



Gleanings:

A Journal of First-Year

Student Writing

Siena College

Volume 9

2018-2019

Cover image: *Palazzo Pubblico* and *Torre del Mangia* in *Piazza del Campo*, Siena, Italy
Photograph taken by Andrew Murphy (Siena Class of 2017) December 2018

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All of the work included in this journal was written by students who were enrolled in Siena's First Year Seminar in 2018 - 2019.

This required course prepares students for the intellectual rigors of college life and beyond by building critical thinking and communication skills as well as by fostering creativity and advocacy.

Throughout this two-semester seminar, students are encouraged to reflect upon and discuss the vast amounts of reading and writing that they do both inside and outside the classroom.

Siena College is committed to showcasing the intellectual and engaging work being accomplished on its campus, so *Gleanings* was created as a means of celebrating some of the finest and most provocative first-year student writing completed each year.

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While slight editorial changes have been made to these works, they were purposely kept to a minimum. The FYS team deems it important to preserve the authentic voices, the authorial choices, as well as the integrity of the assignments when compiling this journal.

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First Year Seminar requires that all students participate in out-of-class learning experiences. The students in this class attended an on-campus event of their choice and then wrote reflection essays. In this short response, the writer grapples with the complex themes raised in the theatrical performance that she attended and makes insightful connections to course readings and to herself.

Black or White, We All Are Just Some Egg

By Nancy Asante

Prof. Barranca - Media and Society

Racism is the fire fueling politics, violence, and hatred. The prayer for world peace seems to be drowned out by a nation being torn apart. As an African American female in today's society, my cocoa brown skin begs the question: "Am I worthy of being respected as a human being?" Why should I be judged for my roots stretching far and wide, for they are the foundation for the seeds representing my uniqueness, my heritage? I can relate to the circumstances surrounding Freeman's frustration in the play *Platanos Y Collard Greens* as he is judged not by the content of his heart, but by the color of his skin. Eggs, whether scrambled, poached, or boiled, will never be discriminated against for the color of their shells, but rather for their taste, or what's on the inside. Whenever an eggshell is cracked, whether brown or white, the yolk is always yellow. It's what is inside that binds all humans. Without knowing and appreciating the true roots of my heritage, my identity will be lost in a world that plays "Society Says," which includes the worshipping of what is on the outside, such as fair skin and straight hair. However, I choose to embrace and proclaim my heritage wholeheartedly, even as society's voice tries to drown it out.

While watching the play *Platanos Y Collard Greens* in the Beaudoin Theatre located in Foy Hall at Siena College, I was captivated by the focus on the ties between African-Americans and Latinos through the development of a college relationship. The comedic stereotypes introduced at the beginning of the play certainly pleased me as I found myself connecting to the main character, Freeman. As an African-American college student who is fond of Angelita, who is Hispanic, Freeman is met with criticism from not only Angelita's racist mother, Samana, but also from a brown-skinned girl named Malady. The two lovers are torn apart because of their differences in ancestry when, in reality, under the Hispanic heritage that encompasses silky hair and light skin, a blend of African culture is buried. Samana's pride in her culture is struck down by Angelita's love for Freeman because Samana relies on the labels placed on blacks, which clouds her better judgment. Such examples of discrimination and racism highlighted throughout the play taught me to always stand up for my beliefs, no matter the consequences. Despite the bigotry that he is subjected to, Freeman continues to hold Angelita in high regard when he could have easily backed away. Freeman's respectful nature and the boldness in his decisions (even though some of the inaccurate assumptions about him came from those who share his own complexion) made me question myself. I considered how I could be like those who don't take a second glance to see what's underneath someone's pigmentation, or how I could be like many others who shy away from their culture because it's not regarded as acceptable in society.

The play emphasizes subtle overtones and actions to show the differences between people. For example, Samana refuses to shake Freeman's father's hand and does not believe that someone with darker skin than hers could earn a degree from Harvard or Yale. It is clear that Samana has been brainwashed by society and chooses to be oblivious to the African roots nested deep within her DNA. However, Angelita decides to ignore her mother's perspective, which is a pivotal event since many daughters unwillingly have their lives shaped by the dreams of their families. Likewise, the article "Disney's Darlings" by Jena Stephens, illustrates this changed mindset, for after years of submission to other peoples' dreams and opinions, Disney princesses are now more independent and not "forced to follow someone else's idea of her life plan" (97). This has paved the way for young viewers, who look up to these characters, to find the courage to pursue only to their own hopes and future aspirations.

Returning to *Platanos Y Collard Greens*, while Freeman is not female, the article, "Disney's Darlings," relates to him. More specifically, Disney's first African-American Princess, Tiana, is praised and criticized for rejecting the princess archetype in the film, *The Princess and the Frog*. This change entails a new-found independence. With a mind of her own, Tiana seeks her dreams and sheds the former idea that princesses need a man for their happily-ever-after. Tiana's popularity among Disney movie-watching audiences has led to the inclusion of more princesses of varying races in other Disney movies, each straying from the desire to have a man and focusing instead on her dreams and goals. Likewise, in *Platanos Y Collard Greens*, Freeman does not strive to be the stereotypical black adolescent male interested in sports and building his ego; rather, he has a mature mindset that shows an interest in literature. It is Freeman's passion for poetry and leadership that opens Angelita's eyes to prioritizing personality over background. By influencing Angelita's views, Freeman starts a chain reaction, for then Angelita shows Samana the flaws in Samana's own prejudice. Through the play and the class reading, I can see how essential it is to recognize the labels placed on people and to appreciate the boldness in those who choose to take the narrow path against the majority's assumptions.

Freeman undoubtedly receives criticism for his decisions simply because of his heritage. However, the key lesson that I took from his story is how to turn negative situations into positive ones. Although no one has said so directly, my dream of majoring in Physics and becoming an Aerospace Engineer seems to be impossible. The countless surprised faces and comments from those who ask about my aspirations in life point to this unfair reality: black women are rare in STEM fields. Police brutality and the #BlackLivesMatter make me wonder, "Why does the system seem to set me up for failure?" While watching the play, I found myself truly appreciating that it was written. It gave me inspiration as I easily deciphered the slang used and made connections to the scenes and characters. For example, Samana perming Angelita's hair to make it straight relates to my own upbringing. My hair was permed before I made the decision to embrace my kinks, which is something that I believe speaks to my own identity. Thus, the limits placed on me by others stem from society's cultural views, but it is my task to

recognize these faults and prove that such limits are nonexistent when it comes to my core values. This relates back to Disney's first African American princess, Tiana, who "grows up. . . [learning] the value of working hard" (Stephens 96). As a minority, I have to work twice as hard to be noticed. However, my worth ethic leads to recognized accomplishments and a sense of pride in black excellence. Similarly, in *Platanos Y Collard Greens*, Pops has degrees from Ivy League schools, Freeman respectfully shares his pride in his skin tone, and Angelita loves who she is because of her mixed culture dating back to her ancestors. I, too, love what makes me, me.

Ancestry websites truly reveal how humans are all one big family, and perhaps my egg shell does not make me so different from other eggs. Angelita's true acceptance of her mixed-race is just one example of progress, and I appreciated how the play went on to show the importance of setting aside our differences and proclaiming the human race to be the only race. My own heritage is not something I should take for granted, for it does influence my thoughts, looks, and associations. However, embracing who I am as an individual is important to keeping my own identity alive.

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For this research paper, the author chose a topic she is personally interested in and that relates to her major (Psychology). The assignment required students to incorporate elements of the Franciscan tradition, so this author relates the mental health of those affected by the criminal justice system with two Franciscan concerns—diversity and social justice.

Mental Health and the Prison System:

How the Prison Experience Affects More than Just the Inmates

By Autumn Aubrey

Prof. Rody-Wright- FYS Incarceration

The incarceration experience is trying for all individuals involved. The inmates, the guards, and the children of the inmates all face challenges that come with the roles they play throughout the incarceration period. Inmates are heavily affected by the epidemic of poor mental health that is sweeping the globe; their mental health suffers as their world is turned upside down. In addition to this, the mental health epidemic affects more than just the inmates themselves. It also affects the guards who work in the facility, who face their own special set of challenges, and the children of the incarcerated individuals who struggle to find healthy ways to cope with the conviction of a parent. This increase in mental health issues has led prison officials to attempt to create programs to help all of these individuals improve their mental health. Still, they have struggled to find programs that are a perfect fit for their facilities and are both helpful and affordable for the inmates, guards, and children of inmates, as well.

When the topic of mental health in prisons is brought up, the main group of individuals that is discussed are the inmates. There are certain variables that come into play in regard to the development of mental health disorders that are specific to the prison environment that the average person does not deal with. Reporter Anna Swanson states: "According to the Department of Justice, about 15 percent of state prisoners, and 24 percent of jail inmates report symptoms [that] meet the criteria for a psychotic disorder."¹ This statistic shows that some inmates were likely incarcerated as a result of an untreated mental illness or that the prison environment has a negative impact on a person's mental health. For many male inmates, prison is a hypermasculine environment in which there are pressures to be strong, aggressive, dominant, and, as psychiatrist Ronald Doctor puts it, "emotionally ensnared [which] renders them unable, because unwilling, to express themselves."² These pressures promote violence and power struggles among male inmates, and promotes anxiety among this population.³ This hypermasculine environment also causes male, and even female, inmates to feel the need to hide their emotions, and, therefore, they may not seek help for any mental illnesses they may suffer from to

¹ Ana Swanson, "A Shocking Number of Mentally Ill Americans End Up in Prison Instead of Treatment," *The Washington Post*, April 30, 2015, accessed February 4, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/04/30/a-shocking-number-of-mentally-ill-americans-end-up-in-prisons-instead-of-psychiatric-hospitals/?utm_term=.dcf1ea303215.

² Ronald Doctor, "Psychotherapy and the Prisoner—Impasse or Progress?" in *Life Within Hidden Worlds: Psychotherapy in Prisons*, ed. Jessica Williams Saunders (New York: Karnac, 2001), ebook, 57.

³ John Olliffe, et al., "Do You Want to Go Forward or Do You Want to Go Under?' Men's Mental Health In and Out of Prison," *American Journal of Men's Health* 12, no. 5 (2018): 1236, accessed January 20, 2019, doi: 10.1177/1557988318765923.

avoid being seen as weak in front of their fellow inmates. Researchers have found that another cause of mental illness within the prison system is the challenge of trying to successfully “adapt to new contexts, identities, and social structures.”⁴ This, in turn, a recent study finds, leads to feelings of “insecurity and emotional vulnerability.”⁵ Entering the prison system is an unnerving experience in which the inmate is removed from his life and placed into an entirely new environment from which he cannot leave on his own free will. The newly arrived inmates may face threats and harassment from other inmates trying to assert their dominance, which can lead to the development of anxiety. The inmates also may develop feelings of shame because of their situation and the feeling that they have let down their families. These feelings, combined with the emotional vulnerability that comes with being moved to a foreign environment, are variables that contribute to the development of mental illness among incarcerated individuals.

With mental illnesses like anxiety and depression running rampant through the prison system, there have been efforts to implement treatment options and provide resources behind prison walls to help treat mental illness. However, these resources often fall short for many reasons, including diagnostic procedures, funding, and short staffing. For example, the Federal Bureau of Prisons implemented a policy that promised to improve care for inmates with mental health issues. Their solution for lowering the high rate of mental illness in prisons was not to treat the inmates properly, but to raise the criteria for diagnosis so that fewer inmates were diagnosed with mental health disorders even if they suffered from them.⁶ Journalists Christine Thompson and Taylor Elizabeth Eldridge explain: “[The] prison staff are determining that prisoners - some with long histories of psychiatric problems - don’t require any routine care at all.”⁷ Judging by the implementation of this policy, it is clear that these inmates are not being treated, and that the government and high ranking prison officials do not care about the mental health of the inmates themselves, although they do care about their own reputations. This policy allows government officials to look like they are making improvements when it comes to the treatment of mental illness in prison, when in reality, inmates are suffering from untreated and ignored mental illnesses because of this change in diagnostic classification and procedure. In addition, funding also plays a role in the treatment available to inmates. According to Thompson and Eldridge, the Federal Bureau of Prisons “did not add the resources needed to implement [their policies], creating an incentive for employees to downgrade inmates to lower care levels.”⁸ Even though the mental health staff in prison facilities are trying to make care

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Christine Thompson and Taylor Elizabeth Eldridge, “‘No One to Talk You Down:’ Inside Federal Prisons’ Dangerous Failure to Treat Inmates with Mental-health Disorders,” *The Washington Post*, November 21, 2018, accessed February 4, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/11/21/feature/federal-prisons-were-told-to-improve-inmates-access-to-mental-health-care-theyve-failed-miserably/?utm_term=.a0fc328a9c79.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

accessible to inmates, they simply do not have the resources to do so. By assigning patients to a lower care level, it allows the staff to treat more inmates while staying within the budget, even if these inmates are not getting care to the extent they need. Understaffing is also an issue. Thompson and Eldridge report that staffing in some prisons is so low that some “in the federal prison system have forced the bureau to require some counselors to serve as corrections officers”⁹ and other types of jobs around the facility that do not pertain to counseling. This is very harmful to the prison population because it does not give the counselors enough time to properly treat each of their patients throughout the day.

In addition to inmates, corrections officers must also face the daily hardships of the prison system. Their mental health is greatly affected as well because they are faced with the additional challenge of separating their work mentality from their mentality at home. Sociologist, author, and mental health counselor Bonnie Sultan has written extensively about this topic and found that they face the struggle of “be[ing] two completely different people each day- an officer and a citizen.”¹⁰ Although some may argue that corrections officers do not suffer from mental illness because, after all, they chose this profession and are free to go home at the end of the day, in actuality, Sultan argues, corrections officers suffer from “staggering rates of depression, feelings of hopelessness, and thoughts of suicide.”¹¹ One aspect of the prison environment that is cited as a cause of mental illness for corrections officers is the strange shift work that they must accept. Many officers work shifts that range from eight to twelve hours at a time. This “shift work disrupts the circadian rhythm,”¹² Sultan says, and “results in families not having dinner together and parents sleeping while their children get ready for school.”¹³ This aspect of the life of a corrections officer causes a separation from family and a sense of loneliness and not belonging within the family unit. A lack of sleep and separation from loved ones contributes to the rising rates of depression and suicidal thoughts among correctional-based staff. Another cause of mental illness in corrections officers is working in a hyper-violent environment.¹⁴ With the constant threat of violence, and the abundance of hatred the officers receive from the inmates, an officer must always be hypervigilant. Having to be hypervigilant for an extended period of time can lead many correctional officers to suffer from anxiety. In one study, corrections officers reported “feeling nervous or fidgety” and “abusing prescription drugs to alleviate stress and anxiety.”¹⁵ This constant stress, hopelessness, and “inability to find pleasure in anything” has led to “about 10

⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰ **Bonnie Sultan, “Working Behind the Wall: Mental Health of Correctional-Based Staff,” PsychAlive, 2019, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.psychalive.org/working-behind-the-wall-mental-health-of-correctional-based-staff/>.**

¹¹ **Ibid.**

¹² **Ibid.**

¹³ **Ibid.**

¹⁴ **Ibid.**

¹⁵ **John Rogers, “Focus I Survey and Final Report: A Summary of the Findings: Families Officers and Corrections Understanding Stress,” U.S. Department of Justice, quoted in Bonnie Sultan, “Working Behind the Wall: Mental Health of Correctional-Based**

percent of prison guards say[ing] they have considered or attempted suicide, a rate nearly three times that of the general U.S. population,”¹⁶ according to a report in the *New York Post*.

With such discouraging statistics involving the suicide rates among correctional-based staff, one would think that officers would have access to adequate resources that could help to improve their mental health so that they could continue to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. However, there is an alarming lack of support for and acknowledgement of the psychological suffering that corrections officers are subjected to. Reporter Simone Weichselbaum explains, “The cumulative impact on corrections officers, including an apparent high rate of suicide, has rarely been studied in depth.”¹⁷ Because of the lack of research in this subject area, it is difficult for prison officials to realize the impact that working in these institutions has on the mental health of a corrections officer. However, many unions representing current and retired corrections officers are trying to change this and are participating in research to develop effective programs to improve mental health. For example, the California Peace Officers association partnered with the University of California, Berkeley, to conduct questionnaires, run focus groups, and try out potential mental health services¹⁸ for corrections officers in prisons throughout California to discover the best way to improve their mental health so they can live happy lives and do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

The criminal justice system affects the mental health of not only those within the prisons, but those outside prison walls, as well. In particular, the children of incarcerated parents are impacted by the prison system every day. The incarceration of a parent is an extremely traumatic experience for children, especially if they are there to witness the actual arrest of the parent. A major part of their lives is suddenly taken away from them. For some of these children, this is their only parent, so they have no choice but to live with another relative or go into foster care, where they will likely not get the emotional and psychological support they need. Instead, the children in foster care often develop mental illnesses. These include depression, due to the lack of support from a loved one, and anxiety, due to constantly having to fight for food and attention from the other children in the care system. At home, before the arrest, these children are likely to have been exposed to violence and drug abuse at a young age, which could also further their development of mental illness.¹⁹ Because of these factors, criminologists Jillian Turanovic and Nancy Rodriguez explain that “several studies have shown

Staff,” PsychAlive, 2019, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.psychalive.org/working-behind-the-wall-mental-health-of-correctional-based-staff/>.

¹⁶ “Why Are Suicide Rates So High Among Corrections Officers?,” *New York Post*, January 9, 2018, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2018/01/09/why-are-suicide-rates-so-high-among-corrections-officers/>.

