



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

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Cover Image: Sculpture of St. Francis near San Damiano on Monte Subasio, Assisi, Italy  
Photograph taken by Anne Glynn, January 2024

*Gleanings: A Journal of First-Year Student Writing*  
Siena College

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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 during the 2023 – 2024 academic year.

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

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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

While 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, and the integrity of the assignments when compiling this journal.

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*The author of this Nature Unit essay explores the nuances of ecofeminism to develop a “so that” argument in favor of vegetarianism.*

## A Violent Diet: An Ecofeminist’s Relationship With Food

By Juliana Bellini

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

Many stand up for the environment and for the things that cannot speak up for themselves, especially animals, and traditionally, women have especially displayed this kind of empathy toward the natural world. Since women tend to be more empathetic than men towards animals, they often display a deeper connection with the environment and have a higher rate of becoming plant based, or vegetarian. Through ecofeminism, they developed that connection even further, by bringing light to the importance of fostering an equilibrium between humans and the world around them. They educate the world about the shared exploitation of women and nature with an end goal of preventing further distress for them both. Ecofeminists understand the importance of fostering a humane connection with the other species they share a planet with so they advocate for them. However, many of them still indulge in the typical American diet involving a substantial consumption of meat. This is far from humane and ultimately supports the slaughter of animals and thus they are, in fact, exploiting the natural world for their own benefit, something ecofeminists pledge not to do. Vegetarianism is a way to respect the environment as well as understand humanity’s connection to it. The simple act of considering their dietary impacts will provide clarity to their moral ambiguity. As a result, it will give ecofeminists the opportunity to model behavior they wish to see, ultimately increasing their societal influence as it allows them to become more reputable and thus much more effective activists.

Ecofeminism and vegetarianism should coincide. The two ideologies are typically carried out by women who advocate for the environment in general and animals in particular. They compliment each other tremendously, yet many ecofeminists fail to practice vegetarianism. They understand the importance of fighting for the environment and the animals that reside within it, but do not reflect on the impact their dietary choices have. Some may say that vegetarianism is not sustainable for everyone and that is a valid argument. However, opposers need to acknowledge that no one is saying that ecofeminists have to completely give up animal products. Rather, they need to understand that by completely ignoring their diet, they are feeding into hypocrisy. Environmental advocates cannot afford to be hypocrites because that is how they lose support both from outside as well as within the environmental movement. Exemplifying the consequences of hypocrisy, environmentalist Jen Gilbert wrote an open letter addressing the Sierra Club for its hypocritical environmentalism. In resigning her membership from the organization, Gilbert angrily asked, “what was the point of the Sierra Club fighting hard to save all living creatures” if they were just going to destroy the habitats

they live in anyway?” There is no point in advocating for animals if ecofeminists do not acknowledge their own hypocrisy. If they are still participating in the typical American consumption of meat, they cannot claim to support the rights of animals. When any advocate does not extensively research the subjects they are fighting for, they come off as ignorant and unreliable. Having made a conscious decision to not eat meat, vegetarians tend to be extremely knowledgeable about their lifestyle and share many of the same beliefs as ecofeminists. However, if ecofeminists ignore the dietary aspects involved in environmental advocacy, they will eventually lose the support of those vegetarians and achieve a reputation of hiding behind a green facade. The backlash they would receive will undercut all the progress they have tirelessly worked to attain.

Men commonly display a sense of disconnect between themselves and the natural world, and when ecofeminists do not even contemplate adopting a vegetarian diet, they are exhibiting similar behavior. Men frequently perceive themselves as above the environment, as they often take advantage of the animals that they share the planet with through hunting both for food and sport, as well as traditionally being the ones to raise livestock in inhumane conditions, ignoring the necessity of developing a harmonious relationship with the natural world. In *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, environmentalist Terry Tempest Williams discusses how “many men have forgotten what they are connected to” and the “subjugation of women and nature may be a loss of intimacy within themselves” (qtd. in Williams 10). Most women are aware of the fact that they are more empathetic than men when it comes to nature. Additionally, they also recognize that those same men will often view both them and nature as weak. Rather than letting this idea put them down, they were able to develop an even stronger interconnection, birthing ecofeminism. Ecofeminists understand the importance of balance in the connection between humanity and the environment; however, they are missing something critical. When people advocate for the environment, they must look at every element that goes with it, including the consumption of animals. Many ecofeminists advocate for animals but mindlessly partake in the same consumption of them as any other non-advocate. Everyone knows when they are eating animals, but most do not think anything more about it; for ecofeminists, this is antithetical to their core beliefs and they must realize this. When they do not, it demonstrates hypocrisy since they are not fully respecting the environment as much as they claim, tainting their image as reputable role models.

The intimate connection between nature and women leads ecofeminists to advocate for animals, but they must take the next step and seriously consider reducing or eliminating their consumption of meat. In the words of Pulitzer-prize winning memoirist Annie Dillard, humans “must speak up for the creation” (269). The animals do not have the ability to speak up for themselves. Many women thoroughly grasp this concept and take it to another level by becoming vegetarian. They take a moment to reflect upon their dietary decisions and determine how they are affecting the world around them. This simple decision can have all the more

impact as it advances the intimacy of the relationship between women and the natural world. In *Refuge*, Williams made the point that humanity's "attachment to the land was" their "attachment to each other" (15). If humans do not protect their connection with the world around them, then they are not connected with themselves. When they are not connected with themselves, they often will not care about what happens to the environment, which is why ecofeminism is so important to follow. When enhanced through the principles of vegetarianism, ecofeminists can amplify their voices and be heard. Although there are some who will say that there is no difference between human consumption of animals and animals hunting for survival since it is just the circle of life, this is not the same situation because people can make other conscious choices about their diet. Dillard, for one, claimed to "have thought a great deal about carnivorousness" and although she ultimately decided against vegetarianism, at least she displays a deeper level of empathy with the natural world because she has taken the time and made the effort to mull over the subject ("The Deer at Providencia" 64). It does not take much to become more aware of the impact of one's dietary decisions and this is something ecofeminists should do to increase their level of empathy towards the environment and ultimately help them attain a much more enlightened perspective.

The importance of developing an enlightened perspective through an open mind allows environmental advocates to be truly heard and this issue is magnified for ecofeminists who are speaking up for both nature and women. Through contemplating the vegetarian lifestyle ecofeminists will amplify their voices and have much stronger arguments. The decision to go plant based is not sustainable for everyone; however, it is important to at least acknowledge that a high indulgence in meat is not sustainable either. Despite the struggles to feed an ever-increasing population, people do not take the time to think through their dietary impacts and instead remain ignorant. Conservationist Rachel Carson, whose book, *Silent Spring*, is credited with kicking off the modern environmental movement, commented on people's lack of awareness in pointing out that "much of the necessary knowledge is now available but" humanity does "not use it" (11). People have become desensitized to thinking about their food consumption and its sourcing because mankind fails to recognize that humanity and nature are interrelated. Thus, people do not fully grasp that when one is exploited, the other is directly impacted. Ecofeminists say they realize this, but many fail to open their minds up to plant-based dietary options. They must learn to overcome this hypocrisy in order to be impactful role models for society. Only then can the world begin to develop into something greater.

Women's empathetic nature and their capacity to empower not only themselves, but also the environment, is an excellent source of connection. Although they take this bond even further through ecofeminism, they still have a long way to go. A small step in the right direction would be for ecofeminists to reconsider and reflect upon their dietary habits. In order to free themselves from hypocrisy, they must fully

take into account the influence they have. Only then can they become the role models they aspire to be and enlighten humanity to the divine connection between themselves and the natural world.

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*For this event paper, the author considers the overall message of the SienaFest Concert and how it reflects the College's commitment to Franciscan values*

## Harmony and Unity: The Transformative Power of SienaFest Concert

By Sarah Beshay

Dr. Haas- Music: The Soundtrack of Our Lives

The SienaFest Concert, held annually at Siena College, is not just an event, it is a culmination of rhythm, melody, and unity that reverberates across the campus. This spring, as the academic year drew to a close and the stress of finals loomed large, students eagerly anticipated this grand musical event. The stage was set with performances by Jay Sean, B.o.B, and Sage The Gemini, turning the campus into a pulsating hub of excitement and energy. As the sun began to set on the day of the concert, students clothed in vibrant outfits flooded the Marcelle Athletic Complex, their anticipation palpable in the air. The beats of the music were like a magnet, drawing everyone together regardless of their differences. It was not just a concert; it was a celebration of the diverse community that makes Siena College unique. This year's lineup brought sensational performances, but also echoed Siena's Franciscan commitment to diversity and inclusivity by showcasing artists of color. In doing so, the concert served as entertainment as well as a platform for representation and empowerment.

