RUTGERS

# Dialogues @ RU

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Dialogues @ RU

# INTERNS' FOREWORD

Welcome to Volume 17 of the *Dialogues@RU* journal. Curated by ourselves—an undergraduate editorial board in the Writing Program's *Editing Internship*—this year's volume showcases a variety of topics ranging from the American Dream and economics, to eating habits, drag queens, and many more nuanced topics. The essays that we selected were written by students previously enrolled in the course *Research in the Disciplines*, in which students were asked to write research papers on a topic of their choice. Highly insightful, these essays are both microcosmic of the intellect of Rutgers' student body and an illustration of the intricate synthesis of academic research and creativity that college students produce on a regular basis.

Though the past two years have proven unpredictable and challenging for many students, Rutgers students have continued to demonstrate academic endurance through their commitment to academic research, collaboration, and studies, among other facets of their education. What this internship has demonstrated to us is that amidst a slow transition to normalcy, we can continue to learn and grow as future editors, publishers, authors—or just simply as writers and people.

As student editors in the *Editing Internship*, we were given the opportunity to not only learn about what goes on behind the scenes in the production of a published work, but to be part of this publishing process. As interns, we were involved in selecting the essays found in this volume, editing them, and working closely with the student authors to improve and refine their papers for publication. Reading from a pool of over 350 submissions, our intern team was impressed by the work and expertise many of the essays demonstrated, and later on, we were more impressed by the efforts our student authors put into working with us to ameliorate their papers. Throughout all phases of the editorial process, we worked collaboratively with the student authors and with each other in order to produce the most perfected essays possible. We are pleased and proud of the final product and cannot wait for all of you to read these outstanding essays.

Reading and editing student papers has been such a rewarding experience. Not only were we able to practice and utilize our writing and analytical skills, but we also earned the chance to learn from other strong writers. Collaborating and conversing with our student authors has enriched our academic and internship experience; it has strengthened our communication and decision-making skills, and our ability to sustain interpersonal relationships. Collaboration and hard work are necessary life skills we will bring with us after graduation and into our careers, whether we go into publishing or not! From email etiquette to devising creative ideas, we believe that we have gained more value from this experience than our wonderful and cherished student writers. Working with other interns has also shown us the importance of cultivating a productive environment and finding inspiration from other interns' keen ideas. Most of all, Professor Tracy Budd, head of the *Dialogues@RU* journal, has taught us everything we need to know about publishing and the diligence required to produce a worthwhile product. We would like to thank her for her continuous guidance throughout the internship and her dedication to the journal and to us. We are grateful to have had such an experience, and we will utilize these transferable skills in our work, personal relationships, and, most importantly, throughout our lives.

# EDITORIAL BOARD

# CONTENTS

**Elizabeth Huettl**

# The Cultural and Environmental Significance of the Street Food Market in Vietnam


## ABSTRACT

*A conceptual approach considers the implications of street food culture in Vietnam. The Vietnamese street food market is examined as a mode for feeding large urban populations, maintaining Vietnamese cultural tradition, and providing a sustainable job market for a diverse array of Vietnamese people. While street food holds an established tradition, its practices are under scrutiny for presenting food safety, environmental, and zoning law issues. As a result, policies that suppress traditional methods of street food preparation and vending are beginning to appear. The significance and value of fighting these policies is considered as a method for maintaining valuable, core traditions that are foundational to Vietnam's national identity and sustainability.*


## INTRODUCTION

With the American celebrity Anthony Bourdain's introduction of Vietnamese street food into Western American culture, Asian street food vending became a popular source of glamourization and scrutiny from the Western world. Bourdain took an initial trip to Vietnam in 2002 and came back raving about the infamous Vietnamese noodle soup, Phở, and the intrinsic qualities of the street food experience. After his trip, Bourdain shares, "…This is the way so many of the great meals of my life have been enjoyed. Sitting in the street, eating something out of a bowl that I'm not exactly sure what it is. And scooters going by … I feel like an animal. Where have you been all my life? Fellow travelers, this is what you want. This is what you need. This is the path to true happiness and wisdom" ("Bourdain Off The Cuff" 1).

After this, Western media painted Vietnamese food vending neighborhoods as earthy, slightly primitive yet intriguing societies that exist as special hidden secrets of Asia. Though Bourdain's corporeal street food experiences reflect a true appreciation for Vietnamese culture, the labor-intensive preparation, and global urban food culture, others do not see beyond the superficial, exoticized popular media version of this narrative.

In truth, Vietnam's street vendor identity is a long-established, authentic, and dependable system. It is more than a bowl of soup; it is part of the foundation for Vietnamese society. In a 2012 study, scholar Annette M. Kim explored the value of street vendors along sidewalks and in public space within Ho Chi Minh City districts. She writes, "[S]idewalk life is a longstanding part of the [Vietnamese] culture, that vendors provide low-priced useful goods and services, and that people need a way to earn a living" (Kim 227). Earning a living in this job sector is also relatively reasonable given that street food financially supports new vendors who have limited resources to do business. Despite these well-established benefits, public health experts and government officials are cracking down on street food's allegedly problematic practices. Common criticisms mention food safety violations. Other critics warn of the safety and public health risks of the waste's pollution (Vargas). Regarding zoning laws, Ho Chi Minh City officials have been working "to prohibit sidewalk vending through official policies and legislation" in order to make roads safer and clearer as well as more transportation-friendly (Kim 226). These policies pose a clear issue for street vendors, many of whom have lives that revolve around their craft. Vietnamese business owners may struggle to satisfy expectations for business and property management that do not consider their current status. The country has developed street food as an almost autonomous economy and culture for a reason. Its operations, though flawed, have sustained an entire population for decades. Although "imposed health and safety regulations on street food practices are crucial, Vietnam is a low income [nation] that can make meeting these standards difficult" (Vargas). Adjusting to policies potentially more suitable for higher income and more developed nations is difficult for these vendors. They have created a successful system within their identity as a developing country, and it has brought immense pride to the nation. This grand impact marks the street food lifestyle as a defining characteristic of Vietnam. Within a bigger context of street food across Asia, the market influences numerous types of public pedestrian spaces. However, a complex problem exists where certain components of its tradition are being subdued by the world's intentions to adapt to contemporary views. This may be wiping out a crucial part of Vietnam's cultural, social, and structural identity.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND DEFINITION OF STREET FOOD WITHIN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Street food culture is best known for its presence within the urban and populated pedestrian spaces of the developing world. It makes up a large part of many countries' diets and is often the center of people's social life (Samapundo 79). A viable job market, "the sale of street foods supports the livelihoods of millions of the urban poor and can make a sizable contribution to the economies of developing countries" (Samapundo 79). Vendors give back to their communities by sharing food. Customers boost their local businesses, and the beautiful cycle continues. While it is definitely a more complicated dynamic, the process is practical. It seems to help communities within developing countries find their economic niche. Street dishes are often based on local ingredients as well, so there exists a cheap, accessible way to obtain materials. All of this contributes to the allure of starting a street food business. The Netflix docuseries, *Street Food: Asia*, shines light on the ground-level subtleties of street food markets across the Asian diaspora. Produced by Western directors and videographers, its contribution to the media demonstration of authentic Asian life is substantial and necessary. Snails and broken rice are distinguished as delicacies in the street market sector. In the episode titled "Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam," a Vietnamese street food chef shares, "I'm so thankful to the snails. Thanks to them, I was able to put my son through school." The unwavering dependency and confidence in this job sector speaks to the significance of its success. A large contributor to its achievement is the component of public space; the public space influences what kind of food is being sold and how. The food "exists in a variety of forms depending on where and when it is being sold, cooked and consumed" (Stutter 2). Street vendor cultures and methods can vary neighborhood-to-neighborhood, city-to-city, and especially country-to-country. Individual street food vendors contribute their own flavor of street food culture to their community, proudly announcing signature dishes and techniques to make known their long history in the business. Selling food unique to these places "has … become a way to preserve cultural and social heritage and to stimulate tourism" (Simona Alfiero et al. 2462). Because each street food vendor location across the globe holds its own identity, it is not viable to try to come up with a singular street food culture identity. However, defining its core values, benefits, and drawbacks gives an idea of the impact of this nuanced cultural phenomenon.

## VIETNAM'S STREET DESIGN LANDSCAPE FOR VENDING STREET FOOD

Vietnam has worked to sustain and proudly demonstrate its architectural identity for much of its recent history. Specifically, the country has had to substantially negotiate its street design plan with the introduction of Western design aesthetics. Cities and towns have been adapting since before the large development of street food in the early 1900s. However, a much more structured evolution of Western architecture influence on Vietnamese design has happened within the span of the early 1900s till the present 2020s. This shift in building and street planning has changed the landscape for street food spaces. By the time the Vietnam War conflict began in the mid-to-late 1950s, the urban landscape was changing by necessity. Due to the war's events, "the increased number of American troops in the South … led to the expansion of cities and towns, in order to house the allies' officials and the peasants, who were uprooted from their villages by armed conflicts" (Huynh 211). The solutions for housing all of these people, Western and Vietnamese alike, were largely influenced by Westerners already in Vietnam. Western architecture was a reasonable frame of reference for expansion because its design is often characterized by larger square footage within buildings and generally wider, more open outside areas (Ngoc 10). In addition to buildings, streets were affected by this expansive ideology. This integration of outside work created an evident dynamic between Western and Vietnamese design that created an incredible amalgamation of styles. In late 1900s Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc says, the city was not completely re-developed into Western structure, but rather, there appeared a "coexistence rather than elimination" (Ngoc 6). As a special case, certain Vietnamese street sections, such as Hanoi's previously mentioned 36 Streets district, remained distinctly Vietnamese with their central, condensed structure. To this day, the 36 Streets maintain their old quarter history and structure as an intimate street vendor trade and craft-specific location (Cohen). However, in many of Vietnam's large cities, (where Westerners are located as a result of war, tourism, and colonization) there is a "diversity of commercial streets", and districts, especially in areas such as "the old downtown of Ho Chi Minh City" (Ngoc 3). This reflects the special ethnic diversity of populations in these locations. Older Vietnamese style is mixed into the modern design. Some street buildings and roadside structures have "traditional motifs (phoenix, bamboo)" (Huynh 209). Others have higher-rise Western buildings. The streets specifically have differing widths and feelings, as Ngoc points out. She associates "typical streets with the characteristics represented for each district" (Ngoc 4). She distinguishes certain combinations of architecture that each hold their own architectural identity. They include, "buildings with low-rise, Western architecture", "buildings with mixed height, row houses, Chinese architecture", and "building with low-rise, row houses, local architecture", among others (Ngoc 4). Each area seemingly has its own architectural identity. The desire to maintain traditional design is clear in the way these categories are presented. From the Vietnamese, there has not been much of a resistance to change but more an acceptance of Western aesthetics as key players in the new mixed Vietnamese style. This remains true for Vietnam's architectural past and present. Huynh shares that, "[w]hile the drive for modernity was enhanced by contacts with the West and new technology, tradition was also a focus, to retain national spirit" (Huynh 208). Vietnam is an overall successful example of an adaptable country, a nation that understands how settings for culture can change. While conflicts between Vietnam and the West in other parts of history are nothing short of gruesome, Vietnamese people remain committed to surviving as a people and as a culture. Street food vending is a strong effort to maintain national unity alongside foreign influences. Amongst the nation's evolving and diversifying population, Vietnamese street food chefs now share distinct Vietnamese culture on an aesthetic and architectural backdrop of cultural fusion.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND DEFINITION OF STREET FOOD WITHIN VIETNAM'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

Vietnamese street food has a strong cultural foundation; its vendors have found beautifully unique, idiosyncratic techniques to put popular, national dishes on the map with a distinct, Vietnamese identity. The diversity and establishment of traditions between street food shops, especially within markets in the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, implies a long history. However, Vietnamese street food is much newer than conventionally assumed. *Culture Exchange* writer, Mark, shares that street food "all began to develop in the early 20th century when a lone entrepreneurial spirit … decided that they would sell soup around their neighborhood carried by a yoke. A trend began in which street sellers could effectively access more customers" (Mark). The type of street food "yoke" referenced by Mark is a long stick that is supported on one shoulder, held there by one or two hands. From each end of the stick, strings hang down to hold baskets that contain goods for transport. The yoke helped early street food vendors reach many districts and neighborhoods by allowing foot travel. In the northern Vietnamese city of Hanoi, however, reaching each street and neighborhood in the district was a formidable challenge. Hanoi's old quarter district has a famous name of 36 Streets, and it boasts a chaotic urban design (Phuong and Groves 121). The 36 Streets district is known for its street trade, and reaching customers is most effective when one can access each section. However, being a mobile vendor requires materials, and "carrying enough soup and noodles was back-breaking work … [M]obile vendors realized that if your food was good enough customers would instead come to you. Street stands started popping up outside homes and on the side of busy roads" (Mark 1). Today, street vendors have expanded on that idea and have adapted from the old vending and transport techniques. Mobile vending still exists, but vendors are now "selling from the back of small vehicles likes motorcycles or pick-up trucks" (World Health Organization 22). These newer inventions allow for much safer and easier mobile vending across districts. More popular, however, are "portable/makeshift food stalls … and permanent streetside food vendors" (World Health Organization 22). Many street food sellers have realized that customers genuinely do have the potential to find food that is worth seeking. Vietnamese street food is not only worth seeking, but it is inherently Asian. While street food vending in urban Vietnamese areas may be relatively new, the cooking ingredients and the eating traditions are Vietnamese to the core. The way this street food "is produced, painstakingly prepared and where it's eaten all play a crucial role in maintaining a cooperative society" (Mark). It has become an expectation that Vietnamese street vendors know their way around a cleaver knife and can identify between ten different types of noodles. This smooth, well-oiled machine that is the street food world creates pride and an intensifying sense of identity within Vietnamese people. In most Vietnamese street food markets, "[t]he types of foods and drinks include: pho and mien; noodles; wet rice scroll, sticky rice; sticky rice cake, coffee; cream; beer; and instantly cooked foods such as chicken, poultry and beef" (World Health Organization 22). Often, these foods are served in generous portions and are almost always made fresh on the spot. This distinctly Vietnamese way of sharing food and company is a celebration of the maintenance of Vietnamese culture post-colonization from the French in the 1800s. While there is much French influence in contemporary Vietnamese cuisine, the food on the streets of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Hue, Hoi An, and many other cities holds an exquisitely pure stake in the Vietnamese cultural model. On a grander scale, Mark shares, "Street food in Vietnam provides an important outlet that bridges the often large divide between home life and the wider community. The Vietnamese are much stronger because of this" (Mark 1). Sharing intimate parts of one's home culture is a very sacred practice in almost any context. By proudly demonstrating special family traditions amongst the public, Vietnamese people find comfort in their position within the larger Vietnamese societal context. They find a way to maintain self efficacy, and this motivational piece usually improves any system of people.

## THE CRITICISM AND CHALLENGES OF VIETNAMESE GLOBAL STREET FOOD

When considering the significance and history of these Vietnamese public spaces, critics acknowledge their special qualities but often also call attention to some of the street food market's glaring flaws. The most frequently studied and criticized component of street food is its food safety practices. Critics argue that street food is made in environments and settings that are "unacceptable" locations for preparing food (Hanashiro, Agnes, et al.). In 2009, The Food and Agriculture Organization noted that "there are many and varied contamination and risk factors involved in this [street food] sector, in urban and suburban areas. These include, limited hygiene (also personal), inadequate access to potable water supplies, garbage disposal and unsanitary environmental conditions (FAO 2009)." The discourse surrounding these cultural standards is often driven by Western, Euro-centric researchers and organizations. Western scholars often study street food in foreign locations such as Asia and South America to highlight the contrasts between different groups' cultural standards and expectations. These studies often point out larger, fundamental problems in Vietnamese society. As an example, one study in the *Food Control* journal of 2016 criticized developing countries' education levels for causing such detrimental food safety issues. The study examined multiple Vietnamese populations' personal associations with food safety, and researchers found that "women are traditionally responsible for cooking and child care in Vietnam and generally have lower education and skill levels. As a consequence these women are more likely to be involved in informal sectors such as street food vending" (Samapundo al. 81). In general, researchers tend to attribute unsafe food handling practices to lack of education, referring to both formal academic instruction and food business training (Samapundo, 81). However, changing an entire population's perspective on something like food safety and professional culinary standards is not something that would happen overnight. It is a future task to consider. Currently, street food has remained successful despite these food safety challenges, and the risks have not deterred the market from positively influencing communities.

Aside from the hygiene and food safety issues of street food, there are other environmental points that pose issues to researchers regarding street food practices. Many critical researchers look for urban signs of underdevelopment and lack of modernization as a partial result of 'old' cultures such as street food markets. Two studies in the early 2000s found that economists and commerce historians often see street food vending as "tainting … the city image" (Bromley 1998). Additionally, street vendors are seen to cause "traffic congestion and creat[e] unfair competition for local businesses" (Bromley 1998). Ms. Linh, as part of the Changchun Institute for Urban and Rural Planning, shared thoughts on street vendor practices' effect on pollution and urban decay in Asian cities. Her claim is that "[s]ometimes street foods can be the reason for the polluted environment because the bad behaviours of sellers and the buyers, they throw rubbish on the road and in the lakes…" (Stutter 108). Environmental protection is an enormously popular topic amongst the emerging population of young professionals in 2022. As Generation Z begins to fight global warming, reducing pollution on the street and in bodies of water becomes essential (Romanova, 1). Though Linh's point about the amount of waste that comes from street markets is controversial, it is hard to argue. This is the case with many of these criticisms. While they are harsh, they are mostly backed by scientific evidence. The conflict between these critical results and the strong cultural pride that street food vendors have for their practice creates a complex problem.

## CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES AFFECTING STREET FOOD CULTURE TRADITIONS

Many health and safety organizations around the world are picking up on this discourse and taking matters into their own hands. By addressing each of the specific issues raised by critical researchers, these institutions are systematically working to change the way the street food market operates, for better or for worse. The World Health Organization (WHO) is a large player in the fight to regulate street food vending. To first address the notorious food safety issues in 2006, it quickly "adopted the five keys to safer food, i.e. keep clean, separate raw and cooked foodstuff, cook thoroughly, keep food at safe temperatures and use safe water and raw materials" (WHO 2010). In acknowledging these important components, the organization expressed a commitment to maintain these standards and "integrate them into the street food sector" (WHO 2010). The success and impact of this legislation is still being determined. However, American school teacher and frequent world traveler, Tracey Whitesell, commented in a written interview that she has not seen much effect from these policies. She has observed a lack of commitment to cleanliness and organization on Ho Chi Minh City streets in the last 20 years. Whitesell shared,

> …I have vivid memories of a small food stand inside the zoo in Saigon (HCMC). It was very informal looking, very porous like there was no boundary between the walkway and the stand. On the side of the stand, a young girl was washing dishes in a soapy basin next to a cat that meandered about. The sidewalk wasn't the cleanest. It was terribly hot. People sat on these little plastic stools eating food by the stand. It seemed so fluid and impermanent. I had no appetite to eat there! (Whitesell)

To tackle other issues about zoning and license regulation, the WHO and other institutions added more legislation in 2012 that is mentioned in its handbook copy of *Regional consultation on safe street foods*. The WHO stated the following:

> The vendor would need to obtain a license and abide by all technical instructions and laws. The license should be issued based on the conformity of the vendor with regard to standards for the storage and preparatory area, utensils and food processing equipment, transport and carriage (24).

The challenge for Vietnam lies in enforcing these licensing standards because there is a disconnect between the actions of local officials and the demands of higher powers. However, many developing countries do not have a choice but to default to these local health authorities because resources are considerably limited. The WHO took this into consideration in 2012 and stated that "[e]nforcement of legislation and laws should be the responsibility of the local health authorities. Punitive actions could comprise on-the-spot fines, revoking of license/permission, and severe penal action by mobile courts …" (24). On-the-spot fines tend to create unnecessary person-to-person conflict, and the introduction of mobile courts usually delays the process when handling local issues such as street vendor status. However, the WHO created this piece of legislation to work with developing street vending countries in hopes that local governments would have significant influence. Surprisingly, evidence exists that some districts are successfully implementing zoning policies. Whether they are being followed is another question. In her study of zoning regulations in action within smaller Ho Chi Minh City neighborhoods, Annette M. Kim found that "[s]ome local wards have taken to painting lines on the pavement to apportion space between parking, sidewalk vending, and pedestrian throughways" (227). The painted lines on Ho Chi Minh City streets literally and figuratively symbolize the Vietnamese government's intention to separate the street food trade from other 'developed' activities of the mobile, pedestrian world. It is a strong statement that reflects Vietnam's and many countries' desire to follow Western contemporary health and safety attitudes. The act of punishing street vendors for failing to conform to new urban standards implies the greater task of bridging the gap between Vietnam's historical identity and its new one.

## THE PROGRESSING ETHNOCIDE OF VIETNAMESE STREET FOOD'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

The depth of the Vietnamese street food trade and its contribution to Vietnamese global,  economic standing has been established. However, a discussion that is underrepresented in global discussion is street food's impact on Vietnamese social and personal identity. It is difficult to use research data to substantiate a claim about the Vietnamese perspective because, in the academic world, "[l]ittle attention has been paid to the sustainability or social contributions of street food, illustrating a clear lens through which street food can be explored" (Stutter 10). This is sad because arguably, one of the most important parts of researching this topic is hearing the voice of the Vietnamese people. There are wonderful nuggets of information scattered about the internet discussing what it is like to live on the ground in Vietnam. Finding these anecdotes truly demonstrates how much more Vietnamese locals know about the activities of urban Vietnamese life than the average tourist. In the "Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam" episode of the Netflix docuseries, *Street Food: Asia*, Vietnamese Chef and Restaurateur Nikky Tran speaks on the street food lifestyle and its importance to the rhythms of Ho Chi Minh City life. There are clips interspersed of her walking through Vietnamese night markets between video snippets of aesthetic Vietnamese city motifs. Tran shares,

> … When you talk about Saigon, you're talking about a unique culture. It's very chaotic. It's constantly changing. But it's also very laid back at the same time. There's a culture of eating outside, drinking outside, hanging out outside … And in the city of ten million people, almost one million make a living by selling on the street. So, street food is a vital part of Saigon ("Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam").

This way of life creates essential social structures in Asia. People know who to go to for good food. The stereotype about the old Asian woman on the street corner who has her recipes perfected is not too far off the mark. Whitesell shares from her travels, "I visited HCMC about 7 years ago … many people used the street as their kitchen. Why get their house hot when they could … eat on the street? Or spend hours, simmering pho broth, when the auntie down the street had it perfected? It was so popular and clearly a way of life" (Whitesell). The "auntie down the street" holds a special connotation to the timeless feeling of the street food experience. People do not go to the auntie who cooks perfect noodles because she dictates the entire eating atmosphere. Rather, street food customers seek out these people, these culinary masters, because their food has become an integral part of being present and mindful and appreciating the city for what it is.

Vietnamese people hold an unmatched devotion to this craft and respect for the life it creates. The street food chef previously mentioned from the docuseries who specializes in cooking snails shares a very profound thought in her voiceover. She says, snails "carried me and my family through hard times. I will never give them up" ("Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam"). What would Vietnamese people do without this? How would they recalibrate their entire lives after the abolishment of this job sector? The new zoning policies and laws that are forcing street food vendors to go inside or stay off the roads are going to subsequently uproot an entire culture and shock it into unknown territory. Although it is important to acknowledge that this legislation does have potential to benefit food processes and increase safety, it would not just be the market that is affected. The feeling of the streets would be different. There would be less social life, less vibrant energy from conversation and the demonstration of craftsmanship. There would be few tourists, much fewer foreigners experiencing the real feel of the city. As we observe a progressing ethnocide, Vietnamese people are forced to consider that their true history and identity are being challenged. The community looks elsewhere for finances and social happiness, but there exists no viable path to a new journey. Vietnam exists as Vietnam because the true passion for street food remains alive.

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**Martha Afflu**

# The Effects of Shifts in Creative Culture on West African Immigrants


## ABSTRACT

*Creative culture is encompassed by a variety of facets ranging from music to language. When an individual moves from one environment to another, they also shift their whole culture. This paper researches the relationship between creative culture shift and identity on a West African American immigrant. This research is about the differences in West African and American creative culture and how migration can affect one's identity due to the shift in creative culture. The paper touches on how beneficial it is to a West African American immigrant to effectively balance both creative cultures in their identity as it presents them with new perspectives and an array of opportunities. There is also a discussion of some practices West Africans have learned that help them to keep in touch with their West African identity and the phenomenon of one creative culture eventually dominating an individual's identity. This research will try to communicate the struggles West African American immigrants face in dealing with the pressure to conform whilst simultaneously holding firm to their West African roots without being stagnant.*


## INTRODUCTION

Culture is distinctive to each country and the foundation of culture is built based on creativity. Creativity and culture are mediums of self-expression and representation. Therefore, one could argue that creativity is embedded in culture as it is a way for countries and their people to express and present themselves in society. Creative culture refers to the facet of culture that encompasses the elements: music, fashion, literature, and films. Felix-Kingsley Obialo, a Nigerian with a PhD in educational evaluation, claims that "since culture encapsulates a people's way of life, creativity becomes pertinent in such people's understanding and interpretation of their existence" (2863). Since creative culture in West African and American society is undoubtedly built on different foundations of beliefs, lifestyle, and traditions, there are various distinctions that separate the two cultures.

In today's society, there has been an increase in immigration which has led to individuals having to adjust to a completely different creative culture. According to an article written by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), African immigrants made up 3.7 percent of all immigrants with about one-third migrating from West Africa. When an individual migrates from one country to another, they experience a shift in creative culture due to the contrasts in the migrated country's culture - music, literature, social experiences, fashion, cinema, etc. - from the individual's original country's culture. West African immigration to the United States has been rapidly increasing, leading to many West African immigrant youths having to adapt to a foreign creative culture. West African immigrant youth denotes the "youth from seventeen countries comprising the Western Africa geographic region - Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, St. Helena, and Togo" (Watson & Knight-Manuel 281). The United States is a figurative melting pot of diverse cultures, making it all the more challenging for West African immigrants to resist immersion into the different creative cultures surrounding them and not lose sight of their West African identity.

This paper will argue that West African immigrants' attempts to balance both creative cultures prove futile as they eventually lose touch with their authentic ethnic culture because they attempt to fit into the new social environment. Even though West African immigrants develop habits to combat identity crises and firmly hold onto a semblance of their ethnic culture, their identities are still affected by the shift in creative culture.

This paper will attempt to analyze cases that are all extensions of the question: how are West African immigrant youth's identity affected by the shift in creative culture? In the first section, "The Struggle with Bicultural Identity Due to Differences and Shifts in Creative Culture," I will examine the dissimilarities between West African and American creative culture and the effects it has on West African immigrants' identities. I will also include some of the habits of West African immigrants' that make it possible for them to balance their bicultural identity. The next section, "External Factors' Effect on Self-Identity," will discuss the disconnect between West African immigrant youth and their families and society. I will explore the development of West African immigrant identity and the impact of the shift in creative culture on immigrants' relationship with family and society. The third section, "Loss of Ethnic Identity," will examine the imbalance of a bicultural identity that leads to the prominence of one creative culture over another in a West African immigrant's identity. It will also include a discussion of the  consequences of losing one's ethnic identity. These sections will provide the reader with an insight into the battle West African immigrants face with their identity when they migrate to an unfamiliar environment.

For this paper, I will use a sociological framework to make my case about how the change in creative culture affects West African youths. I will also be utilizing Sylvia Xiaohua Chen et al.'s concept of bicultural identity integration. Their paper, "The Role of Dialectal Self and Bicultural Identity Integration in Psychological Adjustment," will be utilized as a lens through which I will explain the notion of dual identity and some of the struggles individuals with this identity face.

West African immigrants must rethink their current identity to accommodate both creative cultures. As they attempt to integrate both creative cultures into their identity, they first must understand who they are - their ethnic identity - and what elements of the new creative culture they wish to incorporate into their identity to create a complete bicultural identity. However, in some cases, the resulting identity can result in adversities in other aspects of a West African immigrant's life. These consequences - loss of sense of community and development of a 'problematic' identity - are the products of the use of 'too much' creativity in the molding of one's (West African immigrants) bicultural identity.

## THE STRUGGLE WITH BICULTURAL IDENTITY DUE TO DIFFERENCES AND SHIFTS IN CREATIVE CULTURE

Migration from West Africa to America is inevitably associated with the development of a bicultural identity due to changes in creative culture. Music and cinema are creative components of each country's culture that are uniquely defined and have a great influence on the development of an individual's identity. Both creative cultures "link[s] the past and the present, and preserve[s] the cultural roots" of the people by exhibiting traditions and beliefs through their crafts (Vilarinho & Christiaans 842). The influence from each country's cultural roots are what develops these distinct components. The components that make up music and cinema are distinctive to American culture and West African culture "since each country's culture encapsulates a people's way of life" and it is evident that both countries' ways of living are not equal (Obialo

2864). When West African immigrants migrate to the United States, they recognize the distinctions in the musical components. This is because traditional West African music is "a cultural activity which reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal relationships" (Munyaradzi & Zimidzi 193). However, American music is more of a different form of entertainment with components that are sometimes frowned upon in West African culture. For instance, in West African culture, the individuals usually make a performance out of the music as the music is a recreational activity in itself. American music is the polar opposite of West African music, especially when it pertains to the audience and content. Additionally, most of the mainstream songs in American culture contain less complicated rhythms as many of the more popular songs possess the same messages and are usually accompanied by very provocative music videos and live performances which are usually considered almost as taboos in West African music (Munyaradzi & Zimidzi 193).

The attributes found in American music are also present in their films. American films "are a very sophisticated artform involving highly skilled craftsmen and technological know-how" (Pitkethly 2:13-2:28). West African filmmakers, on the other hand, are still learning to catch up to the American standard of craftsmanship. West African cinema and American cinema are very different in terms of content and acting techniques,though West Africans have adopted some elements of American cinema over the years. For instance, Computed-generated imagery (CGI) - the ability to use technology to enhance imagery - is much more advanced in America but is being adopted and learned in West Africa filmmaking. The movie content that American cinema presents sometimes leaves West Africans shocked when they migrate to the United States. American films are set "to truly engage[d] the audience, pure entertainment" but sometimes the kind of 'entertainment' presented in American films leaves West African immigrants doubting their ethnic and racial identities due to the many negative portrayals of them in the American cinema (Pitkethly 2:07 - 2:12). In American films, West African immigrants are likely to see people of their skin color held to lower standards frequently or the roles cast to Africans being extremely derogatory.

Despite the negative portrayals of West African immigrants on screen, African immigrants, especially those that are interested in the musical field, can choose to absorb both countries' musical techniques to create a unique sound for themselves. Each country has a different understanding of what music is and how it relates to the country's culture. As Munyaradzi and Zimidzi stated, "music is regarded as an art that is difficult to understand as it is usually influenced by many attributes" (193). Exploring the functions and differences of both cultures' music "presents the person with a complex challenge of integrating elements from different cultures," providing West African immigrants with unique perspectives and conceptions as they look beyond their ethnic creative culture and attempt to combine both sounds to create versatility in their craft (Chen et al. 61). Similar to how a West African immigrant musician might combine their West African and American knowledge of music to create unique sounds, so can West African immigrants aspiring to be actors and movie directors. In The Met, one individual said, "In my films, I'm using modern methods, today's methods! But we still use our inherited methods, so they are not limited to the past" (Biro). Combining knowledge learned from both cultures will likely improve a West African immigrant's versatility. This versatility allows them to adapt to any situation and increase creativity. Properly balancing both cultures contributes to West African immigrants' self-identity as they try to find a place for themselves in the new social environment. The process of utilizing knowledge from two cultures' techniques can shake the foundation of a West African's identity as West African immigrants absorb American music and cinema. Since "creativity is then shaped culturally and socially, through interactions between the mind and behavior in a cultural space" West African immigrants will experience a shift in creativity as they migrate to new social spaces that are different from where they came (Obialo 2864). West African immigrants have to navigate through new systems of traditions and beliefs and that pressure leaves them disconnected to who they are and confused about how they fit into society.

Fashion is a form of self-expression that is individual but influenced by culture and is a vital aspect of each country's creative culture. Clothing styles are crucial to the realization of a West African immigrant's identity. It is of no surprise that one major contrast the West African immigrants realize about the clothing when they first migrate to the United States is the level of conservativeness. Usually, West African fashion airs on the side of conservative looks compared to most American styles, mostly due to differences in culture and upbringing. As Vilarinho and Christiaans mentioned in their text, "dressing well and wearing exclusive garments has become crucial for people in search of identity, distinction, and individuality" (841). West African countries have traditional prints and unique elements that encompass their fashion and help to define the individuals of the culture. As West African immigrants try to fit into the American society, they succumb to fashion trends and lose sight of their self-identity and creative ethnic clothing sense. West Africans can tap into their creativity to aid in the balance of their ethnic clothing, as it is a representation of an aspect of their identity. Failing to remember who they are as individuals can be detrimental to the development of West African immigrants' self-identity as they grapple with the blurred lines created by the differences in American culture. This is because "ethnic identity is one domain of identity exploration" that is very important if a West African desires to embrace their bicultural identity (Purgason et al. 207). West African immigrants are immediately assigned a bicultural identity when they move to the United States. It is up to them to discover creative ways to battle the identity crisis they are likely to face. Eventually, West African immigrants realize that "clothing and fashion represent something like a border or a margin between the public external person and a private internal identity" (Vilarinho & Christiaans 841) and serve as a medium of self-expression and symbol of acceptance of their identity. Whatever clothing style they develop is a representation of their identity. Ideally, someone with a bicultural identity should have their clothing style represent both cultures. "Bicultural individuals' tendency to tolerate contradicting elements" stems from the notion that West African and American cultures are too polar to be homogenized (Chen et al. 62). However, this paper begs to differ, as the right conditions can provide individuals with a bicultural identity the opportunity to uncover a balance between the two creative cultures by whatever means. Some creative ways that West African immigrants come up with to battle this dual identity issue in fashion is to integrate their ethnic culture into any fashion style they adopt in America. For instance, they could pair a pair of jeans with a kaftan shirt with a West African print. This way, West African immigrants do not feel too different while preserving their ethnic culture and developing their identity. Another way for West African immigrants to preserve their ethnic fashion is to visit African tailors with the knowledge of the creativity in both cultures' fashion. This allows West African immigrant to gain "an African perspective on clothing and fashion (Vilarinho & Christiaans 841). West African immigrants are allowed to represent their authentic ethnic culture through their creative clothing styles in social settings such as churches or other social gatherings. They can find a connection and balance between their past and present cultures and utilize the many benefits of embracing their bicultural identity. Nevertheless, this paper cannot fail to mention how American culture glorifies certain types of fashion trends such as 'the naked dress fashion trend' which is frowned upon in West African societies. Though they were raised in an environment where certain clothing styles are not accepted, upon moving to the United States, West African immigrants often discover the freedom of dressing as whoever and whatever they want through the creativity of their fashion ideas. This level of freedom is accompanied by pressure to decide on one cultural identity or balance both.

Language is the foundation for literature and is a vital element in an individual's identity as it serves as a means for communication and self-expression. Language is rooted in the "concept of creativity" and "is reflective of a people's cultural viewpoint," and the accumulation of traditions and expression (Obialo 2863). "Africa is one of the greatest concentrations of linguistic diversity in the world" with Nigerians alone speaking over 250 different languages (Onyeakagbu). Thus, many West African immigrants coming into the United States are multilingual. They also usually have distinguishable accents. When utilized correctly, West African multilingualism can be very important in crafting one's identity and improving one's creativity, as multilingualism broadens one's perspective. With a multilingual identity, West African immigrants can bring different viewpoints to the table when they combine their past and present cultures and look through the lens of different spoken languages. For instance, West African immigrants could utilize the concept of, "... a 'Sankofan education' across Akan and Yoruban culture" or other writings which would improve their linguistic versatility. (Watson and Knight-Manuel 286). Learning to balance both linguistic techniques in the two creative cultures broadens one's perspectives and knowledge and allows West African immigrants to construct a wholesome identity. Possessing a wholesome identity provides West African immigrants with the opportunity to be "able to integrate two cultural or social identities" (Chen et al. 62). Equipped with different languages, West African immigrants can include this in whatever they do which sets them apart from their colleagues. Despite all these benefits of speaking multiple languages, West African immigrants often shun their ethnic language and work extremely hard to alter their accents in order to avoid negative stereotypes surrounding their ethnicity as they "seek to meet [their] basic need for inclusion" (Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Bretones 634). "When bicultural individuals attempt to manage the languages of their new culture and culture of origin, they may find features of these two languages contradictory. For instance, the two languages are distinct in their linguistic history, properties of tense and voice, pronunciation, and script" (Chen et al.). Some creative habits that West African immigrants can develop to encounter these stereotypes are by educating people about the uniqueness and diversity of their ethnic language through their work. For instance, a student could include their ethnic language in a creative project, such as a poem or play. A creative project allows West African immigrants to embrace an aspect of their identity while not shunning the culture shift.

As previously discussed, West African immigrants have to negotiate their identity by adhering to the social standard set in the environment that they are in. West African immigrants who have recently migrated to the United States have very noticeable accents when they speak. There are a lot of negative perceptions surrounding individuals with accents different from the American accent, with the most popular assumption being that different accents equate to unintelligibility. "I was so focused on perfecting my English (in order to not be ridiculed by the white students at my school), that I never really learned Vietnamese," explained an author (Nguyen). Due to these circumstances, West African immigrants develop creative ways, though detrimental to their identity, to "negotiate their cultural identities" by altering their accents depending on the environment in which they find themselves. These harmful changes result in a disconnect with their identity as they "enact multiple identities and fashion linguistic identities within varied contexts" (Watson & Knight-Manuel 285 & 291). For instance, in a school setting, West African immigrant students might attempt to sound just like everyone else so as not to stand out, but when they get home, they switch back to their accent. This back and forth switching of accents, though very creative, results in disarrayed identity. While switching accents depending on the environment is another creative way for West African immigrants to cope with their bicultural identity, it also defeats the purpose of learning to balance both cultures.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS EFFECT ON SELF IDENTITY

Social interactions are creative ways of expressing oneself and sometimes differ from culture to culture. Navigating social interactions might just be the most difficult aspect of migrating to a different culture. There is a clash of civilizations in social interactions when West Africans migrate to America due to cultural differences and division.

Many West African immigrants face culture shocks as they integrate into American society because they are taught from infancy certain ways to interact which can vary widely from what American  are taught. West Africans and Americans from infancy are taught certain ways of expressing "thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" as it is a "reflection on their social identity" (Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Bretones 638). Depending on the situation, the cultural divide can lead to "misunderstanding audience behaviors" (Mzumara). For instance, West Africans are taught to respect their elders no matter the situation and not express any feelings or opinions they might have. "African people believe that elders are next to God/ancestors. Elders are seen as custodians of communal knowledge and can, therefore, not only teach but direct the young within the community in the most culturally acceptable manner" (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 448). They then migrate to the United States and realize that modeling that behavior will likely hold them back from accomplishing what they want as the way of things is not the same in both cultures. Mzumara mentioned how different audiences behaved in plays from both cultures. He talked about how Africans in the " audience clapped, shouted in satisfaction" but during his "first performance of the play in Europe…the audience watched in total silence - just a little laugh here and there, but controlled" (Mzumara). West Africans are known to be rowdy and that energy is present in everything that they are involved in, including plays that usually require silence. In contrast, Western people present this aura of calmness and quietness which they exhibit in an audience setting. If a West African immigrant decided to watch a play once they have migrated and displayed some of the common manners in their country of origin, they would notice the odd looks. In due course, West African immigrants learn to blend into the environment by adopting the American way of interacting in social settings. Aside from adopting refined mannerisms, West African immigrants discover creative ways to express themselves, both as West African and American. As Watson and Knight-Manuel mentioned in their text, "'Sankofa' refers to the Adinkra pictorial image symbol in Akan culture in Ghana,...uses of Sankofa, Temple (2010) notes, have since emerged in the United States as 'Diasporan practice,' for example, in the 'naming of schools, bakeries…residents in the United States use Sankofa in such ways to evoke a "reversal of [...] ahistorical thinking" (p. 129) toward 'deliberately and concisely cultivat[ing] and preserv[ing] African culture and philosophies'" (285).  One of the creative habits West African immigrants develop when navigating their identity is finding ways to integrate aspects of their West African creative culture, for instance language, into American creative culture. For instance, a West African immigrant who owns a store in America could name their store after a symbol in their ethnic culture or even design the interior of their home with West African decor. This way, individuals who come in may have an insight into what the West African is trying to express without verbalizing it. In the end, West African immigrants would realize that social interactions need not only to represent verbal communication or appropriate social cues but also to express one's creative ethnic cultures through representations.

## LOSS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

A key influence on the development of a West African's identity is family. West African immigrant identities are oftentimes embedded in their family. "The African cultural values and worldview that encompass emotional vitality, interdependence, collectivism and hospitality… [and] harmonious blending" (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 447). West African communities are created within the dynamic of fostering co-dependence. When West Africans migrate to America and discover the variety of possibilities they have to integrate into the development of their identity, they devise many creative ways to embed the different aspects of the creative culture in the United States they identify with into their self-identity. However, in the excitement of all this, West African immigrant parents recognize the changes in their youth and address and counteract them with pressuring ideals that do not allow for any options. This paper argues that West African immigrant parents exert the most pressure on their West African kids not to adopt the American creative culture. As an article recognized, "children taking on Western habits and values represented a significant source of stress and challenge" (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 451). Due to some of the stereotypes surrounding American values and culture, West African parents in the United States go to extreme lengths to prevent their kids from adopting such values. In those efforts, they place stress on their kids and contribute to the identity crisis that these West African youths face. These kids are forced to negotiate their identity when they move to the United States. As they attempt to fit into whatever social construct they are met with, West African immigrants are left confused about whether to abandon their ethnic identity and adopt a more Americanized version of themselves. A study conducted "...found out that some Black immigrants identified racially as African American, whereas others identified ethnically as Afro-Caribbean…" (Knight et al. 831). Some West African immigrants are faced with the reality of pre-existing assumptions of how some Americans view African Americans and the conditions that they have to face when they migrate to the United States. Not only do they have to cope with the shift in the creative culture but they also have to combat negative stereotypes about their race in America. West African immigrant parents "living in the United States were, and still are, extremely concerned about their children becoming Americanized, and sought to teach their children about their cultural heritage, language, and values" (Watson and Knight-Manuel 292). This is due to the bad representation of African Americans in western media, from lack of academic achievement to poor behavior.. West African immigrant parents try to enforce aspects of their creative cultures at home and get their kids to identify more with their ethnicity than their race. The parents integrate as much of their West African creative culture into their home to remind their kids of their roots, thus increasing the pressure on the immigrant children to fit into this creative cultural shift in a certain way. The pressure has led to some West African immigrant kids coming up with creative ways to combat these pressures from both their home and the outside world. These youths pretend to be someone else or negotiate their identity through creative habits they develop when in public to fit into the environment different to who they are at home, which also leads to a disconnect in their identity. On the other hand, it has also helped West African immigrant kids to come up with creative ways to battle this issue of dual identity. They integrate aspects of their culture into school projects, musicals, or poems. They may sometimes also include their ethnic culture in their clothing, for example pairing jeans and a kaftan shirt with West African print. This way, West African immigrants,especially the youth, do not feel too different while also preserving their creative culture. However, in the quest to "understand the social and cultural principles, ideals, standards, and requirements" of their foreign country, West African immigrants eventually lose the majority of what their ethnic identities entail (Babatunde-Sowolo et al. 448). Despite the efforts put into the "retention of the ethnic culture and acquisition of the host culture," West African immigrants still end up with half-baked identities. One culture ultimately overshadows the other. Despite these creative habits that West African immigrants develop to combat pressures and preserve their ethnic identity while also immersing themselves in the American creative culture, it almost seems inevitable to almost have one creative culture be more prominent in their identity.

Creativity presents culture with a medium of communication and self-expression. Since each country has its own culture, individuals can utilize creativity to bridge the gap of misinformation and allow themselves  to express their identity through various forms, whether by painting or clothing. As mentioned before, West African immigrants in America utilize their sense of creativity to find techniques to deal with the shift in creative culture. Developing these techniques allows them to fit into American society without completely losing touch with their ethnic identity at times. However, while"creative processes were used to form positive communities of identity," creativity can be utilized to foster negativity and a disconnected sense of community (McWilliams). In the process of balancing their bicultural identities, West Africans are likely to develop different thought patterns and perspectives which sometimes result in a loss of sense of community when they go back to West Africa to either visit or stay due to the differences in culture. While their creativity might have effectively balanced their West African and American identities, what is usually overlooked is how it impacts these West Africans when they go back to their visit. As one article acknowledged, "for the people involved, these migrations pose a radical change in environment and in their lives as they face adaptation to new perceptions, values, and behaviours. All these lead to major challenges and repercussions for their personal and social identities" (González-González & Bretones). The core values that West Africans are taught and have lived by are likely to change as they find creative ways to balance their identities. These changes, therefore, foster a notion of not belonging anywhere. Despite the hard work, West Africans never seem to fully be able to balance both creative cultures in their identity. The result does not produce wholly positive outcomes as some aspect of their life will be negatively impacted. More frequently than not, it is their West African side that is negatively impacted by this balance. Creativity might help West Africans acculturate to America and balance their identities, but it might also negatively impact their sense of community in West Africa as it constructs a sort of unrelenting identity that no longer fits into the structures or confines of what a West African should be according to their community.

## CONCLUSION

Culture is encompassed by many elements and attempting to include each aspect of creative culture is beyond the scope of this paper. However, from the few that are presented in the paper, one can discern how distinctive West African culture is from American culture. The divide between both cultures makes it all the more difficult for West Africans to not lose touch with their ethnic culture while attempting to immerse themselves into the foreign culture. There exist many ways for West African immigrants to integrate both cultures to develop a wholesome identity. During my research paper, I realized some suggestions for West African immigrants in the United States who would like to not lose touch with their ethnic identity whilst acculturating to American culture. One example is to keep in touch with family back home to foster communication and decrease the disconnect resulting from the bicultural identity. Another is to maintain the use of their ethnic language. West Africans' ethnic language is an aspect of culture and identity that connects West Africans back home to their family and culture. Lastly, I would recommend finding one's own path to balance. West Africans have the choice to decide how to express their heritage and should ignore anyone that puts them on a path that does not work for them. Despite these efforts, one could argue that no matter how much effort West African immigrants put into holding firm to their ethnic culture, they still end up with underdeveloped identities. They become more Americanized and develop a watered-down version of their ethnic identity. It seems impossible to balance both American and West African cultures without having one culture that is more prominent in a West African immigrant's identity. While researching and writing this paper, my original hypothesis evolved. I realized that though creativity helps West Africans balance their dual identity, it also negatively impacts them when they visit home in West Africa. Therefore, as they employ creativity in their quest to balance the creative culture in their identity, the outcomes from balancing their cultural identities shift their perspectives and values, which contributes to a sense of disconnect in their community in West Africa. The increase in adopting an Americanized version of an identity results in West African immigrants passing on a foreign concept of their ethnic culture which might be misinformed and unauthentic in society. Developing a completely unrecognizable identity is an outcome from attempting to balance both creative cultures that should not be overlooked. In the quest to hold on to their original culture and accept the new culture, West African immigrants could end up with problematic identities. This could result in individuals who believe they are too knowledgeable,due to their bicultural identities, to consider anyone else's perspectives. This would then create a group of West African immigrants with problematic thought patterns, behaviors, and beliefs. Therefore, there is a need for balance in both creative cultures. These resulting effects and outcomes from the attempted balance then begs the question: Should West Africans in the United States be saddled with the responsibility of properly representing their ethnic culture? Are the incoming youth from West African countries affected by the successes of balancing both creative cultures in the identities of West Africans already in the United States?

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**Nora Abdelfattah**

# Medicine Against Intersectionality: On the Failure of Informed Consent


## ABSTRACT

*Standing at the intersection between race and gender, Black women have historically endured scientific racism and sexism within medical and research settings, particularly pertaining to reproductive care. Despite policies and laws, like the 1981 informed consent act, since having been passed, these issues have discretely persisted into the modern day. Using intersectionality as a framework, this paper will contrast how pre-1981 and post-1981 medical systems continue to violate the bodily autonomy of Black female patients. Modern use of informed consent continually fails to protect Black women. Stricter control and accountability is required to ensure misinformation and coercion doesn't affect patients. Some argue that negative informed consent, essentially giving a physician complete control over a patient, should be made commonplace. However, this provides no protection against aforementioned predatory physicians. Instead, the U.S. medical system must work with Black women, instead of over them to ensure the advancement of science without exploiting either party. Only with stricter medical supervision of those who care for vulnerable Black and female populations can the U.S. finally begin to correct the blights of scientific racism and sexism.*


## INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Apendectomies will go down as one of the grossest violations of women's and civil rights of American History. Thousands of Black women, from the 1920s to the 1980s underwent forced hysterectomies to control the African American population, and as practice for medical residents. In the same time period, hundreds of Black men died from the Tuskegee Syphilis studies, where penicillin was withheld from patients since researcher's morbid curiosity seemed to outweigh the value of Black lives. Blacks were robbed of their bodily autonomy. It was only after decades of ethnic torture that cases like the Mississipi Apendectomies and the Tuskegee Syphallis Studies caused the Food and Drug Administration to recognize informed consent in 1981. Informed consent laws require physicians to tell their patients all relevant information about treatment, like risk, ingredients, and side effects. This includes research through experimental treatments. Informed consent also requires a patient to be willing and aware of having the procedure administered, meaning treatment can't be administered without patient permission. Altogether, informed consent guarantees a patient's bodily autonomy isn't being violated (FDA). Many physicians, researchers, and authors in pre-1981 and post-1981 informed consent eras have documented how the intersectional identity of Black women has endured subconscious racism and sexism. I will be using primary sources, like my interview with Professor Coleman Daniels, as well as books like Dr. H.J. Eysenck's *Race, Intelligence, and Education* from 1971, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, and Dorthy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body* to find anecdotes and personal opinions about how Blacks, women, and Black women have been discriminated against. I then used secondary journal articles to frame and rationalize these stories, including Dr. Lisa Bowleg's "The Problem With the Phrase Women and Minorities", Dr. Mary Howell's "Can We Be Feminist Physicians?" and Dr. Andrew Coleman's "'Scientific' Racism and the Evidence on Race and Intelligence." Many women of color have struggled with intersectionality and endured situations like the Mississippi Appendectomies, but this paper will focus exclusively on Black women. More specifically, it will look at the intersectional identities of being Black and being female. Intersectionality is the overlap of a person's two identities, including discrimination from this overlap. It is a purely conceptual framework, as "intersectionality has no core elements," hence why it is not a "theory" but a "theoretical framework or perspective" (Bowleg 1268). For Black women, intersectionality can explain how sexism and racism affect their bodily autonomy.

Such raises the question, what is the role of subconscious discrimination like sexism and racism in heathcare for Black women? In this paper, I will aim to answer these questions by looking at how the evolution of informed consent impacts women of colors' bodily autonomy and reproductive rights through the lens of intersectionality. This paper will be broken down into "Medicine Against Women", "Medicine Against People of color", and "Medicine Against Women of Color", which will respectively discuss how subconscious sexism in physicians reduces accessibility to reproductive health, how subconscious racism in physicians affect eugenics, and how intersectionality means women of color must deal with subconscious racism and sexism from physicians. Furthermore, I will use scholarly sources and primary sources from both pre-1981 and post-

1981 eras to demonstrate how informed consent has proven ineffective. Despite 1981 informed consent laws intending to protect minorities such as Blacks and Latinos from ethnic-based testing like the Tuskegee Syphilis studies or the Mississippi Appendectomies, which are founded on racial minorities having genetically and socially inferiority, these laws sometimes fail to protect women of color in the modern day. Some physicians have a subconscious sexism-based lack of trust in their female patients to make their own medical decisions, which prevents these women from getting access to reproductive care. Other physicians can also have subconscious racism towards patients of color, which results in these patients being used for inhumane research to benefit the physician. Women of color, who have an intersectionality of these two identities, are therefore hindered by both subconscious racism and subconscious sexism, resulting in their reproductive rights being violated for the sake of research. These racial reproductive rights issues persist into the 21st century, making it clear the informed consent policies of 1981 fail to protect the bodily autonomy of women of color. As such, harsher consequences for breaking informed consent policies must be imposed on physicians to improve the bodily autonomy rights of women of color.

## MEDICINE AGAINST WOMEN: MEDICAL MISINFORMATION IN HEALTHCARE

Informed consent policies emphasize that a patient should have complete control over their care and body. However, not all doctors will prevent violations of women's bodily autonomy, like the right to sterilization through subconscious sexism. Physicians see women's rights as women's issues, not informed consent or medical issues, thus justifying their subconscious sexism.

Some physicians justify their refusal to sterilize informed, consenting women because of their conscious beliefs founded in subconscious sexism they can't control. Take the story of Sophia, a childless woman with a career in law, married to a man who didn't want children. She was denied sterilization in 2002 by multiple physicians on the grounds of her age, having no children, and because her "future partner" may want children. Her decision to not have children was "well informed" given her situation and circumstances. As Ariel Tazkargy writes in "Coercion to Coercion," in this case "physicians are opposing a procedure based on a consciously held belief that a woman should want to be a mother"

(Tazkargy 144). Although this belief is held consciously by the physicians, note that "belief" is not synonymous with discrimination. A belief may be founded in discrimination, regardless of whether that discrimination is held consciously or unconsciously. Tazkargy doesn't make this distinction, but most physicians don't want to consider themselves sexist, so this discrimination is likely subconscious. That means these physicians are unaware of the source of their beliefs and unable to change it. According to the article "Physician gender as a source of implicit bias affecting clinical decision-making processes" by T. Hedges Champagne-Langabeer, physicians presented with inaccurate information "may unintentionally permit a patient's gender to anchor the clinical decision making process in terms arriving at a diagnosis and prescribing treatment and then is unable to revise either the diagnosis or treatment upon additional clinical information that might disconfirm the initial diagnosis and treatment" (Champagne-Langabeer 503). The "anchor" of subconscious sexism is too heavy to move, as it not only weighs down a physician's revision skills, but also prevents the patient from receiving adequate care. The fact the bias is "implicit" and the action "unintentional" further emphasizes that this sexism is subconscious. Clinical decision making is therefore not free of subconscious influence. Applying this conclusion to Sofia's case, her gender and age are the data of the physician's "clinical decision making process," and denying her a sterilization is the "treatment". The physician can't revise the treatment"despite the additional clinical information of learning Sofia does not want children, simply because his clinical mind has molded Sofia's case to his personal beliefs. He is incapable of understanding that some women do not want children, since it would violate his diagnosis. It is not his intention to discriminate against Sofia: it is an unfortunate circumstance of his subconscious sexism. He is not aware of it, and he cannot change it.

The physicians in Sofia's story want to give her good medical care, but do not believe that she can manage her reproductive choices. Sofia was informed in her choice to be childless. Being informed is a key part of informed consent, although in many patient-physician relationships, physicians traditionally provide the information about treatment. Applying this situation to abortion, we see yet another example of subconscious sexism affecting female patients. Many states require physicians to give patients seeking abortions pamphlets with incorrect information. This is government-sanctioned misinformation, a clear violation of informed consent. However, subconscious sexism has prevented doctors from stopping this deception.

Physicians don't prevent state-sanctioned medical misinformation because their subconscious sexism makes them see misinformation about abortion as a women's issue, not an informed consent issue. I conducted an interview with Dr. Cynthia Daniels from Rutgers University about her I*nformed Consent Project*, in which she tracks the different pamphlets state law requires doctors to give out to women seeking abortions. She has found many medical discrepancies between these pamphlets. In her words, "about a third of the information was medically inaccurate," which is a fundamental violation of informed consent. Not only a violation of it, but it's actually forcing doctors to hand over misinformation to their patients" (Daniels). Even though the doctors are being "forced" to break informed consent laws, they still are responsible for the misinformation violations. By choosing state law over informed consent laws, they become bystanders and enablers of these medical violations. This "fundamental violation" is not a result of subconscious sexism causing conscious discrimination, but instead causing inaction through detachment of responsibility. These physicians have been subconsciously trained not to care about women's issues. In "Can We Be Feminist Physicians?" Dr. Mary Howell explains that our "society has shunted caretaking to women… "Handholding" is for nurses; doctors are too busy being scientists to have time for caretaking. [Their] training denies [them their] caretaking role" (Howell 168). Because physicians are denied "handholding," they think someone else will take responsibility for caring about patients and their rights. By listing "caretaking" and "science" separately, Howell emphasizes the modern medical system views these as separate, unrelated responsibilities instead of affecting one another. Caretaking being "shunted" further insinuates it's less important than the physical treatment. In abortion, "caretaking" becomes synonymous with the struggles a women has to get an abortion, including medical misinformation. Abortion is already a women's issue, but physicians don't see it as a medical issue, especially male physicians since they are less likely to be involved in women's rights. Male physicians make up 64% of American doctors (Searing). If all of them learn to "shunt" explaining abortion and it's effects to their female counterparts, they subconsciously detach them from the responsibility of contributing to sexism. Since they're "too busy being scientists," the physicians won't actively campaign to stop the misinformation. That is why Daniel's work is so important, as it helps physicians see how misinformation is a medical issue they are responsible for, and can put an end to medical coercion through subconscious sexism.

The coercion of women through misinformation and violation of informed consent affects many female patients seeking reproductive healthcare. The subconscious sexism of physicians greatly impacts the quality of care these women receive. However, this subconscious sexism is amplified when the woman is Black.

Subconscious sexism, combined with subconscious racism, can increase the medical coercion experienced by women. According to Professor Daniels, "it's much harder for a white woman to get a sterilization as opposed to a woman of color" (Daniels). Not only is a woman's right to choose being denied, but she is also being used to increase the population of whites. The physician doesn't have to intend to discriminate, as justifying refusing to give a white woman the procedure can come from many sexist reasons, like age or lack of children, instead of racist ones. Although, subconscious racism can unconsciously block these sexist reasons in favor of controlling the Black population. When comparing the refusal of sterilization to white women to a situation like the Mississippi Appendectomies, "involuntary sterilization… represents one kind of coercion, while women denied voluntary sterilizations represent another form of coercion" (Tazkargy 158). "Coercion" means these women's informed consent rights are being violated for ulterior motives, in this case to decrease the Black population and increase the white population. Regardless of whether it happens consciously or subconsciously, coercion is still coercion. White or Black, women's intersectional identity between heritage and reproduction is used as a reason to coerce them. Both are unforgivable versions of coercion with the same endgame. However, the violent and invasive coercion towards Black women has been more historically detrimental, as decades of negative scientific racism have reduced them to human-like lab rats without rights or bodily autonomy, an issue that still persists over four decades after 1981.

## MEDICINE AGAINST BLACKS: SCIENTIFIC RACISM IN RESEARCH

Black patients are discriminated against by healthcare professionals due to subconscious racism of physicians. However, human ethics, especially with respect to medicine, are always progressing forward, and it may be unfair to hold physicians of the past accountable for their discrimination, since they were unaware of their subconscious racism.

However, their actions can still be seen as racist decades down the line as the definition of racism changes. This change in what is seen as racism, is a result of Americans learning about their subconscious racism.
Scientific racism can largely damage a race's social or political standing, and only race-conscious researchers can help prevent the dogma and pseudoscience that come from it. The term 'scientific racism' is the use of genetic and physical differences between races to justify racial superiority. It was coined by Dr. Andrew Coleman to describe Dr. H.J. Eysenck, who tried to prove Blacks were less intelligent than whites through genetics in his study from 1971. He justifies his conclusion by stating that " I am not a racist for believing it possible that negroes may have special innate gifts for certain athletic events or for certain musical forms of expression... Nor am I a racist for seriously considering the possibility that the demonstrated inferiority of American negroes on tests of intelligence may, in part, be due to genetic causes' ' (Eysenck 11). Eysenck's tone throughout this passage is snobbish and patronizing to both his critics and Black individuals. To be so specific with the "innate gifts' ' of African Ameicans, like music and athletics, then to be negative about a concept as vague, broad, and fluid as intelligence implies there is more wrong with Blacks than there is right. Eysenck's description of his mindset is a poor attempt to mask his racism. As Coleman writes, he is "justified in applying the term 'scientific' racism to their writings, because they contain pseudo-scientific dogmas which can be used, and have been used, to legitimate racially oppressive policies" (Coleman 152). "Dogma" is a powerful word, as it truly calls out Eysenck's attempt to veil his racism. Although "pseudo-science," or fraudulent beliefs and discoveries mistakenly attributed to the scientific method,  wouldn't best describe Eysenck's research, as he did use legitimate methods to obtain his data. It is his conclusion and analysis that are founded in scientific racism. Eysenck's data isn't pseudo-science, but his claims are. Eysenck describing Blacks as having "demonstrated inferiority" implies he feels he has demonstrated superiority with respect to intelligence, hence why he uses pseudoscience to justify his scientific racism. Researchers like Eysenck damage the reputations of Black races through self-delusion which is itself founded in subconscious racism, while researchers like Coleman remain aware of not only their own, but also other researcher's bias, and not afraid to call out scientific racism.
It was scientists like Eysenck that caused the suffering of so many Black men during the Tuskegee studies, on the grounds of scientific racism and pathogenic Blackness.

Blackness has long been associated with disease and health disparities. Researchers must consider racism, and not race, as the reason for such discrepancies. The Tuskegee research study was a cruel violation of bodily autonomy justified by scientific racism, although some researchers believe modern views on the study to be radicalized. For instance, there are false rumors that men in the Tuskegee study were infected with syphilis. This was not true. Professor Susan M. Reverby writes in "More than Fact and Fiction" that "if we understand that the men were not deliberately infected but also were not told they were in an experiment… It is easier for us to deny the study's reality and make the PHS doctors into Nazis and the men absolute victims," (Reverby 94). The tone of Reverby's article is accusatory towards the audience, while also insensitive and diminishing of the unnecessary suffering that the Black men had to endure. While she does well in acknowledging the rumor, she insinuates the men weren't "absolute victims" despite the clear violations of their bodily autonomy. The "reality" where these men were willing participants instead of targets of scientific racism is ignorance on Reverby's part. As Rebecca Skloot writes in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, "researchers chose black subjects because they, like many whites at the time, believed black people were 'a notoriously syphilis-soaked race'" (Skloot 40). The researchers were racially motivated in doing the study, seeing their subjects in a negative light while having an utter disregard for Black safety and public health. Regardless of what Reverby says, no counter argument can portray the researchers of the Tuskegee research studies in a positive light. The association between Blackness and sickness is a result of scientific racism, one that continues into modern-day research. As Dr. Ijeoma Nnodim Opara writes in "Modern Day Drapetomania: Calling Out Scientific Racism," "racism, not race, is the vector of disease and health disparities" and that American public health connects the amount of Blacks in an area to level of drug use, sickness, and poverty, therefore "pathologizing blackness and normal responses to chronic intergenerational trauma, oppression, and exploitation. It reinforces the bogus theory of supposed Black inferiority" present within scientific racism (Opara 226). The Tuskegee syphilis studies "pathologized" Black citizens, and despite 50 years having passed, it seems intergenerational trauma of this stereotype towards Black individuals hasn't entirely faded. Opara is justified in referring to intergenerational trauma, oppression, and exploitation as "normal responses," since it is human nature to be afraid of what we do not understand, and teaching our children to also fear those things. It is a subconscious survival instinct that must be consciously overcome. This is especially true for researchers, as their bias and scientific racism can result in policies and legislation against Black citizens.

The best way for researchers to overcome both subconscious and scientific racism is to become completely blind and uncaring about their subject's race, in order to remove all biases. Some physicians still actively seek out Black subjects due to chronic Black pathologization and use them as lab rats. In "Insight Medicine Lacks- The Continuing Legacy of Henrietta Lacks," Dr. Shakkaura Kemet, a Black female gynecologist at the University of California, recounts her mother's story struggling with vaginal cancer. Kemet writes that the physician treating her mother's cervical cancer asked her mother to undergo an experimental treatment, and to "donate her time and possibly risk her health and life for science. Nothing had been done to address my mother's fears about her disease," as instead the physician "glossed over countless pages of side effects" of an experimental treatment (Kemet 800). The physician "glossing over" any side effects is a violation of informed consent, and counts as conscious misinformation. Kemet's tone throughout the story is mournful and frightened, and it is easy to feel her emotions and frustration with seeing her mother being used as a lab rat. This happened in 2001, thirty years after informed consent laws were passed, but it is clear they had no bearing on the physician in this anecdote. No one should be put in the situation Kemet's mother was in, especially not just for the color of their skin. Researchers must become blind to color. In a Bioethics inquiry titled "We're in This Together," authors Mandy Truong and Mienah Z. Sharif write that "we reframe our… approaches to be explicitly focused on anti-racism efforts" so that the differences between races "understood, or even accepted, as innate or inherent patterns" allowing future researchers to "omit any attention or responsibility towards addressing the structural and systemic factors" (Truong and Sharif 114). The "reframing" of researchers from a scientifically racist mindset to an anti-racist one must be done consciously and quickly. The "explicit" focus on this shift is a short term plan that will pay off in the long term by making all researchers conscious of their subconscious racism, allowing them to get rid of it, and by extension, any scientific racism, stereotypes, or biases. Getting rid of subconscious racism makes a researcher more open-minded, hence why they would be so capable and willing to understand the "patterns" of different races. Essentially, being more accepting of other races will help researchers understand their behaviors better by getting rid of "Black pathology". Since

Blacks won't be subconsciously tied to sickness, they'll be as normal and unappealing as white research subjects, preventing them from being used like lab rats as with Kemet's case.

## MEDICINE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN: DAMNATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Black women have an intersectional identity by being both a woman and Black, making them more likely to be victims of a physician's subconscious sexism and subconscious racism. This collective discrimination makes it impossible for Black women to receive safe reproductive care.

Intersectionality grants Black women useful perspectives on abortion and reproductive rights, although men dislike intersectionality because the subconscious sexism and racism stops these meaningful vantage points from being acknowledged. In her book *Killing the Black Body*, author Dorthy Roberts talks about her experience speaking at a Black rally, where a man verbally assaulted her because "he thought it was dangerous to mention the word "abortion." He said that reproductive rights was a "white woman's issue," and he advised me to stick to traditional civil rights concerns, such as affirmative action, voting rights, and criminal justice," (Roberts 12). This man is gatekeeping abortion by refusing to acknowledge the struggles that Black women face. It's only "dangerous" for the white patriarchy to talk about Black abortion, but progressive for Black women. Though the civil rights movement has always been a front for progress, forcing Roberts to only advocate on "traditional" fronts stands in the way of progress. He is using Black women's intersectional identity against them by devaluing their womanhood because of their Blackness; Black women aren't seen as real women, unlike white women. This discrimination through intersectionality is not only damaging to Black women, but both Black and female populations separately. Bowleg writes that "because intersectionality takes the experiences of historically oppressed or marginalized populations as its vantage point, it can facilitate and inform the development of well targeted and cost-effective health promotion messages, interventions, and policies" (Bowleg 1272). By specifying that the vantage point belongs to a "historically repressed population" but not specifying a population affected by the "messages, interventions, and policies" of these repressed populations, Bowleg insinuates intersectionality can be used as a force for good for all American citizens, not just women or minorities. Bowleg acknowledges how Black women's intersectional identities grants them a new perspective on social issues, including those of abortions. However, she fails to account for these "historically oppressed or marginalized populations" as continuing to be marginalized in the modern day. Although they have a valuable vantage point on abortion, it is considered to be a "dangerous" perspective by subconscious sexists and racists. In short, intersectionality provides Black women with valuable insight about abortion, but intersectional identities also prevent them from being heard and acknowledged.

Intersectional identities are the crossroads between biological and social realities, and the way to allow individuals at these intersections to be heard is to not use race and gender as categories, but factors in researching how women, Blacks, Black women, and everyone else interact on a holistic level. Race has long been argued to be a social construct instead of a scientific one, as "despite long being disproved as a legitimate scientific category the insidious nature of race throughout history has shown the persistence as a means to categorize, classify, and oppress groups of people," (Sharif and Truong 113). Using race as a scientific category is scientific racism, especially as a means to "oppress" Blacks. Describing scientific racism as not only harmful, but "insidious" indicates the practice is subtle, hence why so many subconsciously still believe it. It is easy to confuse scientific racism, which categorizes individuals in superiority or inferiority based on race, with merely seeing race as a factor or explanation for a person's behavior. As Professor Jonathan Kahn writes in "Science is Complex-So is Race," it is important to acknowledge the "the relation between social realities and biological realities of race are complex, interrelated, and iterative The biological shapes the social and vice versa," (Kahn 56). Kahn is not referring to racial delusions and pseudoscience here, but rather, "biological realities" as it is true our biology does affect our physical appearance and social decisions. The scientific definition of racism cannot continue to be synonymous with biology. It is not part of the "biological" reality, but it can be part of the "social" reality where it can be influenced by subconscious discrimination. As such, there is an intersect between a person's social identity, like race and gender, as well as their biological identity, like their genetics and sex. It is important to take these intersections and realities into account when studying a person or group of people, especially when it affects these groups' collective health.

When followed by physicians, informed consent policies prevent the exploitation and discrimination of black women. As Kimala

Price's writes in "It's not Just about Abortion," when "designing projects on abortion and reproduction, especially those that claim to study the general population, we need to employ strategies that capture the nuances of intersectional identities, inequalities, and privileges of different social groups," (Prince 557). Prince implies that studies from the past "claim" but fail to take into account the intersectionality of the general populations. She also suggests that the majority of the general population has an intersectional identity. While this might be the case, intersectionality is not normally applied outside of racial and sexual identities. Intersectionality's "nuances" are more present in non-minorities than minorities, since Blacks and other races have been discriminated against more socially, making the intersectionality of Black women more pronounced than white women. That means racial minorities have more experience with identifying intersectional crossroads, which is a gift that would be useful in modern research challenging subconscious racism and sexism. As Alexander Chaitoff writes in "Reply—Acknowledging Intersectionality and Historical Context in Medical Education Research," gauging the impact of intersectionality on research will "require having groups that the scientific community has historically wronged in leadership positions to guide improvement efforts in addition to resources dedicated to recruiting underrepresented research participants" (Chaitoff 3096). While acknowledging that racial minorities have been "historically wronged" and "underrepresented," Chaitoff doesn't consider the impact that generational trauma might have on detering black women from participating in future research. He and Prince both acknowledge that intersectionality is essential in finding and analyzing data from a large population by providing the framework for drawing connections between social and biological realities. However, neither acknowledge nor explain why Blacks and historically marginalized groups would be willing to risk even more oppression. That is why policies like informed consent are such important policy changes, since they provide proof to black women that researchers and physicians will see them as partners, instead of lab rats. It was a lack of informed consent policies that allowed for so much exploitation of Black women to occur. As such, it is stronger informed consent policies that will allow researchers and physicians to regain the trust of their Black female patients

## COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Despite some patients retaining strong and trusting relationships with their doctors, we cannot afford to practice negative informed consent on a large scale since it risks exposing predatory physicians to vulnerable patients. Negative informed consent, as defined by Dr Ulrik Kihlbom in "Autonomy and Negatively Informed Consent" is when patients give up their informed consent rights by leaving all medical decisions up to their doctors. It is founded on the principle that informed consent prevents patients from trusting their doctors, and that giving a physician full control over one's healthcare will increase the trust and quality of the treatment. This directly opposes my argument of having harsher consequences for physicians violating informed consent. The practice of negating informed consents would severely hinder the care of Black women, since their physicians are inclined to use them for research, thereby not having the patient's best interest at heart. Shakkaura Kemet, a gynecologist writing for the New England Journal of Medicine, recounts an experience she had with her mother's vaginal cancer when she was younger, in which the doctor glossed over the consequences of medication in an attempt to get Kemet's mother to sign up for an experimental treatment. Kemet writes that "Unbeknownst to her, the doctor had already lost our trust. She had not explained my mother's diagnosis or prognosis as she had promised to do when we made the appointment." (Kemet 800). Kihlbom writes about a differing type of patient-doctor relationship. He indicates that "negative IC requires a substantive patient-doctor relationship of confidence or trust. So, it can hardly be a reasonable practice in all kinds of medical contexts or all kinds of treatments" (Kihlbom 149). For a case like Kemet's mother's, the implementation of negative IC would have devastating consequences. It would remove any protection she had from her physician taking advantage of her, while making the doctor's actions permissible in the medical community. As such, it would be a severe violation of her bodily autonomy. Thankfully, Kihlbom does specify that negative informed consent would only be applied in scenarios where the patient and doctor have a long-lasting, positive relationship, founded on trust and the patient's best interest. Kemet explicitly states that the doctor had lost their trust, and as such, the concept of negatively informed consent should not be applicable in the first place. In general, it would be extraordinarily hard to distinguish between the positive and negative relationships between doctors and patients—not to mention that there's an entire spectrum between those two extremes. Someone might have a pleasant relationship with their doctor and trust them, while still wanting to remain informed about their treatment. Or there may be patients who trust their doctors to treat them, but not get too personal with their healthcare providers. Individuals who fall into the criteria of "long-lasting, positive relationships" are few and far between. Their comfort and convenience is not worth jeopardizing the treatment of someone like Kemet's mother, who had a doctor trying to take advantage of her. Positive informed consent is there to protect patients, and though there are exceptions, it is still primarily the case that a patient and doctor should both know what is going on. That being said, while the intentions of negative informed consent are positive, there are ultimately too many flaws, exceptions, and risks for it to be a plausible system.