¹⁷ Simone Weichselbaum, “For Corrections Officers and Cops, a New Emphasis on Mental Health,” *The Marshall Project*, June 14, 2017, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/06/14/for-corrections-officers-and-cops-a-new-emphasis-on-mental-health>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Jillian Turanovic and Nancy Rodriguez, “Mental Health Service Needs in the Prison Boom: The Case of Children of Incarcerated Mothers,” *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 28, no. 5 (2015): 417 accessed January 20, 2019, doi: 10.1177/0887403415591269.

anxiety, depression, and other internalizing problems to be common among children of incarcerated mothers.”²⁰ In addition, Co-Director of the Centre for Health Promotion Research in the UK, James Woodall, points out that “[p]risoners’ children are twice as likely as other children to experience mental health problems.”²¹

In regard to attempting to improve the mental health of these children, there are programs across the United States that allow inmates to have extended visits with their families. However, these programs are extremely hard to be accepted into and only exist in four states: California, New York, Connecticut, and Washington.²² Though these extended visits help to strengthen the bond between an incarcerated parent and their child and improve mental health for both parties, they are nearly inaccessible for the majority of inmates across the country. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go in developing ways for parents and children to connect while the parent is incarcerated. Another program that exists is The Osborne Association in New York. The Association’s children’s program focuses on youth development and youth leadership among children with incarcerated parents in which “members receive a safe space for self-expression, leadership training, and advocacy workshops to help them achieve their professional and personal goals.”²³ In addition, the Osborne Association works to raise awareness about the struggles that children of incarcerated parents face by “speak[ing] to the media, on panels and with public officials.”²⁴ This program, though supportive and effective, is only active in New York State and is inaccessible to children in other areas of the country. Although programs for the children of incarcerated individuals do exist, they are sparsely scattered across the nation and are not accessible to all those in need of them.

For those who support a Franciscan perspective, the mental health of those affected by the prison system should be of utmost concern. The Franciscan value of diversity involves accepting those around you who may be outcasts, or different from the majority, and treating them like they belong. St. Francis demonstrates this when he embraces and touches the lepers who were feared by and removed from society because of their leprosy. In society today, there is a stigma against the mentally ill, which is similar to that of the lepers. Those suffering from mental illness are often feared and misunderstood. Instead of getting the proper treatment for their disorders, they are too often thrust into the prison system where their mental health suffers even more. If the mentally ill population were treated with the love, understanding, and respect that St. Francis exhibited for the lepers, then it would be much less likely that they would end up in the prison system. Instead, they would be

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 416.

²¹ James Woodall and Karina Kinsella, “Playwork in Prison as a Mechanism to Support Family Health and Well-being,” *Health Education Journal*, 76, no.7 (2017): 843, accessed January 20, 2019, doi: 10.1177/0017896917716204.

²² Dana Goldstein, “Conjugal Visits,” The Marshall Project, February 11, 2015, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/02/11/conjugal-visits>.

²³ The Osborne Association, Youth Action Council, 2019, accessed March 25, 2019, <http://www.osborneny.org/services/reconnecting-families/children-youth-services/youth-action-council/>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

provided the treatment they need, which would improve their quality of life. In addition to respecting and embracing those who are outcasts, people should also be concerned with making sure the Franciscan value of social justice—that is, the just treatment for all individuals in society—be applied to those affected by the prison system. The mentally ill are not treated in a just manner and do not have access to the same treatment options that a non-incarcerated individual would have. This poor treatment of the mentally ill within the prison system contributes to further decline in their mental health. Following the example set by St. Francis in regards to the values of diversity and social justice would improve the way the mentally ill population is treated in the prison system.

A countless number of factors can contribute to a decline in the mental health of any individual. However, those within the prison system face especially intense challenges, which can lead them to develop mental illness at an alarming rate. Inmates who are taken from their homes to a completely new environment are bound to struggle psychologically with the challenges they face. A guard who has to remember to keep his work life and his personal life completely separate rarely has an opportunity to work through his struggles that come from his career. Finally, a child who may have witnessed the traumatizing arrest of a parent and now lives a life without this source of support and influence is bound to struggle mentally and emotionally. In order to prevent and treat mental illnesses that arise from these types of situations, it is important that inmates, guards, and children with incarcerated parents have access to effective mental health support, to help lower the alarming statistics regarding their mental health.

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Using examples from the Bible, medieval history, 20th century poetry, and contemporary short fiction, this writer considers and challenges the Western heritage of war.

The Myth of War

By Isabella G. Barone

Dr. Woolbright- The Idea of War

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, stories were told of bravery and cowardice, of victory and defeat, of life and loss. These legends were swapped over the crackling of campfires, between the pages of illuminated manuscripts, and passed from parent to child as time pressed onwards, unravelling into our modern day. Stories are the foundation of culture, and tales of war have been especially prominent in the formation of civilization. Like all stories, our war narratives have been embellished and shifted and censored to serve a purpose, whatever that purpose may be. We tell tales not to simply pass the time but to impress beliefs upon our listeners; nothing is told without a purpose. Our heritage is found in our stories, and no myth or tragedy of war captures all of the truth. Therefore, we need to be aware that our heritage of war is based on perception, not in truth.

Some of our earliest legends are tales of the glorious vanquishing of the enemy as granted by the gods, or God, as in the case of the tale of the Battle of Jericho in *The New American Bible*. According to the Book of Joshua, Joshua's army sieged and conquered the sinful city of Jericho and reveled in their God-given victory. The army came away victorious and, as a result, "everything in [the city was] under the Lord's ban" (Joshua 6.17). The story of Jericho serves to emphasize the importance of the Lord in victory. God was on the side of the victor, and, if one prayed to Him, they would win over the crude and deplorable. This a story that represents the power of God and serves as a warning to those who do not follow Him - it's either serve and win, or sin and lose. This tale empowers the faithful and reminds them of their righteousness. Of course, there is an inherent bias in the telling of the battle, for it was recorded by Joshua, the victorious commander. The common people of Jericho were slaughtered because of their sins, and "men and women, young and old," were murdered without mercy because they were the sinful enemy (Joshua 6.21). There was no pity for them, and there was no question that they deserved their fate because the story of Jericho was written to sway the reader to the side of Joshua, the side of the faithful. Even from the beginning, the heritage of war is steeped in bias as history was usually written by the victors.

As we move later into Western history, the stories of war only grow more complicated. For example, Francis of Assisi is a saint well-known for his kindness and piety. However, his history is far more complex. The earliest stories that described his life were originally written to convince the reader of Francis's holiness, while the later stories strove to uncover the "truth" of Francis's life, if there is any to be found. Thomas of Celano was one of the earliest writers to describe Francis's life. However, his writings serve as hagiography, for he writes with the intention of getting Francis canonized. He skips over Francis's first experience with war and bloodshed

to weave the myth of Francis that would best support his canonization. Thomas of Celano believed sharing Francis's true experience with war would deter that process and create a wrongful image in the people's minds, so he instead plays with the truth to best portray Francis for the sake of canonization. He purposely omits that the battle of Apulia would have been Francis's return to the battlefield, not his first meeting, and depicts Francis as turning away from war to "direct his will to God's" (Thomas of Celano 27). Thomas of Celano creates a holy image of Francis, and he sees the separation of war from Francis's story as necessary to achieve his goal. Contrastingly, later texts devoted to the life of Francis have included his encounters with war and how they set him on his holy path. Paul Moses's *The Saint and the Sultan* focuses extensively on Francis's relationship with war, something all but erased from earlier narratives. Moses positions himself as writing the truth, but much of his writing is based on presumption. In reference to Francis's first foray into battle, we are given a variety of reasons for why Francis may have gone to war, such as wanting to act out "a childhood fantasy" or to "maintain his family's honor" (Moses 18). Moses extrapolates from the basic facts we have, but he composes a narrative about a shattered man in an attempt to uncover the truth. For example, he writes about Francis's likely trauma after returning home "a physical and emotional wreck" (Moses 25-6). While neither narrative of Francis is wholly true, both portray him as a saint, as a soldier, and as a man. Both Thomas of Celano and Paul Moses wanted to capture and portray their perspectives of the truth about Francis, but to do that, facts and reality had to be manipulated.

Storytellers have always been aware of their power to write a narrative that only captures a speck of truth and furthers their personal agendas; even Shakespeare, one of the most renowned writers of all time, was the master of story manipulation. Like Shakespeare, the character Henry from his play *Henry V* is aware of the power of words and uses them to tell his troops a narrative about the legends that they will leave behind. According to Shakespeare, Henry understands that they may be "mark'd to die," but he persuades his army to stay because their story will "outlive [the] day" (4.3.22-43). The soldiers are rallied to fight for their king because they know that war stories are "freshly rememb' red" and that their sons were taught by "good [men]" (4.3.57-58). The legacy of a story is more powerful than anything else that the common foot soldier can leave behind. Henry spins his troops a tale about the power of legends because it is greatness that inspires, and the promise of greatness and power is enough to persuade men to his side. In telling a story, Henry becomes a legend of a great leader who rallies his troops in the face of almost certain death, bolstering his own legacy by inviting his men to share in immortality. Henry and his troops are an inspiration to those facing unlikely odds because they are immortalized in legend.

However, our perception of war has changed, and with that change our narratives have shifted focus. We have moved from tales of glory to tragedies as we began to try to uncover another piece of the face of war- the face of trauma. As our wars became more and more destructive, writers strove to reflect the pain

that destruction wrought by switching perspectives from commanders and officers to the common soldier. For example, Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*, a beautiful nightmare of a poem, was written to reflect the pain of the individual soldier. Owen spits on the idea that war provides a proper reason to die, and instead argues that war is a hell to survive. He sees war through different eyes than those of his predecessors as he experiences war firsthand and is traumatized by it. His poetry is both a coping mechanism and a recount of what he has seen. Through Owen's recollection of his once "helpless sight" (line 15) and usage of vicious diction, he persuades the reader to empathize and to contemplate whether war is innately good. Owen portrays his pain, but, more importantly, argues against the righteousness of war. His poem is one of the most famous examples of a war story because he captures a face of the elusive war, the side of trauma that had largely been left unexplored until this time. It does not matter if he actually dreams of "guttering, choking, drowning" (16) men because he writes to evoke the same trauma that was inflicted upon him. A war story can only be true if it captures even a small slice of an experience, not if it only pertains to facts. The ideas and emotions are far more important than the logistics because they are tailored to portraying an individual experience that is genuine and true.

This attempt to portray a true war story by experience and not by fact has continued into modern day. To quote Tim O'Brien, "A true war story is never about war" (85). War stories are about the perspective from which they are told. It does not matter what the stories say so much as how they are said. As readers and listeners of stories, we need to consider and analyze how the storytellers perceive the truth, and how the storytellers want us to perceive the truth. Storytellers craft their work methodically, weighing each word with careful consideration. In O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, he recalls a fellow soldier in the Vietnam War, Lemon, being blown up and another soldier, Rat, pouring his heart into a letter to Lemon's sister who never responds. A reader of the story should consider even the slightest details and ask a multitude of questions such as: Why does this matter? Why is Lemon's sister never named? What's the difference between calling her "Lemon's sister" and referring to her as a "dumb cooze"? What changes if she were called a bitch? Why does it change? Why does he even call her a cooze? O'Brien hands us slivers of facts through his deliberate usage of language to get us to see from his perspective, and from Rat's, so that we understand what really happened. While "a true war story cannot be believed" (O'Brien 71), a mostly or even partially true story can be. Lemon's sister is "a cooze" because that's what Rat called her. That's how they, the soldiers, viewed her, so to call Lemon's sister anything else would be a lie. All she is to them is a sister of their dead fellow soldier. Due to their anger, trauma, and loss of humanity from the war, they call her a cooze, so that is how she is labelled. The reader is meant to understand not what happened but, rather, how it happened, how they saw it happening, and how they felt.

Perception is what matters when these stories are told, and O'Brien's repeated telling of how Lemon died emphasizes that point. Each time, the story is different. He tells us first about Rat's letter to Lemon's sister and Rat's response, then about the horrific singing of "Lemon Tree" as they collected Lemon's body parts, and finally elaborates on how the light seemed to lift Lemon upwards. O'Brien describes the same event, but the story is different each time because the perspective is shifted. He tries to make us understand the whole of what he experienced through individual experiences. We may never get a complete vision of the truth, but we can understand how it is perceived. Expanding on different perceptions is the closest to the truth we will ever get, and it will never be even close to fact.

Once upon a time, a city was looted and slaughtered by religious zealots. Once upon a time, a saint was a soldier. Once upon a time, a king promised glory to those who stayed to die for him. Once upon a time, a traumatized soldier fought back against the world with his pain. Once upon a time, a man died, and his sister didn't write back.

Each story lulls you into believing its perception is true. That is the job of a story. However, in order to create a state of being that is beyond true and false and rather one closer to perceived reality, we must acknowledge that the absolute truth in stories is nonexistent. Multiple tellings of the same story through different perspectives brings us as close to life as we can hope to come. Stories reveal complexities between what is and isn't said, and it is only by the acknowledgement that our heritage is based on falsehoods that we can begin to sift out the truth and understand ourselves and our culture.

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For the Nature Unit essay, students were asked to find an article in the library research databases about a topic that interested them and then use the article to develop an argument about their selected topic.

A Park Can Change Lives

By Shannon Mary Bergin

Prof. Barranca- Voice

Many believe that all humans are contributing to the degrading of the environment. Right now, with all the media attention on the negative changes to the environment, it seems like most don't care about this beautiful planet. However, for many people, nature is a part of their daily lives, whether it involves biking, running, walking, eating, sightseeing, or hanging out with friends and family. We should all appreciate nature and the earth as a whole. With the multiple health benefits associated with exercising in parks and nature, we must protect our parks in order to continue receiving those benefits.

Being in nature has social benefits, making parks important to many people. That is why we can't take nature and its beauty for granted. In "Parks, Recreation and Public Health," Ching-Hua Ho et. al. show the importance of exercising in nature and argue that people who exercise in parks are healthier than others who don't exercise in parks. However, people don't always have to exercise when they are in parks. For example, people talk with family and friends, play board games, or have a barbecue or picnic. Ho shows that many people go to parks to do sightseeing as well, pointing out that "regardless of activity, interaction with the natural environment, including scenery, wildlife and aesthetics were the most frequently reported benefits of using the parks among older park visitors" (22). There are so many sights to see such as the animals that live there, trees, flowers, water, and other people. Moreover, parks are beautiful at any point in time during any season. One benefit of using parks is that people can be there in the cold snow or in the hot summer sun and still feel its effects and see beauty. Socializing in nature creates many benefits for people of all ages.

Being in nature can benefit a person's mental and physical health. Ho argues that when people are in nature, they have less anxiety and depression compared to others who work out indoors. To support his claim, he notes that in one study, "Approximately one-half reported that they were in a better mood after visiting the park" (21). This is a reason why most people like to exercise outdoors in nature rather than indoors. Further, many older people in the park interact with others, which lowers their chance of suffering from depression. Ho brings up the fact that even driving by parks can reduce a person's stress levels. Exercising in nature will benefit the body mentally and physically. About one third of Americans don't exercise even though exercising is crucial to stay healthy. Constructed environments are built to simulate nature as a way to motivate those who don't exercise. We need to keep our parks nice because they are vital for our lives mentally and physically. People who use the park regularly receive so many health benefits.

People who frequently use parks will agree with Saint Francis's ideas regarding nature. Francis of Assisi encouraged people to appreciate nature as much as he did. In "The Canticles of the Creatures," Francis brings up

the idea that people should be grateful for nature because we can't live without God's creations. He thanks God for creating everything such as the sun, moon, stars, wind, water, fire, and Mother Earth. Each part of nature presents a different beauty and can be beneficial to everyone. For example, the sun, moon, and stars give off light through the darkness. Francis portrayed the importance and beauty of light when he states, "Who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor" (line 15). Without the sun, moon and stars, nothing on this earth could survive in the resulting darkness. Meanwhile, water is necessary for hydration while fire gives us warmth and light in cold and dark times. Francis believed it was necessary to appreciate Mother Earth as well, as indicated when he said, "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs" (16). Francis saw Mother Earth as a producer of life. Everything that Francis mentioned in nature is found in parks. Francis wanted us to be thankful and take care of nature because it is a gift from God. By protecting nature, we honor and glorify God. I think Francis would love to see the parks today and how thankful people are for nature and how nature positively benefits the ones who use it.

Some people believe that we don't need to save our parks because there are plenty of other places for people to exercise. Many people don't even care where they exercise as long as they are outside in the fresh air. For example, people can take a walk on the sidewalks in their neighborhood. Also, many people who live in cities might walk or run in the city streets for convenience. Although exercising in cities or neighborhoods might seem like a good alternative to parks, it will not produce the same benefits. These people will not see the tall oak trees and different kinds of animals in these industrialized areas. Cities and neighborhoods don't have the beautiful grassy fields and dirt walkways through forests. In cities, there are a lot of cars and people that produce a lot of noise and commotion, and in neighborhoods, there are many homes. Meanwhile, in parks people will breathe in fresh air with fewer distractions. People need to exercise in parks to get away from society for a while and relax. We must protect our parks to keep receiving these physical and mental health benefits.

With the multiple health benefits associated with exercising in parks we must protect our parks in order to continue receiving those benefits. Nature brings enjoyment and so many positive physical and mental health benefits. Not caring about our degrading environment can lead to damaged nature. We can't lead a healthy lifestyle if the planet becomes too damaged. We need to start protecting nature now or it will be too late. By saving the parks we are saving ourselves.

