrate the behavioral expectations and roles within a functioning society. These illusive beliefs create a reflection of the self by establishing a connection between personal and communal values, such as ties to religion, family, and social status. Cultural teachings are unconsciously embedded within the human mind, and thus they influence how people think, speak, behave, and perceive the world. Conversely, trauma is characterized by the unspeakable thread of experiences that happen outside of “normal” human behavior. While some people may believe that trauma is an eminent danger to the preservation of heritage and personal identity, in reality, the real danger lies within the pre-existing traditional responses to trauma - invalidation, silence, and isolation. The problematic pattern of such responses are shown in Judith Herman’s book Trauma and Recovery as well as in short stories like “Soldier’s Home” by Ernest Hemingway and “How to Tell a True War Story” by Tim O’Brien. In these two short stories, the pattern of societal responses foreshadows the potential annihilation of self-identity by perilously prolonging a cycle of trauma that hinders all hope of recovery amongst victims. It is imperative that society change these taught responses in order to unveil the dangerous ignorance of stigmas and to bring forth the reality of the pivotal impact that heritage teachings have on determining self-identity, as well as the recovery for trauma victims.

Recovery for trauma victims requires the active restoration of self-identity that can only be achieved through the reconstruction of perceptions, beliefs, and values. One of the most crucial components needed for an individual to recover is a narrative that establishes connections with others to lift the shameful stigmas that are placed on the victims. Judith Herman’s book Trauma and Recovery is one of the first to introduce the history of trauma while combining a series of testimonies that expose the role that heritage plays in perpetuating its own cycle of trauma on individuals within society. This interpretation challenges the work of those critics who have long

assumed that victims were mentally weak by their own doing and could be cured with some electric shocks and scare tactics. While it is true that such aggressive treatments have an undeniably violent impact on individuals, trauma cannot be cured by the infliction of more trauma.

In the past, military members who displayed trauma symptoms were often seen as cowards and were treated inhumanely because their attitudes and behaviors directly negated society's romantic notion of war and depiction of the quintessential valiant soldier. Herman explains this phenomenon by saying, "In the view of traditionalists, a normal soldier should glory in war and betray no sign of emotion . . . The soldier who developed a traumatic neurosis was at best a constitutionally inferior human being, at worst a malingerer and a coward" (21). This quotation accentuates the destructive tendencies that are transmitted through heritage teachings by invalidating the soldiers for not fulfilling the socially constructed expectations of what it means to be a "real" man. It demonstrates how heritage teaches people that to be a "real" soldier, one must be a brave, manly, strong, and unyielding fighter in the presence of danger. Herman emphasizes how these traditional responses of invalidation blatantly disregard individuals' experiences and inhibit the recovery of trauma victims by dehumanizing them with stigmatized perceptions. Although these responses may seem of concern only to a small group of people who have been affected by trauma, it should, in fact, concern all people who care about preserving their own self-identities while living in a corrupted world that is dominated by the influence of cultural teachings.

Societal teachings construct the innate response of silence within individuals by reinforcing the notion that the solution to the existence of these problems is to deny them rather than address them for what they are. While some may argue that society isn't denying the existence of trauma, it is evident that society naively dismisses the impacts of trauma through the taught responses to trauma victims. This idea is shown in the short story "Soldier's Home," written by Ernest Hemingway, which is centered on the life of a former soldier named Krebs, who has recently returned home from war. Krebs morphs his self-identity to fit the ideal image that embodies the following belief projected by the socio-culture: in order to be a valuable member of society, one must alter his own desires to fit the ones that best suit the community. Prior to returning home from war, Krebs's identity was defined by the relationships in his life: he was a son, a brother, a man, and more importantly, he was a soldier fighting with honor and loyalty to

protect his nation with the hopes of bringing pride to his family. Contrasting with Krebs's expectations, he is greeted with neither respect nor honor for his service after he returns home. Instead, he is renounced by his community with an unwavering silence. Hemingway states, "Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie . . . In this way he lost everything" (69-70). This quote exemplifies the consequences of silence by portraying the disconnection between Krebs and his identity. In this sense, the community possesses selective accountability. The people refuse to accept the responsibility for the role they play in the annihilation of a soldier's identity by forcing the cultural teachings onto the younger generation and exposing them to the traumatic nature of war at the expense of their innocence. Krebs' identity erodes as a result of the merciless nature of war, but it is ultimately compromised by the dissention of society's single-minded beliefs that lack all empathy and compassion.