Jay Sean's soulful melodies, B.o.B's infectious beats, and Sage The Gemini's electrifying stage presence transformed the venue into a melting pot of rhythm and emotion. Hits like "Down," "Airplanes," and "Gas Pedal" served as a soundtrack to the collective experience, drawing cheers and applause from the crowd. But beyond the music, the SienaFest Concert served as a catalyst for unity amongst the student body. Many of the songs evoked a sense of nostalgia because they were released in the 2010s, which was a childhood era for most of the students attending this concert. The songs teleported the students to a time when many were carefree and happy, instilling liveliness in the audience. As classmates danced and sang along to the familiar tunes, barriers dissolved, and bonds were strengthened. It was a moment of respite from the pressures of academic life, a chance for students to unwind and destress before facing their final exams. Through the nostalgic 2010s performance, the concert served as a platform of unity as artists were being rediscovered by the student body.

The decision to feature artists of color like Jay Sean, B.o.B, and Sage The Gemini at the SienaFest Concert not only showcased their immense talent, but also reflected a broader movement towards inclusivity and representation both on the Siena campus and in the music industry. Featuring top artists of color from the 2010s induced many students to rediscover their music on streaming platforms, giving the songs of these artists a second life, where they are enjoyed in a new time. In a landscape where major record labels have often been criticized for perpetuating racial stereotypes, this concert served as a powerful rebuttal, demonstrating that

artists of color have a significant impact on popular culture as many of them create songs that become top hits and are listened to and enjoyed many years after their release. A UCLA-led study delved into the content of hip hop lyrics, revealing that positive messages, which promote constructive social values and uplift communities, are incredibly popular with fans (Wolf). This finding challenges the notion that music must conform to narrow stereotypes to be commercially successful. Jessica Wolf, author of the study, explains that “the big record labels often overlook what researchers call ‘pro-social’ themes.”<sup>1</sup> One of the top tracks of the night was “Both of Us” by B.o.B featuring Taylor Swift. This song touches on dreams and struggles, highlighting themes of poverty and social inequality, urging the audience to take action. By featuring artists who not only entertain, but also convey meaningful messages through their music, the SienaFest Concert exemplified the power of representation to break down barriers and foster unity. It sends a clear message that diversity is not just about tokenism, but about recognizing and celebrating the myriad voices and experiences within society.

In choosing to elevate these artists of color, Siena College not only provided an incredible musical experience for its students, but also took a stand against the perpetuation of racial stereotypes in the music industry. Artists of color bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the forefront of the music scene. By featuring musicians like Jay Sean, B.o.B, and Sage Gemini, Siena College celebrates the rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds that contribute to the vibrancy of the arts. This representation allows students from diverse backgrounds to see themselves reflected on stage, fostering a sense of belonging and validation, further empowering the student audience to chase their dreams regardless of societal norms. It also educates and exposes all students to a wider array of musical styles and cultural narratives, enriching their overall college experience. As fans danced and sang along to the performances, they not only enjoyed the beats, but also absorbed the positive messages embedded within the lyrics. It is a testament to the transformative power of music and the importance of promoting artists who use their platform to uplift, empower, and inspire.

As the night drew to a close and the echoes of the final encore faded away, students departed with a renewed sense of camaraderie and pride in the Siena community. The concert provided a much-needed break from the rigors of academia, reminding everyone of the importance of balance and finding joy in their lives. For a few hours, students were able to set aside their textbooks, deadlines, and differences to simply enjoy the music and community surrounding them. The SienaFest Concert provided an unforgettable musical experience and reaffirmed the values of unity, inclusivity, and solidarity that define the Franciscan spirit of Siena College.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Wolf, “Are Major Record Labels Passing up Profits by Playing into Racial Stereotypes?” UCLA Newsroom, University of California, Los Angeles, July 10, 2017, accessed April 23, 2024, <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/are-major-record-labels-passing-up-profits-by-playing-into-racial-stereotypes>.

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*In this essay, the author discusses a controversial topic and in doing so, skillfully acknowledges and overcomes the naysayer.*

## What It Really Means to Remove a Historic Monument

**By Elena Borrero**

Dr. Stein- Out of Bounds

There are conflicting opinions about the purpose of historic statues and thus controversy over their removal. When news outlets cover the removal of such statues, it is very clear which stations favor such action and which do not and so information is presented to the viewer from a rather slanted view. To become fully informed about this topic, then, people must seek out information on their own, which they are not necessarily inclined to do. Moreover, because this is such a highly polarized topic, even if people seek to become better informed, the information gained from biased internet sources can be suspect as well. The hard truth is that some historic statues were once used to instill fear and demonstrate the power that some had over others. It is clear that these monuments continue to promote racism, something that American society claims it no longer supports. Allowing these monuments to stand indicates that America is not, in fact, supporting equality. Throughout the past five to ten years, the removal of historic statues has gained popularity in the United States. It offers a way to address historical issues and promote equality. Although frequently criticized for being a way to censor and potentially forget American history, the truth is that the American society as a whole cannot move toward equality without seeking ways to understand and not celebrate periods of American history when racism was once so heavily favored.

It is important to first understand that removing historical monuments is not a means to censor, judge, or erase history. In fact, the opposite is true: allowing the monuments to stand demonstrates a misguided view of history and promotes an ideology America no longer supports. In her 2021 article about the removal of historic statues, *New York Times* reporter Laura Zornosa discussed the decision of the New York City Public Design Commission to take down the Theodore Roosevelt monument in front of the Museum of Natural History due to its display of his visible dominance and authority over the Native American and African figures in the monument. New York City Parks Department representative Sam Biederman explained that although the monument “was not erected with malice of intent,” it had to be removed because it “supports a thematic framework of colonization and racism” that the museum in particular, and America in general, no longer promotes (as cited in Zornosa, 2021, par. 7). Over time, the meaning of monuments like this one has shifted. Where it was once seen as celebrating America’s past, it can now be considered hurtful because it reinforces racist ideas. There is nothing wrong with honoring historical figures, but doing so should not reinforce ideas that are out of step with America’s investment in pursuing equality. This monument— like many others— reflects

an ideology that is a part of American history, but one that many people today do not agree with. Zornosa stressed how it is not the Commission's wish to change, renounce, or erase history by removing the monument from the front of the museum. It is meant to show the public that America no longer stands for the overall message it is promoting.

The debate about whether to remove such statues has been ongoing for almost a decade, and more often than not, historians come to the conclusion that a majority of these monuments represent historical figures who once supported white supremacy and racism. Even though not all monuments were built to convey a negative message, a number of historians have noted that from 1830 on, a majority of monuments in the South and even several in the North were built as a way to institutionalize racism, and hold control over people (Robertson, 2020). Many people argue that they are intolerable reminders of history that are painful to look at (Wright, 2019). The past includes people and events that are honorable and others that are horrifying (De Witte, 2020). This is why it is imperative to understand historical context. If we do not understand the historical context, we run the risk of incidentally promoting ideals we no longer hold. This is particularly evident through the Confederate monument that was once on the campus of the University of Alabama as this monument was meant to commemorate slave owners and proponents of white supremacy. Removing the monuments is a step in the right direction and creates the understanding that as a Nation, America should not celebrate anything that prompts intolerance or racism.

In 2020, 168 out of 2,100 public monuments were removed, but many of these removals were the result of protestors taking matters into their own hands due to the fact that they felt unheard by political officials (Diaz & Ortiz, 2020; Treisman, 2021). Although removing the monuments should be brought about with proper approval, the protestors' actions nevertheless convey a message that Americans want to move forward to a world where everyone is equal. Since then, the number of monument removals has continued to increase, particularly after the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement was launched. This trend coincides with the passage of the Confederate Monument Removal Act, which includes stipulations meant to help better gauge all historical facts as well as the overall message the monuments convey in order to ensure the most logical method of removal for offending monuments. This new law also makes it harder for BLM protestors as well as pro-Confederate groups to remove monuments without the proper research first.

In response to this recently passed 2022 law, a federal judge approved the removal of a Confederate memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, one of the first monuments to be removed from a military facility (A. Ortiz, 2023). The judge noted that this monument in particular created a sense of discomfort for the families of fallen soldiers who were laid to rest there. The removal of this monument is also a part of a military-wide effort to remove Confederate symbols from ships, bases, and other military facilities (A. Ortiz, 2023). Since

September 2021, the military has either removed or relocated 73 Confederate monuments (Rhoden & Dalila, 2022). It has come to many state officials' attention that the removal of these monuments can be truly beneficial to society because the message that many of these statues convey are rooted in racism, which is no longer widely supported in America.