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For this Natural World unit assignment, students were asked to take a picture of something in nature that they see differently than others and then write a paper that clearly demonstrates why the representation of nature they have chosen is important to focus on as we work globally to sustain our planet and its occupants.

The Value of Nature's Beauty

By Peyton Coones

Dr. Nadeau- Global Education and Migration



The Outer Banks, North Carolina is a small chain of islands off the coast of mainland United States. The area is a popular tourist site, with thousands of visitors each year. The islands provide several attractions, such as museums, dining, sporting events, and beaches to satisfy the average tourist. Every summer, I take the 13-hour car ride to this vacation site, as my sister fortunately lives on one of the islands. While walking along the shore earlier this year, I came across a part of the beach that seemed to be untouched by man. Shells lined the sand while crabs hid amongst them, a rarity for many of the public beaches on the island. There were no ropes separating this beach from the rest and no signs indicating that it was actually private land. Weary at the time, I decided to just take a picture of what I had seen, not wanting to disturb what was already there. Looking at the picture today, I remember noticing how other people's footsteps seemed to stop right where I did, as if they, too, were unsure about stepping further. The decision to leave the beach untouched is symbolic of what the natural world needs today. If we as humans look at the world's beauty for what it is and work to preserve it, we will subsequently be helping sustain the planet.

When we look at the natural world today, a majority of us fail to understand what is truly surrounding us. Due to technology, we have become accustomed to looking at the devices in our hands rather than the

flowers on the ground. Whether it be the trees, the ocean, or the smallest of bugs, nature in today's society is usually a second thought. This lack of appreciation for Earth's beauty contributes to our lack of awareness about its eradication. We have become so blind to the destruction we have been doing to the Earth that it becomes taboo to discuss global climate issues, like deforestation. Writer and naturalist Helen Macdonald explains that "Brands are not butterflies. Changes to city skylines are not the same as acres of beetle-blasted trees: Though they are caught up in stories about ourselves, trees are not ever just about us" (Macdonald). While the industrial revolution has brought forward many beneficial changes, we forget to look at what we are trading in for these benefits. Macdonald points out that "[t]hey support complex and interdependent communities of life, and as forests slowly become less diverse, the world loses more than simply trees. It has been suggested that the rise of Lyme disease in many parts of North America and Europe is in part because less-diverse forests favor the ticks that carry it" (Macdonald). Macdonald brings up just one of the problems we face because of deforestation. While we cut down trees to fuel industrialization, we are losing much more than just natural beauty. Along with it, these deforested areas then become hotspots for diseases, amongst other things, that can further harm the natural world in ways we didn't know possible. Though we are quick to comment on Earth's beauty in pictures posted on Instagram, that beauty will not last if we continue to choose industries over the environment.

While we use the natural world to push forward industrialization, agriculture and hunting are also being driven by the resources around us. With the ever-growing population, farming companies need new ways to produce crops and products in order to keep customers happy. Environmental editor Damian Carrington, in explaining the results of a scientific report, says that "[t]he biggest cause of wildlife losses is the destruction of natural habitats, much of it to create farmland. Three-quarters of all land on Earth is now significantly affected by human activities. Killing for food is the next biggest cause – 300 mammal species are being eaten into extinction – while the oceans are massively overfished, with more than half now being industrially fished" (Carrington). Every day trees are being cut down to make room for farming. While farming is a necessity for human survival, the amount of life we destroy is drastic compared to the crops and livestock that get put in its place. From my personal experience in the Outer Banks, I have noticed that although there are many responsible fisheries, many boating companies will offer fishing trips for fishermen willing to pay for an opportunity to catch the biggest fish the ocean has to offer. These companies will set hundreds of traps and typically will bring back over one hundred fish in one trip —fish they often catch for fun, not for necessity. While these traps are usually set for fish alone, turtles, snakes, and even whales can get caught among the wires. As reported by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, "Whales, for instance, can find ropes and nets wrapped around their fins and flukes or become caught in their baleen plates. The whales might drown and die quickly or live for weeks or months with the deadly gear tightening around them, leading to eventual infection, illness and often death" ("The Dangers of Entanglements"). This decreases the biodiversity within the area, which, over a long period of

time, can make the area unsuitable for other animals who depend on the ocean for survival. For visitors coming into the Outer Banks, the large array of aquatic life is one of, if not, the biggest attractions. To harm that biodiversity would also hurt tourism as well as the beauty that is so often depicted on postcards and travel sites.

St. Francis appreciated the natural world's beauty and did not view it as a source for economic wealth. Instead, he thought nature should be treated as if it was a close relative to man himself. This relationship is demonstrated in "The Canticle of the Creatures" where St. Francis writes, "Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom you give sustenance to Your creatures" (Francis of Assisi). St. Francis referred to the natural world using terms such as brother, sister, mother, and father. These terms make you look at the world in a gentler, more emotionally connected way. St. Francis wanted his followers to treat everything in the world with kindness since it is all a gift from God. This is why he says, "Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility" (Francis of Assisi). If St. Francis were alive today, he would push for the appreciation of the environment, as humans and nature have a direct correlation with one another. If we protect the biodiverse areas that have not yet been negatively impacted by man, we will be able to slow down the rate of the natural world's depletion.

Today, we overlook the world's beauty and focus on what it can be turned into, not what it already is. While sustainability cannot prevent the "death of nature," it can certainly slow it down. To many, the picture of the beach has no message. To many, it is just like any other vacation picture. If you truly look, though, and think about just how rare it is to see something that is untouched by man, you will realize how big of an impact we have on the Earth. To say the environment does not matter implies that we as humans don't either, as we both share this single planet that we call home. St. Francis encourages us to treat nature equal to mankind as if we are a singular unit, whose mission is to improve each other's quality of life. We could learn a lot about sustainability if we, like Francis, appreciated nature's beauty.

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The writer of this essay offers a synthesis of class-assigned sources to make insightful correlations between ineffectual personal relationships and failing societies.

The Devolution of Societies

By Marcel D'Aprile

Dr. Shideler- Relationships

What was our society like from the start of civilization? What is the story of society's evolution in Western heritage? In the origin story of Genesis, in the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, and in the nonfiction book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, the evolution of civilized society is explained. All three sources show that the shortage of personal morality, commonwealth, and obligation are direct causes of governmental devolution within communal bodies, leading to miscommunication, strife, and failure.

Complications among individuals arise when rules are not clearly shared and enforced by a governing medium. In the story of Genesis from *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Eve is tempted by the Forbidden Fruit of Knowledge that God has prohibited, and she encourages Adam to eat it as well. As a form of retribution, God casts Adam and Eve out from the Garden of Eden. A verdict like this could have led to arguments that exacerbated the issue at hand rather than to conciliatory discussions. However, Adam and Eve work through their numerous trials and tribulations and have two children, Abel and Cain. Abel and Cain bear gifts to God as a sign of goodwill, but when God observes what Cain offers, He has "no regard" (Gen. 4.5). The absence of compliments for the sacrifice Cain makes to God is clearly insulting. But Cain, instead of appreciating or analyzing why God may have chosen to do that, "rose up against his brother . . . and killed him" (Gen. 4.8). The mature, moral, and civic response to another's action is never maiming or killing, so the improper and inadequate teachings of how to resolve conflicts reveals a degradation of familial governing in this story. If Cain's parents had guided and taught him self-checking and regulatory practices, Cain might have known to disregard the jealousy he feels and to approach the conflict in a more level-headed manner. The lack thereof results in barbaric savagery and demonstrates archaic and ineffective interpersonal skills and relationships.

Regardless of the one's negotiation abilities, the ability to convey those emotions and make others conscious of them is even more important. In Plato's allegory of cave, there are prisoners shackled to a wall, independent of each other. One prisoner is released, learns about the world outside, and returns wanting to share his new-found knowledge. Due to his new-found knowledge, the freed prisoner loses his sense of commonality with the other prisoners, and as a result, the freed prisoner cannot effectively relate or assign meaning to the knowledge he finds. Without the sense and structure of order, the prisoners, like Cain, are not able to interpret new information and respond in a useful manner. As Plato explains, this lack of order and interaction underscores the idea that when "something grows of its own accord and owes no debt for its upbringing . . . it is not keen to pay anyone for its upbringing" (Plato 214). Society is one of the most influential

factors that controls how and what individuals believe. If constituents live in an environment where they cannot relate to one another because of inadequate mediation and order—in this case government—there is no shared desire to build the community. The absence of connections between the freed prisoner and his former fellow prisoners results in, again, another society failing to thrive.

So how does one excite fervor for knowledge and civic engagement in their community? In the book *Bowling Alone*, author Robert Putnam talks about the application of social capital in our daily lives. Putnam defines social capital as the “connections between individuals,” asserting that it forces individuals to be consciously aware of how they treat others in the given society (19). Social capital not only commands attention regarding how we function in relation to others, but it also forces us to be inclusive. If members of society decide to alienate themselves or others, society would collapse due to apathy. Putnam refers to this notion by referencing David Fischer, an American historian who attributes the success of the American Revolution to the structure of interpersonal government. Putnam writes, “Paul Revere’s alarm was successful only because of the networks of civic engagement in the (Middlesex) villages” (24). If the townspeople hadn’t openly communicated with each other about potential British attacks, the strength of the social network would have diminished, and the response by the villagers would have been insufficient. By communicating the possibility of a dire, imminent attack, the stakeholders became invested in creating a strategy for the common good. The capabilities of corresponding with and correlating among individuals are some of the most paramount skills when living in society. As seen in Genesis and in Plato’s allegory of the cave, if there is no general consensus or will to work together and construct a way of life with one another, no progress or advances occur. The lack of social capital breeds disassociation and clearly demonstrates the unwillingness to communicate, confer, and connect, thereby impeding society’s growth.

All three texts reveal the disorder among individuals if there is no semblance of government and common purpose. Not only is the inability to properly and efficiently communicate within societies disheartening, but it effectively prevents any true development. Philosopher John Locke alluded to this concept by introducing and elaborating on the social contract that individuals develop and agree upon when entering into a society. Without social contracts, the concept of government decays and festers into an anarchistic arena.

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For the first essay of the semester, students were asked to assess the character of both Victor Frankenstein and his Monster to determine where their sympathies and allegiance lay. This writer favors the creator over the created and defends his position with strong textual and philosophical evidence.

An Argument in Favor of Victor Frankenstein's Character

By Trevor Goodemote

Prof. Collins- Narrative: The Inside Story

Gris Grimly's graphic narrative, whose cover informs us, was assembled from the original text by Mary Shelley and tells the story of the ambitious Victor Frankenstein, his pursuits in the creation of life, and the subsequent repercussions of his success. Frankenstein is relentless in his pursuit of knowledge, but he remains connected to his core moral values, never acting in a way as to bring direct harm upon those around him. This is not to suggest that Frankenstein is perfect in his morality, but that his plight is far more sympathetic than that of his monstrous counterpart. Frankenstein represents the human drive for progress and understanding. Because of this and his sincere disposition, he is far more deserving of the reader's sympathies than his murderous creation.

Frankenstein's love of the natural world and desire to understand its inner workings are characteristics that immediately make him an admirable person. Nearly all progress throughout human history has been driven by the ambitions of those looking to answer life's most pressing questions. If such ambitions are of such great positive consequence, as they have been established to be in all of today's greatest innovations, then they must not be faulted but rather praised in the case of Frankenstein. The degree to which Frankenstein absorbs himself in his work is worthy of further admiration as it truly marks his extraordinary dedication to his cause. This is revealed when he says, "I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination" (Grimly 39). Frankenstein is truly enveloped in his work and captivated by the possibilities to be brought forth from his research, hence its irresistible hold over his imagination. Another important and admirable fact about Frankenstein surfaces here as he continues his work because of his passion for discovery despite its loathsome nature. While it seems such a work ethic is obvious to those looking at ends rather than means, it is rare to find those who put such a philosophy into action. Frankenstein is not only admirable due to his work ethic but also due to his principles.

Frankenstein proves himself to have a clear sense of right and wrong in the novel while the monster is conversely shown to be a fiend with no regard for the lives of the innocent. After the monster takes the life of Frankenstein's innocent little brother William, Frankenstein feels immense guilt and sadness. He experiences innately human emotions that every reader can connect with. Visiting the location of his brother's murder and seeing the monster in the distance leads Frankenstein to understand his unnatural creation's part in William's death. Frankenstein cannot help but blame himself for the evil misdoings of the monster that regards human life as so very negligible. Victor Frankenstein is a vulnerable man who has experienced a painful loss that weighs

heavily on his conscience. This proves that Frankenstein has the great capacity to be a virtuous and honorable man, for he is able to recognize his role in the story's unfortunate events. However, I think the case for Frankenstein is strengthened the most through an examination of his greatest enemy in the novel, his creation.

It should be noted that Frankenstein's arguably most immoral action—his abandonment of the monster—is understandable to a degree. To bring to life a creature as described in the novel would leave most people with a great sense of fear, and it is of little surprise that Frankenstein would flee from such a disturbing creature. The graphic novel paints a picture of the creature with its yellow skin and visible arteries as well as calling attention to what Mary Shelley described as its “shrivelled complexion and straight black lips” (41). In this case, even if the abandonment is immoral, Frankenstein's fear is likely matched by the reader's uneasiness at the sight of the monster, allowing for a stronger connection with Frankenstein to develop over this shared horror. Furthermore, the abandonment of the monster is not a valid excuse for the monster's murderous actions. Frankenstein's abandoning of the monster does not even warrant the monster's revenge directed at his creator, and it certainly does not warrant the monster's subsequent execution of Frankenstein's wholly innocent family. All of the monster's egregious actions leave the reader with no choice but to sympathize with Frankenstein and wish for his triumph over evil.

One might argue that Frankenstein's monster, due to his prompt abandonment following birth, has no understanding of the differences between what can be considered right and wrong. While this may have been initially true, it is shown in the text that the monster learned about morality prior to his murders when the monster says, “I learned the views of social life, to admire their virtues and to deprecate the vices of mankind” (101). The monster claims to understand the concept of virtue and what is considered taboo, and yet he acts against society's laws by murdering the innocent. The murder of Frankenstein's friends and family, while knowing exactly the magnitude of his actions, condemns the monster to be viewed as evil. Still, the choice to align with Frankenstein should not be one made by default but made because Frankenstein is morally superior.

As previously mentioned, Frankenstein's greatest crime was his abandonment of the monster, which sets the novel's unfortunate series of events in motion. Frankenstein proves later in the novel that he has learned from his mistakes and should not have brought such a monster to life in the first place. He does this by ultimately refusing to create a female counterpart for his original monster, even as the monster threatens to kill his betrothed. Frankenstein nobly puts himself and his future wife in danger in order to prevent bringing more evil into the world. Such an act of self-sacrifice is of the highest moral significance and allows the reader to forgive some of Frankenstein's morally questionable activities early on in the novel. There is no greater appeal to be found in a character than that created through an act of redemption, which Frankenstein aptly produces while the monster is fully unable to redeem his disgraceful behavior.

Victor Frankenstein can be described as a character that is admirable in his pursuit of knowledge, generally virtuous in his behaviors, and certainly worthy of the reader's sympathies for his tragic losses. To sympathize with the monster is to sympathize with a creature worse than that of a mindless beast. At least the beast acts purely on instinct while the monster knows the difference between good and evil and still willfully chooses evil. Frankenstein takes responsibility for his initial mistake and refuses to create another monster even at the cost of everyone he holds dear. The attitudes of Victor Frankenstein should be strived for in everyday life, to not only be successful in one's work but virtuous in their greatest decisions.

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The purpose of this assignment was to write a research paper on any topic relating to music. With the astonishing high rates of Americans battling mental illness, there are many studies about the effects music has on mental illnesses. Rather than repeating these studies, this analysis focuses on how a specific branch of music, musical theatre, helps to erase the stigma of mental illness.

“A Light in the Dark:”

Musical Theatre Provides a Unique Platform to De-Stigmatize Mental Illness

By Abigail R. Hall

Dr. Haas- Music

With millions of Americans suffering from various forms of mental disorders, an effort has surfaced to spread awareness regarding this serious topic, particularly in the entertainment industry. Mental illness does not discriminate and can affect any person, even famous actors and artists. With the extensive scope of their public platform, it only makes sense for these famous people to use their voices to help spread awareness and reach the millions of other Americans battling these mental disorders. Through the release of various films, television shows, and Broadway productions, the entertainment industry has been exposing the public to the significance of mental illness and mental health awareness. While the on-screen film and television attempts certainly start conversations about mental illness, they lack authenticity. Broadway musicals provide audience members an authentic performance by actors in real time, portraying true and emotional stories related to mental illness. The mix of the emotions in a live show, personal writing, genuine performances, and music, all create the authenticity the on-screen attempts generally lack. This unique atmosphere makes musical theatre the best platform to help destigmatize mental illness and is therefore an experience no one should miss.

Mental illness is a serious topic and seeing as there is no precise cure, it is not to be taken lightly. It does not discriminate regarding age, gender, or social status; anyone can suffer from mental disorders. In an article from *Playbill*, it was reported that “according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 43.6 million adults in the U.S. suffer from mental illness.”¹ While this statistic is alarming, it is important to note, too, that teenagers are particularly susceptible. According to information from the National Institute of Mental Health reported in a *Time* Magazine article, “The year *Dear Evan Hansen* opened on Broadway [2016], an estimated 3.1 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 had at least one major depressive episode.”² The least that can be done to help those suffering from mental illness is to remove the stigma surrounding it. Those involved in musical theater are attempting to do just that. Moreover, the atmosphere associated with musical theater is uniquely equipped to successfully destigmatize mental illness.