## CONCLUSION

My thesis argues that black women have to deal with their bodily autonomy being violated by subconscious discrimination due to their intersectional identity. The primary and secondary sources I used complicated one another and this argument, such as by showing how deeply rooted scientific racism is in both modern and historical research which raised the question of intergenerational trauma. Similarly, the misinformation Daniels spoke about threw into question whether women could trust their physicians when seeking reproductive healthcare. Intersectionality served as my synthesizing framework in addition to my analytical one, as it allowed me to see how Black women were shunned away from both their identities. They are not seen as true Black individuals because they are women, and they are not seen as true women because they are Black, causing them to have no voice in medicine. That is why, even after decades of progress for women's issues and Black civil rights, are Black women's rights are only now being acknowledged through intersectionality, which is still a new concept compared to the long-present subconscious racism and sexism rooted in physicians' minds. This subconscious discrimination can only be fought through self-awareness by the physicians, which is why harsher consequences to informed consent, and not practices of negative informed consent, would be useful in making physicians aware of their internal discrimination. Intergenerational trauma of intersectional discrimination has made Black women weary of their physicians, and unwilling to participate in research, which is why they are an underrepresented population. It will take a lot of work on the medical system's part to regain the trust of Black women. But with intersectionality and similar frames of thought gaining traction, there is hope that this method of healing and trust could soon become a reality. So while the Tuskegee studies and the Mississippi Appendectomies remain ugly blights of exploitation, sexism, and racism on America's healthcare history, there is no reason that we, the physicians and researchers of tomorrow, cannot learn from the past and build towards a better future.

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**Akshaya Shivaparan**

# Social Media's Influence on Adolescent Body Image and Satisfaction


## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes the extent to which social media affects adolescents' body image issues. With the ever-growing use of and dependence on social media and digital platforms, their impacts must be addressed before the problem becomes too large to fix. Social media has ingrained itself into today's society, and the main purpose of this paper is to examine and explain how social media heightens body image problems amongst adolescents through various mechanisms like social comparison, idealization, and societal pressures. The paper begins by examining the Tripartite Influence Model, which explains social comparison and other external factors such as internalization of social media ideals that can lead to body dissatisfaction. Next, the paper explores the idea that social media is a platform encouraging and stimulating competition and validation. Furthermore, the idealization of certain body types that occurs through social media also contributes to body image problems. Then, the paper discusses the facade social media creates through photo editing, which creates an unrealistic beauty standard and changes adolescents' perspectives of themselves and other people. Lastly, the idea of body positivity is explored, suggesting how social media and body image is not a completely negative relationship. Increased positivity and body acceptance have been the forefront for fixing this crisis.*


## INTRODUCTION

Today, teenagers spend more time than ever on social media platforms. Due to vast technological advancements and subsequent social media growth, platforms are prevalent and accessible to users now more than ever before. Constant availability and accessibility means that teenagers spend more time utilizing social media platforms. While technology and social media can help connect people when they are not synchronously together, these digital platforms can be significantly harmful and detrimental to users' mental health. Studies conducted by Ninoska DeBraganza and Heather Hausenblaus featured in "Media Exposure to the

Ideal Physique on Women's Body Dissatisfaction and Mood: The Moderating Effects of Ethnicity" have shown that higher use of social media is "positively associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms" (DeBraganza and Hausenblas 701). Adolescents are vulnerable during this developmental stage of their lives—they are constructing their personal identities and molding their beliefs, and they can be easily influenced by what they see online. By using social media, teenagers criticize and compare their lives and body types to people they see online. These comparisons can lead to low self-esteem and life satisfaction, and subsequently to poor mental health. Furthermore, social media platforms are extremely harmful to people's mental health, as people often curate a false reality which creates a certain standard for how people have to appear. In their article, "Social Media is Not Real: The Effect of 'Instagram Vs Reality' Images on Women's Social Comparison and Body Image," Marika Tiggemann and Isabella Anderberg introduce the term "social surveillance," which refers to how "individuals not only closely examine the content uploaded by others but also critically examine their own posts from other people's points of view" (Tiggemann and Anderberg 2185). Social surveillance is an important concept because it helps explain how adolescents view themselves through the eyes of others, which makes them self-critical; the perspective of others is often those who are in judgment due to agreed social standards. Because of this growing problem and the prevalence of this issue in today's society, it is important to explore and understand the effects that social media can have on adolescents' body image issues. This research is significant because it promotes increased awareness of this growing problem and will help prevent teens from being consumed by the toxicity of social media, ultimately helping to alleviate stress related to body satisfaction that comes from social media platforms.

Through this research and analysis, I seek to answer the following question: How do social and digital platforms elevate adolescents' body dissatisfaction and body image issues as a result of social comparison and internalization of societal pressures? Furthermore, I seek to demonstrate how social media fosters a specific culture and standard, and how this creates a facade that users feel like they must follow. In order to do this, I utilize the Tripartite Influence Model framework. This framework explains the relationships between social media and external factors and body satisfaction. The model, according to Caroline Huxley, Emma Halliwell, and Victoria Clarke in their article entitled, "An Examination of the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image: Does Women's Sexual

Identity Make a Difference?", specifically highlights two parameters and emphasizes the idea that "appearance pressures from family, friends, partners, and the media lead to body dissatisfaction and restrained eating behaviors" (Huxley et al. 337). Through this model framework, the extent of social media's impact on individuals' perceptions of their own bodies can be explored and understood. Social media plays a large role in adolescents' body image issues by promoting upward social comparison and the internalization of a specific body type, which ultimately leads to lower self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, continually damaging one's mental health. However, these effects can be minimized through an increase in body positivity and media literacy.

In this paper, I begin by explaining the Tripartite Influence Model and its two parameters. Then, using the model, I analyze the specific culture social media promotes and the type of environment it creates, which fosters comparison and competition. Next, I analyze the facade that social media creates, and how that impacts adolescents' perception of themselves and others. To provide contrast, I conclude with a discussion on the body positivity movement and digital literacy, which can counteract the negativity presented on social media and may be a possible solution.

## THE TRIPARTITE INFLUENCE MODEL: COMPARISON AND INTERNALIZATION

To understand the effects of social comparison and external factors on adolescents' body dissatisfaction, the Tripartite Influence Model is crucial. The Tripartite Influence Model features two parameters: the internalization of social pressures, and the frequency of social comparisons. Regarding internalization, adolescents are extremely vulnerable and impressionable, and therefore can internalize ideas from social media. In their article, Huxley, Halliwell, and Clarke examine the pressures that can be explained by the Tripartite Influence Model and impact body image. The authors found that "in the final models for both groups, perceived pressures from the media and from male partners were most strongly associated with thin-ideal internalization." (Huxley et al. 344). The thin-ideal internalization is extremely prevalent on social media, whether it be through posts from celebrities or peers. Posts that exhibit the thin-ideal often receive the most praise and admiration, which causes people to yearn for that ideal in order to feel accepted. One of the main problems is when teenagers begin to internalize ideas from social media—it begins as a social pressure and continues as a problem that becomes intrinsic to the self. Adolescents begin to personalize the issue and have continual cycles of body dissatisfaction, which makes it harder to escape. Furthermore, through a superiority ranking that is subconsciously created with the thin ideal being labeled as superior, the thin ideal becomes a measure of self-worth, explaining why adolescents' self-esteem is intertwined with this idea. This idea is further explained in "An Evaluation of the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbance with Adolescent Girls" by Helene Keery, Patricia van den Berg, and J.K. Thompson. The authors explain how sociocultural factors and the media "appear to be one of directly leading young girls to begin restriction, yet also setting the stage for restriction (possibly later) by enhancing internalization of societal messages, comparison, and body dissatisfaction" (Keery et al. 249). The thin-ideal internalization is especially dangerous, as it promotes an extremely specific body image that represents very few of the population. If adolescents begin internalizing ideas that come straight from the media, it forces them to fall into conformity and the belief that they must look a certain way. This can intensify existing self-esteem and body image issues, as adolescents believe they must further alter themselves to meet the standard.

The second parameter examines social comparison and how people naturally compare their own bodies to others', which can stem from and lead to body dissatisfaction. In their article, authors Keery et al. conduct a case study using a sample of middle school girls and found that "internalization and comparison also partially mediated the relationships between peer influence and body dissatisfaction and between media influence and body dissatisfaction" (Keery et al. 248). Visual media on social media platforms makes it extremely easy for adolescents to compare themselves to what they are seeing. Social comparison often stems from following a certain standard, and adolescents compare themselves to those who fit into the standard. The effects of internalization and social comparison explain why there is a relationship between media influence and body dissatisfaction. In their article "Social Comparison, Negative Body Image, and Disordered Eating Behavior: The Moderating Role of Coping Style," Emilie Pinkasavage, Danielle Arigo, and Leah Schumacher, emphasize that "these upward comparisons highlight a woman's failure to achieve the accepted standard of attractiveness, and communicate that achieving this standard is possible (though actual achievement is unrealistic for most women)" (Pinksavage et al. 72). Inclusivity and acceptance are often feelings that cause adolescents to strive to fit into the standard. By comparing their bodies to those who are accepted in that standard, they begin to believe that it is possible to eventually look that specific way without considering cultural and biological factors.

Through the Tripartite Influence framework, it is clear that the media, being an external factor mentioned by the model, plays a role in body dissatisfaction, specifically hurting body image. The relationship between internalization and social comparison can be analyzed through this lens. In Keery et al.'s article, the authors conclude from their data that "comparison leads to internalization rather than the converse" (Keery et al. 249). While the exact relationship cannot be established, the general relationship between comparison and internalization is important to understanding how these factors work together. Oftentimes social comparison and internalization can act independently, but the more that adolescents compare themselves to others, the more they believe in the standard that makes someone labeled as "superior." Nevertheless, the opposite relationship can also be explained by the findings of Rachel Rodgers Siân McLean, and Susan Paxton in "Longitudinal relationships among internalization of the media ideal, peer social comparison, and body dissatisfaction: Implications for the tripartite influence model," which suggests that "media-internalization temporally precedes social appearance comparison and is a prospective predictor of social appearance comparison" (Rodgers et al. 249). Internalization can precede and be the cause of social comparison; when an adolescent internalizes the standard that is put forth on social media, they use it as a baseline for their comparisons. While these sources contrast each other, they both agree that social comparisons and internalization are interconnected and lead to body dissatisfaction. Understanding this connection is important to understanding the Tripartite Model and therefore the mechanisms of social media that can lead to body dissatisfaction.

## SOCIAL MEDIA CULTURE: A PLATFORM FOR COMPETITION AND VALIDATION

Although social media can provide a platform for interconnectivity, it ultimately creates a destructive culture infused with competition and comparisons through comments and the visual aspect of the media. Social media can often be toxic and negative, even if unintentional. Many users post on social media without the intent of hurting other people, but when societal stereotypes are reinforced by the media, it ends up being hurtful. The media plays an important part in broadcasting specific messages to its users, which, in this case, can be ideals about body image. In her study about how social media comments impact body image, entitled, "What Do Others' Reactions to Body Posting on Instagram Tell Us? The Effects of Social Media Comments on Viewers' Body Image Perception," Hye Min Kim explains how "viewers of favorable comments reported greater idealization of the body, whereas viewers of unfavorable comments showed a lower level of idealization. In other words, the degree to which participants perceived the social media body posting as ideal was in the same direction with the valence of comments about the body" (Kim 3459). Social media will often favor certain body types through the forms of positive comments and idealization, for example. Oftentimes, a user's feed will consist of only one body type that is regarded as superior, which forces those who do not have that body type to think they are inferior. This inferiority perpetuates low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, which causes adolescents to feel like they have to change their bodies to be socially accepted and idealized. Through societal acceptance, teenagers want to make themselves feel better and continue to seek this validation by changing their bodies. Validation and ideals become internalized and are real harms to adolescents' self esteem and body satisfaction. Furthermore, in Tiggemann and Anderberg's article discussing the impact that visual media can have on body image, the authors claim that "the negative effects of social media, like traditional media, have generally been attributed to the process of social comparison. Indeed, it has been argued that social comparison is particularly pertinent to social media because comparison targets are largely peers" (Tiggemann and Anderberg 2184-2185). In both sources, it is evident that social media creates an environment that idealizes and favors certain body types, which are then put forth as the standard for all other users. The superiority and inferiority difference that stems from social media poses a conflict between changing one's body to feel appreciated and validated, and staying true to oneself. Idealization leads to social comparison because social media idealizes certain body types, and adolescents begin to feel like they must change their appearance in order to be satisfied with their bodies.

In addition to idealization, social media creates a platform and stimulates competition in relation to body image, which causes teenagers to seek validation. Whether or not users realize it, they are a part of the internal competition that social media promotes, which can lead to social comparison. With this internal competition, adolescents start to want to appeal to others, especially to attract romantic partners. In "Instagram and College Women's Body Image: Investigating the Roles of Appearance-Related Comparisons and Intrasexual Competition" by Joshua Hendrickse, Laura Arpan, Russell Clayton, and Jessica Ridgway, which discusses intrasexual competition, the authors mention the intrasexual competition model, which states that "women especially, engage in appearance-related comparisons to evaluate their own attractiveness among members of the same sex, with the ultimate goal of attracting and retaining high quality mates" (Hendrickse et al. 92). Social media stimulates competition and social comparison by idealizing certain body types which are then used as the standard for comparison and referred to by other users as the "top competition" or "top goal body." Adolescents, especially females, are prone to making social comparisons against other females as a way of understanding themselves and evaluating their own beauty. This creates a cycle of competition amongst girls: adolescents who were once trying to change their body and fit into the standard are now the people to whom other girls compare themselves. For heterosexual adolescent females, this standard for comparison also becomes a way for them to attract the male gaze and receive male validation. Adolescents are impressionable, especially in romantic ways, and they want to impress their desirable romantic partners. They use competition as a way to understand where they stand. The idea of competition is further explained and analyzed in "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Peer Competition, Television Influences, and Body Image Dissatisfaction" by Christopher Ferguson, Monica Munoz, Sandra Contreras, and Kristina Velasquez, which highlights the influence of peers and celebrities on body dissatisfaction and competition. The authors found from their study that "dissatisfaction increases in the presence of competitive females and in the presence of a desirable male" (Ferguson et al. 480). Once again, intrasexual competition stimulates body dissatisfaction as adolescents become prone to comparing themselves to their peers and others while also wanting to seem "attractive" to males. When adolescents see a desirable male attracted to a specific body type, they begin to believe that changing their appearance to mimic that will give them the male validation they desire. Social media allows adolescents to see who other people follow and what pictures/media they interact with through likes and comments. When a young female sees a desirable male liking or following a certain type of person with a specific body type or look, they begin to believe that they must look similarly in order to receive a like from that male. The validation that stems from a like or comment can impact the way adolescents see their own bodies and the desire to change their bodies. Overall, the competition on social media drives adolescents to want to look a certain way to feel superior and attract romantic validation.

## THE SOCIAL MEDIA FACADE: SHAPING ADOLESCENTS PERCEPTIONS OF THEMSELVES AND OTHERS

Through the distinct online culture mentioned above, social media allows users to create a facade that does not accurately reflect their reality, which impacts people's perceptions of others and themselves. One of the aspects of social media that distinguishes it from other forms of media is its accessibility. Users can pick what to post, when to post, and how to post. Consequently, this allows people to only post pictures that are their "best," which can create an unrealistic standard of life. Tiggemann and Anderberg highlight that "the Instagram world seems inhabited largely by people who, unlike the viewer, have seemingly perfect bodies, perfect lives and perfect relationships" (Tiggemann and Anderberg 2185). Since users can choose their best photos to post online, those photos are what other people view and therefore compare themselves to. However, that is not always the reality: people do not consistently look like how they present themselves on social media, which creates a dangerous facade. Consequently, adolescents are using these pictures and ideas as a baseline for comparison, which is dangerous considering that they are not representative of reality. Interestingly enough, the facade adolescents create through photo editing also reveals important knowledge on how it affects the user itself, in addition to others viewing it. In a study conducted to explore the relationship between selfies and picture editing with body dissatisfaction and dietary restrictions, entitled "Photoshopping the selfie: Self photo editing and photo investment are associated with body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls," Siân McLean, Susan Paxton, Eleanor Wertheim, and Jennifer Masters found that "individuals who more frequently manipulated photos of themselves prior to sharing and reported being more invested in their photos, reported greater body-related and eating concerns at the univariate level, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large" (McLean et al. 1138). This source provides a new dimension to how this altered reality impacts both parties. There is a perpetual cycle that stems from the relationships between the two: teenagers view other users' posts and compare themselves, which in turn leads to body dissatisfaction and stimulates future photo editing and alterations, which impacts another user to continue the cycle.

When adolescents see unrealistic body types on social media receiving praise, they believe they are realistic and begin to work towards changing their appearance to match the facade. This can interfere with their perceptions of themselves and others. Adolescents begin to perceive their own bodies as inferior because they believe in and internalize the facade social media creates. The elaborate and detrimental facade can have a ripple effect on all users of social media, harming adolescents' body image perception and body dissatisfaction. In an article about adolescents' perception of their bodies as a result of what they see on social media, entitled "Body Image Perception in Relation to BMI and Self-Esteem in Adolescent Girls," authors Sneha Mary Jayan and Malini R. highlight that "it may be assumed in this context that individuals' perceived body image may be influential in determining one's beliefs about oneself" (Jayan and Malini 531). This causes adolescents to believe that they are not good enough or not "beautiful," which lowers self-esteem and further lowers body satisfaction. Especially in today's world, where photo editing and altering is extremely prevalent, adolescents are more immersed in this type of content, which warps their perception of what is real and not. When adolescents are submerged in content that is heavily edited and inauthentic, it shifts the perception of what is real relative to the beauty standard. The new, flawlessly edited version of people becomes the ideal. As a result, adolescents compare themselves to that ideal and ultimately desire to change in order to fit that standard. This can alter people's perception of themselves and others, because the line between what is real and not real becomes blurred, and perfection becomes the standard. Perfection is not realistic in regards to body image, as every person is unique and has their own flaws that are not necessarily negative. In an article about the perfectionism that stems from photo editing and the objectification of women on social media, entitled "Beyond the shallows of physical attractiveness: Perfection and objectifying gaze on Instagram," authors Karina Sokolova, Hajer Kefi, and Vincent Dutot write that "a step away from photographic perfection towards beautiful naturalness could, in fact, have positive outcomes on both acceptance by the audience and objectification" (Sokolova et.al 2). However, when social media continually promotes unrealistic perfection, it creates the idea that everyone must appear flawless both on social media and in real life in order to be beautiful, which is detrimental to body satisfaction.

## BODY POSITIVITY AND UNDERSTANDING MEDIA MANIPULATION: A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

Despite these negative influences, it is important to note and understand the opposite effect that social media can have on people's body image—body positivity. In today's media, since the harmful effects of social media have been researched more, there is a larger effort to spread body positivity and inclusivity rather than dissatisfaction and shame. In "The Case for Body Positivity on Social Media: Perspectives on Current Advances and Future Directions," which explores the idea of body positivity, authors Rachel Cohen, Toby Newton-John, and Amy Slater accentuate the core values of body positivity, including "appreciating the unique features of one's body, accepting aspects of the body that are inconsistent with idealized media images, broadly defining beauty, inner positivity, tending to the body's needs, and filtering information in a body-protective manner" (Cohen et al. 2367). Through this body positivity movement, those who do not fit into the narrow range of body types that society promotes can feel welcomed and connected to others who also feel the same. This can promote better self-esteem and body satisfaction. Furthermore, in Staci Zavattaro's article on social media and body positivity, "Taking the Social Justice Fight to the Cloud: Social Media and Body Positivity," the author writes how "social media are key tools fat acceptance and body positive advocates use to challenge the neoliberal, hegemonic discourse around health (thinness), and women tend to occupy these digital spaces more frequently than men because women are disproportionately affected by weight stigma" (Zavattaro 285). Both sources highlight how social media can be a space for positivity and connectivity between users who are struggling through similar issues. If adolescents see people who are not restricted to the very narrow standard society creates, it stimulates a more open, inclusive standard that can increase body satisfaction and decrease body image issues. While the body positivity movement is beneficial, it is still underdeveloped and is often overshadowed by body dissatisfaction and shame.

In addition to body positivity, an increased knowledge and understanding of how social media works can prevent and reverse body dissatisfaction and therefore work towards a solution. Social media has many inner workings that subconsciously affect many adolescents without them even realizing it. Developments such as the "ranking system" that places certain body types over others, internal competition, and the media's ability to mass broadcast certain messages all affect users whether they know it or not. However, by better understanding social media and the content it produces, adolescents can minimize its damaging effects. In their article analyzing the effects of the rise of social media on adolescents' mental health and body image issues, entitled "A Meta-Analytic Review of the Relationship between Social Media Use and Body Image Disturbance," Alyssa Saiphoo and Zahra Vahedi found that "social media use may not be as strongly associated with body image disturbance as traditional media. This could be because users may recognize that content on social media is idealized, and thus irrelevant for social comparisons, so they make less of them" (Saiphoo and Vahedi 269). If adolescents know and understand how social media is altered and highly unrealistic, the normal effects may not impact them as much. Knowing that certain ideas and images are not real makes them easier to face; therefore, adolescents can prevent frequent social comparison and the internalization of ideas that are fake. This is similar to what C. Blair Burnette, Melissa Knitowski, and Suzanne Mazzeo found in their article, "'I Don't Need People to Tell Me I'm Pretty on Social Media:' a Qualitative Study of Social Media and Body Image in Early Adolescent Girls," which analyzed the relationship between social media use and adolescents' perception of themselves while also understanding social literacy. The authors found that "it is possible that the high levels of both media literacy and awareness of the potential dangers of investment in sociocultural ideals served as buffers and decreased the frequency and effects of making such comparisons for this sample" (Burnette et al. 122). Media literacy, which is defined as being able to analyze and evaluate the media, is an important aspect of reducing social comparisons: the more one knows about the dangers of social media, the more they can prevent it from affecting them. Both sources acknowledge that by recognizing that social media can be fake, it prevents adolescents from comparing themselves to an ideal that is unrealistic and unachievable. However, it is important to note that even though many adolescents understand that social media is fake and highly edited, they still struggle just as much as those who do not understand. This is supported by research, as the impacts of social media on body satisfaction were not as high as thought to be. Many adolescents can acknowledge that pictures on social media are fake and repurposed, because they can recognize editing and altering, which changes their perspective on their own bodies. There may be other factors as well, such as personality, genetics, environment, etc. This requires more research and development, but it is a step in the right direction to minimizing the dangerous effects of social media.

## CONCLUSION

In today's world, social media plays a huge role in teenagers' lives, and therefore has a huge role in impacting their mental states. While the relationship between body image and body dissatisfaction is clear, the extent of its impact has been a continuous debate. Understanding this extent is important, as it provides a gateway to understanding and creating potential solutions to the ongoing crisis. Upon final analysis, the research conducted found that while the effect of social media on body dissatisfaction is not as initially thought, it is still extremely influential in affecting teenagers' body image issues and therefore mental health. The overall trend communicated that social media does a great deal of damage to adolescents' body image, but it is not the only cause, and it can be minimized. A majority of the research found that through social comparison and the pressures of social media, adolescents' self-esteem and body appreciation were negatively impacted, but not as heavily as hypothesized because of ideas such as media literacy and body positivity. Through the Tripartite Influence Model, two main mechanisms, social comparison and internalization, were explained and analyzed as two main factors leading to body dissatisfaction. Social media's ability to circulate specific messages about beauty standards leads to adolescents internalizing those messages and pressures, ultimately leading to appearance comparison. While the research provides insightful, beneficial knowledge, the media body image crisis is evolving with new developments in technology. Further research should be conducted to continue to understand this complex issue and search for more effective solutions, like furthering body positivity and body acceptance ideals on social media.

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**Janae Spencer**

# Displacement and Destruction: A Study of Urban Renewal in Richmond, Virginia


## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the ethicality of the Urban Renewal process in Richmond, Virginia, between the years 1950 and 1966 and how its process contributed to present-day gentrification in the city. This research seeks to explain why local governments in Richmond should not have been able to conduct Urban Renewal projects because of the negative humanitarian issues that came from its usage. The racist and classist ideologies embedded in the Urban Renewal process disproportionately affected lower-class black residents with mass displacement and financial loss. Local governments not fulfilling the promises of Urban Renewal had long-lasting consequences and created new forms of redevelopment (gentrification) and the continuous displacement of lower-income black citizens. From the analysis of the ethical theories of Deontology, Minimax, Loyalty to Community, Need, and Fairness or Equality, the research reveals how unethical Urban Renewal is.*


## INTRODUCTION

Between the years 1950 and 1966, Urban Renewal projects drastically altered the city structure of Richmond, Virginia; its demolition and infrequent redevelopment caused impoverished Black residents in Richmond to suffer greatly. This demographic is still experiencing the adverse effects of Urban Renewal because it has evolved into a new form of redevelopment known as gentrification (which began in 2000 and is still prevalent today). In my research, I will explore whether local governments in Richmond should have been able to conduct Urban Renewal when negative humanitarian issues came from its demolition and redevelopment. The article "The Moral Instinct" by Steven Pinker delves into the implications of ethical theories and their standing amongst certain people in an unbiased way to show the reader how some ethical theories can contrast or be misconstrued to fit one's agenda. Pinker's article assists in the research as it allows for an ethical analysis of Urban Renewal. Ethical theories such as Deontology, Equality or Fairness, Minimax, Need, and

Loyalty to Community will be used to examine how ethical Urban Renewal was at the time of its implementation and the ethics of its contributions to modern-day gentrification. The local government in Richmond should have never been able to conduct Urban Renewal. Even if there were some benefits from this type of urban development, the negatives would outweigh the positives. Urban Renewal neglects the needs and issues of those lower on the socio-economic hierarchy who are more likely to be disproportionately affected by urban developments.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT URBAN RENEWAL

The United States government created the Urban Renewal process through the Department of Housing and Urban Development grant and loan program to improve deteriorating infrastructure in large cities throughout the United States after World War II. Urban Renewal launched a significant period of urban renovation in the United States, drastically altering the landscape and structure into what we know today. This form of redevelopment allowed for the construction of many highways, turnpikes, other major roads, project housing, and new infrastructures in large cities. However, it also displaced thousands of people from their homes and communities (predominantly low-income black families), destroyed historical structures, and removed many small businesses. Occurring at a time of heightened racial tensions, Urban Renewal negatively affected United States Black citizens (Knittel).

## THE DEMOGRAPHIC AFFECTED BY URBAN RENEWAL

Urban Renewal impacted a specific demographic when it was enacted in Richmond. In historic neighborhoods such as Fulton, Jackson Ward, and Churchill, the communities were mainly comprised of poor and lower-working-class African Americans who ended up enduring all of the negative implications of Urban Renewal projects. Marvin T. Chiles states, “Blacks represented more than 97 percent of Richmond’s displaced families during the Urban Renewal movements of the 1950s and 1960s” (Chiles 4). It is important to note how the data given implies that mostly Black communities were affected since the percentage of displacement significantly impacted the Black population more than any other demographic, revealing how during redevelopment, it did not considerably impact any other racial group.

Furthermore, Kathryn S Parkhurst depicts how class played a role in the demographic affected by Urban Renewal as well. Parkhurst states, "Most Residents targeted by Urban Renewal could not afford to return to their old neighborhood" (Parkhurst 14). A key phrase here is "could not afford," which implies that the residents were of a lower financial class. This divulges the fact that not only did Urban Renewal target Black communities, but it also targeted poor and lower-class communities, thus disclosing how race and class played a role in which demographic would be affected most. However, contrasting evidence is found in Justin W Hubbard's thesis paper "The Moral Economy of the Housing Sanitarian Crowd: Crime, Disease, and Urban Renewal in Richmond, VA, 1953-1964." Hubbard discloses that Black communities were not chosen solely on the basis of race; but rather on the deteriorating infrastructure found there. Hubbard states, "The 'malignant tumor near the city's heart,' compared quite drastically with much of the city: of the 600 residences in the neighborhood, ninety percent of homes had no private bath, sixty-one percent no running water, twenty-two percent were overcrowded, and only twenty-five percent were owner-occupied properties" (Hubbard 8). This reveals how some city regions needed to be redeveloped because of the lack of livable conditions and the harm caused to the residents who lived there.

Having Urban Renewal projects impact this specific demographic brings its ethicality into question. In Steven Pinker's article "The Moral Instinct," he discusses the ethical theory of Equality or Fairness: everyone should be treated equally. Pinker states in the article, "...fairness should trump community…" (Pinker). No matter what community you are a part of or identify with, being equal and fair should take precedence over choosing your community over another or using another community to progress your own further. Having Urban Renewal in Richmond target specifically poor and lower-class Black communities shows how the ethical theory of Equality or Fairness was violated; only one demographic was negatively impacted by redevelopment, while little to no other demographic was notably affected. If this aspect of Urban Renewal were truly equal or fair, the whole population of Richmond would have been impacted the same way by development projects. The ethical theory of Equality or Fairness can be challenged by the information from Hubbard. Since not all neighborhoods were experiencing deteriorating infrastructure, it can be seen as unethical to redevelop areas that do not need it for everyone to be equally impacted by Urban Renewal projects. Dr. Bender's ethics lecture states that people should be given what they need and that not everything has to be equal. This shows how Urban Renewal can be seen as ethical since it developed areas that were in need and not just because the area wanted it. Given the data from Chiles, the facts presented by Parkhurst, and the ethics of Equality or Fairness, the counterargument is not strong enough to disprove the fact that when Urban Renewal in Richmond used lower-class Black communities to facilitate their redevelopment projects, it was unethical.

## HOW URBAN RENEWAL IS RACIST AND CLASSIST

Urban Renewal in Richmond targeted lower-class Black neighborhoods to facilitate their redevelopment projects. This demographic was impacted and became a target because of the racist and classist ideals embedded in Urban Renewal projects. The 50s and 60s were the height of the Jim Crow era, where segregation and racial tensions were prevalent in Richmond, especially in local government (Komp 2016). James Richardson's journal entry states, "Race has dominated the political and planning history of Richmond. Whites wanted to keep blacks out of power and out of their neighborhoods" (Richardson 363). This shows how race was a prevalent factor in how Richmond's government handled politics. It is essential to note that Richmond's local government at the time was mainly composed of White politicians, which suggests that those in power used their status to ensure that no White neighborhoods would be destroyed or targeted by urban political planning. The quote's last sentence demonstrates how White people wanted to keep Black people oppressed and separated from them, which implies that they wanted to gain more control in Richmond and reap the benefits that urban development offered to those who could afford to live in the newly built neighborhoods. Given that "race has dominated political and planning" in Richmond and that redevelopment took place during a time of intensified racial tension, this information shows how racist Urban Renewal in Richmond was; it strived to impact only Black communities negatively (Richardson 363).

Additionally, in Catherine Komp's article, she not only explores the racist roots of Urban Renewal, but the role classism played in it as well. Lower-class individuals had a more challenging time finding places to live after Urban Renewal projects destroyed their neighborhoods. The suburbs were too expensive and where they once lived was no longer available to them due to the increase in home values caused by redevelopment; Urban Renewal was not only racially motivated by class motivated as well (Komp 2016). This type of classism in Urban Renewal is shown in the article when it states, "Some went to the suburbs, though redlining limited where families could relocate" (Komp 2016). A key term in this quote is "redlining," which is defined as refusing someone either housing, loan, insurance, etc., because they live in an area deemed poor. Kathryn Howell and Benjamin F. Teresa state, "Redlining emerged in 1933 with the creation of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation" (Howell and Teresa 2020). This creation also further oppressed impoverished Black individuals by not allowing them to take Federal Housing mortgages. Due to Black neighborhoods being deemed poor, they could not use resources that would enable them to move back into their communities or find better housing. The classist and racist roots of Urban Renewal deemed neighborhoods with predominantly Black people insufficient, slums, and blighted areas. This caused it to be financially and culturally incongruent with the redeveloped environment. Overarching classist attitudes were a major contributing factor in the process of Urban Renewal as it prejudiced authorities against Black families returning to gentrified developments.

In Contrast, Hubbard's thesis argues that Urban Renewal was not racist or classist due to the trope that those in low-income Black neighborhoods lead the areas to become diseased ridden, and inhabitable. He states, "Further, renewal in Richmond was more than social control of the city's black residents. Advocates felt deeply compelled by the dangers of disease and crime…demolishing the physical structures that bred pathologic tendencies was fundamental to urban renewal projects" (Hubbard 2). Stating how Urban Renewal was "more than social control" suggests that Urban Renewal was not inherently racist and not a significant factor in what areas were chosen for redevelopment. "The danger of disease and crime" pushed Urban Renewal projects in Black neighborhoods. Hubbard also states, "…the trope of poverty leading to diseased homes and dangerous streets…" giving insight that it led to crime and diseases because the neighborhood was impoverished (Hubbard 20). Hubbard suggests that because of these factors, Urban Renewal was not classist or racist; it was just by chance that poor and predominantly Black neighborhoods were in the same areas where crime and disease ran rampant, implying that Urban Renewal was needed to reform crime and take care of diseases and was not used as a tool to facilitate the racial and class divide.

Having Urban Renewal rooted in racism and classism is unethical as it is used as a political tool to further racism and classism in Richmond. Immanuel Kant's ethical theory of Deontology, which is a "categorical imperative," states that people or groups should not use others as a means to an end like they are disposable. The part of Deontology that has been violated with Urban Renewal in its racist and classist implications is that people (low-class Black people) have been used as a means to an end to facilitate the government's Urban Renewal projects. In his article Pinker refers to the Non-Zero-Sum Game, which can relate to Deontology; he states, "In many areas of life, two parties are objectively better off if they both act unselfishly than if each of them acts selfishly" (Pinker). This shows how not using people to further yourself leaves both parties better off and that using someone or a group is selfish and harmful. In the case of Urban Renewal, the government seeks only to benefit itself. It used low-income Black communities as a stepping stool to enact its projects, which is unethical from a Deontology standpoint since it has been deemed immoral to use people.

## WHY RICHMOND'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS VIEW URBAN RENEWAL AS BENEFICIAL

The negative connotation associated with Urban Renewal eradicated any benefits that Richmond's local government thought the program could bring to the city. The city leaders viewed Urban Renewal "as an inherent societal good" because of how it could build the city's economy, attract more middle-class citizens to reside in Richmond, and make the city "beautiful" (Chiles). From the government's view, Urban Renewal was supposed to be a program that enriched the city's communities by offering them job opportunities, better living conditions, better schools, city infrastructure, and more. Robert E. Knittel's paper even states, "The fact that new housing…was being built through the program…that community facilities were being created, such as sewer systems, schools, playgrounds, parks, and parking lots…soon gave the urban renewal program a feeling of working in community development" (Knittel 68). A key phrase here is "working in community development," which implies that Urban Renewal was needed to create more robust and better communities within Richmond and not destroy them, which is commonly associated with this type of redevelopment (Komp). In her research article, Catherine Komp also states that the goal of redevelopment projects in

Richmond was "...to improve employment opportunities in the community…to provide adequate services to support resident and industrial land uses…" (Komp). It is crucial to note and see how the written plans and promises made by the government sound like the best thing to happen to Richmond, especially to the city's impoverished Black communities, whom the government viewed as needing the most help from Urban Renewal Projects (Chiles). Many Black Richmond citizens even supported Urban Renewal efforts, "...believing that jobs would be created and new businesses might be enticed to locate…" near Black-owned businesses because of all the positive benefits Richmond's local government promised its residents (Bowen 65). Their subtle support implies that Urban Renewal should have been a positive change in Richmond.

However, there is a reason why Urban Renewal is not associated with the positive benefits that the government put forth; the government did not facilitate Urban Renewal in a manner that would not adequately benefit all its residents. Richardson states, "...Richmond…did not immediately embark on a program of urban revitalization…" (Richardson 363). Redevelopment took a while to emerge, thus leaving parts of the city not rebuilt and having empty demolished lands. Parkhurst states, "Truman portrayed urban renewal as a neighborhood improvement plan, but urban planners rarely placed the well-being of neighborhood residents first…they typically approached projects with a conviction that cities had nothing to offer anymore, resulting in mass bulldozing and clearance rather than restoration" (Parkhurst 12). The government not providing its residents in need with the benefits that were promised and the lack of care towards those impacted by the destruction reveal how the negative humanitarian issues surrounding Urban Renewal outweigh the good. Based on the analyzed information, the local government's view of Urban Renewal is biased and unethical. Pinker discusses ethics surrounding community and states how people follow the groups' beliefs and what they deem to be moral within a community. However, the theory of Loyalty to the Community states that people in the same community should not harm or betray one another. These ethics when violated when the government used Urban Renewal as a tool to uplift wealthier Whites while displacing and further pushing their Black community members into poverty. Although they were in the same community, the political elites did not see their Black residents as a part of their community, dehumanizing them and moralizing the harmful effects Urban Renewal has had on the Black community.

## HOW URBAN RENEWAL CONTRIBUTED TO MODERN-DAY GENTRIFICATION

Urban Renewal was used as a guide to facilitate modern-day redevelopment, known as gentrification. Parkhurst defines gentrification as "The creation of a white, middle-class enclave within a blighted neighborhood…" (Parkhurst 5). This sounds similar to what Urban Renewal Projects had created a few decades prior to the popularization of gentrification. As shown in Roshanak Mehdipanah's, Giuila Marra's, Giuilia Melis's, and Elena Gelormino's journal entry, "Evidence supports that urban renewal programs, especially those implemented within inner-city neighborhoods, are often aimed to attract younger…" White "...professionals" (Mehdipanah, et al.). This information establishes the connection Urban Renewal has with gentrification; evidence has proven how Urban Renewal had driven gentrification since it established the higher value of the land, property, and taxes "thus, market-led gentrification of populations that are vulnerable" (Mehdipatnam, et al.). Urban Renewal caused different neighborhoods to become susceptible to gentrification because of monetary gain. Since Urban Renewal paved the way for Gentrification due to money, it normalized the displacement of long-term residents in certain areas to reap market benefits. (Parkhurst).

Furthermore, Urban Renewal leading to gentrification has caused Black lower-class Richmond residents to be continually displaced over several decades, which violates the ethics of Minimax. The theory by John Rawls states that people should put up "a veil of ignorance" when making decisions that would affect society to avoid biases. He states, "The unanimous vote would be to maximize benefits to those who have the minimum number of goods in society" (Tisha). The government's decision to continue to use redevelopment projects reveals how they did not put a "veil of ignorance." They continued to use redevelopment, which impacted the same demographic for decades, destroying and oppressing the communities that they claimed to want to help (Knittle). Instead of maximizing benefits to those with the minimum number of goods in Richmond society over time with things such as stability and homes, they did the opposite. Since Urban Renewal has led to continuous displacement, it is unethical as it depicts the negative humanitarian issues it has caused, which impacted several generations of people.

## THE LONG-LASTING CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN RENEWAL ON THOSE DISPLACED

Years after Urban Renewal ended, those displaced still experienced the lasting consequences. Those relocated still face displacement as redevelopment became a normalized occurrence in Richmond, which put more lower-income Black Residents into government housing where a majority of families would live for generations (Fullilove). Fullilove even states, "African-Americans were forced out of the renewal areas, but only were able to move to other ghetto areas" (Fullilove 74). Indicting that housing choices became limited for Blacks and still are because of the foundation set by Urban Renewal projects. Displaced people as well faced further exploitation since Urban Renewal created high profits for business people, government officials, and property owners. Displacing Black people "...created a housing market that was profitable for those who did own because it was based on the exploitation and exclusion of Black people from ownership," thus showing how Black communities over decades would be used for monetary gain (Howell and Teresa 2020).

Lower-class Black communities still experiencing the consequences of Urban Renewal is unethical. It is unethical because the government is using the lower-class Black communities as land to sell and rebuild, disproportionately affecting them over the course of decades, justifying it in the name of urban development (Fullilove). The Richmond government violates the theory of Deontology by Immanuel Kant as they continue to use redevelopment/gentrification for the revenue it can bring in for the economy and local business owners. The government uses one community to uplift the other, which is unethical as it hinders one group from progressing for decades.

CONCLUSION

From an ethical standpoint, the local government in Richmond, Virginia, conducted an immoral project, Urban Renewal, in the 50s and 60s because of its racial and class biases in housing redevelopment and Black displacement. There were some benefits from this type of redevelopment as Urban Renewal was able to construct new homes, schools, sewers, roads, highways, and more. However, the research more clearly supports how Urban Renewal neglected basic human needs and had negative humanitarian issues surrounding it. It contributed to the mass displacement of lower-class Black residents because it was rooted in racist and classist ideologies making their communities targets for redevelopment plans. Then, with Urban Renewal contributing to gentrification, with a continuous displacement of impoverished Blacks, the research supports how unethical Urban Renewal was since it worsened humanitarian issues. Given the ethical theories of Deontology, Minimax, Loyalty to Community, Need, and Fairness or Equality, each supports the research findings. Using lower-income Black residents as a means to an end to uplift the White-collar White community, displacing thousands of Black families for decades for monetary gain, and targeting poor Blacks because of racism and classism violate each ethical theory. Although the Urban Renewal project conveyed a morally upright mission, its execution ultimately resulted in the erroneous displacement of impoverished Blacks and redlined these demographics into further marginalized neighborhoods.

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**Temi Ayetiwa**

# Medical Racism: Its Impact on the Exploitation of Black Patients Within U.S. Clinical Trials


## ABSTRACT

*Black people constitute a large percentage of patients within the U.S. medical system, but are poorly represented, exploited, and excluded from clinical trials. Medical racism and its subsequent effects serve as pivotal barriers to healthcare for many Black patients, thus leading to a low percentage of trial involvement. The connection to medical racism and omission of Black patients in clinical trial enrollment is directly related to longstanding historical events of medical negligence and a clear lack of ethical treatment in current and past clinical trials. The key focus of this research is to analyze systemic specific barriers to healthcare that create medical mistrust, as well as detail the ways that peripheral trauma, privilege, and lack of clinical ethics both stigmatize and deter Black patients from trial enrollment. Some of the key findings are as noted: Black patients with high levels of mistrust cannot and will not enroll in trials if there is an associated high level of risk. The emotional, financial, and psychosocial barriers that gatekeep patients from clinical trials must be resolved for trial involvement. Additionally, Black patients showed hesitancy in decisions regarding enrollment due to complex decision making factors that go beyond the needs of the individual. Lastly, awareness of peripheral trauma in minority patients can allow clinicians to provide better care, increase cultural competence, and eliminate bias. However, an awareness of trauma and increased representation alone is not enough. The results of these findings convey that systemic level change that addresses the neglect that Black patients face within the healthcare system is a vital start to increasing the enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials.*


## INTRODUCTION

Medical racism is a longstanding issue that impacts many aspects of life and the healthcare for Black people living in the United States. Medical racism is defined as: “the systematic and wide-spread racism against people of color within the medical system” (Bronson, 2020). Black patients have been historically disadvantaged and exploited by the U.S.

healthcare system. A recent study conducted by the New England Journal of Medicine noted that, "although Black people make up 13% of the U.S. population, they account for 21% of deaths from Covid-19 but only 3% of enrollees in vaccine trials" (Warren et al.). This alarming statistic only scratches the surface of an ongoing problem that currently exists when it comes to the treatment of Black patients in medicine. In comparison to other minority groups, there is a large divide when it comes to fair and consensual care in clinical trials for patients within the Black community (George et al.). Clinical trials are research studies done on patients that evaluate the effectiveness of new medical techniques or medications. This research paper will seek to answer the following questions: In what ways do clinical trials limit the inclusion of Black patients? How do high levels of medical mistrust, privilege within the healthcare system, and peripheral trauma impact access to and enrollment in clinical trials for Black patients? These questions will add a different perspective towards what is already known about medical racism by highlighting the current and specific systemic barriers that prevent the inclusion of Black patients in clinical trials.

The focus of this paper will be on examining the medical ethics behind past and current clinical trials involving Black patients, and highlighting the different ways that current and long standing barriers to healthcare utilization contribute to low representation of Black patients in clinical trials. Medical ethics and its connection to informed consent as well as peripheral trauma will be used to bring attention to the role medical racism plays in clinical trials. As stated by the Vermont Ethics Network (2019), medical ethics is defined as "a set of moral principles, beliefs and values that guide [healthcare professionals] in making choices about medical care." Within this paper, medical ethics will be centered around the concept of informed consent. Informed consent is when doctors and clinicians are clear and open with the potential risks and benefits of a medical procedure and/or clinical trial (Shah). Overall, it is all about making sure the patient is educated and aware of any medical procedures they undergo. The psychology of peripheral trauma is also vital to the understanding of this topic. Peripheral trauma is a phenomenon where exposure and awareness of racially targeted events over time contributes to adverse mental and physical health implications amongst minority patients even if the patients are not directly involved in the traumatic event (Alsan et. al). Finally, healthcare utilization, or the ability and willingness of a patient to seek medical treatment and care, is lower in Black communities largely because of peripheral trauma, systemic privilege, and overall mistrust surrounding trials. I will be connecting these frameworks throughout this paper to highlight how experiencing medical trauma induces medical mistrust, thus decreasing healthcare utilization and clinical trial enrollment in Black patients.

Clinical trials are vital within the field of medicine because they help to improve overall patient outcomes. From the discovery of new medications, testing of new procedures, and determining effectiveness of new processes, clinical trials provide extremely valuable information that can help improve healthcare and medical services. The inclusion of minority patients in clinical trials can mean better healthcare and medical services for Black patients because researchers will be able to implement different treatments and analyze how they work in different marginalized communities (Banda). Though Black patients make up a large percentage of the U.S. healthcare system, they are poorly represented and excluded from clinical trials due to systemic barriers like privilege, lack of informed consent, peripheral trauma, and inaccessibility to healthcare. This research article will seek to examine medical racism in past and current clinical trials involving Black patients.

## A HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BLACK PATIENTS IN CLINICAL TRIALS

The first key barrier that will be mentioned is the history of Black patients within clinical trials and the lingering effects that historical instances of exploitation and abuse have on Black patients today. In order to highlight the important points within the frameworks of medical ethics and peripheral trauma, key figures or case studies will be mentioned. The people and case studies that will be examined in detail include: The Tuskegee Experiment and experiments conducted by Dr. J. Marion Sims. Credited as being the "father of modern gynecology," Dr. J. Marion Sims was a practicing physician in the 1830s-1850s who "developed pioneering tools and surgical techniques related to women's reproductive health" (Holland). He was the first doctor to open an all women's hospital where he conducted medical research specifically on Black women (Holland). He utilized unethical scientific techniques that were backed by his belief that Black people did not feel pain, and as a result performed non-consensual gynecology experiments on "enslaved Black women without anesthesia or medical ethicists" for many years (Holland). The experiments conducted by Dr. Sims will be used to examine the importance of informed consent within clinical practice. The "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male," was a research study that sought to study the progression of syphilis in Black male patients. At that time there was no known treatment for syphilis so doctors from the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) were tasked with running a study to fully understand syphilis as a disease (Nix). The study began in 1932 and was shut down in July of 1972 after many ethical concerns came to light when it was discovered that doctors running the study allowed hundreds of men to go untreated and die. It is recorded that, "researchers provided no effective care as the men died, went blind or insane, or experienced other severe health problems due to their untreated syphilis" (Nix). The Tuskegee Experiment highlights medical neglect and the exploitation of Black patients in research. This study in particular will guide the discussion regarding ethics, transparency in clinical practice, and the vital importance of informed consent. The experiments done by both Dr. J. Marion Sims and The Tuskegee Experiments will be used to highlight the role that racism plays in medicine and how the lingering effects of these trials have stigmatized clinical research for male and female Black patients.

Though these experiments are seen to have occurred in a distant past, the current effect these case studies have had are still strongly present within the Black community. A study supported by the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) revealed the current thoughts from Black people when it comes to clinical trials. The paper states that: "In focus group interviews with 33 Black patients and a Black moderator, most participants viewed clinical research negatively and expressed concern they would be treated as a guinea pig. They also believed Black patients would not benefit from clinical research because of racism and the inability to pay for medical care" (Powell 155). The authors provide this specific example to show first hand thoughts from Black people when it comes to clinical trials. The results reinforce the fact that Black patients are guarded with their approach to healthcare due to past instances of exploitation and neglect.

The lingering effects of case studies like the Tuskegee Experiment highlight a very interesting viewpoint when it comes to modern day healthcare utilization for patients within the Black community. This relates back specifically to the effects of the Tuskegee Experiment. In addition to the men involved in the study being exploited, neglected, and denied medical attention, the effects of the trial spread to those around them. By the time the horrifying effects of this study were revealed, "28 participants had perished from syphilis, 100 more had passed away from related complications, at least 40 spouses had been diagnosed with it and the disease had been passed to 19 children at birth" (Nix). The blatant negligence of those clinicians created a domino effect. Not only did the study deeply impact those involved, but its effects spread to their families and generations to come. When examining this impact it is easy to acknowledge why many in the Black community are wary when it comes to clinical trials. Black patients may not fully trust clinicians when there is clear evidence of neglect shown in trials like Tuskegee. Further evidence of the lingering effects of historical exploitation is shown in the same case study aforementioned in the previous paragraph. Powell goes on to mention: "In another set of focus groups with Black women, the theme of trust also emerged. Women were suspicious of how clinical research was funded and expressed concerns regarding the termination of programs that specifically help the black community" (Powell 155). A correlation that can be made from history and its impact on patients within the Black community today is that, for Black patients, when it comes to health care, the thought process is not centered on the needs of the individual patient, but rather on the resulting impact their decisions may have on the Black community. Instead of Black patients worrying about how the trial may affect them physically (ex: symptoms, potential side effects, etc.), these participants showed proof of thinking about external effects like how clinical trials may affect funding within their community and their own financial circumstances (Powell). Overall, Black patients may show hesitancy in making the decision to enroll in clinical trials because of complex decision making factors that go beyond the needs of the individual. As shown by the responses of Black respondents in the case study, many Black patients have adapted to become primary advocates for themselves and the communities around them even when making decisions as personal as seeking medical treatment (Powell). This not only shows the historical impact of clinical trials but also relates to the psychological impact of peripheral trauma due to the way that history has changed the decision making process for Black patients approaching healthcare.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERIPHERAL TRAUMA AND ITS IMPACT

The second barrier that prevents the enrollment and retention of Black patients within clinical trials is peripheral trauma. Peripheral trauma is a phenomenon where exposure and awareness of racially targeted events over time contributes to adverse mental and physical health implications amongst minority patients even if the patients are not directly involved in the traumatic event (Alsan et. al). A strong example of peripheral trauma at work is the healthcare utilization rate of male Black patients after the events of the Tuskegee Experiment. Data analysis conducted by doctors, Alsan, Wanamaker, and Hardenman with the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), in a recent case study found that The Tuskegee Experiment induced peripheral trauma in Black males and increased mortality rates from 1968 to 1987 (Alsan et. al). The study also showed that the core reasoning for the increase in mortality is the reduced interaction with doctors in Black males between 1973 to 1977 (Alsan et. al). This finding is vital because it provides reasoning behind such low levels of healthcare utilization in Black patients years after a large and widely known traumatic medical event. Awareness of peripheral trauma in minority patients can allow practitioners to provide better care, become more culturally competent, and eliminate bias and medical mistrust.

An important note about peripheral trauma can be made in regards to representation of Black clinicians, doctors, and leaders in the medical field. Representation is vital especially within clinical trials and medicine because hyper awareness of struggles, dilemmas, and cultural understandings within specific marginalized groups can allow doctors and researchers to provide a stronger level of care and empathy to patients. Increased representation can contribute to the understanding of peripheral trauma in minority patients, and thus allow medical professionals to gain the trust of Black patients and provide them equal quality of care (Alsan et. al). In "The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis: A Case Study in Peripheral Trauma with Implications for Health Professionals," Alsan, Marcella, et al. create an interesting implication when reporting the finding that increasing minority representation in medicine will result in a direct decrease in patient mistrust. They state, "Black male subjects randomly assigned to Black male doctors were 18 percentage points more likely to elect preventive services relative to those assigned to non-Black doctors, and particularly so for invasive preventive health services requiring an injection or a blood draw. The findings were strongest among men who reported higher baseline levels of medical mistrust or who had limited experience with the healthcare system" (Alsan et al. 4). This directly contradicts the findings of another study that focused on preventative screening on African American men which found that, “the use of minority outreach recruiters, a specialized recruitment manual, and engagement of consultants for minority recruitment failed to yield increases in recruitment of minority participants in a prostate cancer prevention trial” (Powell 154). This quote creates an interesting contradiction surrounding representation by implying that representation may have little impact on Black patients when it comes to healthcare utilization. One key reason why the contradiction is so vast between these two sources may be because the results collected in the first source were from a case study where a Black male patient was receiving direct care from a Black male physician. In the other case study the patient was not in the direct care of a Black physician as it does not mention the specific race, and it also states that there was an increase in minority recruiters – not physicians or another provider. Two key conclusions can be drawn from this. One, the results of this study goes to show how deeply mistrust impacts the issue of clinical trials and Black patients by highlighting the large impact that trust can have on patient enrollment. Second, it is not that representation is ineffective as the source by Powell implies, but that such representation is why Black patients are more trusting and willing to be a part of healthcare services when they are directly treated by Black physicians, or even just clinicians that demonstrate empathy and a level of relatability. Recruiters, like mentioned in the Powell source, only determine eligibility and try to bring patients into trials. They may not be able or even willing to go in depth and explain the medical procedures or processes that go into being in a clinical trial. So the level of trust between a Black patient and a minority recruiter will be less than the level of trust between a Black patient and a Black physician. Overall, care when it comes to Black patients is delicate and specific especially because of the effects of peripheral trauma.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that representation can serve to be the trophy that hides the bigger more systemic problem if that is the only action taken to resolve mistrust. While representation may help in building trust between providers and patients, it may not actually do much in removing long standing stigmas or mistrust in Black patients shown by the increase in minority recruiters, and the inability to increase trial enrollment. If the only solution when it comes to patients within the Black community is increased representation, this serves to ignore the larger issues regarding implicit biases, the healthcare system itself, and lack of access to healthcare for Black patients. If Black patients are able to see efforts at change in terms of consent, support, and increased educational efforts for the Black community when it comes to healthcare this can serve to have more impact than just increasing representation without addressing the other systemic issues.

## PRIVILEGE AND ITS CONNECTION TO LOW HEALTHCARE UTILIZATION

A key reason as to why there is low representation of Black patients in clinical trials is due to the privilege required to participate in medical trials. As aforementioned, patients within the Black community are more likely to be skeptical about utilizing healthcare because of continual and generational evidence of medical exploitation within the U.S. healthcare system. This is the effect of peripheral trauma. An additional barrier for Black patients when it comes to clinical trials are the necessary resources that must be accessible in order to participate in these trials safely. While the U.S. healthcare system has advanced to create guidelines and laws, Black patients are still neglected in different ways. An article from *The New England Journal of Medicine* (Warren et al.) centered around Covid 19 Vaccine Trials and low representation of Black patients in clinical trials went on to make the point that,

> In addition to often lacking access to health care, Black people are also disproportionately likely to be uninsured, and pharmaceutical sponsors in the United States are not required to provide compensation to people who experience research-related injuries. Even when participants have insurance, there is no guarantee that they will be covered. In many cases, injured participants will be forced to rely on the tort system for compensation — a situation that is morally indefensible, especially for participants who lack the means to engage in this time-consuming and expensive process. (2)

This quote demonstrates why neglect is still an aspect within clinical trials. In the event of an injury there is basically no promise of financial compensation or emotional support. For some Black patients, especially ones who have shown a higher level of medical mistrust and peripheral trauma, it is not realistic to consider involvement in a clinical trial because when facing an aspect of neglect that is possible there is zero reassurance, and there is no promise of any kind of support in the event of a medical emergency.

This highlights a unique aspect of clinical trials that acknowledges the extreme amount of privilege that participants must have in order to participate. If there is an expected amount of time or other personal expenses that a patient is expected to allocate in order to participate in a clinical trial this serves as a major deterrent. A study called the "Systematic Reviews of Barriers to Research for Minority Groups" added that, "The concerns [range] from psychosocial issues such as mistrust, fear, and lack of confidence to logistical concerns including childcare, schedule conflicts, lack of transportation, and appropriate support to research-related factors such as lengthy consent documents and lack of adequate information about clinical research" (George et al.). Enrollment of trials goes so much deeper than signing a paper and agreeing to specific terms of the clinical trial. There are also financial barriers, psychosocial barriers, and possibly even transportation issues in addition to things like peripheral trauma and a lack of understanding or education on what a clinical trial entails. A patient that already has a compromised Social Vulnerability Index (a measurement of negative effects on specific communities that may cause external stresses on health), high levels of medical mistrust, and is a minority in a white dominated field, will not be very eager to participate (Warren et al.). There are so many multifaceted and complex barriers that go into a Black patient's enrollment and retention in a trial. Being expected to additionally contribute personal expenses and excess time may completely discourage a patient from enrolling. Patients may view potential enrollment of being in a clinical trial as having more negatives than positives due to the extra steps, responsibilities, and even financial expectations that they may need to implement in their life just to be involved. This is the inaccessibility that prohibits many patients within the Black community from not only accessing clinical trials, but being able to participate.

## THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLE OF INFORMAL CONSENT

The ethical principle of informed consent is the fourth and final key barrier to enrollment in clinical trials for Black patients. Problems concerning ethics occur when patients are ill-informed on procedures during trials, and are also neglected when it comes to being aware of possible side effects related to enrollment in a clinical trial. Informed consent is an ethical principle set in place to prevent this. Author, Colleen Campbell, more specifically defines informed consent within her article by stating:

> Informed consent protects patients' well-being and enshrines respect for their bodies and the right to self-determination…it is a process of communication between provider and patient that produces either affirmative consent or refusal. …It is the mutual sharing of information between the clinician and patient to facilitate the patient's active engagement in their treatment. (Campbell 66)

Informed consent is vital to the enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials because it is one way that patients feel comfortable when enrolling in a trial. Due to peripheral trauma and instances of informed consent being a violation for patients within the Black community, if providers and clinicians are adamant on being thorough with how they approach informed consent Black patients will be more trusting of them.

Historically, Black patients were exploited and neglected from their right to informed consent. Dr. J. Marion Sims' gynecology research on Black women and scientific techniques were all found to be rooted in racism, and a key belief behind his research was that Black people did not feel pain. As a result, he performed non-consensual gynecology experiments on Black women for many years (Holland). Aside from the works of Dr. J. Marion Sims, the mass sterilization of Black women during the twentieth century highlighted the lack of informed consent and increase of gynecological abuse on Black women and other women of color. During the twentieth century (1950-1980s), mass sterilization was "institutionalized as part of the eugenics movement…[which] became weaponized as a source of anti-natalist reproductive policy against poor women of color" (Campbell 57). Recent studies on the data of these sterilizations also showed that, "Black women were sterilized at more than three times the rate of white women and more than 12 times the rate of white men" (Stern, 2020). The case of *Relf v. Weinberger* highlighted the way that Black people and poor patients were experimented on and abused by government run clinics. That court case also exposed the nationwide mass sterilization efforts happening throughout the U.S. during that time. For example, informed consent was clearly violated when Mrs. Relf was duped into signing consent on a form that agreed to all of her children receiving the same shots. "Only later did Mrs.Relf, who could not read or write, learn she had consented to surgical sterilization. Fourteen year old Minnie was asked to sign a consent form stating she was twenty-one years old and consented to the same procedure. She too did not understand what she was signing and never spoke to the doctor before she was surgically sterilized" (Campbell 58). Not only were the patients not clearly informed by anyone, but they were tricked into signing for consent.

The major point of conflict when it comes to informed consent and the ethics within medical procedures in clinical trials is that Black patients are expected to be their own advocates; essentially doing their own research and using all of their own resources to successfully advocate for themselves through systemic barriers like peripheral trauma and privilege. This was briefly seen in the *Relf v. Weinberger* case. Technically it can be said that the patients were given consent, but both patients were unable to clearly understand what they were getting into. One could not read or write, and the other was not even seen by a doctor prior to her sterilization (Campbell 58). Both patients were abused, exploited, and neither were clearly informed. The author highlights why informed consent can sometimes be problematic by making the point that: "A key critique of the doctrine of informed consent is that it emphasizes individual agency and decision making. This formal liberal conception of autonomy invariably obscures medical violence against vulnerable communities. Furthermore, it presumes that medical decision-making occurs within a vacuum, unencumbered by systems of power and inequality" (Campbell 50). When we consider informed consent in instances like the *Relf v. Weinberger*'s case, it becomes easier to see the difficulties that arise. In order for informed consent to work patients cannot be tricked into agreeing to procedures, and they must fully understand what they are getting into. A similar point was made in an article written by Soumya Niranjan that revealed clinicians' thoughts and biases on clinical research. She stated:

> When asked what is most needed to increase the retention or recruitment of racial and ethnic minorities in cancer clinical trials, a few participants believed that constraints, including limited physician time, made it burdensome to discuss the complex nuances of clinical research. Therefore, they perceived the demands of clinical medicine as a barrier to offering cancer clinical trials to racial and ethnic minorities. (Niranjan)

If Black patients feel like their clinicians are not taking the time to really explain their medical procedures and the clinical trial processes they may be more leery when it comes to participating because it can be increasingly difficult when dealing with peripheral trauma or medical mistrust (Powell 155). This serves as an additional barrier to clinical trial enrollment because it can draw patients away from being involved in trials.

The ethical principle of informed consent protects patients, and properly informs them of their rights and the details of the medical procedure they may undergo. However, in order to increase enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials, doctors must be adamant and purposeful in ensuring that Black patients are comfortable and knowledgeable about any medical procedure, or clinical trial they are in. Peripheral trauma due to historical instances within the U.S. healthcare system where Black patients were not only exploited, but also failed to be properly educated on the medical procedures they would receive has increased mistrust in Black patients. Thus, it is vital that clinicians and doctors make an effort to be thorough when answering patient concerns; ensuring that patients are aware of all the side effects and medical processes that occur when it comes to clinical trials. Healthcare leaders must also properly educate patients, and ensure the protection of their right to informed consent. If not, in combination with other barriers, it will serve to continue and perpetuate a larger divide in clinical trial enrollment for Black patients.

## CONCLUSION

Though Black patients make up a large percentage of the U.S. healthcare system, they are poorly represented and excluded from clinical trials. The current systemic barriers and inaccessibility to healthcare that exists within the U.S. healthcare system all prevents the inclusion of Black patients in clinical trials. The concept of medical racism was explored in addition to systemic barriers such as peripheral trauma, privilege within the U.S. healthcare system, and a lack of informed consent in order to contextualize and provide a full understanding of the systemic, historical prohibitors that contribute to the low healthcare enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials. Through the frameworks of peripheral trauma and a lack of informed consent, this paper highlights the different ways that experiencing medical trauma induces medical mistrust, and thus decreases healthcare utilization in Black patients. A detailed examination on the impact medical racism has within clinical trials and how this contributes to low involvement in clinical trials for patients within the Black community was also highlighted. Overall, it was found that Black patients may show hesitancy in making the decision to enroll in clinical trials because of complex decision making factors that go beyond the needs of the individual due to evidence of historical exploitation of the Black community within the U.S. healthcare system. While representation is an answer that works towards a solution, it just barely begins to solve some of the pressing issues regarding Black patients and healthcare utilization; especially concerning peripheral trauma and deep rooted medical mistrust of the healthcare system. The privilege required within clinical trials to even enroll may additionally discourage a patient from enrolling. Black patients may view potential enrollment in a clinical trial as troublesome when there are extra steps, responsibilities, and even financial expectations that they may need to implement in their life just to be involved. Finally, efforts towards properly educating patients, and ensuring the protection of their right to informed consent can positively impact enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials.

In order to increase representation of Black patients in trials, clinicians, doctors, and healthcare leaders need to not only work towards building trust, but also creating change within the system itself. Clinicians and researchers can work to improve enrollment of Black patients in clinical trials by actively working to increase cultural competency, display an understanding of medical mistrust and its connection to peripheral trauma, and strive to thoroughly educate patients through informed consent. However, if improvements are made, it can help include more patients within the Black community in important clinical trials because they will actively seek to lower mistrust, and build understanding in patient-clinician relationships/interactions. Working to build trust between Black patients will not only improve enrollment in clinical trials, but will also benefit even more patients in the long run as this will increase access to more information regarding medication and surgical procedures. In a wider context, this will help provide better and more equitable healthcare within the United States.

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**Kaitlyn Liu**

# K-Pop Idols' Take On Creativity: Transcending Language and Cultural Barriers


## ABSTRACT

*The Korean pop music industry, or "K-pop" for short, has become a global phenomenon–triggering the worldwide distribution of Korean culture. This distribution offers a global community that helps transcend language barriers among different cultures. In fact, K-pop music and its fans from diverse cultures are a clear testament to the notion that music is, indeed, a universal language–as more people are listening to songs in languages they do not understand. While the commercial success of many K-pop groups seem to be attributed solely to their appearances, considering new perspectives can help clarify and narrow the true cause of such rising interest. Throughout this paper, I examine how such creativity is displayed and utilized within the creative input of K-pop's choreography development and performance, fashion styles, and song composition which ultimately promotes Korean culture beyond Korean-American communities. This paper also analyzes the following factors that help foster the success of Korean pop music and worldwide fandom: (1) the fan to artist engagement that creates a sense of intimacy and connection to influence youth worldwide, (2) the potential for learning and self- improvement within K-pop, and (3) the universal messages and inspiration that fans take away from listening to the music. Through a linguistic anthropology framework, this research paper aims to demonstrate how the application of creative strategies within the K-pop industry blurs the cultural and language boundaries among fans while promoting Korean culture and its products.*


## INTRODUCTION

From the mid-2000s, the Korean Wave, also known as *Hallyu*, was instigated by the diversified and geographical expansion of popular Korean cultural products, stronger communication between entertainers and their fans, and the overall popularity of Korean entertainment. During the first generation of the Korean Wave, such popularity was mostly credited to TV dramas. However, the cause of the popularity of

Korean cultural products today has expanded to more than TV dramas with the several debuts of international K-pop groups and new K-pop music. While Korean culture was once limited to Asian countries, it is now spreading globally—exposing non-Asian countries, like the United Kingdom, France, Egypt, and Turkey, to the K-pop fandom (Song 130). This quantifies a sense of cultural affinity, or the relative closeness that one may feel towards a certain entity or group, that non-Korean fans can experience towards their favorite K-pop idols (Yoon). As Yoon indicates that when fans listen to K-pop, they not only enjoy the music for its sound, it is also true that fans tend to feel more attracted and connected with their favorite K-pop idols as they share a part of Korean culture—accounting for the growing global consumption of K-pop. I strongly believe this is a result of the "creative elements" that Koreans use to drive music consumption. K-pop idols transcend cultural barriers among their fans by presenting fans with music that can be translated culturally and emotionally to achieve a sense of connectedness. However, due to this new exposure to Korean culture, K-pop fans may face a language barrier that challenges their relationship/connection to the idols or even to the music itself. While this may be true, as K-pop fans come from all over the globe, this proves to show that fans do not need to know Korean in order to enjoy K-pop music. Given that music is a universal language, fans are able to connect to the artist(s) themselves—rather than simply the lyrics. Nonetheless, the purpose of this study was to determine how the incorporation of creative elements, like choreography, fashion, and lyrics allow K-pop artists to drive the spread of Korean culture beyond Korean-American communities, and K-pop consumption overall. Furthermore, in the first subheading, titled In the *Elements of Creativity Within Music Videos* section, I will go into more depth about the different types of creative techniques that K-pop idols utilize within their music to attract fans and expose them to Korean culture. This is highly prevalent as the creative elements are not only applicable to Korean natives but also to Non-Korean communities—forming a broader lens to enjoy K-pop. Next, within the *Popular K-pop groups* portion of this research paper, I will present examples of famous K-pop groups and provide the creative characteristics within each group to showcase how they are able to overcome language barriers between their fans. In *Application of Creativity to Real-World Situations*, I will be discussing how fans become inspired by creative elements portrayed by K-pop idols within their music to achieve positive results within their daily lives and learn new skills to apply them in the real-world. In the *Fan vs Artist Engagement* section, I will review that despite the fact that K-pop may present limitations in terms of understanding the Korean language, non-Korean fans are able to feel motivated to learn and expose themselves into the Korean culture due to the creative elements that K-pop idols showcase in their performances. Last but not least, in *Creativity Interpreted as Stereotypical*, I will argue critics' claims that the K-pop industry promotes an unrealistic beauty expectation for Koreans by highlighting a broader definition of beauty that is expressed as one's comfortability with oneself and its impact on K-pop fans.

The framework I will be incorporating throughout this research paper is linguistic anthropology, also known as the study of language use in social life (College of Liberal Arts). Focusing on how language affects certain communities in a cultural context, I will analyze how the K-pop fandom community responds to linguistic barriers presented by K-pop idols/groups and how such creative strategies lead to the promotion of Korean culture/cultural products on a global scale. As fans travel beyond the limits of language through the use of creative strategies, this creates a sense that fans may not need to understand the Korean language to fully immerse themselves into the music. The opportunity for individuals to routinely interact with K-pop artists who they favor or admire may also act as an opportunity for artists to build their fan base and gain popularity. Therefore, creativity offers K-pop idols an outlet for expression through creative elements, like breathtaking choreography and performance, unique fashion, and meaningful lyrics, that help expose fans to the [Korean] culture. This exact exposure helps motivate fans to translate such creativity into real world situations—thus promoting Korean culture beyond Korean-American communities and driving the consumption of K-pop music overall. However, there are opposing opinions that claim creativity does not drive K-pop culture but rather drives stereotypes that correlate Koreans to having a perfect, idolized appearance.

## ELEMENTS OF CREATIVITY WITHIN MUSIC VIDEOS

One of the many reasons why K-pop attracts millions of fans is because of its astonishing, visually pleasing music videos that do not fail to incorporate stunning choreography, bright and bold outfits, and an overall story to tell. Many of the Korean idols within today's popular groups come from various music industries and locations and thus possess diverse musical, choreographic and visual backgrounds and traditions; “this creative melting pot feeds a productive tension between the expectations of the broad consensus of what constitutes ‘K-pop’ developed over the past decade by the industry, performers and their fans on the one hand, and the individualistic creative desires of the various individuals contributing to the production of new K-pop videos on the other” (Broadwell 1). The collaborative environment among all band/group members creates a coherent music style that offers a mixture of traditions and cultures. This hybridity commonly results within K-pop music groups, and with the help of creativity through the incorporation of multiple genres in choreography, produces a beautiful visual style that is influenced by and emphasizes different dance styles from American hip-hop, rock, jazz, country, etc, eventually leading to a harmony of musical elements and genres. The integration of popular dance styles not only captures the fans’ attention but can also influence other dancers to use similar steps in their choreography or use similar techniques. Hence, K-pop groups incorporate dance and choreography that is marked mainly by the creative integration of a broad range of popular dance styles that encapsulate/transcend cultural barriers—accounting for the overwhelming popularity of K-pop. In fact, “Several fans emphasized that K-pop is more creative than American pop music, and thus lamented the K-pop industry’s recent effort to incorporate American pop music elements for global audiences. Meanwhile, K-pop’s cultural component, such as visually stunning choreography, seemed to provide its overseas fans with cultural resources” (Yoon K). Their choreography is what makes them distinctive, separating them from the mainstream American popular music videos. While American pop songs are not often associated with dance moves, K-pop songs almost always have iconic choreography that correlates to a particular song. As each routine corresponds to a specific song, the dynamic pairing showcases creativity by telling the story of the song through movement of one’s arms, hands, and legs rather than one’s voice. As fans not only listen to the song, but also see the performance/choreography of K-pop groups, they can understand the song without knowing the Korean language as K-pop artists utilize creative strategies, such as the incorporation of various musical genres, to transcend language barriers. Their performances pair hip-hop and rock, or two different genres, creating a medley of iconic moves. These creative components within K-pop choreography contribute to a captivating performance that attracts fans because such creative elements oddly help express the meaning of the song. In a way, Korean-pop choreography tells a story that encapsulates the intentions of and symbolism within the song, setting it apart from American choreography. The main components that appear to create K-pop global hits include a catchy song and a signature dance move that captivates the fan base to mimic the moves. Most K-pop songs feature catchiness; whether it is reflected through captivating dance moves in the visually appealing music videos or in the hook verses, it is clear that this style of expressing the music is exceptionally different to that of American pop. In other words, it is evident that creative strategies, like the integration of multiple musical genres and signature dance routines, are what distinguish K-pop from American music and can be used as an explanation as to why K-pop music is more popular/trending and consumed more.