Some people argue that the removal of these monuments is not right or fair. This leads them to question where these monuments are being placed after the removal. They claim that hiding monuments away from the public is a way to censor or forget America's history. What they do not realize is that the placement of these monuments is carefully considered so that they can be understood without promoting ideologies America no longer supports. Often, they are accepted by museums and local historical societies in order to be displayed with the proper historical context. This can be seen with the Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart statue, which is currently in Virginia's historical storage and is not able to be viewed by the public until a proper place that can provide historical context is found. Another prime example of this is the Robert E. Lee monument, which is temporarily on display at a local Virginian museum. When visiting the museum visitors can be properly educated about the monument and its history with the help of museum officials and descriptions displayed next to the monument. (E. Ortiz, 2020). However, no proper place has yet been found for the Silent Sam monument, a bronze statue of a Confederate soldier made by a Canadian sculptor, John A. Wilson, which was originally located in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It was supposed to be taken down and handed over to a Confederate group, but a judge ruled that the group lacked the proper judgment to take it into their custody. The monument's current status remains a closely guarded secret and has not been released to the public (E. Ortiz, 2020). While some argue that this is an attempt to erase history, many protesters believed that the statue portrayed efforts by the United Daughters of the Confederacy to change Civil War history, which was a key reason for its removal (Killgrove, 2018). Furthermore, many residents said that the removal of the Silent Sam monument along with the removal of the Screven County Confederate Dead Monument in Sylvania, Georgia, is a symbol of progress toward a more inclusive community. The removal of such monuments as a result of the Confederate Monument Removal Act highlights the importance of responding to the people's wishes to advance a more fair and equal society for all people. The removal of these monuments is not to forget America's past, but to create a better future for all people by avoiding displays that in any way promote racism.

The passage of the Confederate Monument Removal Act indicates that America will not allow statues that promote racism to continue to stand as this is a violation of the nation's desire to move forward toward equality. It is important to understand the reasoning behind these removals in order to move forward with a more equal society. Many of these monuments provide Americans with an understanding of what was once

considered acceptable representations of history in our society, but they now represent an ideology American society no longer supports. Continuing to ignore the true meaning of these monuments will only further divide our country. These monuments should be removed. Encouraging the removal of such historic statues and relocating them for display only where proper historical context is provided will directly contribute to the societal advancement of America and the downfall of ideologies that are no longer supported. America's investment should be a promise to move forwards with history without fully forgetting our past.

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*This research paper analyzes both popular and scholarly sources. It showcases many of the writing structures explained in They Say/ I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing, including the development of a clear I Say argument focused on the “so what” and addressing the naysayer.*

## Implementing Artificial Intelligence into Mental Health Therapy

By Alexander Farabaugh

Dr. Liptak- Trauma Narratives

In today’s ever-changing world, mental health problems are increasingly becoming a major concern. More than one in five adults in the United States suffer from mental health illness (Duszynski-Goodman). Each mental illness manifests itself distinctly, including a wide array of symptoms, triggers, and effects on patients’ lives. With such a variety of presentations, it is critical to recognize that each condition requires a tailored approach to diagnosis, treatment, and support. Amidst these challenges, new artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have emerged with the potential to provide promising solutions. With its ability to provide individualized insights and analyze large amounts of data, AI can better personalize treatment, enhance the diagnostic process, and improve the accessibility of therapy. Therefore, using AI must be embraced by apprehensive healthcare practitioners and skeptical patients to supplement existing mental health treatment. This transition should be facilitated through pre-consultation workshops conducted by an AI specialist in order to ease patients’ concerns regarding the effectiveness and privacy of novel AI technologies.

Even though it is becoming increasingly widespread, there is a considerable degree of unfamiliarity regarding artificial intelligence. AI is a broad field of computer science focusing on systems that perform tasks that typically require intelligent problem solving (Malgaroli and Schultebrucks 273). These systems are programmed to process extensive amounts of data and recognize patterns, which is advantageous for large-scale data analysis. With available online models like ChatGPT, a vast set of online data from internet sources is synthesized to generate a text result. Similarly, AI models can process large amounts of patient data in a clinical setting. Machine learning (ML), a subset of AI, can learn rules from data sets and identify patterns without explicit programming (Malgaroli and Schultebrucks 273). These models are especially useful in making decisions based on available data, which can improve the diagnostic process in healthcare. Other AI systems are able to process language, referred to as Natural Language Processing (NLP). ChatGPT uses an NLP model to understand and generate human text, and similar clinical models can use this technology to communicate with patients. With so many advanced functions, these various AI systems have the power to drastically improve patient outcomes for those with mental health conditions.

AI can allow therapists to overcome the challenge of treating unique mental health conditions by assisting in personalizing therapy and treatment. Mental health conditions are complex and multifaceted, with

636,120 different combinations of symptoms composing diagnostic criteria (Malgaroli and Schultebrucks 272). In light of this heterogeneity across mental health disorders, a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment simply cannot address the unique nuances of a patient's condition. This is a major problem across mental healthcare, as most patients can recall a clinical experience that seemed ineffective or impersonal. Instead, treatment must be tailored to the individual patient in order to ensure the best possible outcome. However, it can be difficult for therapists to identify which therapeutic techniques are most effective at treating a patient with a specific condition due to their individualized symptoms. According to Andy Blackwell, the Group Chief Science and Strategy Officer at IESO Digital Health in Cambridge, UK, AI computational technology can offer the solution through its ability to micro analyze the "content of therapy, even down to the level of individual words used by the therapists" (Blackwell 11:10). This means that specific techniques used during a therapy session can be identified by AI. Blackwell goes on to explain that after the session, patients report on the frequency of their symptoms, allowing therapists to correlate patient improvement with specific therapeutic techniques. This enables therapists to pinpoint the most effective techniques, which will be reused in subsequent therapy sessions to deliver personalized care. The analysis of therapy by AI can significantly improve patient outcomes by allowing mental health practitioners to deliver more individualized therapy with specific therapeutic techniques.

The heterogeneity of mental health disorders also complicates diagnosis, and AI systems could assist professionals in identifying specific mental health conditions. With so many combinations of symptoms constituting a wide variety of mental health conditions, it can be difficult to accurately diagnose a patient's disorder. This failure to properly diagnose a patient can lead to an ineffective treatment plan, resulting in a worse patient outcome. However, due to their ability to analyze large amounts of patient data, AI models can assist mental health professionals in diagnosing patients. One such model is CADSS, or computer-aided decision support system, which processes a patient's background data and identifies patterns that could indicate a possible disorder. The model uses routinely collectible patient data, such as the patient's sex, age, symptoms, and medical history. In a trial study, CADSS was able to predict post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in sex abuse victims with 99.2% accuracy (Ucuz et al. 82). This striking accuracy suggests that CADSS can effectively assist mental health professionals in patient diagnosis. A potential risk of CADSS, however, is that physicians will solely rely on AI systems for diagnosing patients, which could lead to inaccurate diagnoses because these models cannot account for the variance of human emotion. Emotional symptoms and behavioral cues are critical to identifying many mental health conditions, so they must be accounted for during the diagnostic process. Thus, CADSS must be coupled with the expertise of mental health professionals in the clinical setting. This ensures that AI diagnosis systems would supplement physicians instead of replacing them,

allowing for the consideration of human emotion, a crucial aspect of mental healthcare. Because there are so many struggles associated with heterogeneity in mental health, the implementation of CADSS can limit inaccurate mental health diagnoses by helping to inform a physician's diagnosis.

Another challenge in mental healthcare is the lack of accessibility to therapy. Gale Lucas, a psychology researcher at the University of South Carolina, reported that "There is a shortage of human therapists and they're not available 24/7" (Muller). Many mental health conditions plague patients continuously, and this is particularly concerning because therapy is often not immediately available. Unlike many physical conditions that are only present during certain situations, activities, or times of day, mental health conditions can relentlessly impact many facets of a person's life and health. This includes social life, physical health, and emotional stability. Thus, it is paramount to always have therapy available for all patients, regardless of the time of day or their location. Lucas also expressed that therapy is "not available in remote places" (Muller). In many rural areas, the demand for mental healthcare is unmet because there are significantly fewer mental health professionals available. Sparse populations and reduced healthcare infrastructure is not suitable to attract healthcare workers, leading to a shortage of available therapists. As a result, rural residents must travel long distances to access mental healthcare and often forego treatment altogether. Remote therapy must be made readily available to mitigate these issues, and language- processing AI models could offer the solution in the form of AI chatbots. One of the NLP-powered chatbots currently available is Woebot. Bernard Marr, a *Forbes* columnist and best selling author of *Generative AI in Practice: 100+ Amazing Ways Generative Artificial Intelligence is Changing Business and Society*, affirms that Woebot "learns to adapt to its users' personalities and is capable of talking them through a number of therapies" (Marr). These chatbots are advantageous because they are available to patients 24/7 at any location, even where there could be a shortage of therapists. If made available to patients in rural locations, AI chatbots could address the pressing demand for mental health treatment. Furthermore, many patients are hesitant to access mental healthcare because of the shame associated with presenting their troubles and insecurities to another person. Receiving therapy from an AI chatbot could alleviate this shame, allowing a person to access therapy in a more comfortable manner. In many distinct ways, the emergence of AI chatbots, such as Woebot, can increase accessibility of mental healthcare by providing remote therapy.