¹ Kieron Cindric, “How Musical Theatre Exposes the Truth on Mental Illness,” *Playbill*, July 8, 2016, accessed January 23, 2019, <http://www.playbill.com/article/why-the-musical-theatre-is-the-fitting-medium-to-tell-stories-of-internal-struggle>.

² Katie Reilly, “‘There Are a Lot of People in Distress.’ *Dear Evan Hansen* Creators and Experts on a Youth Mental Health Crisis,” *Time*, May 15, 2018, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://time.com/5272063/dear-evan-hansen-mental-health-roundtable/>.

Efforts to destigmatize mental illness via television and film do not compare to that of musical theatre. Many may argue that musical theatre productions are expensive and that people can watch something similar at home on their television for virtually no cost. However, the depictions of mental illness on screen compared to the depictions on stage are completely different. On screen, people who suffer from mental illness are usually negatively portrayed as violent and aggressive. An example of this behavior is seen in the character of the Joker in *Batman*.³ Although the Joker storyline is not intended to center around mental disorders, the character illustrates a person who obviously suffers from mental illness and is portrayed as violent and aggressive. Such characterization of mental illness on the large and small screens tends to reinforce the negative stereotype of those suffering, further adding to the stigma. On the contrary, in real life, most who suffer from mental illness function as typical, everyday people. The writers of the musicals *Next to Normal* and *Dear Evan Hansen* based these shows on personal experience and took great care to effectively and accurately illustrate what it is like for people afflicted with mental illness. To tell the story of *Next to Normal*, book writer and lyricist Brian Yorkey, along with his writing partner Tom Kitt, were inspired by the people they loved who suffered from mental illness. The duo diligently researched this subject by reading various psychology books and memoirs of those suffering from mental illness. They also consulted with medical professionals to verify the authenticity and accuracy of their portrayal throughout the creative process.⁴ The amount of research conducted and the personal connections the writers had to those suffering from mental illness allowed them to realistically tell their story. Similarly, *Dear Evan Hansen's* lyricist, Benj Pasek, was inspired to shed a more accurate light on this serious topic because of an incident relating to mental illness stemming from his own high school years.⁵ In these musicals, those suffering from mental illness are portrayed by the writers to be average, normal people because the characters are based on their personal experiences. *Next to Normal's* main character is a suburban mother battling bi-polar disorder, while the main character in *Dear Evan Hansen* is a typical teenage boy facing anxiety and depression. These on-stage depictions accurately portray the everyday life of those afflicted with mental illness and helps to eradicate false and misleading ideas regarding these diseases.

The theatre is an accepting and inviting place, eager to educate people about important societal issues while many television and film companies are ratings-driven. If mental illness is the hot ticket item of the year, these big media companies will sell it in a revenue-producing way. Unlike many companies seeking profit, the creative heads of *Dear Evan Hansen* were willing to forgo a marketing

³ Jessie M. Johnson Quintero and Julius Riles, "‘He Acted Like a Crazy Person’: Exploring the Influence of Stereotypic Media Representations of Mental Illness," *Psychology of Popular Media and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2018): 147, accessed February 6, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.siena.edu:2048/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=19&sid=d8afe947-6ed2-4766-8124-af749ee6d437%40pdc-v-sessmgr05>.

⁴ Cindric, "How Musical Theatre Exposes the Truth on Mental Illness."

⁵ Sarah Shevenock, "Exploring Mental Illness Through Musical Theatre," Pulitzer Center, March 13, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/exploring-mental-illness-through-musical-theatre>.

ploy in their attempt to spread mental health awareness. Producer Stacey Mindich stated in a *Time Magazine* article:

In early marketing meetings, we stayed away from words like suicide and mental health — for fear of being known as “the suicide musical.” But once we saw just how the show was affecting people, we realized that some things are more important than marketing messages and talking points, and we quickly embraced our unique ability to impact mental health stigmas.⁶

What was important to this creative team was to use their platform to help destigmatize mental illness. It was of upmost importance for the creators, producers, and cast to tell the story in a creative and educational manner. Profits did not motive them; the story did. Portraying mental illness in a sincere way helps to destigmatize it, and this is what makes musical theatre productions so special and an opportunity not to be missed.

The emotion and authenticity displayed through musical theatre is like no other due to its live aspect. In an article from *PlayBill* that discusses how musical theatre provides audiences with unique insight, *Next to Normal* book writer and lyricist Brian Yorkey explains that a character “can turn to the audience and sing to us, bring us into their mind and let us see what’s happening inside it... With *Next to Normal*, the characters are constantly at this state of high emotion... The music makes it possible to empathize with what these characters are going through rather than just sympathize.”⁷ Yorkey’s point is that the audience members are not physically separated by a screen from what is happening on stage. The advantage to watching shows such as *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Next to Normal* is that they allow a few hours of comfort for those suffering from mental illness to intimately observe the production unfold right before their eyes as they see and connect with the actors. When watching a television show or film related to mental illness, the viewer is, in truth, separated by a screen, making it more difficult to relate to and identify with the characters. Seeing a character depict such important and emotional content in real time, while also singing, allows audience members to both sympathize and empathize with the character. For example, in the opening number of *Dear Evan Hansen*, the mothers whose children suffer from mental illness sing the lyrics, “Does anybody have a map? Does anybody happen to know how the hell to do this? I don’t know if you can tell but this is me just pretending to know. So, where’s the map? I need a clue ‘cause the scary truth is I’m flying blind, and I’m making this up as I go.”⁸ Hearing these lyrics and watching the actors perform live prompts audience members to relate on a personal level. An audience member who is a

⁶ Stacy Mindich, quoted in Reilly, “There Are a Lot of People in Distress.”

⁷ Brian Yorkey, quoted in Cindric, “How Musical Theatre Exposes the Truth on Mental Illness.”

⁸ Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, *Dear Evan Hansen*, Atlantic Records, 2017, MP3 file.

mother with a child who suffers from mental illness can relate to the onstage mother through this message.⁹ Or, an audience member who suffers from mental illness can connect with the feelings brought up by the lyrics and the overall substance of the performance. Musical theatre can also help those who have friends or loved ones suffering from mental illness by drawing the person into the scene and, thereby, further educating them. The emotion and authenticity of a live musical theatre production creates a connection that other mediums usually lack.

Watching a live musical theatre production about mental illness provides a therapeutic atmosphere that on-screen attempts do not provide. Dr. Nisha Sajjani, director of the drama therapy program at New York University, explains that live shows, like *Dear Evan Hansen*, involve a process called witnessing, which “provide comfort to those who are struggling” because audience members are watching the validation of what it is like to suffer from mental illness on stage.¹⁰ Musical theatre shows portraying mental illness provide a unique outlet for those who are suffering from these diseases by illustrating important messages. Some may argue that those who suffer from mental illness can simply watch a television show at home, such as *13 Reasons Why* to obtain the same effect. However, this is not the case. In the television show *13 Reasons Why*, a teenage girl loses her battle with mental illness to suicide, and, sadly, this show glorifies suicide rather than presenting alternatives.¹¹ Ultimately, this approach was used for the satisfaction of the Hollywood shock factor and does more harm than good in raising awareness about mental illness. In *Dear Evan Hansen*, a character similarly dies by suicide; however, the action is not shown on stage nor glorified, and alternatives to suicide are presented throughout the duration of the show. The therapeutic process of witnessing can assist an audience member who hears the lyrics sung at the end of the first act: “Even when the dark comes crashing through. When you need a friend to carry you, when you’re broken on the ground. You will be found. So let the sun come streaming in, ‘cause you’ll reach up and rise again. If you only look around. You will be found.”¹² This powerfully positive and uplifting message performed by the entire company speaks directly to the suffering audience member in ways that television shows fail to do. Instead of portraying the idea that death by suicide is the only option for those suffering from depression, this musical theatre production offers an alternative.

Art is one of the best forums for social change. Mostly known for its easy going and fun reputation, musical theatre is often underappreciated compared to television or film. Yet, in a groundbreaking way, musical theatre has humanized and shed light on mental illness, therefore, pushing this important topic further into the

⁹ Susanna Shrobsdorff, “*Dear Evan Hansen*, Thanks for Finding Us. We’ve Been Waiting for a Musical Like You,” *Time*, March 9, 2017, accessed January 23, 2019, <http://time.com/4696451/dear-evan-hansen-musical/>.

¹⁰ Shevenock, “Exploring Mental Illness Through Musical Theatre.”

¹¹ Gabriel Santana da Rosa et al., “*Thirteen Reasons Why*: The Impact of Suicide Portrayal on Adolescent’s Mental Health,” *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 108, (2019): 6, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.siena.edu/science/article/pii/S0022395618306344>.

¹² Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, *Dear Evan Hansen*.

national conversation. With the enormous rate of Americans diagnosed with mental disorders, now more than ever, accurate depictions of those suffering from such afflictions are needed to help destigmatize mental illness. Musical theatre provides a unique atmosphere that allows the audience to understand and connect with those who are suffering in ways no other medium can. Through the emotion of a live show, personal writing, and genuine performances, musical theatre provides an experience that helps to destigmatize mental illness and should, therefore, not be missed.

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As humans, it is only natural to question what lays beyond our realm of reality. In many instances, the unknown terrifies us into various states of denial and fear. This author provides an alternative perspective on the dying process and the scope of reality.

New Reality and Near-Death Experiences

By Nora Kipp

Prof. Allegretti- Exploring Death to Save Your Life

In life, we explicitly trust our senses to tell us the truth, believing what we see, smell, touch, and hear. However, there comes a time when, regardless of our life experiences, we face unexpected barriers, and we begin to question everything we have ever known. This raises one question: If we, as humans, can doubt whether our senses are reliable and genuine, how can we know what truly exists and what does not? This daunting question comes to plague the mind of the fictional prisoner in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and two people who have undergone eye-opening near-death experiences, Anita Moorjani and Eben Alexander. These three individuals encounter profound personal transformations that many people fail to fully comprehend, or even more importantly, learn from. The life-altering events experienced by the prisoner, Anita Moorjani, and Eben Alexander drastically alter their appreciation of life as well as their objectiveness concerning reality. When we suppress our feelings about the mysteries of the world, we are unknowingly preventing ourselves from embracing new perspectives and accepting the things we cannot change. Therefore, we must actively allow ourselves to understand that life and death exist on a continuum. Such knowledge has the power to bring the world into clearer perspective and teach us valuable lessons that give meaning to our existence.

Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" depicts a cave with prisoners who are chained in front of a fire observing the shadows of objects on the wall before them. The shadows represent the only form of reality the prisoner knows, and, therefore, he believes what he sees to be true and real. Yet, Plato believes that in order to live a fulfilling life, the prisoner must break out of the chains and discover the fire burning outside of the cave. According to Plato, as the prisoner becomes accustomed to his new surroundings, he will discover that his former perception of reality was misleading. Hence, Plato uses the fire to represent the idea that people must always strive to reach enlightenment rather than settle only for what they observe. Plato's Allegory taught me that if I rely solely on my sense of perception, I will never attain real knowledge. Instead, I will always be subject to the world of changing appearances.

After discovering the new world outside the cave, the former prisoner in Plato's Allegory embarks on an intellectual journey filled with authenticity and meaning. When his awakening is complete, Plato states that he should then desire to return to the cave to enlighten those who are still chained, watching the shadows on the wall (Plato). Plato teaches the importance of educating those who are too blinded by their perception of reality to seek a greater knowledge of the world. Thus, he argues there is a basic flaw in the way humans mistake their limited awareness for reality based on their absolute belief that there can only be one truth. The allegory reveals how this flaw affects education and spirituality as well as how we embrace life. Plato implies that receiving an

education involves an ongoing struggle to uncover the significance of the human experience. The person who leaves the cave is openly questioning his beliefs, whereas the people in the cave willingly accept and trust what they are shown. The world outside the cave represents life as it should be: full of new ideas, meaning, and spirituality. Hence, the cave symbolizes a world in which things are not always how they appear, indicating there is far more to the world than people tend to understand. Must it be such a life-changing experience—like the prisoners—that makes us realize we are living in a cave?

On February 2, 2006, doctors informed Anita Moorjani's family that she only had hours left to live. Moorjani was previously diagnosed with an aggressive form of lymphoma, and she was in the end stages. On that February morning, she slipped into a coma and her organs began to shut down one by one. As she lay dying, her lungs were filled with fluid, making it impossible for her to breathe without the aid of a respirator, and her muscles deteriorated, leaving her bedridden. However, even as everyone witnessed her comatose state, Anita Moorjani was aware of everything that was going on around her. She was conscious of her husband's distress, the news of her brother flying from India to visit her one last time, the presence of her father and best friend who had both crossed over, and the tubes the doctors were inserting into her to improve her breathing. As Moorjani later explained, "[I]t felt as though I had 360-degree peripheral vision" (*Dying to Be Me!*). She could not only see everything that was happening all around her body, but even far beyond the scope of the physical realm. Moorjani was no longer attached to her physical body, and she felt as though she was able to be wherever she focused her awareness. During her near-death experience (NDE), Moorjani was presented with the choice to return to her physical body or to continue into this new realm. She chose the former.

In more ways than one, Moorjani's near death experience changed how she perceived the world, people's physical bodies, and the confines of illness. Moorjani confronted what she referred to as a "realm of clarity where [she] understood everything" (*Dying to Be Me!*). She understood the cause of her cancer, the power she possessed, and her connection to everyone. When she regained consciousness, her cancer began to heal at a rapid pace. After five days, Anita Moorjani's tumors shrunk by over 70 percent, and, to the astonishment of her doctors, she was completely tumor and cancer free within five weeks (*Dying to Be Me!*). Recalling her experience, she explained how her father urged her to go back to her body because her story was not yet finished. According to Moorjani, her "soul was finally realizing its true magnificence. And in doing so, it was expanding beyond [her] body and this physical world" (*Dying to Be Me!*). Following her discharge from the hospital, she was compelled to resume her life, but she was unable to do so because everything she once knew began to feel unfamiliar and different. After studying Moorjani's extraordinary experience, I was convinced to broaden my perception of what constitutes the truth because she provided new knowledge concerning what lies beyond death's door.

When explaining her NDE to the many believers and disbelievers she encountered, Anita Moorjani used an analogy about a warehouse. In this analogy, the warehouse was completely pitch black and she was unable to see anything in front of her. In her hands, she held a little flashlight, and she switched it on to help her navigate through the dark. Everything she saw in the warehouse was only what the beam of light revealed and nothing else. One day, when the floodlights turned on, she realized the warehouse was much bigger than she had been capable of comprehending. The warehouse was lined with hundreds of shelves with numerous items - things she could envision and things she could not imagine existed on the shelves side by side. She saw a select few of the items previously when her flashlight illuminated them, but many had not been visible to her because the light was too small. When the floodlights turned back off and she was forced to use her flashlights again, she experienced a change within herself because she knew there was so much more that existed, and she had seen it with her own eyes. Similar to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Moorjani used the analogy of the warehouse to portray the difficulty she encountered as she integrated back into a world full of people with little knowledge about her life-altering experience. Her struggle was significant because she was encouraged to resume her old way of life in spite of her new knowledge that there was more to the world than what people perceived as reality. As depicted in Plato's Allegory, once a person's understanding of the world is questioned or expanded, he/she faces a spiritual awakening. Thus, it is impossible to return to one's prior existence because of this new awareness.

Just two years after Anita Moorjani's near-death experience, a man named Eben Alexander underwent a similar experience. Alexander was a man of science—a brain surgeon who focused on logic and who believed the brain was central to consciousness. However, in November 2008, his belief in near-death experiences and mortality emerged after he spent seven days in a coma. Alexander had a severe case of bacterial meningitis, and the CT scans showed that it covered his entire brain. The part of the brain that makes us human and allows for conscious experiences, the neocortex, was completely destroyed. The coma left him lifeless, completely unconscious, and yet he said later that he "experienced a consciousness that defied all his years of medical training" (*Proof of Heaven*). Before entering the coma, he had little faith in God and no religious conviction. However, when recalling the events, he claimed he saw and felt his definition of God. On the other side, he heard a beautiful melody and witnessed a spinning, powerful light that revealed a portal into a beautiful realm. Alexander described his experience by saying that there were "millions of butterflies flying through a very ultra-real scene and there was a warm breeze blowing through that was like the breath of divine" (*Proof of Heaven*). I found Alexander's understanding of what he encountered particularly compelling because his NDE inspired him to openly question his faith. His prior understanding of space, time, the soul, afterlife, and what gives life meaning was entirely dismantled and reinvented. The many lessons that Alexander learned served to heighten his awareness and deepen his appreciation for the world, with all of its miracles and mysteries included.

Eben Alexander's 10-year-old son pried his father's eyes open and pleaded with him to come back. In this moment, he knew he had to wake up, and he said he had to "claw [his] way up out of [the] very deep hole" (*Proof of Heaven*). Against all odds, on the seventh day he woke up and by medical standards, he made a miraculous recovery. Nonetheless, the new problem facing Eben Alexander was how to convey what he saw and felt. He knew with the amount of damage sustained to his brain there was no way to experience hallucinations or fantasies. However, he understood that his notions were revered as crazy by those around him and, even more specifically, by scientific research. Personally, I have always been a skeptic about near-death experiences and the questioning of reality. It was easier to accept things as they were without objection. Nevertheless, I began to discern that my beliefs were mainly shaped by my fear of the unknown.