Similar to how K-pop stars utilize creativity in their choreography to allow *all* fans to immerse themselves in their Korean songs despite the potential language barrier, they also incorporate creativity into their fashion sensibilities to create appealing visuals and connect with fans. For example, a journalist from *Across The Culture* writes, "...I began to ask whether the K-pop movement could be influencing other areas of life such as our fashion. After all, how can we not expect a worldwide phenomenon to influence what we wear when it even determines the colors we use or even motivates us to make use of signs that identify us to a certain group?" (Forero). Within their music videos, Korean idols tend to express their music through a creative fashion medium. Rather than copying K-pop idols' looks, fans use their creativity and acknowledge the fashion as inspiration to recreate their own, personal aesthetic looks to express their connectedness to the K-pop idols. Recreating K-pop idols' eye-catching outfits, fans boost their confidence and may feel a sense of belonging to the K-pop community. Though K-pop fashion is not limited to merely boosting one's self esteem, Korean pop music has been associated with incorporating elements of traditional Korean culture into their performances and music videos as "K-pop's uniqueness lies in its skill in combining traditional elements specific to Korean culture with Western-oriented pop music. In the past, heritage was expressed through language, but recent years have seen familiar folkloric details displayed in melodies, choreography and the visual elements of music videos, such as costumes (e.g. BTS's song "Idol" and Peggy Gou's "Starry Night")" (Valge and Hinsberg). The cultural and historical aesthetics of popular K-pop music videos are more than visually appealing: they draw attention to East Asian music and traditions, showcasing their unique cultural characteristics and providing a sense of Korean culture that K-pop fans can experience. The costumes mentioned in the quote above include Korean traditional clothing called hanbok, which is commonly seen in Korean music videos with an additional twist and combination of modern fashion. Similarly, in June 2020, BLACKPINK, a Korean K-pop girl group, also released a music video of their song "How You Like That," which featured the hanbok Korean clothing (Yeon-Soo). By incorporating traditional elements of the hanbok into their costumes, K-pop groups, like BLACKPINK, are encouraging their fans (especially Non-Korean) to explore Korea's traditional beauty. Evidently, as K-pop groups use creativity to mix fashion looks, they introduce a crossing of cultures between the American and Korean traditions relevant to clothing. This provides their fans with the opportunity to not only connect with what is already familiar to them, such as modern-clothing, but also learn and experience new Korean traditions and culture through clothing by watching their favorite K-pop groups wear them in music videos and concerts.

Ironically, an additional creative strategy to transcend language has to do with language itself by translating Korean lyrics into English. Although the difference in language between K-pop artists and their fans present difficulties of communication, "'Music videos have storylines. And so a lot of people come up with theories. They are trying to figure out what the storylines are when they don't understand [the] lyrics.' Indeed, as shown in the flourishing K-pop reaction videos by global audiences on YouTube, the language barrier paradoxically offers overseas fans room to to play with original texts, and thus has formed a unique K-pop fan culture." (Yoon K). Despite the language and cultural barriers that K-pop music presents, fans still attempt to translate the lyrics and decipher the meaning behind the music videos—which consequently help facilitate the fan engagement of the music itself. In fact, this creates a kind of "mystery" for non-Korean-speaking audiences to make sense of what the K-pop videos are saying as well as the storylines behind it. The aforementioned quote mentions K-pop reaction videos, which acts as a creative response towards K-pop music videos. As K-pop idol groups post a new music video, fans are creating their own content that translates the meaning of such lyrics and providing their own perspective of the videos. This creates a "domino effect", an event that involves a chain reaction or a cumulative effect of creativity; to clarify, fans become enthusiastic to watch and listen to K-pop music videos and produce their own creative content to put out into the media, causing a rapid chain reaction of K-pop music consumption. Fans' interest in K-pop increase their contact with Korean culture nonetheless and provide an outlet to broaden forms of communication between their favorite K-pop idols to fully immerse themselves in the songs. Consequently, although language and cultural barriers are present within Non-Korean fans and Korean idols, Korean fans make use of what they are presented by the Korean idols to make their own creative content and transcend such cultural barriers.

## POPULAR K-POP GROUPS

There are several influential K-pop groups that produce music and spread Korean culture beyond Korean-American communities through the usage of creativity. One of the most popular international K-pop groups is Bangtan Sonyeondan, also known as BTS. As an international boy band, there are difficulties related to the Korean cultural background and language barrier within their music videos. For this reason, it is expected for it to be difficult for fans to connect and fully understand and grasp the effect of their music. Accordingly, as the role of K-pop in breaking down language barriers and opening up cultural opportunities in which non-Korean K-pop fans live is examined, "[b]eing a K-pop [BTS] fan has enabled people to discover and develop their full potential. It gives fans a way to express themselves, particularly about their fan identity, through the creation of arts and content…The fanworks demonstrate that being a fan can foster creativity, artistic talent, and organizational skills," (Mohd and Nur). Given K-pop"s popularity, what allows fans to identify with the K-pop groups other than the music itself, despite language barriers? Though K-pop music videos by popular groups present a limitation to their fans in terms of language and culture, fans are able to grasp a similar, if not equal effect of their music by connecting to their idols through different mediums, such as performance, fashion, and lyrics/presentation. Such creative elements attract fans by providing them with a sense of belonging and connectedness that is remarkably comforting on an emotional level. Though, aside from these elements, BTS utilizes a unique way of directly connecting and communicating with their devoted fans, who they refer to as Adorable Representative M.C. For Youth, or ARMY. In fact, they have their very own social media platform called "Weverse". Through Weverse, fans can purchase merchandise and watch performances, as well as connect with the BTS band members (Gupta). Whether BTS is replying to ARMY posts or posting new content, they go beyond the cultural barrier with the use of the Weverse platform to reach fans and offer a community filled with authentic connection. By facilitating closeness among their fans, K-pop groups inspire the spread and use artistic talent and skills to promote K-pop. In other words, K-pop groups have the ability to spread their creativity beyond choreography, fashion, and lyrics, with the power of social media and connection. With such intimacy and community, BTS helps influence their fans to feel a sense of connectedness without the need of language, leading to increased consumption of K-pop music and Korean culture. The emergence of multilingual K-pop listeners due to application of creativity spreads K-pop content for others to enjoy, defying and tearing down the language barriers. Nevertheless, BTS and their achievements showcase how the creative elements that K-pop idols incorporate into their music, like their interaction with fans, choreography, fashion styles, etc, helps unleash the interests and talents of their fans and in a way, providing an escape from possible difficulties and offering motivational support. Another example of a popular international K-pop group that has a similar effect on their fans would be BLACKPINK, a South Korean girl group. As another popular K-pop group, BLACKPINK delivers fan engaging performances that are able to connect with BLACKPINK fans, named the Blinks, despite the language barrier within their songs. A journalist from an article from *Vogue* magazine offers a fan's input after interviewing them on their opinion of the BLACKPINK craze, "'The members' [of BLACKPINK] outfits at airports are always iconic looks, and I take inspiration from the baggy clothing that Lisa and Jisoo wear. When I was 15, I was going through a hard time with my self-confidence, and they helped me through that. I genuinely feel like their music can empower women and young girls, despite the language barrier'" (Pike). The UK fan displays the impact that BLACKPINK has made upon her life, despite language differences. Identifying the potential that K-pop groups, like BLACKPINK, has to positively influence fans , the fan took inspiration from the creative elements within BLACKPINK's unique style to overcome her difficulties with self-confidence—illustrating an example of how K-pop groups and their creativity within their musical platforms urges fans to apply such creativity to real-world situations. Even though the fan was not Korean-speaking and from the UK, she was nonetheless still able to acknowledge the creativity that BLACKPINK presented for her despite language barriers. This case dictates the impact that K-pop groups have on fashion as well as their strong connection with their fans. Another fan comments, "BLACKPINK are special because they're taking huge steps as women of color in such a competitive industry. The girls have this fierce, attractive sound that overcomes language barriers" (Pike). In this case, as fans take notice of BLACKPINK's sound, they become fascinated by the disparity of the language from their own, or even possibly the delivery and presentation of the song itself. The music is so enticing that the fans do not need to know Korean in order to enjoy the music. Fans of such K-pop groups do not overlook the music just because it is in a different language. They utilize strategies to differentiate creative elements that K-pop idols/groups utilize to connect with their audience, both Korean and Non-Korean fans. This inclusivity that creativity offers enables artists to continue their popularity as it can be considered versatile for all.

## APPLICATION OF CREATIVITY TO REAL-WORLD SITUATIONS

Creativity through the elements of choreography, fashion, and lyrics enables fans to extend their admiration for music into a creative form of expression through the idea of potential improvement within their lives. To elaborate, fans utilize the music of their favorite K-pop artists as inspiration to make their own versions of the song of interest. Given this utilization, "popular music seem[s] to be a useful resource for enriching the daily linguistic creativity of the participants. Active participants in social network sites like to read or upload their English/Chinese translations of song lyrics for others who have a weaker language ability. As such, they not only learn the song lyrics but also express personal and collective emotions, desires, and opinions on social or global issues" (Jong Sook and Ellen146). Increasing the creativity of its streamers, music enables fans to utilize this creativity and express deeper thoughts and emotions that pertain to real-world situations. This is a huge impact as simply watching and listening to popular music can allow one to realize particular elements that allow them to immerse themselves into the nature of the song, and go beyond what is presented in front of them. The aforementioned translation of song lyrics, in other words, creating music/english translations of Korean songs, allow an individual to not only retain the information and remember it better, but help one to make use of their creative skills to mimic a similar effect. Specifically, though non-Korean fans of K-pop may not fully understand the lyrics of their favorite songs due to the language barrier, they may create their personal renditions or covers of the song—whether these covers are translated in English, or sung in Korean more personally. Therefore, fans make use of their creativity as well as the artists' influence to create their own music to express their personal emotions and feelings.

In addition, another example in which fans utilize the creativity that Korean-idol show in their songs to achieve goals of their own. Specifically, this is achieved by improving one's writing skills through the incorporation of creative elements. An article from the *Odyssey* proposes the notion that fans are not only touched, but mainly *influenced* by the creative nature of their favorite K-pop celebrities' performance/music to go on and make use of such creativity to improve a certain aspect of their lives. The author reflects, "As a fan myself, live performances are really important to me. The fact that they stay in character for their performances and really try to convey the story through their arms, legs, eyes, hands, instead of *just* through the lyrics, is really admirable and inspirational. As a writer, I often wonder how I can bring other elements into my storytelling that will give my audience the sensory overload that I experience with VIXX." (Mitchell). As VIXX, the name of a South Korean boy band, introduces creative elements that are not only applicable to Koreans, but also to Non-Korean, VIXX presents a broader scale for fans to enjoy K-pop; this suggests that the audience does not need to understand Korean to enjoy K-pop because they can find meaningful interpretation through the usage of creative strategies like choreography. Just as the fan felt inspired to look beyond the limits of language and notice storytelling elements that she can incorporate into her own writing, Non-Koreans can utilize the creative strategies presented by K-pop groups to immerse themselves into the music and culture—collectively bridging the gap between Non-Korean and Korean communities. Applying creativity from pop culture into one's real world can prove to be useful as one can achieve a unique style that is similar to that of K-pop. This application of creativity serves to portray the creative influence between the crossing of culture that helps bridge the gap between Korean and non-Korean fans as well as their ability to connect music to their real-world situations for improvement.

## FAN VS ARTIST ENGAGEMENT

Regardless of possible language differences, non-Korean fans can feel motivated to learn and expose themselves to Korean culture due to the creative elements that K-pop idols showcase in their performances. "If we look into influencers' and interviewees' discourses, striking similarities and expectable differences unfold: consistent engagement with K-pop in general and with BTS in particular led to a broader cultural perspective, as shown in the summary table below" (Bakó 161).

**Table 3.** *BTS fans and their engagement*

| Name or alias | Level and type of engagement | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Anna (alias) | High, entertainment and cultural | Daily engagement, informed, went to concert, speaks and writes Korean (basic), visited Korea. |
| 2. Erika (alias) | Low, entertainment | Basic BTS knowledge, listens favourite tracks but not daily, open interest towards K-drama. |
| 3. Kitti (alias) | Medium, entertainment | Informed, bought products, started to learn Korean, influenced by friend and sister. |
| 4. Mari (alias) | Low, entertainment | Informed, used to be a fan, influenced her younger sister, general interest towards K-pop. |
| 5. Lily (alias) | High, entertainment and cultural | Daily engagement, informed, cooked kimchi, started to learn Korean (basic), bought products. |

(Bako 161). This table depicts the trends of activity with Korean pop music and culture among 5 BTS fans from Romania, depending on their level of engagement. For instance, as Anna has a high engagement with Korean culture and pop music, she is able to write Korean and has visited Korea. Another example is Lily, with high engagement, knows how to cook kimchi and started learning the Korean language. This chart compares the relationship between high and low engagement of Korean culture and its effect on newfound/gained knowledge. Despite living in an underprivileged region, Non-Korean fans in Romania indirectly stay connected with BTS by immersing themselves into the Korean culture thus gaining a broader cultural perspective by engaging in different activities like making kimchi, learning Korean, traveling to Korea, watching K-drama, and going to Korean concerts, etc. This serves as an example of how Non-Korean communities can overcome challenges presented by language by exposing themselves to the culture that K-pop groups are associated with. Participating in diverse cultural activities because of K-pop enables fans to become motivated to try other things and increases familiarity and favorability of Korean culture—allowing fans to accept and embrace cultural differences rather than seeing it as a barrier. Korean pop music groups utilize creativity to incorporate cultural aspects into their music videos to not only attract fans to their music, but also increase the favorability and popularity of their Korean culture.

## CREATIVITY INTERPRETED AS STEREOTYPICAL

While K-pop idols present their fans with unique choreography and looks, such attributes may be less correlated with creativity and more tied with Korea's restrictive beauty standards that are seen as unattainable and/or unrealistic. The success of Korean pop culture can yield unintended consequences like the misunderstanding of promoting "picture-perfect" Korean idols as a defined representation or expectation of what all Koreans should look like. However, in an article called, "Korean Pop Culture Sparks Negative Stereotypes for Vancouver Locals," the journalist interviews high schoolers on how this high expectation can result in insecurity and self-deprecation; "I get that K-pop looks very cool, and many Koreans might want to live in that world too," said Shin. "But it is far away from the accurate representation of Korean people" (Wang). The intention of incorporating K-culture can be reflected as a misrepresentation of the fans' perspective of being pressured into the perfect appearance that K-pop idols illustrate. In this case, language can be interpreted as stirring new stereotypes among the Korean/Non-Korean fan-base rather than positively influencing them. Rather than transcending language barriers, creativity within K-pop plays a role in reinforcing the idolized, unrealistic beauty standards in Korean communities, showcasing a negative side of Korean society and culture. This standard can pertain to having soft, porcelain skin and a skinny figure—which are both not naturally obtained for most Koreans. This promotes a preferred treatment of light skinned people, also known as colorism, which acts as prejudice and discrimination against individuals with a darker skin tone and is also widespread in Korean society (Valge and Hinsberg). Such discrimination in Korean communities towards colored(less pale) individuals elucidates how creativity can lead to a beauty standard and association of Koreans to thin, light-skin individuals. Highlighting a potential hierarchy marked largely on skin color, creativity accentuates the discrimination faced by people of color in Korean societies who fall outside of Korean orthodox beauty standards. Accordingly, in terms of the long-term effects on fans, as indicated previously, this negative influence can harm the confidence and self-esteem of K-pop fans by normalizing a flawless appearance tied to slim and thin bodies and surgical procedures, resulting in eating disorders and plastic surgery to obtain a seemingly perfect look. Here, creativity sets an inaccurate definition of beauty by associating the term with artificial, physical appearance. Additionally, there have also been other forms of opposition when determining whether creativity plays a role in driving the consumption of K-pop culture. Some might argue that, "While contemporary K-Pop has advanced hybrid culture, it is less likely that the Korean music industry is developing a creative form of hybridization, known as the third space, which works towards maintaining local identities in the global context. K-Pop has been homogenized in the main themes and styles because K-Pop singers and groups make heavy use of English names and song titles, and also English mixing in lyrics" (Jin and Woonjae). As the authors examine the transformation of K-Pop by analyzing the incorporation of the English language into the lyrics of K-pop music, it is possible that the motive behind K-pop idols/music industries incorporating English terms is not for hybridization nor creative purposes but rather a gesture to enable themselves to be as popular (or even moreso) as English/American pop stars. As it is argued that creativity may not play a factor in K-pop music, this possibility aims to disprove the validity of my argument that K-pop makes use of creativity to transcend cultural and language barriers. While the approach to mix languages in lyrics may seem like an attempt to generate new creative cultures and establish cultural hybridity, it seems that such mixing can be interpreted as a form of offense taken towards the original music or sound, or perhaps as a means of copying or attempting to assimilate into the ways of English songs. This investigation presents a question of whether hybridity can be seen as a creative approach to transitioning popular music or rather an "oppressive" manner to maintain K-pop's competitiveness with English music.

Though such points may seem valid, the overall argument that the consumption of Korean culture is rather misconstrued. Beauty has a broader definition than critics make it out to be. It is not about K-pop idols setting a stereotypical image, but rather an image that one is comfortable with expressing oneself. In fact, most K-pop idols' images seem to be controversial as they can be reflected as having accents of both masculinity and femininity. By doing so, they break away from traditional gender norms and teach their audience acceptance, expression, and self love. Having a global influence, K-pop groups spread several universal messages, including gender positivity and love. "No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin color, gender identity: speak yourself," said Kim Nam Jun, leader of BTS in a speech to the United Nations in 2018 (BTS heartfelt). It is their messages and themes that attract and inspire fans across the world to create lasting change. Their dedication and connectedness to their ARMY. Their actions and awareness which pertain to speaking about current social issues and new initiatives. All these factors are the building blocks of their reputation and continue to propel their ARMY forward in helping them make the world a better place through their music. Hence, critics have clearly overlooked the deeper meaning within K-pop groups and their attempts to touch the hearts of fans beyond music, through universal messages that focus upon social change and increasing awareness of the world around them.

## CONCLUSION

Through the lens of linguistic anthropology, I was able to come to a conclusion that as K-pop increases cultural contact, we are able to rethink the value of such popularity as a sense of motivation that K-pop groups instill towards their fans to assist them in overcoming language differences and broadening forms of communication to showcase Korea's cultural diversity and fully understand the context of K-pop. Throughout my research, it was discovered that K-pop groups can allow fans to translate the creativity seen in their performance costumes/fashion, stunning choreography, and meaningful lyrics, to real-world situations in their lives to yield positive change and improvement while also building strong connections between K-pop idols and their fans. By incorporating culture into their collective performances, K-pop artists present their audience with countless efforts to enjoy their music beyond language. By transcending language barriers with their Non-Korean speaking crowds through creativity, K-pop artists illustrate that K-pop is a universal dynamic that can be shared with everyone, both Korean and Non-Korean communities—spreading Korean culture and the consumption of K-pop music. The significance of this research project was to explore on a broader scale on what exactly contributed to the phenomenal growth of Korean culture through K-pop on an international scale and how this contribution marked with creative elements contributes to something more than popularity and music consumption…something more meaningful; K-pop artists/groups and the music they bring help transcend the boundaries of language by employing creative elements within their work to allow fans to build connections, improve aspects of their daily lives, and discover methods to enjoy music without heavy focus on lyrics. If such trends continue in the future, K-pop groups and their music will continue to evolve through creative elements like choreography, fashion, and performance/lyrics, which help their fans face language differences by offering several outlets for expression to yield positive change throughout their daily lives. In fact, as English words are now commonly being embedded into K-pop songs, there is no doubt that the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, will continue to encourage additional crossing of cultures and transcend language barriers through the use of creativity.

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**Jane Cho**

# Implications of Caffeine Consumption for Adolescents


## ABSTRACT

*Caffeine is an ingredient in many commonly sought beverages, including coffee, tea, and energy drinks, and its consumption is often a habitual aspect of one's life as it has been ingrained into society. As consumption has risen, particularly among adolescents, it raises questions about how the substance may affect one's cognitive functioning or academic performance. This paper investigates the possible correlations between caffeine consumption and academic performance through the collective analysis of various studies, delving into the direct and indirect influences of caffeine. The theory of planned behavior and the perfect storm model explicate the inconsistency between motivations for caffeine consumption, which is driven by factors of taste and a desire to stay alert, and the reality of caffeine's impact on well-being. Through examination of the extent to which caffeine impacts factors of sleep and cognitive function, which may vary with the intake dosage of caffeine, the paper analyzes how this can ultimately factor into levels of academic performance. This indicates the significance of caffeine literacy, the understanding of the potential benefits and unintended consequences of caffeine consumption, in order for adolescents to reduce caffeine-related risks and impacts. Although there may be individual variations in caffeine sensitivity among other confounding factors, caffeine still has the potential to interfere with adolescent development and habits, indicating the importance of further research on the long-term implications of intake.*


## INTRODUCTION

Caffeine consumption is a familiar subject in one's life, with many consuming it to stay awake and as it has been ingrained in society and culture. Its impact on academic performance, sleep, and cognitive functioning has become increasingly important as consumption has risen, especially among adolescents. In examining the effects of caffeine consumption, "Motivations for Caffeine Consumption in New Zealand Tertiary Students" references the theory of planned behavior, which explains how an individual's intentions for caffeine consumption and perceptions of how it affects oneself may be associated with motivations for caffeine intake (Stachyshyn et al.). The framework of the perfect storm model in “Wide Awake at Bedtime? Effects of Caffeine on Sleep and Circadian Timing in Male Adolescents – a Randomized Crossover Trial” may indicate that adolescents have a complex relationship with sleep and caffeine, as biological changes and academic pressures can contrast with each other (Reichert et al.). These frameworks indicate that in order to explore why individuals may be inclined to consume caffeine, it is necessary to understand individual perceptions and how they may contrast with the reality of caffeine’s impact on wellbeing. Utilizing these frameworks, the objective of this research paper will be to examine the extent to which caffeine can impact factors of sleep and cognitive function, and how its influence can in turn impact academic performance. The research question to guide this will be: What are adolescents’ motivations for consuming caffeinated products, and how does consumption impact cognitive function, and in turn, academic performance? How are other factors integral to academic performance such as sleep and anxiety impacted? Consumption of relatively high doses of caffeine impacts adolescents’ academic performance with its negative implications for cognitive function through sleep deprivation and reduced sleep quality, as well as anxiety symptoms. This contrasts with adolescents’ motivations for caffeine intake, which the theory of planned behavior helps explain, and by highlighting this inconsistency, it introduces the need to initially comprehend why adolescents may look to caffeine. Adolescents’ subjective perceptions may contradict the potential negative implications of caffeine consumption on academic performance through detriments to cognitive function. This can become an issue when social interactions perpetuate norms that view adolescent caffeine consumption as acceptable or normal in replacement of proper sleep and nutrition. Through increased caffeine literacy or comprehension of the potential benefits and unintended consequences of caffeine consumption, adolescents will be able to better reduce caffeine-related risks.

In this paper, I will analyze the extent to which caffeine affects sleep quality, cognitive functioning, and psychological distress, and how it perhaps interferes with motivations for academic performance. The first section will outline the motivations that drive adolescents to consume caffeine, which correlates with academic performance, and introduces subjective perceptions that tie into caffeine intake. I will then provide an outlook on the direct negative effects of caffeine on cognitive function and sleep. After establishing that degrees of sleep deprivation may occur, this foundation will be used to explore the consequences of lower sleep duration and quality, which holds the ability to influence an individual's cognitive state. I will also delineate the correlations between caffeine consumption and emotional states, in which physiological distress can be associated with a lack of sleep. The last section will address how sleep deprivation and cognitive function in the context of caffeine consumption may impact academic performance in adolescents. Complications of caffeine's direct and indirect impacts on adolescents will be examined as well, as adolescents may not be impacted to the same extent when presented with similar conditions.

## THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN CAFFEINE CONSUMPTION

The motivations of adolescents for caffeine consumption reveal there are several factors, in which functional and social motivators were common foundations for developing caffeine consumption habits. In examining the counteractive effects of caffeine consumption, it is first necessary to examine the underlying motivations in adolescents for it. A 2021 study delved into how motivations for caffeine consumption include hedonic factors of taste, functional effects of staying alert, and sociocultural factors relating to socialization (Stachyshyn et al.). This is reinforced by the perceptions of adolescents for consumption, in which one male explained that "for coffee and energy drinks, it's more like the energy boost in the morning or through the day," which conveys the functional motivations of caffeine. The study also included a female who thought that "people nowadays, if you ask them, do you drink coffee, and they say no, it's surprising now because it's just kind of expected," which indicates the presence of social motivations behind caffeine intake (Turton et al.). As the theory of planned behavior frames the idea that one's subjective perspective of attitudes, norms, and control over behavior predict foundational beliefs about the behavior, the functional and social factors presented in the quote constitute factors or attitudes that determine caffeine consumption behavior. The theory delineates that these motivations correlate to why individuals gravitate towards caffeine intake and presents one fundamental aspect of consumption that can be targeted to redirect consumption habits. Adolescents' attitudes or sense of control over their caffeine consumption imply that such social environments may strengthen the underlying motivation of adolescents to utilize its functional effects associated with an increased sense of alertness to improve academic performance, as the academic environment and resulting stress of school are socially relevant to individuals.

These consumption habits during a time of development may place strain on adolescents, and the motivations of adolescents may not be fulfilled in the process. Turton et al. found that "caffeine was consumed in the morning, evening, and during exams to stay awake for class and to study," which reinforces the notion that adolescents are motivated to intake caffeine for its functional effects and improve academic performance. These habits indicate the potential for caffeine to satisfy motivations to some degree in individuals, but relying on its functional effects for relatively long periods may provide unsustainable results if it induces adolescents to stay awake for prolonged periods or is overstimulating to the point that it interferes with performance and wellbeing. In addition, the possibility of overstimulation may highlight the fact that within the range of motivations for caffeine intake, only some may be satisfied throughout the process of consumption, in that functional effects brought up by Stachyshyn et al. may be difficult to justify with the potential negative impacts of caffeine consumption. This discrepancy between the motivations for and impacts of caffeine consumption is alarming, and it shows how the notion of caffeine literacy is increasingly significant and relevant in a society where caffeine consumption has risen among adolescents.

## DISRUPTION OF SLEEP AND COGNITIVE FUNCTION BY CAFFEINE

The disconnect between perception and reality may become a threat as caffeine's potential impacts are explored, as becoming dependent on a substance that may not be as beneficial as it is perceived is dangerous. Caffeine can produce direct adverse impacts on cognitive functioning and sleep. There are conflicting studies on the effects of caffeine on cognitive functioning, one variable being memory. The article "A review of caffeine's effects on cognitive, physical and occupational performance" by McLellan et al. provides insight into the complex nature of caffeine's influence. One study referenced observed that there is a "general consensus that caffeine improves 'lower' cognitive functions such as simple reaction time, whereas caffeine's effects on 'higher' cognitive functions such as problem solving and decision making are often debated," which presents the notion that caffeine perhaps helps certain aspects of function in low doses, although further research may have to be done to support this finding (McLellan et al.). This could also be limited by the authors' introduction of the factor of one's arousal levels, in that if an individual's arousal levels before consumption are high, it could indicate that one can be more easily overstimulated even with lower doses of caffeine intake, which would instead degrade function and weaken the potential short-term benefits of caffeine. It reinforces the contradiction between the impacts of caffeine intake and motivations, as individuals who utilize caffeine for feelings of alertness may experience a lack of benefits. Caffeine intake may produce other detrimental effects with this stimulation, particularly in its influence on sleep.

Caffeine consumption plays a role in suppressing the need for sleep, in which the subsequent lack of sleep in individuals raises questions about how it may affect academic performance or wellbeing. Clark and Landolt's "Coffee, Caffeine, and Sleep: A Systematic Review of Epidemiological Studies and Randomized Controlled Trials" explains that at a basic level, caffeine works as an effective stimulant by "blocking the adenosine neuromodulator and receptor system," which are associated with feelings of sleepiness. However, caffeine may have more complex effects on sleep mechanisms, which would provide an important basis for the potential of researching correlations between sleep, caffeine, and academic performance. Caffeine may also "suppress melatonin secretion and delay the circadian onset of the biological night," which indicates the possible correlation between caffeine consumption and sleep suppression (Reichert et al.). The theoretical framework of the perfect storm model provides insight into the contrasting nature of adolescents' biological clocks and society's, which explains why adolescents may not attain adequate amounts of sleep. Adolescents may be susceptible to daytime sleepiness through the conflicting interactions between school start times and academic pressure and changes in sleep behavior, as these factors may promote or induce disrupted sleep patterns during adolescence development. Adolescents may look to caffeine to enhance their academic performance with their superficial view of the effects on sleep, but the model begins to question the practicality of reducing sleep to reach academic goals as sleep deprivation may have detrimental effects. The byproduct of sleep deprivation is an interesting factor in this mix, as it may counteract the initial goals for which young students are consuming caffeine. The discussion in "Cognitive Flexibility: A Distinct Element of Performance Impairment Due to Sleep Deprivation" advances this idea as the article states that "sleep deprivation involves an impairment in the dynamic reallocation of attentional resources to meet changing task demands… [and can result] in reduced cognitive flexibility" (Honn et al.). It demonstrates the link between academic performance and sleep deprivation as the latter reduces levels of cognitive function in individuals which could negatively impact academic performance. This bolsters the argument that caffeine may have counterproductive impacts on sleep that impact academic performance. However, caffeine may not only have linear effects in its role as a stimulant but also depend on individual differences in caffeine sensitivity that lead to varying degrees of response to caffeine (Clark & Landolt). This may present a complication to my argument, as it may be difficult to pinpoint or gesture to specific doses of caffeine or sleep durations that lead to negative effects on individuals.

In order to examine the potential of caffeine consumption on academic performance, it is important to view the contribution of lack of sleep on aspects such as cognitive function, which is crucial to academics. Throughout day-to-day life, sleep loss and quality may contribute to the impairment of cognitive function. In the article "Shorter Duration and Lower Quality Sleep Have Widespread Detrimental Effects on Developing Functional Brain Networks in Early Adolescence," a 2021 study on individuals in different stages of adolescence found that "shorter sleep duration may affect…both segregated processing and transmission of information and integration across the brain" (Brooks et al.). This implies that sleep deprivation and lower quality of sleep may negatively affect the efficiency of brain networks that are involved in information integration or processing with contributions to reduced brain functioning. The study also mentions that early adolescent sleep is crucial during a time of development, which emphasizes the importance of sleep quality and could have subsequent implications for the level of cognitive functioning an individual is capable of during a period of reduced sleep. This provides a premise for how sleep loss and quality may affect cognitive function and memory, as well as that this incomplete maturation of brain networks could have long-term effects on one's cognitive development and function. Unhealthy sleep tendencies and sleep duration can disturb cognitive processes at an age of development, with memory and attention among the factors impacted, which supports the claims that adolescents are commonly counteracting the initial goals of academic achievement with caffeine intake (Brooks et al.).

## CAFFEINE'S EFFECTS ON EMOTIONAL STATES

Lack of sleep may have additional adverse effects on individuals, including feelings of anxiety that may also produce negative effects on academics. A clinical review in "Sleep and Anxiety: From Mechanisms to Interventions," investigated the link between sleep and anxiety, displaying evidence that suggests there is "an overlap of brain networks underlying sleep and emotional regulation…[and] individuals experiencing anxiety show increased activation of the amygdala and insula, both of which implicated in aversive stimuli responses and emotional regulation" (Chellappa & Aeschbach). This specifies regions of activation related to anxiety and indicates the presence of a connection between anxiety and sleep. It develops the perspective that there is a relationship beginning from one's brain wiring and focusing on this association may show an underlying mechanism. Similarly, a theoretical review in "The Role of Adolescent Sleep Quality in the Development of Anxiety Disorders: A Neurobiologically-Informed Model" of sleep quality detailed initial studies that revealed there is a "significant relationship between poor sleep quality and increased physiological distress which has been shown to be closely associated with the likelihood of developing anxiety disorders" (Jamieson et al.). This builds on the clinical review by bringing into focus sleep and anxiety disorders, as it shows how the wiring of sleep and emotion may impact the degree of risk of anxiety in individuals. Sleep's impact on emotion and anxiety signifies the extent to which sleep is important in adolescents. It may indicate the existence of some of the subsequent effects of caffeine consumption as well, with caffeine producing a varying degree of sleep deprivation, leading to reduced cognitive function and increased symptoms of anxiety. This also gestures to the fact that caffeine consumption may have undesired impacts on one's academic performance from its impacts on sleep, highlighting the contrasting nature of motivations for caffeine and outcomes.

There may be implications for the future of adolescents consuming caffeine regularly as well, particularly in the emotional sense. In "Kicking My Caffeine Addiction," John Horgan outlines his self-conducted experiment where he attempted to completely cut caffeine intake, first by switching to tea and then to nothing at all. The author mentions that starting from his mid-twenties into adulthood, he would drink up to six cups of coffee a day and claims he was dependent on caffeine to start his day. As Horgan felt "less anxious, glum, moody, irritable, impatient. More calm and clear-headed…. during the day." He writes that "even when [he] feel[s] tired, [he] can summon the energy [he] need[s] to get things done" after successfully carrying out his experiment, which provides notable implications for the future (Horgan 2018). Adolescents who are beginning to form caffeine consumption habits may experience negative consequences if they continue similar intake patterns, which is reinforced by the benefits Horgan experienced after successfully cutting out caffeine from his diet. This real-world example is further developed by the implications Jamieson et al. bring up, as they explain that there is a "propensity of anxiety disorders to first emerge during adolescence and progress into adulthood." It provides the correlation as to how present consumption habits that could produce levels of anxiety through sleep loss could continue to affect individuals in the future as well, perhaps by influencing performance at work or daily routines. As there is a link between sleep and emotional states, it could also indicate how anxiety symptoms could also impair cognitive function. Some levels of anxiety may serve well in low levels, as it could provide a sense of energy or stress to do well, but higher levels could produce negative influences on academic performance as individuals could find it difficult to complete work or reduce one's ability to concentrate in class. This signifies the importance of understanding how caffeine intake could have short-term benefits, such as staying awake to complete more work and study for longer, but if those habits continue, there may be negative implications for the future. It could be explained through terms of the theory of planned behavior as well, in that individuals may perceive that they are likely to consume caffeine when they see this behavior as beneficial or view others as approving of it, but this may only pertain to the temporary benefits that caffeine may have, and not the lasting influences from these habits.

## IMPAIRMENT OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND COMPLICATIONS

Addressing the possible impacts of caffeine consumption on sleep, as well as that of sleep deprivation on cognitive function and anxiety, sets a foundation of reasons for the need to understand the effects of caffeine. It is important to pay attention to how caffeine may adversely affect academic performance, building off its associations with sleep deprivation and anxiety. The article "Self-Reported Sleep Need, Subjective Resilience, and Cognitive Performance Following Sleep Loss and Recovery Sleep" showed a study involving cognitive performance, sleep need, and resilience, which found that "individuals with low resilience and low subjective sleep need performed the worst during sleep deprivation and during a recovery period" (Mantua et al.). The authors predicted this was due to the fact that individuals who perceived low subjective sleep need often underestimated the objective amount of sleep they needed, and so will more likely carry a greater amount of sleep debt than those who perceive a high level of sleep need. This identifies that subjective sleep needs and levels of resilience may impact the extent to which caffeine may produce detriments to cognitive function in individuals. It highlights the complex nature of caffeine in that its effects not only depend on its stimulant properties but also that individual factors play a role in determining the strength of caffeine's biological effect on oneself. While sleep may have predicted detrimental effects on academic performance, there may also be indications that anxiety or other emotional disorders have similar effects. In addition, the article "A Longitudinal Cohort Study to Explore the Relationship between Depression, Anxiety and Academic Performance among Emirati University Students" involved a 2020 study that examined the relationship between depression and anxiety and academic performance. The study revealed that "baseline findings support[ed] an association between higher levels of depressive symptoms and poorer academic performance" (Awadalla et al.). This implies that emotional distress may negatively impact students' academic performance, as well as build on the associations made between cognitive performance and sleep by displaying the counteractive results of caffeine consumption in individuals who are academically motivated for it (Awadalla et al.).

However, there may be complications that limit the extent to which caffeine's impacts can be predicted in individuals, as multiple variables may contribute to lower sleep quality, anxiety, and cognitive function. There may be individual variations that may predict the extent to which caffeine consumption can affect individuals, including factors of caffeine sensitivity, resilience, subjective sleep need, and arousal levels. Clark and Landolt refer to caffeine sensitivity when they mention that "symptoms of insomnia…were found to be more prevalent in self-rated caffeine sensitive than in insensitive respondent." It reinforces the presence of variation among individuals, and in whom caffeine is able to have significant effects on sleep patterns. This limits the population of adolescents who may be impacted to the extent that it affects academic performance, as well as shows that such individuals may face more consequences when intaking caffeine. It also closely resembles the concept of low resilience, in which some individuals may be able to resist cognitive impairments and still function at rudimentary levels. With this, Mantua et al. display that the combination of subjective low resilience and low sleep need has the potential to predict negative influences on performance. Such factors begin to indicate the presence of biologically based factors that may reduce caffeine's impacts. There may also be psychological differences, as arousal levels prior to caffeine intake were shown to impact performance by determining if one may be overstimulated (McLellan et al.). These complications may limit the scope of adolescents who may be impacted to the extent that there are detriments to academic performance, but it does not necessarily undermine the importance of caffeine literacy, as such effects of caffeine on sleep and anxiety are still influential and may impact other aspects of individual states of wellbeing.

## CONCLUSION

Caffeine consumption is commonly motivated by the functional effects of caffeine in adolescents, a population who have been increasingly consuming caffeine. This holds the potential to induce sleep deprivation and lower levels of cognitive performance, although the extent of impact could also include the degree of arousal before as overstimulation could decrease function. Caffeine's direct impact on sleep may also have associated effects on cognitive function and anxiety levels, in which sleep loss impacts the efficiency of brain networks that play a role in information processing and emotional regulation. Subsequently, perceptions of caffeine's effects are important as they hold the power to drive individuals to consume caffeine, which is laid out in the theory of planned behavior. It displays that attitudes and perceived control of caffeine intake may predict consumption habits in individuals, which is a key underlying foundation to understanding why and how to target such routines. Although the introduction of individual differences in responses to caffeine through arousal levels, subjective sleep need, and resilience present complications as to the general degree to which caffeine may affect adolescents, it is still pertinent that it can place strains on the body while it is undergoing significant transformation. Caffeine can interfere with standard levels of emotional wellbeing and cognitive functioning in individuals, which may give rise to detrimental impacts on academic performance, especially when subjective perceptions differ from the truth. As the consumption of caffeinated products is socially embedded in society and is increasingly common, it gestures to the significance of comprehending how caffeine may affect individuals in day-to-day life. There may also be implications for the future, as continual caffeine consumption may produce a sense of dependency, which indicates the nature of the possible short-term benefits of caffeine but long-term complications. There is still much uncertainty as well on what individual tendencies or traits are more susceptible though, implicating that the topic of caffeine consumption holds vast potential for future research.

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**Grace Maa**

# Galatians 3:28 The Seemingly Forgotten Verse in White American Christianity


## ABSTRACT

*Among the many titles that the United States holds, it also holds the title for the country in the world with the most practicing Christians, with approximately 253 million people considering themselves a part of the religion out of the 332 million population according to the census. Not only was America founded on the basis of Christian principles but it has maintained its status as a Christian nation for 246 years. Just as Christianity is woven into the fabric of American laws and society, the United States's legacy has also been tainted with white supremacist values. This paper will explore the connections between Christianity, white supremacy, tribalism and the effect of all these things on race relations in America. More specifically, this paper aims to discover how tribalism played a role in intertwining Christianity and white supremacy with one another in a historical context, as well as how Christianity has aided in the upholding of white supremacist ideals. It was Spanish Catholic conquistadors who first outlined race in the new world in its modern context and this system of racial hierarchies, based on pseudoscience, established a foothold for white supremacy to flourish in America. Yet, it is the Christian understanding of sin, retribution, and repentance that play a role in maintaining White American Christians' racial ignorance. In order for America to solve the issue of race relations, it is crucial to understand the role that Christianity has had in not only reassuring White Americans in their whiteness but also being used as the justification for the misdoings against people of color in the United States.*


## INTRODUCTION

"SHE'S NOT A CHRISTIAN!!!!!" Marguerite Perrin screams on a TV episode of Trading Spouses in 2005. The video has been circulated on social media with people using the video to show the dark side of Christian believers with the hashtag "#shesnotachristian" having been viewed over 2 million times on TikTok. Teens and young adults take to the app and post videos of themselves coming out, getting their ears pierced, getting abortions because they were victims of sexual abuse, or simply being a person of color and engaging with their cultural practices with the audio blaring in the background. Their content implies that Christians have told them that they were not believers because of such deeds. Hundreds of thousands of commenters agree that they have similar stories in which they were told they were un-Christian or spawns of Satan because of their identities or fashion choices in America. It is not surprising that the white American Christian stereotype has taken on the role of the manic, judgemental, racist, homophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic redneck. Is the stereotype true?

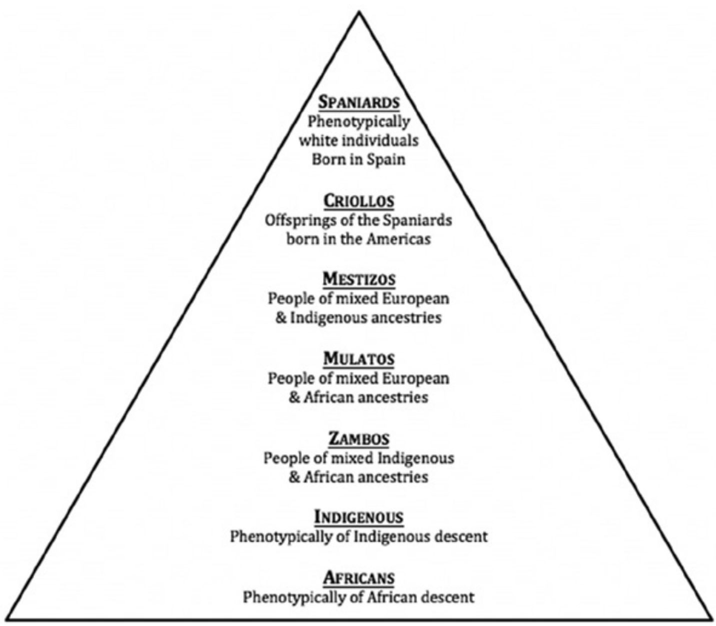
Well, according to data collected from the American 2020 elections by the Pew Research Center, and in "Most White Americans who regularly attend worship services voted for Trump in 2020" by Justin Nortey, "About seven-in-ten White, non-Hispanic Americans who attend religious services at least monthly (71 percent) voted for Trump, while roughly a quarter (27 percent) voted for Biden. Among White Americans who attend religious services a few times a year or less, far fewer voted for Trump (46 percent) while around half (52 percent) voted for Biden" (Nortey). There seems to be a larger disparity between White American Christians that regularly attend church services versus the ones that do not, more so than White American Christians versus non-religious or non-Christian practicing White Americans. These results are interesting as Biden has been open about being a practicing Christian, while Trump has not. This also does not mean that everyone that voted for Trump fits the stereotype mentioned above. However, it is important to understand that Trump has not only been accused of sexual assault by multiple women, but has also been quoted saying racist, xenophobic, and ableist remarks. This means that for the people that voted for him, none of these statements were alarming or necessarily red flags for a potential leader of a country that is known for being a "melting pot." In fact, his tagline "Make America Great Again" refers to returning America to the past, implying that America's past was greater than it is now. Well, America's past was also filled with Jim Crow laws, few rights for women, xenophobia, and the forceful removal and genocide of Native Americans.

It is important to understand that correlation does not necessarily equal causation and that this paper does not suggest that all white American Christians are racist, sexist, xenophobes. However, this paper aims to inquire into the extreme homogeneity of white American Christians. Why does Christianity and specifically white American Christianity seem to attract the same types of people into its ranks? More specifically, how has Christianity served as the perfect "conduit" for white supremacy and how has a religion that was founded on the belief that everyone is loved by God, was spun to justify the ideas that one race was created to be far superior than any other? Furthermore, how has this legacy of white supremacy and such appalling acts affect the faith of the victims of these acts who are still practicing Christianity today? How has white supremacy become so intertwined with Christianity in America that Christians who are not white always bear the legacy of this while practicing Christianity? How has Christianity become synonymous with hate? While I do not necessarily imply that Christianity was the perfect conduit for white supremacy in that the religion in itself was perfectly made to dominate and exploit people, it is undoubtedly evident that the Bible is easy to misinterpret and manipulate. The fact that the Bible has most likely been changed as well as having entire chapters and books hidden from the public is another reason why Christianity has been used at is. It is easy to manipulate the face of holiness and purity (Jesus) as being European even though he most likely was not. Not only that but rarely do people closely read the Bible in its correct context and this can be used to push certain agendas. Essentially, it just so happens that white supremacy was furthered by Christianity simply because it was the religion that a majority of Europeans happened to believe in and that if another religion had been practiced widely by Europeans then that religion could have been used as a conduit for white supremacy instead. The problem inherently lies in white supremacy and not Christianity.

## WHITE SUPREMACY AND CHRISTIANITY AS A FORM OF EVOLVED TRIBALISM

White supremacy is defined by Oxford Languages as "the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups" (Oxford Languages). The term, according to Merriam-Webster, was first used in 1824 (Merriam Webster). Although the term is only about 200 years old, for centuries, some form of white supremacy has been the primary justification for some of the most horrible acts against humanity that the world has ever seen: the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery that spanned all the way from the 1500s-1800s; Jim Crow segregation which lasted from the end of slavery until 1964; the

Holocaust (1933-1945); European colonization and imperialism of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, Indingenous genocides, etc. White supremacy has also been linked to Christianity for an extremely long time and the spread of Christianity outside of Europe has been thoroughly guided by white supremacy, even before the concept of race as we know it today was created. Race is a socially constructed idea by Europeans but the idea that one's own people are better than any others is not unique to Europeans. According to "Historical Foundations of Race ‹› published by the *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, however, asserts that making race based solely on skin color and religion and then claiming superiority based on false scientific reasons is unique to white people. Europeans were the first to outline race into racial categories in a clear cut way that the world has never seen before. In "New World" Spanish colonies, there was a strict caste system based on the percentage of "whiteness" in a person's blood. This can be seen as one of the early stages of white supremacy.




*Latin American Social Caste Pyramid (LASCP) (Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, and Organista 7).*

Even earlier than these racial hierarchies in the new world is justification of the enslavement and the dehumanization of Native American and African people that led to the creation of the new world as we know it today. Starting with the "The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493" by Pope Alexander VI, head of the Catholic Church at the time (and all of Christianity as the start of Protestantism didn't begin until Martin Luther in 1517; this also doesn't include Orthodox Christians as there was a separation between the two in 11th century), said that any lands not "discovered" by Christian people could be claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers as they wished, proving how the dehumanization of other races was deemed morally just by the head of the Catholic Church (Wallace). Although this can be seen as the "start" of white supremacy in its modern context and of the United States of America which comes out of this act, truly white supremacy stems from tribalism, defined by Oxford Languages as "the behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group" (Oxford Languages). Tribalism is a psychological and evolutionary trait that has kept humans alive since the beginning of time. Associating closely with one's tribe and not with outsiders led to the overall benefit and survival of the tribe, leading humanity to be as populous as it is today. However, in the modern era, white supremacy, as well as Christianity, can be explained as a way to protect one's tribe.

When I claim that white supremacy along with Christianity are an evolved form of tribalism this does not mean that Christianity simply morphed into tribalism. Rather, Christianity has always been a form of tribalism, from the moment that it began or became a religion that people could identify with which is not necessarily unique to only Christianity but other religions as well. Any identity is subject to tribalism because tribalism as seen by the definition above has to do with the loyalty associated with identifying with a common objective. Before white people identified as white, what separated them from the rest of the world was their religion, meaning that their main identity was simply being a Christian. This means that there was more than likely not a pre-tribal period of Christianity because the two have always overlapped. Evidence of this is once again found in "The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493". The Pope never said that any lands discovered by Africans, or Asians, or Native Americans could be "rediscovered" by Europeans: he said that any lands not discovered by Christian people could be brought under Christian rule. The Pope was above Kings and Queens, and therefore he could be seen as the head of Western Europe where Catholicism was practiced by almost everybody. This means that being Christian was synonymous with being white, because whiteness had not been created in its modern context yet.

Somehow in the unconscious of our primitive human mind, people's identities become synonymous with their "tribe" or with their "team" and when someone feels that their tribe is under attack. Even when it is not, they either fight back or they try to push other people out. They will do whatever it takes to protect their tribe. It is why we see many white American Christians scared of refugees from Muslim dominant countries. "What if they take over our government?" or "What if they commit terrorist attacks?" It is why we see them scared of Black people. "Their music corrupts the minds of the youth" or "They're violent people". Negative stereotypes of other races or religions influence the perception of the "other" so much that they become afraid to the point that their immediate response is to protect their white and Christian way of life. What exactly is going to be lost is a subject up for debate, but evidently for white American Christians what they are so afraid of losing is something that they feel threatens extinction or their way of life. These fears are further exacerbated by leaders that use these negative emotions to gain support. For example, Donald Trump focused his campaign on the constant threat of losing the things that made America so great and returning America to its former glory. Stevan E. Hobfoll in his book *Tribalism The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics* writes, "This primitive response is more universally experienced when there are real threats of terrorism, whose purpose is to create a sense of terror far disproportionate to its actual danger. We only require the hint of threat to alert our protective systems" (Hobfoll 5). In this way, politics can serve as an aid to terrorism by spreading the idea of terror, of constant loss and the need to be on guard lest the "other" come and end your way of life. Hobfoll writes:

> For evolutionary purposes, our brains developed to be loss-sensitive. The loss of a tooth, of several females of productive age, of two hunters in the tribe, of a source of water, all threatened the end of life, end of the tribe, and an end of our progeny. In contrast, the brain barely recognizes gain. Indeed, the sole purpose of gain was itself to protect against future loss. This primitive and basic element of our brain shapes our emotions, how we organize our attachment to others, our seeking of protection and safety, and the very way we form our cultures and governments. It is therefore a highly effective strategy to speak in terms of extremes and the extremis of threat and annihilation (Hobfoll 5).

Recognizing loss over recognizing gain is the reason why negative stereotypes prevail over positive ones (if any other racial or religious group ever had a truly positive stereotype to begin with). And it is the reason why speaking in terms of loss can get people riled up more than speaking in terms of anything else, because one sparks a clearly stronger emotional response than the other in our subconscious minds.

A prime example of this is Nazi Germany (1933-1945), where Adolf Hitler used a similar rhetoric to that of Donald Trump in 2016 when he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspicious girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people." Comparatively, Donald Trump while announcing his campaign states, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best…. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." These similarities are not coincidences nor are these instances unrelated. This is the purposeful use of the human subconscious to strike fear of the "other" into people's hearts. It is important to mention that although white supremacy stems from tribalism, white supremacy does not equate to tribalism. Tribalism is about protection of the tribe and maintaining its way of life while white supremacy takes this concept several steps further by attacking, harassing, and harming other groups of people for simply wanting equal rights, or for no perceivable reason at all. The difference is between a real threat of loss of life when tribes were dozens of people large versus a perceived threat against the 235.4 million (2019 Census) white identifying people in a country 332 million people large. Although neither Hitler or Trump were advancing Christian-based politics, the fact that Christians have explicitly supported both is something to be noted. In fact, what makes this so interesting is that they weren't doing anything in order to benefit Christianity but rather to benefit white supremacy.

## HOW WHITE SUPREMACY FOUND ITS WAY INTO CHRISTIANITY - THE ERA OF SOCIAL DARWINISM

The simple answer is that it didn't. It's not that Christianity found its way into white supremacy, more so that white supremacy stemmed out of the identity of Christianity, which was already linked to whiteness. As mentioned before, race as we know it today did not exist for a long time because it is a man-made social construct that has been constantly changing. At different points in history, certain people that we may associate as being white now were once not considered to be so when they came to America, such as Italians, Jews, Poles, Slavs, and Greeks. The lines between what it meant to be a particular race were blurred tremendously. However, the defining characteristic that Europeans used to identify themselves with was their religion: Christianity. This means that ever since Europeans embraced Christianity (the Holy Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity in AD 380 and the rest of Europe went through Christianization), Christianity in terms of history became synonymous with whiteness. However, just because Europeans identified themselves as being Christian first before their race, doesn't mean that the beginning stages of white supremacy in Christianity weren't already set in motion as mentioned in the previous section, "White Supremacy and Christianity as a form of Evolved Tribalism". Nonetheless, the era where we begin to see white supremacy come to the forefront of Christianity is coincidentally during the same era as what historians call "High Imperialism" or "New Imperialism," which was the rush to empire for many European countries in the late 19th century. In order to justify their colonization and imperialism further into Africa and Asia, Europeans used the research of famed scientist Charles Darwin and his work in The Origin of Species, published in 1859. Authors such as German zoologist Ernst Haeckel who published The Riddle of the Universe in 1901 "discovered" that there were ten races. From his findings he concluded that not only were there ten races within the human race, but that Caucasians were at the top of the hierarchy while Africans were at the very bottom and were linked to monkeys. Another important author responsible for furthering ideas of white supremacy to validate colonization and imperialism was Herbert Spencer, an anthropologist and theorist of "Social Darwinism". According to Harry Burrows Acton of Brittanica, social darwinism is a belief that "the principles of evolution, including natural selection, apply to human societies, social classes, and individuals as well as to biological species developing over geologic time"(Acton). According to Robert Strayer and Eric Nelson in *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History*, from this era of Social Darwinism emerged two ideologies (Strayer and Nelson):

1. The belief that Europeans must be at war with non-Caucasian individuals to destroy them and that this was the natural order of the universe. Caucasians were at the top of the food chain, and it was their right to assert their dominance over everyone else.
2. The belief that Europeans were indeed superior to non-Europeans however, this was mainly due to their superior culture and

civilization and not necessarily only because of genetics. It was up to Europeans to bring other people out of the darkness and save them from their savagery. Maybe in the distant future, non Europeans would be able to lead themselves but for now they were in need of white saviors to rule them and teach them the ways of what it meant to be "human".

Both of these white supremacist ideals were not only popular in Europe but of course very prevalent in the United States of America where white Americans were still struggling to accept Black Americans as being full citizens of society. In America where at first there was slavery and freedom, now there was a very clear difference between White and Black (this is a bit nuanced in the fact that even free Black people could be captured simply because they were Black and turned into slaves and even if they maintained their status as a free person, a majority were still treated terribly). However, although not seriously practiced, the status of being Black did not automatically make someone an enslaved person. Yet, that also did not mean that white people during this period in America were subjected to the status of being slaves as they could only be maids or indentured servants. At this point in history not only were white people assured in their Christianity but also in their whiteness. Besides the fact that there was a new identity that bound them together, there was also the belief that their whiteness made them biologically superior and now there was "scientific evidence" to prove it.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN MODERN CHRISTIANITY

In the previous sections, the history of white supremacy in Christianity and the ways in which the two became intertwined with one another was discussed. However, this section's main focus will be on the consequences of white supremacy in American Christianity and the effect it has had on race relations in America. Furthermore, how the history of white supremacy in America has caused a separation between White Christianity and Black Christianity and how non-white Christians always bear the legacy of white supremacy while practicing Christianity. America has always been known as a majority Christian nation, and even if the demographics have started to shift slightly, Christianity is undoubtedly woven into the fabrics of this country as well as white supremacy. Because of this, white supremacy in American Christianity has had a huge effect on race relations in America, often being one of the biggest issues that divides people. In his book *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, Robert P. Jones states, "After centuries of complicity, the norms of white supremacy have become deeply and broadly integrated into white Christian identity, operating far below the level of consciousness. To many well-meaning white Christians today—evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic—Christianity and a cultural norm of white supremacy now often feel indistinguishable, with an attack on the latter triggering a full defense of the former" (Jones 15). When a system such as white supremacy has been upheld and defended using Christianity for so long, it is almost impossible to erase the connection between the two without actually working on trying to sever the ties that American Christianity has with racism. When white Christians try to pretend as if they simply cannot be associated with racism because of their Christianity, they are willfully ignoring the hand that Christianity has had in the destruction of Black people's lives and other people of color for centuries. Not only are they ignoring the long history between white supremacy and Christianity, they are ignoring history in general. Christianity has been used to justify horrific transgressions and when that has been happening for as long as it has that means that the past is still intertwined with the present. This can further be explained in why people begin to feel that a threat on one (specifically Christianity) is a threat to another (people's identity with whiteness), because of how deeply inseparable white supremacy and Christianity have become. Despite this truth, white American Christians have worked to erase people of color from Christianity while simultaneously being responsible for the forced conversion of other races into Christianity. The representation of Jesus for centuries has been a white man with long, straight, light brown hair and blue eyes. Angels are always white and God is always depicted in a similar manner, a white man with long straight white hair despite the fact that no one knows what God looks like and the fact that biologically speaking, Jesus could not have been white at all. So why in every movie, in every famous painting, or T.V. show is this so? Of course, because white Christians have even tricked themselves into believing that their savior, the representation of purity, humbleness, and perfection must have been white. Because to be white is to be pure, humble, perfect, and worthy of humanity.

Of course this outlook on Christianity only leads to the dehumanization of blackness. If the Lord and Savior was white and pure then blackness must be the opposite of purity, it must be evil. If Black people had to continue practicing Christianity with this mindset, then they would inevitably lose their sense of selves. This is why once Black people gain their freedom in America, Black Christianity becomes vastly different from white Christianity, taking a shape of its own and becoming a sort of hybrid between western Christianity and a mix of traditional African spirituality. James Cone talks about the differing theologies between Black American Christianity and White American Christianity in his book *God of the Oppressed*. Cone's experience as a theologian was one of being in a white Christian world that blamed Black people for their suffering, that had named their suffering to being preordained, and that as long as they continued to think differently from white people, they would continue to be oppressed because white people would not listen to them. But Cone writes that this is not true theology. He contends that real theology recognizes the differences between the Black experience and the White one and that rather than one conforming to the other it is important to educate on how the Bible can relate to these different experiences. True theology recognizes that Jesus is "the liberator of the poor and the wretched of the land" and that God "is not indifferent to suffering and not patient with cruelty and falsehood. But God's power and judgment will create justice and order out of chaos" (Cone 8). He writes,

> What is the connection between life and theology? The answer cannot be the same for blacks and whites, because blacks and whites do not share the same life. The lives of a black slave and white slaveholder were radically different. It follows that their thoughts about things divine would also be different, even though they might sometimes use the same words about God. The life of the slaveholder and others of that culture was that of extending white inhumanity to excruciating limits, involving the enslavement of Africans and the annihilation of Indians. The life of the slave was the slave ship, the auction block, and the plantation regime. It involved the attempt to define oneself without the ordinary historical possibilities of self-affirmation. Therefore when the master and slave spoke of God, they could not possibly be referring to the same reality (Cone 9-10).

To this day, because of history Black people and white people cannot possibly share the same life, and a person's race will always have a huge impact on how the world views them and therefore how their lives are lived. He claims that to Black Christians, God is the God of the oppressed. But does this mean that white people view God as the God of the Oppressor? Certainly not, it is most likely the case that white American Christians view themselves as being oppressed. Perhaps only to me this is contradictory. As a Black woman I cannot possibly fathom being any lower on the totem pole of oppression than I already am right now, and cannot imagine white people as being any higher. To be the face of the oppressor for so long not only to Black people but to other people of color and then to turn around and claim to be oppressed is ludicrous. And yet perhaps it's not as obvious to white American Christians as it might be to everyone else how apparent their privilege truly is because of racial ignorance and assumed innocence.

## HOW CHRISTIANITY NECESSITATES WHITE SUPREMACY - RACIAL IGNORANCE/COLOR BLINDNESS AND WHITE GUILT

Not only has Christianity helped to spread white supremacy out of Europe along with the teachings of the religion, but in a way, the two have become so inseparable that Christianity necessitates white supremacy. Christianity has helped to keep the hold of white supremacy in America because of the state of the country being a Christian nation while simultaneously having been created to exclusively benefit white people. This perpetuation of white supremacy benefitting white people and their ancestors has created new forms of racism even as times have seemingly changed to make life better for people of color living in America. It began with the overt racism of the justification of Black people's suffering using the Bible directly from white American Christian leaders and has now turned into a "color blindness" ideology that perpetuates racism in a different way. In his book *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy*, Russell J. Hawkins discusses the many ways that Southern Evangelicals during Jim Crow used the Bible as a way to justify white supremacy. He writes:

> But if evidence from nature was not enough, white Christians also posited that the South's flourishing and, indeed, the shedding of God's grace on the entire nation under Jim Crow further indicated God's segregationist preferences. After all, these men supposed that if God desired integration, why would he have so generously lavished favor—and in these white Christians' minds, God clearly had—in a region that practiced racial separation. As one Baptist church group wondered, 'If segregation became wrong in 1954 [with the Brown

> decision] why was it not wrong before that year? And, if it is wrong, why has the God of both races so wonderfully blessed the area . . . where total segregation has been practiced?'… Methodist pastor Medford Evans quoted from the New Testament book of Matthew: 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' (Hawkins 48).

This idea that God has blessed white people and therefore that is why they prospered under slavery and under Jim Crow is the epitome of how white people have been seemingly blind to the fact that their prospering has only come from the suffering of others, and that the founding fathers had set up America for them to prosper off the backs of people of color.

This is a part of racial ignorance that white people are still victims to today and goes hand in hand with white guilt, in which white people misunderstand the way that race affects them and affects other people of color. As mentioned before, white people's sole identity for a long time was their Christianity which transformed into their identity of whiteness, meaning that it is easy for white people to shed their identity as white people while other races are not afforded this same grace. Ever since white people colonized and imperialized other countries, those natives have always and only been identified as being whatever their race is, and in relation to whiteness it was always inferior. Joanna Brooks discusses issues such as racial ignorance and racial innocence within the theology of white American Christianity in the chapter titled, "American Christianity, White Supremacy, and Racial Innocence" in her book *Mormonism and White Supremacy*. She states,

> White American Christianity has done a great deal to reassure white people and maintain us in our misunderstanding. It has sown into our imaginations a deep association of whiteness—as color, as symbol, as identity—with innocence and blackness with guilt. It has engaged Americans in performances and rituals designed to convey a sense of absolution or transcendence without moral responsibility. White American Christianity has also advanced one of the constituting mechanisms of whiteness by creating spaces that do not require white people to name their whiteness and acknowledge their privilege (Brooks 4-5).

In fact she goes even deeper reiterating the fact that there is privilege in the fact that white people can choose to not see color, or be "colorblind". She writes, "Whiteness derives power from the fact that it does not name or acknowledge itself but rather assumes an unnamed role as an organizing principle of social relations and a driver of value. Whiteness thus serves as its own alibi. It excuses itself; it refuses to speak its own name to make itself invisible and exculpate itself from agency and responsibility" (Brooks 5). Whiteness becomes the basis for goodness and innocence but also assumes a meaning of its own. The word "whiteness" speaks for itself and forces "blackness" and anything else to only be in relation to it. By doing this, white people can become invisible in a way that benefits only themselves because their whiteness can be an identity that can be simultaneously removed and yet still remain beneficial while other identities cannot be removed in the same way. A person of color will always be attached to their race while whiteness can morph into anything else. And a person of color's race will always be a part of their identity, an identity that they cannot remove or be colorblind to, while white people can.

Not only does white supremacy work from ignorance or innocence but it uses Christianity, specifically in terms of morality and sin to defend itself, making the cycle of white supremacy and Christianity a constant wheel of unstoppable destruction. The reason why white American Christianity is also one that is so intertwined with white supremacy is because of the history of how this country came to be in the first place. From the beginning white American Christianity and its ideas of morality, retribution, and sin have been woven into the fabric of the legal system. In this way, sin becomes transactional and Jesus Christ becomes the medium between humans and God. Sin and salvation are, of course, central to the Christian teaching and ideology but the Bible stresses the idea that no matter how many times someone sins if they repent then we must forgive them, no matter how much they have hurt us. Luke 17: 3-4 (ESV) says, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." White American Christians are seeing their surface-level fixings of the law, or amendments as repentance without it actually being true repentance and fixing the system that is benefiting them and hurting others. But if they believe that they have done enough and are "repenting" then people of color must forgive them. This idea of how sin can constantly be "fixed" if someone repents makes the detestation of sin practically irrelevant and transactional. If you can just sin and repent and your sin is wiped away then what is stopping you from not sinning in the first place?

This contradiction has allowed for white people to come to a place filled with people and call it their own country because white American Christianity at its root simplifies morality in order to preserve its innocence. Brooks also argues that this is what leads white American Christians to have "racial ignorance" because, once things have changed for the better for people of color such as in the court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, then white supremacist intentions become separated from the historical aspect of what these amendments were trying to correct (Brooks 6). This gives white people the chance to start again, affording them an innocence that is granted to no other racial group. White people become the poster race for goodness and for innocence as they become obsessed with moral righteousness. Christianity serves as an excuse to be able to start anew without first addressing the issue and examining why there has been an injustice in the first place. White supremacy then benefits from this by only affording this grace to white people. This transforms into a "white silence" where white people benefit from a system put in place for them and then ignore that this system is actively destroying the lives of people of color.

White people begin to feel a sense of white guilt and this is where the ideology of colorblindness comes into play. According to Monnica T. Williams, Ph.D. of *Psychology Today*, colorblindnesss is the racial ideology that says that the best way to end discrimination "is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity" (Williams). While some white American Christians might have the best intentions when mentioning colorblindness, they fail to understand that the reason why colorblindness is harmful to people of color is because by being colorblind you are refusing to acknowledge the painful history that has caused race to be so imbedded into people's identity in the first place and the role that white supremacy has had in that. To claim to be colorblind is a privilege because everyday people of color are constantly reminded of their race and how it has affected their entire existence. However, because white people have had the privilege to constantly start over, to have the privilege to not acknowledge their race, in countries such as America which favors white people and was built off white supremacy, their biggest flaw is their racial ignorance. Kristopher Norris perfectly sums up the detriments of colorblindness in his book *Witnessing Whiteness: Confronting White Supremacy in the American Church* by writing,

> Today, the seemingly innocuous claims of colorblindness are produced through stories that allow white Christians to avoid the responsibility of reckoning with reality: 'I'm not a racist,' 'I don't see color,' Stories shape social and theological imaginations and mold ethical visions; they allow white people to see ourselves as not racist or to believe Christianity is not concerned with social realities like race…white Christians have failed to be witnesses to our own whiteness. We don't perceive it, much less give an account of it, or tell its story. In fact, the stories we tell ourselves— 'My family didn't own slaves,' 'Racism is in the past; let's just move on' —actually serve to blind us from our own whiteness, and the devastating effects it has upon the church and the world. Our theologies and church practices shield us from these realities and prevent us from rightly telling the stories of our own past and present. Our theologies and church practices fail us—and especially fail those harmed by our failure to witness whiteness—because they are entangled in white supremacy in patterns threaded so tightly that only a painful, dangerous, and necessary process of unraveling will allow us to see the horror we have inflicted (in the name of Christ) and to have any hope of redemption (Norris 1-2).

Colorblindness does not solve the issue of racism as much as it merely tries to cover it up and make white people feel better for what their ancestors have done. In reality, people of color do not blame white people for their whiteness nor do people of color blame white people for the past that they were not actively responsible for. What people of color, and what Black Christians want is the acknowledgement from white people that show that they understand the privilege afforded to them because of the past and the disadvantage that it puts people of color at in America. We want them to have the willingness to learn and to listen without feeling that their identity and way of life are under attack and that there is a genuine way to solve the issue of race relations, not only in a social context but in a religious one as well.

## CONCLUSION

The reason why this paper needed to be written is because now more than ever, historians can agree that we are living in a time of extreme political correctness. However, with that comes an equally extreme opposition to political correctness. People feel scared on both sides. They feel marginalized, and so there is a strain on racial, religious, and political relations. Jones sums it up perfectly in his book as he writes, "In the history of the nation, there are moments of extraordinary transformation, when the wheels of demographic, cultural, and economic change turn together. In between the old and new orders, particularly for those who are most swept up in the currents, there seems to be little direction to the flow of history. Chaos rules. The old assumptions fail. Hierarchies are turned on their heads. Common sense no longer functions. In his Prison Notebooks, early twentieth-century political theorist Antonio Gramsci expressed this sentiment from his cell in a Fascist prison in Italy: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'" (Jones 17). We are at that precise point in history where it is up to us to create a society that we want to see, perhaps we are always at a point in history where this is true. However, this paper is written not to chastise white American Christians, and not to nitpick everything wrong with Christianity either, but rather to pinpoint where exactly did it all go wrong and what can we do from here. There are multiple things that can happen from here on out but realistically, understanding the history of anything is the only way to ensure that we are not doomed to repeat it. Tribalism as a human instinct has undoubtedly led to the notion of white supremacy as we know it today and Christianity has been associated with both. In fact for many, Christianity cannot be unlinked to the things that it brought with it: death and destruction of people's native way of life and culture. People of color have to live with that burden. White people, too, must live with that burden.

This paper serves as only a starting point to uncovering the racism that is evident in Christianity and barely scratches the surface of how to fix it. Whiteness, Christianity, Blackness, all of these things and more are merely worldly concepts that humans have created to be able to explain things that they could not completely understand yet and these things gave them a temporary understanding of their world at the time, or even our time. Perhaps this is even true of religion, if it turns out to be yet another man-made invention to help us cope with the harsh reality of this life. Yet, one of the amazing things about religion and specifically Christianity is that it does provide hope and inspires us to be better people, even if we as humans often fall into the same harmful patterns. Humans are fickle but words are not, and for Christians the word of God lives forever. That is why I hope that this paper reminds all Christians that no matter what our other identities may be, we are all united in God by his love and that we should never forget that it is written, "There is neither Jew nor

Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

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**M. Nasir Ismail**

# Systemic Double Standards Toward "Drill" Music: How Institutions Criminalize the Contexts They Create

## ABSTRACT

*Marginalized communities endure suspicion and invasive surveillance from local and federal authorities because of their misunderstood expressions in art and culture. As a result, these marginalized communities as well as the individuals involved have been undermined as a subversive influence in mainstream media. Law enforcement continues to criminalize Drill music as perpetrating influence to evoke violence and aggression within its listeners. A sub-genre of Hip-Hop, Drill music, originates from inner-city Chicago street culture and is inspired by its ambitious lifestyle in surviving arduous times. Yet, the pressure stemming from increased policing and surveillance exacerbates systemic racism, fabricating public narratives that low-income POC are inherently violent. Research and statistics show that these media narratives originate from prejudiced policing programs; and, this paper will delve into how exactly misunderstanding a sub-culture can create life-threatening repercussions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Drill music, a sub-genre of hip-hop, is characterized by its depiction of urban street culture. Recently, urban communities worldwide saw a rise in inner-city gun violence which has caused authority figures to stigmatize Drill music, prosecuting its lyrics and censoring music videos for promoting gang activity (Vozick-Levinson 1). How can law enforcement correlate interpersonal violence that occurs in marginalized communities to the artistic expressions these communities create? Both of which, marginalized communities and artistic hip-hop expression, are products of the same post-neoliberal systemic violence paradigm (which will be further detailed in the proceeding section). Actually, competition for resources in the midst of community neglect and social inequities result in behavioral repercussions such as interpersonal violence. However, media coverage and law enforcement initiatives fail to address the sociological origins of these issues (Lee 1; Fatsis 1). Dominant authorities, prejudiced against Drill music, inadvertently gatekeep the free-market capitalist society from marginalized communities. As such communities attempt to participate and contribute to the very same society, these authorities overlook how structural injustices have deprived marginalized communities from basic resources and privileges.

Such "testimonial injustice" involves a listener's not appropriately trusting a speaker," wherein the listener role is often filled by an dominant institutional power, and the speaker role taken by a marginalized voice (McKinnon 169). Whether enacted implicitly or explicitly, this injustice is what occurs when law enforcement criminalizes culturally subjective Drill music lyrics. By attitude contagion —the ability for a dominant group's beliefs to flourish by the silencing of inferior group perspectives— the effects of such criminalization retain inherently racist and classist stereotypes against the marginalized (Flores 2).