Accessibility can be further improved through another new technology: AI-driven wearables. Digital health devices are already integrated into healthcare, as it is not uncommon to see insulin pumps or glucose monitors worn by those with diabetes. A similar concept can be applied to mental health patients through the use of AI-driven wearables. Mental health conditions can be characterized by abnormal speech, actions, and behaviors, which can be recognized by these digital wearables (Malgaroli and Schultebrucks 277). This means

that AI-driven wearables can analyze patients' everyday behavior patterns, allowing for close monitoring of mental health symptoms. If abnormal behavior is detected by the AI system, it can inform a mental health professional, providing healthcare practitioners with an unprecedented oversight of a patient's mental health status. Constant tracking of a patient's symptoms allows the medical team to gain a better understanding of the patient's condition, which could lead to more effective treatment. A potential challenge with this new digital technology could be sifting through the continuous stream of meaningless activity for behaviors that are pertinent to mental health conditions (Margaroli and Schultebrucks 277). Over time, however, machine learning systems will be able to identify the specific, minute behaviors that are indicative of mental health disorders. Tracking mental health symptoms outside of the clinical setting is difficult, but can be made more accessible to practitioners through AI-driven wearables for patients.

Despite the potential benefits of implementing AI systems into mental healthcare, many are wary of possible risks surrounding AI. A study conducted by Pew Research Center found that "60% of Americans would feel uncomfortable with their provider relying on AI in their own health care" (Tyson et al.). There are certainly legitimate reasons for this skepticism, particularly in regards to patient confidentiality. Large amounts of patient data are needed for the AI-driven data analysis systems to function effectively. This introduces the fear that patient data will be misused or exposed. However, if professionals are transparent with patients and appropriate security measures are taken, people can be confident that their data is secure. Patient data is already securely stored in medical portals and electronic health records across hospital systems worldwide, so it is certainly possible to safely protect patient data for AI analysis. Naturally, people tend to be wary of change, but if informed about the potential benefits, people should favor the transition to AI in mental healthcare. Risks associated with AI undoubtedly exist, but if implemented appropriately into existing clinical settings, many of the risks can be mitigated.

Artificial intelligence can be smoothly implemented into mental healthcare through the use of pre-consultation workshops. Studies have shown that pre-consultation workshops increase patient knowledge, leading them to be more receptive to treatment plans (Platt et al. 2). In the mental health field, pre-consultation workshops would inform patients about the use of artificial intelligence in their care through the mediation of an AI specialist. This AI specialist would be trained by the technology company but would spend most of their time working in the clinical setting with health professionals and patients. In pre-consultation workshops, the AI specialist would present the benefits of using AI in mental health treatment to patients and ease any concerns pertaining to confidentiality. This presentation would emphasize the effectiveness of AI, including statistics regarding how it has accurately diagnosed and improved treatment of symptoms. Additionally, the workshop would briefly explain how AI systems work to process and analyze data, allowing the

patient to make a more informed decision about whether or not to include AI in the treatment of their mental health condition. This process would be very transparent, so that patients can comfortably consent to providing their data for AI analysis. A potential risk with pre-consultation workshops is that they could deter patients because of the inconvenience of attending the workshop. However, pre-consultation workshops are already an integral part of modern medicine, as they promote patient education, foster trust, and establish communication with healthcare professionals. These values are especially applicable to AI workshops, due to the significant amount of uncertainty with mental health conditions. To further minimize inconvenience, these AI workshops can be offered online. Implementing artificial intelligence into mental healthcare can be convenient and valuable for patients if pre-consultation workshops guided by an AI specialist are instituted.

Another responsibility of the AI specialist entails handling any technical issues with the AI-driven systems. This method of implementation would minimize the amount of training that existing medical professionals would have to undergo, making it very practical and easily applicable. In the future, however, AI should be included in the curriculum in medical school education. A survey of medical schools reported that medical students and faculty report limited AI literacy but are interested in learning about AI (Wood et al. 4). By understanding the capabilities and limitations of AI models, mental health providers can harness this technology to personalize mental health treatment, enhance clinical decision-making, and improve accessibility of therapy. Furthermore, AI education enables healthcare professionals to critically evaluate AI systems, ensuring their safe and effective integration into clinical practice. Overall, pre-consultation workshops guided by an AI specialist along with education about AI will allow for a smooth implementation of AI into mental healthcare.

Artificial intelligence is a burgeoning field that has the power to revolutionize the current landscape of mental healthcare. Advanced machine learning and natural language processing models have the computing power to optimize therapy and diagnosis. Through microanalysis of therapy sessions, treatment of mental health conditions can be personalized. CADSS can provide accurate diagnoses through the large-scale analysis of patient data. Patients could receive therapy anytime from any location through remote therapy offered by AI chatbots. Data on patient symptoms can be collected around the clock to identify changes in their mental health condition. These advancements are not merely baseless speculation; indeed, they are quickly becoming available for many patients. Soon, these artificial intelligence systems will undergo widespread implementation into clinical settings, and this process could be streamlined through the use of pre-consultation workshops and AI specialists. The aforementioned advancements of artificial intelligence are merely the beginning, as further innovations will benefit mental health patients in unforeseen and profound ways. The future of mental

healthcare is bright, and artificial intelligence will illuminate pathways to mental wellness and recovery that were previously unimaginable.

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*Using Paul Kalanithi's When Breath Becomes Air, the required summer reading text, and two supporting outside sources, the writer of this essay argues that storytelling plays a vital role in the healthcare field.*

## The Power of Stories in Medicine

By Connor Fourman

Prof. Collins- Environmental Storytelling

It is hard to argue against the power of a story-- its ability to evoke emotion, spread information, teach a lesson, or even just entertain. Stories are powerful; that much is undeniable. Equally undeniable is the healing power that stories hold. The process of telling or hearing a story can be incredibly therapeutic for all those involved, giving them a sense of community, understanding, or perspective that they previously lacked. This is especially important in the field of medicine, where storytelling gives both the doctor and patient a much needed connection, allowing the patient to feel seen and heard and the doctor to truly understand not only what they are treating and how, but who they are caring for. The power that an individual narrative holds-- that ability to garner empathy, create connection, and aid healing-- should be the foundation of the healthcare field; without this power, true healing is impossible.

Stories-- related to healthcare or otherwise-- have an innate ability to garner empathy and create connection in a way that mere facts, figures, and logic cannot. The spread of viral stories and videos online is a perfect example of this: the way that these individual stories can bring attention to an issue and hit harder than the more broad numbers can is evident. Hearing about the war in Ukraine, including the number of deaths and details about the complete turmoil the country is facing is of course tragic. However, these statements do not have as strong of an impact as the more intimate and specific story of a father having to leave his family in order to fight to protect them-- a personal, explicit example of the sort of pain, suffering, and sacrifice that the war brings (Mineo). Individual stories have the power to turn indifference into concern and empathy, which is invaluable to bringing about action, change, and healing. There exists a phenomenon that renowned psychologist Paul Slovic dubbed "psychic numbing" in which, as Harvard Medical alumnus Neal Baer summarizes it, "most people might care about the suffering of a single person, [but] they may become indifferent to the plight of many" (qtd. in Mineo 3). As bizarre as it may sound considering their line of work, a similar feeling of indifference and apathy towards suffering is often felt by healthcare workers.

Burnout and loss of empathy for those working in the medical field is incredibly common due to the weight of their responsibilities plus their incredible workload, which prevents them from really hearing their patients' stories and forming the connections needed to truly care for them on a deeper, less superficial level. According to Chief Medical Officer Elaine Cox, MD, satisfaction surveys have revealed that patients often feel

dissatisfied and disappointed with the care they received, believing that their provider did not have the time to truly address what was important to them. These feelings are entirely valid and often shared by the doctors themselves, who are just so overwhelmed with work that they struggle to give their patients the attention they need and deserve. Paul Kalanithi, a neuroscientist and author, described multiple instances of this in his memoir *When Breath Becomes Air*. He describes one incident where a patient recently diagnosed with brain cancer sought out his comfort and expertise in her moment of terror and confusion. However, as Kalanithi writes, “I was exhausted, disconnected. I rushed through her questions, assured her that surgery would be a success, and assured myself that there wasn’t enough time to answer her questions fairly. *But why didn’t I make the time?*” (84-85). This sort of situation where the patient is treated as just another task that needs to be taken care of as soon as possible so the next person can be seen leaves both patient and doctor feeling dissatisfied, both knowing that more could— and should— have been done. Despite repeating this experience numerous times throughout his career, Kalanithi did not recognize this unfortunate pattern of behavior until he was a patient himself, forcing him to take on the opposing perspective.