Many scientists say an encounter of this magnitude cannot be real. Despite this, Dr. Sam Parnia is attempting to prove the possibility of a conscious state after death. Parnia believes that, from a scientific standpoint, "we have to accept that these experiences occur" (*Proof of Heaven*). In his opinion, it would be entirely "unscientific to reject them" because there are millions of such cases all over the world (*Proof of Heaven*). At New York's Stony Brook University School of Medicine, Dr. Parnia collects evidence that supports the premise that the consciousness lives on once the brain dies. When a person dies and their brain and heart cease to function, the cells inside the brain remain in a viable state. There are currently 25 hospitals in Europe and the United States participating in Dr. Parnia's research. Based on the evidence collected, during the first few hours after death, when death is reversible, there is no evidence that consciousness is eliminated. For instance, one of the experiments to test the authenticity of out-of-body experiences requires the researchers to place a photo above critically ill patients on the operating table. If the results indicate that a group of people who have regained consciousness claim to have seen the doctors, they also want to know if they saw the images placed above them. This type of experiment is highly significant because if the subject is capable of recalling the images, such an outcome would indicate that consciousness is boundless, leading us to question the permanence of brain death and opening a whole new realm of understanding concerning what is real.

In life, our perceptions are entirely our own and the combination of this awareness creates our sense of reality. As humans, we must learn to question whether our personal beliefs hinder or advance our connection to the world. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" as well as Anita Moorjani's and Eben Alexander's near-death experiences guided me towards a greater truth than I have ever known. Their incredible transformations inspired me to embrace life differently by developing an appreciation for new ideas and worldviews. Hence, the prisoner's exposure to a greater world and the spiritual encounters of Moorjani and Alexander served to help me overcome the confines of my comfort zone and urged me toward deep self-reflection. Their stories encouraged me to question what I have been taught, and, therefore, I have grown to consider the infinite truth.

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This author was asked to respond to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assertion: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere...Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." Using a metaphor, this analysis shows how King's premise still holds true today.

Human Responsibility

By Donia Kleinsasser

Prof. Krisanda- Fear

Injury affects the whole body. When one part of the body is hurt, a person's consciousness is directed to the injury and multiple internal processes are activated to spur the healing process. A person notices such an injury mostly through the feeling of pain. Pain is the body's way of telling people that something is not working correctly. Even if a person ignores the pain, much of his or her energy is being directed to help heal the injury. An injury to the hand may not affect the foot directly, yet because the foot is a part of the same body as the injured hand, it is still affected indirectly. Similarly, when there is injustice, it doesn't only affect a sub-group. In the same way that an injury of one part affects the entire body, injustice to anyone negatively affects human society as a whole.

To begin with, injustice never fails to cause unintended negative side effects. While he was in Birmingham Jail for participating in a civil rights demonstration, some well-meaning local ministers asked Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to drop his cause because, as an outsider, he should not be involved and should instead leave the issues up to local authorities. He responded with a lengthy, eloquent letter stating the rationale behind his actions. In that letter, he argues that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.... Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" (King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail"). Basically, King is saying that injustice should be all people's concern because it affects everyone. In an ironic way this often includes the perpetrators of the injustice because the oppressors also suffer under the oppression they impose. This disadvantage takes many forms, from missing out on valuable cultural assets, to maintaining a flawed view of themselves. A perfect example is what happened in Nazi Germany. Because the Nazis persecuted the Jews, many brilliant inventors and scientists emigrated and ended up working against the Germans developing new war technologies. Some scholars argue that in this way, the German persecution of the Jews indirectly caused Germany to lose the war. Likewise, enslavement of Africans in the Americas has since caused an unbelievable amount of conflict and hardship, from civil war, to strikes, to the rioting that still goes on today. In these ways, injustices, though directly inflicted upon a minority population, are still felt by all people.

Moreover, because all people are affected by the injustices inflicted on any one person, everyone has a responsibility to stand up for the human rights of all people. Four years after initially drafting the powerful "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. put his ideas about social justice into a speech that many scholars say was a fatal mistake. In this speech, King expands his call for social justice at home to a call for social justice in American foreign policy. At the beginning of this speech, King discusses how many people

believed he was compromising the cause of his people by taking up the fight against the Vietnam War. In response, he explains that these “inquirers have not really known me, my commitment, or my calling” (King, “Beyond Vietnam”). These people failed to understand that King cared about all human rights, not just those of the African American community. He firmly believed that fighting against one injustice does not make it permissible to ignore another. He did not only care about the injustices facing his community because he had experienced them; he cared about them because they were a violation of basic human rights. Therefore, when he saw injustice elsewhere, he had to speak out. In his speech he also points out a certain level of hypocrisy in speaking out for only one group’s human rights. Some people failed to understand his mission. He was not called to only help his people; his was a greater calling that encompassed all people.

The importance of considering the well-being of the whole is readily made clear when talking about sports teams. One person’s disrespect of another’s human rights can endanger the whole team. *Remember the Titans* tells the story of a recently integrated high school’s football team as they attempt to grow together as one team. Even after training camp when it seems that they have become one team, one white player, Ray, still refuses to properly guard his black quarterback. The team captain, Gary, notices that Ray let an opponent through on purpose and even though they are best friends, Gary kicks Ray off the team. Gary realizes that any person who still hates his teammates hinders them from being a unified team, and they will not be able to win when the competition gets tough. Gary is willing to give up his friendship with Ray to make his team united. For him, it is not enough to simply learn to respect his teammates himself. Rather, he cannot allow anyone who does not respect them to play on the team either. He knows that any one player’s bad attitude affects the whole team, for injustice that goes unopposed will affect everyone.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. argued in his speech and letter, and as Gary found on the football field, people are inherently connected through their humanity, and as a result, anything that affects one will inevitably affect others. Injustice always has unintended negative side-effects, and everyone has a duty to ensure that all people receive social justice or at least they must care when they see injustice. People must remember that everyone is ultimately part of the same human society and, therefore, cannot incite or tolerate any injustice.

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This researcher uses a variety of academic sources to substantiate her claims about the educational importance of a popular and long-standing children's television program.

The Effect of *Sesame Street* on Preschool Children's Language Acquisition, Academic Skills, and School Readiness

By Madison E. Kousoulas

Dr. Daly- Popular Culture and the Meaning of Life

With the continual improvements that technology makes, the conversation about when to introduce media sources to children becomes a more prevalent topic early on in many households. This conversation is important because viewing different sources, such as television, can have a lasting impact on a child. Some may say that watching television (TV) in general is not good for a child who is of preschool age because there is nothing to gain from sitting and watching others perform an activity. While this may be true of shows that are meant purely for entertainment, programs with educational content show a very different effect (Fisch, 2004; Wright et al., 2001). Children at the preschool age learn from observing what others do; educational TV shows that express those important day-to-day skills that the child can benefit from gaining allow him/her to develop cognitively and socially (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 87). *Sesame Street* is one of the best educational shows that parents can introduce to their kids (Kirkorian et al., 2008, p. 47). *Sesame Street* positively impacts preschoolers' development of language acquisition, academic skills, and school readiness through the use of specialized strategies, structure, and content that is created to engage the children. Through the use of this education tool, parents and educators can better guide the children in their lives on a path of becoming lifelong learners. Although parents and educators play a key role in educating, *Sesame Street* teaches children the basics of language, manners, and mathematics without an adult needing to be present. In addition, this educational TV show allows children to have fun while they are learning, which makes the lessons they learn even more impactful.

The creation of *Sesame Street* in 1969 was reinforced by the needs of the country at the time. The late 1960s were filled with confusion and chaos, yet one thing that stood out with great promise was the "War on Poverty" that the government had initiated (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 25). One main goal of taking on this reduction of poverty initiative was to create social programs based around education. The creators of *Sesame Street* decided that preparing young children for school would be their primary purpose, leading them to determine the skills that children would need in order to reach this goal (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 26). This educational approach of setting a goal and then figuring out a way to achieve it was a strategy that was unheard of at the time. Known today as Backward Design, educators use this child-centered approach to meet their learning goals. In the classroom, education was very centered around the teacher while *Sesame Street* is very child-centered. However, this progressive approach to teaching, which loosened the structure of teaching by giving students more creative freedom, reverted back to a more traditional approach. This approach, filled with

structure and basic concepts, seemed more fitting to the educators and parents of the 1970s who were concerned with students' academic performance. *Sesame Street* took the best of both approaches and became a television program that was built upon a specific structure while also being creatively driven. Over the course of the show's 40-year history, "[T]he curriculum has evolved in response to changes in professional understanding of children's growth, development, and learning" (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 35). *Sesame Street* is an educational TV show that pays attention to the changing times of society; everyone involved with the show constantly conducts research and reaches out to the public to make sure that viewers are achieving the many learning goals the show sets.

One of the main goals that the show has explicitly set out to accomplish is helping children begin to understand and use language; *Sesame Street* helps create a vocabulary base that fosters language acquisition. The show has demonstrated "improvements in receptive vocabulary" even without a co-viewing parent, through the use of specified strategies, including visuals, repetition, active participation, and specific language used by characters (Fisch & Truglio, 2000; Wright et al., 2001). This ability for children to grow and develop their vocabulary, without the help of their parents, allows for additional opportunities to begin developing language more fully. *Sesame Street* takes advantage of its "unique opportunity to present words and concepts" through the use of "a combination of images, verbal description, and sound effects" to not only draw viewers in, but keep them cognitively active (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2010, p. 1584). More specifically, one beneficial action that *Sesame Street* takes when helping children to develop their language acquisition is through the characters' use of simple language. The segments of the show that involve definitions describe the words with "student-friendly definitions" as well as "simple language [that is] likely to be understood by young children" (Larson & Rahn, 2015, p. 215). Having this consistent language embedded throughout each segment allows for child viewers to fully comprehend and absorb the information they are being given. This act of using simple language in order to fully understand a concept is an effective strategy child viewers can incorporate in their learning later on in their lives. The information learned throughout each segment allows the child to develop a foundation for learning that is fun and that can be built upon throughout their real-world experiences.

Sesame Street uses other strategies to help with language acquisition. For example, pictures are utilized when trying to explain the meaning of a new word to the child viewers in the show's segment "Word on the Street" (Larson & Rahn, 2015, p. 215). This part of the show introduces the word of the episode through a series of examples that are acted out by different characters on the street. Each person gives a definition of the word and follows it with a visual representation of it. This action-packed, short segment of the show allows preschool age viewers to be exposed to the word that will then be repeated multiple times throughout the remainder of the episode (Larson & Rahn, 2015, p. 214). This initiative sets up the rest of the episode, for some other segments such as "Murray Has a Little Lamb" and the "celebrity scenes" continue to promote the word (Larson

& Rahn, 2015, p. 215). The use of the same content portrayed in various contexts helps kids see the different ways the word can be used (Fisch, 2004, p. 33). Varied practice through the use of multiple examples as well as repeated practice sets give way to a deeper understanding of words and their definitions (Fisch, 2004, p. 169). The idea is that “the more often a child hears a word, the more likely he or she is to recognize, understand, and be able to use that word in the future” (Larson & Rahn, 2015, p. 216). The use of repetition throughout the show allows multiple chances for preschool age children to pick up the word and begin to actively process it into their language memory. The continual use of repetition allows for parents to not have to be present throughout the episode’s entirety as the characters act as the child’s source of information reinforcement.

Similar to the benefits that *Sesame Street* creates for viewers in learning new vocabulary and growing their overall language acquisition, research has shown that there is a positive correlation between the show and school readiness (Kirkorian et al., 2008, p. 47). School readiness, one of the central goals of *Sesame Street*, is the notion that children are not only cognitively ready to go to school, but socially, emotionally, and physically as well. Children who are sufficiently prepared for school understand many learning approaches and have a foundation of information to contribute and to build upon. According to Linebarger & Piotrowski (2010), “[W]atching educational TV as a preschooler predict[s] better school readiness skills at school entry and more leisure book reading, greater academic self-concept, and higher English grade point averages when a teen” (p. 1583). Not only does *Sesame Street* prepare child viewers for school, but the messages and foundations the show provides are carried with the kids throughout their entire educational career. Starting to watch the show around the age of two or three years old enables the creation of potentially long-lasting educational effects that correlate with higher general readiness for school (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 87). At this young age, having the principles of being kind, listening when others are speaking, and being interested in and excited about the curriculum put forth, are highly important when introduced to school for the first time. *Sesame Street* teaches child viewers these important school skills that are needed throughout their educational journey.

Strategies used to build upon these basic messages and foundations that are carried throughout a child’s education include “activation of prior knowledge and repetition and review of the content after it has been presented” (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2010, p. 1583-84). This action of having kids reach back into their cognitive memory and recall some of the basic ideas that they know helps them develop their memory and start to combine information with their own thoughts. *Sesame Street* helps create a school-ready child by allowing them to have these flexible mental representations of skills and strategies they can use when learning new curriculum. The television program uses planned curriculum that is not only filled with linguistic and production techniques, but is age-specific to its viewers, too (Wright et al., 2001, p. 1349). This specialized content allows for more enhanced learning by the children observing different characters and their actions; lessons are portrayed in multiple ways, with different examples throughout each segment of the show. Viewing skills

portrayed in varying contexts helps the child have a more flexible understanding of what the skills are and what they can be used for, and the strategies that characters use to figure out various problems can then be enacted by the child in various real-life situations (Kirkorian et al., 2008, p. 52). The children then begin to truly understand what certain words and numbers are used for as well as problem-solving actions that can be taken in different instances without having help from a parent or other adult. The positive correlation between *Sesame Street* and school readiness is seen when a child takes the strategies and skills and builds a strong foundation for their later learning in life.

Sesame Street helps kids go a step further than being prepared for school by supporting the development of specific academic skills in an area such as literacy. Besides the main goal of school readiness, the show focuses its “informative programming” on “letter skills” and “number skills” (Wright et al., 2001, p. 1361). General academic skills such as letter recognition helps the preschool age children watching the show expand their knowledge regardless of a co-viewing parent being present or not. Having this foundation supports the child in comprehending more complex and thought-provoking tasks on their own. Learning the smallest parts of words eventually adds up to the child reading full words and then sentences. There is a significant positive correlation between “*Sesame Street* viewing and preschoolers’ ability to recognize letters of the alphabet” which leads to kids telling full stories and reading (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 90). Standard lessons like learning the alphabet from the show at a young age are carried throughout a child’s school career where they are “more likely to be able to read storybooks on their own, and significantly less likely to be receiving special help in school for reading problems” (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 124). The independence that the show fosters through supporting the child in learning without a co-viewing parent, reinforces this self-reliant learning that is carried into the child’s schooling. The frequency of new words being paired with representative pictures and the use of songs that entertain the kids while they learn, are some fun and effective strategies that *Sesame Street* uses to successfully support preschool-age viewers in their independent reading.

The writers of the show look for new teaching techniques that even the public finds useful. In one of the first years of the show, the production hosted a literacy seminar, and an advisor pointed out that characters themselves do not have good reading habits. She explained that if the puppets were to simply run their fingers beneath the words when they read, it would show the kids that in English, one reads from left to right (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 34). *Sesame Street* is so effective because it listens to the informed public and takes its suggestions about how to further support the young children who watch their show. Another strategy that *Sesame Street* began to employ through the help of advisors was nicknamed “the James Earl Jones Effect” (Fisch, 2004, p. 25). This method of repetition, named after James Earl Jones who recited the alphabet at a slow and deliberate pace on the show, proves that through watching a segment multiple times, kids begin to recognize the answer before the characters on the show do. With the inclusion of this effect throughout episodes, *Sesame*

Street has been able to support viewers' efficient learning (Fisch, 2004, p. 25). Through the adoption of "broad areas of goals," *Sesame Street* has been able to effectively teach "language and reading" for these past four decades (Fisch & Truglio, 2000, p. 84). Not only does this goal support the development of language acquisition, but it furthers child viewers' school readiness, excitement to learn, and ability to understand the world around them.

Some may argue that because children become passive while watching TV, there are no real benefits for doing so. These individuals find that the negative effects of screen time outweigh any type of benefit that can be gained from any show. While screen time is a prevalent concern in today's society, these critics, more often than not, look at the negative outcomes of entertainment TV rather than the positive outcomes of educational TV. Research shows that "educational programs are positively associated with overall measures of achievement and with potentially long-lasting effects, while purely entertainment content, particularly violent content is negatively associated with academic achievement" (Kirkorian et al., 2008, p. 50). It is important to look at the content of shows that young kids are watching. Educational programs are not passively watched by children; kids are actively engaged and excited while being drawn in by the academic content of shows such as *Sesame Street*. Again, this show constructively impacts preschool-age viewers' development of academic skills, language acquisition, and school readiness through the use of captivating content portrayed through various strategies and structures, without the need of a co-viewing parent.

Through the use of specialized and fun strategies, structure, and content, *Sesame Street* positively impacts preschooler's development in a multitude of ways. This is important for parents and caregivers to understand when they first introduce the show to the child. The show gives its young viewers a cognitive advantage from the beginning, creating a long-lasting effect throughout the child's education (Fisch & Truglio, 2000; Wright et al., 2001). The skills that children acquire from *Sesame Street* benefit them greatly in the long run. Research shows that "*Sesame Street* [is] significantly related to higher grades in high school" when viewed from a young age (Fisch, 2004; Wright et al., 2001). The long-running program takes advantage of the unique opportunity that media brings with its constant improvements, and this type of media is primarily beneficial to all who watch.

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The purpose of this research paper is to convince the reader that a social media presence is beneficial not only to the Catholic Church, but also to people—particularly young people—who are seeking to enhance their faith.