Hemingway's point is that silence is a responding form of invalidation from a community to the returning soldiers after war, and the traumatic effects of these teachings can result in an everlasting catastrophe. These findings have important implications for the broader domain of recovery because they demonstrate the vital need for a supportive environment when dealing with the aftermath of trauma in order to protect the life that still remains. The deprivation of any and all support, validation, and acknowledgement from an individual's community makes recovery seem dubious to the victim. Ultimately what is at stake here is the security of self-identity and an individual's ability to move forward.

The disconnecting response of isolation creates a potential for the annihilation of self-identity for trauma victims because society's rejection causes them to live within the confining walls of their own minds. How the community responds to trauma can ultimately define the momentous difference between an individual's recovery or deterioration. Tim O'Brien's, "How to Tell a True War Story," embodies society's dismissal of trauma when the narrator, a former soldier, tells the story of his own experiences with loss, survivor's guilt, and the witnessing of horrific death. The narrator's experience with the death of his comrade, Curt Lemon, symbolizes the destructive bane of innocence that war imposes on these "men." These young soldiers are not men; they are merely children draped in society's inherently constructed attire of beliefs that contain shoes too large for them to fill. They are forced into a life in which they involuntarily live in a constant state of stress, awaiting the next trauma to react to.

After returning home from war, the community continues to carry on with “normal” life and does not treat the men with the human dignity that they deserved, especially after enduring the unspeakable nature of war. In the short story, O’Brien explains that after speaking about the reality of his war experiences, spectators typically do respond to his ideas regarding society’s dismissal of and failure to accept responsibility for its role in forcibly causing soldiers to endure trauma. However, the response is not helpful to the soldiers. O’Brien reflects on a past comment made by a member of the audience, “What I should do, she’ll say, is put it all behind me. Find new stories to tell” (9). This quotation illuminates the mentality that heritage produces by showing how our culture encourages individuals to forget tragedies of the past because strong people are expected to move forward. It has become common today to dismiss the traumatic events of the past; however, what many people fail to recognize is that these events, no matter how heinous or horrific they may be, are important parts that contribute to personal as well as social histories which can essentially influence what the future may bring.

The works of Judith Herman, Ernest Hemingway, and Tim O’Brien advocate for a radical revision of societal responses to trauma victims. But why should people who have not been affected by trauma care about this? Well, the truth of the matter is that trauma does not have any limitations or biases. There is not one person who is completely protected against its toxic ways. Trauma is an untamable force that implodes aimlessly on the human life and damages everything in its path. After an individual endures such horrific experiences, their prior illusions about cultural beliefs, values, and identity are shattered and lost amongst the wreckage of perception. An irreversible change occurs from trauma and it causes a person to merely transform into a fossil of their heritage, leaving behind the ghost of who they were to be in conflict with the uncertainty of who they are and who they will become. This crucial moment during the aftermath requires the compassion and support of an empathetic social environment in order to preserve the self-identity and the potential recovery of a trauma victim. The standard way of thinking about trauma includes questioning the victim’s credibility and placing them at fault. However, denying an individual’s natural right to emotion - the right to feel pain, confusion, and grief - frames an abstract idea of the context of trauma. Heritage is the perpetrator for teaching these ignorant responses. Society is the bystander that has the choice to either empower or disempower victims, and the individual’s self-identity is the ultimate victim. There is the opportunity for society to be the active bystander and extinguish the shameful stigmas that are

placed on victims. It is urgent that we change these inhumane, inherently taught responses and attitudes towards trauma victims to ones that reflect compassion, empathy, and understanding in order to create a new heritage that will lead humanity in a more prosperous direction and mend the broken mistakes of past traditions.

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*Students in this section were asked to connect a class reading to a movie shown in the First Year Seminar Film Series. In this essay, the writer explores similarities in the stories of Clare of Assisi and Malala Yousafzai and acknowledges the important examples they set for young women today.*

## **The Relevance of Ancient Stories to Modern Struggle**

**By Caroline Petrozzo**

Prof. Collins – Story to Screen

For the First Year Seminar Film Series showing of *He Named Me Malala* on October 11, 2016, I walked into the comfortable environment of the library and watched the narrative of Malala Yousafzai unfold on screen. As I heard her story, I was astounded by her courage and passion to live her life the way she does. She has not had the benefits I have had, to grow up in safe surroundings that enable me to pursue my studies and live my life without fear. Yousafzai, who risked her life to fight for girls' rights to an education even though it had been banned by the Taliban, is one of today's great role models. In this way, she is similar to Clare of Assisi, another strong woman whose story Margaret Carney recounts in the essay, "Clare of Assisi: Bringing Her Story to Light." Clare also became an inspiration for others as she fought for women's rights to live independently and spiritually, instead of being forced to fit the mold that society had created for them. Both women went against societal rules to do what they thought was right for the world. Although they lived hundreds of years apart, Yousafzai and Clare are connected by their rejection of oppression and their dedication to service, and their stories are guideposts for young women across the world.