This research will blend theories in the social and cognitive sciences with criminological research to develop a critical perspective on the discriminatory structural violence that neoliberalism, as manifested through structural racism, employs both in creating an ultra competitive consumerist environment for citizens and in unjustly silencing cultural expressivity in marginalized communities. (Monbiot 1; Lynes et al. 1; Gooden 12). Structural violence is violence that maintains the status quo, due to unjust economic and sociopolitical norms, like systemic violence or structural racism (Lynes et al. 5) Neoliberalism views "competition as the defining characteristic of human relations," leading members of marginalized communities to resort to different forms violence in the consumerist, ultra competitive pursuit of already limited community resources (Monbiot 1). Applied to race, racial neoliberalism manifests both "as a privatistic free market agenda which disenfranchises disadvantaged social groups by and through disinvestment in and exclusion from state supported welfare provision" and "as a political doctrine which expects individuals to take responsibility for the structural disadvantage they suffer from as a result of state neglect" (Fatsis 1310). Both Drill, and its alleged perpetuation of inner-city violence, are but a product of racial neoliberalism. Racial neoliberalism manifests by way of White institutions cultivating and retaining socially dominant identities through "testimonial justice", a theory to which each following section will relate back (McKinnon 169). These White institutions perpetuate institutionally driven “resistant social beliefs” that erroneously stereotype low-income Black and brown individuals (Flores 3). The resulting “structural racism” is a form of systemic violence that “[extends] institutional racism by recognizing the cumulative effects of social inequality across organizations that compound and reinforce one another in particularly real ways” (Gooden 12).

Further, it is important to note that Drill music with conceptual meaning holds ontological subjectivity and therefore, establishes lyrics which are culturally subjective in meaning (Barrett 419). Drill lyrics are created to be “reflection[s] of street culture” and are not to be interpreted literally but figuratively - contrary to the actions of law enforcement (Lynes et al. 7). On a physiological level, the way in which the brain processes such information plays a formative role in the lyrics’ and musical sounds’ interpretive subjectivity. These same brain regions which process linguistic and musical information strengthen the argument that it is unjust to police music (Aucouterier & Canonne 1; Brandt et al. 1). After demystifying common misconceptions about violent lyrics leading to violent behavior, especially in specific environments, this work will reveal lyrical censorship for what it is: a form of epistemic injustice resulting from racist neoliberal classism (Carlson et al. 3; McKinnon 169). This will demonstrate how lyrics are inherently nonviolent, fluid, and subject to contextual interpretation—and how any attempt to blame hip-hop lyrics for criminal behavior stems from and creates several forms of violence.

## BACKGROUND

Drill music thematically incorporates lyrics rife with violence, weapons, materialism, and aggrandized self-portrayals. Its cultural foundation is manifested from “the structural conditions of late-capitalism,” or the institutional market exploitation of marginalized consumers (Lee 450). Neoliberal economic policies which birthed modern capitalism were adopted initially to empower individuals by inspiring free-market consumerism, wherein the laws of supply and demand rather than a central authority would dictate a product’s market price (Monbiot; Fatsis). As the U.S. was irrefutably built upon White supremacy, evident by its participation in slavery, dominant institutions easily amassed wealth while designating non-white communities as undeserving of equal economic freedom, shaping their social realities for the worse (Fatsis 1301). This caused the notion of ‘crime’ to be “quickly linked to ‘race’in a scenario which blames black music for the state's failure to keep its citizens safe" (Fatsis 1311). Thus, the correlation between crime and race creates a context by which structural racism would flourish.

Originating in Chicago 2012, Drill music is founded on the composition of earth-shaking 808 bass patterns underlying fast drum machine loops over dark, distorted soundscapes. Over these instrumentals, artists provide a layer of "extra-linguistic transmission" through the use of emotionally inflected, culturally specific lyrics. The incorporation of musical sound and sonorous word reflects their cultural experience - arguably the basis of all art (Lee 3). Recently, Drill has garnered exposure in mainstream media due to increasing media coverage about the rising gun violence in Chicago, New York, and UK cities. However, by broadcasting the crime rates within the style's three major cultural hubs, news outlets have positioned Drill in the crosshairs of censorship and surveillance initiatives by law enforcement. For instance, in January 2022, the mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, declared a "War on Drill Rap". This initiative was established after blaming the deaths of two Brooklyn rappers on their music's "alarming" content (Vozick-Levinson 1). Several rappers like Drakeo the Ruler, who was murdered in December 2021 after establishing his innocence regarding a murder charge he battled from jail for three years, were falsely prosecuted because their figurative, hyperbolic Drill lyrics were treated like confessions in court (Dillon 1). Initiatives like this fail to address the fundamental causes of this violence and instantiate moral panic—the counterintuitive, "socially regressive overreactions to objectively minor problems," within society (Hier 1). While interpersonal violence in marginalized communities should not be dismissed as an objectively minor problem, identifying its fundamental cause in structural violence reveals the major societal issues that structural racism propagates.

## THE CULTURAL SUBJECTIVITY OF MEANING

Art can be interpreted through a multitude of lenses and varying degrees. Its subjectivity is not simply dependent on an individual's unique experiences but due to many a nuanced perspective from differing cultural and regional backgrounds. Recognizing culture as "the 'threads of collective meaning' around a 'symbolic environment' that 'animate' individuals and groups" reiterates how people of different social environments inhabit different social realities (Ferrell et al. qtd. in Lee 3). Thus, when people interpret lyrics of any genre literally, it can detract artistry from the work, which is an avenue towards testimonial injustice. Indeed, interpretation may inspire meaning, but that meaning is subjective to how an individual is socialized. Research in music cognition reinforces how meanings

> experienced by music listeners are influenced by a variety of parameters related to listener traits…states…and cultural contexts, therefore, rendering the whole process of [meaning] production listener-and context-dependent. (Coutinho & Schuller 2)

This is important to know to fill gaps in understanding how speech or music could convey any sentimental meaning. It is not the sound itself, but the subjective, cultural consensus surrounding how to interpret a certain sound that brings conceptual meaning to a sound. Further support shows that music, like emotional effects, are ultimately "decoded by the listener," since they contain information that a network in the human brain must process (Juslin & Laukka qtd. in Aucouturier & Canonne 95). Therefore, it is the case that "ontologically subjective categories," like audiological interpretations or lyrical meanings, "depend on collective intentionality for their existence" (Barrett 420). Human interpretations of physiological responses like thoughts or emotions associated with certain acoustic patterns, like speech and music, rely ultimately on a listener's culture and experience.

This is why complications in interpretation may arise when ontologically subjective categories are removed from their contexts—or interpreted by other cultures. Culturally incongruent, "street-illiterate" institutions like police interpret Drill lyrics literally, even citing them as evidence against artists in prosecution (Ilan 1). This removes all context from lyrics as artistic expressions of one's subculture, reductively essentializing them as violent, breeding testimonial injustice. Law enforcement and systems of authority tend to overlook the nuanced artistry, social constraints, and institutional factors involved in the creation of Drill music, failing to realize it occurs "within wider patterns of criminalization against the marginalized" (Ilan 1). This neglect reinforces structural violence through testimonial injustice by lending "credence to the suggestion that Drill" (or any other auditory stimuli) "causes violence" (Lynes et al. 2). Violent lyrics must not transduce violence, since lyrics are culturally subjective, and ultimately result from imbalanced social dynamics.

As law enforcement is a dominant social institution, its testimonies can change collective beliefs and reinforce stereotypes throughout society.

## THE FLUIDITY OF LYRICAL & SONIC EXPRESSION

Lyrics, if listener dependent and culturally subjective, can be treated as fluid or sonically ambiguous. A meta analysis of music cognition research showed that music and speech are modulated by the same brain areas (Asaridou & McQueen 11). The implications of this finding suggest sounds can be used to express abstract information as complex in meaning as language. Other research indicates there is "a great degree of overlap between the…patterns of acoustic cues used to express discrete emotions in both" speech and language (Coutinho & Schuller 2). Thus, there is a bidirectional relationship between the cognitive architecture that processes both information types—meaning that both are likely just one kind of information, and how it is processed relies on its subjective interpretation. As such, because music varies in subjective, cultural, and technological meaning and interpretation, any sound can be processed musically, regardless of tonal, organizational, or even temporal orientation (Brandt et al. 1). This underscores why lyrical interpretations need not be assigned with meaning, and why random noise can evoke abstract thought or emotion.

Sound must be fluid and personally subjective because people can enjoy musical lyrics sung in languages they do not understand, and they can derive emotional meaning from music without lyrics, such as classical and electronic music. Wholly different stimuli may produce the same kinds of responses, attitudes, or beliefs in our brains (Brandt et al. 3). Some cultures use percussion to communicate, rather than language, signifying that context determines how "the same stimuli can be perceived as language or music" (Brandt et al. 3) When culturally incongruent social groups listen to music outside of their realm, like when certain law enforcement officials obsess over trap music lyrics to find meaning, it is unlikely that their interpretation will align with the artists intention, even when the two groups are linked by language. Recapping the year 2016, an editor for a lyric publishing platform said the year in music was "all about the lyrics" despite "the biggest songs of the year" like Rihanna's 'Work' and Desiigner's 'Panda,' being "the most difficult to understand" (Iandoli). Lyrics must not be central to musical meaning in every case then, otherwise songs with ambiguous lyrics, like the aforementioned two, would not receive appeal. Therefore, the vilification of even violently themed ideas in music discounts the emotional and artistic expression of artists.

Furthermore, studies in aggressive music reveal that it is not the content of the music that produces emotion, it is the listener's emotional state that ultimately influences their subjective emotional response (Carlson et al. 4). It is likely that any meaning they derive from such music is a reflection of their own mental state, as perpetually anxious individuals utilize unhealthy listening strategies when listening to music (Carlson et al. 4). It is more likely, however, that "resistant social beliefs" surrounding cultural stereotypes, like 'rappers are violent criminals,' cause institutions to maintain the status quo and disseminate beliefs that protect dominant identities, causing deeply entangled barriers that restrict structural reform (Flores 3). Since differing audio mediums can cause people to experience variable emotional meanings, lyrical meaning is a nonessential part of music, and thus its vilification is predatory— perpetuating injustice against the marginalized.

## NEOLIBERALISM CONCEIVES VIOLENCE

When discussing how neoliberalism, or the consequences of neoliberal free-market economic policies, inspire the actions that authority figures try to blame on music, three conceptions of violence are relevant: objective violence, subjective violence, and structural violence. Symbolic, or objective violence, refers to hate speech and discrimination. Then, subjective violence refers to terror and crime which is usually interpersonal. Lastly, structural violence seeks to preserve the status quo by normalizing unjust economic and sociopolitical strictures, such as systemic violence or structural racism (Lynes et al. 5). The consequences of racial neoliberalism constitute structural violence because the communities from which Drill music emerges, despite its mainstream influence, are the same communities from which its forefather hip-hop had emerged—namely underrepresented and underprivileged inner-cities.

Considering the origins of hip-hop to its global spread, it can be seen that structural racism, a hallmark form of structural violence exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies, underpins the vilification of Drill lyrics today. In its earliest form, hip-hop provided a means for a 1970s Bronx community to exhibit poetic lyricism and quick wit on instrumentals (Lynes et al. 6). But throughout hip-hop's existence around the world, street illiterate institutions have both produced and contributed "to the ongoing dynamic of suspicion between marginalised (particularly black) populations and the agents of criminal justice…facilitat[ing] policies and practices that are counter-productive from a crime-control perspective" as the "profit" and "politics of consumer culture" ultimately motivated the genre's growth (Ilan 4; Lynes et al. 6). This contributed to the positioning of lower class minorities in socially immobile urban contexts by advancing on them the expectation to "take responsibility for the structural disadvantage they suffer from as a result of state neglect" (Fatsis 1301). As a result, the emergence of hip-hop culture showed a pacifying cultural shift from industrial productivism, which bred tough, stoic, masculine identities–to consumerism, which generated "envy," inspiring a "possessive," "competitive individualism" (Lynes et al. 6).

As "machismo has been intrinsic to the art form" since its origins, hip-hop battles emerged quickly as a competitive outlet, positioning "rap diss and 'beef,'" as "integral" to the culture (Lynes et al. 11). The same elements of machismo prevail today throughout hip-hop's sub-genres like Drill, because when marginalized people become labeled as criminals—their communities over-policed—these "negative stereotypes" cause competition, consumerism, and the pursuit of "cultural capital" to drive the community's motivations (Lee 454). When considering that rappers' lyrical content "often involves taunting rivals in vividly shocking terms, describing the harm that awaits them, and [posting displays] of each collective's transgressive capital" it is thus important to recognize modern Drill music as a "fictional artistic expression, loose autobiography and calculated social-media-style performance," emerging from consequences of racial neoliberalism (Fatsis 1302; Ilan 5). As lyrics appear violent, hyperbolic expressions and personal jabs that may reflect the ill-resourced social structures and the contentious social dynamics of the communities that popularized hip-hop, it is equally as important to recognize the survivalist competition to which racial neoliberalism subjected members of those communities. Structural violence thus manifests through the systemic imbalance of power that deprives marginalized communities of social resources, as institutions fail to see Drill music as "a powerful cultural resource that emerges from a structural context" (Lee 454). As police prey upon Drill rappers in low-income neighborhoods, they further the marginalization of these artists' communities, maintaining the status quo through the social immobilization of these communities' constituents.

Furthermore, negative attitudes from police and media contribute to the marginalization of lower social classes, “reaffirm that urban black men are more likely to be criminal and violent,” and contribute to the destruction of their cultures since “individual beliefs often push back against structural reforms” (Lynes et al. 2; Flores 1). Censorship initiatives thus fail to address residual effects of neoliberal economic policy and structural racism, which include systemic issues like gun violence in marginalized neighborhoods where subjective violence occurs. The structural violence at hand motivates other kinds of violence by inspiring ultra-competitive behavior within underprivileged communities and motivating fierce consumer culture in under-resourced environments. In a consumerist, pacified, neoliberal America, institutionalized racism creates symbols of hate against the marginalized, creating environments for subjective violence to thrive, while dismissively attributing normalcy to it.

## THE SUBSEQUENT MANIFESTATION OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Predatory institutions, such as law enforcement, continue their historic marginalization of particularly Black and brown communities by spreading attitudinal beliefs that vilify their actions. Due to the pseudo-pacification of capitalist culture, notions of individuality that result from neoliberal classism can help explain the expression of violence, as briefly mentioned earlier. The theory of pseudo-pacification states that “the significant reduction in physical violence associated with the historical shift from the middle ages to the modern age…involved a concomitant rise in symbolic violence” (Lynes et al. 7). The theory explains how

> actual physical violence needed to be curtailed in order that the early capitalist economy could grow… However, [since] violence did not disappear…it was forced into the symbolic dimension, where its energy [was] harnessed and used to drive forward the economy. The law restricted physical violence but, in the symbolic dimension, [people] were encouraged to be aggressively self-interested in the battle for our material well being and social significance. (Lynes et al. 7)

Through the lens of pseudo-pacification, it is possible to understand the root causes of violence that structures impose upon marginalized communities and the crime, or subjective violence, that certain community members may impose on one another as a result. This is why claims that violent rap lyrics represent actual, physically realized violence are outrageous and perpetuate harmful notions against artists of marginalized communities, contributing to the expression of symbolic violence towards them. Since "individuals' belief change" is essential to "structural interventions," when dominant social structures like law enforcement perpetuate narratives that fail to understand structural racism, it afflicts symbolic violence upon marginalized communities by destroying their social credibility (Flores 4). Consequently, this qualifies as a "testimonial injustice" due to its neglect of the inferior social group's experience (McKinnon).

On the other hand, Mumble rap, a style of vocal expression commonly used in modern hip-hop and its sub genres, encapsulates how the "street-illiteracy" seen in law enforcement authorities trying to criminalize Drill music, is actually a form of epistemic injustice (Ilan 1). As stated, to listen to music does not require literally interpreting the sounds presented. Mumble rap "creates emotive and self-representational music without decipherable lyrics or a consistent flow, displaying what linguist[s] refer to as 'reduction in speech'" (Waugh). Through this "deliberate inarticulation," the style can convey "'a more natural, authentic kind of speech [and] emotion'" (Waugh). People tend to hum along to it or use filler words, which distances a sound's perceived meaning from the words' literal meanings. Scrutiny of lyrics takes away from other artistic elements like intonation, cadence, and flow, which are independent sonic dimensions, and creative elements of Drill music. Viewing them as anything other than such qualifies as symbolic violence and testimonial injustice (Lynes et al.; McKinnon). While the origins of rap relied heavily on lyrical content, today's musical culture promotes sonic creativity. The ubiquity of mumble rap styles thus contributes to dismantling the stereotypes that regard hip-hop lyrics as negative or violent by detaching literality from meaning in stylistic, figurative rhymes that popular rappers employ. However since law enforcement authorities and the media are socially dominant, their beliefs prevail as dominant beliefs—restricting any structural reform. As a result, police and media attempts to vilify these lyrics remain. Just consider the absurdity of the following 2019 article headline: "Police in the UK are enlisting language experts to help them decipher rap-influenced urban slang because it's now so complicated they keep misunderstanding evidence" (Bostock). The media coverage of such stereotypes only exacerbates and reaffirms social beliefs regarding the genre. The overlooked stylistic lyricism "produc[es] a unique expressive format that does not need to rely on limitations of words" (Waugh). Thus, efforts to police lyrics thus have no place in society when the problems that create violence remain unaccounted for by media efforts.

## REFUTING REDUCTIVE, ESSENTIALIST BELIEFS ABOUT DRILL MUSIC

Criminology professors Lauger and Densley, argue that all Drill artists are gang members by virtue of the art form. In response to Drill music videos, they claim that "gang members' imperative to represent themselves violently via electronic mediation" shows how they want "to be seen within their cultural milieu" (Lauger & Densley). Not only does this claim create an implicit, criminalizing stereotype against Drill rappers by blanketing them all as gang members, it also demonstrates the authors' failure to understand the context of the culture that they are analyzing. By reducing this behavior to components of gang-related violence, these researchers use assumptive, motivated reasoning to neglect the cultural experience of these artists, who were more than likely using music videos as an artistic outlet for the sake of cultural expression. Nonetheless, they continue to reduce low-income community members to their conceptions of their behaviors by claiming they "perform [their] identity by rapping about incidents of violence and ongoing conflicts" (Lauger & Densley). As University professors are institutionally protected, they are socially dominant in the dissemination or contagion of attitudes and beliefs. Lauger and Densley unfortunately advance literature that reinforces cultural stereotypes against members of marginalized communities from a dominant position, which poses a real threat to any systemic change. Attitudes like theirs show how music is "an easy target for those wishing to be seen to be doing something about crime," but who fail to see the socio-economic inequalities that contribute to crime (Ilan 2). Drill music is "a specific urban construct rooted in the experience of class and oppression" representing the plight of street life (Lynes et al. 3). That street violence did not "appear as a feature of social reality as Drill music began to take shape" shows that Drill music, a cultural expression, is not central to inner-city violence, it is rather a result of the consequences of neoliberal economic policies acting on structural racism (Lynes et al. 1). Lauger & Densley fail to recognize that criminal violence does not emerge as a consequence of rap music, but that it is instead bred into the culture. Furthermore, they neglect not only that the "violent commentary" present in artists' rap lyrics is "part of social exchange as opposed to evidence of real intention," but how through the presumptive false attributions of intention from dominant social groups like law enforcement, "rappers are victimised by the violence they are accused of performing" (Miller qtd. in Ilan 11; Fatsis 1309). Therefore, understanding the social dynamics neoliberalism creates in a post-slavery America helps clarify why lyrics are unimportant in solving crimes, and how attempts to target violent lyricism are rooted in classism and structural racism.

A PhD study from Iowa State University claims that violent song lyrics have a causal relationship with violent behavior, after assessing 500 college students on their judgements of lyrical content. The study suggests that violent lyrics "increase negative emotions and thoughts that can lead to aggression" (Palmer). The methodology that the study employed was a word association task that prompted participants to "link more non-aggressive words with aggressive words or fill incomplete words with vowels to make aggressive words" after listening to rap and rock songs, against control songs (Palmer). This does not account for the fact that all participants belonged to the same cultural cohort, as they were all Iowa University students. Novel studies have depicted that "fans of extreme metal and rap music with violent themes…predominantly experience positive emotional and psychosocial outcomes in response to this music" which exhibits the ultimate subjectivity of sonic interpretation (Powell et al.). The former study also ignores novel research that suggests that the style of musical listening one employs while listening heavily determines the feelings one will perceive after. Current literature shows that emotional discharge, "using music to express negative emotions," leads to negative thoughts in healthy individuals, and occurs more frequently in depressed and anxious individuals (Carlson et al. 1, 4). This supports earlier evidence that any meaning in music is entirely context dependent and subjective to its listener, because a listener's mental context can determine the emotional response they elicit to a song. Lyrics need not have one absolute meaning because the brain can choose how to interpret them, since music and language are essentially the same kinds of data and processed within the same informational domain–explaining phenomena like sarcasm and lyrical hyperbole alike (Asaridou & McQueen).

Influenced by neoliberal consequences, marginalized communities tend to listen to and process music a little differently. Due to the fact that emotional discharge is more prevalent in marginalized communities, anxiety and social paranoia is a common experience among members. In this way, it would make logical sense that music has the potential to exacerbate aggressivity or angst in neglected communities (Carlson et al 4.; Lynes et al. 9). This emotional discharge stems from classist structures that fortify structural violence in these residential areas. Yet, a community that's resilient in the face of anxiety should not be criminalized for their artistic and intellectual expressions in hip-hop. Not only is it unjust, it is illogical to directly categorize emotional discharge as the causation of urban violence. Thus, the responsibility lies in the authoritative power of institutional leaders to seek resolution to the sociological and structural discrepancies in marginalized residencies without villainizing tenants.

## DISCUSSION

This research serves to expose how the influence of neoliberal economic policies in marginalized communities boasts freedom and choice through a capitalistic free market, while rewarding extreme competition that manifests through subjective violence. As a result, social resources are disproportionately mobilized away from marginalized, lower-class communities by compounding the effects of structural racism (Ilan 1; Lynes et al. 7; Lee 1). The structural violence that institutions like law enforcement and media outlets afflict not only creates inequity in society by marginalizing historically socially inferior groups, but it afflicts symbolic violence by disseminating resistant social beliefs that stereotype the marginalized, thereby reducing their social opportunity (Fatsis 1; Ilan 1; Flores 2). While law enforcement institutions try to combat the subjective, interpersonal violence that might occur within these communities, they either fail or neglect to realize that they are the very institution that socially positioned these individuals to a less privileged, less opportune, yet more competitive lifestyle, which pressures people to break laws and defy authority for either personal gain or survival. Initiatives by media and law enforcement to vilify Drill music ignore the fluidity of artistic lyricism and sonic instrumentation while twisting their audience's interpretations of the art by disseminating harmful attitudes towards street-culture, furthering the breadth of structural violence like structural racism (Aucouterier & Canonne 1; Brandt et al. 1). Structurally instantiated social competition and exigent circumstances therefore cause individuals to conflate the art of Drill and hip-hop music with the attitudes the media assigns to it. Capitalism and the perpetual exercising of market freedom motivate not only the desire to outperform others, but greed as well, which can be expressed in terms of its fuel: consumerism

(Ilan 2; Lynes et al. 7). The literal interpretation of Drill lyrics ignores that we are all human products of a neoliberal society wherein capitalist institutions govern the intrinsic beliefs and motivations of different social classes. Criminalizing cultural expressions in marginalized communities thus ultimately restricts the social mobility of the predominantly black, low-income communities from which hip-hop and its sub-genres like Drill emerge.

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**Ava Sacchetti**

# Influence of Drag Queens on Rigid Gender Norms

## ABSTRACT

*This research paper will focus on drag queens and how they influence the harsh gender norms that have been created and imposed on young men. This paper will use Gender Stereotyping Theory to stress that harmful, rigid gender stereotypes are imposed upon males at a very young age and follow them throughout life. It will utilize Gender Identity Theory to demonstrate how these norms affect young men who wish to be more feminine, or identify as female. While these norms have been installed within men over time, there are icons that can help men who wish to express themselves femininity without feeling guilt or shame. Drag queens are cultural icons that are biologically male but choose to dress and behave femininely. Exposure to these figures can lessen the effects of gender stereotypes by helping to defy Gender Stereotyping Theory. Men may often feel like they will be judged if they choose to dress femininely in opposed to masculinely, and the exposure to drag queens can help ease this fear. Drag queens mix what is considered feminine and masculine to help ease rigid gender norms and help men feel more comfortable within their own bodies and minds.*

## INTRODUCTION

Drag queens are cis-gendered men of any sexuality who choose to dress up as women to perform drag for others, for their own enjoyment or both. They are icons that have significantly impacted how society views gender norms in the modern day and have reformed strict gender norms as well, specifically male gender norms. Male gender norms have placed a form-fitting framework upon men; they have to behave unemotionally, be perceived as strong and masculine, and be the best. While these norms have become less harsh as time has passed on, many countries still have the implicit male ideals that many men follow. This type of framework inhibits any kind of masculinity other than the masculinity that society perceives as correct; men cannot in any way be feminine, interested in hair, makeup, or fashion, and they cannot show emotion without being looked down upon or judged. Drag queens do the exact opposite; they are full of emotion, dress extremely femininely, and behave in a feminine manner. It is because society has become increasingly more lenient with the contortion of male gender norms, and a great deal of that has drag queens to thank. With the drastic increase in technology and social media, one's access to drag queens is a few clicks away. Television shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* have become increasingly popular, showcasing drag queens as the main focus of the television show. For example, the famous Broadway show *Kinky Boots* has a drag queen as one of the main characters. As time passes and drag becomes more prevalent in society, it is surprising to think that a cis-gendered man would never be exposed to such icons.

This paper will explore the research question: how have drag queens expanded gender and masculinity in a way that has greatly impacted how society and heterosexual cis-gendered men view gender norms in the modern day? Gender Stereotyping Theory is the view that certain attributes or characteristics belong to specific genders, and it will be discussed first in this paper to understand how drag queens expand masculinity. Gender Identity Theory is the view that humans have an internalized self view of their own gender regardless of the sex they were born as and will also be discussed to show how drag queens have diversified and encouraged growth for the male gender. Gender Identity Theory will aid in exploring the complexity of gender, specifically men who wish to be either gender fluid or transgender, and how drag queens have provided role model status and the leniency to explore masculinity and gender. While one may think that drag queens would only have an effect on cis-gendered men who actually perform drag, in actuality, drag queens serve as role models for all cis-gendered men and show them that it is possible for men to explore masculinity in a way that goes against both Gender Identity Theory and Gender Stereotyping Theory. If society, specifically cis-gendered men, were not exposed to such powerful gender role-defying icons such as drag queens, the expansion and diversification of masculinity and gender would not be as extensive as it has been. This research paper will be discussing and using Gender Stereotyping Theory and Gender Identity Theory to explore how drag queens are helping to expand not only masculinity, but gender in general, as well as how they have helped to defy harsh societal gender norms and ideals, providing young boys and men an inspiration and role model when it comes to masculinity.

## GENDER STEREOTYPING THEORY, AND ITS EFFECTS ON MEN

A Barbie doll dressed in pink would be strongly associated with femininity and girls, while a blue monster truck would be strongly associated with masculinity and boys. Behavior-wise, a man should act emotionally detached, with strength, and in some ways, aggressively. These are examples of stereotypes that the Gender Stereotyping Theory encompasses. It describes how society associates certain characteristics and behaviors with belonging to males or females.  These stereotypes are extremely harmful to men who do not align with such characteristics, are harmful to the mental health of men, and can be very hard to go against. These stereotypes are made clear early in the lives of children, as Milica Skočajić and other researchers investigate the rigidity of gender stereotypes in young children through experimenting in preschools in the article titled, "Boys Just Don't! Gender Stereotyping and Sanctioning of Counter-Stereotypical Behavior in Preschoolers." Having young children categorize toys by gender based on the colors or features of those toys, it was shown that children ages 6-7 usually have stronger stereotypical foundations laid out. They are less likely to stray away from those stereotypes for fear of being punished or judged (Skočajić et al. 165). The framework enforced upon cis-gendered males begins at a very young age, so as they age, the ideas begin to solidify with time.

The male stereotypes reinforce the notion that men are on a societal pedestal, and should be more superior and powerful than women. This may seem like the stereotypes are beneficial to men and their social standing, but they are actually working against men. These stereotypes will only harm men and their well-being. In "Measure of a Man: Outcomes of Gender Stereotyping for Men and Masculinity," Corinne Moss-Racusin and Jessica Good research gender stereotypes and how the lack of research done to see how these stereotypes can actually be harmful to men; they discovered that "masculinity threats [such as being called weak] can lead men to both distance themselves from femininity and associate themselves with masculinity" (Moss-Racusin & Good 180). The reason why this is detrimental is because the push for male stereotypes can result in aggressive men when their egos get damaged. These men may also distance themselves from showing emotions, which are natural, but the stereotypes for men are leading the world to believe that men do not show/have emotions. Aggression and power go hand in hand and men who feel the need to be in power may experience aggression may even turn to violence. They are expected to uphold this belief that they are superior to women, which in turn "suggests that boys can be expected to have more rigid gender schemas and hence to be more prone to gender stereotyping than girls" (Skočajić et al. 165). Men are put more on a pedestal, a higher ground when it comes to upholding masculine stereotypes, and because of that, they may be more afraid of straying from those stereotypes for fear of sanction. Icons that defy these gender stereotypes, such as drag queens, help to expand what the male gender views as masculine. These icons work to go against the harmful notions that Gender Stereotyping Theory creates amongst men.

## GENDER STEREOTYPING THEORY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH DRAG QUEENS

Drag queens break down the views of Gender Stereotyping Theory by expanding what is considered "manly" and what is considered "feminine". Drag queens possess the physical bodily characteristics of a cis-gendered male, yet when in drag, they behave and dress like a woman. In terms of the Gender Stereotyping Theory, the superior being, the male, is dressing like a more marginalized, inferior being, a female. This within itself defies the dynamic of both male and female societal stereotypes by having the ideals of gender stereotypes "cross-over". In Caitlin Greaf's research paper titled "Drag queens and gender identity," Greaf explores how drag queens defy the stereotypes enforced upon them by interviewing multiple people of different sexualities and beliefs. Not only do drag queens fluctuate the power dynamic between men and women by dressing as marginalized beings, women, but drag queens also "break the heteronormative guidelines that our society has created to symbolize what a woman looks like and acts like" (Greaf 664). A drag queen may dress masculinely but still wear makeup and have their nails polished; your average male may choose to wear eyeshadow and makeup but still identify as male. Exposure to cross-dressing or behaving as a female while identifying as a male expands the definition of masculinity, which can lessen the rigidity of societal gender stereotypes.

The rigidity of societal gender stereotypes takes damage when icons such as drag queens defy what can be considered masculine, causing the diversification of masculinity and creating a sense of leniency with harsh male stereotypes. A man can be feminine and be considered masculine in terms of societal stereotypes; he can still be strong and emotionally detached if he so chooses. Drag queens blur the stereotypes for masculinity by helping men to "gain more of their own gender-specific knowledge" as they continually see drag queens expand what is considered masculine by society (Skočajić et. al 165). Because drag queens typically still identify as cis-gendered men while having the gender performativity of a woman, they still encapsulate masculine body features and acknowledge that they are male even while being perceived as a woman by other people. Drag queens can refer to themselves and other drag queens with female pronouns, but this paper is focused on the idea that men can act femininely and portray female stereotypes all while referring to themselves as male. They can still be considered masculine while having feminine characteristics, which causes the expansion of what can be considered masculine while still presenting themselves as women. Not only do drag queens mix female and male stereotypes into one, but they "break down that belief that every girl is the same and that every guy is the same" by combining both male and female stereotypes. Gender Stereotyping Theory claims that there are certain characteristics and attributes that every man has. Drag completely defies this theory by working against the categorization of gender and the attributes that "should" come with each gender (Greaf 660). By breaking down these norms, drag queens expand masculinity and femininity, allowing men to explore their gender identity and using drag queens as role models to do so. While one may think that cis-gendered men would not have exposure to drag queens, it would actually make sense for men who are either questioning their identity or exploring their masculinity to research such icons and use them as inspiration. Drag queens allow for leniency when it comes to gender stereotypes and gender in general, defying what is understood and maintained by society.

In addition to the exposure of drag queens and icons alike, there are other ways to prevent the installation of harsh gender stereotypes in young children. In her research paper titled "Challenging Toxic Masculinity in Schools and Society," Kathleen Elliot believes in expanding gender stereotypes and masculinity as a whole by teaching young children to be more accepting of differences in gender stereotypes. She believes that "explicitly teaching about and against sexist language, behavior, and gender-based violence ….. can all help to bring about healthier, more complex understandings of masculinity" (Elliot 21). Elliot believes that masculinity can become toxic, and to put an end to it, the world must model and educate young men on diverse and complex types of masculinity, specifically in the classroom (Elliot 21). While Elliot does not explicitly mention drag queens, it should be considered that drag queens are effective role models for teaching young men about extremely complex and intricate masculinities, showing young boys that it is okay to explore their masculinity and identity.

## GENDER IDENTITY THEORY AND ITS EFFECTS ON MEN

The Gender Identity Theory encapsulates how a person presents themselves to either identify as a male or female. According to society, the way a person presents themselves is supposed to align with the sex they were born which can be presented through clothing, personality, behavior, and more. However, this way of thinking and identifying a person is harmful and can lead to fear of sanction for people who wish to dress as the opposite gender.

This type of behavior (dressing or behaving as the opposite gender) can lead to judgment from peers, family, and society. This phenomenon is demonstrated in Taadaki Furuhashi's research paper titled "Biological Male 'Gender Identity Disorder' Is Composed of Essentially Distinguishable Core and Periphery Groups", where Furuhashi examines several cis-gendered males in Japan whom all suffer from some form of Gender Identity Disorder (GID). Gender Identity Disorder is the internal feeling of displacement and discomfort with oneself when they identify as one gender internally, but are biologically the opposite sex.  Furuhashi found that for "typical biological male patients, a special longing for feminine clothes and behaviors already begins in childhood" (Furuhashi 64). When cis-gendered male children identify with a more feminine way of living and cannot successfully express themselves as they wish, they often experience "discomfort with their own sex" (Furuhashi 65). This discomfort can entail feeling uncomfortable wearing particularly masculine clothing, having lower self esteem, amongst other factors. In order to avoid the backlash that they would endure from their peers and family, young boys actually "avoid the knowledge associated with the other gender," which mean be avoiding feminine clothing, make-up, and even immersing themselves in more masculine behaviors (Skočajić et al. 165). This causes increased stunting of their gender identity, and their wishes and needs when it comes to their desired gender. Many men go through their lives wishing to dress and behave as the opposite gender. However, they are afraid to do so because they feel they have no other choice but to live as their biological sex to peacefully live and get along in society (Furuhashi 68). The idea that a cis-gendered man can perform and identify himself with feminine tendencies is extremely looked down upon in Japan and most countries of the world. Every country starts out strict, but with increased exposure to such behavior, a better environment can develop. American gender norms started out as extremely harsh, but through exposure to such icons like drag queens and even performers like David Bowie and Prince, who identified as men but dressed in a way that shocked society, the societal definition of masculinity has adapted; society has become more accepting of differing masculinities. Drag queens defy the notion that men are supposed to identify as men 100% of the time. This can show men who suffer from Gender Identity Disorder that it is possible to act out their internalized desires and wishes when it comes to gender. With the increased exposure of gender-defying icons like drag queens, men who are forced to hide their true gender identity have role models they may choose to follow.

## HOW DRAG QUEENS EXPAND GENDER IDENTITY IN SOCIETY

Drag queens not only show people who do not identify with the crossing of gender identities that societal gender norms and stereotypes need to be pushed, but they show people who do wish to identify with the opposite gender that they can also make the same moves. Drag queens "provide an understanding that gender is both a social construction and a performance" by performing both male and female personas, either at the same time or at different times (Greaf 664). Gender can be changed and fluctuated, and a person can still identify as one gender yet perform as another. In their 2020 study, Yunjung Kim and Sun Yong Kown interviewed and researched South Korean male exotic pole dancers and focused on the idea that they are cis-gendered men working in a predominantly female work environment. While not being drag queens, they do encompass what society would deem as feminine, including their style and choice of work, which is very similar to what drag queens encompass. While this case study does take place in South Korea, every country will have its own set of rules. In this case, South Korean and American perspectives of masculinity are not very different. South Korean perspectives may be harsher than American perspectives, but American perspectives on gender stereotypes were once extremely harsh as well. Increased exposure and "rebellion" against such ideals drive the expansion of masculinity. This exposure could be through the actual performance, such as exotic pole dancing and drag, or through social media, television, or even acquaintances in real life. Through interviewing the exotic dancers, Kim and Kwon found that pole dancing can be "a progressive tunnel of individual subjectivity and an expansion of the gender spectrum" (Kim and Kwon 1046). Some people do not view gender identity as a spectrum or a performance. For example, an interviewee in Caitlin Greaf's research paper actually thought drag queens wanted to be women. The interviewee subconsciously went along with society's gender stereotypes and immediately assumed that "drag queens want to be women because they present a complete female gender identity (Greaf 659). But, with increased exposure to drag queens, and other figures that defy the strict gender norms, those ideas may morph into new ones, ideas that agree with gender being a performance and a spectrum.

Gender can be both a performance and an identity. Drag queens "present gender as a performance, [drag queens] use pre-existing gender roles to express themselves [which] deconstructs essentialist views of gender and sex" (Greaf 660). Increased exposure to such icons deconstructs and even dismantles what society knows best, gender stereotypes and harsh regulations when it comes to gender identity. It is believed by society that one is supposed to be presenting themselves as their biological gender. Drag queens completely defy that notion. Instead, drag queens and cis-gendered exotic polers both "emphasize subjectivity and express self-identity unrelated to gender." (Kim and Kwon 1044). Regardless of their sex at birth and regardless of how they choose to present themself, they choose to identify with however they choose. They are not male or female, they are whomever they choose to be, regardless of the gender assigned at birth (Kim and Kwon 1044). This kind of behavior is encouraged when drag queens step out into the limelight, and they show men who are unstable with their gender that it is okay to identify in whatever way they desire. This process can be particularly frightening, as "boys were more likely to be excluded from the peer group [in the experiment conducted by Skočajić and others] if they exhibited this kind of behavior" (Skočajić et al. 165). Kim, Kwon, and Greaf all agree that men who go against what is considered masculine by participating in what is considered feminine emphasize that gender is not only an identity but also a performance. While Kim and Kwon are not researching drag queens, they are still researching men who have gone against their society's guidelines and benefited from it in some way, while Skočajić is researching the negative impacts that a young boy can experience when society has enforced such harsh regulations of gender upon them. This is why it is important to expose young men to icons like drag queens and male pole dancers who have gained the knowledge that they can do things that the opposite gender would usually do, and still be considered masculine. They have gained the knowledge that gender can be a performance that does not have to intersect with the gender you choose to identify with, expanding how the world views masculinity. When drag queens choose to share their identity with the world, not only are they being role models for men who experience gender discomfort but they are "blurr[ing] lines between masculinity and femininity", allowing for gender identity to become more lenient (Kim and Kwon 1046). Transitioning from an assigned gender identity to one that is the "opposite" will be judged, yet drag expands gender identity and allows men to explore their gender identity with the help of drag queens as role models.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, the idea of how drag queens have expanded gender and masculinity in a way that has greatly impacted how society and heterosexual cis-gendered men themselves view gender norms in the modern day has been analyzed, researched, and explained using the Gender Stereotype Theory and the Gender Identity Theory. Throughout the research process, I have found several articles such as Greaf, Kim and Kwon, Skočajić, and others that have supported my hypothesis greatly by either researching drag queens themselves and how they feel about gender, researching how harsh gender stereotypes and norms have negatively impacted cis-gendered men, or researching how exactly drag queens have expanded masculinity in ways that positively impact cis-gendered men and society as a whole.

I have found that drag queens not only show the world that gender is not a concrete idea but an abstract idea, but that drag queens have shown that masculinity is ever-changing. Drag queens show that one can be masculine while engaging in "feminine" acts, thus expanding what can be considered masculine. In addition, drag queens have shown that gender is not just an identity but a performance. One does not have to perform as the gender they were biologically assigned; if a man were to dress femininely, that does not take away the fact that they identify as a male.

The two theoretical frameworks that have been used in this paper are two of the most prevalent theories when it comes to modern gender issues. The Gender Stereotype Theory is still prevalent today, as many countries still heavily base their beliefs on gender stereotypes, which is extremely damaging to their citizens who do not feel comfortable with the gender they were born with. Gender stereotypes are very limiting to those who feel like they need to express themselves in ways that would not be according to their biological sex. The Gender Identity Theory is similar to the Gender Stereotype Theory but differs in what they both focus on. Many people still align with this theory; they automatically assume a person's gender based on their appearance without a second thought, hence why it is still prevalent in today's society. In this paper, I wanted to encapsulate modern-day issues since gender is still a debate. The significance behind researching drag queens was to show that gender norms are ever-changing and blurred as time passes on, and I wanted to demonstrate that people who go outside of what is considered okay by society are the driving force behind it. Drag queens are icons who help to change a world that needs a lot of changing, and they change it in a positive and peaceful way. From my findings, there is a great possibility that people will continue to educate themselves in a society that is ever-changing by studying, educating, and accepting icons like drag queens that positively impact society and the harsh regulations society has imposed upon its citizens.

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**Abigail Matish**

# The Ethicality of Privatization of Healthcare in Prisons


## ABSTRACT

*This research paper aimed to determine the ethicality of privatized medical care being implemented in prisons across the United States of America. The relationship between Neoliberalism and Recidivism in determining medical care ethicality is explored, where profitability and exploitation of prisoners is proven to prevail above meeting their basic human needs. This paper explores the lack of ethicality in prison medical care through various case studies and a court case reflecting Constitutional Rights and social patterns. The concept of Supply and Demand Economics, the Free Market, and the deregulation of the economy from that of the government is explored, where the quality of private medical care for prisoners is not improving while prison officials and private medical companies are profiting from these prisoners' medical issues. The lack of rehabilitation and post-incarceration programs that could ensure a smooth transition back into society is a likely contributing factor for increased reincarceration rates as well.*


## INTRODUCTION TO PRISON HEALTHCARE

Micaela Gelman wrote the article "Mismanaged Care: Exploring the Costs and Benefits of Private vs. Public Healthcare in Correctional Facilities" in order to shed light on a continuous growth of incarceration in the United States.  As the incarceration rates within the United States have been steadily increasing since the 1970s, the quality of medical care for prisoners has not paralleled this increase (Gelman, 2020). Medical care for prisoners normally is taken care of by government funds and regulated, therefore, by a board of certified medical professionals who have useful knowledge in diagnosing and treating patients. However, outsourcing medical care has been a common solution amongst prison facilities. This outsourcing is better known as the privatization of medical care in which contracted medical companies deal with the medical care and treatment of prisoners. According to Michaela Gelman, author of "Mismanaged Care: Exploring the Cost and Benefits of Private vs. Public Healthcare In Correctional Facilities", "more than half of all state and local prisons and jails have outsourced their healthcare", highlighting the popularity of this method (Gelman, 2020, p. 1389). Why? The increasing rates of incarcerated prisoners in U.S. prison facilities with lengthy sentences led to expensive medical care for chronic illnesses and diseases that each state's government struggled to budget for (Gelman, 2020). Unfortunately, although incarceration "can act as both an acute stressor (a life-changing event) and a chronic stressor" in which both cases can induce and maintain predisposed or new medical issues, most prisoners will not receive the care that they need (Massoglia, 2018). These stressors can also be found in prisoners who come from a vulnerable population, like those who are low-income, homeless, medically disabled, and may become more of an impact as they enter the prison system. Many incarcerated prisoners come from backgrounds with poor socioeconomic status and a lack of preventative treatment to help manage their care. Racial and socioeconomic disparities account for the fact that "black men are 6.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men" along with the fact that half of "the nation's inmates have less than a high school education" (Shalev, 2009, p. 988). Specific socioeconomic factors and stigma associated with specific races and genders can be seen in high volume within U.S. prison facilities. This idea can be exemplified through the Rikers Island Health Care Delivery System, conducted by Dr. Noga Shalev, who attempted to examine the medical services at the prison facility. Dr. Shalev found that "in addition to these socioeconomic markers, prisoners bear a disproportionately high burden of chronic and infectious disease," as African American individuals are at a higher risk for specific diseases in comparison to their white counterparts (Shalev, 2009). Understanding the predispositions these vulnerable prisoners have to specific chronic conditions along with the high volume of imprisonment in correctional facilities, gives reason for state governments to look for cheaper sources of medical care.

Furthermore, standards for medical care within the prison system vary depending on the state's government guidelines and standards. However, with private medical care and outsourcing, these standards can differ to accommodate lower costs and profitability of privatization. It is becoming increasingly popular to outsource medical care so that the responsibility of the inmate's overall healthcare can be shared if there is blame to be passed around. Privatization of medical care for prisoners is also beginning to become more popular within correctional facilities due to the opposition of conservatism, which is the idea in which the government is involved economically as least as possible in social affairs like universal medical care and its disfavored attempt at using taxpayer dollars for social issues like Medicare, Medicaid, and in this case, prison healthcare. Throughout this paper, the concept of Neoliberalism and its contribution to the differing qualities of care that can be found within privatized medical care will be analyzed. The concept of supply-side theory and demand-side theory will be investigated in their contribution to ever-growing Neoliberalism impacts upon prisoners and their well-being in the correction system. The ethicality of this privatized medical care will be examined in detail, along with the possible breach in patient rights when it comes to providing less-than-quality medical care. Within this research paper, the extent to which privatization of medical care for prisoners is ethically and morally the best decision for their health will be investigated and analyzed. In this way, Neoliberalism causes disparities in prisoner healthcare as this free market ensures that profit is prioritized over quality of care, leaving a breach in overall care for prisoners who are subject to privatized medical care.

## NEOLIBERALISM'S GOAL

The construction of a privatized prison healthcare system based on Neoliberalism is potentially very dangerous. Neoliberalism, as defined by Will Kenton, "is a policy model that enhance[s] the workings of free market capitalism and attempt[s] to place limits on government spending, government regulation, and public ownership" (Kenton, 2020). Essentially, Neoliberalism is encouraging the United States' economy to thrive without the influence of the government. This means any forms of social aid like Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, Affordable Housing, Obamacare, and in the scope of this paper, Prison health care should be diminished. The majority of the United States of America identifies with either Conservatism or Liberalism in terms of the governments' involvement in social issues.  This idea of prioritizing singular growth of Neoliberalism and its potential social benefits from society and the government, can create a lack of unity amongst Americans and can lead to more division and conflict in social situations. Essentially, forcing those who have a Conservative mindset to promote a Liberal opinion and vice versa can cause a chain reaction where these important social issues become obsolete, where Americans are more focused on having their Constitutional Rights upheld and not feeling pressured into beliefs they do not identify with. Yeheskel Hasenfeld, a distinguished professor of social welfare and rights at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, and his colleagues crafted the article "Nonprofit Human-Service Organizations, Social Rights, and Advocacy in a Neoliberal Welfare State: Social Service Review" which states that "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (Hasenfeld, 2012, p. 301). Neoliberalism exposed the profit that the economy and the free market were able to create based on the social issues that many vulnerable individuals seek help for. Where basic human needs, like housing, good-quality medical care, nutritional food, insurance and more, are being exploited in order to make those in places of immense power even richer. This idea is quite dangerous as it diminishes the desire to provide for vulnerable Americans that need some sort of stepping stone to get their lives back on track and become functioning members of society after prison. Now, destabilizing the economy in order to provide for vulnerable individuals will not solve any problems; it will most likely make them even worse, but working to stimulate the economy in a way that benefits both the vulnerable individuals and those who are in charge of these powerful companies seems to be the most pleasing option.  Stimulating the economy is always a good thing for the working people of the U.S., however, without government regulation and tax collection, day-to-day necessities would still inevitably have to come out of the pockets of Americans. Neoliberalism encourages privatization as a way to continually stimulate the economy and help other medical providers and companies generate revenue where there is a free market of sorts, incentivizing that the wealth is spread to companies other than the ones that dominate and receive massive amounts of revenue.

Supply-side and demand-side theory directly correlate with these ideas of Neoliberalism where the application method can be observed for potential flaws in the system. The supply-side theory is defined as "an economic concept whereby increasing the supply of goods leads to economic growth" (Chen, 2021). This theory prioritizes growing the economy as well as the companies that are producing the products. For instance, medical manufacturing companies produce necessary products so that hospitals and other treatment centers can purchase and use the materials to help those in need. Private medical facilities can receive contracts from prisons to provide care to their prisoners, directly cutting out the middleman – the state government. In contrast, the demand-side theory is defined as "economic growth stimulated through buyers" (Chen, 2021). This theory promotes the idea that the more a product is desired by the public for any specific reason, the more people will contribute to the profitability of said product. The demand may cause the cost of the product to increase or decrease depending on the availability of materials, the people to assemble the product, and how fast it can be restocked. This high demand creates an incentive of sorts for marketers to take advantage of those that are desperate and need the product.

Both theories directly align with the ideals of neoliberalism's attempt to minimize government control within the economy and thus stimulate the privatization of any sort of service. The private sector of prison medical care is able to make its own rules and regulations because they are not controlled by the government as much as the public sector of prison medical care is, which gives any private company the ability to make rules and procedures that work best for the success of their company. This allows private companies to have rules that may differ from state mandates or standards, as these companies are not receiving as much funding from the state as public companies are. Since private prison medical care companies contracted by the state government may still receive direct compensation, like in the managed care model coined by Gelman in terms of how little money the private prison system is willing to spend to provide medical care to prisoners, they may be forced to abide by some of the rules and regulations that the state believes need to be upheld. Viewing this idea of supply and demand through the lens of Neoliberalism's encouragement of a free economic market, it is apparent that there could be incentives to keep the demand for prisoners high as a way to encourage the need for medical providers and, therefore, increase more profit. This cycle promotes a lack of quality medical care that can create a bad relationship with seeking medical attention in which prisoners will not know whether their trip to the infirmary will cause them more harm than good. This conclusion can be found in the high rates of recidivism, the likelihood that a former prisoner is reincarcerated, for prisoners. In the eyes of the majority of the public, the cause of Recidivism is not the first thing that comes to mind when a prisoner is reincarcerated. This ignorance causes a disparity in the actions taken to decrease the environmental factors that may increase a prisoner's likelihood of reincarceration, exploiting yet again, the prioritization that private prison systems take part in. Avrim Hadar, the author of "Are Private Prisons to Blame for Mass Incarceration and Its Evils: Prison Conditions, Neoliberalism, and

Public Choice", shows that "economic deregulation and retreat of the state from its welfarist function led to an increase in punitive function, 'managing' its poor through criminalization and incarceration, rather than providing them with opportunities for labor and mobilization" (Hadar, 2014, p.423). Hadar sheds light on the way that the government innately pushes those who are financially dependent on the government for other assistance programs to systems which they can be profited from. The government is creating its own free market where they recognize a pattern where those who are vulnerable and without basic necessities will do anything, even resorting to criminal actions, in order to survive and provide for their families. Prison facilities take advantage of this vulnerability by housing these prisoners, meeting their very basic needs, and profiting from them. Without the incentive of profit that the prison system and the government receive from these prisoners, nothing would happen as quickly to give these vulnerable populations the tools they need to survive. Furthermore, Neoliberalism and its free market want to make those who are rich even richer, and those who are poor even poorer. This supply and demand within Neoliberalism is a flawed and broken system that relies on prisoners, who have everything to lose, and private medical companies and prison officials, who have everything to gain from these prisoners during a vulnerable time. Neoliberalism's flawed approach to stimulating the economy while simultaneously deregulating government involvement can be further analyzed through the scope of prison medical care's privatization.

## NEOLIBERALISM'S IMPACT ON PRISON HEALTH CARE

Within both private and public prison facilities, there are aspects of its medical care that have been infiltrated by Neoliberalism and its attempt to privatize it. This by-product of "the privatization of prison health care is not an inevitable consequence of some obscure market dynamic; rather, it represents a deliberate decision by local government legislative bodies to subject a particular constituency to the market forces" (Weiss, 2015, p. 730). The opportunity to exploit a market that many are unaware exists, in terms of medical care for prisoners, is one that presents itself on a silver platter. The profitability and exploitation of these prisoners have already begun through the use of cheap labor methods facilitated by large companies. Yet, the idea of profitability through medical care has recently become more popular. Following the marketability that Neoliberalism has promoted for the rest of the economy and understanding the application within the correctional system is important in order to recognize the underlying tactics that could be incorporated to look like the prisoners are benefitting from the system's involvement. According to Gelman, prisons that privatize their medical care use the managed-care model, where "the state pays a flat rate per inmate-patient" (Gelman, 2020, p. 1404). This contract model exemplifies how there is room for exploitation of the model where the actual quality of care does not matter, but the amount of care given to the patient does matter. More specifically, "In the [managed-care model], the company is incentivized to keep costs low, as every dollar the state pays that does not go towards providing the care becomes profit." For example, "A county jail in Maine similarly denied prescriptions—including psychiatric prescriptions—regularly to inmate-patients to save money in 2016. Critics claim that eliminating prescriptions has been a policy of Correctional Medical Services… since the 1990s." (Gelman, 2020, p. 1405). This model does not encourage preventative care or a qualified medical team to provide treatment most beneficial to the prisoner's needs. Rather, the cancellation of necessary prescriptions for prisoners is a perfect way to not only gain the most profit from the managed-care model, but to ensure that the prisoner patient will continue coming to the infirmary, ensuring more money is allocated to the patients' low-quality care. Furthermore, the privatization of medical care in prisons thrives off "self-interest and self-regulation" in which profitability is prioritized more than the quality of care provided (Peacock, 2018). Correctional facilities are finding a loophole where they do not have to abide by the same medical standards as public medical care that the government provides, while also profiting off the minimal care their prisoners receive. Through this, correctional facilities possess unparalleled power over medical care. Private prison medical care does have to follow specific state guidelines just like public prison medical care, but they can prioritize the elements of medical care they deem important, more specifically, those that are most likely to make the most money while providing the bare minimum of care.

The profitability aspect of privatized prison health care is unethical and morally wrong as it preys on the vulnerability of prisoners. While in prison, inmates are subject to a specific quality and standard of housing, medical care, nutrition, and the right to have their Eighth Amendment protected. The Eighth Amendment within the United States

Bill of Rights states that upon imprisonment, "excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted" (Stevenson, N.D.). Understanding the principle of this amendment is vital in understanding the ethical dilemma that profiting off the privatization of prisoners' medical care promotes, as the quality of these outsourced medical professionals often constitutes cruel and unusual punishment inflicted on the prisoner. A specific case that demonstrates both the managed-care system and the prevalence of cruel and unusual punishment is found in Dan Weiss' article, "Privatization and Its Discontents: The Troubling Record of Privatized Prison Health Care (Case Notes and Comments)", which researches the exploitation of prisoner rights within privatization of medical care. Ken McHill was a relatively healthy, middle-aged man when he was incarcerated for a DUI and imprisoned in a correctional facility that had outsourced their medical care to a private medical facility. Randomly, McHill began exhibiting signs of a stroke, yet was not properly diagnosed or given medical treatment upon asking for it. Rather than offer him the medical attention he needed, McHill was sent to solitary confinement for continually asking for more intensive care. The next morning, McHill was rushed to the hospital and was found to have suffered a massive stroke that he now has permanent brain damage from (Weiss, 2015). This is one case of three separate accounts in which prisoners were given inadequate care from three separate privatized and contracted medical providers. There have been innumerable instances of inadequate care within government-funded medical care for prisoners where prisoners have been diagnosed with broken arms, broken noses, severe muscle pains, need for eyeglasses, asthma, allergies, and more (Posner, 2021). These are all considered serious injuries that require high cost and quality medical care, yet were not treated as such. The Court Case Estelle v. Gamble was a civil court case settled in 1976 at the Supreme Court that set the standard for which prisoners can claim that their Eighth Amendment right has been compromised. Essentially, a prisoner named Gamble had been injured during prison work and was seen numerous times for his injuries by prison medical staff, where his care and the consistency with which he received his medication were not upheld. Gamble petitioned and filed a civil rights action against the prison medical staff under the claim that "his treatment was cruel and unusual in violation of the Eighth Amendment" (Salvatoriello, 2019). Gelman states that in the Supreme Court Case, Estelle v. Gamble, "the Court held that "deliberate indifference to serious medical needs of prisoners constitutes the 'unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain'" which is a violation of his Eighth Amendment right (Gelman, 2020). Public prison medical care must classify serious medical needs and understand they are liable and responsible for providing these prisoners with high-quality, effective medical treatment. On the contrary, the private prison medical care instance discussed above did not have classifications for their serious injuries like McHill's. This negligence left him paralyzed.

Reviewing McHill's quality of care in comparison to effective public prison medical care shows how private medical providers and facilities do not necessarily share the same standard of quality care for their patients as government-funded public prisons. The blatant disregard for McHill's well-being, after several attempts to alert medical staff, shows how privatized medical care does not have the same level of care for the severity of the injury in comparison to government-regulated medical care, and thus, directly violates his Eighth Amendment right. Privatization should not be an excuse to allow the violation of a prisoner's Constitutional rights and their human rights. Neoliberalism has no intention of providing and protecting the social rights of prisoners regardless of how relevant and important they seem. By continuing to promote a system that thrives off the pain and suffering of prisoners, private prison medical care proves to be a resource that should not hold the power of providing to vulnerable prisoners.

## RECIDIVISM IN RELATION TO NEOLIBERALISM IN THE PRISON HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The effects of privatization of prison healthcare does not just affect the current health of those incarcerated, but also affects the state of their health after release. Recidivism, the likelihood that a previously incarcerated individual will be reincarcerated, increases significantly more due to a poor relationship with medical professionals and general medical care. Michael Massoglia, the author of "Linkages Between Incarceration and Health", discovered a correlation where "the elevated risk of poor health conditions and mortality extends beyond prison," in which "studies have found an increased risk of poor health conditions and mortality both immediately after and years after release" (Massoglia, 2019, p. 95). These coexisting and post-incarceration medical conditions prisoners have forced them to look for some other avenue in which to receive treatment, which may not always be optimal in terms of their freedom.

Furthermore, it is important to note that although the medical care these prisoners are given is of lower quality, many prisoners are released into areas where, socioeconomically, healthcare would not have been given anyways. Those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, homeless, or are simply not able to get adequate medical care after incarceration, will subconsciously turn back to the prison system as a way to get their basic needs met. According to Amir Sariaslan, author of "Neighborhood Influences on Violent Reoffending Risk in Released Prisoners Diagnosed with Psychotic Disorders", "neighborhood exposure variables (median income, proportion of welfare recipients, and crime rate) independently predicted subsequent violent reoffending rates on the population level" (Sariaslan, 2017, p.1017). Many prisoners face chronic and acute stressors from the facility as a whole that can be heightened once a prisoner is released into the general population as they are forced to relearn the structure and balance of a life differing significantly from that of a prison. Sariaslan demonstrates the correlation that Recidivism has with the lack of a welfare system, such as Medicaid or Medicare, that provides uniform medical care for the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Having an unreliable medical care structure within the prison, and an even more unreliable medical care structure once back in their familiar environment, may cause former inmates to return to criminal habits and behavior as a way of coping with the instability of their lives. As prisoners are continually being released, Neoliberalism's proliferation of profit creates instability for a vulnerable population like those from these socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods. It ensures that there will be a constant flow of inmates who will fund correctional facilities with exponential profit. This idea connects to that of Recidivism, as the prison system is not working to address socioeconomic or other social issues that cause individuals from these neighborhoods to result in crime and violence. Once released from prison, former prisoners are being returned right back to the environment that drove them to commit these crimes with no post-incarceration plans for employment, housing, education, nutrition, or medical care, which will increase the likelihood of that prisoners resorting to criminal activities in order to make ends meet. The lack of these post-incarceration programs that promote good behavior and proper social care can be tougher on certain groups of people than others, especially those who are cognitively impaired or have mental health issues.

Recidivism is prevalent in prisoners with mental health issues, as they are more likely to reoffend due to a lack of continual medical treatment, impaired judgment and decision making. According to Ben Newman, the author of the article "Connecting the Dots Between Recidivism and Medical Malpractice Claims in Correctional Facilities", there is a "correlation between higher rates of recidivism and increased medical malpractice claims" where "more than 70 percent of prisoners with mental health disorders have substance abuse issues. Studies have shown that inmates who participate in treatment programs while incarcerated have 20 percent lower recidivism rates and 35 percent lower drug relapse rates" (Newman, 2022). These statistics show a direct correlation between those with mental health disorders who are also suffering from substance abuse and the benefit of diagnosing. Ensuring that medical providers can catch the signs and symptoms of these disorders and provide the correct intervention will effectively lower the rates of recidivism and the number of people who suffer within the prison system. Still, the idea of intervention has limitations depending on how different medical providers see it necessary to treat these coexisting disorders as a result of medical care privatization. Some medical providers may only see the signs of mental illness and just treat it rather than also taking note of the coping mechanism through substance abuse. This does not ensure that the prisoner patient gets the best quality of care while in prison, as private medical care may deal with the most prevalent illness rather than the underlying stressors and coping mechanisms. The statistics found by Newman show that creating a quality treatment plan for prisoners disincentivizes prisons that rely on Neoliberalism to want what is truly best for the prisoner patient, showing the lack of ethicality and priority for a prisoner's medical well-being where there would be a decrease in their supply of prisoners. Thereby decreasing the profit they would receive from the managed-care contract with the state government.

This concept can be seen in a study done by Samantha Hoke, author of "Mental Illness and Prisoners: Concerns for Communities and Healthcare Providers", who examined the likelihood of recidivism as a subconscious ploy by neoliberal medical care providers. Inmate X, as they are referred to, is a 49-year-old male, who was diagnosed with mental health concerns at the age of 26. When he was first incarcerated at the age of 26, he was diagnosed with various debilitating mental disorders and had a history of substance abuse. During his incarceration, his mental health disorders were managed, and he was medicated to properly function at a relatively normal level, so much so that he was released from prison. Unfortunately, Inmate X was found to be under the influence of substances shortly after his release and was reincarcerated. While incarcerated for the second time, Inmate X was restabilized with the medication needed to manage his mental health issues and drug addiction (Hoke, 2015). Inmate X's fallback on substances is a direct correlation to being reincarcerated as he was reintroduced to an environment that does not promote his medical care and mental stability, resulting back to what he knows in order to cope. This instance further shows that it is necessary to ensure medical stability for those who have very little of it in their environment, where even the smallest amount of medical support can change the lives of prisoners who have been released. Post-incarceration programs involving medical care and other social stability should be a major component of the social work system and parole that these former prisoners must endure when transitioning back into society.

Advocating for vulnerable prisoners' continual medical care in privatized facilities until they can secure their own form of government-assisted medical care is the best way a correctional facility can provide continual treatment. However, this continual care would come out of the pocket of the prison facility. Since this former prisoner does not bring the correctional facility any more profit through managed-care contracts or from privatized medical care, they have no incentive to help the former prisoner. Rather, they would prefer that the individual is reincarcerated so they can receive funding and another opportunity to profit off of their medical care needs. Establishing or improving accessibility to a Primary Health Care facility for these former prisoners would aid those "with the greatest need" who have the "poorest utilization of healthcare services" (Richard, 2016, p. 2). Creating a program similar to this model would require the prioritization of prisoners' social rights, as well as encourage the ethical and moral obligation correctional facilities have to maintain in order to protect prisoners' human rights and Constitutional rights. This program would also require correctional facilities to prioritize the future of these prisoners after leaving prison to ensure that they will not become dependent on bad habits or substance abuse, but will rather learn to cope with their situation in ways that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting extensive research on this topic, it has become apparent that the intentions of privatized medical care within public and private prisons are morally and ethically wrong. Evidently, this one-sided system works to ensure that the rich continuously work together to get richer off of the backs of those who need more aid. Correctional facilities and their low-quality medical providers are supposed to work together in advocating for the prisoners' well-being and overall success. However, implementing a system that profits off of prisoners' medical misfortunes caused not only by their socioeconomic and ethnic predispositions, but by the stress of going to prison itself, is ethically careless and directly violates the trust of these prisoners. Working towards implementing a neoliberal economy would be more beneficial to those struggling to make money than large companies that garner a majority of medical contracts. In spite of this stimulation of the economy, ensuring the safety and well-being of prisoner's healthcare along with their Constitutional Rights being upheld is a much more valuable investment, as the people within society fuel the economy. Without social rights and programs, the United States would be completely divided with the richer and more privileged dominating every aspect of the country while the vulnerable, in this case, prisoners are fighting to maintain their basic human rights within the tyrannical society that has been created. Privatization of medical care is not always a bad thing. In some cases, it is beneficial to have mediocre medical care professionals at correctional facilities when medical specialists or exceptional medical interventions are needed and are not readily available. Nevertheless, when it comes to generalized medical care and advocating for the patient, prisons need to prioritize the ethical and moral responsibility that they have to protect prisoners' well-being above the profit that they can make with privatization. Evaluating the correlation between the quality of privatized medical care and monetary gain is the next step in fixing an immoral approach to making money off of a vulnerable population.

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**Jonathan Roy Varghese**

# The American Dream: A Financial Fabrication that Destroyed the Middle Class


## ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to understand the role of consumerism and its derivatives in the ideal of the American Dream. The research focuses on minority and immigrant middle-class consumers, the financial environments they inhabit, and the economic incentives they are exposed to. By placing the American Dream in a larger context of agency, this paper seeks to examine its effects on the aspirations and motivations of those that pursue it, alongside its consequences on their community. This examination is primarily accomplished using research on minority middle-class spending habits, credit-lending environments in low-income neighborhoods, and the correlation between individualism, radii of institutional trust, and inclusion in formal markets. This paper also attempts to decipher the political and economic motive behind the continuation of the American Dream as a prominent ideal and its role in influencing the societal views of immigrants.*


## INTRODUCTION

The economic downturn that plagued the United States in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, although unique in its causes, was similar in its effects to almost every other period of economic volatility in the past century of capitalism—the financially vulnerable were left to handle the crumbling mess of the unsustainable life they were encouraged to build, while those of the upper echelon *still* found ways to improve their bottom line and present prestigious annual earnings. Although these differences in economic resilience have historically been chalked up to be a by-product of vulnerable communities having lower education and family stability levels, recent studies that hold these variables constant and still see the same effect call into question the idea of 'social mobility', and by translation, challenge the native overarching idea from which such a concept is derived—The American Dream.

While vaguely preaching a message of widely available success when paired with sufficient grit, innovative thinking, and hard work, an exact definition of the American Dream remains elusive; instead, its role as a societal ideology makes it an influential way of thinking with regard to personal finance. I will temporarily refrain from providing a concrete set of principles that the American Dream is comprised of since not only is this abstraction more accurate from the perspective of an everyday consumer, but also because its very existence more as a mysterious, utopic ethos plays into its widespread allure and endurance throughout centuries of American political and economic upheaval. My specific focus will be on minority and immigrant populations, seeking to answer the following questions: How does the pursuit of the American Dream affect the financial autonomy of immigrants and minorities, particularly in the new age of powerful, interconnected, transnational, private banking institutions? How and how *often* does the idea of the American Dream create shifts in immigrant cultures that otherwise do not place high value on material success? I intend to examine these questions primarily under the lens of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's self-determination theory, supplemented by C. Wright Mills' theory of the "power elite", and some broader precepts of consumerism in America.

In the first section of my paper, I argue that the American Dream morphs consumers' long-term aspirations into a disproportionate focus on material wealth, which forces them to surrender their agency and potential for self-actualization. I use research focusing on minority middle-class spending habits and credit-lending environments to prove this lack of agency and cyclical hindrance to upward mobility that underserved communities are unknowingly subjected to. In the second section I argue that financial individualism and weakened personal support networks are communicated as implicit requirements to material success, evidenced through  the discussion of the correlation between individualism, radii of institutional trust, and inclusion in formal markets. In my final section I introduce parameters to identify the origin and largely retrospective view of the American Dream, alongside its particular appeal to immigrants that seek a sense of belonging. To build this claim, I identify the implicitly political motive behind the American Dream, its continually nostalgic view of past greatness to measure the present, and the centrality of wealth in belonging to the national community. The very concept of the American Dream promotes an unsustainable, debt-ridden lifestyle for most Americans. Further,  contrast to its philosophical bearings as a saving grace for the middle and lower classes, the American Dream has played a role in destroying the nation's median and lower-quartile earners.

## CORRUPTED INTRINSIC ASPIRATIONS, FALLACIOUS AGENCY, AND THE ROLE OF INFORMATIONAL ASYMMETRY IN PREDATORY LENDING PRACTICES

The American Dream's promotion of impulse-purchases and credit payments give consumers a false and fleeting sense of agency that only serves to solidify their need for even further spending, which in turn ties them to a cyclical life of inescapable debt and worry. According to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, the three psychological needs that drive motivated behavior are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When examining this theory within the context of the American Dream however, two key problems arise—the end goal and the 'autonomy' sector: essentially, their perception of the future and their understanding of the present. The theory surmises that people must feel like they are in control of their behaviors, that they have mastery of the tasks needed for success and a sense of belonging to not only "facilitate more self-determined and high-quality functioning in the immediate situation, but…also to promote the development of more effective self-functioning, resilience, and enduring psychological health for the long term" (Deci and Ryan 12). Deci and Ryan also divide "long term" goals into two types: "intrinsic aspirations" and "extrinsic aspirations" (21). While intrinsic aspirations are defined to be those that align with human virtue and personal fulfillment, like "forming close affiliations, experiencing personal growth, and giving to one's community," extrinsic aspirations revolve around "gaining wealth, fame, and image" (273). In a culture of consumerism however, these extrinsic aspirations are mistakenly believed to provide the personal fulfillment that is otherwise associated with intrinsic motivation and become faux long term goals that drive motivated behavior. In quoting the work of an earlier critique by Charles Derber, Kasser and Ryan note that "many of the values modeled and encouraged by modern society suggest that success and happiness depend on procuring monetary wealth," the pursuit of which, Deci and Ryan find, only serves to harm people's "self-actualization and vitality" and correlates negatively to an individual's "global social functioning and social productivity" (Kasser and Ryan 410; Deci and Ryan 274). Elevating the blatantly external reward of monetary wealth to the position of an internal aspiration permanently alters a person's sense of fulfillment, making them dependent on "external sources of regulation for behavior and attitude adoption" (Kasser and Ryan 410). In trying to achieve the ideal future of the American Dream, consumers are deluded into believing that the quantifiable achievement of material wealth is a testament to their control over their own fate, when in reality it only surrenders one's possibility of self-actualization to an economic system that benefits from this optimistic view of financial freedom.

If a misguided vision of the future is what persuades people to participate in consumerist culture, then it is the manipulation of their in-the-moment agency that keeps people addicted to it. Czarnecka and Mogaji find that such manipulation is common practice in advertising, "especially for loan advertisements, because they appeal to the more irrational, emotional side of the consumer decision-making process via the peripheral route" (5). In their research—which although done in Britain is arguably applicable in most capitalist countries—they found that in analyzing the loan advertisements in eight newspapers spanning a total of 2,900 editions, the "most often used appeals were: relief (63.9 per cent), security (53.3 per cent) and adventure (36.8 per cent)" (Czarnecki and Mogaji 14). In advertising that their customers *deserved* that new house or claiming that a new car was the *best* way to prepare for the future of travel, financial service companies are able to frame most events as out of a consumer's control, and a risky financial instrument as a way to *reclaim* it. In using imagery of a happy family or a vacation resort, consumers are deceived into believing that entering debt is a relatively small price to pay for a ticket to exercise a false sense of control in—as per the ads—a usually out-of-control life. By advertising products that seem to be pillars of the standard American life—a house, a car, a family—financial institutions are able to exploit and push the average consumer into risking their financial future to move towards the unending pursuit of what they are told is the end goal of an American resident.