How an Online Connection Changes a Faith Connection

By Meredith McElroy

Prof. Barranca- Entertainment Media and Society

With a 280-character limit and worldwide audience, people of all backgrounds, races, ages, and differences share their thoughts with the *Twitter* community on a daily basis. These tweets, along with *Snapchat* selfies and *Instagram* posts, are at the foreground of the social media world. The skyrocketing usage of social media has forever changed the way people communicate, stay in touch with, and share news with others. In keeping with the times, the Catholic Church has established a presence on social media, using this digital platform in a variety of ways. Many religious sisters, parishes, and priests, along with Pope Francis, have created online accounts where they post religious messages and thoughts. This growing online Catholic presence has allowed the word Catholic to further fulfill its meaning as universal. The Catholic Church must use social media as a platform for evangelization in order to share the message of the gospel and keep followers of all backgrounds connected all over the world.

The new standard for sharing and attaining information has become instantaneous access. With the ever-growing popularity in social media platforms, sites focus on bigger and better ways to present users' content, aiming to connect people of all different places, backgrounds, and situations within seconds. Communication has become more convenient and easier as delays between message sharing are diminished. Dings and rings spill out of our phones as companies such as *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *Snapchat* allow users to receive alerts and messages when their online friends share updates, posts, tweets, and snaps. Our culture is centered around a need for constant communication.

Some may think younger users are more easily caught up in the drama and unintended consequences that social media brings, resulting in a lack of attention to the positive messages of the Church and the gospel, and thus making the Church's means of sharing their message online ineffective. Many social media users are children, teens, and young adults who use social media to stay connected with friends and family. In "A Framework for the Dark Side of Social Media" by Angeline Close Scheinbaum, an outline for the unanticipated negative effects of social media is laid out, comparing the positive and negative implications. Scheinbaum explains that social media brings "digital drama," which is defined as the "occurrence of and reactions to negative online consumer behaviors" (4). Social media also brings the unintended effect of "digital over-engagement" which could "be unhealthy or even be an early indicator of a social media addiction" (Scheinbaum 5). Many users spend their time online criticizing themselves or others because of what they see. Social media is

said to bring about negative connotations and open the door to drama and media addictions. However, this is not the only way that social media can be used.

A user's perspective is heavily influenced by what they see on their timelines. The Catholic Church strives to bring positivity to feeds that may otherwise be filled with negativity. Through the use of social media, the Church aims to connect to those who may feel lost or curious about what practicing a Catholic faith life or living a Christian life entails. However, some users are unaware of these resources and accounts and find themselves tangled up in the social media mess of comparisons, judgements, and obsessions. Social media can better be used to bring those who are lost back into the group, both in the secular and religious context. Our younger generation is so connected to social media that they have become disconnected from all other things. The Church's use of social media as a means of sharing the message of the gospel is an effective way to shepherd the younger sheep back to the masses, the youth groups, and the community. People want a positive outlet, and the Church provides this as young people are logging in online to connect with their faith. Using social media as a way to evangelize provides the Church with the ability to connect to people of all ages, personalities, and backgrounds, and can serve as a light in the seemingly dark social media world. With youth's reliance on social media, it is especially important that the Church use this platform to bring young people back into the religious fold.

This connection to the younger generation is best formulated through the use of social media because of their attentiveness to the online world. The article, "The Catholic Church in Italian Media Coverage: An Analysis of Newspapers, TV News and Social Media," by Rita Marchetti and Susanna Pagiotti, provides an in-depth analysis of social media and its effectiveness in portraying the Catholic Church. The authors explain that "the debate about the relationship between the Church and the media is alive and well, making traditional means no longer enough to evangelize" (Marchetti and Pagiotti 2). Media sources provide instantaneous access, which is so craved by the younger generation. An online media presence creates a community of technology-savvy faith seekers, eager to connect both online and in their parishes and churches. As the Church aims to spread its message to a wider audience, Marchetti and Pagiotti argue, their "need for a media presence is principally due to its specific objective to announce the evangelical message 'to all the people'" (4). The universal church is in need of a way to keep its connection with all participants alive, and social media is the best way.

One of the most used social media sites is *Twitter*. Many parishes, along with numerous Catholic schools, utilize *Twitter* to send information to parishioners and parents about upcoming events, daily readings, and new opportunities. Messages often contain words of wisdom to spark both positive outward action as well as inner peace. Pope Francis sets a good example for this. In "Social Media in Catholic Schools" by Nancy Caramanico, the positive impacts of using social media in a Catholic school setting are outlined, focusing on the Pope's support of social media and its efforts to spread faith. At the 2014 World Youth Day, Pope Francis said,

“the Internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God” (qtd in Caramanico 23). The ability to instantaneously share information is a blessing. Because of this innovation, the possibilities for connection and gaining knowledge are endless. Caramanico goes on to explain that outside of the school, Catholics can “truly engage with other Catholics from around the world via the gift of social media” (25). The Church is alive and well through the use of social media sites, most specifically *Twitter*.

Although *Twitter* users contain a wide range of famous people, one of the most influential and top followed users is Pope Francis. *Twitter* became a significant media source for the Church with the launch of the Papal *Twitter* account in 2012. In the interview “Vatican Interns Help Build Papal Following on Social Media” from *All Things Considered*, host Jennifer Lynn tells the stories of two college students who were instrumental in the Papal presence on social media. Vatican media experts turned to young people as they searched for innovative ways to increase the impact of the Pope’s message, and their answer was to create a social media presence. As the head of the Catholic Church is a model for communication and action, the Pope’s messages on *Twitter* promote a positive and faith-centered reflection, which encourages followers to converse in positive and thought-provoking manners. His tweets serve as a tool for spreading the Word of God to all members of the Body of Christ. When asked about her experience in helping launch the Papal *Twitter*, Rhabb explained that the account was “a huge step for a religious leader like the Pope to actually take a step into social media to try and reach out to the youth, or not just the youth, but everybody, to make him more tangible” (Lynn). Rhabb’s statement that the account allows the Pope to reach out to people of all ages supports the aim of the Church in its use of social media: to become more universal and accessible to all.

More than just evangelizing those who are new to or exploring the Catholic faith, social media allows its current Catholic members to learn more about their own practices and ways to be continually involved in their faith lives. Catholic school teachers and priests have found their own unique ways to use social media to their advantage. Carmanico explains that within the school setting, “Many classes follow Pope Francis (@pontifex) and reflect on his *Twitter* message for the day” (24). *Instagram* and *Twitter* accounts have been made to help share daily events and life stories of fellow Catholics, along with share resources and tools which are available to help strengthen faith lives. In a news article titled “Catholic Church Promotes Ministry in Faith” by Carolyn Click, the story of an inquisitive Catholic man provides an example for how social media changed his faith journey. Josh Joseph, a lifelong cradle Catholic, began to question the idea of joining the priesthood, turning to “the social media platforms that are so much a part of his media-savvy generation” for insights and guidance (Click). Media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, webcasts, and websites helped Joseph to discern his call to the seminary, as they provided “a window to the evolution of a priest” (Click). Without this online resource, Joseph, and other men like him, would have a much more difficult time in understanding the lifelong commitment they are praying

and thinking about. Social media allows those more involved and seasoned in the Church to share their experiences, promoting faith through both actions and words.

Another example where priest and religious figures' lives are broadcasted can be seen in Marchetti and Pagiotti's article about Italian media coverage. It is important to remember that this article focuses solely on the Italian media presence and does not include an examination of American media. We must keep in mind the similarities and differences between the way the Church is covered in Italy and the United States in order to examine our own relationship with the media. The Catholic Church is based in the Vatican, a city-state fully contained within the city of Rome, Italy. This is where both the Pope and the Vatican reside, and thus is an important site for the Catholic faith. The article addresses religious figures, such as priests, cardinals, nuns, catholic devotees, the Pope, and more as religious actors. Marchetti and Pagiotti say that "the storytelling of the priests' daily life is privileged thanks to *Facebook* pages and the personal profiles of the same priests and of the parish" (12). They continue by adding, "Social media is confirmed as potentially a very powerful instrument to give voice to the requests and the positions of the *little* religious actors and who are then able to enter into the public debate as active voices" (12). The religious men and women who use social media to share their stories are taking advantage of a unique opportunity that allows them to connect to all types of people. Social media can act as a leveler, creating an even playing field and equal opportunities for users to share their voice and message. The message of the Catholic Church is focused on the gospel, and particularly on loving your neighbor. Social media allows all types of people, both those who have professed religious vows and those who have not, to share their experiences and thoughts on pertinent Catholic teachings and debates.

The significance of all of this sharing on social media by religious figures, the Church, Catholic organizations, and everyday people is that the Church is reaffirming its efforts to be universal. In a world so filled with secular influences and social pressures, the Church is able to log on and connect to a plethora of followers who receive their good news daily. Without social media, the ever-changing events, resources, and practices of the Catholic faith would not be accessible to all. Social media allows the gospel to come to life through commentators, reflections, podcasts, and more. A new found sense of identity takes form as people witness the church as it truly is—with the people. The Catholic Church is not a perfect organization, but rather a melting pot of people from all different backgrounds, experiences, thoughts, and lives. Social media creates an environment where followers all over the world can stay connected and engaged with the message of the gospel.

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Students in this First Year Seminar class were asked to build their research projects around the course theme of narrative. In this engaging essay, the writer combines scholarly studies with personal stories to dispel misconceptions about autism.

Understanding Autism

By Raina Moody

Prof. Collins- Narrative: The Inside Story

A parent's natural reaction to the word autistic being slapped as a label on their three-year-old child is one of shock, horror, and the inevitable question, "Why my child?" Immediately, their dreams of teaching their son to ride a bike, helping him reel in his first big fish, and cheering for him as he scores the winning touchdown for his high school football team are dashed as images of a nonverbal child, rocking back and forth with his hands over his ears, invade their imaginations. The parents' dreams are replaced with fears that their child's life will be one of constant care, dependency on others, and one big narrative of social embarrassment. These stereotypes associated with autism are shared by many across the country and beyond. However, such a diagnosis does not need to be viewed as a death sentence for a child or for the parents' dreams. People with autism simply need advocates to understand and help them navigate the confusion of a world dominated by neurotypical people. There is a fear surrounding the diagnosis that stems from a lack of knowledge about this condition - a fear of the unknown. Through educating and exposing people to more stories about the productive, meaningful lives led by the people who are often labeled as disabled, autism will not be viewed so much as a disorder, but rather as something to understand and appreciate.

To give a brief overview of what this disorder actually entails: autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that it is not measurable in severity because of the broad range of characteristics it describes. It is a complex condition because each individual is completely different, each presenting a unique set of needs. Autism is also a relatively new topic, with little research covering its causes and cures. From the research that has been completed, the causes seem to include both genetic and environmental aspects. Genetic causes may involve random gene mutations, as research shows that most people with autism have no family history of it. The most conclusive evidence suggests that environmental factors such as parental medical conditions, age, and exposure to toxins during pregnancy combined with gene mutation increase risk of the disorder the most. However, research has not clarified exactly which genes interacting with which combination of environmental factors results in a positive diagnosis of autism in a child ("A Parent's Guide to Autism"). A survey in 2009 determined that 1 in 110 children in the US are diagnosed with autism, and that boys are four to five times more at risk than girls. This prevalence rate has drastically increased in the last few decades, most likely due to more information available in diagnosing the disorder, rather than an increase in actual cases (Turkington and Davidson 590). With the number of autism diagnoses increasing, it is even more essential that society in general is more aware of the complexities of this disorder. By gaining an understanding, people can then offer support to these individuals instead of avoiding or shunning them because of their apparent differences.

Even though every case of autism involves a different set of needs, there are three basic symptoms that characterize autism. People with autism often display repetitive behaviors which are presented differently for every person. For an autistic person, these repetitive behaviors often provide a sense of security or a way to decipher what is going on in the world around them. This repetitive behavior can take another form: they may develop a focused interest in things such as moving objects, numbers, or science topics. The second and perhaps the most inhibiting symptom is social impairment. People with autism do not pick up on nonverbal social cues that aid in almost every social interaction. These subtle cues that most people unthinkingly use to predict what others are feeling and what their actions will be are lost on someone with autism, and as a result, they often have trouble understanding another's point of view and get confused in a conversation. Closely linked with social impairment are communication issues. Often an autistic person's language skills develop at a slower pace, and they rely on other sources to communicate their feelings or emotions. Typically, they have difficulty with conversation and often use words or phrases that may seem odd or out of place. Communication and social skills that come naturally to a neurotypical person need to be taught to a person with autism ("A Parent's Guide to Autism"). Because of their difficulties in communicating, people with autism often are simply brushed aside as weird or different; however, what they really need is someone to take the time to interpret what they are trying to say. Their thoughts and feelings are just as valid as anyone else's even if they cannot be expressed as easily.

Perhaps the most important aspect of autism to understand is that the sensory perceptions of an autistic person are disordered. Senses such as hearing, touch, or smell may be hyper- or hypo- acute. Sensory inputs that a neurotypical person might not even think about can cause excruciating pain to someone with hyper-acute senses (Turkington and Davidson 592). For example, a simple trip to the supermarket involves many people all talking at once, music coming from the loud-speakers, the beeping of the cash registers, grocery carts wheeling across the floor, and kids crying. There are bright lights, and hundreds of smells are mixing together and clashing. All of this sensory information is invading the fragile sensory receptors of an autistic person, and their brain, which has difficulty distinguishing which stimulus to focus on, can quickly become overstimulated (Notbohm 1-2). In her book, *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*, Ellen Notbohm writes from the perspective of an autistic child and explains, "I may appear withdrawn or belligerent to you but I am really just trying to defend myself" (1). Asking a child to behave and effectively communicate what they are thinking while they are experiencing this barrage of sensory information is expecting the child to perform a monumental feat. It is essential to understand that to an autistic person, the world can seem like a hostile environment they need to protect themselves from.

Autism presents a seemingly overwhelming set of challenges for a child to overcome. However, as many individuals with autism demonstrate over and over again, even the most challenging obstacles can be worked through and conquered. In her book, Ellen Notbohm suggests that perhaps the most important factor in

determining an autistic child's future is if they have people in their lives who will understand and support them, help them to achieve their dreams, and, ultimately, love them for who they are. Writing in the voice of an autistic child, she says, "Without your support, my chances of successful, self-reliant adulthood are slim. With your support and guidance, the possibilities are broader than you might think. I promise you - I am worth it" (Notbohm 27). Last summer, I had the opportunity to work with a five-year-old autistic boy and personally witness the challenges autism presents, but more importantly, the achievements Notbohm refers to that can be reached with the right kind of support and understanding.

The child I worked with was diagnosed with high-functioning autism when he was three or four years old, which means that his symptoms were relatively mild. While he was part of a larger group of kindergarteners in a daycare, he needed one-on-one care because, as many autistic people do, he had social interaction issues. For him, often this meant resorting to violent behaviors whenever he got frustrated or overstimulated. I worked hard with him to teach him the appropriate response to certain situations and to teach him to use his words instead of physical actions to solve his problems. I had to figure out what sparked his frequent meltdowns as well as when he was telling me with nonverbal cues that he had had enough and when he was just simply being a mischievous five-year-old boy. It was not easy; he often left me exhausted at the end of the day. I was frustrated because it seemed like I couldn't get through to him, and many times I was discouraged because it seemed like we weren't making any progress. Yet, as Notbohm asserts, the patience and tenacity it took to overcome challenges with this child was worth it.

There is a myriad of moments that stick in my mind revealing this boy's beautiful heart underneath his often wild, seemingly emotionless actions. I could see it in his fascination as we made applesauce together out of crabapples that we had collected from a nearby tree and as I watched him become completely absorbed in the make-believe land of elves and fairies that he and a friend had created during playtime. I saw it the time he triumphantly presented me with a squirming salamander he had finally managed to catch and the time he looked at me after a particularly rough day and said, "You are such fun, Raina. Can you be with me always?" I knew for certain all the struggle and work had been worth it when he cried and hugged me like he would never let go at the end of summer when I had to leave for school.

Through my personal experience with this autistic child, many of my pre-existing ideas about autism were dispelled. Because of their communication and social impairments, those with autism are often written off as disabled. People need to become educated about the basic fundamentals of autism in order to understand that although people with autism may need different ways to connect with people or make sense of the world, their ideas and feelings are just as valid as anyone else's. What these people need most is a friend or advocate to help them decipher the confusion surrounding them and set them on a path to a fulfilled, productive life. In the research article, "What's the Point of Having Friends?" Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. state, "The ability to

make friends and feel part of a social group is seen to be a key feature of human interaction” (2). Rosqvist and partners go on in the article to explain that autistic people are not exempt from this basic human need and that the sense of belonging that every person craves is just as important for someone with autism - they simply need help in learning how to make friends (4). Because autistic people often feel disoriented, out of place, and unable to communicate their feelings effectively in a neurotypical-dominant setting, Rosqvist et al. suggest having autistic safe-space. These are spaces dominated by autistic people and are environments where they feel comfortable socializing with people similar to them. In their research, Rosqvist et al. found that participants in these safe-spaces created a “sense of community within this group [that] often contrasted to experiences of alienation when autistic people interact with Neurotypicals” (6). A good example of a successful autistic safe space is shown in the movie, *Life, Animated*; this is a film that follows the story of an autistic man, Owen Suskind. Wanting to share his passion for Disney movies, as well as wanting to meet more people like himself, he starts his own Disney club. The movie shows Owen leading a meeting of about forty people, all diagnosed with autism. As Owen shows them a scene from a popular Disney film and then leads a discussion on how the scene pertains to their own lives, the participants’ enthusiasm for Disney films and the fun they are having together is clearly evident (*Life, Animated*). The people attending this club feel safe to express what they think without worrying about keeping up with the pace of a “normal” conversation and without having to worry if what they have to say is socially appropriate.