By spending time getting to know the patient and connecting with them, this issue can be avoided. Kalanithi describes another surgeon’s approach to informing a family about their child needing brain surgery, claiming that “he not only delivered the clinical facts but addressed the human facts as well, acknowledging the tragedy of the situation and providing guidance” (69). This more empathetic approach, where the patient’s experiences, both present and future, are acknowledged, is far more effective at preparing patients and their families for the trials ahead. This, in turn, strengthens the trust the patient has in the doctor and lessens the emotional and mental burden on all those involved, paving the way for a smoother experience and ultimate recovery. As Cox notes, this sort of connection can serve to address the burnout that healthcare workers suffer and, in turn, revive their empathy. Kalanithi demonstrated that it can be easy to view patients as no more than another pile of paperwork rather than people with their own stories, but by learning about their patients’ experiences and perspectives, healthcare workers can remind themselves of their patients’ individuality and humanity (73). Without this reminder, the emotional and mental needs of the patient could be left unaddressed, leaving them feeling confused and ignored, their ailments addressed at only the most surface level.

Taking the time to listen to each other and address concerns fosters the patient-doctor relationship into what it is meant to be: a connection that aids healing. This connection cannot be made without sharing stories, whether they be one’s own or those of others, which is what makes storytelling so intrinsically valuable to the medical field. Patients desire to feel heard and seen while doctors desire to understand and heal; with stories, these desires become reality.

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*This research paper examines the physical, psychological, and monetary costs of playing one sport year-round at a young age.*

*A variety of sources on each of these risks were utilized to support the author's argument.*

## Navigating Youth Sports: The Dangers of Early Specialization

By Josie Hayes

Dr. Larkin- Sports, Politics, & Society

A part of growing up is learning to adapt to new environments. Kids navigate many developmental stages that involve them becoming increasingly independent and learning to work with others while dealing with new challenges. Playing sports allows kids to experience various emotions and learn how to listen to others while developing physical and cognitive skills. In addition to these positive aspects of playing sports, they were also meant to be a fun outlet for kids to exert their energy. Despite this, there seems to be a problem in youth sports today. Kids are beginning to practice a method of early sports specialization, which is training and playing in just one sport year-round. This has been common practice in professional, college, and older high school athletes who plan to continue their sport. For younger athletes, though, specifically preadolescents, it presents a variety of problems. Engaging in just one sport all year can make young athletes prone to future injury due to the lack of diverse muscle movement. Burning out or falling out of love with a sport can also happen if kids dedicate too much time and energy in this way. Furthermore, the massive surge of hidden costs have proven to be an issue for many families. Although sports specialization is not inherently negative, its physical, emotional, and monetary costs can be detrimental to young athletes and their families.

Despite the obvious benefits of playing multiple sports, young athletes often choose to participate in one sport, believing that they will improve faster than their teammates and opponents. There is evidence to support this position; however, one must consider, too, the benefits of playing multiple sports. In "Sport Specialization: Risks, Benefits and How Coaches Can Guide Athletes," researcher Jordan Donnelly argues that honing in on one sport grants athletes greater cognitive ability in that sport "through the increased exposure." Young athletes who spend all year on one sport can become proficient in that sport quicker than multi-sport athletes because they practice more repetitiously and gain more experience. Donnelly further argues that these athletes can also obtain more self-confidence, increased motivation, and better concentration in that one specific sport. This is corroborated by a study of men's and women's professional Swedish soccer players, which found that players, specifically males who went to soccer academies where they train every day of the year, "were more likely to still be playing football at the age of 21" (Söderström and Garn 1872). Thus, the idea of committing to one sport seems enticing; however, it is important to understand that early specialization means the athlete is not able to take advantage of the benefits involved in playing multiple sports. One of the

most important benefits of playing multiple sports is that doing so helps evolve an athlete's motor skills. According to coach Jamie Clark and professor of Athletic Coaching Timothy Baghurst, motor skill development can aid athletes since different sports require the development of skills that "are highly transferable from one sport to another." While repetition can fine-tune certain skills, it may not be necessary for a youth athlete if they can utilize diverse skill sets to improve in their favorite sport. Moreover, obsessively dedicating time to just one sport can jeopardize an athlete's mental and physical health. If a young athlete devotes a significant amount of time to just one sport, their life may revolve around it. If they underperform or fall out of love with this sport, then this will harm them rather than help them improve because they will begin to feel a dissatisfaction toward their sport and they may lose their passion and drive to improve their skills. To avoid this, young athletes should play multiple sports instead.

Injuries are a common form of adversity that most athletes endure. If they are not taken care of properly, they can worsen and cause more damaging long term effects, which is especially concerning when it comes to early specialization. Athletes who specialize often fall victim to overuse injuries. In "When Is It Too Early for Single Sport Specialization?" Orthopedic surgeons Brian Feeley, Julie Agel, and Robert LaPrade discuss multiple studies revealing the clear relationship between early specialization and overuse injuries. David Bell, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and his team conducted a study on a small sample of high school athletes and found that specializers "were more likely to report a history of knee injuries" (1469). The findings concluded that early sport specialization can "lead to a repetition of specific movement patterns," and these patterns could potentially increase an athlete's risk of injury due to the lack of different movement patterns (Bell et al. 1469). The repetition of certain movements must happen for a long time for an athlete to begin experiencing the nagging pain of an overuse injury, indicating that these highly specialized athletes may have been playing and training in only one sport long before high school.

Some sports require specialization to a certain extent; however, the degree of specialization must be closely monitored so that it does not go from honing a skill to harming the athlete. Feeley and his fellow orthopedic surgeons point out that in Little League baseball, "pitching more than 100 innings per year resulted in a 3.5-fold increase in injury risk," which resulted in lost playing time (Feeley et al. 237). Such injuries can lead later to Tommy John Surgery, which is the realignment of the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) in the elbow. New rules, like the pitch count, have been put in place in youth baseball to prevent further injury, yet experts are still noticing a rise in UCL injuries at the youth level (Feeley et al. 238). Many believe that training long and intense hours ensures that kids will develop well in their sport, but injuries from these extensive hours will halt their development by keeping them off the field. Moreover, research has revealed that intense and long practices are not necessary. Neeru Jayanthi, MD, and fellow medical experts discuss a study on youth athletes

in the U.K., noting that young athletes in the UK have lower rates of injury since they only train 16 hours per week, which is far less than youth athletes in the U.S (Jayanthi et al. 255). Decreased risk of injury benefits young athletes in the long run since they are able to remain on the field and continue to improve as they play. In the case of youth sports, less can be more. If an athlete dedicates fewer hours to one main sport, and makes room for recovery or other activities, it benefits them in the long run.

It is not uncommon for kids to quit a sport that they once loved as they develop new interests; however, when an athlete specializes early, they often end up quitting because they grow to resent their beloved sport. William Russell, professor in the Physical Education, and Recreation department at Missouri Western State University, conducted a study of 200 undergraduate students regarding their youth sport experience. He discovered that half the participants had specialized in one sport before adolescence and that only “30 participants (15%) were currently competitive participants” in that sport (Russell 293). Russell also discovered that external pressure from parents, peers, and coaches were more frequent in those who focused on one sport before their teenage years (Russell 298). If a child chooses to specialize in one sport before their teenage years because they feel pressure from outside factors, then they will be incurring all of the risks of early specialization such as overuse injuries. This can have a negative psychological impact on a young athlete as their confidence and self-esteem may shatter if they suffer from constant injury since they may feel as if they are failing because they have to miss time on the field, letting their parents, teammates, and coaches down. This kind of duress can cause athletes to experience burnout in a sport they once loved. They may lose the passion for something that once brought them joy.

Psychological burnout in athletes is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion caused by intense and prolonged involvement in a particular sport. According to former Olympic consultant and professor in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at Clemson University, Skye Arthur-Banning, burnout occurs in stages to the physical and emotional detriment of the athlete. When athletes specialize early, they will likely experience overtraining and injury, which often leads to the first stages of burnout when an athlete may see an increased rate of fatigue, irritability, and lack of enthusiasm when it comes to their sport. Athletes may notice minor body aches and feelings of frustration due to fewer awards and lack of achievement. If they then feel less rewarded in their sport, they lose interest and motivation. Towards the final stages of burnout, athletes start to become more withdrawn, apathetic, or develop unhealthy and disordered eating habits (Arthur-Banning 50). Burnout can therefore be damaging to a young athlete's physical and emotional well-being since they experience less motivation, increased frustration, and lagging confidence. It is clear that specializing after preadolescence may result in more athletic success and satisfaction. One study done on elite Russian swimmers found that those who were only engaging in swimming before the age of

eleven retired much earlier than those who specialized later while similar conclusions were drawn regarding elite men's and women's tennis players (Feeley et al. 235). Researchers separated these players into "elite" and "near elite status," finding that the "near-elite" athletes had specialized in tennis earlier than the "elite" athletes had. Other studies that utilized the "near elite" versus "elite" technique concluded that elite athletes were "more likely to start intense training after the age of 12" (Feeley et al. 235). Those who were considered to be at the near-elite level were obviously not as good as those who were labeled elite. Although there could have been multiple reasons for this, the fact that the elite athletes started specializing later is key. It is also ironic considering that one of the main reasons why children specialize so young is to reach the elite level of their sport. The tennis players who did not start specializing until later on were likely able to strengthen different areas of their body through playing other sports, and did not have to deal with the strain of overusing the same muscles as a young athlete. All of this prevented them from experiencing burnout. Enrolling children in multiple sports and delaying specialization beyond their pre-teenage years seems to be the clear and consistent way to avoid burnout.