By creating an institutional imbalance of power and information, the financial and political elite are able to create asymmetries in the stakes between the consumer and large lending institutions to exploit financially vulnerable communities. There exists an inherently uneven split between the influence of the different players within the pursuit of the American Dream—on one side, there are the consumers and everyday residents, while on the other are the capital-intensive transnational financial organizations. In analyzing the quality and *quantity* of credit offered to communities of varying ethnic makeup, Begley and Purnanandam explore this imbalance of power, finding that "in a multivariate setting, a one standard deviation increase in the minority share of the population leads to a 16% increase in complaints" regarding the terms of a borrowed loan, and "the relation between the minority share of population and complaints is not only increasing, but it is also convex with the strongest effects in areas with greater than 80% minority population" (49). In their comparison, they found that minority-prominent neighborhoods had the lowest quality of credit, a result that was supposedly the side effect of a government regulation that sought to reward banks that blindly increased the quantity of credit they supplied to economically distressed neighborhoods. In providing ways for lending institutions to improve their reputation and marginal returns simply on account of extending loans, communities that lacked "complete information about financial products" were offered "confusing products," sold "bundled services," or met with "improper disclosure" (Begley and Purnanandam 51). This directly violates Deci and Ryan's definition of agency, which argues that autonomy depends on whether "one's behaviors are self-endorsed, or congruent with one's authentic interests and values" — not only were these communities misguided into buying risky financial instruments, but their lack of information about the financial system also makes them ambivalent to what their "authentic interests and values" *should be* (Deci and Ryan 10). These findings are consistent with the findings of Pittman Claytor, whose research on middle-class African American aspirational consumption highlights that "the most frequently mentioned category or type of item on their wish lists, was a home," which, despite being "often unattainable in real life for many middle-class Blacks, is highly valued and maintained symbolic weight" (6). This emphasis on the sentimental value of material purchases could indicate that members of underserved communities do not see mortgages or financial housing agreements simply as assets or sources of perpetual income like the well-off do, but rather as a place with sentimental value that fosters a sense of fitting into the idealized sense of 'moving up.' This perception is indicative of the inherently imbalanced view that the different earning classes have on such a monumental purchase—the vulnerable often see a sense of relief or inner happiness in a 'home', while banking institutions and the financial elite see it just as another digit on a financial statement. The currency that everyday middle-class consumers deal with is not their money, but rather their hopes of attaining the future that they idealize. In doing so, they fit Kasser and Ryan's definition of being "control oriented," depending on "external sources of regulation" for emotions that should otherwise be stimulated by intrinsic rewards (410). Kasser and Ryan argue that this is particularly dangerous for individuals with "low security and sense of wellbeing" that may be "more prone to view money as a means of self-enhancement" (420). In giving into to that extrinsic view of 'mobility' and surrendering potential for self-actualization, "a cycle may then be initiated that maintains or possibly deepens the original sense of contingent worth," leading to the systematic, perpetual poverty and economic instability that underserved communities are subjected to (420). The American Dream fabricates itself as an opportunity for everyday consumers to remain resilient to economic downturns, when in truth it creates a system that traps consumers in a cyclical trap of debt and informational asymmetry about the purchases they are *told* are important to prove their prosperity and social standing.

## EFFECT OF INDIVIDUALISM ON CONSUMER-LENDER TRUST, AND THE INVERSE CORRELATION BETWEEN UPWARD MOBILITY AND RELATEDNESS

By presenting financial individualism as a requirement for achieving the American Dream, large financial institutions implicitly encourage weaker community relationships between people that forcefully widen a consumer's radius of trust to accept riskier financial investments that are more likely to become an unsustainable burden. In researching the connection between individualism and financial inclusion, Lu et al. "postulate that individualistic culture promotes financial inclusion," since "individualism is associated with a wide radius of trust" (3). In contrast to "collectivist cultures" in which "people mostly interact within cliques" and internally "facilitate the monitoring and sanctioning of others" within the group, "the diffuse nature of social ties in individualistic societies creates opportunities for interactions with strangers, which facilitates the growth of trust beyond group bound" (Lu et al. 3). Lu expands on the importance of a wider radius of trust in consumer culture, positing that the very "functioning of financial markets hinges on trust," since "the inclination of households to use financial services depends on their trust in financial institutions, which are mostly managed by strangers" (3). This one-sided relationship of trust is also, unsurprisingly, a commonly encouraged notion in the American Dream's path of 'upward mobility.' A consistent ideology within the Dream is that of being more successful than one's previous generation, so that one can provide an even better life for those that come after oneself. Although this seems like a novel concept that promotes hard work, it can also be interpreted as a call to separate oneself from the ways that the previous generation earned their wealth and pursue a path of one's own, thus separating oneself from the ties that would otherwise hinder one's potential as a market participant. To clarify, this paper does not seek to argue that believing in the American Dream inherently means embarking on a unilaterally anti-social path of material success. Rather, it seeks to argue that in a system comprised of incentives for rampant personal spending and a constant need to benchmark happiness through material goods, most consumers are encouraged to try newer, riskier methods of funding for these brazenly extrinsic ambitions. This emphasis on community fits perfectly into self-determination theory's discussion on the "relatedness" component of motivated behavior. Ryan and Deci find that "acting in ways that are modeled and endorsed by family, peers, or other significant social groups, individuals can feel a greater relatedness and sense of belonging" while Lu et al. remark that buying into the ideology that financial wealth inevitably comes at the cost of intrinsically valuable personal relationships also causes a consumer to forfeit the "strong family and social ties associated with collectivistic values" that "provide security" through "informal credit and risk-sharing arrangements," leaving them with "weak, informal support networks" (Deci and Ryan 202; Lu et al. 3).

Lu et al. clarify that the effect of individualism was most strongly pronounced in lower income neighborhoods—a claim that is evidenced perfectly by Claytor's aforementioned research. When Claytor surveyed communities of middle-class African American earners, she found that "deeply embedded in their aspirational consumption are the goals of racial advancement and maintaining solidarity with and connections to a broader Black community" (9). She found that in the median-earning quartile, most of her survey participants "emphasize the importance of helping family and friends, and intimidate others to improve their financial situations," wanting "those closest to them to share in their imagined good fortune" (Claytor 9). On the contrary, however, "a few, particularly those who had privileged backgrounds, reveal that their aspirational consumption…is free from a sense of racial obligation and racialized tastes" (16). Although this correlation does not necessarily imply causality, it does contribute to the larger claim that those who are financially successful tend to value an—albeit faulty—sense of financial autonomy at the individual level rather than at the level of the collective. According to

Deci and Ryan, this approach to agency has subconscious ramifications for one's financial future; if pursuing individual wealth is encouraged as a means of upward social mobility but is also correlated with diminished feelings of belonging and security, traditional wisdom would imply that it is a trade off, with the individual taking on increased risk for the rewards of a risk-free future. However, Deci and Ryan find that people "display curiosity and intrinsic exploration when they feel a sense of security with respect to others"—in other words, people only begin to pursue intrinsic avenues of happiness when they feel secure (119). Yet if the prior correlation— that of upward mobility *inevitably* increasing security—holds true, the American Dream then proves itself to be an unending cycle of pushing away intrinsic happiness until some future security is obtained, only to find that this security will always be out of grasp because of the inverse correlation between financial inclusion and community relationships. In the longer term, this would explain the rationale of banks in seeking to irresponsibly supply credit into minority neighborhoods; their main purpose is not to make the community better off or help them escape the cycle of poverty, but rather just to provide them with enough purchasing power to have them cast off the 'anchor' of racial and community obligations and make them more reliant on the market, setting them up for a future of perpetual insecurity and little to no formal support network to rely on.

## IMMIGRANT DESIRE TO BELONG IN A NATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

If those that currently reside in the United States and are subject to economic suppression—like underserved communities—suffer from having to abandon their "relatedness" to obtain material success, immigrants and those with foreign cultures are led to believe that participating in the consumerist ambitions of the American Dream are the ticket to feeling included on a societal level, and finding that "relatedness." In describing the creation of national ethos like the American Dream or its Chinese counterpart, Callahan notes that "neither the American Dream nor the China Dream are simply positive jingoistic celebrations of the nation. Alongside the celebration, there is always a lamentation about missed opportunities and lost greatness" (Callahan 253). In describing the origins of these ideologies, Callahan remarks that these national dreams often emerge when the political elite "worry that their [nation's] treasured values are at risk," and "criticize the moral corruption of society and lament the nation's imminent decline," akin to the "discourse of fear" argument for various American military and economic interventions around the world"(Callahan 259; Hoggett and Thompson 103). As a result of these ethos' inherent nature of being a "mixture of aspiration and anxieties," the American Dream was primarily a political tool to promote a "sense of dissatisfaction, a belief that the nation we inhabit isn't quite right," and thus, keep consumers in an unending nostalgia of previous 'prosperity' (Callahan 259). Under the lens of this retro-centric view of success, "The American Jeremiad is a process of containment, where the future is limited by the past in the quest for perfection"(Callahan 264). Despite being unattainable, most consumers—especially immigrants that are seeking to acclimate to the social and economic environment—still seek the American Dream because partaking in this longing and lamentation provides them with a sense of "belonging to the…national community" (Callahan 253). This involuntary acceptance of the American Dream's ideology "highlight[s] the tension between longing for the true nation"—the version of America that immigrants are told was a golden era, and the "belonging in the actual nation"—the debt-ridden reality of the material-focused view of intrinsic happiness (Callahan 252).

This dilemma of incentives would imply that immigrants pursue these dreams not only because they expect to find financial autonomy at its end, but also for an inherent desire to blend in with society. Many immigrants are thus able to justify a materialistic outlook on life, which their parents or previous generation likely did not have. When portraying the past as a unilaterally 'golden era' without a practical comparison, people see material wealth as a window into experiencing this past glory by buying into the age of prosperity that they were unable to experience. In arguing that the citizens have failed to face up to the, as Callahan calls it, "American Jeremiad" because the "country…has lost its way," the Dream thus combines a sacred covenant," representative of intrinsic ambitions, "with a worldly," extrinsic "mission" (Callahan 250). This fusion of a rousing political call to national greatness and its apparent financial incentives clarify why the American Dream has endured, at least in name, through 200 years of history: when the past is used as a model of what can be achieved, people will often seek to re-emulate it, only to find that it is a vision of an unreal future modeled after an exaggerated past.

Bargetz notes that the retro-centric view that Callahan describes the American Dream with is also fairly representative of the academic literature that has emerged over the past few decades. It consists of “a narcissistic desire for ‘past political attachments’” and “passivizing mourning over the loss of past political promises,” making “any contemporary investment in political mobilization, alliance, or transformation’ impossible” (Bargetz 184). Despite Bargetz describing the former in a literary perspective, one can argue that the financial version of the ‘left melancholia’ was manufactured and sold to American consumers by introducing debt as an inescapable part of life. With the rise of accessible information and technology, however, “there has been an increase in resistance to this sentimental scripting of hopelessness” in political movements backed by theoretical frames of agency that are beginning to surface and challenge the modern idea that capitalism and current political institutions are the only option. Bargetz speaks to the rise of a “new materialism” that “expand[s] the humanities and social sciences by including various materialities in their research and analyses—for instance, animals, data, things, nature, atoms, toxins, psychopharmaceuticals, electricity, garbage, works of art, bacteria, artificial intelligence, spirituality, drugs, weather phenomena, stem cells, metals, ultrasounds and nanotechnologies, just to name but a few” (186). This idea of expanding materialism to encompass more than just traditionally monetary instruments could refer to a reversion of intrinsic ambitions becoming the new driver for motivated behavior at the individual level, and casting off the purely extrinsic financial incentives of the American Dream. The reduction of the supposedly depressing political mood that has plagued critical theories for the better half of the 20th century gives rise to a better future for intellectual debate and discourse about the true long term goals of the American Dream and a critique of its teachings for the American middle class.

## CONCLUSION

By introducing Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory as the overarching theoretical framework, this paper sought to argue that the American Dream has historically been an unsustainable, unending quest for most middle-class Americans. This perpetual quest promotes sacrificing financial autonomy, community support networks, and traditional collectivist cultural values in order to contribute towards a national identity that emphasizes extrinsic, material wealth as the way towards content, motivated behavior. In promoting the view that agency can only be purchased with large financial commitments, like a house, car, or vacation, lending institutions incite feelings of financial security within consumers to encourage the faux relationship between happiness and extrinsic ambitions. If given the opportunity to explore further, this paper would have also sought to examine the differences in the pursuit of the American Dream for various ethnic communities, attempting to find patterns in financial behavior and correlate them with certain aspects of culture or community.

Given that individualism is an unusually strong precept in an individual's behavior towards corporate entities, particularly with regard to banking and financial firms, large institutions promote the undertaking of personal financial risk without the aid of informal support networks to make consumers more active market participants, trapping them in a life of insecurity without hope of uncovering their intrinsic ambitions. Accepting the ideology that financial success is an individual endeavor revolving around an idealized version of oneself has turned American consumption into a quest for individual success with little importance given to the welfare of society. Despite the various restrictions and substitutes that the American Dream tries to impose on the financial agency and societal relatedness of individual consumers, the rise of technology and easily accessible information provides everyday citizens with the knowledge to resist the faux understanding of extrinsically motivated happiness, even if such an ideological revolution is premature for widespread adoption.

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**Tara E. Clark**

# The Wrongful Utilization of Correctional Officers as Mental Health Specialists

## ABSTRACT

*In the present study, the paradox of power is utilized to understand how the United States incarceration system was able to gain power and the ability to influence. The shifting of power has been taking place since deinstitutionalization in the 1950s. To this day, mentally ill inmates suffer from deinstitutionalization, receive a lack of respect, and are mistreated by the incarceration system. This study examines research investigating how and why inmates witness and experience extreme neglect from correctional officers, improper medical attention, and repeated incarcerations. These studies show how power disparities that the United States incarceration system encourage and enable the cruel treatment of mentally ill inmates and the utilization of correctional officers as mental health specialists.*

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On April 13, 2015, Karl Taylor, an inmate at Sullivan Correctional Facility, was ordered to clean his cell by a guard at his maximum-security prison. Taylor resided in a particular unit for inmates classified as mentally ill; he was diagnosed with delusional disorder and paranoid personality disorder (Robbins, 2018). Following a guard opening Taylor's cell door, a fight broke out between Taylor and correctional officer Bruce Tucker. Multiple officers then restricted Taylor; inmates heard Taylor claiming he could not breathe (Robbins, 2018). The guards handcuffed Taylor, forcefully marched him down the hall, and declared him dead within minutes of arriving at the prisoner's clinic (Robbins, 2018). In an earlier era, correctional officers were not expected to deal with mentally ill inmates. However, since the mid-1950s, mentally ill persons frequently end up in prison due to deinstitutionalization. The rising number of inmates with mental illness makes correctional officers' jobs increasingly strenuous.

In the United States incarceration system, correctional officers frequently look after inmates who need a more structured accommodating system. The lack of power regulation is no new issue. In nineteenth century Europe, people doubted the gruesomeness of public executions; they argued that there should be a legal limit on the power to punish. Unregulated power has been an issue since the nineteenth century, and transforming the current biased power situation in United States prisons is still a problem today. In the mid-1950s, deinstitutionalization began to take place because of the belief that mental health hospitals were cruel and inhumane (Kim, 2016). The public's attitude to mental health and mental hospitals was changing for what they thought was the better, providing antipsychotic medications to people who needed them and allowing them to return to a 'normal life' (Kim, 2016). Unfortunately for many, returning to everyday life was not the reality. James Walsh, the superintendent at Sullivan Correctional Facility from 1999 to 2007, "saw much of his facility become a de facto mental ward" (Robbins, 2018). A prison facility becoming a mental ward is problematic because they are not designed for it, and correctional officers can not provide mental health treatment (Robbins, 2018). Although power shifting has been taking place for so long, mentally ill inmates still suffer from deinstitutionalization, receive a lack of respect, and are mistreated by the incarceration system. The issue of correctional officers possessing an inequitable amount of responsibility for mentally ill inmates must be researched, questioned, and transformed.

In allowing for the mistreatment of severely mentally ill inmates, the United States incarceration system creates a terrible environment for both correctional officers and inmates. Many people believe that deinstitutionalization has benefited patient care, resulting in better psychiatric coverage, reduced stigma around mental disorders, and better symptom relief (Jacob, 2015). In contrast, others find deinstitutionalization detrimental due to decreased access to medication, increased homelessness, insufficient community care, and the surge of mentally ill inmates in and out of the incarceration system (Jacob, 2015). Both views result in the unethical treatment of mentally ill populations and give correctional officers an unjust amount of power over inmates who need mental health professionals. In my research, I aim to answer the question: how are mentally ill inmates and correctional officers negatively affected by the United States incarceration system encouraging discriminatory treatment and denying proper care?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For centuries, people have obtained power through force, deception, manipulation, and coercion. New beliefs on acquiring and keeping power have recently altered old beliefs (Keltner, 2007). Dacher Keltner, a professor of psychology at U.C. Berkely, researched interests in social aspects, social interaction, and conflict and negotiation. Keltner's (2007) findings present the Paradox of Power: "The skills most important to obtaining power and leading effectively are the very skills that deteriorate once we have power." New studies are being conducted claiming that people are more likely to abuse their power once they gain power. Once positions of power are assumed, people are more likely to act selfishly, impulsively, and aggressively.

The paradox of power theorizes that people gain power and the ability to influence through social practices that take into account the well-being of others, for example, empathy, collaboration, open-mindedness, fairness, and generosity (Keltner, 2018). Correctional officers are not expected to follow those social practices; many do the opposite of those social practices. Nevertheless, deinstitutionalization took place in the 1950s when mental institutions were perceived as highly unethical (many were). Numerous mental institutions were extremely cruel to their patients, not considering any positive social practices. The paradox of power can begin to explain this. Due to deinstitutionalization, the United States incarceration system unintentionally obtained power and control over mentally ill individuals because they had nowhere else to go.

Power affects the human mind, and the paradox of power requires no corruptive influences or unfairness toward how one with power portrays and treats one with less power. If corruptive influences are present, a person's power will deteriorate, and their followers will become attracted to a different leader who is willing to give away power to keep influence. Currently, the United States prison systems are not distributing power nor considering empathy, collaboration, open-mindedness, fairness, or generosity. For example, inmates have no say in who has control over them. Mentally ill inmates are frequently put into solitary confinement simply because correctional officers do not want to deal with them, which is detrimental to their pre-existing mental health issues (Clark, 2018). Additionally, correctional officers frequently abuse their power over inmates making their environment extremely unpleasant twenty-four seven. The United States incarceration system is partaking in extremely unethical social practices, so if the paradox of power is true, the current system should eventually lose its power.

## POWER AND COMPLIANCE

Maintaining order and power over inmates is one of the main goals for prison managers. Thus, examining how correctional officers get inmates to comply is a vital idea to be questioned and researched. Amy Stichman has her Ph.D. in the Division of Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati and has much research experience. Jill Gordon has her Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati, and her research interests are centered around correctional employees' attitudes toward the work environment. Gordon and Stichman's (2016) research focuses on the dimensions of power between compliance and inmates, correctional officers' belief in rehabilitative ideas, and organizational factors related to maintaining order. In order to run this study, they got 1,273 correctional officers in the Mid-Atlantic state to complete the study. As discussed in the study, the control of the prison environment "lies in the hands of the officers, administrators, and staff" (Gordon & Stichman, 2016) so sustaining order and power over inmates "is essential for the safety of all, yet we know little about compliance in prison" (Gordon & Stichman, 2016). Employees' immense power over inmates and employees' lack of proper education and training in dealing with mentally ill inmates are critical tensions that need to be addressed in prison systems. Drawing upon the idea that officers control the prison environment, it can also be inferred that correctional officers control inmates' mental environment. Correctional officers impact inmates mentally, physically, and environmentally so proper training is essential.

Inserting the paradox of power into conversation with compliance and power in the United States incarceration system is jarring. Correctional officers have excessive amounts of power, yet they often do not display empathy or kindness to obtain this power. In contrast, correctional officers often have a violent, indifferent attitude toward the suffering of others. Historical contexts may explain how the incarceration system found a 'loophole' in the paradox of power. Imprisonment rates have "skyrocketed nationwide since the late 1970s" due to psychiatric deinstitutionalization (Kim, 2016). Although perceived as helpful places greatly benefiting people with mental illnesses, psychiatric hospitals were the exact opposite. Such positive perceptions allowed these medical facilities to obtain power, negatively impacting mentally ill people. Many psychiatric hospitals were extremely inhumane, unfair places for people with mental illnesses to live. How psychiatric hospitals gained and lost power adheres to the rules of the paradox of power. However, because of psychiatric deinstitutionalization, people with mental illness had no place to go, leaving the incarceration system one of the few places for them. Now, the incarceration system has unintentionally acquired this immense power over a large population of people who can easily be mistreated. This fault in the paradox of power can explain why the United States incarceration still holds immense power even though it completely disagrees with the paradox of power.

## OFFICER ABILITY AND INMATE TREATMENT

Correctional officers being overworked, overstressed, and not qualified for their jobs can explain inmates' extreme neglect and mistreatment. There are far too few employees working but, at the same time, far too many employees who need to be more qualified for the jobs offered. This combination of qualities leads to inmate deindividualization, which means inmates are told they are unimportant and not identifiable as individuals but by group or number (Bauer, (2016). Shane Bauer is a reporter from *Mother Jones*; he has previously reported on solitary confinement police militarization and writes about his two years as a prisoner in Iran. Bauer's (2016) experience in this privatized prison is trustworthy because he spent four months undercover, documenting the inhumane ways he was required to treat inmates. Bauer (2016) was told while undercover in a privatized prison that "we do not want them to feel as though they are individuals" (p. 26). Practices like inmate deindividualization can significantly negatively impact inmates with pre-existing mental illnesses. These practices do not allow inmates to get better. Negative treatment does the opposite essentially. People go to prison, struggle with maltreatment and have their individuality stripped away.

As previously discussed in Bauer's (2016) writing, the United States incarceration system disproportionately affects inmates' mental and physical wellness. According to the paradox of power, the power dynamic should soon shift to different sources. However, due to the unintentional way that the incarceration system obtained power and influence over people with mental illness, power dynamics seem as if they are less likely to change. Is amendment of the paradox of power possible within the United States incarceration system? Amending the paradox of power within the incarceration system seems complicated but possible especially when considering the multiple researchers exemplifying how unacceptable the abuse of inmates in the incarceration system is. The numerous scholarly articles analyzed in this research are just beginning to prove with statistics how unjust the incarceration system is to inmates and correctional officers. If the findings in these multiple research studies obtain more attention from people, the paradox of power will become more likely to take effect and adjust the power dynamics. The paradox of power supports this way of thinking because people must be aware of the corruptive influences present in the incarceration system before power can be taken away and attracted to a different superior.

Correctional officers have control and power over inmates in so many ways, often creating toxic effects on inmates depending on how they apply their power. Bauer (2016) provides first-hand experiences that exemplify how excessive power in correctional officers' hands deteriorates inmates' mental health and significantly negatively impacts inmates with pre-existing mental illnesses. One man, Robert Scott, made at least nine requests to see a doctor regarding "sore spots on his feet, swelling, oozing pus, and pain so severe he couldn't sleep" (Bauer, 2016, p. 34), but no one cared to do anything about it. Eventually Scott's legs had to be amputated due to neglected and worsening gangrene that was spreading to other parts of his body. Scott went into jail able to walk but he will be leaving in a wheelchair because of the extreme neglect from the correctional officers. Extreme negligence from prison staff affected Scott physically, but this experience will take a huge mental toll on him. After experiencing such a severe lack of care, it is hugely unlikely that Scott will ever feel safe or valued in this environment. This experience can induce depression, anxiety, intense anger, and feeling unsafe.

The reason Scott no longer has legs and will have to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life is due to this privatized prison he is required to live in. The extreme neglect Scott underwent in prison reveals the extreme power imbalance and how detrimental excessive power, lack of knowledge, and respect is to inmates. In general, this does not comply with the paradox of power. Keltner (2007) claims, "True power requires modesty and empathy, not force and coercion." Robert Scott received a lack of empathy and fairness; instead, he received zero help from the correctional officers. It is hugely unfair to the inmates and the correctional officers who are not qualified to be in this position of power; it is an apparent failure of the incarceration system. The current power structures create extremely unsafe and unaccommodating environments for both inmates and correctional officers. Reform and inmate healing are unlikely when employees are given responsibilities they can not fulfill and have so much power. When guards control inmates, they also have power over inmates' mental health.

## REHABILITATION OR PUNISHMENT

In prisons, correctional officers can essentially choose between two major philosophies: support for rehabilitation or support for punishment (Gordon & Stichman, 2016). Support for rehabilitation emphasizes how important it is to treat different criminogenic factors and help inmates improve (Gordon & Stichman, 2016) compared to punishment. Research indicates that support for rehabilitation increases "positive staff to prisoner relationships" (Gordon & Stichman, 2016). Unfortunately, the rehabilitation philosophy is not frequently chosen among correctional officers. A majority of the relationships between staff and prisoners are incredibly harmful.

The meta-analysis "Is mental illness associated with placement into solitary confinement in correctional settings? A systematic review and meta-analysis" by Dellazizzo et al. (2020) assesses the association between any mental health problems and placement in solitary confinement. According to the meta-analysis findings, individuals who have a mental illness, "due to their psychological and coping deficits, [they] may have greater difficulties adapting to correctional facilities and complying with regulations than other inmates" (Dellazizzo et al., 2020). Meta-analysis findings indicate that these inmates can display unusual, problematic, and potentially violent behavior due to the side effects of their disregarded mental illness. Correctional officers are not mental health specialists. They do not have the skill sets to deal with mentally ill inmates who are more prone to displaying unusual, problematic, and potentially violent behavior. Officers will enforce punishment philosophies when presented with such behavior because that is what they are trained to do. This treatment of mentally ill inmates creates a dangerous environment for inmates and correctional officers. The incarceration system was not designed to give the responsibility of mental health care to officers with no previous background or interest in providing quality care for mentally ill inmates.

## IMPROPER CARE TAKING AND REINCARCERATION RATES

Inmates with mental illness are more likely to have had multiple incarcerations than those without mental illness. "Psychiatric Disorders and Repeat Incarcerations: The Revolving Prison Door" is a peer-reviewed article by Baillargeon et al. (2009). In this study, 79,211 inmates were analyzed concerning psychiatric disorders, demographic characteristics, and history of incarceration. The results found that inmates with major psychiatric disorders "had substantially increased risks of multiple incarcerations over the 6-year study period" (Baillargeon et al., 2009). These statistics are important because it correlates directly with correctional officers being unable to provide proper mental health care for inmates with mental illness. If inmates receive care from appropriately trained and educated mental health specialists, reincarnation rates would not be nearly as high. This can be explained by the revolving door phenomenon.

The lack of mental health care that mentally ill inmates receive creates a phenomenon referred to as the revolving door. The revolving door is a "phenomenon in which many mentally ill people move continuously between homelessness and the criminal justice system" (Baillargeon et al., 2009). People with mental illness are not getting the help they need and are constantly in a hostile, unsafe environment that encourages violent outbursts, which will land them in and out of prison. The cycle repeatedly continues because nothing new is implemented in the incarceration system to break the cycle. The statistics "15%- 24% of U.S. inmates have a severe mental illness" and "half of inmates– over 1 million individuals– have at least one mental health condition" (Baillargeon et al., 2009) demonstrate why the incarceration system must change. Utilizing officers as mental health providers is unproductive and detrimental.

## OFFICER PUNISHMENTS TOWARDS THE MENTALLY ILL

The use of solitary confinement to correct behavior is ineffective, especially regarding mental health. An essential correlation researchers have been observing is the relationship between inmates with pre-diagnosed mental illness and the likelihood of receiving disciplinary segregation following misconduct (Clark, 2018). Kimberly Clark (2018) has her Ph.D. at UMass Lowell in criminology and has been published or co-published in four research journals focusing on inmates, mental health, and solitary confinement. The survey Clark (2018) analyzed was administered to almost 18,000 inmates covering various topics like "inmate behavior, criminal histories, personal backgrounds, and experiences within and outside of incarceration" (Clark, 2018). Clark's (2018) findings communicate that "inmates with a mental illness are more likely than those without to be given a severe punishment (segregation) compared with certain other less severe disciplinary actions" (Clark, 2018). Correctional facilities should offer special consideration for those with mental illness to help them, not further segregate them, further harming their mental well-being. Clark's (2018) research may begin to encourage administrators to find other effective ways to deal with the population of mentally ill inmates, rather than rely on correctional officers to provide proper treatment for those with mental illnesses.

The combination of solitary confinement and improper treatment from correctional officers further exacerbates inmates' mental health issues. People with mental illness and mental health problems "may be more susceptible to the negative effects of solitary confinement" (Clark, 2018). The increased susceptibility creates a cycle where "mentally ill offenders are put in solitary confinement due to their mental illness, which is made worse by isolation, leading to further or worsening symptomatic behavior" (Clark, 2018). Places of incarceration should be compelled to offer mentally ill inmates the proper facilities to help them learn to live with their mental illness instead of having people sent in a never-ending cycle of being in and out of prison or solitary confinement. Mental health and incarceration are issues because of this 'revolving door.' Correctional officers are put in an unfortunate position when the incarceration system essentially forces them to deny proper care.

Incarcerated persons with mental illness have different experiences regarding how they are perceived by and interacted with by correctional officers. If correctional officers have minimal to zero experience in dealing with people with mental illness, they cannot be expected to provide quality care. The connection between mental illness, misconduct, and mistreatment was analyzed in the peer-reviewed study "Revisiting and Unpacking the Mental Illness and Solitary Confinement Relationship" by Siennick et al. (2021). This peer-reviewed study sample is 159,749 men who went into correctional facilities on or after July 1, 2007 and were released on or before December 31, 2015. The study claims that a correctional officer who is not a qualified mental health specialist "may not recognize or appropriately manage (i.e. with quality mental health treatment) behaviors associated with mental illness, and instead may respond to behavior as though it were unrelated to mental illness" (Siennick et al., 2021). The inability to appropriately manage inmates with mental illness explains why having a mental illness is associated with an increase of "up to 170%" regarding extended solitary confinement (Siennick et al., 2021). Improperly trained correctional officers are unsure how to manage mental illness; in turn, correctional officers send these inmates to solitary confinement. It is incredibly frustrating and discouraging for untrained individuals to manage people with mental illness, so when mentally ill inmates are in solitary confinement, the correctional officers' jobs become significantly less distressing. When mentally ill inmates are in a different location, correctional officers can handle inmates who do not need intensive treatment. Therefore, correctional officers send inmates to solitary confinement as an easy fix.

## CONCLUSION

Correctional officers receive zero proper training to deal with mentally ill inmates, leaving both parties feeling helpless. The incarceration system's lack of protection for mentally ill inmates and correctional officers deteriorates their mental health. Receiving constant disdain from correctional officers is a significant factor instigating behavioral hardships among inmates: inmates witness and experience extreme neglect from correctional officers, improper medical attention, and repeated incarcerations. These circumstances exemplify why correctional officers should not be expected to take responsibility for severely mentally ill inmates; they do not know how to manage them. Mentally ill inmates do not belong in prisons because correctional officers are not mental health professionals. Mentally ill inmates do not receive the care they need and are unfairly punished, thus creating an unsafe environment for inmates and correctional officers.

There are multiple claims about the construction of the incarceration system, the psychology of prisoners and correctional officers, and power structures. Correctional officers are constantly required to look after inmates who need a more accommodating and professional environment. Due to deinstitutionalization, people with mental illness no longer have a place designated for their treatment. Instead of mental health professionals and institutions having power over mentally ill people, the prison systems possess power. A prison facility looking after people with mental illness is unacceptable because officers are not trained to provide mental health treatment. Mentally ill inmates still suffer from deinstitutionalization, are not respected, and do not receive help from the incarceration system. Current studies researching and questioning current power structures in the incarceration system exemplify just the importance of this issue.

The United States incarceration system allows for mistreatment of mentally ill inmates creating a toxic environment for correctional officers and inmates. As a result, how mentally ill inmates and correctional officers are negatively affected by the corrupt United States incarceration system becomes relevant. Due to the incarceration system requiring correctional officers to manage mentally ill inmates with zero proper training, both inmates and officers are left feeling helpless. Additionally, the incarceration system's lack of protection for mentally ill inmates and correctional officers deteriorates both parties' mental health. Inmates' mental health deteriorates as they endure extreme neglect and improper mental and physical medical attention. As a result of worsening mental health conditions and poor treatment in facilities, repeated incarcerations are more likely to occur. The numerous negative consequences that occur when mentally ill inmates are mistreated exemplify why correctional officers should not be expected to have responsibility for mentally ill inmates. Mentally ill inmates do not belong in prisons because correctional officers are not mental health professionals. Mentally ill inmates do not receive the care they need and are unfairly punished, creating an unsafe environment for inmates and correctional officers.

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Cheryl Berger

# The Tragic Revenge Arc of an Anti-Hero: Grappling with Ethics, Morality, and Justice


## ABSTRACT

*In a world of ever-growing anti-hero narratives—stories on a character with a moral compass between that of a traditional hero and a villain—individuals may be concerned if these types of characters represent a shift in culture towards immorality. But these types of stories do not corrupt the viewers who engage in these media that involve the plot of a morally ambiguous character. Through a psychological and philosophical lens using scholarly sources, this paper will analyze the ideas of revenge, tragedy, justice, and ethics in regard to an anti-hero character's arc and how these lead to positive ethics being upheld in the audience. The audience may be enjoying the plot of an anti-hero narrative, but the enjoyment is derived from catharsis and a balance of karma shown in these narratives, not enjoyment directly from the immorality displayed from the protagonist. A flawed character allows for the complexity of human morality and justification to be explored in a fictional world, but does not impede on the viewer's innate moral standing in the real world. Specifically, this paper will utilize the musical "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" as a case study for a morally ambiguous character that undergoes a revenge and tragedy arc.*


## INTRODUCTION

A person of immoral standings harms an innocent individual; the individual, in turn, retaliates and vows to invoke pain onto the harm-doer. Revenge, a tale as old as time, offers an individual a chance to bring retribution to a wrongdoer through active action. The critical aspect of revenge involves a sense of justice. Another form of justice comes in poetic justice, as defined by Scott Forschler in "Revenge, Poetic Justice, Resentment, and The Golden Rule", in which karma punishes the evil deed without the victim taking action. Immoral actions are innately subjective and dependent on the circumstance. Fictional media such as theater, in which characters, plots, and scenery can be manipulated, allows many scenarios to explore morality. When the character is not a hero or villain but an anti-hero, the lines of morality quickly blur, though the audience may still be rooting for this type of protagonist. Morally ambiguous characters have a large popularity in media, especially ones as protagonists in the narrative (Daalmans, 1). A concern with these morally ambiguous characters, or anti-heroes, is that it may impair the viewer's ethics and result in the audience not understanding the difference between right and wrong (Daalmans, 1).

In the case of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, a musical by Steven Sondheim, the story follows a man named Benjamin Barker, newly named Sweeney Todd, and his quest for revenge against Judge Turpin, who unjustly banishes him from London to steal his wife and daughter. Todd believes his wife to be dead due to Judge Turpin's meddling and plots to murder him at the mercy of his barber knives. However, despite his success in murdering the judge, Todd's life comes to a tragic end at the conclusion of the musical. Using this musical as a case study, how does the tragic revenge arc of an anti-hero uphold ethics despite the viewer's enjoyment of a morally ambiguous character? To answer this question, this paper will analyze judgments of morality and justice about revenge arcs and how these ideas interplay with tragedy theories such as mimesis and catharsis, and how they work together to make an enjoyable play experience.

Disciplines within psychology and philosophy will be utilized in this paper to explore theories and ideologies revolving around revenge judgments and the effects of tragedy on an audience. Tripp and his colleague in their paper " "Poetic Justice or Petty Jealousy? The Aesthetics of Revenge" take an in-depth analysis of various studies to understand how individuals judge acts of revenge within a psychological study. They concluded that "altruism, poetic qualities, and symmetry" are forms of "aesthetics" that dictate the reaction to such an act (Tripp et al. 967). Specifically, they focus on the symmetry of method and consequences of revenge. They concluded that asymmetrical methods are more desired as long as the consequences of said revenge on the harm doer are equal to the initial act. Scott Forschler perceives revenge from a more philosophical perspective and focuses on the overlap between revenge and poetic justice. He emphasizes the morally driven side of revenge, to which the idea of *lex talionis* states: "do unto others as they have done unto you" (Forschler 4). As the corollary to the Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," this phrase acts as a framework to judge the morality of a revenge plot.

Besides the field of psychology, this paper will delve into the discipline of Philosophy to create a more well rounded discussion of tragedy. Lean Golden's"Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis" is a philosophical article regarding tragedy that provides the framework to focus on the ideas of catharsis and mimesis. Mimesis encompasses life through imitation on stage and is a key aspect of an audience's play experience. Besides the focus of these ideas, he argues that the enjoyment of a tragedy comes out of cognitive analysis. Together, all these works emphasize the importance that a play provides due to its fictional nature, in that manipulations of plot and character can help explore human nature and the psyche. Through cognitive analysis, revenge can be judged on a stage through its presentation and therefore dictate the audience's opinion toward the vengeful character. In addition, through mental processes, tragedy brings catharsis by exploring pity and fear via the mimesis of a stage production. An immoral mindset does not drive one's engagement with a tragic revenge arc; instead, aesthetics, poetic justice of revenge, and aspects of catharsis bring the audience enjoyment as the play unfolds in which the building blocks of good ethics are upheld. This paper will analyze the aspects of mimesis and aesthetics in section one, which will lead into the idea of *lex talionis* and the importance of symmetry within revenge in the musical's presentation in section two, and finally will analyze the tragic elements of the show in section three.

## MIMESIS AND AESTHETICS

The innate structure of a play, especially a musical, involves the coordination of theatrics and fictional elements to make the storyline and character cohesively come together. The mimesis lays the groundwork for a play to form through words - the script, shapes - objects, or rhythms - soundtrack (Golden 18). Theater provides the specific space and spectacle to bring revenge storylines to life. It brings pity and fear conflicts to the forefront of the audience's mind, deep emotions within the human psyche that are ingrained in human nature. However, the tragic event is not happening to them despite the audience's emergence in the storyline. The emotions dissipate as the audience becomes snapped back into reality at the conclusion of the play as the effects of mimesis end. While the show's close can rip the audience out of the show's spectacle, the characters of varying personalities, backgrounds, and moralities in this fictional realm seemingly come into reality for the show's duration. As Golden specifies, “mimesis may use different means such as words or physical shapes or rhythms to represent noble or ignoble character and action… and is rooted deeply in human nature” (Golden 18). Imitation of people, who may be viewed as villains, heroes, or anti-heroes, mimics real-life human emotions and moralities. The portrayal of a character of high morality or lower morality ties into Forschler’s poetic justice, in which “the real world just doesn’t follow this principle as much as literature does… ‘the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily.’” (Forschler 15). The seemingly bad, especially the ignoble, can be served poetic justice within the play since the mimesis, the imitation of real life, can be orchestrated for the audience to view. The innate fictional nature of a play allows for exploring different aspects of human nature, specifically aspects of revenge justice, through the concept of mimesis.

Aesthetics influences the play’s presentation, including the display of the revenge plot and the wrongdoer’s retribution. Revenge plots must begin with a victim becoming harmed as their driving force for retribution. In *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, in the song “No Place like London,” Sweeney Todd recounts his story before the opening of the curtains: “There was a barber and his wife, and she was beautiful, a foolish barber and his wife… A pious vulture of the law, who with a gesture of his claw, removed the barber from his plate, then there was nothing but to wait, she would fall.” With a few lines of flashback, the audience hears the plight of the main character and gains an understanding of his situation. Judge Turpin, the “vulture of the law,” seemingly caused the “fall” or death of Sweeney Todd’s wife as stated in this number. Todd, in turn, deeply desires to bring pain onto the judge and murder him. The ability to set the aesthetics of the plot and Todd’s backstory characterization lays the groundwork to have sympathy for his character.

The aesthetics of Todd’s characterization further beyond his backstory and frame the presentation of his emotions. Despite Todd’s extreme measures taken due to anger, the murder of Judge Turpin, the audience may relate to anger out of a wronged action. Anger is a basic human emotion and a part of human nature. With Todd’s anti-hero status, as a character who was wronged and decided to take justice into his own hands, the audience will be engaged with his narrative and justify his action. As found in Mina Tsay and Maja Krakowiak’s study regarding why viewers perceive anti-heroes positively, their research found that “the greater the perceived similarity between the viewer and character, the more likely one is to justify the immoral actions of the character” (Tsay &

Krakowiak 8). Through the theatrical imitation of anger that the character Todd channels, the audience may bridge similarities between themselves and Todd. The viewers will justify his actions for it is "driven by protective mechanisms to maintain their self-concepts" when the viewer experiences anger themselves (Tsay & Krakowiak 8). When a character filled with rage vows revenge, and the audience connects to those feelings of anger, they want to give the characters the benefit of the doubt and pity they would like to receive in those instances within real life. A small level of moral disengagement with an anti-hero can be seen through the connection of human emotion that theater evokes from an audience member as seen in Todd's character. Aesthetics in theater, at its core, is important for the development of the character and narrative and the perception of the show that the audience builds throughout its duration.

## LEX TALIONIS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMMETRY WITHIN REVENGE

To understand an audience's perception of revenge, the action should be viewed from a psychological and philosophical lens. *Lex talionis* acts as a counterbalance to the Golden Rule of "do unto others as you would have done unto you," in which the individual remains passive until another person or group wrongs said individual (Forschler 4). Not only does this mean that the victim harms the wrongdoer, but the wrongdoer must feel equivalent harm. *Lex talionis* does not explicitly state if equality comes from the inherent pain inflicted or if it is the method of injury, but to the victim, such as Todd, ensuring the pain of the wrongdoer takes precedence over any other aspect. Tripp's psychological study affirms that the audience desires an equivalence of consequences as justification for vengeance, for "revenge acts that are equal in their provocations in damage caused are judged as more acceptable, tolerable, just, and ethical than unequal acts" (Tripp et al. 14). A "symmetry of consequences" creates a more positive view of Todd's revenge; since Todd's wife is deemed dead due to Judge Turpin, Todd has "equal consequence" in the judge ending up dead (Tripp et al. 14). Todd exercises that idea of *lex talionis*, because Judge Turpin destroyed Todd's life through his wife's supposed death. Now Todd seeks to destroy Turpin's life so that Turpin may experience the deep pain that Todd felt. Therefore, the audience may view Todd's actions as morally justified, for equal consequences, and the philosophy of *lex talionis* has been satisfied.

Not only does the consequence of revenge matter, but the manner in which the revenge unfolds. Tripp and his colleagues assert the aspect of aesthetics for the explanation: "asymmetric methods are better because they are typically more covert... [and] maybe more aesthetically pleasing when it is not simply a repetition of the provocation" (Tripp et al. 14). The repetitiveness lessens the novelty factor of a storyline, as the importance of aesthetics for a play is reinforced. The audience may judge the character as a watered-down cliche, in which their engagement and interest in the play decrease. The nature of asymmetrical methods keeps the audience captivated, as an element of grandiose plotting may fascinate them. In *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, Todd not only plans to murder Judge Turpin but plans to do so with his own flair. As a former barber, he proposes an elaborate scheme to lure the Judge into his workspace. In the end, he aims to end the judge's life through a slow cut to the throat from his barber knife.

But how is a revenge plot judged from a moral standpoint of asymmetrical methods? As stated previously, the idea of *lex talionis* does not explicitly note if equality comes from the inherent pain inflicted or if it is the method of injury. Still, to an external party, Todd has violated the rule of this philosophy. While Todd is inflicting harm on the judge, the mode of his physicality is not equal. The judge did not directly kill Todd's wife. Rather, she supposedly "poisoned herself. Arsenic from the apothecary on the corner" due to the judge's unrelenting pursuit, as Mrs. Lovett accounts. For *lex talionis* to truly be adhered to, Todd cannot directly murder the judge, rather, he must bring suffering to someone in the judge's life. This small but important distinction through the philosophy of *lex talionis* must be noted, for it cannot be truly achieved within this musical. The judge does not have close relationships with people close to him, nor would it be ethically sound for Todd to hurt innocent individuals. While *lex talionis* cannot be followed literally within the narrative, it is more productive to discuss *lex talionis* as a version of consequences rather than methods. Todd's original revenge plan involved bringing pain to the judge, which can only be achieved through asymmetrical means, as stated. However, as the narrative continues, Todd does not adhere to his revenge solely against Judge Turpin, which begins the tragedy of his character.

While no character specifically plots revenge upon Todd, his cascade of actions leads to his demise at the conclusion of the musical. As his anger begins to consume him, he begins to have a mental breakdown in the song titled "Epiphany." Todd sings, "No, we all deserve to die! Tell you why Mrs. Lovett, tell you why. Because the lives of the wicked should be made brief. For the rest of us, death will be a relief. We all deserve to die! And I'll never see Johanna. No, I'll never hug my girl to me" (Sondheim 60). While Todd originally seeks revenge solely on the judge, his anger begins to consume him. The first few lines of this quote have him singing in a heightened, crazed fashion, with the music mimicking the emotion of intensity and disarray through quick notes. These lines indicate the anger and passion he feels toward the judge begin to manifest in ways that his judgment becomes clouded. The mood shifts rapidly in the lines, "I'll never see Johann. No, I'll never hug my girl to me," for his agony and sadness emerge through his seeming output of rage. His character grieves the loss of his wife and his child's presence in his life. He is tormented by his inner anger and grief, believing that "death will be relief." He begins killing his clients with razors, and his accomplice bakes the bodies in the pies as a means of disposal. He ultimately commits these acts due to his immense turmoil and anger, which ultimately leads to his tragedy.

The rules of symmetrical consequences and *lex talionis* become violated as his revenge no longer directly deals with the judge. Therefore, Todd's character slowly inches toward the position of a wrongdoer in the audience's minds. As Golden phrases it, the character begins to have a "moral pollution" in which the moral purity of the character is lost, as seen in Todd's indiscriminate killing (Golden 17). Without moral purity, Todd's actions are deserving of punishment—even as the protagonist of the story. Forschler refers to an event such as this to be poetic justice: "injury coming to a wrongdoer that is both roughly equivalent to and caused by his wrongdoing," but "[un]anticipated by [the wrongdoer]" and "nor primarily inflicted on him by other persons as part of an intention to punish his wrongdoing" (Forschler 5). The infliction of pain that the wrongdoer experiences must be derived from their original immoral act through a cascade of events. Innately this sequence of events means that the wrongdoer does not intend this reverberation of their action; instead, the act creeps up onto them, which only spectators may see coming. Cosmic retribution occurs, in which sequential steps lead to cohesive and satisfactory harm to the individual without input from a victim. The idea of karma can be seen as defined by Ardeshir Ruttonji Wadia, a renowned author in India in her work "Philosophical Implications of the Doctrine of Karma,": the energy and actions an individual puts into the world will eventually be reflected back to them or seen as a low of cause and effect in a moral sphere (Wadia, 1). While both good and bad karma exists, bad karma is what makes poetic justice satisfactory to witness.

## THE TRAGIC ELEMENTS

The poetic justice that Todd must face ties into the tragedy of his character and the subsequent feeling of catharsis that the audience experiences. While Todd commits acts of immoral nature in the framework of revenge, his storyline leaves room for sympathy in the form of tragedy. As defined by Golden, "tragedy demonstrates the deed of horror in the drama, of itself an act of moral pollution was performed in essential ignorance" (Golden 17). The audience cognitively absolves the character of their seemingly immoral actions due to the character's ignorance. The audience does not categorize the character as a villain, for the character committed their actions under a pretense. Under a pretense provided by Mrs. Lovett, Todd believes his wife to be dead and blames Judge Turpin. In the wake of his passion, he kills a poor beggar woman, who reveals to be his wife after her death. Mrs. Lovett exclaims in defense, "better you should think she was dead…yes, I lied…" to which Todd screams in a tone full of grief and sorrow, "WHAT HAVE I DONE?" At this moment, Todd's ignorance, and up to this point of the show, the audience's ignorance, is unveiled. Any reservation the audience may have for the character transforms mostly into pity as the audience watches Todd lament with his dead wife cradled in his arms. His karma-ridden death leaves the audience feeling bittersweet due to its tragic nature. Since he committed his actions out of ignorance, the audience can "exonerate the [character] from the charge of moral pollution and consequently feel requisite emotions of pity and fear" (Golden 17). The audience feels the height of pity for Todd immediately following his death, for even though he committed unjust actions, he did so out of ignorance.

Todd's moral pollution is necessary for a tragic character as it enables empathy from the audience. His tragedy occurs through moral pollution of extreme passion and anger, in which his unjust actions of revenge are dealt with poetically. Watching the tragedy of a virtuous character would leave the audience disappointed, as the character is undeserving of misfortune. Suppose the tragedy occurs in an inherently evil character. In that case, the play contains no tragedy, for the character deserves ruin and would not cause feelings of pity or fear from the audience. The character must be one with moral justification while also possessing flawed qualities to create a tragic play. Hilde Vinje describes this phenomenon as a "middle character" in which the tragic character morally lies between virtuosity and villainy and "by definition [has] at least one flaw" (Vinje 8). Sweeney Todd would qualify as a middle character in which tragedy falls upon him. While some viewers may argue that Todd is vicious with the slashing of the victim's throats and butchering them into pies, it is the judge's wrongdoing that brings Todd's anger to the point of violence. Before the judge mettled with Todd's life, he lived happily with a wife and child, causing no significant issues to those around him. The judge wrongfully uses his status in the town to sentence Todd to prison under a rigged trial so that he could steal his wife and child for himself. His passionate anger toward the judge becomes his large flaw, which engulfs his whole demeanor and causes him to commit murder. The story frames the judge as the villain and Todd as a victim and, therefore, will not be the evil found within the play's narrative. As an anti-hero, Todd holds the qualities that would designate him as a middle character and therefore deserving of some level of pity and fear arising from the audience, the hallmark emotions of tragedy for a viewer to experience.

The audience feels both pity and fear through a tragic event in a play. According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, fear stemming from catharsis forms through "what we pity in others, we fear for ourselves," for the tragic flaw is nothing more than a human trait (Sachs). Todd's passion and anger can take hold of almost anyone in real life and lead an audience member to fear an unforeseen negative outcome of themselves following a similar trait pattern. Through this plotline, the viewer acknowledges that they can cause their own suffering. Goethe, an analysis of Aristotle, states: "tragic completeness is achieved by the perfect balance of emotions attendant on human suffering [and] their resolution or reconciliation" (Boyle 4). With the end of Todd's life, the tragedy comes to an emotionally heavy close. Still, the pity for Todd ends with the understanding that the character would no longer be suffering from the knowledge that he killed his wife. The feelings of fear extinguish, for there is comfort in recognizing the flaw within oneself as something to monitor. Despite the horrific deeds he committed, Todd's ignorance brings out the tragedy of his character arc, leaving the audience in pity, fear, and subsequent catharsis, a release of internal tensions from an output of emotion. The catharsis arises cognitively, and when the emotions emerge through the musical, they dissipate as the show comes to a close through cognitive processes.

## CONCLUSION

As an anti-hero undergoing a tragic revenge arc, Sweeney Todd offers a case study to analyze such a narrative. Despite the seemingly morally reprehensible actions this anti-hero protagonist may commit, the protagonist status of the character does not omit them from justice. Through the aesthetics and mimesis of the show, the viewer gains sympathy for the character's background and cause. However, once the character commits actions that are beyond their deserved retribution through more extreme actions, the character loses the audience's approval, for the idea of symmetrical consequences regarding revenge has been violated. Therefore, the tragedy of the character brings together feelings of poetic justice and catharsis, for feelings of justice, pity, and fear converge. Revenge may be a passion deep within human nature, the feeling of justice to be served through the philosophy of *lex talionis*. The vulnerability that comes with emotions, in which an individual can act irrationally and cause their own downfall, digs at a fear that the viewer may endure. While audiences may normally try to sequester the emotions of grief, anger, and despair, narratives with prominent anti-heroes bring forth these emotions. Thus, these forms of media act as a platform for the evaluation of ourselves and of others. A flawed character such as Todd reflects the innate nature of humanity and, therefore, the complex nature of people as a whole. The anti-hero style of the narrative ultimately does not taint the viewer's ethics and morality; rather, it provides a platform for audiences to keep engaged while the inner intricacies of human morals and justice can be explored.

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**Aparnaa Muthaiah**

# Bharatanatyam in the US: Exploring Cultural Transmission Through Dance by Immigrant Gurus


## ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to explain how dance functions as the physical embodiment of culture, more specifically exploring how the abstract concept of Indian culture is taught through a concrete medium such as Bharatanatyam, an Indian classical dance form originating from Tamil Nadu, South India. This paper specifically investigates the essential part immigrant gurus play when transmitting Indian culture to American-born students part of the Indian diaspora using personal experience and interviews with the guru Rashmi Sudheendra. Born and brought up in India, Sudheendra teaches her native culture through Bharatanatyam to students who feel as outsiders to their own culture. This situation gives rise to the question of how and why cultural transmission is affected by differing cultural and educational values between India and the US. To answer this question, this paper examines the importance of cultural knowledge to learn Bharatanatyam, the nature of a typical dance class conducted in America, and the guru's role in the process. Through an ethnographic and phenomenological analysis comprised of three macroscopic lenses—(1) inhaling, exhaling, and transforming culture, (2) high-context vs. low-context culture, and (3) gnosis vs. episteme—the results suggest that cultural transmission heavily depends on an environment's predominant culture, communication, and educational ways. Moreover, the conclusions of this paper establish the crucial, expanded role immigrant Bharatanatyam gurus take on in the US as tradition transformers, cultural storytellers, and revivers of gnosis.*


## INTRODUCTION

As a two-year-old wobbling from side to side, I routinely stood two feet away from our Sony CRT TV, flailing my arms and nonsensically dancing to upbeat Tamil-language movie songs. By the time I was five, I regularly stood wide-eyed near the front door and hopped from one foot to the other with a water bottle in one hand and my dad's car keys in the other, eager to arrive early at my weekly Indian classical dance classes.

At the age of twelve, I formally pursued a diploma in Bharatanatyam and completed my *arangetram* (solo graduation performance) shortly after. Little did I know then that learning Bharatanatyam in the US would become such a large part of my life and identity. Now that I reflect upon my Bharatanatyam education and journey, I realize the immensity of the social and cultural impact it has had on me as a child and now as an adult. I found a community of dancers facing similar struggles, such as balancing American and Indian cultural values, formed a close relationship with my dance teacher Rashmi Sudheendra, or as I affectionately call her Rashmi Aunty, and above all, developed a deeper understanding of Hindu mythology and connected to my native culture despite living abroad.

Interestingly, learning rather than absorbing one's native culture is not uncommon. In fact, given that the world's migration rate is accelerating and multicultural identities are more prevalent than ever, several scholars have rightfully shed light on the alternative, increasingly commonplace method of connecting with one's cultural heritage through mediums such as dance, music, and food within the confines of a different, dominant culture. For instance, in her article "'In Between Spaces': an Investigation Into the Embodiment of Culture in Contemporary Dance," Lucy Smith coined the term "in-between identities," where dancers practicing the art form out of their country of origin take on a hybrid nature, merge aspects of traditional dance with contemporary dance, and acknowledge their roots while expanding their reach to break away from strict conventional norms (2008, 80). On the other hand, in her article "Traditional Challenges, Challenging Tradition: Helping Students Find Agency in Bharata-Natyam at the Junction of Ancient Indian Thought, Somatic Practices & Feminist Pedagogy," Sumana Mandala, a Bharatanatyam dancer who studied dance in the US, argues that American-born Indian students find themselves balancing between two distinct spaces, one deemed as "Indian-ness" (e.g., temples, dance classes, cultural events) and the other as "American-ness" (e.g., school, college, shopping malls), often failing to bridge the gap between the two cultures as Smith believes (2021, 94). Clearly, Mandala and Smith focus on a student dancer's perspective and the development of multi-layered cultural identities. However, Bharatanatyam is a two-way street, with both the *guru* (teacher) and *shishya* (student) heavily invested in the education process.

Abstract ideas of Hindu culture are transmitted through concrete mediums such as the Indian classical dance Bharatanatyam. As immigration has facilitated the spreading of culture, immigrants now teach cultural dances outside of their native countries. Consequently, while students of the dance form become increasingly diverse, immigrant teachers must take on new roles as culture bearers and tradition developers in non-native environments. The expansion of a teacher's role transforms traditional dance pedagogy into an inclusive and authentic method. As a result, teachers combat feelings of homesickness by practicing and adapting their culture through dance, illustrating the dynamic, intertwined nature of dance, culture, and tradition.

Thus, I investigate the lesser covered experience of immigrant teachers teaching their native culture through dance. Moreover, since one's environment plays a vital role in how culture is acquired and passed down, and dance can embody an abstract concept such as culture, I analyze how and why cultural dances performed outside of native environments are taught differently. I build upon Mandala and Smith's consensus that a dance form can be more than just an art and varies between communities by investigating what the designation of dance—a physical medium through which culture is relayed—means within the larger context of assimilation.

## AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Ethnography, which systematically focuses on collective customs, and phenomenology, which highlights individual perspectives and lived experiences, can be combined to form a deeper understanding of culture and community as a whole. Unfortunately, as Leonard Primiano points out, an overwhelming issue is that folklorists have often focused on historical, established records with a scientific lens, displaying very little interest in personal experiences that ethnography and phenomenology value. In his article "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife," he notes that through a vernacular study that takes what people say, feel, and experience seriously, scholars can do "justice to belief and lived experience," which is what ethnography encompasses (Primiano 1995, 41). Through this study, I hope to combat what he has cited as an issue with contemporary literature on religion and culture by taking the perspective of studying "vernacular culture," which recognizes the importance of various experiences of individuals.

To study Hindu cultural transmission through Bharatnatyam in an ethnographic way, I could think of no better individual to interview than my own *guru* Rashmi Sudheendra, who not only taught me dance itself but also supplemented this knowledge by teaching me about the art form's origins, history, purpose, and lineage. Rashmi Sudheendra is a performer of the Pandanallur style of the Indian classical dance Bharatanatyam (see figure 1). She grew up in the city of Mysore in Karnataka, India, learning Bharatanatyam from her accomplished *guru* Dr. Vasundara Doraswamy from the young age of four. During her twelve years of training, she earned first place in her Bharatanatyam Vidwath examination offered by the Karnataka government, completed her senior exams in Carnatic vocal music, participated in several dance dramas directed by her guru, and completed her *arangetram*. In 2000, she moved to the US, teaching and performing at various dance schools and local temples throughout the tri-state area. In 2009, between attending the online University of Phoenix to earn her Master's degree and taking care of her three sons, she began teaching her neighbor's children Bharatanatyam, using her living room as a makeshift studio. Soon after that, in 2013, Sudheendra opened and registered her dance studio Navaranjitha Performing Arts Center (NRPAC), becoming a full-time Bharatanatyam *guru* to over 100 children and adults in Franklin Park, Hillsborough, Plainsboro-West Windsor, and Monroe Townships in New Jersey.


Figure 1. *Guru* Rashmi Sudheendra posing as Lord Shiva, the God of Dance

I interviewed my *guru* for one hour on two separate occasions, inquiring about her experiences and lessons she learned throughout her journey teaching American-born Indian students. Through this, I gathered essential data on the role of an immigrant dance *guru* in a non-native environment, the transmission of culture through dance, and the influence that this has on an individual student and community as a whole, doing justice to "lived experiences" as Primiano urges (1995, 41).

## CULTURAL HISTORY OF BHARATANATYAM

Hinduism and Indian mythology, subsets of Hindu culture, are deeply entrenched within the classical dance form Bharatanatyam. Given the strong connection between the dance form and Hindu Gods, it is only fitting to revisit the early, divine beginnings of the dance form. The most common origin story many teachers tell their students goes as follows. Concerned that humans would not correctly comprehend and abide by the complicated *Vedas* (defining ancient scriptures of Hinduism), other gods approached Brahma the Creator, seeking a solution. Brahma created a fifth *Veda*, namely the *Natya Veda*, by combining the words of *Rig Veda*, emotional expressions of *Yajur Veda*, music of *Sama Veda*, and emotions of *Atharva Veda*, passing the completed piece to powerful Sage Bharatha Muni. Using this knowledge, Sage Bharatha Muni wrote the *Natya Shastra*, an Indian text on the performing arts containing 36 chapters and 600 Sanskrit verses on dance, art, music, theater, philosophy, and mythology. While Sudheendra has not had time to extensively study each chapter of the book, from the 25% she has covered, her interpretation of the *Natya Shastra* is that Bharatanatyam is not simply dance for entertainment. Instead, it is a form of spiritual and religious connection for both the dancer and audience members. Further supporting the idea of dance as a way to become spiritually elevated, Lord Shiva imparted both *Thandavam* (masculine, rigorous dance performed by his alternate form Lord Nataraja, otherwise known as the Hindu God of Dance) and *Lasya Natya* (elegant, feminine movements), which are both outlined in the *Natya Shastra* as well. Given such a divine origin and mythological connection, it is clear that cultural and religious knowledge are vital for the practice and spread of Bharatanatyam. When explaining Bharatanatyam's origin story, Sudheendra, a dancer through and through, accompanied her explanation with hand movements and facial expressions and physically demonstrated the difference between *Thandavam* and *Lasya Natya* (Personal communication, February 8, 2022). Moreover, beyond a text, several aspects of the dance practice itself are tied to Hindu culture and religion. Nearly every Bharatanatyam item choreographed and taught is in praise of a Hindu god or goddess, depicting a particular mythological story and showcasing Hindu cultural and religious knowledge through physical and expressive body movements. Sudheendra mentions that dancing and taking on the character of such Hindu gods and goddesses relieves stress and calms her. Although the meaning of dance has changed from enjoyment to enlightenment for her, she speculates that many American-born Indian students have yet to feel a deeper connection and solely experience intangible Indian culture through dance. Regardless of this limited spiritual elevation, students learn and acknowledge their culture, two behaviors essential to learning and performing Bharatanatyam.

## THE PRACTICE OF TRADITION IN A TYPICAL DANCE CLASS IN THE US

Conventionally, tradition is thought of as static repetition of long-standing practices, which overlooks its dynamic repetition. In "Introduction: The Individual and Tradition", authors Ray Cashman, Tom Mould, and Pravina Shukla introduce tradition's ever-changing nature by theoretically deconstructing the broad term into two defining characteristics: process and resource. On a fundamental level, tradition is routinely passed down from generation to generation. Beyond this basic idea, tradition can be defined as both a verb and a noun to expand on the common perception of tradition as a static concept. As an action, tradition is the future extracted from the past. In turn, individuals are free to draw upon tradition as they see fit, emphasizing what the authors call the "agency of the individual," or individual freedom, as Cashman, Mould, and Shukla set forth (Cashman et al. 2011, 3). In other words, tradition is an action: an individual picks, practices, and relays aspects of traditions they find necessary to produce a modified version of said traditions for the future. This definition builds upon the common understanding of passing down tradition by introducing it as an evolutionary yet recycling process, where each generational transition betters and refines tradition. As a resource, tradition is a publicly accessible resource that is "as pervasive as it is malleable," or as widespread as moldable (Cashman et al., 2011, 3). If tradition was indeed a highly rigid, unchangeable notion, then individuals would have had to abide by stringent rules and suppress their individuality or defy the rules and risk being othered by worshipful followers of tradition. Moreover, Henry Glassie's book on Turkish artisans, *Turkish Traditional Art Today*, further affirms the consideration of tradition as a process and resource. He explains that instead of a simple transfer between master and student, artisans put their master's ways into practice by "inhaling" the instruction, "exhaling" their innovation, and further transforming their craft through a free and evolving process (Glassie 1993; cited in Cashman et al. 2011, 4). In this example, the master is the resource aspect of tradition while the artisan learners are experiencing the process side of tradition.

Just as scholars Cashman, Mould, and Shukla use Glassie's terminology of inhaling, exhaling, and transforming tradition, immigrant Bharatanatyam teachers take in their own guru's teachings, apply them to a new environment, and transform traditional pedagogy. Bharatanatyam dance classes are traditionally taught in a *gurukulam*, an ancient Indian residential schooling system involving the guru, student, and student's family. Now, the art form is taught in various settings such as temples, basements, outside, and dance studios. Students are expected to attend weekly one-hour classes and attend extra classes if necessary. Sudheendra is not as strict with her students' attire but prefers and encourages students to come in *kurta pajamas* (traditional Indian top and bottom) with a *dupatta* (veil) tied around their waist, which allows for free movement and proper posture. Beginner dancers often enter the class early and sit down along the sides of the studio, eager to observe the ongoing class. Sudheendra encourages this practice—it allows the younger dancers to learn through observation and establishes the older dancers as role models, encouraging them to take in Indian culture. Each class begins and ends with *Namaskaram*, or salutation, where the dancer seeks permission from Mother Earth for stomping on her, as well as respect and blessings from God, their guru, and the audience. Through this short salutation consisting of hand and leg movements, dancers gain a sense of respect and obedience. Given that the art form is heavily physical, dancers stretch and strengthen every part of their body, especially their hands and legs, at the start of every class. In addition to typical bodily warm-ups like lunges and stretches, dancers practice salient movements unique to Bharatanatyam, such as neck and eye movements: students practice moving their neck side-to-side while keeping their shoulders still and head leveled, moving their eyes side-to-side, up and down, and in a circle, and assuming *aramandi* (half-sitting position) where a dancer squats halfway down and joins their heels while pointing their toes outward. After students are

Figure 2. *Guru* Rashmi Sudheendra conducting class

warmed up, they practice *adavus*, or elementary steps of Bharatanatyam (see figure 2). These steps are the foundation of Bharatanatyam, containing precise leg positions, body postures, eye movements, and hand gestures that follow the rhythm and syllables sung by the teacher. Sudheendra explains *adavus* as analogous to the alphabet: just as students must learn each letter before writing words and sentences, dancers must learn and perfect each *adavu* before learning and performing full dance pieces. Only after does the *guru* begin teaching dance routines, which can take anywhere from five to fifteen weeks to train and master, depending on the length and complexity of the dance piece and the student's capabilities.

Bharatanatyam has been passed down from generation to generation through a highly traditional, linear pattern. The *shishya* is content with keenly observing and mimicking the *guru* under the pretense that the student is highly knowledgeable about Hindu mythology and culture represented in the classical dance. However, as the art form made its way to the international stage, Bharatanatyam teachers have felt the need to adapt their conventional methods to fit a new cultural context that recognizes each student's unique background and often limited cultural understanding. Thus, given that Bharatanatyam is deeply based upon Hindu epics and deities, Sudheendra finds it imperative to spend entire dance classes explaining the cultural and mythological context of dance to students before teaching the dance routine itself, likely to make up for the lack of Hindu cultural immersion that American students face. Then, around halfway through the class, Sudheendra transitions into teaching new dance pieces. She explains the story behind the work before physically teaching the choreography to ensure that each student has a clear contextual understanding. Moreover, by learning the religious and cultural context, students can better embrace the characters and express appropriate emotions. Afterward, Sudheendra depicts the story herself, first allowing the class to observe and follow. However, she cautions against pure imitation and prefers that students use her demonstration as a jumping-off point for their own facial expressions and bodily movement, something her own *guru* did not necessarily emphasize. Essentially, students listen and take in their guru's words, then express them through dance. To conclude the class, each student performs the Namaskaram once again to thank God, their guru, and the audience for a successful session and their continued blessings.

The deconstruction of tradition as a process and resource is strongly applicable to culture, as illustrated by many immigrant *gurus*.

For instance, Sudheendra expresses her individual choices and relays what she deems fit for her students, representing an active process. At the same time, she draws upon her own guru's teachings and contributes to new traditions applicable to unconventional environments, depicting culture as a resource. Sudheendra's change to unconventional translational methods of teaching Bharatanatyam to multicultural learners and American-born Indians suggests that new, adaptive ways of teaching Bharatanatyam within a new environment encourage conversational understanding and further strengthen the bond and passing of knowledge between a teacher and student. Through this imparting of knowledge, she illustrates how dance teachers in America are more than just dance teachers—instead, they are primary sources of cultural knowledge for students. In other words, beyond passing down the dance itself to students training in the US, a *guru* heightens a student's cultural understanding by stimulating an environment that mimics the absorption of culture through one's surroundings, as students training in India experience.

## THE GURU AS A STORYTELLER

Communication, a receptive and expressive behavior that is vital in education, is heavily dependent on the context and environment in which the teacher passes on their knowledge. Bharatanatyam *gurus* in the US, therefore, must adopt different methods than those in India. In his article "Unstated features of the cultural context of learning," Edward Hall distinguishes between communication in high-context cultures and low-context cultures. As the name implies, high-context cultures rely heavily on contextual surroundings, where communication is subtle, implicit, and indirect; this is common in many Asian countries like Japan, China, and India. On the other hand, low-context cultures favor concise, clear, and direct communication, which is prevalent in the US (Hall 1989; cited in Alter 2002, 29). Given that teaching is a highly communicative process, Bharatanatyam *gurus* must take an art form traditionally taught in a high-context culture and apply it to a low-context culture, which suggests that the instructor must make certain adjustments.

Earlier in her career, Sudheendra taught students just as her *guru* had taught her, simply demonstrating movements and expecting students to reciprocate. Given the blank stares and confusion students initially displayed, she quickly learned how ineffective such teaching was within another cultural context. Instead, she assumed that students had little to no knowledge about the Bharatanatyam's culture and supplemented physical training with verbal instruction and explanations of culture, taking on the role of a storyteller. One prominent example Sudheendra highlights time and time again is a piece titled navarasa, the nine emotions of the Hindu goddess Devi. The nine emotions—love, laughter, sorrow, anger, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, and peace—are complex emotions that young students have yet to truly experience, let alone express through dance. Instead of worrying that such expressions would be complicated for students to embody and would appear artificial, she sits down with her students and explains the story they will be depicting. She portrays each emotion as well as the meaning of the lyrics, coupling her explanations with meaningful hand gestures. This allows students to gain both a contextual and physical understanding. More specifically, Sudheendra choreographed a short story to illustrate laughter. Devi's half-elephant, half-human son, Lord Ganesha, loves sweet dumplings. Under the false belief that his mother left the house, Ganesha sneaks a full plate of sweets just in time to be caught red-handed by his mother. Rather than scold him as Ganesha anticipated, Devi laughs with motherly affection and feeds him more sweets herself. While the story seems simple, several emotions are harmoniously blended: a dancer must first take on the guise of Lord Ganesha, sneakily enter his house, rapidly consume sweets with childish innocence, and then transition into a tender, loving mother who affectionately laughs upon seeing her child's mischievous indulgence (see figures 3a and 3b).

Figure 3a. Lord Ganesha sneakily eating sweets

Figure 3b. Goddess Devi laughing at the sight of her son

Generally, after the *guru* provides the necessary context, they must translate the Sanskrit lyrics into English and Bharatanatyam hand gestures similar to the choreography. Once students understand the background of the dance piece they are learning, they can adjust their body movements and facial expressions accordingly, as each work is performed with a deep understanding that allows for some freestyling.

Ultimately, without the introduction of storytelling, immigrant *gurus* would likely struggle to effectively teach and pass on the art form to American-born Indian students due to the varying standard practices of communication between India and the US. Dance teachers in the US utilize narratives and verbalized modes of teaching to align with cultural values American-born Indians have imprinted on them by the dominant Western culture. In fact, such a role in storytelling agrees with what Suparna Banarjee, an immigrant dance teacher and researcher, experienced. In her paper on the adaptation of dance pedagogy for Western classrooms, entitled "Adaptation of Bharatanatyam Dance Pedagogy for Multicultural Classrooms: Questions and Relevance in North American University Setting," Banerjee explains that since "multicultural learners require a detailed account of the cultural and historical perspectives in comparison to the learners who are familiar with the culture," there is an apparent shift in methodology from "traditional teaching method to a more verbalised one" (2013, 31). Banerjee highlights the changing verbal nature of the art form as she taught multicultural learners, who can be considered similar to American-born Indians because they both have limited Indian cultural knowledge. She primarily argues that since such a verbal method of teaching "provided [her] with a strategy for mediating the technique and the culture in which the dance was situated," proper dance pedagogy must take into account a learner's background and knowledge (Banerjee 2013, 31). The change to non-traditional methods of teaching Bharatanatyam to American-born Indians suggests that new pedagogical methods that consider the dominant way of communication within a particular environment enhance the transmission of cultural knowledge between a teacher and student. Hence, as Edward Hall, Suparna Banerjee, and my informant Rashmi Sudheendra convey, the fact that American culture is a low-context culture plays a role in why Bharatanatyam education in the US heavily relies upon verbal explanations rather than imitative training traditionally followed in India, where high-context culture exists.

## THE BHARATANATYAM ARANGETRAM: A BATTLE OF GNOSIS VS. EPISTEME

Two contrasting methods of education, episteme and gnosis, are often at odds with one another. However, Bharatanatyam *gurus* in the US provide their students with the unique opportunity of gaining exposure to both educational approaches. Episteme, the Greek word for scientific knowledge, is information gained through proven, systematic study, highlighting outcome over causation. On the contrary, gnosis, the Greek word for esoteric knowledge, is information gained through verbal stories, emphasizing the journey of learning over results. While both terms can coexist and have done so previously, modernization and Western education have favored the replacement of gnosis with episteme (Mandala 2022, 2). As a result, in light of migration and globalization, dance pedagogy and training in the US, especially cultural dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, have experienced a similar shift.