Stories about autism are another way to help autism become more normalized, accepted, and understood. In his research, Ian Hacking explores the rising genre of autism fiction and writing in general. Written accounts give autistic people the opportunity to describe what they find challenging, confusing, or downright impossible about living in a world dominated by neurotypical people. In his article, “How We Have Been Learning to Talk About Autism: A Role for Stories,” Hacking explains that autism writing “describe[s] autism ‘from the inside’ . . . suggest[ing] that there is a truth about autistic inner life that we are gradually revealing” (506). He says: “I suggest there is little ready-made language to describe this inside, and that the autobiographies, the blogs, the novels, the movies, are creating it right now” (Hacking 506). Hacking, too, is emphasizing that the thoughts and feelings of someone with autism are just as valid and important as those of a neurotypical person. He goes on to explain that because autism tends to hinder communication skills, writing can be an effective outlet for their feelings, serving as a language and a way to communicate their true inner life and thoughts with the wider world (Hacking 505). Those who have been diagnosed with autism need to be given a way to make their voices heard, and neurotypical people need to listen. The sharing of autism stories is a perfect way for people with autism to let the world know their heart and feelings - the part of them that is beautiful and perfect.

Finally, people with autism need to be accepted and appreciated for who they are. Ellen Notbohm puts it very well when she writes, “View my autism as a different ability rather than a disability. Look past what you may see as limitations and see my strengths” (Notbohm 27). As a mother of an autistic son, Notbohm had to relinquish her ideas of a “perfect” child. When she discovered her son had autism, she was forced to view life from a very different perspective. However, she chose to focus on what her child could do rather than his various disabilities. Sure, her son and the thousands of other people with autism have different ways of interpreting their surroundings or communicating, but focusing on and building up all the “can do’s” in a person will help to support the positives both in the autistic person and in society’s attitude toward autism (Notbohm 93). Like Notbohm did for her son, Owen’s parents in *Life, Animated* had to change their dreams for their son when they learned of his autism. Altering their aspirations for their child’s successful life did not mean giving up on their dreams altogether; it simply meant that their definition of a successful life had to change. Owen’s parents accepted Owen for who he was, and worked with him to fulfill his dreams of moving into his own apartment where he could live independently (*Life, Animated*). As Ellen Notbohm and Owen’s stories show, it is essential to look past the stereotypes that may be creating negative mindsets against what a person with autism is capable of and, instead, foster dreams in a child regardless of their abilities. Dreams need to be nurtured and worked towards in order for anyone’s, but especially an autistic person’s, potential to be reached. Accepting and understanding autistic people is something everyone can help with so that these people can lead the fulfilled, self-reliant lives they are capable of.

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For this assignment, students were asked to develop their own original argument, using assigned readings on nature along with student-chosen song lyrics. This author adeptly argues that music creates a harmonious bond between humans and nature.

Musicians Striving for Harmony with the Earth: Music Can Save the Planet

By Bridget Murphy

Dr. Haas- Music:

Earth rotates around its axis daily, generating vibrations of natural sound. These vibrations can come in the form of a violent stampede of animals, an avalanche in the mountains, the pitter patter of rain, waves crashing on the shore, or the gentle tunes of a song bird. By observing the naturally produced tunes of nature, mankind, filled with inspiration, adopted a man-made form of music produced to enhance their social, emotional, and cultural lives. As a result, through the practice of music, a harmonious bond formed between humankind and nature. As technology and science advances, people become distracted and lose their harmony with the earth. It is important that this close connection between people and nature is maintained. Respect for nature ensures that future generations share in and appreciate nature's beauty. The promotion of the environmental movement through music is the most effective way to persuade people to become harmonious once again with nature.

Technological and scientific advancement is creating a divide in the relationship between people and nature. In the past, humankind was greatly inspired by nature: the development of music, the first scientific observations, and the earliest forms of religion were all derived from a close observation of and deep respect for nature. An example of the religious impact nature has on humankind can be found in "The Canticle of the Creatures," written by Francis of Assisi. He sings, "Praise be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures" (Francis). Francis gives thanks to God for providing bountiful sustenance on earth for His people. In addition, he gives credit to the earth for its sustenance because the earth and its fruits are a gift to humanity from God. Currently, however, people have begun to lose their respect for nature. New technological distractions, such as apps on cell phones and reality shows on televisions, are captivating people's attention instead. The natural music surrounding them outdoors is drowned by the buzz of technology. This idea is echoed in Carolyn Merchant's work, "The Death of Nature," where she hypothesizes that "a change in the image and description of nature was occurring during the course of the Scientific Revolution" (271). As suggested in the title of her work, her point of view is that the scientific revolution is causing the death of nature. The scientific revolution sparked the change in how people behave toward nature. These scientific advancements distanced people from harmony with the earth to such an extent that the average individual has grown to act with complete disregard to the planet's well-being, accelerating the destruction of the earth. People today do not understand the beauty of pausing for a moment while outside to listen to the vibrations of sound in the air. Respect for nature is being lost, which has freed people from the guilt associated with mutilating the earth. Merchant suggests that "one

does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body ... as long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it" (271). It is disconcerting to witness the ruination of the harmony between people and nature and the consequent deterioration of the environment. Because music is the source that connects people to nature, however, musicians today can coax people back into a harmonious balance with nature.

If allowed, nature can fill people with inspiration to compose music to protect the earth for future generations. Folk music is one avenue through which a change in the relationship between people and the environment can transpire. For example, Eric Bulson discusses in his article, "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan," how "Dylan manipulated the timing and rhythm of the chords and overlaid them with dense image-laden lyrics" (127). Both the imagery in his lyrics and the rhythm of his chords represent how nature inspired Bob Dylan's music. Although his lyrics are not specifically advocating environmentalism and the message to save the planet, Dylan's clear, natural sound and lyrics cause his audience to be more aware of nature, which, in turn, replenishes their respect for nature. Contemporary artists should emulate Dylan and incite their audience into an awareness of nature.

Other musicians are more direct with their environmentalist position. In "Pass It on Down," the band Alabama promotes pro-nature concepts in its lyrics in order to influence a return to harmony with the earth. Alabama uses visual descriptions of nature in their lyrics, such as, "let's leave some blue up above us / let's leave some green on the ground" (Alabama) that evokes in the audience a desire to preserve nature. The demolition of the planet by its human inhabitants through, for example, the erection of highways in the mountains and the burning down of forests for urbanization, has left scars upon the earth where once beautiful landscapes stood. Alabama reminds its audience, "it's only ours to borrow / let's save some for tomorrow / leave it and pass it on down" (Alabama). The message portrayed here is that during their short lifetimes, people need to conserve the earth for the next generation. As the song continues, the band utilizes guilt as a tool to advance the reparation of nature as they sing, "Now we all oughta feel just a little bit guilty / When we look into the eyes of our kids / 'Cause brothers it's a fact, if we take and don't put back/ They'll have to pay for all we did" (Alabama). Part of the role of a parent is to behave as a role model for their children. If people act with complete disregard toward nature, their children will be influenced to do the same. The song is protesting what humans are doing to the planet and sending a message to be harmonious with nature, rather than act as a destructive force against the earth. A continued integration of nature in music will help create harmony once again with the earth and save the planet.

Alternatively, people who advocate technological and scientific advancement believe that harmony with the earth only prevents them from pursuing their modern goals. If, for example, a mountain stands in the way of a more convenient highway route, they have no qualms about defacing the earth's surface with dynamite. They

believe that humans are above nature and that dominion over nature is, as Merchant describes it, a necessary “remedy for the disorder” (276). Her mechanical model poses the idea that the world today is treated like a machine that is meant to be analyzed, manipulated, and easily repaired with standardized replacement parts. People today have become increasingly ignorant, thinking the earth solely exists for human benefit. However, the human conscience can expand to incorporate new, innovative scientific thought while preserving environmentalist views. From nature comes all things, including the origins of music and the first scientific concepts. Environmentalist musicians, like the band Alabama, teach their audience that nature is a necessary part of life, and that disregard for nature creates a loss of the quality of life itself.

Music creates an intimate harmony between people and nature. It is important that this bond remains strong for the preservation of nature for future generations to experience its inspiring beauty. Although technological and scientific advancement is inevitable, people should not let these advancements result in the death of nature. God only created one planet for His people. It is vital that the earth is cherished and preserved, otherwise it will fall to ruins and future generations will be left with a dying planet. Because music is recognizably a binding factor that connects people to nature, more musicians like the band Alabama should utilize their power to change people’s views to save the planet.

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This research paper explores the different layers of trauma that child sexual assault survivors can endure, and in an effort to increase the likelihood of recovery, the writer argues for more sweeping changes regarding how they provide testimony.

Child Sexual Assault Victims and the Traumatizing Effects of Testifying

By Shannon Netzer

Dr. Liptak- Trauma

Child sexual assault is a horrendous crime that impacts many children every day. Approximately one in four girls and one in six boys experience sexual abuse before they reach age 18, yet according to the National Sexual Violence Research Center (NSVRC), only 12% of child sexual abuse is reported (NSVRC). The testifying process can be frightening for children to undergo, but it is critical for the sexual assault cases to go to trial in order to obtain justice. In most child sexual assault trials, there is usually no other documentation of evidence except the details of the case that come solely from the child. Therefore, it is crucial that the child testifies in order to uncover the evidence. However, the testifying process in court can be very traumatic and negatively affect the child. Testifying by itself is not what causes children to be negatively affected; it is the constant questions from authority figures, the repetition of their story, and the facing of their abuser that causes them to relive the trauma from the sexual assault and forces them to have a more difficult time healing from the stemming trauma. There are different state laws regarding testimony, but regardless if the trial is open to the public or closed, children still are faced with similar trauma stemming from the required legal procedures. However, there are aspects of the court process that can be changed in order to make the testifying easier and less harmful for children. While there is no way to determine if a child will experience trauma, for trauma impacts everybody differently, testifying in court multiple times negatively affects how children recover from sexual assault. Therefore, federal laws should dictate changes that will ensure children repeat their stories less and that allow for them to not have to face their abusers, both of which will ultimately make testifying less harmful and traumatic.

There are many different aspects of the testifying process that can induce more trauma for abused children and affect their healing process. Before the trial, victimized children meet with figures of authority, such as police officers and lawyers, to tell their story. At these meetings, the children are repeatedly asked questions about what happened to them, and they are asked to recall the events numerous times. It is estimated that children repeat their story around fourteen to sixteen times before even going to trial (Brannon 441). The constant repetition of their story causes them to relive their trauma over and over again. The more children have to repeat their experiences, the greater the negative effects on their healing process. It makes sense that the children are asked to repeat their story in order to make sure they are giving an accurate account of what happened. However, repeating their trauma fourteen to sixteen times is extreme. In addition, each time they are asked to repeat their story they have the opportunity to change details and leave out parts that happened. This can cause the child's story to be considered inaccurate which can impact the trial. There is no actual proof that

repeating their trauma will cause them to tell the full story. Therefore, they are reliving their trauma while repeating their story for no proven reason.

Not only does talking to authority figures cause the children to relive their trauma, it can also cause them to develop secondary victimization. Secondary victimization occurs when people blame the victim which, in turn, causes the victim to blame themselves. Authority figures can be insensitive when speaking to the victim. For example, they may ask questions and make comments that suggest the abuse was the victim's fault. This can cause secondary victimization for the child, causing them to feel guilty and blame themselves for the abuse (Elmi et al. 23). When analyzing secondary victimization that occurs in court, researchers claim that "consequences associated with secondary victimization would be even greater for the children because of their heightened vulnerability" (Elmi et al. 23). This is important because it demonstrates how children are more likely to be impacted by secondary victimization due to their vulnerability. Though everyone is susceptible to secondary victimization, children are more likely to experience it because they are young and impressionable. Also, the way other people react to them influences how they feel. If authority figures are questioning them and making comments that seem insensitive and perhaps accusatory, the children are going to feel as though they are to blame for the abuse they endured. However, justice must be pursued.

The prosecuting of abusers can be problematic for survivors. Dr. Judith Herman claims, "Efforts to seek justice or redress often involve further traumatization . . . [A]n adversarial legal system is of necessity a hostile environment; it is organized as a battlefield in which strategies of aggressive argument and psychological attack replace those of physical force . . . It therefore provides strong guarantees for the rights of the accused but essentially no rights for the victim" (52). Going to trial can cause additional trauma because the strategies and questions used by lawyers often result in the victim being emotionally and mentally attacked. Questions are asked in a way that causes the victim to feel as though they are to blame. Studies have shown that children are scared to tell their story because they fear crying, being embarrassed, and being told that they are lying (Elmi et al. 23). These vulnerable children are traumatized when they are being attacked by lawyers simply for sharing their story. Children, like all victims, need help from those around them in order to heal properly, for when they are supported, their trauma may be lessened (Herman 44). To properly heal, children should be exposed to nurturing environments, not ones that cause them fear.

As stated above, in order to make the testifying processes less detrimental and to encourage an expedited and effective healing process, children shouldn't have to repeat their story numerous times throughout the duration of their trial. One solution would be to minimize the number of interviews that a child goes through. This can't be lessened in court because children telling their story is a crucial element of a trial. However, this can be lessened before the trial when the children meet with authority figures as this is where most of the repetition occurs anyway. Since the number of times a child repeats their story is one of the biggest

indicators of trauma, the children should be able to have their interviews recorded (Brannon 442). This isn't something that is commonly used because authority figures believe that the continuous questioning allows them to receive the full story. However, in reality, the more times children are asked to repeat their story the more time they also have to change it. The continuous questioning and repetition do not guarantee an accurate account of evidence and therefore is unnecessary. Federal laws should be put into place that allow children to immediately have their interviews recorded, for this would reduce the number of times they have to share their story with police officers and lawyers. Rather than the children talking to multiple different authority figures, their tape could be played instead. As a result, children would not have to repeat their account as much, which may minimize further trauma.

Another solution is introducing courthouse dogs to help abused children; a video on *CBS News* shows the positive effects of this. The dog helps traumatized children who are too afraid to talk to prosecutors and lawyers by providing comfort to the survivors. When they are able to interact with the dog, the abused children begin to feel comfortable enough to interact with prosecutors. The courthouse dogs can even come into court and sit on the witness stand with the child. There are 126 dogs in 34 courts across the country ("Meet the Dog"). Bringing more dogs into courts will allow children to feel more comfortable, calm, and supported when speaking with prosecutors and other authority figures. Having a comforting companion will help lessen the trauma related to both the violence itself and the sharing of their story.

During the trial, it is usually a requirement that a child testify in front of the perpetrator. During this experience, the child has to directly face their abuser and give their account of what happened. According to Brannon, "[T]he most negative and frightening aspect of court testimony in a criminal proceeding, as perceived by most child victims, is having to face their accused assailant" (440). Facing the abuser is the most traumatic part of the entire court process for children because they now not only have to tell their story out loud, but they have to tell their story in front of the person who put them through it. As if it isn't hard enough to testify, having the abuser in the room with them creates a whole other level of stress that makes the process more difficult. Facing their abuser has the potential to cause survivors to relive their trauma again, for they are put in the same room as the person who once made them feel powerless. The effects are even worse if the abuser is someone the child had a relationship with (Brannon 442). The abused children are then reminded of the person and the relationship they had as well as the trauma they experienced. This can cause them to relive everything again which can worsen their trauma and alter their healing process.

In addition to causing the children to relive their trauma, testifying in front of their abuser causes emotional, mental, and physical stress. According to Brannon, "Child victims of sexual assault are particularly prone to suffering emotional distress from testifying in the presence of their alleged abusers . . . As a result of the trauma induced by having to face the accused, the child witness may display observable signs of nervousness, fear, and

anxiety during testimony” (442). Children are so anxious to testify in front of their abusers that it affects them mentally, emotionally, and physically. It may even drive them to the point where they physically demonstrate how terrified they are. The court process is stressful enough as it is and forcing abused children to face their perpetrators only makes it worse.

In order to make the court processes easier for children, the children should have the opportunity to testify without facing their abuser. Although the laws differ in every state, it is commonly required for children to testify in front of the defendant. However, there are other ways that the child can still give their testimony without having direct contact with their abuser. These alternative methods need to be acknowledged and federally mandated so that the children don't have to be further traumatized. Some of these methods include videotaping the testimony, having the testimony shown through a television screen, and testifying away from their abuser (Brannon 440). All of these different methods allow for the child to still testify but without the stress and added trauma that comes from having to face their abuser. There have been many court cases that have allowed children to testify through some alternative method. This has to be decided by a judge on a specific case by case basis. If a judge determines that the child will be traumatized by facing their abuser, then the child is allowed to testify without having to face them (Brannon 460). It is important that this is an option because it helps protect the child. However, it should be available to all children, not just the ones who the judge feels will be traumatized. Judith Herman says, “No two people have identical reactions, even to the same event. The traumatic syndrome, despite its many constant features, is not the same for everyone” (42). Trauma affects everyone differently, and there isn't a way to determine how it will impact someone. A judge should not be able to determine which cases will be more traumatizing than others because there is no way to guarantee that. Trauma is not a predictable thing, and there are too many variables to consider. Therefore, a federally-mandated law that allows children to testify through an alternative method should be put into effect for all child sexual assault victims.