Young athletes rely on parents for many things related to their sport, including transportation, equipment, extra practice/lessons, etc., and this is especially true for those who specialize early and play on highly competitive teams year-round. If a parent becomes too involved in their child's athletic career by controlling the sports they play, their diet, practice schedule, and even organizing their social life around a sport, then it may damage their sense of autonomy, which is their ability to make independent decisions. Adults are supposed to teach children to become independent, but this does not happen if their parents make every decision for them in certain aspects of life, including their athletics. Janice Butcher, professor of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Manitoba, along with Keonraad Lindner and David Johns, professors in the Department of Sports Science and Physical Education at University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong, respectively, conducted a retrospective study involving a large group of tenth graders and their parents. Each child and parent was asked about the sports they had played growing up, which sports they had dropped over the years, and why they quit the sport. As the age increased, the number of dropouts consistently rose. Most students and parents agreed that kids quit due to poor coaching, loss of time, or other factors. However, many students claimed that parental pressure to perform well was a key factor in their discontinuation (Butcher et al. 159). A majority of parents did not provide this answer, likely not realizing the pressure that they had put on their child to perform. Arthur-Banning explains the overinvolvement of "helicopter parenting" and how it "may be the inhibition of the autonomy of youth athletes" (52). A parent may micromanage their child's athletic career to the point where they feel as if they have no freedom to choose something as simple as what sport to play, stripping them of their autonomy. This kind of situation

makes sports a miserable experience for youth athletes instead of the fun, joyous experience it is supposed to be. Parents may push their kids too far in sports simply because they care, but damaging their sense of independence causes the child to resent the sport.

Spending money on equipment, travel expenses, and extra lessons may grant kids a better opportunity to improve, but it can also damage youth athletics as a whole. In *Take Back the Game*, Linda Flanagan claims that “in 2019, the youth sport industry was valued at \$19.2 billion,” meanwhile the National Football League (NFL) was only valued at \$15 billion (18). This highlights the overspending on and over-commercialization of youth sports, as well as the possible hidden costs. According to HBO’s *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel*, nowadays “there’s no off-season anymore in bigtime youth sports,” resulting in extravagant and increasingly expensive facilities (00:00:18-23). Families are spending up to \$175 per hour for private trainers in these facilities in order to help their kids hone their skills (00:01:34-42). The cost and time involved in this kind of training makes it difficult for kids to play other sports. Hotels and airlines are now making money off club and Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams that travel to tournament facilities to face a more diverse level of competition and to gain exposure to college and professional coaches. The hopes of getting a scholarship or playing professionally is what attracts kids and parents to committing to these teams, usually requiring focus on just that one sport. Playing on high-level teams and traveling to tournaments provides more exposure, and private training can evolve one’s skill faster. However, there is no research proving that early specialization results in kids later getting scholarships or turning professional (Arthur-Banning 48). In spite of this, parents are still signing their kids up for private training to garner a spot on an elite travel team’s roster. Studies have revealed that families spend up to \$12,000 a year on clubs and trainers, and therefore “36 percent reported fewer vacations, and 19 percent had to add a second job” (Flanagan 10). Such sacrifice can create external pressures making the young athlete feel as if quitting is not an option. Nevertheless, this can lead to burnout and nagging overuse injuries, which are both incredibly unhealthy. Without the guarantee of a return on investment, it is almost pointless to force a child into one sport at a young age.

The dangers of focusing on one sport are undeniable. Any athlete who specializes early will likely face injury and burnout. The rising costs of competitive youth sports has only made it more difficult for families to afford. Although participating in club and AAU programs can allow a child to improve, the expenses can force a child into just one sport. Due to these costs, many parents find themselves inevitably pressuring their kids to perform in order to secure a future scholarship. The reality is that there is no proven connection between early specialization and getting a scholarship, and by pressuring their kids to perform for this reason, parents are unknowingly putting their kids at risk of injury and burnout. Young athletes should not have to experience this. Kids should be playing multiple sports, socializing and learning new lessons along the way. They should not

have to worry about pressure, overuse injuries, or even losing the joy in something they should cherish. Kids who want to play for club or AAU travel teams should play other sports, where they can get the sufficient training they need to be successful in their main or favorite sport while working different muscle groups to prevent injury and become stronger both physically and cognitively. Athletes may come to a point when they must choose to only play a sport if they see a future in it. There is nothing wrong with this, but this decision should not be made until they are beyond their preadolescent years to reduce the risks of severe and overuse injuries as well as fatigue. Most importantly, children should be able to just simply have fun and grow with the sports they want to play.

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*This assignment prompted students to examine how relationships from their own lives and the summer reading, When Breath Becomes Air, change in the face of pain and suffering.*

## The Perfect Relationship Does Not Exist

By Anna Heur

Dr. Liptak- Trauma Narratives

The perfect relationship seems constantly out of reach— there is always more time that could be spent together, better communication to be had, more sacrifices to be made. But because life is fleeting, there comes a time we must stop chasing perfection and decide what makes relationships special in their present state. This concept is explored in Paul Kalanithi's memoir, *When Breath Becomes Air*. After his terminal cancer diagnosis, Kalanithi deepens his relationships by abandoning his pursuit of solutions and instead falling back on his faith and relying on his trusted doctor. As someone accustomed to providing the cure, this act takes immense humility and an understanding that his relationships are inherently valuable, even in the face of adversity. Kalanithi's shift in mindset echoes my own perspective, as I believe that the strength of a relationship is defined by its ability to persevere through hardship rather than its proximity to perfection. Unfortunately, the success of relationships is most easily measured in the end results— like reaching milestone anniversaries, having the white picket fence, and raising a couple of kids— rather than as a product of their ups and downs. Individuals must have the humility to relinquish the idea of a perfect relationship, an act that consequently allows us to grow closer to those who are most important to us.

Kalanithi experienced this through his relationship with his oncologist, Emma Hayward, who taught him that seeking help is not synonymous with weakness. Initially, Kalanithi believed the perfect doctor-patient relationship involved discussion about all the specifics of his lung cancer, especially life expectancy, in order to find the best solution. Thus, Kalanithi fumed over Hayward's refusal to talk to him about the Kaplan-Meier survival curves, wondering, "How dare she?...This is how doctors— doctors like me— understand prognostication. I have a right to know" (123). As a fellow doctor accustomed to being at the head of medical decision-making, Hayward's refusal felt like a breach of the mutual respect they shared. Having only assumed the role of the doctor in the past, Kalanithi routinely reduced patients to their disease and treated them as a problem to be quickly solved. However, being the one in the hospital bed fostered empathy and acceptance that there was no foolproof cure, even if Hayward equipped him with all the minute details about his disease. He found the humility to recognize Hayward as the captain of the ship towards the end of his battle with cancer, saying, "you know how you offered to just be the doctor and I could just be the patient?...I think that's maybe a good idea" (Kalanithi 190). In surrendering his role as the primary doctor and adopting the role of

patient in their relationship, he uncovered a more ideal patient-doctor relationship: one where he found peace in yielding the responsibility for his treatment to Hayward. While neither was perfect— Hayward promised him five more years to live when he had fewer, and Kalanithi demanded information he knew Hayward would not disclose— their relationship became increasingly meaningful because they trekked every step of the path together, facing the unknowns of cancer, until the very end.

Like Kalanithi, I learned that embracing the unknown and relinquishing the idea of a perfect relationship fosters deeper, more meaningful connections. When my mother was experiencing health issues, I learned that it is enough to simply walk alongside a loved one through hardship, rather than immediately offering a solution. I originally viewed the world as a rigid series of problems to be solved, and as the oldest child, I have always wanted to provide the solution to my family's issues. Yet, when my mom was partially hospitalized, I felt utterly incapable of helping her. I tried and failed to come up with the magical words to soothe her struggle after being invited to join her family therapy sessions. I was at a loss sitting next to her in therapy one day, so in that moment, I made the decision to articulate the seemingly trivial truth to her and let go of my desire to produce her cure. I simply expressed how strong she was for seeking help, without any suggestion of a solution or future steps she could take to beat her sickness. When I met her eyes and found them shining with appreciation, I realized that such simple support was enough; not having the solution did not make me helpless. At that moment, I began rewriting my definition of a perfect relationship: it was no longer contingent on instantly solving others' problems. Rather, being there in the moment— talking with her, holding her hand— was meaningful in itself. Kalanithi's relationship with Hayward resonated with me because they forged a steadfast relationship by simply facing the unknown as one, even without the promise of a cure. To me, the strongest bonds are forged when hardship is faced together, not when problems are instantly solved.