Initially, dancers in India are encouraged to honor their dance lineage through acknowledgment, respect, and careful study of their dance style, origin, history, and associated choreographies, which Mandala states is lost when Bharatanatyam is studied outside of India in Western communities (Mandala 2022, 8). Rather than process-based learning, students tend to focus on credit, praise, and end products, which they have implicitly learned to do under their Western education. As a result, students who prioritize outcomes with a performance-focused mindset lose sight of their purpose, goals, and values.

The application of traditionally gnosis art forms to episteme environments is evident through the planning, preparation, and execution of Bharatanatyam *arangetrams* in the US. The performance takes a tremendous amount of planning, often done by the student's parents. After a teacher agrees that a student is ready to begin training for their *arangetram*, the student and her family decide a date and estimate the number of guests. As the performance date approaches, the parents reserve a venue, hire live musicians from India, arrange for food and caterers, print and


Figure 4. Traditional Bharatanatyam attire worn during my 2017 *arangetram* photoshoot

distribute invitations, hire professional lighting, audio, photo, and video personnel, and organize decorations. Aside from logistics, students, their families, and the *guru* work together to decide on and purchase costumes and accessories.

Traditional Bharatanatyam attire is comprised of vibrant, colorful saris with a pleated cloth that fans out during various leg movements and *aramandi*; traditional temple jewelry such as headpieces, necklaces, dangling earrings, and nose rings; a tight hair bun and long braid (often accomplished with the aid of hair extensions) along with orange and white flowers; *salangai* (anklets with bells that musically accompany a dancer's movements); and Alta red color dye artistically applied to the feet and hands to highlight a dancer's hand and leg movements. Also, heavy makeup that capitalizes on the dancer's eyes and eyebrows allows facial expressions to shine through. Altogether, the ensemble attracts the attention of audience members and is designed to aesthetically enhance and complement a dancer's performance (see figure 4).

The performance can range anywhere from two to three hours. The recital begins with the first dance piece, the *Pushpanjali*, an offering of flowers to God to bless the upcoming performance. Next is *Alarippu*, which contains the Tamil root word "alar," which means "blooming." Thus, the dance is a short, *Nritta* (pure rhythmic movement) piece that allows a dancer's body to open and immerse into the performance. Following *Alarippu* is another pure *Nritta* piece called *Jathiswaram*, with short, quick limb movements that test the dancer's stamina and primarily functions for aesthetic pleasure rather than storytelling. *Shabdam* is the first piece that introduces abhinaya (emotions expressed through the face) and is usually in praise of a Hindu god or deity. Sudheendra explains that such abhinaya is usually the hardest for students to grasp, as they either feel shy or do not experience that level of emotion in their own life, let alone have the ability to act it out. Emotions and stories are expressed through word-by-word translations of song lyrics into dance movements and acting of scenes. Sudheendra likens this to the theater but with Indian classical dance movements. The central and longest piece of the *margam* (traditional dance repertoire) is the *Varnam*, which tests the dancer's stamina, strength, and focus. It is composed of both emotion and movements at various speeds. Sudheendra does not teach this dance until she feels that the student has demonstrated commitment to their practice and the acting of emotion required for such a piece. Following this, the dancer performs the *Padam*, a dance that closely resembles a theatrical piece. Since this piece predominantly showcases a dancer's storytelling abilities through emotion and grace with minimal body movements, it is fitting that nearly every *Padam* is devoted to a Hindu god and their mythological story. The next dance, *Thillana*, begins with eye movements unique to many Indian classical dances and is followed by rhythmic, fast-paced movements. It is primarily a movement piece highlighting a dancer's artistic and aesthetic qualities. *Mangalam* is the ending of a dancer's repertoire that thanks God, their guru, and audience members for their time and support. It is a culmination of a dance performance, allowing the dancer to take in their accomplishments and feel the fruits of their rigorous training. The performance is then followed by speeches from the guru, parents, and performer thanking the audience for their attendance and inviting them to stay for food and pictures.

Several items, such as the venue, menu, guest list, costume colors, and decorations, are left to the freedom of the parents and the dancer. While this allows graduating dancers to express individuality, there is a slight drawback. As Rashmi Sudheendra mentions, many parents and students let the extravagance and pride associated with such *arangetrams* in the US overshadow a dancer's ability, competence, and passion for the art form, illustrating the unfortunate reality of episteme prevailing over gnosis as Mandala has noted (2021, 2). Due to such a misleading perception that strays away from the meaningful practice and spreading the art form, Sudheendra ensures that each *arangetram* honors the tradition of Bharatanatyam by explicitly reminding the student of their personal reasons for dancing, their hours of training over several years, and their future goals. Concurrently, she is also sure to satisfy the student and her family's desires by giving them the freedom to design invitations, decorate the stage and lobby, plan the menu, and more (Personal communication, March 18, 2022). She notes that while it is easy to say, executing an *arangetram* in a traditional manner that respects the art form yet entails the same lavishness that Western culture encourages is a difficult job, depicting the battle between gnosis (honoring the learning process and journey) and episteme (celebrating the result and accomplishment). Hence, one can conclude that in an epistemically ridden Western educational system, Bharatanatyam teachers bring back gnosis, allowing both pedagogical methods to coexist as they did before the 17th century CE. Thus, American-born Indian dancers can not only learn about their culture through dance, but also gain a glimpse of the gnosis form of education conventionally taught in India. While one form of education is not superior to another, such dancers likely have a more well-rounded educational experience than their Indian counterparts, as Western-taught Bharatanatyam offers them an exposure to gnosis in addition to episteme provided in Western schools.

## CONCLUSION

While culture is generally transmitted through social absorption, native dancers have engaged in cultural transmission through education and passing of knowledge rather than through experiential learning, as is common in India. Thus, cultural dances, like Bharatanatyam, historically taught with a strong focus on movements, have started to take on the new primary purpose of teaching culture in Western environments. In adapting teaching methods to enhance American-born Indian students' cultural knowledge while respecting the rich history behind the art form, immigrant Bharatanatyam *gurus* have taken on the role of cultural storytellers, transformers of tradition, and revivers of gnosis. More specifically, immigrant dance teachers establish a hybrid teaching practice that accommodates the need for conversation and curiosity encouraged by Western educational norms as well as the gnosis way of education—common to India—that focuses on the process and not the product. With such vital duties, dance teachers can be considered the ultimate culture bearers, providing native students unfamiliar with their heritage and non-native students with a medium through which culture can be learned in the absence of the ability to absorb it from one's surroundings. Thus, considering increased rates of migration and assimilation threatening the longevity of Indian culture abroad, immigrant *gurus* carry and diffuse Indian cultural values into foreign societies. Without dance teachers and culture bearers at large, society would likely welcome assimilation and adopt egalitarianism, where complete uniformity would eliminate all cultural differences. Without heterogeneity, meaning and uniqueness itself are lost. For instance, if every word had the same definition, the fundamental purpose no longer exists. Similarly, in terms of human cultural identity, originality and sense of self will be forgotten, and in a community that adopts dominant cultural values, there would be no incentive to celebrate or spread native practices. Hence, by sharing their art form, sustaining their native culture, and saving society from the absurdity of egalitarianism, dance teachers can be seen as the essential connection between ancestral cultural knowledge and the next generation of multicultural learners.

While this study reveals the outside factors that affect cultural transmission and an immigrant dance guru's role in the process, the conclusion that dance teachers are the ultimate culture bearers can serve as a stepping stone for dance education literature. Future studies can shed light on whether Bharatanatyam education itself has remained authentic and developed or has been appropriated and compromised due to immigrant teachers spreading their art form outside of its home of India. Nevertheless, beyond the physical benefits of Bharatanatyam, the classical dance heightens a student's spiritual and cultural knowledge, especially for those part of the Indian diaspora who lack the opportunity of absorbing Indian culture from their surroundings.

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**Interviews**

Rashmi Sudheendra, interview by author, February 8, 2022.

Rashmi Sudheendra, interview by author, March 18, 2022.


**Photos**

Figures 1, 2: Photos courtesy of Rashmi Sudheendra.

Figures 3a, 3b, 4: Photos by David Glasofer.

**Abdul-Rahman Kharboutli**

# A Faithful Facade: The Secular Motivations of Religious Sectarian Conflicts

## ABSTRACT

*Sectarian conflict is a frequent example of religious tension, often treated separately from broader interreligious spats. Of these conflicts, many researchers archived their histories, and others attempted to explain their inner workings. These previous studies mainly focused on their chosen cases, rarely straying from them. This paper contains explorations of works by various authors concerning history, religion, and sociology in conjunction with each other in order to study various sectarian conflicts. Unlike the common intuition, these conflicts are typically divorced from religion in all facets, save for sectarianism's ability to divide those of the same religion into finer sides. This paper argues against common belief, finding that most conflicts fought under the banner of religion actually have a large historical, political, or sociological precedent to them. These cases can be explained through the ideologies and rationalizations of various aforementioned researchers in order to understand why exactly this tends to be the case.*

## INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, about 85% of the population believes in some kind of religion, mostly organized. For these religions, sects exist inside them, yet dogmatic trouble creates contention in the faith. So, when a religious conflict begins between sects or between faiths, it is not uncommon to hear a familiar sentiment: Religion only serves to divide people further. One of the major global conflicts stems from religious dissension. My research has led to the conclusion that there is no difference between intra- and interreligious conflicts; rather, these conflicts hold many similarities in that they all possess an ulterior agenda in the secular realm. For instance, the Iran-Iraq war, which, while fought under the pretense of sectarianism, was entirely motivated by politics. Most religious contentions are revealed to be political or sociological in nature. Accredited authors, such as Adon Nasurallah Jamaludin, who wrote "Cities and Villages in the Religious Conflict Circle: Socio-Demographic Factors of Communal and Sectarian Conflict in West Java, Indonesia," and Sebastian Ille, who created "The evolution of sectarianism. Communications in nonlinear science & numerical simulation," have provided overwhelming evidence to suggest that conflicts believed to be religiously motivated are, indeed, secular in nature. These ideas can also be applied to Rousseau's concepts of *amour de patrie* and *amour propre*s. These terms refer to a love of one's nation and a love of one's self, respectively, which become intertwined with each other in many sociological interactions. Due to the sociopolitical implications of sectarian conflict, analysis can be organized into three categories: sociological, political, and historical. Although religion can play a minor influential function, most sectarian conflicts are sociopolitical at their core. As such, religious conflicts serve political interests to differentiate between "in" and "out" groups.

## THE SECULAR MECHANICS OF "RELIGIOUS" CONFLICT

On a sociological level, people gravitate towards communities that reaffirm their identity. In religious communities, this bolsters a sense of protection from those who are deemed different. However, underneath the facade of religious adherence, this antagonistic group mentality manifests in sectarian conflicts as confirmation bias rather than religious faith. In his work "Cities and Villages in the Religious Conflict Circle: Socio-Demographic Factors of Communal and Sectarian Conflict in West Java, Indonesia," Professor Adon Jamaludin uses cases in West Java, Indonesia to argue this point, and Steven Engles' "Rousseau and Imagined Communities" analyzes sociological processes in order to provide an explanation of such cases. Engles uses Rousseau's ideology, namely how societies form due to one's identification within that society, in conjunction with his own argument to speak about the sociological tendencies of people to form communities. He defines several forms of love, the most relevant being *amour de patrie*, or love of one's nation, and *amour propre*, or a love of self, and uses these terms to describe the creation of a community. Engles argues that, based on Rousseau's philosophy, if one identifies with a community, then they are able to direct their love of self, their *amour propre*, into a love for their nation or community, their *amour de patrie*. Through this phenomenon, imagined communities are created where there were none before and are loved and devoted to just as fiercely as one loves and is devoted to themselves

This tying of the love of self to the love of the community is the main mechanic behind sectarian conflict. This mechanic can be clearly seen in the interactions of religious conflict in West Java. By looking at two different groups of people, rural and urban people, and relating their levels of homogeneity and the conflicts seen, Jamaludin makes this conclusion:

> …sectarian issues of Muslims tend to develop in regencies but communal issues are more prevalent in cities… Urban and rural socio-demographic conditions influence the tendency of different forms of conflicts in their respective regions. Heterogeneous urban social conditions tend to have an impact on the form of communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians… On the other hand, homogeneous rural social conditions affect the internal forms of sectarian conflict amongst religious communities or fellow Muslims… (Jamaludin 4-5)

Thus, Jamaludin analyzes data in West Java and found that, as a consequence of ideas put forth by Engles, it is the degree of homogeneity that determines the form of conflict in a given society and not the faith that the people identify with. In his West Java study, Jamaludin analyzes two populations: the heterogeneous urban residents and the homogeneous rural residents. The heterogeneous urban population comprised a mixture of Christians and Muslims of various sects. By contrast, the homogenous rural demographic was predominantly Muslim. In the urban population, conflict arose from interreligious disagreements. Religious sects banded together under shared religion to contend against the oppositional group. However, in the rural population, intrareligious conflict arose due to the absence of a major oppositional religious group. By this, it can be observed that the level of homogeneity in a community is a major indicator of how religious or sectarian conflict will arise. They direct their love of self, their *amour propre*, into the love of their community, *amour de patrie*, the only thing differentiating the conflicts seen in West Java being *where* different groups of individuals have put their *amour de patrie*, a factor entirely based on the homogeneity of the population in question.

Usually, sects are just ways to denote sides of a conflict while playing no inherent role in the conflict itself. Generally, most sectarian conflicts begin with a real theological split, where the sides near-instantly adopt a political or social slant, and the conflicts become more and more secular until the conflict itself has nothing to do with the original religious grievances. This is due to a few factors. Sebastian Ille, a professor and journalist, modeled religious conflicts using game theory in his piece "The evolution of sectarianism." The main facet of his model is the power of coercion in these communities, which can be reaffirmed in the Sunni-Shia conflict. Ille argues that coercion is one of the biggest ways that group leaders influence people under them in order to more or less force them to stand in line with their beliefs and that sects act as a way for disparate communities to deal with each other. Instead of being certain, sectarian conflict arises only when the prospective gains of sects dealing with each other cross a critical point—a threshold in which the gains are unbalanced.

A real-life situation of this is seen in researcher Dr. Philipp Holtmann's "A Primer to the Sunni-Shia Conflict." Holtmann illustrates the history of the Sunni-Shiite split, which was quickly turned into a socio-political issue, exacerbated through centuries of violence between Sunni and Shiite states. Ultimately, Holtmann concludes that tensions between countries such as Iraq and Iran have shifted into a purely secular affair and that it would be inaccurate to blame the tension on religious strife, as described by Ille. Of the so-called religious conflict, he writes:

> The original struggle turns around the question if religio-political leadership should be passed on by bloodline (the Shiite imamate) or election (the Sunni caliphate). Today, this has become among some factions a fight over the monopoly to sacrifice and martyrdom, and it takes the form of a competition for political predominance in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran. (Holtmann 1)

Holtmann describes the modern-day conflict not in terms of religious ideology but in those of secular international rivalry, with religious affiliation serving as divisive teams instead. Though still fought under the banner of religion, the real war going on is much more practical.

Even though some conflicts begin as religious in nature, they almost always decay into secular conflicts. One such case is that of the Protestant-Catholic conflict, specifically in Ireland. The Protestant and Catholic churches do not differ much in actual religious service but, instead, act as a banner to rally behind their respective sects. Joseph Ruane, a researcher on related topics, wrote "Long conflict and how it ends: Protestants and Catholics in Europe and Ireland," a piece detailing the long history of the Protestand-Catholic conflict. Of each sect's purpose as a barrier, Ruane says of the purpose of the churches in that conflict:

> The political and geopolitical function assigned to religion further enhanced the power of the churches. The Church of Ireland was now the religious arm of the state, membership was proof of loyalty, a means to social and political advance… local churches provided valuable economic and social networks, and assured communal support in the frontier areas in the face of potential Catholic threat. (Ruane 119)

Membership of the Catholic Church in Ireland extended past theological power, and into real political and social power. Belonging to one sect or another is "proof of loyalty." The Church may have begun as a purely religious organization but quickly assumed real political responsibilities, and thus, the conflict followed, becoming more secularized.

This secularization is reminiscent of Paul Bew and Henry Patterson's "The Protestant-Catholic Conflict in Ulster," a historical recap of the conflict. The authors note that the faiths of people in Ireland usually dictated their position, exactly as Ruane describes the function of belonging to one Church or another. Bew and Patterson attribute the tension between groups as political, claiming it "...was the functioning of the Unionist state itself—the infamous 'Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People'...By openly demonstrating its distrust of Catholics…it demonstrated to the Protestant population just how seriously it took the threat of Catholic subversion" (Bew and Patterson 226). The authors attribute the conflict not to any religious discrepancy, just as Ruane illustrated. The real conflict comes from the social tension at play here between the English and the Irish.

## COMPLICATIONS AND WHY THEY AREN'T SO COMPLICATED

Theological beliefs *have* affected conflicts in the past, but anything can become sacred, and that sacredness usually acts as just a tool in conflicts. Marco Nilsson, an accredited author, explores religion's role in the Iraq-Iran conflict in his work "Causal beliefs and war termination: Religion and rational choice in the Iran–Iraq War"; specifically, how it influenced the attitude towards fighting and how it prolonged the war. Nilsson argues, "A combination of religiously based high offensive stakes, low perceived cost of war, and religious causal beliefs of high expected offensive capacity… contributed to the length of the war" (Nilsson 10). In other words, religious belief plays an influential role in galvanizing civilians to military enlistment and bearing the weight of its consequences. It may appear as though religion is a main contributing factor to this political conflict; however, Nilsson highlights that religious strife uncovers underlying sociopolitical issues and surreptitious agendas. Researchers Jeremy Gines and Scott Atran's "Sacred Value and Cultural Conflict" is a piece that deals heavily with conflicts that are steeped in religious complications, such as Nilsson's chosen case. For instance, the authors describe the interactions between Palestine and Israel over land or the religious separation of Indonesian schools. The view they put forth is that objects or ideas are not inherently sacred; rather, they argue that sacredness occurs when a population thinks that something, whether it be real or abstract, cannot be assigned value. Instead, sacred objects are those that are defined by the taboo in comparing them with mundane material objects. To Ginges and Atran, what makes an object sacred is its non-fungibility, not any actual sacredness. This sacredness, in turn, sparks conflict. As stated in the piece, the "...taboo leads to noninstumenatally rational commitments to a set of beliefs, practices, or places that might serve to both unify people within groups, and create conflicts between groups" (Ginges et al., 2). While the authors do coincide with Nilsson in the assertion that sectarianism (in the form of a sacred quality) *can* affect conflicts, they address the underlying issue with the claim of theological significance, that being religion's ability as a generic motivator, on the same level of other sacred values such as patriotism or loyalty to one's ethnic group. Religion in the Iran-Iraq war had only acted as a way to rally people. And thus, the argument returns to the realm of sociology, which has already seen that religious conflicts are, most often, secular.

In the past, there *have* been cases of purely religious conflicts, but they are evidenced to have been strictly religious and bearing sociopolitical effects. For instance, there has been much contention between Nigerian Muslims and the spiritualist sect of Islam, Sufism. Salisu Bala, an Islamic affairs scholar, observes the various stages of conflict between these two religious groups in his work "Sufism, Sects and Intra-Muslim Conflicts in Nigeria, 1804-1979." Never straying from theology, all argumentation was primarily based on religious tenants and how closely members adhered to these tenants. The author blames the idea of *Bid'a*, or theological innovations, as being the main motivation for these conflicts, isolating this from any secular motivation. Bala writes of the matter that *Bid'a* falls under five headings of sacred law: The obligatory, the unlawful, the recommended, the offensive, and the permissible. For the Sunni orthodox, Sufism as a whole falls under the fourth type of *Bid'a*, being an offensive and inappropriate innovation to the religion, such as "misinterpretation of the Qur'an, and using insulting or defamatory words against others while preaching" (Bala 89). In Bala's explanation of the core of the conflict, however, he has not captured the entire picture of the Sufi conflict in Nigeria. Robert Dowd, a political scientist, describes a different story in his work "Religious Diversity and Religious Tolerance: Lessons from Nigeria." This article reveals a much more political side to the conflict, going beyond what Bala dissects. Dowd describes a group of orthodox Muslims whose goal is to reject the acts of *Bid'a* described by Bala. But Dowd attributes this group with much more political actions, stating they had "accused Nigeria's Muslim elites… of selling out to secularists and Christians," and failed "...to promote the integration of religious and state authority…prompted northern politicians to enshrine the Shari'ah in the constitutions of northern states…Although the Shari'ah applies to Muslims only, many Christians in the twelve Shari'ah states claim that they have been relegated to second-class citizens in their own country…" (Dowd 622). This view of the Sufi-Orthodox conflict in Nigeria much closer aligns with a sociological view of the effects on sectarian conflicts and religious conflicts as a whole. That is not to say that Bala is incorrect. However, the real tension in the region ultimately returned to secularity, as the people in Nigeria disliked their leaders' politics and used the boundaries of sectarianism to rally against them; this is further exemplified by the oppression of Christians in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Religion serves as a convenient way to denote sides in conflicts, serving political interests rather than theological ones. And in cases where religion did play roles, they were minor and eventually turned into political scuffles. Salisu Bala, in his "Sufism, Sects and Intra-Muslim Conflicts in Nigeria, 1804-1979," and Marco Nilsson's "Casual beliefs and war termination," provided invaluable opportunities to explore opposing arguments. Robert Dowd's "Religious Diversity and Religious Tolerance: Lessons from Nigeria" was instrumental in analyzing the transition of Bala's pure theological conflict into a sociopolitical one, and Jeremy Ginges and Scott Atran's "Sacred Values and Cultural Conflict" enabled me to argue why cases such as the Iran-Iraq war does not find its core in theology. Steven Engel's "Rousseau and Imagined Communities" explained how it is possible for people of seemingly similar backgrounds to find strife with each other based on their identities. Sebastian Ille's "The evolution of sectarianism" uses game theory in order to provide a mathematical model that supports the idea of secular "sectarian" conflict. Joseph Ruane's "Long conflict and how it ends: Protestants and Catholics in Europe and Ireland" exposed the true role of the churches in Europe and how they served a secular role in their societies as proof of membership, with Paul Bew and Henry Patterson's "The Protestant-Catholic Conflict in Ulster" demonstrating the consequences of Ruane's description of social structure. And Philip Holtmann's "A Primer to the Sunni-Shia Conflict" served as a vital case to look at and compare to Ille's model. Through all these sources, it should be made clear that most, if not all, large-scale sectarian conflicts are, indeed, secular in their nature, with sectarian issues serving serendipitous political interests. When it is in the interest of one to wage conflict with another of a different group, it is almost a given, should there be a strong religious presence, that the war will be fought under the guise of that religion. This route obfuscates the true intentions and makes each side seem more willing to bear the costs of war, as described by Nilsson, as well as strengthening group identities. It is vital to recognize these sociological and political issues where they stand; believing them to be the works of religion, something that cannot be truly "solved," prevents a solution from being reached. Recognizing them as social or political issues allows for solutions to be made, which are typically much more cut-and-dry than theological ones.

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**Brandon Mark**

# The Benefits of Musical Flow on Well-Being and Happiness

## ABSTRACT

*Although many musicians experience the synergy between flow, music, and personal happiness/well-being, quantifying this relationship scientifically is challenging. Psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, coined the term "flow" in the late 1960s to describe the state of being or feeling one experiences when they are entirely immersed in an activity, such as playing music or a sport. Since then, researchers have hypothesized that engaging in musical activities directly stimulates a person's flow and can improve their happiness and well-being. However, those pursuing musical careers often suffer from incredible amounts of strain and anxiety and put pressure on themselves to meet others' expectations. This warrants the question: How can music, which is beneficial and healing to so many, have such disparate effects on one's emotions and mental health? In this essay, I explore the history and science behind the flow, music, and well-being nexus, and provide a potential remedy to the stressful side of music. Despite the negative emotions some individuals experience during their musical careers, I conclude that there is a strong correlation between flow and happiness and that, overall, music can improve one's happiness. Therefore, more research and attention should be focused on the connection between flow and happiness and how music can bridge the two.*

## INTRODUCTION

The date was April 12, 1929, and there was an exciting program planned for the evening at the Semperoper in Dresden, Germany. The Semperoper is a breathtaking venue reserved for only the best operas, ballets, and orchestras. Seating 1300 spectators, the Semperoper has beautifully painted murals, intricate chandeliers, large pillars emulating the types of architecture found during the Greek classical revival, and a large central seating area with an additional four layers of risers that circumscribe the hall. As the audience quietly filled the seats, it came to their attention that the evening's advertised program had been canceled and replaced by 12-year-old Yehudi Menuhin. An intrigued audience patiently waited for this new act, uncertain what this young child from

New York City would do. Murmurs and giggles echoed throughout the venue as Yehudi waddled onto the floor with his ¾-size violin. In front of the entire audience, stepping upon a podium center-stage, Yehudi confidently raised the bow to his violin and, with the first stroke, began playing Bach's violin concerto in E major no. 2. This 18-minute concerto contains many difficult passages that require refined musical and technical skills. And yet, to everyone's surprise, Yehudi Menuhin performed the concerto with ease. The young boy created such a rich and mature tone that one could easily mistake him for an older performer. He played like no one was listening, wholly entranced and one with his instrument and the music. An unnamed critic later said about Menuhin's performance, "there steps a fat little blond boy on the podium, and wins at once all hearts as in an irresistibly ludicrous way, like a penguin, he alternately places one foot down, then the other. But wait: you will stop laughing when he puts his bow to the violin to play Bach's violin concerto in E major no.2" (Berliner Zeitung).

Born on April 22, 1916, in New York City, Yehudi Menuhin grew up like any other ordinary boy. He enjoyed playing with his friends, eating ice cream, and going on long hikes. But what set Menuhin apart was his remarkable gift. From the age of 4, Menuhin received violin lessons and showed extraordinary talent from the very beginning. Besides his incredible raw musical talent, Yehudi would become a completely different person whenever he played his violin. He would become completely entranced in his playing to the point where his own father could not recognize him. "'He becomes a stranger to us––there is something uncanny about him,' Menuhin's father said" (Judge 15).

What possessed Menuhin was not some spirit or the devil; instead, he was experiencing flow. In the late 1960s, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term "flow," which describes the psychological phenomenon of being in a "state of full engagement, control, [and] concentration and action awareness" when participating in an activity that one thoroughly enjoys (Chirico et al. 2). Flow-related activities can yield positive mental and physical benefits as they can give people "autonomy, self-acceptance, and mastery" over themselves and their actions, ultimately leading to greater well-being and happiness (Kesebir 118). Musicians, in particular, often experience flow in a very controlled manner. Understanding how flow functions can help musicians maximize its benefits to the mind and body.

This research paper will analyze the physiology and psychology of musicians through the lens of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow and Daniel Haybron's philosophy of happiness. The first section, "Flow and Music," will explain the relationship between flow and music and why the two work so well together. The second section, "Musical SOARS," will show the connections between music and Haybron's SOARS; shedding light on how music and musical flow improve well-being. And finally, the section "A Possible Escape" will highlight the struggles some musicians face and how music can help them. Ultimately, having avenues of flow allows people to experience positive emotions and keeps them engaged in their activity; giving meaning to the things they do. Experiencing flow can thus make one happier.

## FLOW AND MUSIC

A flow-related activity will give people a sense of control, concentration, and attunement. These activities can be anything from sports to music to painting to writing. People can experience flow in anything that "engages us fully" and "absorbs us" (Seligman 1380). Experiencing flow is like being "in the zone," and is also "roughly the opposite of boredom" (Haybron 21). Flow is a result of becoming immersed in an activity, and gaining complete confidence and control over oneself and the activity. This is usually accompanied with intrinsic motivation and reward that forces the person to become engaged, and stay engaged, in the activity until its completion. For many people, music is the perfect path to achieving flow. Like sports or art, music encapsulates the definition of flow perfectly. For musicians, flow can transport people to a place where they become unrecognizable; completely immersed and entranced in becoming one with the music. Music is an activity that can engage many parts of the body and mind. For example, pianists have to master hand-eye coordination, rhythmic flexibility, emotional output, and musical score interpretation. Playing music fully engages the player, thus making flow readily obtainable.

The actions of a musician must be intentional and require a high level of focus, concentration, and expertise. Flow is "not usually regarded as an all-or-nothing peak experience" which means that flow can be experienced at varying degrees (de Manzano et al. 301). Playing and creating music is such an effective avenue of flow because it has the perfect "balance between challenges and skills required to best perform it" (Chirico et al. 2). This forces the performer to have deliberation while playing which grants high arousal levels; often having elevated valence (positive emotions) that come with it. Having "both dimensions of arousal and valence" at high levels coincides with experiencing flow (de Manzano et al. 302). Any activity that meets these requirements improves the chances of experiencing flow. Playing the piano continuously stimulates the "somatosensory, premotor, superior parietal, and inferior temporal areas" of the brain which engages musicians in music production and keeps them stimulated (Barrett et al. 2). Similar to an action potential firing off in the nervous system, when musicians reach a certain threshold needed to sustain flow they can further lose themselves which often leads to "distortion of time perception" and "loss of self-consciousness" (Chirico et al. 2). It is sometimes challenging to interrupt flow as they become lost in themselves and their activity.

Differences in flow are attributed to different levels of experience and expertise. Flow is obtained if the "task difficulty" is "equal to [a] person's ability" (de Manzano et al. 301). In the case of musicians, when a piece of music is too easy for the performer they may become bored, and their minds may start drifting. If a piece is above the musician's ability then feelings of frustration and anxiety may emerge. These scenarios would negatively impact the amount of flow a musician experiences. A study showed that "amateur students experienced flow less frequently (87%) than elite students did (95%)" and "amateur students also experienced higher 'loss of self-consciousness' levels than elite students did" (Chirico et al. 9). These findings imply that elite performers experience more flow because they have a greater control of their performance and of themselves. This comes down to both experience and expertise. Elite students have the technical ability to back up the pieces they play and the experience of playing in front of an audience purely because they have been playing for so long. These two factors play a big part in flow because the difference between amateurs and professionals becomes clear when put to the test. When amateur pianists are compared to professionals, "professional piano players did not recognize negative reactions of the mind and body" while performing in front of an audience, whereas amateur performers experienced higher anxiety levels despite their expertise levels being catered to the pieces they were performing (Kurara et al. 33). Lacking the experience of performing in front of others negatively impacted the flow amateur pianists experienced. Although both amateur and professionals experience flow, professionals are at a much higher and more refined level meaning they can experience flow at a more efficient rate.

Musical training and engagement positively influence brain development. Being a musician means being a multitasker with enhanced cognitive control, auditory recognition, memory, and even pattern recognition. Because musicians are regularly exposed to musical stimuli, "anatomical differences have been found between musicians' and non-musicians' auditory and motor cortices and the neural connectivity linking these areas" (Barrett et al. 2). This means that on a fundamental level, the brains of musicians are "consisting of changes in brain function or structure that affect behavior or cognition, underlies development, learning, rehabilitation from trauma, and skill refinement" (Barret et al. 2). Music promotes neural plasticity, making the brain more malleable and adaptive to auditory recognition, timbre, and cognitive and perceptual skills. When children start playing music at a young age when their brains are already extremely malleable the neural plasticity that music provides exposes children to developing literacy, language development, motor skills, social skills, self-confidence, and emotion. Children who "participated in musical activities talked more with parents and teachers" which likely led to higher levels of sociability, interpersonal communication, and self-esteem (Hallam 278). Music allows the brains and minds of children to develop at a heightened level and can contribute to "benefits in well-being and relaxation, benefits for breathing and posture, social benefits, spiritual benefits, emotional benefits, and benefits for the heart and the immune system" (Hallam 281). Having a more developed brain and mind can yield "biological and cognitive enhancements" to people who have musical training. This does not mean that one has to be a "musical prodigy to gain benefits from musical training"; even playing music for a few minutes each day can help improve brain function (Barrett et al.).

Changes in the brain's anatomy and function can hardwire someone to better experience flow. When music can impact so many parts of the brain, musicians can develop more "creativity, fine motor coordination, concentration, self-confidence, emotional sensitivity, social skills, team work, self-discipline, and relaxation" (Hallam 269). Developing these skills can result in changes in one's personality traits and how they learn. Musical training may foster what's called an "autotelic personality," where those who have it will have "opposite personality traits, such as curiosity and persistence[,] the ability to concentrate deeply but also to be open to novelty[,] and independence in conjunction with cooperation"

(Chirico et al. 3). Autotelic people are very receptive to change and can adapt to their environment while maintaining intense levels of determination and motivation. It is almost like music gives birth to people who are meant to experience flow. It is part of their personality to stay engaged in an activity despite adversities that may arise.

## MUSICAL SOARS

Many scholars have tried finding ways to reduce happiness into categories that give it a "blueprint," but happiness is a large umbrella term that cannot be easily defined. Happiness is entirely subjective and has a different meaning for everyone, and is heavily influenced by factors such as "security, outlook, autonomy, relationships, [and] skilled and meaningful activit[ies]" (Haybron 54). In this section, the topics of autonomy, relationships, and skilled and meaningful activities will be explained. Music and the flow musicians experience find their place in all of the SOARS components, and in theory, if one were to have positives in all of these groups they would live a happier lifestyle.

Engaging in a flow-related activity such as piano gives musicians a sense of autonomy. At every step of creating music, musicians decide what they play and how they play. There is such a large repertoire to choose from, and from there, musicians can interpret the music however they would like; giving musicians freedom "from coercion, meddling, and being subject to another's will," which is "a major source of happiness" (Haybron 65). When the musician is with their instrument nothing stops them from losing themselves in the music and letting go. Soloist Lang Lang is known to take heavy artistic liberty when performing his pieces which has brought him much attention – good and bad. Classical purists and many critics are upset with Lang Lang's interpretations because they believe that he "butchers" many of the pieces he plays by playing too loud, too fast, too energetic, or the complete opposite of what is written on the score. But the beauty of music is that there is no right or wrong way to create it. Lang Lang makes his own decisions "without being under another's thumb" (Haybron 65). Not to mention once in the state of flow, musicians gain "a [higher] sense of control" and autonomy over their performance (Haybron 65). The piano has 88 keys, and within those boundaries lies an endless amount of music waiting to be played.

Music serves as a bridge that connects people to build meaningful relationships. For millennia, music has been an integral part of human culture and civilization that allows people to share their stories, emotions, and creativity for others to hear. Music already has numerous effects on those who play it, but for those who listen, music stimulates the "orbitofrontal cortex, and limbic and paralimbic brain regions" which are key parts of the brain that are involved with emotional processing and pleasure (Persson). Listening to upbeat and energetic music makes people want to dance and be in a happier mood. Music boosts people's moods and "plays a significant role in strengthening social bonds" (Suttie). Playing in an organized band or in front of people who enjoy music fosters trust, coordination, cooperation, and security; creating a "safety net that is hard to live without" (Haybron 69). The relationships that are built between people through music are a "potent source of happiness" because strong relationships make people "feel accepted, loved, and protected" (Haybron 69). Music allows the performer to experience flow and happiness through playing but allows them to translate those same feelings to their audience.

Flow-related activities like music are skilled or meaningful activities that give people a sense of completeness and purpose. Like Haybron's SOARS model that satisfies the needs for happiness, Maslow's hierarchy of needs specifies the different levels of needs a person wants throughout life. At the very top, the highest level of needs is considered "self-actualization needs," which is "the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences" (McLeod). Those who pursue self-actualization find meaning in the things they do. For example, if one is meant to be a musician, they will make music. If someone is meant to be an artist, they will create art. If they were destined to be a writer, then they must write. Chasing after these needs requires "appreciative engagement," which meets an "emotional fulfillment" and inspires a "fulfilling life" (Haybron 71). The little moments in life where people fulfill their purpose are "service[s] of something larger than [themselves]" (Seligman 1380). Musicians train their entire careers to produce music guided toward an audience that wants to listen. Through the universal language of music, performers can speak to their listeners through their playing — many times in ways that touch the listener's hearts and souls. When engaged in a flow-related activity such as music, participants experienced elevated levels of "flow, sense of self, achievement, identity, satisfaction and ownership" (Baker 131). Fulfilled musicians can report higher levels of "subjective well-being," which is the evaluation of their "lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions" (Kesebir 118). This is because flow-related activities are "intrinsically rewarding experiences" meaning that when the activity is finished one would feel satisfaction, ecstasy, and a sense of completion (de Manzano et al. 301). Emotions like these help boost self-image, confidence, and self-esteem. Meeting Haybron's SOARS and Maslow's hierarchy of needs allows musicians to be happier and feel happier.

## A POSSIBLE ESCAPE

Music and flow can be used as an escape and a form of healing from the problems musicians face. Many professional musicians suffer from mental health problems in the modern music industry. In a study of over 2,200 professional musicians in the UK, "more than 71% of the musicians who responded said they had experienced anxiety and even panic attacks, and more than 68% said they'd suffered from depression" (Wassenberg). Career paths as professional musicians are highly competitive and can significantly affect one's mental health. These mental health issues can be traced back to their college education and music school. Many university music students are reported to have "high rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and symptoms of burnout among music students" (Koops 130). This may be caused by performance anxiety, internal stress from constant criticism, external pressure from performance expectations, or the worry about future career paths. A music student will have "a typical course load with the addition of musical activities, resulting in more time practicing and taking lessons, and less time for social engagements, relaxation, entertainment, or other activities that could be used to reduce stress and anxiety" (Koops 130-131). Other factors such as maintaining self-image in a judgmental environment, lack of sleep, poor diet, and work overload contribute to mental health issues. It can be understood that there is an immense amount of pressure and stress to succeed as a musician either as a student or professionally. The key difference between music school and the professional world is that professionals are expected to perform to the highest degree for a living. External and internal factors can contribute to both physical and mental health problems and, in turn, may affect the levels of flow they experience. A music student is stated as saying, "a significant amount of the time people are judging your craft, which is good but can be difficult mentally because of the amount of emotion put into it. It becomes difficult to sort out technique issues with the emotion being put into pieces and lessons can become very disheartening when you've put in a lot of emotional value and then get critiqued on it" (Koops 137).

This type of environment is especially detrimental to security and outlook, which are key factors of Haybron's SOARS outline. The anecdote shows that this music student and many more may feel breaches in their "project security" (Haybron 57). People who constantly critique a musician's craft with often less than constructive criticism degrade many musician's "identity or sense of self" (Haybron 57). A skill they have been honing for many years is constantly being torn apart and judged at every angle. This puts great mental strain on aspiring musicians and can affect the security they feel about themselves, their talents, and future career paths. Alterations in security can also lead to disruptions in one's outlook. Since "outlook shapes happiness" external stresses that attack outlook can destabilize one's well-being (Haybron 64). Leading people to lose "control over [their] internal states" (Haybron 60). It becomes apparent that music students face a lot of adversity while learning their craft to make a career out of music. When the environment may become too much to handle musicians can take a step back and refocus; remembering the purpose of music in their lives. Revisiting Maslow's hierarchy of needs, realizing that "self-actualization is a continual process" can help musicians get through the hard times when they realign their goals (McLeod).

Engaging in flow-related activities can make people physically healthier. A study done by researchers in Japan determined that among elderly people those who engaged in flow-based activities showed that their "physical health was better in the groups experiencing flow and in a relaxed state than in the apathetic group" (Hirao et al.). This may be because flow activities are an excellent proponent of happiness, and it is becoming increasingly understood that "happiness is salutary to the body" (Kesebir 121). Having a happy and healthy mind can influence a healthy body, and it is also known that "current research strongly supports [the] insight that happiness leads to better physical health" (Kesebir 121). Flow also increases "general health perception, social functioning, and MCS (mental component summary)" (Hirao et al. 16). The mental component summary as described in the study are eight domains including "physical functioning, physical role, bodily pain, general health perception, vitality, social functioning, emotional role, and mental health" (Hirao et al. 14). This suggests that flow and mental health may also be connected. Musicians struggling with the hardships of competitive music school can use their flow to help improve their psychological and physical health. Musical flow can be used as a form of release and coping mechanism for any stresses they may encounter throughout their lives: "experiencing a lot of flow in daily life has a positive influence on mental health" (Hirao et al. 16). Improving mental health is the foundation to living a happier and healthier life.

## CONCLUSION

Music has been a part of human history for thousands of years, and it lets people "become a little bit more real" (Chirico et al. 2). Without music, much of modern-day art would never exist. Through music and the flow musicians experience, it helps "improve quality of life, happiness, health and sense of community" (Chirico et al. 2). Music "has a great impact on our lives, mainly in promoting our well-being" (Chirico et al. 2). Csikszentmihalyi's psychological framework and Haybron's philosophical ideas allow musicians to understand how their craft influences their actions, well-being, emotions, and motivations. It is essential to know that there is no single prescription for flow and happiness as they depend on many variables. Although this research cannot be concluded with certainty, this opens the door to further research and investigation as flow and happiness are integral parts of human nature.

And with the final stroke of his bow, the music slowly ceased as the last note echoed throughout the hall; fizzling into silence. The young Yehudi Menuhin slowly opened his eyes and saw nothing as the spotlight blinded him. It was not until he heard the entire Semperoper audience on their feet applauding and the slight shadows of their bodies and faces. He let out a sigh of relief as a smile slowly stretched across his face. It took him a moment to realize where he was and how long he had been playing, but that did not matter. Yehudi loved playing the violin and lived for this moment and this moment only.

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**Ginny Cho**

# Societal Influences on the Self-Image of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Adults

ABSTRACT

*The self-image of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) individuals often stem from the cisgender beauty standards. As TGNC individuals want to appear as an individual of their desired gender identity, they often force themselves to fit the image of a cisgender beauty, turning to eating disorders and mechanisms of passing. However, society frequently represents only binary, cisgender individuals. This gap between societal representation and internal identity will influence internalized transphobia, due to dissonance of one's true identity and one's place defined by society. Yet, TGNC individuals can turn to social connectedness to associate themselves with the transgender community and accept their gender identity. Other methods may include gender-affirming treatments, such as genital gender-confirming therapy or socio-cultural institutions that acknowledge the presence of various gender identities, and public visibility, the access to information and resources on the LGBTQ+ community. These methods may improve the negative influences of cisgender societal norms by either providing more information on one's gender identity or emphasizing the importance of their diversity. Even though there may be negative influences of receiving gender-affirming treatment, as messages from social surroundings may be negative, mechanisms of passing, staying connected, being socially visible, and gender-affirming treatments may help alleviate the internalized stigma that TGNC individuals often experience.*

## INTRODUCTION

The rights of transgender individuals have been discussed in recent political backgrounds. The issue of transition, healthcare, and use of public restrooms have been widely debated across the United States, raising the question of whether the focus on transgender identities should solely aim attention on how the public views transgender individuals. Self-image, defined as how one views themself, in transgender individuals is influenced by societal norms and gender norms. Yet, because self-image may not always correlate to an outer projection of one's image, this research will investigate the detrimental influence of societal norms from interpersonal interactions on the self-image and outer projection of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) adults in the United States.

First, I will introduce the concept of passing. This will provide terminology to refer to how TGNC adults act to fit into gender norms created by cisgenderism in society (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Cisgenderism is highlighted in research by Diemer *et al.* (2015) that explores the impact of gender norms and physical beauty standards through an exploration of eating disorders in college students. Their study raises the question of why cisgender women and transgender women are more vulnerable to eating disorders than people who self-identify as male. Furthermore, to develop the TGNC self-image, internalized transphobia as discussed by Austin and Goodman (2017), and Bockting *et al.* (2020) will be examined. If individuals are too conscious of their identities and their roles in society, excessive self-reflection may lead to self-hate. Factors leading to internalized transphobia will also be discussed, including the influence of social connectedness and social visibility in a trans community. Lastly, this research paper will apply self-image to gender-affirming treatments and how mechanisms of altering one's outer projection to fit societal standards may change with these therapies. In the end, because there is a push for collective acceptance of transgender and gender dysphoric individuals in modern society along with a rejection of these identities, this research paper will examine how there is a negative influence of societal norms from interpersonal relationships on the self-image of TGNC individuals and how this negativity can be alleviated through positive social connections and gender-affirming therapies.

In this research paper, I will be proposing different mechanisms that TGNC individuals can apply to alleviate their self-image. Specifically, I hypothesize that TGNC individuals force themselves to a certain image created by cisgender beauty standards, through eating disorders and mechanisms of passing. Because society often defines gender as binary, how one projects themself to the public is different from how one desires to exhibit their identity. Ultimately, this difference will lead to internalized transphobia, due to dissatisfaction with oneself and one's place in society, or to social connectedness, a tool for individuals to adjust to their community and embrace their identities. Thus, gender-affirming treatments and public visibility alleviate and improve the TGNC self-image that is influenced by societal norms represented through internalized transphobia.

Cisgenderism as the Societal Standard

People are constantly exposed to cisgenderism, which is the idea that only binary gender, men and women, exist (Sharp, 2021). Cisgenderism can be seen in different forms of media, including public figures, news articles, pornography, and religious outlets that reinforce the idea of heterosexual love or cisgender identity. Yet, this binary focus may lead to an emphasis on one's self-image. A survey of 289,024 students attending universities in the United States found that transgender students had the highest reports of past-year self-reported eating disorder diagnosis, past-month diet pill use, and past-month laxative use compared to cisgender students (Diemer *et al.*, 2015, p. 146). This suggests that because there is an emphasis on a binary physical beauty standard outlined by society, transgender individuals feel obligated to force their bodies to fit the standards. These standards may include having a breast and acting more reserved for women, being more muscular and bold for men. Transgender women and men state that starving and using laxatives accentuate desired gendered features, such as a slim waist for women and a flatter upper body for men, both of which are binary beauty standards outlined by society (Diemer *et al.*, 2015, p. 147). Beauty standards focused on the physical appearance of binary gender influence transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in negatively viewing their bodies, ultimately not only regulating how they express themselves in public but also how they direct their feelings towards their own identities. Because cisgenderism in society is a constant reminder to TGNC individuals that their beauty doesn't have the gender representation that binary gender does, TGNC individuals may turn to different mechanisms to avoid the negative self-image that results from societal pressures.

## PASSING: MECHANISM TO ALIGN ONESELF

Passing is defined as the action people take to display themselves as an identity other than their true identity as a result of societal norms (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Passing as a member of a different social group than one that society has placed for an individual determines how an individual acts in public. This may ultimately contribute to how one perceives their own identity.

Comparing the gender minority group to a racial minority group, "As with African Americans, transgender people attempt to pass to escape that discrimination. A trans woman may attempt to pass as a cisgender (i.e. not transgender) woman in an attempt to avoid discrimination, scrutiny, or as a self-affirmative step in identity development" (Anderson *et al.*, 2020, p. 45). Anderson *et al.* (2020), researchers at the University of Nebraska Omaha, apply the work of W. E. B. DuBois to the transgender identity in defining passing. Similar to how African Americans have historically used passing as a mechanism to avoid discrimination, transgender individuals use passing as a mechanism to not only avoid discrimination but also provide self-affirmation to develop their transgender identities. The main distinction between these two groups is that for transgender people, there is a constant internal search for one's identity as well as an external search for one's place in society. This constant internal reflection is influenced by cisgender societal norms and the pressure to pass as a cisgender person.

Although introspection may help develop one's identity, an overemphasis on one's identity may suggest an "internalized stigma attached to gender nonconformity" (Bockting *et al.*, 2020, p. 8). Because society defines gender as binary, TGNC individuals often feel obliged to pass as cisgender individuals that align with their internal identity. This obligation to force one's gender identity into a binary gender category creates a dissonance between how one wants to personally define their gender and how they are perceived by others. The difference between how a TGNC individual defines their own gender and how non-TGNC individuals view them ultimately only creates confusion, and may lead these individuals to force themselves to a cisgender image and therefore negatively view their own gender identity.

## NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE OUTLINED IN INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

Enforcement of binary gender and an overemphasis on passing as a cisgender individual may influence internalized transphobia in TGNC individuals. Internalized transphobia defines how individuals direct hate towards their own identities as an influence of the hyper-consciousness of their identities and their roles in society. To study how self-esteem and self-image are influenced by internalized transphobia, Austin and Goodman, researchers at Barry University, studied 65 transgender and gender nonconforming adult participants, ages 18 to 73, from a vendor area at a national transgender conference. The participants completed a survey that assessed their experiences with therapists, community support, and medical or physical modifications to align their appearance with their internal identity. Through these surveys, Austin and Goodman found that internalized transphobia decreases self-esteem. Because the participants who answered that they had experiences with transphobia also had low self-esteem, the authors concluded that these individuals had internalized their outside experiences of transphobia. This finding suggests that one's experience with transphobia may influence one's internalization of such negativity.

Furthermore, four categories of internalized transphobia can be found: Pride, Passing, Alienation, and Shame (Bockting *et al.*, 2020). These four categories help non-TGNC individuals understand internalized transphobia through assessing pride in one's transgender identity, investment in passing as a cisgender individual, alienation within the transgender community, and shame of one's transgender identity (Bockting *et al.*, 2020). From a survey of 903 transgender individuals, Bockting *et al.* (2020) found that each category was not separate from one another: a higher pride in one's identity meant lower shame and vice versa; passing and pride were not complete opposites; alienation and shame were found to be positively correlated. In other words, using mechanisms of passing did not necessarily indicate that an individual was shameful of their TGNC identity, and isolating oneself indicated that an individual felt shameful of their TGNC identity. Because all four categories were found to be related to each other, the study results suggest that internalized transphobia extends beyond just shame of one's gender identity, and impacts one's social role through alienating oneself from their social environment, and using mechanisms of passing.

Moreover, Rood *et al.* (2017) asked TGNC participants about what they have heard from either their personal experiences or from others regarding transgender or gender non-conforming individuals. In response, one participant said, "The messages held me back from transitioning; I delayed transitioning because I was worried I would end up like the messages I heard; I internalized the message that if I could not pass, I could not transition" (Rood *et al.*, 2017, p. 417). Internalization of social messages from interpersonal relationships and the media led this participant to refrain from expressing their identity through transitioning. This idea of passing is emphasized once again in defining internalized stigma in TGNC individuals. Because society emphasizes cisgenderism, it is often difficult for TGNC individuals to accept their identity. Rather, they feel obligated to physically pass as a cisgender person that aligns with their internal gender identity. Thus, they integrate the stigma from their social environment that their transgender identity isn't welcome in society. This internalized stigma doesn't just come from society denouncing the TGNC identity. Some TGNC participants noted from Rood *et al.*'s study that "society also stigmatizes those individuals who are attracted to TGNC individuals" (Rood *et al.*, 2017, p. 416). As media, news, and arts mainly display binary gender, the calculated avoidance of the LGBTQ+ community creates an otherness of transgender individuals. This otherness establishes a stigma of who can love transgender individuals, ultimately labeling TGNC individuals as unworthy of being loved. In return, TGNC individuals may feel that they cannot receive love from others, decreasing their self-esteem and self-image.

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND VISIBILITY

Yet, social connectedness may improve one's negative self-image that results from internalized transphobia. This is the measure of closeness experienced between an individual and their social surroundings, and how difficult it is for this individual to maintain this closeness with their social environment (Austin & Goodman, 2017). Because internal transphobia is influenced by social surroundings, an individual's social environment may change how they view themself.

In a research conducted by Bond and Miller (2021), 428 LGBTQ+ individuals completed a survey on the influence of social media, specifically YouTube, on their social connections. The researchers found that "Viewing LGBTQ YouTubers was positively related to social connectedness among participants open about their LGBTQ identities and who reported the lowest social support but negatively related to social connectedness among those concealing their LGBTQ identities and who reported very strong social support" (Bond & Miller, 2021, p.1). In other words, viewing LGBTQ YouTubers helped individuals feel connected to the LGBTQ+ community, only if they were comfortable with their identity. This suggests that individuals who are struggling with internalized transphobia feel strongly supported by the presence of different identities on platforms such as YouTube. The researchers suggest that although social connectedness through online methods may not help completely disestablish internalized transphobia, visibility on online platforms may help. Visibility, in terms of how accessible information about the LGBTQ+ community is, provides strong social support in helping TGNC individuals feel less alone, although it may not effectively alter the effects of internalized transphobia. Similar to the findings of Bond and Miller (2021), Katelyn Burns, a freelance journalist in D.C. and the first-ever openly trans Capitol Hill reporter, writes on the impact of cultural sexism and social media on visibility for transgender identities. Burns states that social media in the past decade has opened conversations for self-survival for trans people and also changed public attitudes, "the early internet not only helped trans people organize politically but also gave trans people access to transition resources and language to describe their gender identity on a massive scale" (Burns, 2019). Burns uses her background as a Capitol Hill reporter to tell the general public that the 2010s has had many political gains and losses for the trans community. Yet, the political gain isn't the only benefit that resulted from the internet. It also gave TGNC individuals direct access to resources that they could not otherwise receive.

Because social media platforms such as YouTube raise awareness of different identities, the visibility of TGNC individuals has increased in the past decade. This increase in visibility and accessibility to various social connections helps improve the TGNC self-image, as social connectedness and self-esteem are positively correlated (Austin & Goodman, 2017). Social connections, both online and in-person, therefore, may be a mechanism that TGNC individuals can use to alter how they view themselves.

## ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS: INSTITUTIONS AND GENDER-CONFIRMING THERAPIES

As social connectedness and visibility demonstrate to be successful methods in improving the TGNC self-image, some suggest that there should be an emphasis on socio-cultural institutions that center around the transgender identity. There are several key ideas that these institutions should follow: the perspective should be TGNC-affirming and "(1) replaces a binary understanding of gender with a more inclusive and accurate understanding of gender as a multidimensional spectrum; (2) acknowledges and validate all gender identities, expressions, and experiences as equally valuable; and (3) offers visible support and respect for TGNC identities and experiences" (Austin & Goodman, 2017, p. 836). This quote emphasizes the importance of expanding social experiences that embrace the TGNC identity to boost one's self-esteem and self-image. The step towards the positive self-image of TGNC individuals must include a public effort of reinforcement that there is a spectrum of gender rather than binary, an acknowledgment of different gender experiences, and visibility in providing support to the LGBTQ community and the TGNC community. Expanding the social interactions of TGNC individuals to include a positive outlook of their identities will ameliorate the negative self-image that results from cisgenderism and internalized transphobia.

Not only can social connections and visibility of the TGNC identity aid in mediating internalized transphobia, but gender-affirming treatments may also be a way to improve the negative impacts of gender norms on transgender and gender dysphoric individuals, as suggested by Dr. Gemma Sharp at Monash University in Australia. Sharp conducted a qualitative study that assessed patient satisfaction after genital gender-confirming therapies. Although genital therapy is not the only gender-affirming treatment available to TGNC individuals, of those who decided to transition their bodies, "For transgender women, a systematic review of 46 vaginoplasty studies reported postsurgical satisfaction rates of 92% overall, functional satisfaction of 86%, and aesthetic satisfaction of 86%" (Sharp, 2021, p. 2049). Because Sharp's overview of various studies relating to genital gender-confirming therapy found that there is an overall appreciation and positivity resulting from the therapy, aligning oneself in a way that feels truest to them may be a treatment that TGNC individuals can turn to. Gender affirming treatments, whether they be genital therapies or hormone therapies, may help TGNC individuals align their internal identity with a certain image that they long for.

Moreover, undergoing these treatments has demonstrated success in improving one's body image. According to van de Grift *et al.* (2017), transgender individuals who applied for gender-affirming treatments had significantly lower levels of gender dysphoria and body dissatisfaction after their treatment compared to their initial levels before clinical treatment. This finding suggests that gender-affirming treatments aid in guiding a TGNC individual towards a positive self-image, away from the negative effects of internalized transphobia that results from a binary gender construct in society.

## COUNTERARGUMENT: INEFFICIENCY IN TREATING NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE

Despite research suggesting that social connectedness, visibility, and gender-affirming treatments help improve a TGNC individual's self-image, some researchers suggest otherwise. Although representation as a social group affirms one's identity, Austin and Goodman found in their research of 65 TGNC adult participants, ages 18 to 73, that it fails to effectively create a barrier between internalized transphobia and self-affirmation. Self-esteem is positively correlated with social connectedness, meaning that one's self-image is positively influenced by their social surroundings, yet this social environment does not necessarily impact how one internalizes gendered stigma (Austin & Goodman, 2017). This counter-argument suggests that there may be no effective measures against negative self-image resulting from internalized transphobia in TGNC individuals. Furthermore, because self-esteem is not influenced solely by one's gender, one's general social settings and familial environment may also serve as obstacles to self-esteem.

Additionally, representation in social settings may backfire, as social media messages can target specific social groups or individuals. Hughto *et al.* (2021) found that in a study of 545 transgender adults in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, assessed using the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), the majority of the TGNC individuals came across negative media messages in the past year, suggesting that the TGNC identity is heavily stigmatized in the media. The researchers also found that negative media messages are positively correlated with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress. These media messages may come in the form of news media, TV shows, political campaigns, and other structures. Specifically, in political campaigns, the TGNC identity has been politically debated for the past decade, if not more. Reducing a gender identity to help a political platform not only affects how the public views transgender individuals but also impacts how TGNC individuals view themselves, leading them to question whether their rights and identities need to be justified. Although representation in media may be helpful to the TGNC self-image and identity in creating connections and a sense of self-portrayal, individuals may also encounter negative messages that ultimately negatively affect their mental health on the same social platforms.

Similar to how visibility in the media doesn't effectively help the TGNC self-image, gender-affirming treatments also have downsides. According to Lehmann *et al.*, study participants who sought gender-affirming treatments worried that how they presented during the interview with the researchers may affect their treatment and voiced concerns about being categorized as a psychiatric disorder (Lehmann *et al.*, 2021, p. 3542). This suggests that despite efforts to seek gender-affirming treatments, TGNC individuals cannot help but force themselves to an image that they believe will be more accepted by healthcare professionals. As healthcare professionals often lack medical knowledge on treating TGNC patients, TGNC individuals are even more inclined to fit into a cisgender image that they believe their medical professionals will have more knowledge of. The lack of trust in healthcare professionals in seeking treatment ultimately challenges the effectiveness of gender-affirming treatments in improving the self-image of TGNC individuals.

Yet, lack of trust isn't the only barrier in medical care for TGNC individuals. Transgender individuals noted in Puckett *et al.*'s (2018) study that when seeking gender-affirming treatments, the medical providers lacked awareness of how to treat transgender individuals. Others noted difficulties in acquiring help, from fears of rejection by medical providers to parental consent for individuals under age 18 (Puckett *et al.*, 2018). These barriers make it difficult for TGNC individuals to receive gender-affirming treatments that may help improve their self-image and guide them in the direction that they desire.

## RESPONSE TO THE COUNTERARGUMENT: ANECDOTES FROM TGNC INDIVIDUALS

Regardless of the lack of access to treatments to alleviate the effects of internalized transphobia, there are ways to improve one's self-image. Passing, social connectedness, and social visibility may help improve the self-esteem of TGNC individuals although it may not alter the effects of internalized transphobia. Eventually, through these mechanisms, many transgender individuals find comfort with their own identities. In Burdge's interview of 15 transgender individuals, one participant talked about finding their true self; "And now, I'm actually living my dream of being who I should have always been born as. It's an incredible feeling. It's kind of, words kind of can't always explain it, it's just, I feel so happy with who I am. I feel more confident" (Burdge, 2014, p. 367). Finding one's true identity and expressing this identity externally provides self-affirmation that who they see in the mirror is how they want to see themselves. This self-alignment ultimately provides confidence to TGNC individuals that their experiences to reach where they are now are valuable. Lastly, another participant advises TGNC individuals struggling to find or accept their identity stating that "if you can make it through, if you can last long enough, if you're, I guess, strong enough, the rewards are pretty great in terms of your personal development... those are the sorts of things that make me realize, more than I did when I was young, that living this life has been a positive thing" (Burdge, 2014, p. 375). Despite the struggles that one may face externally from their social environment as well as internally, eventually, there will come a time when these experiences will have made one's transgender experience truly unique and valuable.

Being transgender comes with facing a cisgender society and having to constantly seek mechanisms to align one's internal identity with an external expression. And because society often stigmatizes transgender identities, seeking gender-affirming treatments takes courage. Yet, being transgender also comes with finding a social community of like-minded unique individuals who work to counter cisgenderism present in society. As these identities expand how society views and defines gender, non-trans individuals need to listen and recognize their voices.

## CONCLUSION

Although it may seem like a negative self-image in TGNC individuals cannot be avoided, mechanisms of passing, social connectedness and visibility, and gender-affirming treatments may help alleviate the internalized stigma that TGNC individuals experience. The findings of this research suggest that passing may help to align oneself with one's internal identity, while social connectedness and visibility may help in providing close mentors and role models to share experiences. Gender-affirming treatments may also improve one's self-image by aligning one's internal identity with how one wants to represent themself. Specific to treatments, socio-cultural institutions that focus on a spectrum of gender rather than binary gender may help TGNC individuals align their identities and improve their self-image. Eventually, finding comfort with one's identity will have demonstrated how courageous and strong they are.

Yet, there are some limitations to this research paper. It should be noted that this paper provides only some mechanisms to mitigate the effects of negative social messages. There are many more resources available to not just TGNC individuals but to the broader LGBTQ+ community as well. Also, readers should note that this research paper reports on only one aspect of the TGNC identity, specifically the self-image influenced by negative social messages. This paper does not summarize or assume negativities in the entire experience and identities of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. Furthermore, there were limitations to the research available about the TGNC self-image concerning societal norms. Thus, as more research on self-affirming treatments and the self-image of TGNC individuals is conducted, this research must not reframe one's transgender experience as one that is problematic or needs solution-seeking. With more research and reports on the TGNC identity conducted, researchers must be cautious as to be cognizant of the various identities present in society.

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**Elizabeth Leoniuk**

# Lessons Learned from Lesbian Mothers: Sexuality and Parenting Intertwined


## ABSTRACT

*The discussion of queer sexual orientation is just starting to proliferate during the turn of the twenty-first century, while the debate on parenthood, specifically in terms of motherhood, has remained steady over time. What has not been discussed as explicitly is the former and the latter combined. This paper addresses how the intersectionality between maternal identity and sexual orientation for a lesbian mother challenges the heteronormative views set out by essentialist motherhood. The research is drawn from scholars who define new terms and interview various groups of lesbians and mothers to make important discoveries on familial hierarchies. The paper then transitions to a discussion on the influence of additional intersectional identities on lesbian motherhood and how they further challenge essentialist motherhood. Following the research drawn from scholar's discoveries, the paper investigates how some of the research is applied in lesbian mothers with a large following on social media, and the weight their social media presence has on debunking essentialist motherhood and what it means to be a lesbian mother as a whole.*


## INTRODUCTION

The timing of progressive acceptance of queer sexual orientation has differed across the globe, yet the consensus for many first-world countries like the U.S. is that the acceptance is slow. It was not until the turn of the twenty-first century in 2003 that the *Lawrence v. Texas* court case ruled that it was unconstitutional to criminalize homosexuality in its acts and behaviors (Darrow et. al). In addition, it was not until 2015 in the Obergefell v. Hodges supreme court case that homosexual marriage was considered legal (Darrow et. al). This historically slow nature of the acceptance of queer sexual orientation on a legal scale translates into a plethora of individuals facing difficulties on a spectrum of challenges with accepting their sexual orientations. By extension, as queer individuals in the U.S. who believe marriage is a precursor to parenthood have only had under seven years to legally marry their significant others, the integration of parenthood and sexual orientation has had limited explicit discussion with those who claim this intersectional identity of being queer and a parent (Darrow et. al). That being said, the current view of parenthood, more specifically motherhood, is rooted in essentialist motherhood- the roles and responsibility of being a mother is something that is desired by a woman in a heterosexual relationship; she is expected to put all her efforts consistently into raising her child while her male counterpart assuming the role of a father is never held to these expectations as his male identity requires him to undertake non-familial responsibilities. Thus, the following question is raised- how exactly does the intersectionality between the maternal identity and sexual orientation of a lesbian mother challenge the heteronormative views set out by essentialist motherhood? In analyzing this question, additional questions are posed- how does being the "non-biological" or "biological" mother in a lesbian parenting relationship where only one of the mothers undergoes a pregnancy impact the familial hierarchy of that relationship? How does the intersectional identity of a "lesbian mother" impact other intersectional identities a lesbian mother may have? How does the way social media lesbian mothers present themselves impact how lesbian mothers are viewed as a whole?

To further understand the interaction of mother and lesbian identities for an individual identifying as a lesbian mother, the theories of motherhood essentialism, intersectionality, and scripts must be considered. Motherhood essentialism, as defined by scholar Andrea O'Reilly in her journal article "Outlaw(ing) Motherhood: A Theory and Politic of Maternal Empowerment for the 21st Century", is the idea that the perfect mother is associated with only certain maternal identities: heterosexual and co-parenting with a man, white, and highly feminine presenting (69). On the other hand, intersectionality theory, as defined by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in her work "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Policies", is the idea that when multiple identities converge, how exactly they interact is more complicated than the sum of individual identities (140). Additionally, scholar Zelma Tuthill, who discusses the theory of scripts in her essay "Negotiating Religiosity and Sexual Identity Among Hispanic Lesbian Mothers" , defines scripts as behaviors that individuals adopt for themselves for their intersectional identities as a result of specific behaviors only being explicitly outlined for individual identities (1195). Together, these theories will be applied in this research paper in various ways. To accomplish such a task, this research paper will initially focus on how motherhood impacts a lesbian relationship and how a lesbian relationship shapes the familial hierarchy of a newly founded family. Then, the paper will transition to discuss how having other identities outside of "lesbian" and "mother" for lesbian mothers may contribute to different experiences and behaviors. This paper will onclud by observing the content that social media lesbian mothers, namely Abbie and Julia Ensign and "Team2moms", release to celebrate the non-essentialist parenting structure. Overall, this paper as a whole acknowledges that lesbians who choose to adopt a motherly identity, in particular, have unique perspectives to offer as opposed to other parenting communities because the act of taking on a combined identity of a lesbian and a mother debunks the essentialist views on motherhood shaped by heterosexual mothers; A primary example of this tainted view on being a mother by essentialist motherhood is a family being composed of a woman playing a strict mothering role by maintaining the household, and a man playing a fathering role that is largely absent from household life. Additionally, lesbian mothers have largely only been discussed in a context that relates to their sexual orientation, which adds onto the domination of heterosexual mothers in essentialist views on motherhood. Thus, it is significant to analyze the experience of lesbian mothers, as their experience provides more insight into sexuality and parenting than solely heterosexual mothers and lesbian individuals alone since through their intersectional identity they present unique motherhood behaviors not regarded in essentialist motherhood.

## FAMILIAL HIERARCHIES WITH LESBIAN MOTHERS

Lesbian parenting relationships are unique because the women in the relationship are differentiated from each other by their children and individuals outside their family based on how they brought children into the family, oftentimes the first major distinction made in their relationship. In addition to this idea, the distinction created in the lesbian relationship, while often explicitly labeled with terms such as "biological" and "non-biological" mother for mothers who choose to undergo artificial insemination, is not as easily defined as essentialist views of motherhood for heterosexual mothers. In the article "Motherhood Is Not a Given Thing: Experiences and Constructed Meanings of Biological and Nonbiological Lesbian Mothers," scholars Ben-Ari and Livni account for such a situation when they interview one lesbian mother in their study who accounts, "We have to clarify how we want to see our parenting—as equal motherhood? ... As long as there is no formal recognition of lesbian parenthood, it is not a given thing and we have to talk about it" (525). Essentially, the difference in the intersectionality of the maternal identity and sexual orientation of a lesbian mother for the biological and non-biological lesbian mother is dependent on the way the non-biological and biological mother wishes to define motherhood. The "given thing" that the participant in Ben-Ari and Livni's interview refers to is the essentialist view of motherhood. Although essentialist motherhood is something many mothers are considering straying away from, at the bare minimum essentialist motherhood gives those who fit or could fit into the way it labels mothers. For example, essentialist motherhood grants feminine presenting heterosexual stay-at-home moms a standard of comparison or a guide to a way they might attempt to raise their children (525). Lesbian motherhood is not a "given thing" like the participant of Ben-Ari and Livni's study suggests. Still, an important takeaway from the participant is that when non-biological and biological mothers unite together in "equal motherhood," the challenges of reaching this "equal motherhood" further depend on the differences in the intersectionality of the two mothers. McKelvey in her narrative analysis "The Other Mother: A Narrative Analysis of the Postpartum" highlights an example of such differences when a non-biological lesbian mother research participant admits, "Feeling jealousy toward her partner since the baby seemed to prefer the breastfeeding mother" (107). Despite most of the day-to-day responsibilities as a mother being able to be divided amongst biological and non-biological lesbian mothers to achieve an "equal motherhood", the intersectionality between lesbian and mother differs in the experiences a mother from a respective group has with her child that is unable to be replicated by the other mother; In the case of McKelvey's participant, the ease at which the biological mother can breastfeed her child and the difficulty a nonbiological mother has to do the same is the driving force of what separates how the lesbians can integrate their new parental identity with their sexual orientation. In addition, the integration of a parenting identity with a lesbian identity for non-biological and biological mothers alike is unique in the sense that the children themselves are an important aspect of the newfound identities of these women, and thus labels used to interact with these children are also taken into consideration.

While terms such as "non-biological" or "biological" mother may not be used to interact with children in the familial hierarchy with two lesbian mothers, lesbian mothers have different ways of utilizing parenting labels around their children that challenge the essentialist label of solely “mom” or “mother”. In contrast, other lesbian mothers resort to continue using these labels for personal reasons. Labeling in a familial hierarchy between lesbian mothers and their children is important as it affirms exactly what the complexity of the intersectional identity of lesbian mothers entails from the lesbian mothers’ perspective. To emphasize this complexity, Brennan and Sell in their journal piece “The Effect of Language on Lesbian Nonbirth Mothers” explain how the biological and non-biological mothers collaborating to come up with labels that work for their familial hierarchy impact their children: “It also created the possibility that their children would eventually have to explain their family dynamics to others” (535). Ultimately, the differences in the child’s explanations in their familial hierarchy would rely on how the mothers collectively agree to discuss their identities with their children, and therefore the child would explain the difference in their roles, if any, in this way. Moreover, non-biological lesbian mothers and biological lesbian mothers share a similarity in the intersectionality of their identity as a mother and lesbians as they both require their parental role to be explained by their children in certain situations. This similarity also carries for mothers who choose to use nontraditional labels in their familial hierarchy. For instance, Reed in her work “Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Motherhood: Crafting Radical Narratives and Representing Social Change through Cultural Representations” notes, “These participants preferred instead to craft alternative titles for themselves, which articulated their role outside of traditional scripts of motherhood” (43). Because crafting “alternative titles” for a lesbian mothers to use to refer to themselves as a parent is not reliant on whether the mother was a biological or non-biological mother, and is rather created at the discretion of the lesbian mother themselves through their scripts, the intersectionality of sexual orientation and motherhood for non-biological and biological mothers does not differ when it comes to labels. In other instances, however, mothers utilize essentialist labels like “mom” and “mother”. For example, Reed found that “other women [he] spoke with identified those same [heterosexual motherhood] traditions as a key reason why they wanted to take on the title of ‘mother’” (47). Although initially, it might seem illogical for a lesbian mother whose sexual orientation and parenting identity combined falls outside the essentialist view of motherhood to want to pick up essentialist motherhood labels, Reed makes an important observation in the sense that other intersectional identities impact a lesbian mother outside of her lesbian and outside of her mothering identity. Since the word "mother" is particularly femininely charged, a lesbian mother may choose to use the term "mother" regardless of the fact it is rooted in motherhood essentialism because it is personally more important for that lesbian mother to use a term that affirms her gender identity rather than using a term that challenges motherhood essentialism. In essence, while the intersectionality of sexual orientation and motherhood plays a factor in the uniqueness of lesbian motherhood, other intersectional identities cause the intersectionality of the two identities alone to fluctuate from individual to individual, which in turn impacts the way labels and family hierarchies are set out for lesbian co-mothers.

## LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD AND OTHER INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

No one experience encompasses the experience of every lesbian mother. While this is primarily due to the intersectionality of lesbian mothers with other demographic identities, it needs to be clarified that these variations in experience stem from the blending of these identities rather than the sum of a lesbian mother's identities. Aside from the already largely absent lack of representation for stand-alone identities, like lesbian, mother, racial minority, gender minority, etc., when the representation of these minorities is brought into the conversation, typically only a singular stigmatized identity is discussed. If multiple stigmatized identities are discussed, they are separate from each other in conversation, and bringing multiple identities into conversation with one another is marginalized. Crenshaw, for instance, agrees that "When feminist theory attempts to describe women's experiences through analyzing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race" (154). Essentially, the lesbian motherhood experience, regardless of whether it is the one of a biological or non-biological lesbian mother, needs to be regarded as not one all-encompassing experience but rather a layered experience that is altered as the "separate spheres" of identities interact with the lesbian mother identity. Once the demarginalization of individuals' experiences with multiple identities was to occur, only then is true intersectionality achieved. Yet, a common shortcoming to this demarginalization of individuals with multiple stigmatized identities and achieving true intersectionality is when marginalized identities are analyzed individually, and the stigmatization stemming from each identity is added as more marginalized identities are analyzed. According to the black lesbian mother Sylvia whom Bowleg interviews in her piece "When Black + Lesbian + Woman ≠ Black Lesbian Woman: The Methodological Challenges of Qualitative and Quantitative Intersectionality Research", "Because of those multiple identities, there are so many stereotypes and so many roles that you're supposed to be in" (317). In other words, when minority identities like a lesbian mother or a black woman are stigmatized in conjunction with additional identities, the common assumption is that each additional stigmatized identity added onto the lesbian mother label just increases the stigmatization of the lesbian mother by the respective stigmatization amount for the given marginalized identity. Sylvia and Bowleg's argument about "roles you're supposed to be in" coincide with Crenshaw's idea of blending "separate spheres" as it relates to lesbian mothers, other intersectional identities, and challenging essentialist motherhood views because as a lesbian mother blends her sexual orientation and status as a parent with her other identities, she is simultaneously challenging the "role" that essentialist motherhood sets out for her. This "role" is the one where a mother is genuinely feminine presenting, with all the mother's efforts being given towards her children, and most notably that the mother is raising her children with her loving husband.

Even among lesbian mothers with similar demographic identities, the intersectionality between these identities and their status as lesbian mothers varies due to the individual lesbian mother's subjugated identities, scripts, and how the lesbian mother chooses to challenge dual stigmas. Despite lesbian mothers having identities on top of their lesbian motherhood, not all of these identities are always as salient as their lesbian mothering identity. Even within the lesbian mothering identity, some women feel that their lesbian identity is more salient, some feel their mothering identity is more salient, and some may more heavily align themselves with a racial or ethnic identity. Hennekam and Ladge state in their journal entry, "When lesbians become mothers: Identity validation and the role of diversity climate" add to this thought when they discuss the intersection of the lesbian and mothering identities more thoroughly: "Indeed, visible social identities that are culturally meaningful, such as pregnancy, influence strongly how a woman is perceived. Compared to the less visible nature of sexual orientation, pregnancy is likely to become the primary basis of categorization" (42). Essentially, Hennekam and

Ladge are saying that a biological lesbian mother's subjugated identity is her sexual orientation, and her mothering identity is the more dominant identity. On that note, one can infer that a non-biological lesbian mother's subjugated identity is her mothering identity, while her sexual orientation is the more dominant identity. The importance of this is that even though in both scenarios, women share the "lesbian mother" title, the degree to which their identities are perceived or stigmatized varies from woman to woman. Additionally, both nonbiological and biological lesbian mothers challenge the heteronormative and essentialist views of motherhood as in essentialist motherhood subjugated identities are less present or absent as a mother behaves and follows the guidelines that essentialist motherhood lines out for her. In other words, a nonbiological lesbian mother is challenging essentialist motherhood because she asserts herself personally by claiming a parenting title but does not have the traditional, very visible pregnancy period that is associated with essentialist motherhood. Even with a biological mother who may seem to be adhering to essentialist motherhood with her very "visible social identity", it is her subjugated identity as a lesbian that challenges these essentialist motherhood views because sexual orientation is not even referenced when it comes to essentialist motherhood. While some identities for a lesbian mother are not chosen to be more "socially visible" than others, there is still an imbalance of power that certain identities hold over a lesbian mother when these identities are equally socially visible or not at all. In such instances, lesbian mothers use scripts to determine which identities they prefer to present as being more or less salient than other identities. Tuthill confirms this idea when she applies it to her research on religious Hispanic lesbian mothers: "Identity creation for Hispanic lesbians involves the negotiation of their sexual identity with their roles as minorities, mothers, and religious adherents" (Tuthill 1195). Lesbian mothers challenge the dual stigmas that are a byproduct of not adhering to essentialist views of motherhood by not only flaunting both their subjugated and dominant identities but also by willingly "negotiating" between their identities to define their own unique lesbian motherhood experience.

## SOCIAL MEDIA LESBIAN MOMS: CHALLENGING ESSENTIALIST MOTHERHOOD VIEWPOINTS

Essentialist motherhood views are challenged when mothers who defy these views make themselves heard. Social media lesbian mothers are an excellent sample of individuals who accomplish such a task. While every social media lesbian mom has different ways of addressing juggling their parenting experiences and their maintenance of security in their sexual orientation, Ebony and Denise "Team2moms" and Abbie and Julie Ensign are pioneers in the challenge against essentialist motherhood viewpoints. Before delving into a deeper analysis of "Team-2moms" and Abbie and Julie's pioneering work in lesbian motherhood, it is important to recognize that the experiences of social media lesbian moms and lesbian moms do not garner a large social media presence can be vastly different. For example, Hennekam and Ladge insist, "Different from holding a more visible social stigma, lesbians can choose whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation to others" (41). That being said, lesbian mom social media influencers are generally out to a much larger audience than the everyday lesbian mom, and this difference in how disclosed their lesbian parenting identities are can alter their experiences.


*LEFT: Ebony, Denise, and kids via Twitter*

*ABOVE: Julia, Harbor, and Abbie Ensign Day in the Life via YouTube*

What sets Denise and Ebony apart from many other lesbian mother social media influencers, other than their particularly large following, is the time they have been posting content as lesbian mothers and their unique intersectional identities that play an important role in conjunction with their identities as lesbian mothers. As noted by Weiss in her article "These Black & Puerto Rican Lesbian YouTubers Are Showing Queer Youth What Family Can Look Like", Denise and Ebony were first seen on social media when they began posting on YouTube about President Obama's presidential re-election with their daughter Olivia in the video (Weiss para. 1). The video garnered all sorts of publicity, including both positive and negative publicity. Some of the negative publicity included comments like, "How is she your daughter? You are two women"

(Weiss para. 6). This type of publicity is essential to analyze as comments like those prior stems from intersectional stigmas known as dual stigmas. A dual stigma is disapproval towards an individual because of two or more aspects of their identity (Hennekam and Ladge 41). Not only is the person writing this comment disapproving of Ebony and Denise's identity as lesbians when they say "you are two women", but they are also disapproving of Ebony and Denise's identity as mothers when they say "how is she your daughter?" Hence, the dual stigma is enacted. To counter the essentialist views of motherhood that are deeply engrained in this comment, Denise and Ebony took the initiative to brand their content under the name "Team2Moms", emphasizing that parenting can include the teamwork of two moms and is not exclusive to heteronormative parenting.

Abbie and Julia Ensign are lesbian mom social media influencers that post YouTube and TikTok videos that update their viewers on how they raise their son Harbor together; These videos provide valuable insight on how Julia and Abbie define their roles as parents in their relationships and how it differs from heteronormative and essentialist views on motherhood. For context, Abbie is the biological mother of the harbor, whereas Julia is the non-biological mother of Harbor. In their video titled "DAY IN THE LIFE OF BABY WITH 2 MOMS", Abbie and Julia are seen through different periods of the day trading responsibility of taking care of Harbor, but Julia is seen to spend the majority of time with Harbor. At the very beginning of the video, when it is five in the morning and Harbor is awake, Julia is seen caring for him, and she remarks, "I decided to give Abbie a little bit of a break. Today was one of those days, so she is sleeping in" (Ensign, 1:10). Whereas the heteronormative view of motherhood emphasizes that the mother must be at the side of the child at all times. The father can be relatively absent as he is the breadwinner for the family, Julia and Abbie challenge this view by switching the responsibility of who looks after Harbor and by allowing Abbie to amply rest given the toll that pregnancy has taken on her mentally and physically. Equally important, Julia and Abbie doing a thorough review of their day-to-day responsibilities and sharing them on their platform for many other mothers to see show them that there is an alternative approach to motherhood that does not follow the essentialist motherhood viewpoint, and that lesbian mothers have the freedom of defining their day to day responsibilites as a parent.

## CONCLUSION

By exploring how sexual orientation and motherhood intertwine in a lesbian mother's identity as well as in her auxiliary identities, and the importance of the representation that social media lesbian mothers bring to the lesbian mother title, my research confirms that it is the intersectionality of sexual orientation and motherhood that lesbian mothers have that challenges the essentialist and heteronormative views of motherhood. My research also concludes that not all lesbian mothers achieve such challenging essentialist motherhood in the same manner and extremity, particularly with the differences in stigmatization received by non-biological and biological lesbian mothers. Regardless of how lesbian mothers individually choose to challenge essentialist motherhood, such challenging is accomplished by primarily flaunting both dominant and subjugated identities, following a script that does not align with that of essentialist motherhood, or even in the day-to-day responsibilities a lesbian mother takes on as a parent that does not align with what a mother following the essentialist views may follow. While this paper covered many significant related topics to lesbian mothers challenging essentialist motherhood, beyond the scope of this research paper is how lesbian mothers who undergo differing methods of conception for their children outside artificial insemination (ex: adoption, prior heterosexual relationship, etc.) are impacted by stigmatization and how they challenge views on essentialist motherhood. Thus, to further investigate the way lesbian mothers challenge heteronormative and essentialist views on motherhood, variations on lesbian mothers may be a research area of interest.

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**Alexandra Paskhaver**

# The Power of the Pen: Creative Propaganda and the Battle for the American Mind


## ABSTRACT

Little research exists on the exact ties between wartime propaganda and creativity. The aim of this essay is to explore the impact that wartime propaganda had on the modes and means of American creative expression during and after the Second World War. In particular, this essay seeks to explain trends in American art, like the rise of Abstract Expressionism, as well as the corresponding surge in creative forms that emphasized more traditional values. In the films and posters of the age, one can trace the use of creativity as a weapon that enabled each side of the war to act in both the present and for posterity, which allowed the characterizations and ideals emphasized by creative propaganda to live long after the wars had ended. Through an analysis of organizations such as the Committee of Public Information and numerous creative oeuvres, this paper clarifies the ties between American art and American ideals, as influenced by wartime propaganda. Finally, it discusses how wartime propaganda influenced creativity's descent from the realm of artists into the realm of industry. This gave rise to a mechanized form of creative expression which led to the United States' dominance in popular culture and which perpetuates the impact of World War II propaganda on creativity through the modern day.


## THE WAR OF THE WORDS

Everybody knows Rosie the Riveter: the iconic woman with a polka-dotted headscarf, rolling up her sleeve, telling the world "We Can Do It!" She is now recognized as a landmark of World War II propaganda and has served as a source of inspiration, imitation, and caricature by artists the world over. In a sense, Rosie is the symbol of a larger cultural shift reflective of the effect of war propaganda on the American populace, a shift that has led to new forms of creative expression. Indeed, one can trace the evolution of American ideals as expressed through the creative oeuvres produced after WWII. New creative movements like Abstract Expressionism rebelled against post-war cultural norms at the same time as 1950s traditionalism affirmed them (Cernuschi 1). Films like *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) treated the war romantically as *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955) painted it with a cynical sheen. World War II played such a massive part in the rise of the United States as a political and cultural power (White 17, 20). By examining wartime propaganda, the pulpit of creative expression, one can classify creativity's profound and peculiar impact on the American populace. In the films and posters of the age, one can see the development of creativity as a weapon that enabled each side to act not only in the present, but for posterity, allowing the characterizations and ideals emphasized by creative propaganda to live long after the wars had ended. While there is some debate over how effective WWII propaganda was on influencing creative trends, I intend to clarify it by answering the question, *What was the effect of creativity in World War II propaganda on Americans' perceptions of the ideals of liberty and democracy as emphasized in art produced after the wars? Did it leave a legacy worth preserving?* I will accomplish this by reviewing propaganda through sociological, historical, and neurobiological lenses. Art is an inherently social phenomenon, relying on the artist's relationship with myriad unknown viewers. Furthermore, artwork has been used historically to great effect to convey deep emotions, clarify ancient questions, or explore the depths of the human psyche. Creative propaganda, an artistic and artful extension of the science of conviction, has much to teach us about the United States and about ourselves.

The impacts of creative WWII propaganda are many and varied. This essay will begin with *Huns, Terms, and Creel*, an examination of the history of propaganda that focuses on domestic propaganda production. This naturally leads into a discussion of why propaganda, and especially creative WWII propaganda, was so effective in affecting the minds of American civilians. The subsequent section, *Malice In Wonderland*, will explain how the legacy of such propaganda was realized in the effect it had on Americans' perceptions of themselves and of creativity itself, as evidenced in the form and messages of artwork produced immediately after the war. I will follow that with *The Perks of Being a World Power*, which will explore that shift in the perception of creativity. I intend to analyze the artistic and cultural trends that WWII propaganda influenced in the decades following the war. Subsequently, in *Where the Filed Things Are*, I will discuss the impact of creative WWII propaganda on perceptions of the war, creativity, and art and the persistence of those perceptions. Finally, in *One Hundred Years of Sanctitude*, I will conclude my research on how the creative elements within WWII propaganda influenced the artistic enshrinement of American beliefs and the transformation of creativity. To be sure, some would argue that WWII propaganda actually influenced an artistic rejection of American values. Creative WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' hopes and fears to not only change Americans' perceptions of themselves, but also of creativity itself, transforming creativity into a means to achieve an end from its previous role as merely a form of inspiration consigned to artists. This mechanization and commonization of creativity creates more opportunities for non-artists, but potentially makes the act of artistic creation less meaningful.

## HUNS, TERMS, AND CREEL: HOW AND WHY PROPAGANDA MACHINES GRIPPED AMERICANS

In order to comprehend how creativity within WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' perceptions, transformed creativity itself into a means to an end, and shaped long-lasting legacies, one must understand its history. Propaganda itself is a relatively recent phenomenon, since it relies on having an information-literate society. It is no wonder that propaganda took on such a massive role as early as the 1910s, since the early 1900s showed substantial increases in school enrollment rates, with the overall enrollment rates for 5- to 19-year-olds rising from 51% in 1900 to 75% in 1940 (Snyder 6). This historical increase in educational attainment explains why propaganda played an increasingly dominant role in the world wars: the early twentieth century marked the highest percentages of Americans, especially the youth, who were information-literate enough to be affected by it. Naturally, this necessitated the brisk development of methods to utilize information as a war tool.

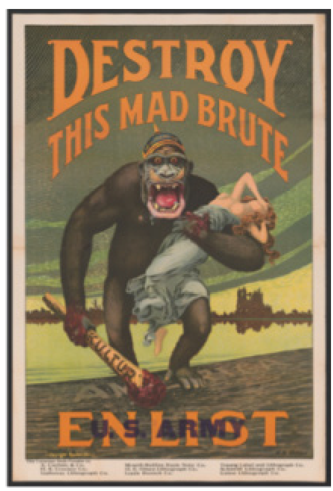

Fig. 1. Hopps, *Destroy This Mad Brute*. 1918.

In the United States, weaponized creativity found its genesis in the Committee of Public Information (CPI), a propaganda agency established during World War I. The head of the CPI, George Creel, was quick to realize creative propaganda's multifaceted nature. In his book *How We Advertised America*, he wrote, "We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption" (4). The emphasis on the connotation of words like "propaganda" are evidence of the importance of symbolism in the war efforts. Whereas Germans produced propaganda, Americans had to produce something higher and nobler: not mere propaganda, but a creatively-bolstered truth.

This creative truth had to be cloaked in color to be most effective. Creel noted that although "Artists, from time immemorial, ha[d] been looked upon as an irresponsible lot," the clarion call of war inspired a frenzy of cartoons, motion pictures, and most importantly, posters (133). Creel emphasized that "The printed word might not be read, people might not choose to attend meetings or to watch motion pictures, but the billboard was something that caught even the most indifferent eye" (133). This highlights the diversity of creative output necessary for the effective distribution of propaganda, with posters being the most important, as they communicated through bold visuals rather than words. Whereas words were limited by the language of the viewer and movies limited by the fact that viewers had to be in movie theaters to watch them, billboards and posters could be seen anywhere they happened to be in a public space. Creel also shows evolving perceptions of creativity: whereas artists were once seen as an "irresponsible lot," they now became some of the most important contributors to the war effort. Already creativity was being recognized for its immense power as a war weapon: a weapon that worked on minds, not bodies. Yet how did creativity gain this immense power?

The answer lies in human biology. Mark V. Flinn is a professor at Baylor University and a biomedical anthropologist specializing in interhuman relationships, of which creativity is an extension. In his article "Creative Neurons," he concluded that "The human brain appears designed by natural selection to acquire and use information from other minds" (Flinn). This explains why creative propaganda is so effective as a means of changing an individual's mind and evoking certain emotional responses: humans are designed to do so. Human beings must necessarily make use of information that has, after a fashion, been pre-processed. Thinking through everything ourselves would be exhausting, overwhelming, and unnecessary, much as when looking at a field, we do not perceive each individual blade of grass. Hence, we rely on others' information:

information that, in times of war, is shrewdly and artistically twisted for maximum effect. The effectiveness of creative propaganda depends in large part on the way it manipulates our information processing systems to take in specific views and values. Creative propaganda abuses or takes advantage of our biological tendency to streamline and specify the information we choose to take in. It gives a biological backing to Creel's methods. Because creativity—a uniquely human form of information analysis and synthesis—transcends cultural and verbal boundaries, it is especially effective (Flinn). Since individuals have varying reactions to certain facts and ideas, it was necessary to creatively utilize as many forms and means as possible to ensure the accumulation and transmission of ideas favorable to the Allies during WWII. However, merely acquiring and using information from other minds is not enough. We forget much. As Flinn notes, "What accumulates is part chance, and part filtering by a multitude of minds designed by selection to make good choices" (Flinn). Good choices, in the evolutionary sense, would enable us to preserve our lives and our offspring. Creative propagandists take advantage of these biological proclivities to evoke emotional and physical responses by subtly manipulating our hopes and fears through art. Some of the most memorable WWII posters implicitly emphasize the fear of death, loss of life, and the destruction of families: images that naturally imprint themselves in our memories. Contrasted with the alternative, it is clear to see why well-designed creative propaganda left a legacy that supported the ideals of liberty, democracy, and American exceptionalism. Creative propagandists were thus able to twist Americans' human instincts to use others' information and to protect their loved ones to inspire Americans to fight, which also implicitly shows the rising importance of creativity as

Fig. 2. *Careless Talk Got There First*, 1943.

Fig. 3. *Ours To Fight For: Freedom From Fear*, 1943.

a tool no longer consigned to the realm of artists.

## MALICE IN WONDERLAND: THE CONFLICTING LEGACY OF WWII PROPAGANDA IN POST-WAR MOVIES

Creative propaganda's growing role as a war weapon instead of an artistic muse was best seen in its subtle manipulation of Americans' hopes to be a united force against evil in WWII. Weaponized creativity took advantage of this preliminary belief to shape Americans' perceptions of themselves as a nation of ultimate do-gooders: a perception that persists to this day. Nowhere are such characterizations as evident as in the creative works produced immediately after the Second World War. They, of all art pieces, bear the implicit stamp of creative wartime propaganda. One especially iconic film that shows the long-lasting impact of creative propaganda in shaping American ideals is It's a Wonderful Life, released in 1946. In the film, quintessentially small town American protagonist, George Bailey, gives up his personal dreams in order to help his family and his community, a sentiment many Americans could sympathize with during the lean wartime years. George, disqualified from the draft on account of being deaf in one ear, is depicted as being heavily involved in the domestic war effort. As his Uncle Billy approvingly notes, "some people like George had to stay home. Not every heel was in Germany and Japan," echoing propagandists' calls for those on the domestic front to do their part in contributing to an Allied victory (It's a Wonderful Life). Additionally, George's brother, Harry, is awarded the Medal of Honor for his WWII service, artfully emphasizing the positive value of serving and having served. The war is romanticized; Harry and especially George are depicted as being model members of their community. WWII is consistently depicted as "The Good War," emblematic of the "triumph of good over evil": a perception that has persisted to this day (Foley). Evidently, the creative oeuvres produced immediately after the war bore the unmistakable mark of well designed wartime propaganda. This artwork shaped Americans' image of themselves as honest, charitable individuals, a nation of George Baileys. It evoked deep emotions towards family, God, and public service with its tender portrayals of family and faith. Creativity became a means to an end, articulating an artistic idea of American exceptionalism and of the necessary triumph of American ideals that had not hitherto seen its equal in past creative movements.

However, not every creative piece depicted patriotic Americans in a rosy light. The grip of "creative weapons" lessened over the years and was occasionally outright rejected, as seen in the film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1955). Unintentionally bearing a title that could be seen as similar to It's a Wonderful Life, the former undoubtedly shows American disillusionment following the war, which would not have been as widespread in 1946. It is indicative of a creative shift in thinking. *It's Always Fair Weather* has three ex-G.I.s, Ted, Doug, and Angie, depart home after WWII, promising to meet again at one of their favorite bars in ten years. Despite being the best of friends during the war, their reunion reveals to them that Ted, once an idealist, has become a gambler; the artistic Doug is consigned to a high-stress advertising job; Angie, who had high culinary aspirations, runs a mere hamburger joint. They each see each other as hicks, snobs, or punks, and wonder how they ever were friends in the first place (*It's Always Fair Weather*). Even though the film sees them rekindle some of their old friendship, they eventually go their separate ways, and it is unclear if they will ever meet again. Though "the nature of the war allowed for the simplification of the objectives through propaganda," the post-war decades displayed a lack of this united focus (Foley). The creative impact of WWII propaganda had lessened, resulting in the dilution of what had previously been loudly- proclaimed American ideals. A creative about-face was occurring. Artistically, gaudiness rose to replace glory; portrayals of WWII became hammy, not heroic. In a larger sense, it was a symptom of a greater cultural shift. The very nature of creativity was being reevaluated, in part due to WWII propaganda: perceptions were changing to regard creativity and art as means to an end. Though these perceptions found their beginnings in wartime propaganda, as *It's Always Fair Weather* showed, they would take on lives of their own.

The reevaluation of creativity as a means to an end is one of the various legacies of war propaganda; a legacy which continues to shape American ideals today. Indeed, one consequence of wartime propaganda's calls for Americans to do what they could to benefit the country was a flood of new sociological research. Post-war researchers stressed the economic and utilitarian value of creativity, whether it resulted in "poems, patents, buildings, or bombs" (Mareis 53). At the same time, the concept of brainstorming came into being: the word distanced itself from its previous definition of "an individual pathological-delusional state and developed into an entrepreneurial model of productive creative work in a small group" (Mareis 54). The very nature of creativity was changing: wartime propaganda made Americans see that it was an instrument to be wielded, not something that artists channeled whenever their muses inspired them. This is expanded upon by art researchers led by Henrik Hagtvedt, a visual-artist-turned- scholar. In his work, he references the estimate that "7% of emotion experienced in daily life stems from dealing with cultural artifacts" and notes that "it is well established that visual art is an aesthetic stimulus that evokes an emotional response" (Hagtvedt 200). Therefore, the most impactful creative works are those that evoke strong emotions, precisely like wartime propaganda does. This emotional impact may explain why creative propaganda is such a prickly subject, even today. While it may be a far stretch to suggest that something like a McDonalds advertisement bears the stamp of WWII, it is well within the realm of reason to suppose that advertisers learned the trick of how to enthrall or shock their audiences from the original creative weapon: wartime propaganda. This is but one way in which creative wartime propaganda left its mark on American ideals, culture, perceptions of creativity, and art itself.

## THE PERKS OF BEING A WORLD POWER: PROPAGANDA, THE COUNTERCULTURE, AND TRADITIONALISM

While it is true that creative WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' hopes and fears to change Americans' perceptions of themselves and of creativity itself, it is also true that it influenced a conscious creative rejection of those same American values during the 1950s. It is initially hard to see why this was the case. After all, "In the discussion of hostile emotional responses, the role of the self relates to attack on identity or schema. Responses stem from a 'deliberate trespass' (Silvia, 2009, p. 49) against one's goals/values" (Pelowski). People tend to react hostilely when an event attacks their identity or their values. This may explain why WWII propaganda, especially propaganda that emphasized German atrocities, was so powerful. It "trespassed" on Americans' image of themselves as a good, peace-loving people being attacked by a deliberate, cruel force of evil. Indeed, hostile emotional responses "are tied to action that is often given as a means of maintaining or protecting the self, motivating aggression and self-assertion" (Pelowski). This may explain why belief in American exceptionalism rose during and after the war: it was a form of self-assertion, a means of cumulatively and socially protecting the American identity. Why would such a view be rejected after it had been so strenuously asserted and apparently accepted?

Part of the explanation may lie in the freeing of creativity from its wartime bonds. Whereas before creativity had been impressed into the service of the government, it now became a tool for industry, a tool for politicians, and a tool widely available to American civilians—not just artists—to use for their own purposes. Indeed, according to art historian and former director of the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art Stephen Polcari, abstract painting "recapitulate[d] the modernist romance of the artists as rebels against society struggling to assert and maintain their integrity… [and represented] concerns with emotional honesty: rough, awkward, sometimes boisterous surfaces and forms, and naïve feelings" (Polcari 174). The creative vision of Abstract Expressionism was everything propaganda was not, guided by civilians rather than governments, and it asserted an identity that was just as viscerally American. However, this does not paint—or splatter—the full picture.

Creative propaganda so influenced American art that the latter took on similar political connotations and messages to the former. Though it could be argued that "Abstract Expressionism emerged from a half a century of collapse of Enlightenment values and the faltering of Western civilization," the influence of creative WWII propaganda on the creative artforms that rose after the war should not be completely dismissed (Polcari 178). Instead of representing the collapse of those values, the creative output of post-war artists ended up doing the opposite. As Abstract Expressionism rebelled against the form and messages of creative WWII propaganda at home, it actually confirmed them abroad. Professor of American studies Frank Mehring, who researches cultural transfers between the U.S. and Germany, argued that "After World War II, the aesthetization [sic] of democracy became a major issue in the U.S. effort to counterbalance political agendas of the National Socialist past and in the growing political polarization during the Cold War," resulting in a flurry of American art exhibits in Germany, especially of Abstract Expressionists (Mehring 972). Evidently, the artwork of Abstract Expressionists confirmed the same values creative WWII propaganda proclaimed despite Abstract Expressionists' emphasis to the contrary. Abstract Expressionism was seen as the very essence of Americana, as something on the level of propaganda, as something that counterbalanced other countries' political agendas in order to advance those of the United States.

Perhaps this was because the United States' creative WWII propaganda became seen as analogous to American art: industrialized or wartime-centered creativity became the world's perception of American creativity. Seemingly, creative WWII propaganda made any creative output a pro-American creative output. Any form of creativity in the U.S. became synonymous with pro-American values, confirming Americans' belief in their own exceptionalism and again molding the American creative vision along the ideals so loudly proclaimed by WWII propagandists. This was further exemplified by a resurgence of traditionalism in American creative output after the war, a direct contrast to the creative rebellion of the Abstract Expressionists. When focusing on creative output that represents honest-to-goodness Americana before, during, and after WWII, Irving Berlin dominates the stage. Creative WWII propaganda was reflected in many of Berlin's classic songs. For instance, his famous "White Christmas" was originally a war song, intended to evoke "something sentimental about home and love" and a "return to normalcy," creating a vision of the holiday that could not be destroyed by war (Herman 29). Such a song creatively evoked American values as strong as those articulated by WWII propaganda. In this way, post-war artistic output was made to emphasize American ideals: the very thing WWII propaganda sought to accomplish. Creative WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' hopes for peace and prosperity fears to strengthen Americans' vision of themselves, but it also transformed creativity itself into the very mouthpiece of American values. Even creative output that rebelled against WWII propaganda was seen to confirm it. The addition of a rise in traditionalism is a clear indication of just how powerfully well-designed WWII propaganda persists in the creative memory of the United States.

## WHERE THE FILED THINGS ARE: THE PRESERVATION OF WWII PROPAGANDA IN CREATIVE MEMORY

Creative WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' hopes and fears to not only change Americans' perceptions of themselves, but also of creativity itself, transforming creativity into a means to achieve an end from its previous role as just a means of inspiration for artists. This is reflected in the way creative WWII propaganda was preserved in the American memory: the ideals it so fervently proclaimed became ideals reflected in post-war art. Germans began to be stereotypically represented as devious and cruel in film as early as 1917, and such representations only intensified during WWII (Aube 12-13). After the war, film villains of various nationalities became "Nazified," either by portraying them as Hitchcockian "multi-faceted killers with ordinary features," or by giving them stereotypically Aryan characteristics like blond hair and blue eyes (Aube 73, 79). The powerful feelings of fear and danger creative WWII propaganda evoked in connection with the Axis powers had enshrined the image of the ruthless German in popular memory, as reflected in the artwork produced after the war.

Undeniably, creativity itself, as expressed in media, experienced a sort of pro- Americanization. It is easy to enshrine World War II in the American creative memory because it is a tale that so aptly defines American values: values that were highlighted initially in propaganda, and which made their way into the paintings, songs, and artwork of the post-war period. In this way, creative WWII propaganda changed not only perceptions of creativity, but Americans' perceptions of themselves and of other nations. Any creative output by Americans—and by extension, creativity itself—had to confirm and uphold American values. Even works that explicitly or implicitly did not do so could be interpreted as advancing uniquely American ideas in that they were protected by the values of liberty and democracy. Changing perceptions of the role of creativity as a means to an end facilitated such a transformation. The medium became the message, and the message was pro-American.

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SANCTITUDE

Creative WWII propaganda manipulated Americans' ambitions and anxieties to not only change Americans' perceptions of themselves, but also of creativity itself, transforming creativity into a means to an end from merely a form of artistic inspiration. By shrewdly exaggerating Americans' graces while demonizing Germans' depravity, creative WWII propaganda took advantage of human beings' neurobiology to establish an image of the U.S. as a unique force of truth, strength, and light. These perceptions have been immortalized in countless works of art, ranging from movies to melodies, and have given rise to beliefs in American exceptionalism that persist to this day. Even though certain artworks, like those of the Abstract Expressionists, outright rejected WWII propaganda, they were still seen to confirm and elevate

American ideals, like freedom of thought. Indeed, creative propaganda was pivotal in changing perceptions of art—and by extension, creativity—from an artistic aid to a means to an end. Once creativity had been impressed into the service of the government, it also became impressed into the service of industries, institutions, and individuals. Art became more than just a war weapon. It became an economic and utilitarian instrument.

This paradigm shift in thinking about creativity brings both enrichment and loss. On the one hand, creativity has become more accessible. Freed from the domain of artists, it is now ably used by individuals ranging from accountants to zoologists. One can see this with a simple glance at social media. This commonization of creativity has undoubtedly increased the sheer amount of creative output. At the same time, creativity's mechanization, its descent into the realm of productivity, perhaps makes the act of artistic creation less meaningful. Although it is untrue to say that before World War II art was created merely for its own sake, WWII propaganda so thoroughly combined creativity with political messaging that it became difficult to tell one from the other. The mixture was potent, but the individual ingredients lost their identity. WWII propaganda simplified information to get only the salient aspects across.

The United States' cultural creative impact was not limited to propaganda. America's "cultural hegemony in the world community" led to further development of "the arts of mass communication"—propaganda in new shapes and forms—but also "led to the vulgarization of culture as well as the dissemination of its richest prizes among the general public" (White 241 - 242). While it is surprising that creative pieces that rejected American values, like the work of Abstract Expressionists, were seen to confirm those same values, it is less remarkable considering the "caricaturization" of culture. Clearly, a uniquely American form of

industrialized, product-oriented art was spreading around the globe, but as it shared riches, it cheapened creativity.

Furthermore, the legacy of creative propaganda has lacquered most creative pieces made by American artists with a pro-American sheen. While this has confirmed notions of American exceptionalism, it has also limited the range of ideas and emotions conveyed to viewers. Historian Herbert Schiller, who studies American corporate and cultural domination, quotes a speech from Finnish President Urho Kekkonen to demonstrate the rise of values uniquely associated with America in the post-war decades. Kekkonen stated that "Freedom of action and enterprise—laissez-faire—was made the supreme value in the world of business and ideology [after WWII], irrespective of at whose expense success in this world was achieved" (Schiller 43). This was due to the rise of an American business and economic system that heavily relied on creativity. Indeed, "The mass media—the press, radio, television—supplement and extend the message the system wants conveyed," which in the case of the United States meant emphasizing the American values creative WWII propaganda so staunchly proclaimed (Schiller 49). The cultural domination of American values in countries across the globe has certainly impacted creativity. The monopolization of the film industries by large American studios prevents smaller artists from expressing their ideas. While it is uncertain how artistic trends will unfold in the coming decades, it is clear that the United States will continue to dominate the creative cultural sphere for many years to come.

The implications of this for artists in the United States and abroad are manifold. The United States' cultural creative control will require both artists and viewers to be more introspective. Artistic freedom will necessitate striking a balance between flagrant individualism and cultural restrictions, necessary for the coherent functioning of society. At the same time, the United States' creative dominance will also boost the effectiveness of creative government messaging, which can be useful during times of international conflict or domestic turmoil like

COVID-19. Therefore, we must both understand the post-war role of creativity and its industrial connotations, but recognize that this new role opens myriad possibilities to create more complex, nuanced art with far-reaching messages. This naturally raises several questions. How can we creatively communicate our goals as individuals and as a society? Do we have a responsibility to restore creativity to its pre-war role, or to develop it yet further as an instrument for civilians and authorities?

Though the posters that proclaimed men's missions then are now yellowed and tattered, they are still worth studying. Though they cannot promise to give us the answers of the future, they may guide us by revealing the questions of yesteryear. As they creatively communicate the past, they exhort us never to repeat it. Such artwork, though birthed by bloodshed, represents an earnest hope for the dawn of an age where creativity will never again be used in war. It is emblematic of a fervent wish that the art of our time, and of the times beyond, will ever express prosperity and peace.

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**Matan Dubnikov**

# The Psyche-Dilemma: On the Future of Hallucinogens in Modern America


## ABSTRACT

*The pharmacopeia of psychedelics has defined the human relationship with spirituality, transcendentalism and mental well-being for thousands of years in cultures throughout the globe. Within the last century, clinical research has evolved the understanding of psychoactive compounds, specifically LSD and psilocybin, as potent medications capable of treating addiction, trauma, and other emotional disorders. The scheduling by the U.S. Government and suppressive pressure from the pharmaceutical industry, following the escape of psychedelics from the lab and into popular culture, erased the possibility of legalizing psychoactive medicines for decades. Meanwhile, antidepressants, opioids and other prescription medications remain financially supported and potentially dangerous options for emotional and mental conditions in the United States. With overwhelmingly positive results in recent research into psychoactive compounds, changing public perceptions and the scrutinization of "big pharma" comes the potential for a multi-billion-dollar psychedelic industry that may disrupt the prescription status quo and heal the chronic conditions that plague Americans within the next decade.*


## INTRODUCTION

Societies, both ancient and modern, have woven the consumption of psychedelic plants and fungi into the very fabric of their ontological beliefs. The ancient Greeks consumed kykeon, a mystical beverage used in religious ceremonies that likely contained traces of Ergot, a psychoactive fungus. Indian yogis prepared soma, a mixture of fly agaric and herbs that was considered a direct channel to the powerful gods of the Hindu pantheon. Even today, indigenous groups from the deserts of Mexico to the Amazon rainforest ingest psychedelic plant concoctions to achieve transcendence and enlightenment (Schultes et al.).

After the second World War, western researchers leaped at opportunities to explore the psychological and physiological potentials of psychedelic compounds as medicines, therapies, and tools to achieve higher states of consciousness. Early research into psychoactive compounds helped scientists understand the underlying neurochemical imbalances behind schizophrenia (Costandi, 2014). LSD therapy successfully inhibited alcoholism in two thousand patients without relapse; it also induced "a mind-manifesting experience that led to personal insight, transcendence, or 'spiritual' enlightenment" under professional guidance (Dyck, 2006, p. 317). Eventually, psychedelics leaked out of treatment centers and laboratories; first into the hands of writers and public figures like Aldous Huxley, then into the public as an unregulated drug. In the 1960's, as the American military became entangled in conflicts in Cuba and Southeast Asia, compounds like mescaline, psilocybin and LSD became associated with the greater anti-war movement. The threat to American foreign policy was then conflated with the abundant use of psychoactive substances by the US government, and in 1971, the nation criminalized psychedelics under Schedule I under the Nixon administration. The "War on Drugs," an over $1 trillion choreography of anti-narcotic policing in the US with international support for dismantling global drug syndicates over the course of half a century, stripped research opportunities for most psychedelics and established a decades-long crackdown on illegal drug use. Though successful in dismantling several large-scale operations, the nation-wide crackdown resulted in the profiling of minority groups like African Americans, Latinos and immigrants of Asian descent and a surge in mass incarcerations, often for petty crimes (Lopez, 2016).

In recent years, research into the potential of hallucinogens has experienced something of a renaissance. The surge in positive evidence for psychedelic use has introduced political reforms in traditionally conservative drug policy. Abroad, Brazil, the Netherlands and the Bahamas have decriminalized the consumption of hallucinogens with negligible public health and recreational effects (Amsterdam et al, 2011, pp. 423-429). In the United States, historic drug opponents like former Texas Governor Rick Perry publicly endorse accessible psychedelic therapies. In 2020, Washington D.C., Oregon, and cities nationwide voted to decriminalize psilocybin. Private entities are constructing clinics administering psychoactive compounds to paying patients, opening the front door to a two-billion-dollar industry (Jacobs, 2021).

## REFINED RESEARCH QUESTION AND PLAN

Is the United States at a turning point in its tumultuous relationship with psychedelics? Will a wave of groundbreaking clinical research normalize therapies and be used on both sick and healthy clients? Or will conservative institutions like religion-infused politics, dated legal frameworks and shared fears of the unknown cut short the potential of psychoactive substances? Will corporate influence compromise the inherent natural and democratic values of psychedelics for profit? This research paper will examine the current social, cultural, and scientific factors that will define the near future of psychedelics within American society. Through recent scientific advancements in psychedelic research, I will assess the potential for psilocybin, MDMA, ketamine and other hallucinogenic compounds to be introduced into the general pharmacopeia of Western medicine. Case studies into existing legal frameworks will form a basis for insight into national future action. I will investigate philosophical observations about the American relationship to consciousness, happiness, and social norms to interpret the likelihood of societal acceptance of psychedelics beyond clinical treatments.

## THE STATUS QUO: DISORDERS, DANGEROUS PRESCRIPTIONS AND CORRUPTION UNDERMINE AMERICA

The scientific frontier in psychedelics has advanced further in recent years than at any point in the past three decades, spurred on by a mental health epidemic of immense proportions and inadequate medical resources. Over one fourth of adults in the United States suffer from "a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year", with over 30 million American adults combatting depression annually (Johns Hopkins Medicine). A 2017 report estimates that 55 percent of individuals burdened with mental health issues struggle to find psychiatrists that accept either their insurance or new patients (NAMI, 2017). Fueling America's health crisis is the misguided prescription medication scheme adopted by general medical practitioners in the West. With an incredibly influential pharmaceutical sector, expanded upon below, most doctors prescribe a regimen of synthesized painkillers and antidepressants to treat a broad array of chronic maladies and behavioral issues, respectively. Over 20 million antidepressants were prescribed between October and December of 2020 in the UK alone (Robinson, 2021). In the US, nearly 143 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed that same year (CDC, 2021).

However, a disturbing amount of evidence highlights a varying degree of ineffectiveness in conventional prescription medications and suggests they may be more harmful than helpful in tackling the ill-health of the nation. Prescription opioids are highly addictive, releasing the "feel-good" endorphins that block pain and induce pleasure in the brain (Mayo Clinic, 2022). People on opioid pain relievers build dependencies that transform into powerful addictions over the course of their regimen, to the tune of 25 percent of all patients with long-term prescriptions. 11.5 million Americans – nearly 4 percent of the entire U.S. population – abused prescription opioids in 2018 (CDC, 2021), resulting in 16,800 overdose deaths (HHS, 2017). It is no surprise that as of 2017, the Department of Health and Human Services officially designated the opioid crisis a public health emergency.

Some conventional antidepressants build detrimental habituation like their opioid counterparts. Parnate, a popular antidepressant prescribed to treat major depression by restoring chemical imbalances within the brain, causes rapid tolerance and stimulant effects in users despite a high efficacy. An article published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* found Parnate responsible for 57 percent of behavioral medication addictions in the UK from 1963 to 1999 (Haddad, 1999, pp. 300-307). Other antidepressants are ineffective at best. The Mayo Clinic suggests there is no difference in impact between prazosin, a widely prescribed medication said to suppress nightmares in PTSD patients, and placebo treatments. In fact, a meta-analysis of trends in treatment-resistant depression concluded that up to 30 percent of antidepressant users "do not improve or show a partial response coupled with functional impairment, poor quality of life, suicide ideation and attempts, self-injurious behavior, and a high relapse rate" (Al-Harbi, 2012, p. 369). Suicides are an area of great concern in antidepressant users. As of 2019, the rate of suicides in the United States is 14 deaths per 100,000 people. That number increased six-fold within six months of a prescription, per a study analyzing the historical correlation between antidepressant use and suicide. 43 percent of antidepressant-correlated suicides involved people who had preexisting suicidal thoughts, multiple prescriptions, or both, and those whose last prescription was within 30 days were more likely to commit suicide than with a prescription older than a month (Jick et al., 1995, pp. 215-218). Clearly, the prescription status quo represents a medical disaster; Americans with physical and mental illnesses have few remedial options save for prescription regimens that would be considered far too dangerous and ineffective by the FDA's own standards to be approved today.

This, of course, brings up the question of why antidepressants, opioids and other prescription medications continue to undermine the health of millions of Americans. The FDA, the federal body responsible for the approval and classification of all drugs, is vulnerable to corruption with the immense influence of the pharmaceutical industry. A recent Harvard report suggests there is significant evidence of pro-pharmaceutical actions, such as the rapid approval or dismissal of certain drugs, based on donations from private medical companies (Light, 2013). It is no surprise then that the FDA has yet to update public information and recommend psychedelic alternatives to conventional antidepressants and mood-altering medication, despite overwhelming evidence demonstrating their efficacy in treating many mental health issues. Corporations equally influence politicians, left and right, through bountiful financial support, especially in campaign contributions. Pro-pharmaceutical political action committees collectively contributed $147,300 to the 2022 campaign of Representative Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, the "top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee". On the other side of the aisle, Democratic Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado received $513,000 in pharmaceutical donations since 2007. Just last year, freshman representative Frank Ervan saw $20,000 contributed to his first campaign (KHN, 2022). These influential bodies, in turn, are funded by manufacturers of the same antidepressants and opioids that fuel habituation and prescription abuse in millions of Americans. As such, the political chokehold enforced on America's legislators and regulating bodies grant pharmaceutical companies free will to dictate their pro-prescription agenda at the expense of the nation's physical and democratic health.

## THE PSYCHEDELIC ANSWER TO PRESCRIPTIONS

Alternatively, psychedelics offer "profound implications" for the overburdened and underdeveloped mental health industry (Jacobs, 2021), and a contrast to harmful and less effective prescription medications. Contrary to pharmaceutical alternatives, psychedelics pose minimal risks when administered under professional guidance. An analysis from 2010 published in the *Lancet* journal concluded that psilocybin-containing mushrooms and LSD are the least and third-least harmful, respectively, of 20 major controlled and recreational substances including heroin, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine. The same analysis determined that alcohol and tobacco, two of the most frequently consumed substances, are over 5 times more harmful than any of the psychoactive substances studied. Even Adderall is deemed riskier than both mushrooms and LSD

(Nutt et al., 2010, pp. 1558-1565), while the Registry of Toxic Effects of Chemical Substances gives psilocybin a better safety profile than both nicotine and aspirin. A meta-analysis of existing psychedelic research concluded that, unlike opioids, consumption of psychoactive mushrooms is not dependence-forming, and the termination of any temporal regimen does not trigger physical withdrawal symptoms. Psychologically, psilocybin and other psychedelic compounds have "low physiological toxicity, low abuse/addictive liability, safe psychological responses, and no associated persisting adverse… effects during or after use" (Lowe et al., 2021, p. 20).

In addition to relative safety, psychedelics boast a pantheon of impressive psychological and physiological benefits that place them on par with– if not beyond– conventional prescription medication. Psychedelics effectively treated "mood and anxiety disorders … demonstrated analgesic effects… [on] cluster headaches, intractable phantom-limb pain, and chronic pain" of which psilocybin was demonstrated to be as or more effective than conventional medicines (Lowe et al., 2021, p. 4). A Johns Hopkins University study concluded that guided psychedelic consumption was over four times more effective at treating depression than conventional antidepressants (Davis et al.). Specifically, psilocybin was demonstrated to be as or more effective than a six-week regimen of escitalopram (Carhart-Harris et al., 2021, pp. 1402-1411), a common antidepressant approved by the FDA that is associated with defects in breastfed infants (Mayo Clinic) and are associated with reduced suicide ideation (James et al., 2020, p. 5). Another study confirmed the safety and efficacy of MDMA in PTSD therapy. Emerging studies like these support a new narrative on psychedelics as powerful, effective and safe treatments that both outperform prescription pharmaceuticals and contribute to unprecedented long-term healing. Psychedelics wield immense potential in promoting mental well-being, and as such, are speculated to become the next medical leap by investing entities.

## BEYOND TREATMENT: PSYCHEDELICS FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Many of the stressors on American mental health arise from social norms and cultural behaviors. Eastern philosophies, including Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Taoism, warn of the dangers posed by an obsession with consumption. Within these cultural beliefs exists a population of “Hungry Ghosts”– souls who, in life, “are following a path of incorrect desire, who suffer from spiritual emptiness” and in death, “endlessly seek particular objects, emotions or people, those things that obsessed them … when they were living” (Kashgar, 2022). As renowned physician and author Dr. Gabor Maté explains, “The aching emptiness is perpetual because we don’t know what we need, and so long as we stay in the hungry ghost mode, we’ll never know. We haunt our lives without being fully present” (Maté, 2022). Consumer culture has transformed Americans into their own hungry ghosts. Consumerism, or “the acquisition of goods and services is used to satisfy the higher needs”, is responsible for extreme dissatisfaction and deprivation, according to sociologist Amitai Etzioni. He explains, “A culture in which the urge to consume dominates the psychology of citizens is a culture in which people will do most anything to acquire the means to consume—working slavish hours, behaving rapaciously in their business pursuits, and even bending the rules in order to maximize their earnings”. Along the same lines, contemporary philosopher Sam Harris suggests that the American value system makes it impossible for individuals to find true happiness, in the sense that within their emotional lives, Americans experience “nothing … more profound than repeating one’s pleasures and avoiding one’s pains” (Harris, 2014). The result is a simplified existence–especially when compared to pre-modern populations with spiritual and mythological practices–deficient in discovery and conscious exploration, instead placing focus around the accumulation of material wealth and consumption of goods. This culture has led to the generations of Americans pursuing lives without satisfaction nor happiness, overwhelming already limited mental health resources. It was ethnobotanist and thinker Terrence McKenna who first publicly suggested that psychedelics might be used as a tool to rediscover a sense of happiness, awe, and transcendence. McKenna writes in *Food of the Gods*,

> Without the escape hatch into the transcendental and transpersonal realm that is provided by plant-based indole hallucinogens, the human future would be bleak indeed. We have lost the ability to be swayed by the power of myths, and our history should convince us of the fallacy of dogma. What we require is a new dimension of self-experience that individually and collectively authenticates democratic social forms and our stewardship of this small part of the larger universe (McKenna, 2010, p. 138).

As McKenna suggests, the consumption of psychedelics as a cultural asset, not just a medicinal therapy, stands to reintroduce the essential awe and spirituality in societies wired to prioritize consumption over all else. Thus, in tandem with the medical promises of psychedelic therapies and treatments for disorders, additional research is emerging on the implications of psychedelic use in improving spirituality and cognitive well-being. In 2017, a study group of healthy individuals recalled profound experiences of mystical nature and transcendence as well as long-term increases in positive moods, attitudes, social behavior, and spirituality after guided psilocybin therapy sessions (Griffiths et al., 2017, pp. 49-69). This study effectively bridged the gaps between clinical research and enlightenment– a field of thought once reserved for shamans, scholars, artists, and philosophers – opening the door for further research and legitimate discussion about safe recreational use of psilocybin and psychoactive substances. More recent psychedelic research noted that healthy subjects felt increased altruism, connectedness with others and the environment, and even tempered authoritarian views for long periods after the consumption of psychedelic substances (James et al., 2020). As such, psychedelics may be a potent remedy for the sociocultural pressures that diminish happiness and spirituality in most Americans.

However, the means of achieving enlightenment and conscious expansion through psychedelics in the United States are presently reserved to those who can afford their high price tag. Because of the illegal status of psychoactive substances in most of the United States, clients seeking the benefits of psychedelic treatments typically travel to countries with a decriminalized status, like Costa Rica and Jamaica. Such "psychedelic retreats" range from "$5,000 and $10,000 for seven days" (Kamin, 2021). Domestic guided therapy sessions are no cheaper. One midtown Manhattan practice charges its patients $4100 for a series of four 90-minute sessions with ketamine, the only psychedelic currently legal in the US for medicinal use (Jacobs, 2021). The millions of Americans struggling to receive generic psychiatric care for depression and other mental issues have little access to the pricey psychedelic programs available to the wealthy few.

## INFLUENTIAL FORCES IN THE EMERGING PSYCHEDELIC INDUSTRY

Despite an absence of federal support, parties in the pharmaceutical industry have generated a significant rise in funding for clinical research. Over $320 million was invested in psychedelic developments in the second quarter of 2019 (Alexandrov, 2020). An investigative *New York Times* article found that three entities alone – the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, Field Trip Health, and Compass Pathways – have collectively fundraised nearly $500 million for psychedelic research opportunities through 2021 (Jacobs, 2021). Not surprisingly, current estimates place the value of the psychedelic therapeutics market at $6.8 billion by 2027, over three times the calculated value for 2019 (NetworkNewsWire, 2020). Though the designation of psilocybin, LSD, peyote and other psychedelics as Schedule I leaves the private sector responsible for millions of dollars in research grants and clinical support, academic institutions are also rapidly developing psychedelic study centers to establish points of origin for safe use in a vast future audience. According to Lowe et al., "between 2015 and 2020, nearly 550 grants have been awarded to research institutes engaged in psychedelic research" (Lowe et al., 2021, p. 7). As of current, over 100 universities in the United States actively research psychedelics or have established centers for psychoactive studies (Psychedelic Invest, 2021).

Yet the increase of private interests in psychedelics presents potentially hazardous roadblocks to the equitable expansion of treatment opportunities, threatening to replay the devastating schematics associated with the corporations behind conventional prescription pharmaceuticals. Beyond corrupt approval bodies and lawmakers, privatization inherently threatens the natural properties of psychedelic compounds in favor of profit. One of the defining trends in the psychedelic frontier is the race to effectively synthesize psilocybin without extraction. Lowe et al. reports that existing yields in wild or cultivated mushrooms account for 0.1 percent of total dry weight, not nearly enough to provide consistent supply for increasing medical demand. The first attempts at psilocybin synthesis during the 1950s were only 20 percent effective. Recently, Compass Pathways developed synthesis technologies that produce 75 percent semi-pure psilocybin. Though a great leap, synthetic, isolated psilocybin is proven to be less effective than whole psychoactive mushrooms and extracts. A recent study on mice confirmed that the synergistic effect of psilocybin with other compounds present in mushrooms far outperforms psilocybin isolate in reducing anxiety-related behaviors (Lowe et al., 2021, p. 2948).

Paired with existing biases in the medicinal industry, efforts to take psychedelics from forests and farms to privatized medicine pose tremendous risks for indigenous recognition and accessibility across economic and cultural lines. The realm of clinical research remains one of the least diverse practices in the United States. In fact, due to explicit racial disparities in research and medicine, minorities are reluctant to participate in clinical trials (MAPS, 2022). Andrew Ferguson notes in "Making it all up" that the majority of behavioral research is conducted on white, middle-to-upper class undergraduates. Psychedelic research is no different. In 17 studies conducted between 2000 and 2017, 75 percent of subject groups were comprised of white participants. Even the editorial board serving for the *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* is 78 percent male and largely white (George et al., 2020, pp. 4-15). As for the immense cultural histories behind existing psychedelic knowledge, contemporary medicine often fails to recognize indigenous tribes, people, and practices for their roles. At a recent conference on the state of psychedelics, researchers noted that presenters focused more on a plant's universal effects rather than "placing the plant within its specific cultural context" (Feinberg & Cavanar, 2018, pp. 35-57). For the myriad of culturally relevant psychedelics, such as Peyote in Navajo tradition, San Pedro and Ayahuasca in indigenous South American cultures and countless others, lack of representation is a growing threat to tribal rights and spirituality. Marks et al. note in a 2021 review that patents for psychedelic therapies amount to "biopiracy", or the exploitation of indigenous medicinal knowledge "without acknowledgement or compensation" (Marks et al., 2021, p. 1670). They also restrict the control of psychedelic medicines to a few companies and thus discourage direct involvement by smaller clinics, research groups and nonprofits. The ability for pharmaceutical companies to privatize psychedelic compounds accounts for inequities in production. Technologies to synthesize psilocybin like Compass Pathway's recent development are incredibly expensive, resulting in higher downstream costs for consumers and therefore lower availability in lower economic strata.

## CONCLUSION

As the turbulence of the present psychoactive theater presents, the future of psychedelics as medicine in America is obscure. On one hand, the wealth of cultural information and myriad of recently researched benefits appear as potent forces that could very well sway the American social consciousness away from fear and towards acceptance. Clinical trials show psychedelics to be swiss-army tools for a plethora of physical, mental, and social maladies with minimal side effects. In their natural states, psychoactive plants, mushrooms, and their extracts tell tales of indigenous practices and spirituality, all the while remaining economical for people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, geographies and income levels. Billions of dollars in investments promise to tame the psychedelic frontier within the next decade. However, greed, corporatism and the fallacies of the existing medical industry seek to disrupt the promises of psychedelics and absorb them into the status quo. The restrictions of federal scheduling leave both funding and directing psychedelic research in the hands of capital-rich private entities, as the pharmaceutical hand in the pockets of regulating bodies and legislators continues to feed America's public health crisis. Biases in medical institutions discourage both indigenous and minority representation, while patent laws and emerging technologies threaten to maintain access barriers to lower income populations.

Yet psychedelics as a cultural remedy appear more appropriate than ever. The American populace has been subdued by dangerous consumption habits. A misinformed and corrupt prescription-oriented medical industry continues to haphazardly dole out addictive opiates and questionably effective antidepressants for millions of Americans coping with chronic pain, depression, PTSD, and other disorders. The result is a population sicker than before; one that is prone to abusing the medication prescribed to heal it. On a social level, the widespread fixation of accumulating goods and wealth leads to lives of unhappiness and dissatisfaction, void of conscious exploration and awe. Psychedelics offer a means of reintroducing spirituality and enlightenment into everyday life without entirely dismantling the intuitions and norms that eliminated them in the first place.

The role of the individual, the community, and the national populace in shaping this future is not to be overlooked. By educating themselves and others on the histories and functions of psychedelic compounds, voting in elections, writing petitions, and enforcing democratic values, Americans could potentially solve the psychedelics dilemma, dismantle old stigmas, and introduce a new chapter of acceptance.

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**Puja Shah**

# Eating as a Way to Cope with the Pandemic: Healthy or Unhealthy?


## ABSTRACT

*From early 2020 to now, the COVID-19 pandemic has subsumed a major portion of everyone's daily life. Between the pandemic's impacts on holistic health, social interactions, and professional and institutional environments, the pandemic has significantly altered our everyday lives. During the peak of the pandemic, an overload of information, rumors, and misinformation created feelings of confusion and chaos for many. In addition to feelings of anger, stress, loneliness, fear, and sadness, other psychiatric symptoms began to develop or intensify. While there were many adaptive coping mechanisms to combat the stress derived from the pandemic, it was also easy to fall into the trap of maladaptive coping mechanisms. Since many people had consistent access to food, either from their kitchen or ordering takeout, eating became a way to suppress some of the negative emotions induced by the pandemic. Emotional eating is a term used to describe the act of eating to temporarily suppress the negative emotions experienced by an individual. A person's emotions can be tied to their eating habits in such a way that they will subconsciously reach for a food item when upset.. This pattern may create a compounding effect overtime and potentially develop into a life-threatening condition. It is important to talk about emotional eating and the eating disorders associated with it so that it does not take a significant toll on one's health in the future.*


## INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy once said, "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different." Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed everyone's lives. Beginning in early 2020, various preventive measures were set in place to slow the spread of the virus, from masks mandates and social distancing to statewide lockdowns. People's lives were uprooted as they were forced to adapt to a new normal—work from home jobs, online learning, virtual graduations, virtual job interviews, and much more. Even though the impact of the pandemic was felt differently by each person, it undoubtedly sparked feelings of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and depression. In addition to the rising number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, the loss of financial security and loved ones provoked a decline in mental health. The inescapable circumstances of the pandemic brought about a great deal of psychological distress. Moreover, staying at home meant that many people had constant access to food, which may have been a way to cope with the mental distress experienced during the pandemic.

The key of this research paper is to determine and analyze how psychological distress impacted eating habits during the pandemic. This research question will  be studied within the theoretical frameworks of emotional eating and neuroticism. Emotional eating refers to the practice of consuming large quantities of "comfort" foods in response to feelings other than hunger. This is typically seen as a negative coping method since it could repurcuss in the onset of various eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia. Neuroticism, on the other hand, is a personality trait that represents the degree to which a person experiences the world as distressing, threatening, and unsafe. A person with a higher level of neuroticism tends to be more labile, anxious, tense and withdrawn; while a person who is low in neuroticism tends to be more confident and content with their life. A plausible relationship can be seen between emotional eating and neuroticism: those who experience a higher level of neuroticism are typically the ones who turn to maladaptive coping methods, such as emotional eating. Ultimately, I will show how the uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and depression experienced during the pandemic changed people's eating habits by causing them to turn towards emotional eating. Going into the pandemic with a high sense of neuroticism could make people susceptible towards emotional eating.

It is important to study this topic because it helps illustrate how people tend to cope with stressful situations. While there are many adaptive coping methods but there are also a lot of maladaptive coping methods that can potentially harm one's health. While eating is a soothing distraction, people who continuously reach for food to cope with stress may unknowingly develop an eating disorder. Statistics show that during the pandemic, the number of individuals with eating disorders has skyrocketed. In this case, the best avenue for maintaining one's health is to pay attention to their daily food habits (Stallworth).

In this paper, I begin by discussing how the unique environment of the pandemic affected psychological well-being. Then, I examine the relationship between emotional eating and increased neuroticism before addressing the consequences of using food as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Finally, I end by suggesting ways in which the pandemic could have been used as an opportunity to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Before discussing how people's eating habits changed during the pandemic, it is important to analyze the causes of the psychological distress. With exception, most people are generally resistant to change. As the article "Fear can be more harmful than the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 in controlling the corona virus disease 2019 epidemic" states, "Psychologically, when the living environment changes, people feel unsafe, uneasy, and anxious. When the cause of an epidemic is not clear, close-minded attitudes and rumors often flourish" (Ren et al. 3). The amygdala, a region of the brain that regulates emotions and encode memories, plays a crucial role in processing one's emotional distress. For instance, when we experience unexpected change, the amygdala interprets these circumstances as threats; as a result, it releases hormones that induce a sense of fear, triggering our flight or fight response. In this situation, we are more likely to look for ways to resist the change or look for ways to eliminate it. However, during the pandemic, there was no resolution in quickly eradicating the virus which caused people to experience heightened feelings of fear and anxiety. These feelings only seemed to intensify whenever someone would turn on the news channel or go on social media. Everything was centered around the COVID-19 pandemic, continuously highlighting how dangerous this virus could really be. In their study on psychological distress during the pandemic, Wang et al. found that "Longer media exposure was associated with higher odds of anxiety, depression, insomnia, and PTSD/PTSS" (5). At the peak of the pandemic, the media became something to avoid as it continuously broadcasted the rising number of death, hospitalization and infection cases. Spending too much time on media led people to develop tunnel vision and continuously dwell on their negative emotions.

Moreover, the pandemic has presented unforeseen circumstances to people. To reduce the spread of the virus, many precautionary measures were put in place, such as quarantines, social distancing, mask mandates, and lockdowns. These safety measures reduced social interactions between people, potentially causing a decline in their psychological well-being. Reduced social interactions compounded the problem by depriving people of a source of support through the pandemic. While safety measures were effective in reducing the spread of the virus, they did cause people to feel very isolated and lonely. As the article "Social distancing and promoting psychological well-being during COVID-19 pandemic" states, while the safety measures taken during the pandemic were important to mitigate the transmission of the virus, "they will undoubtedly have consequences on the mental health and well-being of individuals, in both the short and long term" (Jakhar 2). The mandatory stay-at-home orders prevented face-to-face communication between people. This means that even if people were more aware of their negative emotions, they were more emotionally withdrawn from friends and outside environment. People's happiness and life satisfaction decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the fear of the disease (Gawrych et al.). The article "Coronavirus stress, meaningful living, optimism, and depressive symptoms" states, "coronavirus stress predicted depressive symptoms through meaning in life, optimism, and pessimism." (Arslan & Yildrim 119). Over the course of the pandemic, people's psychological well-being declined. Furthermore, a positive correlation can be seen between the two factors mentioned by Arslan and Yildrim: as pandemic-related stress increased, so did depressive symptoms. Mental health was significantly impacted by the negativity experienced during the pandemic, and the level of neuroticism experienced during the pandemic.

## EMOTIONAL EATING AS A RESPONSE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS: THE ROLE OF NEUROTICISM

A person's level of neuroticism can determine how well they would be able to handle a stressful situation. Neuroticism is typically associated with the distress and discomfort experienced in a wide range of situations. Neurotic individuals gravitate toward anxiety, depression, self-doubt, and other negative feelings in many situations, especially in situations that they cannot control. The article "Social media exposure during COVID-19 lockdowns could lead to emotional overeating via anxiety: The moderating role of neuroticism" defines neuroticism as "a psychological trait of profound public health significance," as "individuals high in neuroticism often exhibit negative emotions" and use "more emotion-focused and escape avoidance strategies" rather than "problem-focused strategies" (Watson & Hubbard, Bolger qtd. in Gao et al. 4). One of the main escape-avoidance strategies that was seen during the pandemic was emotional eating. Neurotic individuals were more likely to let their emotions take over and lose control of their eating habits. They would be more inclined to participate in maladaptive coping methods to relieve themselves from the negative emotions of the pandemic. As defined in "The influence of COVID-19-related stress on food motivation," food motivation "measures...the willingness to wait, willingness to expend low effort, willingness to expend high effort, and willingness to pay for hypothetical delivery of the food item" (Smith et al. 2). Smith et al. found that "participants were willing to pay the most for fast food followed by sweet snacks" (Smith et al 2). While this may not hold true for everyone, high stress levels during the pandemic caused people to turn to their comfort foods. Motivation was the strongest when acquiring fast foods and sweet snacks, showing that people with neuroticism were inclined to make unhealthy choices. It was a way to escape reality for some time.

The pandemic exacerbated some of the emotional problems that were seen before the pandemic. People who were already dealing with mental health issues and/or eating disorders reported worsening of their depressive and eating disorder symptoms. In Vuillier et al. 's qualitative study about the pandemic's impact on those with eating disorders, a participant said, "In the initial stages of the pandemic it seemed pointless to try to manage my ED. The stress and anxiety regarding the future meant that I did not see the point in investing energy in my own physical or mental health" (Vuillier et al. 7). Not only did the pandemic lead to the worsening of eating disorder symptoms, but it also led to a lack of motivation. The disruption that resulted from the pandemic caused people to lose the motivation to fight against their mental illness and/or eating disorder. Consequently, the symptoms of these illnesses took control, because these individuals did not envision the end of the pandemic in their near futures.

## CONSEQUENCES OF USING FOOD AS A MALADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISM

For our bodies to function properly, it is important to maintain homeostatic levels, especially when it comes to the amount of food that is consumed at one time. As Reichenberger et al. found, "food intake is initiated in states of hunger and terminated upon satiation, thus representing a homeostatic balance of energy intake and expenditure"

(Reichenberger et al. 4). In the case of emotional eating, the amount of energy intake is greater than the amount of energy expended, leading to an imbalance and potentially causing many physiological problems. Emotional eating can affect most, if not all, the organ systems in the body. The physiological consequences of emotional eating can include weight gain, obesity, cardiovascular problems, hormonal problems, neurological problems, and much more. A maladaptive coping mechanism, like emotional eating, could cause an eating disorder that can have very serious consequences on one's health if they are not diagnosed at the right time or treated properly. These disorders can potentially be life threatening and can affect a person's physical as well as emotional well-being.

There were many emotional problems that surfaced during the pandemic which were only magnified by emotional eating. People who typically rely on the social aspects of eating were negatively impacted by the stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Eating alone may cause an increased risk of depression since it reduces the opportunities of social interactions. As a result of the lockdown, some people may have been forced to quarantine alone because they could not move back home with their families or live with their friends. Adding the stress of the pandemic on top of this, most people turned to emotional eating in response to the loneliness and boredom that was seen during the pandemic. As the article "Poor appetite and overeating reported by adults in Australia during the coronavirus-19 disease pandemic: a population-based study" mentions, "Women, those living alone, those living with children and without a partner, those very worried about contracting COVID-19 and those who felt a greater adverse effect of pandemic restrictions, were particularly likely to report being bothered by poor appetite or overeating" (Owen et al 8). Those who were completely isolated from the outside world and their loved ones during the pandemic were especially negatively impacted when it came to their eating habits. In an effort to cope with unbearable boredom and loneliness, reaching for comfort foods aided in soothing the stress they were experiencing. Whether or not emotional eating as a coping mechanism led to overeating is dependent on whether feelings of loneliness causes an increased or poor appetite (Owen et al.). Regardless of its manifestation, disordered eating exacerbates emotional problems by not providing proper sustenance as well as encouraging avoidant coping. Unhealthy eating habits can intensify negative emotions, such as stress, fear, and anxiety, too. Thus, we see how stressful circumstances can influence people to use eating as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Although eating is perceived as an innocent yet enticing mode of self-soothing, without moderation, it holds the potential to develop into an eating disorder.

## COULD THE PANDEMIC HAVE LED TO THE ADOPTION OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

While it is clear that many people turned to unhealthy eating habits during the pandemic, it is important to highlight that everyone may not have been affected by the stress of the pandemic in the same way. Some people, for example, may have decided to cook more and adopt a healthier lifestyle. As Vidal et al. "Is COVID-19 a threat or an opportunity for healthy eating? A exploration of the factors that moderate the impact of the pandemic on eating habits in Uruguay" states, "On the contrary, adaptive coping strategies, such as active attempts to improve a situation (active coping), adopting a positive perspective (positive reframing), and accepting reality (acceptance) ...may act as protectors from the negative effects of COVID-19 on eating habits… and could encourage positive changes in eating habits" (Vidal et al. 3). Eating habits during the pandemic significantly depended on how people perceived the situation. If people saw the pandemic as a positive opportunity, they were more likely to adopt healthier eating habits. If people saw the pandemic as a sad and depressive situation, they were more likely to turn to emotional eating as a way to cope.

As Vidal et al. mentions, there are a few protective factors that a person may have that can help them fight against the unusual situation. There are a few protective factors people may utilize to approach the pandemic more optimistically and to help regulate their emotions and eating habits. For instance, these protective factors may look like cultivating a healthier self-esteem and a holistic understanding of emotional intelligence. In the article "Disordered eating behaviors and psychological health during the COVID-19 pandemic," Chui Yi Chan and Cheuk Ying Chiu state, "Participants with a possible case of eating disorders reported significantly ... lower levels of three dimensions of psychological well-being (environmental mastery, purpose in life and self-acceptance)" (6). These three dimensions of psychological well-being include: environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Environmental mastery is a concept that emphasizes a person's ability to have an impact on the events going on in their lives. It measures how well someone would be able to control a situation through their mental actions. Next, purpose in life is a psychological concept that explains a person's intention to achieve a long-term goal that is meaningful and can leave a positive mark in their life. Lastly, self-acceptance refers to how satisfied an individual is with himself/herself. Overall, scoring low on these three dimensions can lead to a lower self-esteem. Someone's self-esteem can make them susceptible to the onset of an eating disorder. If a person has a lower self-esteem, they would be more influenced by the negativity and would be more likely to show symptoms of an eating disorder. If a person has a higher self-esteem, they would be more in control of their emotions and would be less likely to let their emotions take control of what and how much they are eating.

Along with self-esteem, low emotional intelligence , or alexithymia, can also play a role in sustaining a healthier lifestyle. Alexithymia is a broad psychological term that describes problems experienced by people in terms of feeling emotions. As the article "Increased emotional eating during COVID-19 associated with lockdown, psychological and social distress" states, "higher alexithymia reduces the ability to identify emotional states and to distinguish them from internal signals of hunger and satiety, therefore leading individuals to regulate their emotions through food intake" (Pink et al., Tan & Chow qtd. in Cecchetto et al. 3). This quote helps show how emotions merge together with food-related cues so that they become indistinguishable. This finding helps explain why emotional distress manifests as emotional eating. A person with a higher level of alexithymia would not be in control in identifying their emotions. Anything that a person with a higher level of alexithymia would be feeling would be translated into a feeling of hunger. This could increase their food intake and make them unaware of how much food they are intaking in a given amount of time. A person with a lower alexithymia would  do the opposite.

Looking outside of personality factors, the pandemic could have been used as an opportunity to adopt a healthy lifestyle because people had more time on their hands. Vidal et al states, "the majority of participants who experienced changes in their eating habits reported an increased consumption frequency of home-made meals and a decrease in the consumption frequency of take-away food" (Vidal et al. 8). Additionally, "homemade meals have been associated with higher nutritional quality" (Mills et al. qtd. in Vidal et al. 8). The lockdown gave people more time to cook their meals at home. Before the pandemic, people were constrained by time—whether it was due to their jobs, commuting to work, or attending events, people were more likely to order take out or buy premade foods in a rush . During the lockdown, however, people were working from home and had enough time to cook their meals at home. When cooking meals at home, people are typically more conscious of the ingredients in their food, and they are more likely to corporate healthier foods in their meals.

## CONCLUSION: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through this research, it is clear that although there were many people whose eating habits were negatively impacted by the pandemic, there were also people who saw the pandemic as an opportunity to change their eating habits and become healthier. Overall, the research supports my thesis that negative emotions experienced during the pandemic caused people to turn to emotional eating. The articles presented in this paper help show that people who were more likely to be impacted by the negative emotions used maladaptive coping methods to get a hold of their emotions. Those maladaptive coping methods took the form of emotional eating and various other eating disorders. The sources also help show that everyone may not have perceived the pandemic negatively; those who were more confident in themselves and had a strong support system may not have used maladaptive coping strategies.

Studying this topic is important because it helps researchers see how people cope with stressful situations in their lives. Emotional eating can potentially be very harmful to someone's health. While emotional eating may not seem like a very serious problem at the moment, it can cause the onset of an eating disorder. Since this is a relatively new topic, there is still a lot of research that needs to be done. Due to the risk of infection during the pandemic, most of the research was conducted through online surveys, more research could be conducted in person to further confirm these findings.

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**Ari Goodman**

# Defeating Meat: Consumer Acceptance of Plant-Based Meat Alternatives

## ABSTRACT

*The production of meat adversely impacts the environment, and its consumption is detrimental to personal health. This has engendered a movement to develop meat-like alternatives that are less harmful, such as plant-based meat products. However, the transition to alternative proteins has proven to be challenging in that consumers have automatic distrust and are skeptical of plant-based meats, limiting the use of the products. This paper analyzes consumer concerns as reflected in conceptual frames and uses evidence to support how plant-based meats can overcome these obstacles. It discusses the importance of information in consumer decision-making when making food purchases, reflecting on how "food neophobia" can be overcome by presenting reliable information to consumers through already trusted informational sources such as medical professionals, as evident through survey data. Next, it demonstrates how "technology neophobia" makes potential buyers resistant to trying new products, which can be successfully addressed by making the products appealing through packaging, branding, and price decreases, as supported by consumer purchase records and purchase habits. Finally, it explores how "taste-cost" can be overcome through technology use to make plant-based meats taste and physically appear superior to their traditional counterparts, improving the consumer experience. Overall, plant-based meat alternatives can be integrated into the diets of meat eaters, which can reduce the total production and consumption of meat, limiting its impact on health and the environment.*

## INTRODUCTION

How can plant-based meat alternatives overcome their obstacles to become widely accepted and integrated into contemporary diets sufficient to establish a sustainable consumer base? As industrial farming and meat production have become the foundation of the world food supply, nations have designed an international agribusiness industry that actively contributes to the rise of environmental and health issues such as greenhouse gasses and obesity. The meat industry consumes approximately 70% of agricultural land and is responsible for nearly 18% of greenhouse gas emissions, and is a resource that could be used for the production of healthier and more sustainable foods, (Bonny et al., 2015, p. 256). By 2050, meat production will need to increase "50–73% to maintain [the same] per capita" consumption, which may cause irreparable damage to the environment (Bonny et al., 2015, p. 256). This issue is exacerbated by the fact that 75-90% of energy is lost from converting animal feed into meat and the increased adoption of fertilizers that have the potential of being "300-fold more potent GHG than CO2" (Roos et al., 2013, pp. 573-574). Additionally, there are health concerns that transcend the negative environmental factors, as the "consumption of processed meat and red meat but not unprocessed .. was … positively associated with [a higher] mortality [rate]" (Larsson & Orsini, 2014, p. 286). If meat production continues on this path, not only will temperatures rise, but there will be a continuing obesity and related mortality problem. The attempt to mitigate the negative externalities driven by the meat industry has inspired the utilization of technology to design food products that are similar in taste and texture to meat but without the health and environmental concerns. These products are referred to as "alternative meats."