There is one issue that arises from letting children testify through an alternative method. Some may say that allowing children to testify through an alternative method goes against the Sixth Amendment of the Constitution. The Sixth Amendment, also known as the Confrontation Clause, allows many rights to the defendant, including the right to face the accuser and all the witnesses. Some might say that children should always be required to testify facing the defendant because it is the law. They might try to argue that if children don't testify in front of the defendant, then the defendant won't get a fair trial. In the *Ohio v. Roberts* court case, the Supreme Court mentioned that the Confrontation Clause allows for a fair and accurate testimony by requiring the witness to go under oath and be examined while being in the same place as their abuser (Brannon 447). The idea behind this is that the victim will give a more accurate depiction of the story because of the fact that they are in the same room as the accused. It makes sense that the trial would be fairer if the accused gets

the right to question the witness. However, there is evidence that suggests testifying in front of the abuser may actually cause the children to leave out information because they are scared. According to Brannon, “The trauma of having the accused present in the courtroom might also cause the child to refuse to testify. It could also decrease the chances that a child will be willing or able to give an accurate description of events” (443). Putting the child in front of their abuser makes them even more nervous to testify. The child is already scared of their abuser, so when testifying in the same room they may leave out details due to fear. Although the Confrontation Clause makes sense, the whole point of the trial is to get the accurate story of what happened so that a fair ruling can be decided upon. If the child is too scared to testify in front of the abuser, they might not give an accurate account of what happened to them. Therefore, the Confrontation Clause might actually create an unreliable account of the evidence. Rather than risk having the children not tell their full story, the courts should allow children to testify through an alternative method because it helps enable the child to tell their full story without being afraid, which would result in a more accurate and fair account of details.

The court processes can be a very traumatic experience for children. Testifying in court is crucial for children as it is the only way to present evidence. However, the pressures of testifying in court can add even more trauma for victims and alter their healing processes. The constant questioning, repetition of their story, and facing the abuser, can all cause the child to relive their trauma. In cases where a child has to testify more than once, the impacts can be even greater. In order to help abused children deal with their trauma, there should be more protective federal laws regarding the acquisition of their testimonies. By making changes, the courtroom can become a less fearful and traumatizing place for child sexual assault victims and, rather, be one where such survivors feel empowered to share their stories.

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Using the form of a personal narrative, this student cleverly examines people's reluctance to embrace change and diversity in their lives.

The Quickest Way is the Way You Know

By Dina Olmstead

Prof. Collins- Narrative: The Inside Story

When I was a kid, my mother, my sister and I would travel out of town every so often. My father works construction, and often the job requires that he goes wherever his crew is needed. Sometimes that means that he has to go out of state. He likes to show us the site and the surrounding town, so we would drive out to wherever he was, get a room for a few nights, and stay a while. The drive was always long and tedious, and I couldn't help but notice how my mother almost never relied on directions. Whenever I asked her if maybe there was a better or faster route to take, she replied curtly, "The quickest way is the way you know." It was a common piece of advice that I heard throughout my childhood, and it made perfect sense. So, if I ever found myself heading somewhere, I always took the same back roads or side streets to reach my destination, for I was familiar with the curvature, twisting, and bumps of that way. I thought nothing of it and never even considered a different route.

That old bit of advice was challenged one day, however, as I was driving a friend somewhere, though I can't remember where. But I do recall him suggesting that I take a different way and wondering why I was choosing to take the roads we were on. I told him, "The quickest way is the way you know." He scoffed, to my surprise, as if it were the most ludicrous thing he'd ever heard, and asked me, "How would you know that?" I thought that was a silly question, and that the answer was obvious. Why would you ever take a route that you're unfamiliar with if the one you know serves you just fine? I told him to picture what might happen if we did take a new route. We would have no clue where we were going, what the traffic was like, or the roughness of the pavement. Or worse, we might get lost and never make it there, and we'd have to start our trip again from scratch. The explanation seemed so clear to me. But he said, "Well, how would you know that this is the best way to take if you've never gone any other way?" I had nothing to counter his point because in the back of my mind, I knew that the real reason I always drove the same route was because I was afraid I might run into trouble if I took another.

After mulling it over, it began to seem as though I'd applied this line of thinking to most other areas of my life, too. Going "the way I knew" had become sort of a motto to live by, since after all, it had never steered me wrong. I knew I wasn't the only person who thought this way. In fact, I think most other people think this way, too. Even more, I feel it is a way of thinking that has directed whole communities, and further, societal norms. That's why when these norms are confronted, the majority of people stand by them, even if the new idea presents a better way to go. This mentality is demonstrated in Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," Luis Alberto Urrea's "The Sous Chefs of logua," and the film *Freedom Riders*, which all argue that tradition or traditional

customs are relied on as a source of comfort, safety, and stability. However, these works reveal that this mindset can also prevent growth, change, and experience.

In “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost, the speaker contemplates the implications of building barriers between neighbors, and why despite there being no good reason for it, that same old tradition continues. Watching his neighbor build the wall between them, he states:

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, “Good fences make good neighbours” (lines 23-27).

This excerpt demonstrates that even in the face of reason, there is comfort in repetition. The speaker’s neighbor rebuilds this wall year after year for no better motive than the fact that it is something he’s always done, and what his father before him had always done. It is evident in the fact that the neighbor responds only with an old-fashioned cliché, which the speaker takes note of:

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father’s saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, “Good fences make good neighbours” (41-45).

The reference to darkness not only implies the literal shading provided by the trees, but his neighbor’s ignorance as well. The neighbor follows the same old habits, shamelessly convinced that he is in the right, despite never even considering what the outcome might be without a wall. It can be assumed that the speaker takes pity on the man, not only for finding peace through obsolete sayings, but for the fact that he might never know the connections he could make if it weren’t for the barriers he builds between himself and other people. A similar pity may be felt for Dexter Bower, the protagonist of Urrea’s “The Sous Chefs of logua.”

Dexter Bower is an older man living in West Linden, Iowa. He has lived there his whole life and yearns for the traditional, agricultural lifestyle that had always been the norm until, according to him, Mexican immigrants began to populate the small town. He now goes about his days bitterly: bitter at the youth for not sharing his values, bitter at the loss of his wife, bitter at the immigrants who struggle to speak his language, and ultimately, bitter at the thought of losing the all-American community that he had always known and loved. He remarks, “[The farmhands] couldn't say the name of the state if you paid them” (Urrea 195). His resentment is further confirmed later in the piece as he goes over why he has failed to tend to his wife’s grave: “[Dexter] didn’t like feeling guilty that he hadn’t left flowers lately. All flowers did was wilt and turn brown” (Urrea 201). This

final statement symbolizes much of Dexter's outlook on life and the world he lives in. To him, everything, especially the things he loves, is temporary, and it's only a matter of time before he loses something else. That is the reason why he resists the changes happening in his community. For Dexter, the fading of tradition equates to the loss of happiness. Similar to what the speaker in "Mending Wall" noticed in his neighbor, Dexter believes that he is losing the only way of life he's ever known, and it disturbs him. However, Dexter fails to realize that he is not, in fact, losing his way of life. Rather, it is simply expanding to accommodate different sorts of people from all different places. This misunderstanding was also common in *Freedom Riders*, which depicts a multitude of people in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, for fear that they might lose the type of lifestyle that had always brought them comfort before.

Freedom Riders documents one of the most incredible and dangerous protests of the Civil Rights Movement - the Freedom Rides. The film is particularly effective because it not only gives first-hand stories from the Riders themselves, but also shows raw footage of the outrage and violence that permeated the South in response to the. Watching the footage through a modern lens, it can sometimes be difficult to understand how any rational person could oppose such great social progress. Yet if one compares their behavior to their own biases or to ideas or notions that they have dismissed simply for the fact that they may seem radical, the mindset that change is frightening makes perfect sense. One man, who was a young boy during the Movement, recalls the overall sentiment that had tainted the South. He states, "I've got to hate somebody! I've got to hate somebody!" (*Freedom Riders*). Just as Dexter Bower clung so tightly to the only way of life he's known, many Southerners in this time period felt they had a sense of control in keeping things the way they've always been. By doing this, there are no surprises or gimmicks. The future is predictable, and even the worst possible outcomes of a situation can generally be foreseen. For Southerners at the time, desegregation meant loss of stability; it meant that they had to consider a future where things might not so easily match their expectations. To them, the Riders were asking too much because their requests implied that whole communities of people adopt a new societal norm that had never taken place in that part of the country before. They felt the Riders were blatantly demanding that they go the opposite way they knew. Today, we look at the South during the Civil Rights Movement and shake our heads. But it is hardly ever considered that if we were pressured to change our whole mindset after over a century of the same ideologies, we'd feel like we were losing, too, and we'd fight back hard.

I try not to protest so much anymore if people offer me directions, especially around here. They know the area better than I do, but much like Frost's speaker, Dexter, or the reluctant Southerners during the Civil Rights Era, my stomach still gets in knots when people tell me there's a better way to go. I try to put my faith in them, however, even if the Thruway still scares me every time. When I take their advice, I find that the newest routes generally serve me best. Sometimes back home I test out different routes, and when I'm questioned, I

say that this way is better. To this, others may say, "The quickest way is the way you know." It doesn't bother me but doesn't direct me like it did either. To each his own, I suppose. As for me, I'll try out a few different ones since one's bound to be better than the other.

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The writer of this research essay outlines the benefits that refugees bring to host countries, dispelling the concerns and fears commonly raised by the public.

The Plight of Refugees

By Alexander Tran

Dr. Woolbright- The Idea of War

Refugees are displaced persons whose lives have been uprooted in the face of war, persecution, or a natural disaster. In situations like these, one would think that human nature would motivate those who aren't displaced to advocate for the health and safety of these refugees. Unfortunately, a more prevailing aspect of the human psyche, and namely the citizens of European nations and the United States, is fear—fear regarding the possession of one's own belongings and resources. In many people's minds, these resources extend beyond themselves to their own country's wealth and assets which should be treasured and guarded. Unfortunately, this selfish hysteria leads to xenophobia and the fear of people from other nations coming to take away those resources. People tend to focus on the immediate consequences of a decision that only affect them rather than focusing on the results in the long run. In the case of refugees, they actually contribute more to the economy over time than what they initially take away. They contribute positively to the job market and tax revenue of their host nation's government. Despite these benefits, the current administration in America has continued to restrict the entry of refugees to an all-time low. The fear expressed by society towards refugees of war-torn countries is unfounded due to the refugee community's positive impact on the economy, negligible impact on national security, and positive impact on the diversification of culture.

A primary concern for citizens of European countries and America is that once refugees are allowed into a host nation, those refugees will suck up government resources without contributing to the growth of the economy or the productivity of that country. This has resulted in the growth of many far-right political parties across Europe parading an anti-immigration agenda. In the case of Hungary, President Viktor Orban has launched an ultraconservative movement with new policies such as the Soros Law aimed at prosecuting anyone who helps an illegal refugee gain asylum. Laws such as these are the result of hysterical fear from the general populace over the overwhelming number of refugees flowing into Europe. However, research proves the contrary, showing that refugees are in fact beneficial to a nation's economy. According to a study of 15 European countries, "soon after a spike in migration, the overall strength and sustainability of the country's economy improve and unemployment rates drop. Its conclusions contradict the idea that refugees place an excessive financial burden on a country by sucking up public resources" (Maxmen). When the data for each country's annual tax income and fiscal balance to welfare programs were compared, the model supported the fact that economic health increased and unemployment rates dropped. Contrary to popular belief, refugees pay their taxes and obtain employment. They provide services to native citizens and buy products for themselves to use, increasing market demand. These factors prove that refugees are essential to a prosperous economy due to

their positive contributions to the economy and unemployment rate. In another study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, “Researchers determined that the US spends about \$15,000 on relocation costs per refugee and \$92,000 for various benefits. Conversely, the sample group averaged \$130,000 in taxes over this period — a net gain of around \$25,000 for the US government” (McCarthy). The fact that the U.S. government is profiting off of the influx of refugees and yet is trying to stop a vital aspect of cash flow exemplifies the backwardness of our political system and a possible reasoning for why we are \$21 trillion in debt. While refugees initially use social benefits such as food stamps and healthcare, their contributions to the American economy in the long run are indisputable. Allowing a hard-working group of individuals into a struggling economy would boost productivity and strengthen any country’s GDP whether it be in Europe or America. As a result, claims that refugees are financial burdens are groundless due to refugees’ significant positive impact on economic success in host nations.

Regardless of their economic impact, a key factor expressed by the current administration in America is a fear of terrorist attacks from incoming refugees who have not been properly vetted. Presidents such as Donald Trump and Hungary’s Viktor Orban have run their entire campaigns on placing their citizenry first and securing their borders. They claim that refugees are a danger to the general populace and should not be integrated into society. In reality, the danger lies not from within the refugee population but from native citizens themselves. Immigration expert Alex Nowrasteh found that the “annual chance of being murdered by somebody other than a foreign-born terrorist was 252.9 times greater than the chance of dying in a terrorist attack committed by a foreign-born terrorist” (qtd in Friedman). This exemplifies the fact that refugees are not a danger to society when compared with the general citizenry. The claims made by the Trump Administration should instead be directed towards the members of America’s own native-born populace. Ostracizing a population for a problem that we have not even solved among ourselves is blaming others for our own mistakes. Furthermore, President Trump has directly attacked the vetting procedures for refugee admittance, prompting him to impose a ban limiting the number of refugees to 45,000, the lowest amount since 1980. Yet again, his claims are flawed, for according to a study in 2016 by the CATO Institute, “Of the 154 foreign-born terrorists that committed attacks in the United States since 1975, twenty were refugees. Of these attacks, only three proved deadly, and all three took place before 1980, when the Refugee Act created the current screening procedures” (Felter & McBride). This quotation demonstrates that the current procedures are indeed working, contrary to the claims of politicians like President Trump. Refugees are being vetted properly and are not committing acts of terrorism across the nation. Because the vetting procedures in place are sound, the impact on national security by the refugee population is negligible, and thus provides further evidence to prove that refugees are in fact not dangerous to society.

Moreover, the refugee community contributes a priceless amount of cultural knowledge to any nation they emigrate to. Without influence from foreign nations, we would be ignorant of all the diverse qualities and languages that make us distinct as a species. Refugees do not just bring their physical bodies with them to another country; rather, they bring along countless aspects of their culture. Trump has stated that culture is changed by an influx of immigrants. However, culture is always changing due to factors beyond those related to refugees, such as those pertaining to technology or business. Writer Joe McCarthy argues, "In reality, immigrants change culture for the better by introducing new ideas, expertise, customs, cuisines, and art. Far from erasing the existing culture, they expand it" (McCarthy). There is no concrete definition of one country's culture. The influence of refugees works to keep that definition constantly blurred and evolving with the fusion of foreign cultures. By expanding the threshold of what it means to be a citizen of one country, refugees contribute positively to the growth of society. They open our palates to new flavors and bless our ears with new genres of music. To live without the influence of a refugee in one's life would be like living under a rock. Because a refugee's influence is so ubiquitous, the fear of their community is unfounded in today's society. Furthermore, individual refugees have contributed immensely to other aspects of culture such as science and politics. Albert Einstein fled Nazi Germany as a refugee to the United States where his discoveries and theories helped pave the way to the atomic bomb. His contributions to American science would've been for naught had America denied his asylum request as a refugee. Also, Madeleine Albright, a Czech refugee fleeing a communist regime, became the first female Secretary of State in 1997. Her work towards creating a path for women in politics as well as advocating for the cause of refugees has enriched our nation's culture. These are but two individuals whose work has influenced the lives of generations to come. If these individuals had not been given sanctuary, their contributions to the world would've been forever lost. As a result, refugees are essential to the diversification of culture and broadening of knowledge in society.

Some would say that the initial cost to deal with refugees is simply not worth any payout. They claim that countries such as America or Hungary have no need for improved cultural diversity because a current system already exists. This may be due to the large volume of refugees that flooded Europe as a result of the Syrian Civil War. The initial influx of refugees was so great that critics believe that no amount of money could make supporting the refugee community beneficial to their own nation. However, these claims are shortsighted and do not encompass the long-term picture. While initially taking care of refugees does require funding, ultimately refugees create more funding for their host countries than what they initially cost them. It is analogous to a business deal, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development explains, where "the assistance they received when they arrived was, in purely monetary terms, an investment with a positive return" (Clemens). The ability of refugees to integrate into the labor market and create revenue gives an economic advantage to countries that accept refugees. By investing in the refugee community, a country would be poised

to make a profitable outcome. Economics aside, refugees are human beings who just need another chance at life. The United States is a country built on the backs of immigrants and refugees. From the transcontinental railroad to the high rises of New York City, no one nationality is responsible for building America as it is today. American culture has no concrete definition, as it is always evolving and growing with an influx of people from various cultures. It is hypocritical of us as Americans to deny refugees the right to a second chance at life when we brag about the success of the American Dream. To deny refugees the right to come to our nation is to deny the very values that our nation was founded upon. As a result, the economic and cultural points brought into focus by critics are unwarranted due to the refugee's positive impact on the economy and culture.

The roles that refugees play in nations around the world are integral to the functioning of society. Representing a hardworking class of people, refugees have proven time and time again that they are able to succeed financially and contribute productively to a nation's economy. Beyond economic issues, refugees have shown themselves to not be dangerous to the national security because they are focused on settling down and obtaining jobs rather than committing terrorist attacks as the Trump Administration would claim. The refugee community's impact on cultural diversity is priceless as they lend their language, food, and traditions towards the betterment and improvement of society. Above all, a refugee is no less a human than a native citizen standing beside them and should not be treated as less than that. If we continue to restrict refugees, we debase the very values our nation was founded upon and lose credibility towards our de facto nickname as the land of the free.

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