During the time when he had the fewest possible solutions, Kalanithi fortified his relationship with God— not because he was always a devout Christian, but because he returned to his faith despite the adversity he was dealt. Some may question his faith, pointing to the tenuous period where he rejected the idea of God due to lack of concrete proof. Yet, after his diagnosis, it dawned on him that making “science the arbiter of metaphysics is to banish not only God from the world but also love, hate, meaning...a world that is self-evidently not the world we live in” (Kalanithi 168). Kalanithi realized that not all worldly problems are governed and solved by the principles of science; rather, there were forces beyond his understanding at play. In finding common ground between the ideologies of faith and science, he also recognized there are things he simply could not solve, like his diagnosis. His journey towards this realization was not linear, yet, he was not a bad Christian for accepting God back into his life years after he fiercely denied His existence. Indeed, the temporary

lapse in his faith ultimately strengthened his bond with God in the grand scheme of his journey because he had to sacrifice his pride in order to return to the faith he originally renounced. Moreover, he displayed this humility in the face of a cancer diagnosis that would cause many to question the validity of a supposedly just and loving God. The humility he displayed in his journey with his faith is reminiscent of the selflessness he exhibited in allowing Dr. Hayward to take control of his care, representing a unifying thread that ultimately strengthened both bonds. When considering the sum of Kalanithi's trials and tribulations, it is apparent that his relationship with God was steadfast because of his abiding faith despite all the uncertainty he endured, not because he was always the perfect Christian.

I am no stranger to overcoming pride to repair a broken relationship thanks to my childhood best friend, Elise. By high school, we had been friends so long that neither of us could pinpoint the exact moment our friendship began; it was lost to time amidst the countless sleepovers, school projects, and scary movie marathons. Everything came easily with us, until one night at another friend's house when she left early for dance practice. Someone made an offhand comment about how judgy they thought she was, which led to another comment, and suddenly there was something about Elise that everyone had issue with, but had never been able to put their finger on. During the entire conversation, I did not say a thing. I disagreed with everything that was said, but I stayed quiet to avoid getting involved. When it all inevitably made its way back to Elise, she angrily confronted me about failing to stand up for her. I was bewildered by the fact that she was most upset with me when I had done nothing at all, compared to the insults our other friends had spewed. Proving my innocence was more important than preserving our friendship, and I allowed us to drift apart. Years later, I realized that the basis of my wrongdoing was precisely doing nothing at all in that moment. A good friend would have cast aside the selfish desire to be liked in order to stand up for someone they cared about, instead of allowing the conversation to spiral into baseless insults. Still, it was not until the summer before college that I overcame my pride and sent a text asking to chat over coffee. As we sipped iced lattes in the balmy California heat, we laughed over the rift that drove us apart those many years ago. Although our friendship has regressed several steps, our current relationship is no less meaningful. While we are not as close as before, with ballet whisking her away to Florida and my own commitments on both coasts, I still view her as one of my closest friends because we found resolution after serious disagreement. Even with the gap in our friendship, the humility required to admit that we were petty and stubborn is more meaningful than if we had pretended the fight never happened in order to preserve our friendship. I see the fact that we cannot easily explain the timeline of our friendship or boast a decade of friendship anniversaries as a mark of the humility and penitence it took to get to the point we are now. As with Kalanithi's relationships, the end product of a relationship is strengthened by the tribulations leading up to it.

Ultimately, possessing the humility to view relationships through the lens of both peaks and valleys is the key to meaningful relationships, something Kalanithi wholeheartedly accepted in his final days. As the effect of chemotherapy waned and his days dwindled, Kalanithi decided to step away from the job he had been working towards his whole professional life in order to spend time with his family. In this time, he sought to identify the factor that made his familial relationships so precious. His relationships with his wife Lucy, his parents, and his daughter were riddled with frustrations, shortcomings, and other imperfections, yet Kalanithi valued them more than his accolades and profession in his final days. It was not because these relationships were perfect, but rather because of the love that presided over every interaction, lurked beneath every fight, and beat through their hearts in unison. It was the type of love tender enough to treasure and protect, but also fierce enough to shout and fight and cry over; it was a love willing to traverse every peak and valley, no matter what. In the end, it was a love he felt privileged enough to experience in the thirty-seven years he lived. This sentiment is echoed by Kalanithi in the last paragraph of the memoir, where he imparts that “joy ... does not hunger for more and more but rests, satisfied” (199). Through my experiences, I have come to the same conclusion: humility terminates the perpetual pursuit of the perfect relationship and gives way to something more meaningful, an unconditional love

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*This research paper explores the importance of voice as it carefully considers the evidence in developing the author's argument, which is that pain must be analyzed as a narrative, and patients empowered to be the storytellers.*

## Pain as a Narrative

Gabrielle Hix

Dr. Liptak- Story Matters

The road to modern medicine seems to have more than its fair share of befuddling detours—bodily humors, hysteria, and the miasma theory, to name a few striking examples. These wrong turns range from mere annoyances to resoundingly harmful. A rather pervasive case of this is the continued lack of understanding about pain and how it is managed, which has been exacerbated by the use of malignant treatment tools. Numerical pain scales are one such tool, and their design misguidedly attempts to quantify pain in order to measure it. This action eliminates the complexities of human experience from pain management, replacing patients with abstract representations and forcing a one-size-fits-all mentality in treatment. It is essential for pain scales to be removed from triage and treatment in order to steer pain management away from arbitrary numeracy. A narrative-based evaluation of pain would be more effective as it would give providers insight based on the unique stories of patients and their pain, information that is instrumental to creating a treatment plan tailored to individual needs. The Open-Ended Verbal Rating Scale (OEVRs) is a potential model for this approach.

In order to understand the urgency of eliminating numerical pain scales from healthcare, their connection to the current opioid epidemic in the United States must be examined. This epidemic has claimed over 200,000 lives since the mid-1990s, and while substance-centered epidemics have certainly taken root in the country in the past, this particular one is unique in its severity (deShazo et al. 595). The American public at large is not certain who is to blame for this issue, perhaps because the origin story for this tragedy, which revolves around pain mismanagement, is rarely told (deShazo et al. 595-596). Yet, even when the history is explored, it reveals not a single culprit but a web of wrongdoers. This includes advocacy groups like the American Pain Society (APS), which developed a pivotal campaign titled “Pain as the 5th Vital Sign” in 1995 (deShazo et al. 596). This campaign’s goal was to bring pain assessment to the forefront of medicine by requiring its immediate quantification and charting as a number upon admission to a healthcare facility (deShazo et al. 596). The APS was not alone in this campaign; in fact, it was backed by several esteemed healthcare organizations, including the American Medical Association, the Veterans Affairs Medical System, and the American Academy of Family Physicians (deShazo et al. 596). While a cultural shift in how pain was

viewed was necessary, the methods pushed by this campaign were shortcuts rather than solutions. The changes to pain management enabled and promoted by accredited organizations were a significant catalyst for the opioid crisis, and although their role is often overlooked, their impact in regard to understanding pain has been widely detrimental.

To justify the wide-scale implementation and emphasis of pain charting, the APS should have needed to prove its effectiveness with well-researched studies; however, this did not occur. High-quality research is time-consuming and can be remarkably expensive, but it is still necessary in order to ensure that changes that affect the care of every patient are actually effective, and that they do not result in more harm than good. This was not the only instance where the standard quality checks of medicine were seemingly skipped: the research backing opioid drugs was built on a dubious foundation. The movement to address pain heavily pushed the prescription of these drugs by citing questionable publications from the preceding decade, namely Jane Porter and Dr. Herschel Jick's now-infamous one-paragraph "Letter to the Editor" in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (deShazo et al. 596). This incredibly brief publication "reported that of 11,882 hospitalized patients treated with narcotics, <1% of them became addicted" (deShazo et al. 596). High-quality medical research is much more comprehensive than this, as the nuances of any claim must always be considered. The exact methods for securing and sources of information in Porter and Jick's publication are unclear, and the conclusion is disproportionately sweeping for the amount of information provided. Yet, once other experts began to indiscriminately cite this publication, it became deceptively credible and played a role in convincing professionals and laymen alike that managing pain with opioids would be safe with little risk of addiction, a conclusion that is now known to be false. The impact of this letter must be taken as a cautionary tale: the quality of research must be evaluated before its findings are enforced. This lesson could have prevented a legacy of misinformation and misplaced political pressure, the effects of which quickly became clear in pain medicine. Suddenly, the question was no longer about whether pain was being treated, but about whether or not doctors were prescribing opioids. Thus began a downward spiral of increasing tolerance for misinformation and decreasing tolerance for pain.

This collapse of integrity in the medical field was not the fault of one single entity; the blame is dispersed amongst many groups, including medical professionals. However, the combined power of political pressure and poorly-backed research crafted an environment in the medical system that was not open to opposition. Further compounding this issue, quality checks like patient satisfaction surveys were warped to push the monitoring of pain as a vital sign and its rapid treatment, often with opioids. One example of these surveys was The United States Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey (Levy et al. 435). Although patients were constantly being misinformed about pain, they were still asked

to evaluate whether their physicians and nurses treated them properly, and the results of these evaluations were used to rate the caliber of providers and hospital systems. Furthermore, guidelines for pain management “required pain to be addressed and assessed in all hospitalized patients” and were “used as a component of hospital accreditation and reimbursement,” coupling the stakes of patient satisfaction with the threat of financial burden (deShazo et al. 596). Even if medical professionals doubted the merits of treating pain as a vital sign, they were compelled to comply lest they suffer poor survey results or financial consequences.