The alternative meat industry is capable of market expansion and achieving consumer acceptance, and will give new consumer bases additional options to improve their health and reduce the adverse environmental impact associated with meat production by substituting products that are similar to the meat products that consumers are reluctant to abandon. There already exists a wide variety of vegetarian-styled meat products, which are common in today's market, but those products are marketed to vegetarians and vegans with no intention of replicating the "meat experience" (Boukid, 2020, p. 297). Buyers are experiencing "food neophobia," "technology neophobia," and "taste-cost," which are the ideas that consumers are fearful of eating new foods, skeptical of technology, and dislike plant-based product quality, respectively (Gómez-Lucian, 2019; Hwang, 2020; Pohjolainen et al., 2016). For alternative meats to gain traction with meat eaters, companies will need to employ strategies that promote consumer comfort and facilitate consumer acceptance of the new products.

With the negative consequences becoming more apparent to consumers who are resistant to significantly altering their consumption habits to benefit their health or the environment, academics question the likelihood that these products can be successfully launched commercially in a manner that attracts meat eaters. Slade (2018) reveals the potential for meat alternatives; after "ten weeks[,] the ratings [between meat and alternatives] were not statistically different [in taste]" (p. 429). This seems promising for the acceptance of alternative meats, and when those products are marketed and branded based on product sustainability, which is the ability for the products to be created without significant damage to the environmental resources involved in its production, "consumers who are more concerned about the sustainability issues may be more willing to purchase lab-grown [and plant-based] meat[s]," which would increase the overall market share of the industry (Van Loo et al., 2020, p. 95). However, author Sanchez (2019) argues, "as meat intake [in an individual] went up, the perceived effectiveness of meat reduction went down," showing the impracticality of converting meat eaters to alternatives, as meat eaters are more likely to adopt minor changes such as "meat-free days" (p. 8). Boukid (2020) notes that the taste of alternatives is not yet comparable with traditional meats, and "most of them are heavily processed or/and genetically modified" (p. 302). This perception adversely affects the willingness of consumers and governments in Western nations to adopt alternative meats, which will be explored through an analysis from both Western and international sources as evidence to justify the positive outlook for the future of this industry. This paper reflects on historical trends for meat alternatives, proposes avenues to attract consumers to purchase the products between 2022-2050, and evaluates the possibility of growing and retaining the customer base. The economic and social environment surrounding obesity and carbon emissions has prioritized the need for alternative protein development and consumption, which requires product awareness to inspire advancement in demand. While critics argue that "food neophobia," "technology neophobia," and "taste-cost" debilitate plant-based meat companies from commercializing relevant products, the ability to impact consumer perception of those products by persuading them of their superior nature is often overlooked. Plant-based meat alternatives have the capability to successfully achieve cultural acceptance in the meat-eating consumer segment through prioritizing changes to product marketing and design in order to gain familiarity with consumers, which will result in attracting new buyers. This will give meat eaters a food option that does not compromise taste while enabling them to meet their health and sustainability objectives without significant changes to lifestyle and routine.

The structure of this paper will start with a counterargument in each of the sections and then a rebuttal from the analysis of the researchers' findings. The counterarguments are the frames, "food neophobia," "technology neophobia," and "taste-cost," which are the ideas that have restricted cultural adoption that, if overcome, can lead plant-based meat alternatives to be successfully commercialized. The first section, "Food Neophobia's Impact on Consumer Behavior," explores how reliable information and product health benefits can be used to convince consumers to purchase alternative meats. Hwang et al. (2020) will present the frame "food neophobia," which will be proven by the evidence found by Clark & Bogden (2019). Then, Vainio et al. (2018) will prove that consumer trust in information can alter consumption habits, which will be refined by Szejad et al. (2020) to reveal information's impact on alternative meats specifically. After proving the consequential impact of information, Clark & Bogden's (2019) belief that medical professionals alter consumer behavior will be proven by Jin & Fan (2013), and will suggest that the most successful approach to addressing food neophobia will be to convince doctors to recommend plant-based meats to their patients. The second section, "Packaging, Labeling, and Technology Neophobia," will focus on the technology element of neophobia and will explain how to change consumer perception through packaging and branding as well as product pricing. Cox & Evans (2008) will argue the existence of "technology neophobia," which is a segment of "food neophobia," and works by Lemken et al. (2019) and Siegrist & Sütterlin (2017) will prove consumers' fear of food processing and technology respectively. However, Clark & Bogden (2019) will provide evidence that food labels are a major part of consumer decision-making, which will be used with Szejda et al. (2020) to present possible solutions to alter branding and packaging to convince meat eaters to try the new product. Furthermore, Zhao et al. (2022) discuss the elastic nature of plant-based food pricing, which, when considered with Hoek et al.'s (2013) findings that consumers demand more product after increasing exposure, illustrates how consumer acceptance can become more likely through pricing promotion. The third section, "The Taste Tax," will focus on the physical qualities that shape alternative meats and how product quality and taste can shift consumer desire for plant-based meats. Pohjolainen et al. (2016) introduced the idea of "taste cost," which was proven by Mattas & Lawless's (1985) evidence several decades ago. However, Pohjolainen et al. (2016) also find the existence of "techno-optimism," which is proven possible by modern technology as argued by

Borkid (2020), which shows that after consumers are convinced to not feel "technology neophobia," that consumers will rely on this technology to satisfy their taste requirements for alternatives. Moreover, Siegrist & Sütterlin (2017) explore the idea of "perceived naturalness," which Kyriakopoulou et al. (2019) explain can be advantageous to plant-based products due to technological advancements.

## Food Neophobia's Impact on Consumer Behavior

Meat eaters are resistant to switching their diet to plant-based meats, which is mainly caused by the lack of consumer familiarity with the products. Consumers are experiencing "food neophobia," which is the fear of adopting new foods into one's diet because of unfamiliarity (Hwang et al., 2020, p. 3). "Food neophobia" causes products that were recently introduced into the market to experience more challenges in achieving consumer acceptance than their more established counterparts, regardless of the superior health and price of the new product. In Clark & Bogden's (2019) survey, 41% of respondents were quoted as saying, "I will not like the taste," as a way to justify not trying to increase consumption of plant-based meats (p. 2540). The prospective consumers have assumed that plant-based meats are not suitable as a consumption option and have made predetermined assumptions that they will not enjoy the product (Clark & Bogden, 2019, p. 2540). For consumers to dislike a product with which they have limited or no experience occurs because of the lack of familiarity or fear of trying something new. This is not the same as disliking the taste due to its actual comparability to traditional meat, revealing that consumers are more likely to accept products of which they are more accustomed. It is apparent that the "[l]ack of information on nutritional quality and benefits" causes consumers to shy away from alternatives, as knowledgeable buyers would recognize the "nutritional" value of alternatives and purchase plant-based options (Clark & Bogden, 2019, p. 2540). Food neophobia's impact on taste is affected by information, proving that critics of alternative meat are correct that alternative meats will have a challenging time commercializing in their current form (Hwang et al., 2020; Clark & Bogden, 2019).

It is crucial that alternative meat producers prioritize marketing to trustworthy sources, such as healthcare specialists, to more successfully convince skeptical consumers of the benefits of alternative meats on health. Consumer trust in information will increase the likelihood of buyers considering plant-based meat, facilitating product adoption. This is explored in 2020 by Szejda et al., who reviews several authors' views on the product marketing stages of plant-based meat alternatives, revealing the importance of information in decision-making for alternative meats, arguing that while there is demand for healthier plant-based food options, the "[perceived] beliefs about the healthiness of conventional meat may prevent people from reducing meat consumption or eating plant-based meat" (p. 38). Consumers are bombarded with so much untrustworthy information through traditional media advertisements, which is a prominent form of consumer product knowledge, they may not significantly convince buyers to consider alternative meats. Further, Vainio et al.'s (2018) study found that "reading any message[s] [that were] positively associated with the intention to decrease/discontinue consumption of red meat and increase/start consumption of plant-based product alternatives" were effective (p. 220). The "reduction [of] meat consumption" can be directly related with the "reading of message[s]" indicating that in an environment that contains reliable information about food products, consumers are willing to accept the marketed information, enabling a shift in their meat consumption habits (Szejad et al., 2020; Vainio et al., 2018). While there may be innate feelings that humans have towards consuming new products that hinder the ability for alternative meats to become culturally acceptable in their current forms, this does not mean that companies are helpless to change people's perspective of foods; this may be achieved by stressing the beneficial impact that alternative meats have on health and the environment, which can be communicated to consumers by providing them with reliable information. The false perception that consumers have of alternative meats can be addressed by enabling reliable, trusted sources to recommend and encourage product use. As a result, assuming the consumers are able to trust their informational sources, alternative meats could become more culturally relevant and successfully captured by plant-based meat producers.

The key factor to making consumers trust their information is to have healthcare providers recommend these products as a health solution. Doctors and other healthcare providers are considered to be "the most trusted for accuracy of information related to PBFs[, which had] 87 percent of [the tested] respondents highly trust[ing] this source" (Clark & Bogden, 2019, p. 2542). It is clear that doctors and health providers can be relied upon by consumers for important habit-altering decisions and can be a direct path to relay "information" to "respondents," resulting in the achievement of consumer acceptance (Clark & Bogden, 2019, p. 2542). Moreover, Jin & Fan's (2013), who review individuals' reactions to healthcare advice suggest that "patients who are advised by their healthcare providers, especially physicians, to modify their behaviors are generally more confident and motivated to engage in lifestyle modifications such as dietary changes" (p. 137). The "accuracy of information" resulted in consumers not only becoming educated on alternatives but "motivat[ed]" them to "modify their behavior[-]" (Clark & Bogden, 2019; Jin & Fan, 2013). Medical professionals can be seen successfully convincing meat eaters to become more aware of traditional meat's effect on health and the environment, and unlike other sources, the consumers digest that information and act on it. This "motivation" may cause those new consumers to recommend alternatives to friends, so the initial interaction with the medical professional can have a compounding effect on the meat-eating community (Jim & Fan, 2013, p. 137). Alternative meat producers can successfully implement marketing programs that focus on educating doctors on the health advantages of alternative meats, which expands the acceptance and trust necessary to modify consumer behavior and expand the consumer base to the meat-eating community. Medical professionals can effectively decrease neophobia by influencing consumers.

## PACKAGING, LABELING, AND TECHNOLOGY NEOPHOBIA

Critics of alternative meats are correct that the reluctance to adopt alternatives is likely due to their processed nature, leading consumers to experience "technology neophobia" (Cox & Evans, 2008, p. 709). This is when a consumer is negatively "receptive[-] to foods produced by novel technologies," which results in consumers disregarding the product (Cox & Evans, 2008, p. 709). The fear of technology in food production affects product demand and shows the importance of familiarity in consumer integration. Lemken et al. (2019), who used consumer surveys to evaluate the acceptance of legume-based foods, breaks down segments within the meat consumption category and finds that "the 'wary of processed' [group of people are] less interested in processed legumes, but considers that their meat consumption should be reduced in favor of traditional legumes" (p. 9). They argue that even if this significant consumer base could be convinced of the negative attributes of meat, the "processed" quality of alternative meats would lead consumers to prefer "traditional" foods over alternative products (Lemken et al., 2019, p. 9). This is in line with Siegrist & Sütterlin's findings, as it "demonstrate[s] the difficulty in convincing consumers to accept risks related to new production methods [of foods] even if the total risk to which … [the consumers] are exposed has not changed" (Siegrist & Sütterlin, 2017, p. 325). The "difficulty" of achieving consumer acceptance is associated with the "new production methods" that are enhanced by the use of "technology," which causes the consumer to experience "neophobia" (Cox & Evans, 2008; Siegrist & Sütterlin, 2017). It is evident that consumers not only need to accept the taste and social benefit of the product but must also overcome the product's technological background.

While critics argue that the technological nature of alternatives hinders consumer acceptance, they fail to see how altering branding and packaging enable alternatives to overcome their present inadequacies. Designing product packaging to mimic traditional meat while prioritizing well-known branding, quality assurance labels, and affordable pricing will make people feel more comfortable with the processed nature of the product. To increase sales for alternatives, companies must enable consumers to be confident in the safety and reliability of products that they may not fully technologically understand. Clark & Bogden (2019) find that in making purchasing decisions, consumers "primarily rely on food package labels (60.2 percent)," which provides an opportunity for plant-based products to combat their processed reputation (p. 2541). Companies have the ability to make their products appear familiar to consumers, in that food packaging labels can contain identifiable messages that resonate with consumers due to their consistency with the labeling on products historically purchased by such consumers. Szejda et al. (2020) reveal that "75% of all participants reported that they would purchase a product with an 'All-American' label, suggesting that this label indicates a key attribute of familiarity in both culture and production origin" (p. 41). Therefore, the most popular manner in which consumers make decisions to purchase a product based on branding "label," which is easily changeable (Szejda et al., 2020, p. 41). Companies are able to create the required "familiarity" that will make consumers disregard the processed nature of the products through labeling, revealing that traditional meats do not have as significant of an advantage as their supporters would suggest (Szejda et al., 2020, p. 41). Therefore, even though alternative meats will always require processing, companies' use of non-production based methods to limit "technology neophobia['s]" effect on consumer behavior can be successful (Cox & Evans, 2008, p. 704). By adding recognizable names and certifications to food labels such as "All American," OU (Kosher), or GMO-Free to a product, consumables are able to overcome their technological newness, and alternative meat products are more likely to be purchased by meat-eating consumers.

The increase in pricing promotional practices that are implemented today can encourage consumers to affordably try the product, resulting in becoming less fearful of the new food. With alternative meat only representing 0.4% of the total fresh meat sales in retail stores, the plant-based meat industry is still in its infancy (Zhao et al., 2022, p. 8). This puts it in a prime spot to utilize its attracted capital to subsidize the promotional price cutting to expand product sales and market share. Zhao et al. (2022) argue in favor of the elastic nature of the plant-based alternatives and find that "a 1% decrease in its price leads to a 1.5% increase in the (conditional) demand for PBMA [(plant-based meat alternatives)]" (p. 8). This quality of plant-based meats provides an opportunity for an extensive promotional pricing campaign to convince new customers to try plant-based meats at a cheaper cost and possibly increase the quantity of product consumed and client variability through market development. Hoek et al.'s (2013) work can be used to derive a possible driver for the profound impact a promotional discount could have in establishing a larger customer base, as they believe that a customer "having previous experience with meat substitutes was associated with higher liking scores for the [alternative based] product[s]" (p. 259). Therefore, by decreasing the price of alternative meats, not only do plant-based meat companies benefit from "having more …products sold under promotion… [leading to] increase[ed] total expenditure" for the alternatives industry, but the number of sales itself may attract lasting consumers (Zhao et al., 2022, p. 9). The "previous experience" that customers have with alternative meat can only occur if consumers can afford the products, and the fact that decreasing the price leads to a 1.5% increase in demand, reveals the significant influence pricing promotion has on product intake (Hoek et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2022). The unique pricing nature of alternatives can expand the customer base by attracting consumers with lower product costs, which will result in consumers becoming more accustomed to alternative meats through continual consumption of the products. As a result, people will become less fearful of alternative meats and become more open to trying new products and proteins that are designed by alternative meat producers after the affordability factor is minimized.

## THE TASTE TAX

It is possible that the incremental decrease in taste during the adjustment period can be seen as a barrier to long-term consumption and buyer attraction, as meat eaters may be unwilling to make a taste sacrifice. When shifting purchases from traditional meat to alternatives, consumers may experience a "taste-cost," which is the need for the consumer to become more accustomed to the taste to achieve the same level of enjoyment as the original version (Pohjolainen et al., 2016, p. 38). This concept facilitates the opposition point, where they argue that because taste is an important factor in consumer decision-making, the failure of alternatives to be a true alternative in this key consumption factor invalidates the possibility of product integration. Mattas & Lawless's (1985) study on the effect of changing food inputs in concentration reveals "that when subjects attempt to optimize the taste of foods through active adjustment of a single ingredient, a perceptual error [(a change in taste)] often occurs" (p. 111). This is common in alternative meats, where there may be a negative taste change when adding various qualities to mimic traditional meats, in that "adjustment" is necessary to "optimize" taste (Mattas & Lawless, 1985, p. 111). As a result, designing alternative meat products that successfully address taste and physical concerns such as appearance and texture is argued by critics as unlikely.

While it is acknowledged that the unfamiliar taste of alternative meats may hinder market expansion and inhibit consumer adoption, modern technology's ability to mimic and outperform traditional meat in taste and appearance should not be overlooked. The ability to change specific consumption factors within plant-based meat products, such as taste, texture, and mouthfeel, provides the alternative meat industry with an opportunity to overcome its existing lack of taste comparability. The taste of alternative meats can be successfully reengineered to suit consumer preferences through technological advancement. A significant portion of meat consumers believe in "techno-optimism," which is the idea that technology should be responsible for solving environmental and health-based problems (Pohjolainen et al., 2016, p. 38). Boukid (2020) explores the implications of this on the alternative segment, as companies can employ technology to manipulate specific oils in their products to “intensify the flavor as well as to improve texture and mouthfeel… [and use] flavoring ingredients … to mask of-favors of legume proteins” (p. 299). As companies adjust their products to “improve texture and mouthfeel” through the use of technology, plant-based meats are becoming better positioned to prosper regardless of consumer reaction (Borkid, 2020, p. 299). Either the company will be able to “mask” the initial disparity in taste as compared to traditional meat, or consumers will be willing to compromise on taste and consume the products anyway, as it is the primary strategy in which they support change occurring under “techno-optimism” (Pohjolainen et al., 2016; Borkid, 2020). Therefore, alternative meat producers can limit the taste disparity through the use of a wide range of alternative ingredients, which gives producers the flexibility to integrate plant-based meats into various consumer segments across the meat consumption spectrum. However, even if the critics are proven accurate that taste can not be made comparable, if the fear of new foods and technology are addressed, consumers are likely to still be persuaded towards plant-based products. With the ability to alter the composition of their product, alternative meat could, over time, be engineered to taste better than traditional meat, as taste preferences can be modified to cater to community, country, or even gender. This enables producers to customize each of their products to reach a broader range of consumers and can create health-targeted alternative meats that eliminate specific concerns such as sodium or cholesterol content.

The physical presentation of alternative meats is not only comparable but is superior to traditional meat, making consumer acceptance of the products easier than critics believe. In their current form, plant-based meat alternatives are more resilient than traditional meat when faced with environmental factors like air. The successful development of the alternative segment would require “perceived naturalness,” which is the idea that food quality makes the consumer accept a product as consumable in that it resembles its mimicking product (Siegrist & Sütterlin, 2017, p. 321). This is crucial when comparing traditional meat to its alternative, as the purpose of the alternative is to be as similar as possible to the traditional. Further, Kyriakopoulou et al. (2019) find that traditional meat experiences “color changes … when in contact with air … [which] causes flavor deterioration and off-odors, [while plant-based meats successfully keep] their color … stable over time” (p. 133). It would appear that plant-based meats still experience “perceived naturalness,” suggesting that after the initial days of exposure to air, alternative meats do not experience “deterioration" and remain "stable" (Kyriakopoulou et al., 2019; Siegrist & Sütterlin, 2017). Therefore, alternative meats are able to replicate meat more accurately than meat itself after product exposure, giving consumers more time and access to fresh "meat." The stability of alternative's appearance facilitates its comparability with traditional proteins and may help plant-based proteins to outperform on visual and olfactory factors leading to more product adoption.

## CONCLUSION

Plant-based meat alternatives can be successfully integrated into meat-eating consumers' diets by convincing consumers that alternative meats are similar to meat, without the negative consequences for which meat is responsible. For this perceived similarity to occur, plant-based meat producers have to overcome consumer resistance, which is explained by the concepts of "food neophobia," "technology neophobia," and "taste-cost." "Food neophobia" is the idea that consumers are resistant to trying new foods, and has historically undermined consumer acceptance of plant-based meat products. The first step in convincing consumers is to go to the information sources they trust the most with their health, which evidence shows are consumers' doctors, and have those doctors recommend plant-based alternatives. This can be seen in consumer surveys and studies, where there is consistent evidence that a consumer would take and trust advice from doctors over any other informational source. This strategy will have the highest chance of creating lasting customers and limiting consumers trying the products and transitioning back to traditional meat. "Technology neophobia" is a subsegment of "food neophobia" that focuses on customers avoiding plant-based products due to the complexity in which the products are produced. Therefore, marketing plant-based meat products to resemble traditional meat will allow consumers to find familiarity with the new products, and along with price decreases, plant-based meats will appear more in meat-eating consumers' diets. There is clear evidence that shows putting recognizable brand names and images on product packaging increases consumer confidence in product reliability. Then, taking those reliable products and decreasing the price, especially due to plant-based meat's price elasticity which is responsible for significantly boosting demand for relatively small price declines, would increase general consumption and result in consumer acceptance. Finally, "taste-cost" is the concept that plant-based foods are at a taste disadvantage compared to their traditional counterparts, which makes consumers wary of trying and consistently consuming the products. However, technology can be employed to make plant-based meats taste and physically appear like traditional meats, which should minimize product differentiation. Therefore, the products will taste and appear similar to the traditional meat competition, and due to the superior health and environmental profile of alternatives, the barriers that have restricted consumers from entering into the plant-based meat food category are eradicated.

The implications of this research are that it can be used by governing bodies when making decisions on industry subsidies, in that plant-based meats are part of the solution to the obesity and environmental problems they are currently combating, and if given proper government incentives, will speed up consumer conversion resulting in product acceptance. Further research can provide more in-depth insight into the impact that plant-based meat alternatives have in specific cultures and countries. Moreover, this analysis can be used by possible investors in the plant-based industry, as company valuations may not reflect the high likelihood of diet integration after utilizing the strategy that the argument advises. Minor changes to plant-based products can greatly alter the industry's growth and can be used by marketing and operating departments in developing customer acquisition strategies. Overall, the introduction and growth of plant-based meat diets are capable of being part of the solution to the much larger global problems, including healthcare and climate change.

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**Smit Patel**

# The Implications of Physician-Assisted Death Legalization

## ABSTRACT

*Physician-assisted death, or PAD, is a medical practice by which terminally ill patients—if deemed eligible and of sound mind and reasoning by multiple professionals—can have the choice to request a quick and painless means to facilitate their deaths. These means are most commonly in the form of pills, which the patient can either choose to administer whenever and wherever they'd like, or choose not to take at all. Currently, PAD is legal in 10 US states as well as the District of Columbia, but it remains illegal everywhere else, thus denying most terminally ill patients across the nation access to a painless passage. This paper analyzes both the arguments for and against PAD as it is currently executed. It hopes to address some of the efforts being made to undermine the ethical nature of PAD, while also acknowledging the medical practice's flaws and providing helpful suggestions on how current PAD policy can be improved to make it safer. To promote awareness of and discussion on this controversial topic, this paper includes firsthand accounts from terminally ill patients who have sought PAD. Also included are studies and analyses conducted by a number of different researchers who either defend or question the morality of PAD. This has been done in an effort to offer varying perspectives on the issue of PAD legalization. All of these sources are encompassed within a greater utilitarian framework, which this paper uses as a guide to determine whether an action should be classified as being either moral or immoral.*

## INTRODUCTION

Physician-assisted death, or PAD, is a medical practice whereby terminally ill patients, who don't have much time left to live, are able to request the facilitation of their own deaths through painless means, such as a lethal pill. The actual procedure to undergo PAD, however, is only approved if multiple physicians can "verify that the patient is capable of making an informed choice" of sound mind and reasoning (Sullivan et al. 598). Increasingly, more and more states have started to legalize assisted death over the past few decades, showing how more discussion is being had on this sensitive issue, and how—slowly but surely—public opinion about this medical practice is starting to change. While PAD was once considered to be an unfathomable idea, some people have become more receptive to its benefits and have started to view the practice in a much more favorable light.

Before embarking on a deeper analysis of PAD and the benefits it provides that many terminally ill patients are currently deprived of, it is important to fully understand what PAD is and how it differs from other forms of assisted dying, particularly euthanasia. It is important to recognize that although both forms of assisted death have the same goal of facilitating patient death, the methods by which they plan on achieving this are vastly different. Euthanasia is different from PAD in the sense that it allows for the lethal means to be administered by either a physician or a third party instead of the patient him or herself. These differences in methods, in turn, makes PAD much less likely to have cases of abuse or misuse than euthanasia. Rather, in PAD, the patients retain complete control during their time of passing, and there is no concern of a third party potentially making a decision that goes against the wishes of the patient.

Because of the controversy surrounding this practice, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first state to legalize assisted death, which was Oregon, did so as recently as 1997. Since then, the practice has remained fairly stable in the state and has even led to "more open conversation and careful evaluation of end-of-life options" in general (Quill 1911). Other jurisdictions throughout the country have since followed in Oregon's footsteps, including Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, Vermont, and the District of Columbia. However, despite the small number of states who have deemed PAD a legally acceptable practice, the vast majority of US jurisdictions have still kept it outlawed for various reasons, most commonly being that they consider it to be unethical. As a result, millions of terminally ill patients are being denied the benefits of PAD that patients and PAD-advocates like Brittany Maynard and Jil Finnegan, both of whom had cancer, experienced when their respective state legislatures granted them the option to eliminate their suffering and partake in PAD. Both Maynard and Finnegan's cases connect to the concept of utilitarianism—Jeremy Bentham's philosophical and ethical theory that states that a decision or an action is moral if it results in the greatest amount of happiness, or least amount of suffering, for the most people involved.

The disagreement over the morality of PAD has fueled an intense and ongoing debate. Scholars Benjamin Shibata, Peter Singer, Amy Sullivan, and Timothy Quill, despite the different ways through which they make their point, agree that PAD gives patients more control over their circumstances and offers a quick and painless escape from untreatable suffering. With these scholarly inputs in mind, it is clear that efforts to educate the public about PAD and promote its discussion should be encouraged. In this paper, I will use a combination of historical data, statistics, and personal accounts from patients to argue why physician-assisted death, despite its controversial nature, should be legalized in the US, and how its benefits—how it protects patients' autonomy while easing their pain—far outweigh its cons. However, it is also equally important not to overlook the flaws in the way current PAD instances are handled. Thus, I will also include perspectives from opponents of PAD and address their primary arguments against why the practice should not be legalized. I will then attempt to explain how current medical protocols involving physician-assisted death requests can be improved to overcome these issues and criticisms, and, thus, help the medical practice gain more public and government support in its fight for legalization.

## ANALYZING THE BENEFITS OF PAD

Before analyzing the scholarly debate surrounding PAD, it is critical to hear terminally ill patients' unique perspectives on what accessibility to this medical practice means to them and understand how these perspectives apply to the framework of utilitarianism. Doing so also emphasizes why this debate is important in the first place. In her article, "My right to death with dignity at 29," Brittany Maynard explains why she decided to take the heavy decision to give up the remainder of her life. She says that choosing to participate in PAD has given her "a sense of peace during a tumultuous time that otherwise would be dominated by fear, uncertainty and pain" (Maynard). This "sense of peace" is a calming reassurance that, even though her life is burdened with pain, there is always a peaceful way out. In other words, she is not condemned to her suffering, and so her situation could have been much worse than what she can now choose to make of it with the assistance of PAD. These sentiments are also commonly shared by other terminally ill patients, like Jil Finnegan, another cancer patient who requested PAD. In her article on Finnegan, titled "California's Right-to-Die Law: One Woman's Last Days Have Powerful Impact on Family and Friends," Tracy Seipel discusses not just Finnegan's, but also her family's views on the practice in order to show how PAD doesn't just help the patients, but also their friends and family members. Seipel notes how one family member said she doesn't "think God wants us to suffer", and feels that the act of "eas[ing] our suffering" if we are already dying is "compassionate" (Seipel). She genuinely believes PAD is a way to make someone's passing less agonizing and more comfortable for everyone impacted. The fact that PAD is viewed here as "compassionate" lies in stark contrast to the popular claim that PAD is a cruel abandonment of life. Both of these primary accounts are similar in the sense that they emphasize how patients find relief in knowing that they have a quicker, less painful way out of their misery. Moreover, both of these articles also connect to Peter Singer's utilitarian point, as they defend PAD's morality on the grounds that it allows for the greatest overall increase in happiness and decrease in suffering. According to Singer, "if the future life of [those] being killed would hold more negative elements than positive ones—more unhappiness than happiness, more frustration of preferences than satisfaction of them—then we have a reason for killing, rather than against killing" (Singer 529). This was the case in both primary source accounts, where a "negative" future of "unhappiness" and "frustration" was replaced by a merciful end to life. It is important to note that this was only made possible because the opinions and emotions of the other parties involved were not valued more than the happiness and wellbeing of the patients themselves. Because the patients' views were prioritized, it resulted in the greatest net increase in happiness and decrease in pain, which, according to utilitarian standards, is considered a moral action. The idea of prioritizing the patient's desires leads us to discuss one of the main advantages of legalizing PAD, which is that it would work toward ensuring that patients retain their autonomy in such difficult times when they may be feeling helpless.

By protecting patient autonomy, the legalization of physician-assisted death would benefit terminally ill patients and grant them more control over themselves and their situation, thus giving them more comfort in death. Not only would PAD offer a much more peaceful passing, but it would also make it easier for the patient's friends and family members to cope with their loved one's death. In "State Debating 'Death with Dignity': Lawmakers Planning to Introduce Bill Legalizing Physician-Assisted death," Scott Dance and Erin Cox include an account of Alexa Fraser's 90-year-old father, who tried overdosing on painkillers before fatally shooting himself last year. He had spent the last years of his life struggling with [physiological] falls and eventually Parkinson's disease, and repeatedly told his daughter he would rather die than go to a nursing home. Fraser said of her father's death, "I wish it hadn't had to be that way. I wish like all get-out that he just died painlessly in his sleep, but it was better than the alternatives for him. He made his choice" (Dance and Cox). Although Fraser would have liked for her father to pass away naturally in his sleep, he unfortunately could not tolerate his circumstances any longer. The fact that Fraser's father "repeatedly" told her that he would rather die than be treated and cared for at a nursing home highlights just how miserable life had gotten for him, ultimately leading him to conclude that death was the only way to end his suffering. However, since he did not have the choice to undergo PAD—which would have respected his autonomy and also given him a peaceful way to die—he was left to take much more violent and tragic means to end his own life, such as "overdosing" and "fatally shooting himself." If state legislation had given Fraser's father the opportunity to pass away "painlessly" through a PAD pill, his death may not have left such a traumatic mark on his family.

Furthermore, the protection of patient autonomy doesn't just have positive effects on terminally ill patients and their loved ones; it also conveys why PAD can, and should, be classified as a moral procedure that is righteous in nature as opposed to the violent and wicked practice that its critics often make it out to be. Benjamin Shibata, in his multi-dimensional analysis of PAD, provides his perspective on how the medical practice—by protecting patients' autonomy—promotes beneficence, or mercy and kindness, and fair treatment of all. Shibata's "An Ethical Analysis of Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide: Rejecting Euthanasia and Accepting Physician Assisted Suicide with Palliative Care" describes how anti-PAD state jurisdictions strip patients of their basic rights when they proclaim,

> "If [patients] were on life-sustaining treatment, [they] would have a right to withdraw the treatment and then we could let [them] die. But [if they] are not, we can only allow [them] to refuse nutrition and hydration . . . until [they] die a natural death, however painful, undignified, and costly." This position demonstrates that limiting aid-in-dying has the potential to deny patients their autonomy, because they may be forced into a death that is painful, undignified, and costly. (Shibata 156)

Shibata argues that by denying terminally ill patients the option to undergo PAD, there is a cruel and blatant disregard for their free will and personal choices. PAD, on the other hand, grants patients the option to save themselves from a "painful, undignified, and costly" death, which, in turn, defends the medical practice's humanity and mercifulness. The fact that current anti-PAD legalization "force[s]" patients to continue to live in "suffering" against their will highlights how the law doesn't necessarily have the best interests of the patients in mind, and essentially ends up making crucial personal decisions about them without giving them their rightful say in the matter. Both articles bolster Peter Singer's utilitarian point by reasoning that PAD is moral because it leads to the most amount of happiness for the greatest number of people involved: it takes away the patients' pain while also saving friends and family members from having to witness the heartbreaking scene of their loved ones' continued emotional and physical deterioration. The two articles further connect to each other by affirming that, until the very end of life, PAD allows terminally ill patients to stay in control of how and when they would like to die—a priceless gift, in their eyes, after their illnesses have already robbed them of so much. This decision to end their lives according to their own free will is one of the few things these patients have left, and it allows them to feel as if they are not completely helpless or vulnerable against their illnesses.

## ADDRESSING AND REFUTING CLAIMS AGAINST PAD LEGALIZATION

Although physician-assisted death has many benefits, opponents still try to find flaws with the practice and use them to argue against its legalization. Most of these counter arguments are similar in that they stem from a lack of proper understanding, due to a lack of communication and discussion, of what PAD really is. Without proper education on the subject, people may not be aware of critical facts—like how PAD is only meant to be a last resort for people who only have a few months left to live, that PAD comes with heavy regulation, that it is separate from euthanasia, or even that having a patient's PAD request be accepted does not mean that the patient will actually choose to undergo it. One of the biggest criticisms against PAD is that it results in reckless abandonment of life, especially of those with suicidal ideation or who deem themselves not worthy enough to keep living. This, opponents argue, would lead to PAD being misused for the wrong reasons, a concern also shared by

Lois Sulmasy and Paul Mueller in "Ethics and the Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide: An American College of Physicians Position Paper." According to them,

> Legalization of physician-assisted suicide also raises social justice issues . . . [regarding] the most vulnerable members of society . . . Some individuals might view themselves as unproductive or burdensome and, on that basis, as candidates for assisted suicide, especially if a physician raises it or validates a request . . . legalization [can] lead to attitudinal changes, subtle biases about quality of life, and judgments that some lives are not worth living. (Sulmasy and Mueller 581)

In other words, Sulmasy and Mueller claim that people who may be struggling with their identity, are predisposed to mental illness, struggle with substance abuse, or have a history of low self-esteem may be more "vulnerable" to PAD abuse, and consider it easier to simply end their lives prematurely than to continue living with their hardships. They may have the false impression that they are inferior, or not worth it, and may thus develop negative attitudes and "biases" about their "quality of life." Although one can tell where these authors are coming from and what they are trying to say, it is important to note that this claim can be easily refuted. First and foremost, if implemented, PAD would only be limited to people whose suffering cannot be treated and who have a short amount of time left to live. Even if it were true that some of these terminally ill patients were influenced to request PAD because they felt they were "unproductive or burdensome," there would be no reason for opponents to believe that trained physicians—who would have much more experience with such matters—would actually accept these requests. It is important to note that PAD comes with some forms of regulation, and if a patient is not deemed to meet the requirements, then a physician would have every right to deny their request to facilitate their death. Moreover, even if we were to consider, hypothetically, that there was at least some truth to the claim that PAD would contribute to such issues, it is important to ask why PAD alone should receive most of the blame. Clearly, matters such as discrimination and its consequences have already existed long before PAD legalization was ever first up for debate. Even if a certain group of people were left more vulnerable to PAD abuse than others, it wouldn't mean that PAD legalization itself "raise[d] [those] social justice issues." It would instead mean that PAD is yet another victim of preexisting social issues that need to be resolved first, and that it should not be assumed to be an inherently bad practice.

David Mayo and Martin Gunderson, whose research is focused on whether PAD legalization would put people with disabilities at a higher risk of PAD abuse, support the argument that PAD is not a social justice issue in itself. In "Vitalism Revitalized: Vulnerable Populations, Prejudice, and Physician-Assisted Death," the authors state that,

> The arguments [against PAD] raise serious concerns regarding the medical care of persons with disabilities. At a minimum, [these arguments] indicate a need for greater sensitivity on the part of health care workers and for better protective regulation in all areas—not just end of life decision making. When directed specifically against PAD, however, [these arguments] fail to show that legalization of PAD would introduce any new risks that are not already equally present in current policy. (Mayo and Gunderson 15)

Mayo and Gunderson emphasize how it doesn't make sense for opponents to argue that legalizing PAD would heighten the risk of its abuse by people with disabilities who, influenced by degrading self-perceptions as a result of their conditions, would wish to end their lives. In truth, this issue has nothing to do with PAD itself, but with the larger, preexisting societal problem of discrimination that has already permeated the healthcare industry and fueled feelings of inequality among patients. Thus, it is unfair to blame PAD specifically for "introduc[ing] any new risks" or elements of discrimination "that are not already equally present." Instead, this calls for a greater emphasis on striving towards promoting equality in healthcare to ensure that all patients not only have the same options made available to them, but also have the same limitations set in place to prohibit anyone from abusing the system. This can only be achieved through "greater sensitivity," thoughtfulness, and receptivity by healthcare workers in situations involving more vulnerable patients so as to make the patients feel loved, cared for, and understood. It also depends on the development of "better protective regulation[s]," that would minimize the role that social issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia play in shaping patients' perceptions of self worth, and, thus, minimize the influence that these self-perceptions can have on determining whether patients would be more willing to receiving medical treatment to improve their lives as opposed to choosing to eliminate their struggles by facilitating their deaths. By focusing on and fighting against the bigger societal problems that work their way into healthcare, we can help make all medical practices, including PAD, more equally accessible, as well as prevent societal inequalities from interfering with the true purpose and proper execution of these practices.

The case of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, a pancreatic cancer patient who, despite being terminally ill himself, advocated against the legalization of PAD, further substantiates how a lack of an understanding of PAD can fuel misconceptions about the practice. In "A Voice Against Physician-Assisted Suicide," Charlie Gilham and Peter Leibold include excerpts from a letter Card. Bernerdin wrote to the Supreme Court, in which he expressed his concerns over the possibility of nationwide PAD legalization, in an effort to fight back against the growing favorable interest in the medical practice. In his letter, Card. Bernerdin mentioned how "There can be no such thing as a right to assisted suicide because . . . Creating a new right to assisted suicide will endanger society and send a false signal that a less than perfect life is not worth living" (Gilham and Leibold 46). The fact that Card. Bernardin believed PAD legalization would "endanger society" is important to address, as he seems to imply that PAD would become some form of a trend resulting in a huge rise in assisted deaths if it were to be legalized. Although this is a very presumptuous and unfounded claim, the fact that this is a common misunderstanding shared by many PAD opponents cannot be understated. It is important to understand that if it is legalized, physicians would not be actively encouraging the patient to participate in PAD, but would rather continue to outline all of the options available to them, help ease the patient's anxiety and answer questions, and devise personal solutions that can best improve each patient's life. Saying this, only if the patient continues to feel like they cannot take their suffering any more, they would be able to request PAD as a final option. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that if someone is approved for PAD, it does not mean that they will one hundred percent choose to go through with it. It simply means they will have the means to end their lives made available to them, which they could either choose to administer when and where they'd like, or perhaps choose not to administer at all. Legalizing PAD, thus, won't push people to kill themselves, but instead will give people who are suffering a final way out of their misery when medicine and healthcare has failed them. All we have to do is look at the case of Oregon, where PAD has been legalized for a while, to see how there is no real risk of this practice becoming a popular trend if it is implemented nationwide. In Oregon, the use of PAD has remained fairly “stable” since 1997, with around “1 in 100 terminally ill patients requesting PAD,” and “roughly two thirds of the patients who receive a lethal prescription [dying] as a result of taking it” (Quill 1912). If Oregon, over the span of a few years, never experienced a huge spike in assisted deaths—as many PAD opponents fear would be the case with widespread legalization—then there is fair reason to conclude that there would be no spikes in other US states either, and that the practice of requesting and undergoing PAD would remain fairly “stable” and predictable in those regions as well. The anti-PAD counter arguments previously outlined go to show how misconceptions can be fueled without proper comprehension of how PAD actually works and the regulations that come with it. Thus, it is important to emphasize the necessity to have more discussions between both sides of the debate to limit the spread of misinformation on such a disputed and sensitive subject. We should also shift the focus to more important matters, like how current PAD protocols can be improved to help make PAD less controversial altogether.

## HOW PAD PROTOCOL CAN BE IMPROVED

Although physician-assisted death can help terminally ill patients and their family members, it is not enough to simply legalize it throughout the states. Despite its many benefits, there are still some flaws with the current method by which PAD cases are handled in regions where it is already legal. As stated by Shibata, one of the biggest weaknesses PAD has is that it

Does not guarantee ethical outcomes. Most notably, PAD has been criticized for being unable to prevent individuals with depression from obtaining lethal means to end their lives. Thus, promoting palliative care is recommended to offer support in areas where PAD might fall short of being able to deal with depression. Palliative care is equipped to confront the challenges that cause patients to seek PAD, and it may prevent individuals from wrongfully partaking in PAD. Because of this, policy options for improving PAD with palliative care are suggested. (Shibata 164)

It is important to accept that, although PAD is less likely to be abused than euthanasia, it is still prone to being misused by patients themselves, which is in contradiction to the end goal of reaching “ethical [patient] outcomes,” or the acceptable and honorable impact on patients that healthcare hopes to achieve. There is always the possibility that some patients may feel the need to end their lives when, in reality, that is simply not the case; such people may suffer from depression or have prior suicidal thoughts that influence them to make detrimental choices like "wrongfully partaking in PAD." Hence, it is important to implement protocols that would prevent these people from being able to go through with an assisted death so easily and would instead guarantee that PAD is only used as a last resort when there are no other available options. For example, although current PAD protocol requires multiple physicians to unanimously agree that a patient's request for PAD is valid before providing them with the lethal means, it should also hold a greater emphasis on "promoting palliative care" before PAD requests are approved to "offer support in areas where PAD might fall short." After requiring patients to be educated on the benefits of palliative care, which strives to maximize comfort and minimize physical and emotional suffering at the end of life instead of granting patients the permission to facilitate their deaths, patients may be deterred from a possibly hasty decision to undergo PAD and may instead choose to get alternative help. Through proper palliative care, patients may also have the opportunity to enjoy the remainder of their lives in peace, surrounded by the company of their loved ones, before dying a much more comfortable and natural death—which is something that immediate death by PAD would not have offered. This "suggest[ion]" of incorporating palliative care shows that PAD protocol must be improved to not only help some people by offering them an escape from their suffering, but also to save others from making reckless decisions regarding their lives by providing them with a safe, effective, and peaceful alternative pathway.

Justine Dembo, Sisco van Veen, and Guy Widdershoven further emphasize the importance of making improvements to current PAD protocols in "The Influence of Cognitive Distortions on Decision-Making Capacity for Physician Aid in Dying." More specifically, they aim to ensure proper handling of future PAD cases through the implementation of additional steps that will guarantee that physician-assisted death is not misused, especially in cases involving psychiatric disorders. They state,

From an ethical perspective, we suggest a focus on how to come to reasonable conclusions regarding capacity and suffering in patients both with and without mental disorders, and on consultation regarding difficult cases in both groups, rather than a priori excluding psychiatric patients from PAD. We would also encourage the use of clinical ethics consultation in challenging cases, and space for clinicians to reflect on these cases with adequate support. A combination of empirical research and ethical analysis might provide new ways to deal with cognitive distortions and dysfunctional beliefs in requests for PAD in general, and in cases of psychiatric illness in particular. (Dembo et. al. 6)

Here, Dembo et. al. conclude, with good reason, that cases involving psychiatric PAD, as well as those involving physical illnesses, should continue to be monitored and analyzed so that we can learn from them and make necessary changes to the way these cases are handled. Such analysis is critical to make PAD even more effective and safe over time. They recommend that more focus be placed on determining patients' capability to make sound decisions about their health and body—an important idea to consider when reaching "reasonable conclusions" about whether individual patients should be deemed mentally fit to request PAD. This statement implies that the current system in place does not yield sensible results when determining patients' mental capabilities and, thus, must be replaced. They continue that this new system should be founded on objective "empirical research" and meticulous "ethical analysis" that offers full clarity on whether psychiatric patients are actually vulnerable to misusing PAD, or if we are simply assuming them to be. Dembo et. al. also emphasize how "a priori excluding psychiatric patients from PAD," or determining who is eligible for PAD and who isn't through inferences alone rather than through careful observation and examination, is illogical and can possibly even be discriminatory against psychiatric patients, as they are presently treated differently based on conditions which they cannot control. This, consequently, further underscores the necessity to make improvements in the way PAD cases are handled to ensure all patients are treated equally and have the same end of life options made available to them. Both of these articles go to show how PAD, despite its pros, is not perfect. However, this does not mean it should be banned simply because there are a few problems with its current structure. Physician-assisted death is too good of an opportunity to pass up, so we must put in the additional, necessary effort to fix up its flaws and ensure its proper use if we can hope for its widespread legalization.

## CONCLUSION

My research has led me to believe that legalizing physician-assisted death nationwide would come with a lot of benefits. First and foremost, it would give terminally ill patients the opportunity to choose how, where, and when they would like to pass, thus, giving them a greater sense of control over their situation. Additionally, following the guidelines of what it means to be moral according to utilitarian beliefs, PAD would offer these patients an escape from their constant, untreatable physical, mental, and emotional pain while giving their friends and family members the peace of knowing that their loved one's wishes are going according to plan. While these are some strong benefits, a few of my sources concede that PAD protocol must be improved if it is to be legalized. Most importantly, more emphasis must be placed on the incorporation of palliative care, and, equally as critical, additional psychiatric testing should be made necessary for cases involving psychiatric PAD. Just as crucial is an acknowledgement of how any potential PAD misuse may have ties to the larger, broader societal issue of discrimination. If we want to avoid future PAD misuse spurred on by patients' self-perceptions of worthlessness as a result of their conditions, it is vital that we try to resolve issues of discrimination and inequality in society as a whole and in healthcare specifically. Although it may not initially seem to have a direct connection to PAD, efforts must be made to make each and every patient feel like they are deserving of the same life, end of life choices, and general healthcare options as everyone else.

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**Michelle Qiu**

# The Psychology of Authority: The Reverence of the Physician's Imperfect Perfect Persona

## ABSTRACT

*Physicians have unintentionally been held at a high social status for their medical expertise and ability to treat, heal, and even revive humans. Undeniably, in a world where humans are extremely vulnerable to a range of illnesses and hazards that range from relatively harmless to life-threatening, physicians and their medical expertise are necessary. However, because of this god-like power to heal, physicians have often been associated with a unique type of authority that prompts patients to revere physicians. The significance of this issue comes from the fact that physicians are just as human as their patients…unless physicians do indeed have distinct characteristics from ordinary humans. However, do those differences ultimately deem physicians worthy of this elite social status? Do physicians truly have a perfect persona or is that perfect persona full of misconceptions – an imperfect perfect persona? To dissect the physician's persona and its influence on the physician-patient relationship, this paper explores how problematic it may be for people to defer to physicians and revere them as they would super-gods.*

## INTRODUCTION

The type of language used to describe physicians worldwide is ubiquitous: it is often empowering, embellished with words of respect and reverence that implicitly put physicians on a social level higher than that of the common population. A glaring, contemporary example emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic when physicians were widely crowned with the title "healthcare heroes". Large banners declaring "Thank You Healthcare *Heroes*" were strung all over neighborhoods, healthcare workers were serenaded with an exceptional performance of "Hero" by Mariah Carey, and generic stock photographs of the same phrase filled the media (Lipworth 1). These repetitive public praises ultimately become redundant and superficial, implying that the expectation for physicians to unfailingly save everyone from death has become deeply, meaninglessly integrated into society. The problem is, that expectation is unrealistic and therefore problematic. In fact, during the pandemic, healthcare workers themselves have begun pushing back against their hero narrative because "they associate heroism with a lack of fear – and they are afraid" (Lipworth 1). The reason for society's reverence for and faith in physicians lies in the physician's particular authority that turns physicians into "super-gods" – fearless, invincible supreme beings. Considering that these "super-gods", the physicians, are physically human and feel human emotions like fear, it becomes necessary to ask if it is genuinely acceptable to look so high up to physicians to the point where admiration and respect become veneration and allegiance. And if that perception indeed is acceptable, then the view that physicians are practically superhuman – that they know best, are capable of healing every patient, are immune to disease and death, and can surpass the limits of human physical capabilities – may then present itself as a threat to patients and physicians, which further becomes a threat to the health of the physician-patient relationship.

A healthy physician-patient relationship is strived for in the first place because it leads to positive patient health outcomes. So, what does a proper, healthy physician-patient relationship look like? According to the American Medical Association, the physician-patient relationship is based on trust and a mutually respectful alliance between physician and patient, usually bounded by mutual consent. As part of this collaboration, patients must candidly approach their physician for care, and physicians must advocate for their patients by respecting patients' rights and placing the patients' welfare above their own self-interests (Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 1.1.1, 1.1.3). Undeniably, there is a power difference between the physician and patient that is simply due to a difference in medical knowledge proficiency. It is because of this asymmetry that a patient's trust in their physician is all the more critical. In order to establish and maintain the patient's trust in the physician for the sake of the physician-patient relationship, it thus becomes important to dissect how the physician's general authority changes their individual authority and how society views them.

There is a psychological basis that may explain how this deluded perception of a physician comes about in the first place, which is rooted in the social effects of the physician's authority. This psychological phenomenon acts as the frame to analyze the dynamics of a physician-patient relationship. The psychology behind people deferring to the physician's authority and seeing physicians as superhuman will be explored, as well as the implications, potential consequences, and benefits of such mindsets and behavior. It should be noted that this perception of physicians affects both sides of the physician-patient relationship. Thus, two sides of the physician's authority in the physician-patient relationship will be discussed: how this authority affects patients and how this authority affects physicians. This investigation will therefore determine how problematic it is for people to defer to physicians and see them as superhuman. The discussions on both sides of the physician-patient relationship aim to demonstrate that authority changes the way society and physicians themselves view physicians, which ultimately endangers both parties of the physician-patient relationship. Therefore, the two discussions come together as a plea to both physicians and patients to realize that underneath the physician's perfect facade, physicians are simply human.

## HOW AUTHORITY HARMS THE PATIENT: BLIND CONSENT

Because the role of an authority figure generally refers to one who has superiority and enforces obedience, it would not be unexpected for patients to feel inferior and submissive in the presence of their physician, their authority figure. The inferiority that the patient feels is alarming in the first place, leading to the first, the most obvious consequence of viewing physicians as an authoritative super-god: the patient may end up treating their physician in such an unquestioning way that it disbenefits them. This theme of unconditional obedience bears an ominous resemblance to the Milgram Shock Experiment. These obedience experiments, carried out by Stanley Milgram, tested the limit to which ordinary people would obey orders that involved shocking another person at increasing levels of pain – and for the majority of the subjects, there was *no* limit. These observations display a horrifyingly-extreme level of obedience to authority that prevails over personal conscience. Eric Cassell relates the problem of unconditional obedience to physicians to Milgram's obedience experiments in "Consent or Obedience? Power and Authority in Medicine." Cassell comments, "Milgram's work taught us something profoundly revealing about human nature: how prone we are to obey the commands of an authority even when they conflict with our expressed desires or moral principles" (Cassell 328). The sociological tendency of humans (the patients, in this scenario) to entirely abandon their preexisting values in favor of that of the authority (the physician) is a direct obstacle to the primary bioethical principle of autonomy, the right for patients to make their own decisions regarding their treatment. In this sense, "the question of how often patients' consent really reflects their best interests (as they understand those interests) rather than representing obedience to the physician's authority is made more urgent by the results of Milgram's research" (Cassell 329). The fact that one must now question the patient's consent even after he or she gave consent and allegedly displayed their "best interests" is a problem. The need to second-guess in a situation where the physician is not even coercing the patient implies that the physician's authority is not, at least intentionally, intimidating a patient to obey. Instead, the patient gives automatic, *blind* consent to their physician's treatment plan in trust in their physician's superior medical knowledge. A clear distinction is therefore made, clarified by Milgram himself when he says, "When we talk about a medical authority, we're talking about someone with expertise. That's not quite the same as the kind of authority I was studying, which is someone perceived to have the right to control one's behavior" (Blass 40). Although Milgram's obedience experiments were not specifically tailored to display the problem of the patient's blind obedience to the physician's authority, Cassel argues that no matter the source of authority, the same problem with obedience stands:

> "Although these studies, like Milgram's, involved experimental subjects, not patients, we can easily identify these sources of power in the medical world. [...We] should accept the propensity of sick patients to seek our approbation, celebrate our expertise, and acknowledge the legitimacy of our authority. These tendencies present us with the difficult responsibility of, first, probing carefully to discover what patients believe to be best for them and second, ensuring that their best interests guide both what we ask of them and our own actions" (330).

Cassel calls physicians to recognize the power they hold as medical experts, as *authorities* to prevent cases of blind consent, as blind consent is essentially equivalent to patients not having true autonomy; otherwise, this infringement upon one of the most fundamental bioethics risks the creation of an unsafe medical environment.

## HOW AUTHORITY HARMS THE PATIENT: MEDICAL EXPERTISE

But just how much can the physician's medical expertise be trusted to promote a healthy form of authority? Similar to the problem with blind consent, patients blindly trust the medical expertise of their physician. According to a nationwide survey administered by the American College of Surgeons, a national educational association of surgeons, "the average patient devotes an hour or less to researching his or her surgery or surgeon. [...] In fact, more than a third of patients who had an operation in the last five years never reviewed the credentials of the surgeon who operated" (Chen 2008). The lack of time the patients put into assessing a potential physician, despite being well aware they are bargaining for their health and well-being, demonstrates that most patients have the generalized view that all physicians are medical experts. After all, what did physicians train and go to medical school for ten-plus years for? The unfortunate reality is that physicians, like all other humans, can be fallible and may even still be training after legally qualifying and earning a license as a physician. Dr. Jed Mercurio describes his struggles even while being a practicing physician, "When I qualified, I soon learned that there would be times when I would be called upon to conduct procedures I had never seen, let alone practiced. [...] We all kill a few patients while we're learning" (Mercurio 2004). Mercurio demonstrates how even a physician's extensive, rigorous education and medical "expertise" cannot compensate for the disorganization and spontaneity of the healthcare system. Moreover, it appears from Mercurio's blunt tone that "killing a few patients" during practice has become almost unremarkable due to how commonplace it is. Given this information, it is crucial that patients realize just how risky it is to put their lives in the right or wrong physician's hands. Aside from a lack of training, physicians are also prone to making cognitive errors and having faulty reasoning due to cognitive biases (Mamede et. al., 114). In light of these inevitable shortcomings of the physician, Pauline Chen recounts Dr. Russel's warning that "mistakes can happen, and patients have to be educated and must understand what is going on" (Chen 2008). Together, Chen and Mercurio alert patients, the ultimate decision-makers in the physician-patient relationship, that they must not blindly trust a physician's medical expertise; superior medical knowledge does not mean perfect judgment and skill – even a physician's medical expertise cannot be unconditionally trusted as a healthy source of authority. Although it is the patient's responsibility to recognize that a physician's medical expertise is imperfect, most fail to do so, resulting in the possibility of a patient subjecting themself to risky treatment.

Though patients show an unhealthy amount of certainty in the physician's medical competence, it is not solely the patient but also the physician themself who may over-deem medical expertise to be an indicator of their authority. Essentially, the physician may become consumed by their ego because they fixate on their superior medical knowledge compared to their patient. In this case, this physician's egotism becomes an obstacle to good communication and collaboration between the physician and patient. Believing they know best, the physician may try to monopolize the decision-making (which in itself violates patient autonomy), and the physician may retaliate if the patient questions them. In a study done on patient consultation experiences, Eva Johansson found that "doctors find it problematic to handle distrust and to demonstrate their weakness. Medical uncertainty and patients having an abrasive behavioral style are perceived as threats by doctors" (Johansson et. al., 501). This behavior demonstrates just how deeply medical expertise can be ingrained in a physician's identity and ego; any uncertainty the patient shows in the physician is thus recognized as not only an attack on their legitimacy as a physician but their identity. However, there is one crucial aspect that medical expertise lacks that makes the physician's ego dangerous: medical expertise does not mean the ability to tolerate uncooperative, distrustful patients, nor does it mean pure benevolence or altruism. Within the mind of a physician consumed by their ego, they may view their medical expertise, and their elite skills as excuses for being able to treat their patient however they want. Therefore, when the physician feels challenged, they can endanger the patient by diminishing their expertise. The physician may respond to the distrust by correcting, subjugating comments such as "that is pure rubbish", leaving the patients feeling ignored, disregarded, and rejected (Johansson et. al., 501). The other direct consequence of a physician's medical expertise thus reveals itself as disrespectful behavior towards patients. However, the major threat to the physician-patient relationship is the emotional damage the disrespect inflicts on the patient. The emotional damage creates a cocktail of consequences: fear, anger, shame, confusion, uncertainty, isolation, self-doubt, depression, and physical ailments. These feelings impede the patient's confidence and ability to think, making them less likely to make rational judgments, ask questions, or provide important information (Grissinger 74). A purely negative patient experience results: the patient leaves emotionally damaged *and* likely not having even received the proper physical treatment they had come for because they did not feel comfortable addressing their needs – the patient leaves worse off than when they first arrived. Chen reiterates the importance of patients feeling heard, emphasizing that “patients and their families need to be armed with the fortitude and the right questions in order to find the best doctors for their problems,” (Chen 2008). Chen, Johansson, and Grissinger thus come together to form the argument that a physician’s ego founded on their medical expertise may result in disrespectful behavior and negligence, compromising the patient’s emotional and physical well-being.

## HOW AUTHORITY HARMS THE PATIENT: MEDICAL EXPERTISE VS. EMPATHY

If patients are tremendously disheartened by disrespectful behavior, then how well would they take to an empathetic physician? A study done by Wu Qing on the relationship between physician empathy and patient trust compares what physicians and patients individually deem as the most essential trait a trustworthy physician must have. In administering the cross-sectional survey, participants from 103 hospitals across China were gathered to assess their perception of physicians’ empathy and competence using the 5-point Likert scale concerning their overall trust in the physicians. Qing reported that “generally, physicians value their expertise and competence as the most important factor in medical practice, while our patients reported that interpersonal and communicational skills were more important (Qing et. al., 4). The different values that physicians and patients believe to build a good physician-patient relationship may explain why some patients report unsatisfactory experiences with their physicians. For example, the physician may perfectly heal the patient except doing so with an offending attitude, yet the patient is not pleased with the overall experience. Reading through doctor reviews, Chen finds that patients give “failing grades” to rushed, brusque, or distracted physicians and “high grades” to warm, concerned, and focused physicians without any evaluation of the doctor’s actual medical skill (Chen 2008). Why is there no mention of the physician’s medical ability, what a physician is known for? Why is the patient still unsatisfied if, according to the previous section, they revere the physician for their medical expertise? The problem lies in the first reason patients revere physicians: they blindly, innately believe in their expertise. Therefore, because the patient comes in *already* assuming that their physician is a medical expert, they only assess the physician’s empathy during the appointment. But is it warranted for patients to mainly focus on empathy quality? Chen criticizes patients for that issue that is revealed in her and Qing's findings: "A healthy doctor-patient relationship does not simply entail good bedside manners and responsible office management on the part of the doctor. It also requires that patients come to the relationship educated about their doctors, their illnesses and their treatment" (2008). In other words, a patient's expectations for empathy and expert medical skill should be balanced, neither overly valued, because although benevolence is an essential aspect in the healing process of patients, too much focus on empathy and not enough on the medical quality of the treatment may then become physically harmful for the patient. Chen, therefore, argues that to ensure the best patient outcome, patients must first put aside their preconceptions about the physician's expertise (which, as previously discussed, arose from the physician's perceived authority) and do thorough research on the physician.

## HOW AUTHORITY HARMS THE PHYSICIAN: DAMAGED EGO AND INSECURITY

Just like their patients, physicians struggle with over-valuing their superior medical skills and knowledge. Because their medical expertise is their pride and identity, physicians may resort to disrespectful behavior as a defense mechanism if they feel that their authority and expertise are challenged, as briefly mentioned in a previous section. The fact that minor, temporary challenges trigger such a strong defense mechanism in the physician signifies the problem that physicians are more sensitive than the general public. The physician's sensitivity is a byproduct of "the medical culture [being] built on the premise of perfection. [Physicians] are ingrained to avoid failure [...] but this perfection-driven training magnifies [their] reactions to medical errors" (Nguyen 2020). Just like how the patient sees the physician as infallible, physicians hold themselves to higher standards where mistakes are unacceptable. The consequences can be summarized by the phrase "the bigger the ego, the harder the fall"; when the physician does make a mistake, "insecurity, anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, and narcissism [arise] as a form of self-protection against feelings of inadequacy" (Grissinger 74). Grissinger additionally describes this form of self-protection in times of frustration as a "survival" behavior (74). The use of the word "survival" to describe this extreme defense mechanism suggests that the physician feels so threatened by either a distrustful patient or their own inadequacy that an almost animalistic instinct to survive takes over. They feel the need to fight furiously even though they are not in a life-and-death situation. However, this facade of medical perfection can only be maintained for so long, eventually taking a toll on the physician. Striving for this unhealthy perfectionism and constantly being in survival mode may lead to more serious symptoms, including burnout, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation (Wong 8). Nguyen, Grissinger, and Wong all describe the pitfall of the physician's relentless, unrealistic perfectionism. Although perfectionism arguably ensures high-quality patient care, perhaps it is not worth physician distress, particularly because physicians seem more susceptible to distress. Nguyen and Wong point out that physicians have more extreme reactions to failure, suggesting that the physician's steadfast authority, fortified by their medical expertise and ego, is their weakness.

Ironically, the physician's big ego as the authority figure is the reason for their low self-esteem and insecurities. Their insecurities become more apparent when the physician is in the patient role and must rely on another physician to treat them. Between the treating-physician and the patient physician, there is a subconscious, mutual struggle with figuring out how authority should play out between two people who are authority figures in their own daily lives. Essentially, it results in a combination of the physician-patient submitting to the treating-physician *to an extent* or the treating-physician submitting to the physician-patient *to an extent*. The phrase "to an extent" is highly significant because it implies that the physician is unwilling to defer completely to the other physician. It is insecurity that is the root of what is inhibiting physicians from maintaining a healthy balance of deference and autonomy – the ingredients for a healthy physician-patient relationship. Insecurity within the physicians becomes apparent when the treating-physician and patient-physician implicitly compete to have superior medical information. In "When the Patient is a Physician", Peter Marzuk details the patient-physician's particular insecurity; when being given a prognosis by their treating physician, "the physician patient, perhaps because of embarrassment about not being up to date on medical knowledge, may pretend to know more about the condition than he or she really does [...and needs to hear nothing further about the ramifications of their illness]" (Marzuk 1410). Evidently, the patient-physician is insecure about being perceived as the inferior, less competent, and less knowledgeable physician, even outside of their job. Their profession as a physician is their identity, which becomes the measurement of their self-worth. It is, therefore, easy for the patient-physician to feel worthless if their ability as a physician is undermined. On the treating physician's side, when their patient-physician asserts their medical opinion on their own condition, "the treating physicians may feel intimidated and thus defer to what they perceive as the superior knowledge and experience of their colleagues" (Marzuk 1410). In this scenario, the treating-physician's insecurity resulted in greater submission because the subconscious belief and worry that they are inferior were forced to the surface, becoming a conscious belief instead. Indeed, insecurity, a very human feeling, is the destructive force that shakes and intimidates each physician's medical authority. The psychological relationship between insecurity and authority explains what may be driving physicians to falter in the perfect physician persona they attempt to create. The results of a social psychological study assessing the relationship between authoritarian syndrome, self-esteem, and insecurity confirm that "high authoritarians may be low in self esteem and react to the environment in their characteristic manner because of a more fundamental personal insecurity" and that "the motivation underlying the authoritarian syndrome of traits is an attempt to maintain security in an environment which is perceived as threatening" (Larsen et. al., 229-230). Larsen's research suggests more to the physicians' mindsets and behavior that Marzuk proposes in his scenarios. While Larsen agrees that personal insecurities and low self-esteem underlie some of the physician's behavior, his findings imply that the patient-physician and treating-physician defer in their respective scenarios because they want to maintain security. Perhaps the patient-physician and treating-physician wish to avoid situations where their competence and pride would be further challenged by another physician, fearing that their medical expertise would indeed be proved inferior. However, a physician-patient relationship cannot thrive and work towards healthy outcomes when both individuals are more concerned about their own social standing rather than understanding each other and, even more urgently, the patient's health.

## HOW AUTHORITY HARMS THE PHYSICIAN: HEALTH RISKS

Deep ramifications arise when physicians allow their insecurity to invade the physician-patient relationship. As a consequence of the patient-physician's rejection to hear the full prognosis about their condition and the options for treatment out of embarrassment, "the physician-patient may end up giving very 'uninformed' consent to procedures and treatments" (Marzuk 1410). This lack of true consent from the physician-patient parallels the same issue outlined in the previously explained problem of patients' giving blind consent. Not being fully aware of the illness and treatment's ramifications makes it harder for the patient-physician to know what important questions to ask. Furthermore, it is more likely that the physician would face unexpected physical consequences or outcomes and a violation of their personal values. This would be the scenario if the patient-physician lets the treating-physician take control of the entire medical procedure because they do not want to admit that they do not know about their own condition. What about if the patient-physician attempts to excessively control their care? Marzuk hypothesizes that "sometimes powerful subliminal forces lead the treating physician to arrive at an improper diagnosis or even discharge the patient prematurely" (1410). The powerful subliminal forces Marzuk refers to are the patient-physician's strong denial of their illness and monopolization of their treatment, which is enough to convince the treating-physician not to need to conduct a thorough workup. The improper diagnosis and premature discharge threaten potential poor patient outcomes and health risks in the long term. Interestingly, the patient-physician's insistence on being discharged early so that they can return to clinical practice also negatively influences their treating-physician. The treating-physician may view the patient's clamoring desire to return to treating others as an admirable virtue in a physician (Marzuk 1410). Not wanting to fall behind and be perceived as an inferior, lazy physician, the treating physician may mimic this destructive behavior. Ultimately, this perpetuates the norm that physicians can and *should* ignore their health and work tirelessly to treat those who cannot just ignore their illnesses.

Physicians tend to neglect their physical health because they expect themselves to embody the perfect, invincible, reliable figure society sees them as. They feel that as the authority figure in the physician-patient relationship, they must be trusted to guide and protect the patient. As outlined in the social contract of physicians, "it has been argued traditionally that the special commitment of doctors to a high standard of altruism and beneficence, and hence to a duty to care even at risk to themselves, is one side of the social contract between the profession and society at large" (Reid 352). Physicians take this a step further, expecting themselves to not only sacrifice themselves for their patients but also to not feel physically weak in the first place. The expectation often is subconscious because although physicians are indeed aware that as humans, illness is a part of life, they still expect themselves to be immune to illness and death. In their eyes, once the physician becomes a physician and their role becomes to treat and heal sick people, they simply are not allowed to be sick themselves (Marzuk 1409). Marzuk references the physician's special, altruistic commitment to patients that Reid describes when he claims that the physician's one role is to treat patients, which means physicians cannot get sick. According to that logic, would it not be hypocritical for a physician to become sick then? How could a physician get sick if they supposedly know how illnesses come about, the signs/symptoms, the treatment, etc.? Furthermore, what would falling sick and being unable to treat oneself say about the competence and reliability of that physician? These subconscious thoughts within a physician become insecurities; it is because of these insecurities that a physician would rather deny their mortality and physical limitations, blindly and boldly continuing to tend to the vulnerable, weak common people.

It is alarmingly common for "[physicians to be masters at denying illness in themselves], and they often ignore the warnings they give to patients about signs and symptoms. As a result, they may seek treatment later in the course of a disease than other patients" (Marzuk 4109). As one can guess, delaying treatment or outright ignoring the condition will eventually result in the physician having health consequences. This denial of their mortality acts as a defense mechanism "to cope with the vulnerability they feel from being perpetually surrounded by illness and disease, [physicians often adopt a sense of invincibility]. 'They may be driven by an unconscious need to feel omnipotent'" (Ranieri 23). Physicians' unconscious belief in their "omnipotence," their invincibility, as a result, only deepens their fear when they themselves are struck by illness to the point where they can no longer ignore their condition; they are struck by the harsh truth that they are just as vulnerable to disease and death as their patients are. The realization of their vulnerability despite their medical abilities and knowledge is an extra blow to their dignity as physicians. In "When the Doctor Becomes the Patient," Dr. Mathew Lee, the Chairman of NYU's Department of Rehabilitation Medicine and the recipient of several awards, expresses this insecurity when he unexpectedly developed pancreatic cancer. Dr. Lee comments, "being a pain specialist who couldn't relieve his own suffering made the agony worse" (Ranieri 22). Even Dr. Lee's trust in his gift of medical knowledge failed to compensate for his body's natural fragility, prompting disappointment and shame in addition to the suffering an ordinary patient would feel. After decades of medical practice, Dr. Lee subconsciously developed unrealistic confidence in his invincibility, the same omnipotence that Marzuk describes, trapping him in the unexpected agony of his illness. Ultimately, the expectation of being invincible and omnipotent ingrained in physicians leads to disappointment and greater physical pain when they are the ones who fall victim to illness, especially when their talents and knowledge as medical practitioners fail them.

## BENEFITS OF DEFERRING TO THE PHYSICIAN

There are undeniable benefits of the patient's deference to physicians' authority and superior medical knowledge. As addressed at the beginning of the discussion, a significant, *required* part of a healthy physician-patient relationship is the patient's trust. However, "trust is inseparable from vulnerability: there is no need for trust if there is no vulnerability. This could explain why patients sometimes attribute superhuman power to physicians" (Plomp et. al., 262). In other words, the patient in a physician-patient relationship *needs* a reliable authority figure because vulnerability is a natural part of the patient experience. It may mean that along the way, the patient will revere the physician for their "superhuman" medical skills. However, this reverence could also simply be due to the specific mental state the patient is currently in when they seek a physician. In his paper, "Trust and Vulnerability in Doctor-Patient Relations in Occupational Health", Plomp references a hypothesis called the need theory, which states that "trust arises from the patient's need for help and support and does function as a coping mechanism in response to the intensive psychic distress created by illness or other stressful events" (Plomp et. al., 262). The patient may, at least at that moment, latch onto authority instinctively out of distress. Therefore, one of the reasons why it is so common to see the patient defer to the authority of physicians is simply because, as a coping mechanism, it is an innate strategy ingrained in humans to handle stress and manage difficult situations. However, as discussed in previous sections, both the physician and patient must cooperate to build a healthy physician-patient relationship. To prevent physicians from taking advantage of patients' vulnerable state and deference, "[physicians must be] aware of coping efforts to understand their patient's needs and act accordingly, i.e., do not force information on patients who wish to receive as little information as possible but provide more information to those who seek it. In this context, physicians should be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal communication from patients regarding their coping method" (Aust 7). Aust and Plomp recognize that a part of the patient's reverence for and deference to the physician comes from the patient's being emotionally compromised and needing to cope. In this scenario, physical and emotional dependency on the physician's authority is understandable and necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The immense trust placed in the physician's ability and superior knowledge by both physicians and patients overshadows the concern that perhaps it is problematic for people to defer to physicians so easily. Additionally, the misconception that physicians are "superhuman" because of their perfect personae and unique authority poses risks for both themselves and their patients. However, it must be recognized that patients need a figure they can rely on for steadfast, high-quality physical and emotional care when in distress from a medical situation. Therefore, how valid and healthy it is for the patient to revere their physician is analyzed with the framework of how the physician's authority affects the physician and the patient individually. On the patient's side, the patient is in danger of blindly obeying physicians instead of giving authentic consent, and they may get hurt for revering the physician's medical expertise and fixating on the physician's empathy component. On the physician's side, the physician is at a higher risk of developing low self-esteem, a damaged ego, insecurities, and health risks from the negligence of their health if they become too consumed with their medical power as the authority figure. Overall, many incidents and studies have demonstrated that physicians and society view physicians too highly, signifying that physicians are often held to an unrealistically high standard. Potentially, with this ideology still greatly influencing the medical world, truly fulfilling and healthy physician-patient relationships will remain hard to achieve. To combat this issue, the most significant message to take away from this discussion is that physicians are, at their core indeed as imperfectly human as everyone else.

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