Malala and Clare were both very young when they began to take their path towards the greater good, proving to young women that age does not need to inhibit one's ability to do incredible things. Malala's father opened up his own school, and she would sit in on his classes from the time she was a toddler. This is where she developed her love for learning, and she, therefore, wished to gain a full education. As time went on, she began to speak out against the oppression women faced as a result of being denied an education in a blog for BBC news under a fake name. Later in an interview, she says, "There's a moment when you have to choose whether to be silent or stand up" and she chose the latter, defying the terrorist leaders of her country and putting herself in danger in order to fight for what she believed in (*He Named Me Malala*). Horrifyingly, at the age of fifteen, she was shot in the head on her way home from school. Malala and her family left their beloved home and fled to find medical care in the safety of England. She has not let this situation stop her from fighting for what she believes is right, which is women being allowed to receive an education equal to men. Malala, by the age of 19, has written a book, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, and continues to visit third world countries, inspiring young girls to continue going to school (*He Named Me Malala*).

In a similar respect, Clare of Assisi was only 18 years old when she began her journey that would allow women to fully serve God. She first heard Francis of Assisi preaching when she was 16 and decided she wanted more for her life. She was inspired and joined him in helping the poor and the outcasts of society. She ran away from her family, but created strong relationships with the other Franciscans and formed a new family of Brothers and Sisters. Clare and her new family would work with the less privileged to understand their way of life while helping them to live one devoted to the Lord. She strove to have this way of living authorized by the Pope, breaking the normal role for women during this time (Carney). Malala and Clare began their journeys at young ages, which shows younger women that neither their age nor gender should limit them from reaching their goals and living their dreams.

These two women also defied rigid societal rules and expectations, refusing to conform to the oppression that denied them freedoms. Strict Taliban rules stated that girls could not attend school any longer than it was necessary for them to learn what was said in the religious books. Many families listened to this and kept their daughters at home to keep them safe. However, Malala would continue to find ways to sneak into school, taking different routes every few days. Additionally, she spoke to people about how men and women are not different and how it is not acceptable to restrict a female's right to learn. She continues to fight this oppression from her home in England and will not stop until girls around the world have access to schooling. This path is quite unusual for a young woman from the Sway Valley, which is clear when Malala states, "But if I had an ordinary father and an ordinary mother, I would have two children by now" (*He Named Me Malala*). She explains that normally girls end up marrying and starting families of their own at very young ages.

Similarly, Clare of Assisi broke away from the mold that society had for her, which was to marry and have a family and be a good wife and mother for her husband and children. According to Sister Margaret Carney, Clare was being educated to prepare her "for a life as a leader of a noble family . . . But nothing about that prospect made her happy. She longed for a radical freedom" (Carney 30). Clare strongly felt that God was calling her to join Francis of Assisi and the brothers who were helping the outliers of society. She cut off her hair and cast away her fancy clothing for plain clothes in order to symbolize her full devotion to God. This was not something that women did and to do so was, Carney explains, "social suicide" (Carney 32), but Clare went through with it anyway. She knew there was more for women than being wives and mothers and continued to spread this belief everywhere. By the time she was very old and dying, she was able to have her way of life approved by the Pope, which was a great achievement, for it allowed women to have an alternative to the normal lifestyle laid out for them by society. These two women were very successful in diverging from the paths society created for them. This is significant for



women everywhere, for it demonstrates that they do not need to submit to fear or oppression but can fight against it and do what they are called to do.

It is important for people to have good role models that motivate them to achieve greatness. Malala Yousafzai and Clare of Assisi lived inspirational lives that prove that age and gender need not inhibit a person's ability to fight for what is right, and that women do not have to surrender to the unjust ideals created for them by their societies. Although these women came from very different places and lived about eight hundred years apart, they are truly very similar. Clare of Assisi began the fight hundreds of years ago, giving women another way of life to follow. Malala continued the struggle by advocating for equal education for, and better treatment of, women. Both devoted their lives to promoting better ones for women and proving that they are ideal role models for anyone to follow. If women who were so limited by familial and societal expectations can change the world in such profound ways, imagine the power that those without such limitations have. These two women have made their mark on me to continue the fight for equality not only for all genders, but for all races, ethnicities, and cultures. Clare may have started the battle long ago, but Yousafzai continues to do her part today. Now it is our time to stand beside her for what we know is just: equality for us all. We have the ability to act and speak without fear, privileges that these two women did not enjoy, and yet, they spoke bravely anyway.

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