With all of this mounting pressure, a system had to be developed in order to rapidly chart pain, which would mirror the way other vital signs were assessed and recorded. The suggested manner by which this would be done was unidimensional pain scales used to quantify self-reported pain (Levy et al. 435). Several scales were developed for this purpose, including the Numerical Pain Scale (NPS), which is also called the Numerical Rating Scale, the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), and the Verbal Rating Scale (Levy et al. 435). The most commonly used scale is the NPS, which involves asking patients to rate their level of pain from 0-10. Regrettably, the use of these quantitative scales has caused more pain than it cured because it is no coincidence that the rise of charting pain in this manner is tied to the current opioid epidemic. Due to the political and financial pressures associated with the Pain as the 5th Vital Sign campaign, hospitals implemented pain scales en masse without substantial empirical evidence proving their validity.

Unfortunately, adopting a numeric scale left providers and patients with a tool that confuses rather than clarifies. This is particularly apparent when pain is used as a metric for triage in the emergency department. A study on one such triage method, the Korean Triage and Acuity Scale, found that when pain severity was used as a modifier for the scale, overall accuracy was decreased and overtriage occurred (Lee et al. 10). The emergency medicine experts that authored this study suggested that it may have been “difficult for patients to objectively rate their own pain score due to inaccurate medical knowledge about pain scores” (Lee et al. 10). This contention is difficult to accept, though, for it is hard to imagine why a patient would need medical knowledge to express their own discomfort. The failure of pain scales to make proper evaluations should not be deemed an indictment of patient understanding, but rather a clear sign that the scales themselves are unreliable. This contention is cemented by the fact that providers themselves do not comprehend how numbers accurately apply to pain. Physiotherapist Paula Kersten and fellow researchers have shown that some pain scales may be “a valid tool for measuring pain at one point in time,” yet there is “strong evidence that [they do] not behave linearly” and therefore cannot be used as a metric for chronological changes in pain even though this is an incredibly common practice amongst medical professionals (8). Normally, numerical values are manipulable and changes in these values can be translated to a chronological scale, but as per Dr. Kersten’s research, this is not the case for pain. If the people in charge of interpreting

these values do not understand how pain scales work, then the scales are only serving to create confusion.

This lack of functionality can be explained by the fact that numerical pain scales make a fundamental error in thinking about pain: it cannot be translated to a number. In fact, the very idea of pain being the 5th Vital Sign is unsound. A key distinction must be made here: the other vital signs— heart rate, respiration rate, body temperature, and blood pressure— are their own entities and are treated as such. Of course, processes like the heart beating and blood flowing are incredibly complex, but they can be reasonably abstracted while still being informative. For example, a patient presenting with tachycardia may have a high pulse of 150 beats per minute upon admission to the hospital. After treatment, the pulse may slow to 90 beats per minute. This improvement in the patient’s condition can be easily shown by the numbers representing the pulse, one specific bodily process. Meanwhile, if the patient in this example was asked to report their pain on a 0-10 scale, the value may be three upon admission and three after treatment. Taking this at face value would suggest the treatment did nothing to affect the patient’s pain. Returning to Dr. Kersten’s research, though, these values are only valid at one point in time and are not connected (8). Unlike actual vital signs like a patient’s pulse, pain is a conglomeration of an uncountable number of neurological processes that are not well understood. Attempting to mold all of this information into one value is far too reductive, which explains why numerical pain scales confuse both patients and providers. The solution to this issue, therefore, is changing the manner in which pain is conceived and expressed.

The alternative method for considering pain may be best drawn from another field: the humanities. In his “Imperative Theory of Pain,” philosophy professor Colin Klein explains that “pains ... command rather than describe” (518). Pain signals that something feels wrong, but lacks the capacity to allow the person experiencing it to identify the exact cause. A patient may know their shoulder hurts, but not that their rotator cuff has torn. Additionally, pain severity is remarkably variable amongst patients, and even for the same patient experiencing pain at different times or in different situations. For the example of a torn rotator cuff, one patient may experience pain extreme enough to prompt immobilization of their shoulder and an immediate visit to a physician, while another patient may not even notice their pain. This second patient may instead perceive a headache as the most intense pain they ever experienced. Therefore, the magnitude of action or treatment, especially in the form of opioids, is not easily predicted by pain severity as no certainty can be obtained from its measurement. Pain only mandates that something must be done, not how much should be done. Most importantly, it can only be properly described by the person experiencing it, and not accurately determined by a figure on a scale. Its subjective nature likens pain more to feelings such as grief and humiliation, which are inherently abstract but beg seemingly visceral reactions regardless. The only manner through which these things can be measured is a discussion. Words, then, are the metric, and pain is the

narrative.

With all of this in mind, a logical proposal would be to chart pain in the way it is best expressed: with words. The existing verbal rating score does this to a very limited extent, giving patients the choice of four categories to describe their pain: none, mild, moderate, or severe (Levy et al. 435). Rather than using this constrictive categorical approach, though, an open-ended manner of questioning could be employed. This would give the patient power over what direction their conversation about pain heads in. An Open-Ended Verbal Rating System (OEVRs) would accomplish this goal by simply prompting patients to describe their pain and allowing the discussion to flow naturally. Importantly, this is a system and not a scale, as it does not have boundaries. Again, the patient is the only one who truly knows how their pain feels, meaning they should be the one to control how it is described. The OEVRs would simply facilitate this.

One principal argument against a lexical approach to pain like the OEVRs is that there simply is not time for it. Inquiring about a number and subsequently charting the given digit is not a lengthy process, but asking for descriptors could easily be more time-consuming. Given that hospitals across the globe are struggling with overcrowding, this could make an existing problem worse (Lee et al. 2). Additionally, it may be more difficult to interpret patient responses with this method, slowing time-conscious processes like triage. This argument is misguided, however, because the end result of measuring pain in an efficient way does not justify the means. Sacrificing the integrity of a measurement for the sake of speed makes the results meaningless. The use of numerical pain scales is actually resulting in inaccurate patient assessment and overtriage. Thus, in addition to its dubious morality, its usefulness is questionable. Furthermore, Dr. Adam Rowden, an emergency medicine and toxicology specialist at Albany Medical Center, contends that asking for a verbal description of pain would not be incredibly time-consuming in practice (Rowden). Focusing on a word-based OEVRs would help prevent overtriage and the misinterpretation of the signal given by pain.

Another important issue to consider is the potential magnification of physician biases should the treatment process for pain become more open-ended. Healthcare in America at large has been addled by prejudices, and pain management is not an exception. Researchers note that “racial disparities in pain care are widely reported,” due in part to “differences in pain sensitivity, patient preferences, healthcare access, and, potentially, [explicit and implicit] provider biases” (Hirsh et al. 558). Vulnerable patient populations that are subjected to these biases may be harmed by an open-ended approach to pain charting, for using words in place of numbers requires more work done in interpretation. Yet, whether compressed into a number or expanded into a description, patients always report pain subjectively. Seeking verbal confirmation from patients to determine if their pain is being effectively understood and addressed would be a better method, for numerical pain scales have already been shown to lack the capacity to track changes (Kersten et al. 8). Also, in

analyzing the results of their study focused on race, provider bias, and pain management decisions, clinical psychologist Adam T. Hirsh and colleagues posited that black patients “received care that was less responsive to contextual information,” for the interaction between the race of the patient and the ambiguity of the given medical incident within their research played a significant role in the treatment of pain (565). The authors claimed that the general racial biases of the physicians involved in their study “did not significantly predict pain decisions across patient race,” so ambiguity over bias may be an issue that should be targeted (Hirsh et al. 566). If this is the case, an open-ended lexical approach to asking about the patient’s pain may help inform physicians more in cases that otherwise would have been vague. Of course, this is not to say racial prejudice plays no role in pain care. Hirsh and his fellow researchers noted that they did not test for the involvement of more specific stereotypes that may have occluded providers’ views of the pain tolerance of their patients (566). If anything, though, the active involvement of patients in tracking their pain would arguably make it more difficult for the biases of the provider to interfere with treatment. In an open-ended pain reporting system, patients would quite literally have a say in their charting: it would not be the physician’s interpretation of a number guiding their care, but the patient’s own words.

It would be extremely beneficial to use an OEVRs when approaching pain due to the significant impact on the lives of those it affects, particularly patients living with chronic pain. There is no cure-all solution to pain, and the idea that chronic pain can be sustainably treated with opioid drugs should be dismissed. While there is research suggesting a trend of “statistically significant but small improvements in pain and physical functioning” following opioid use by “patients with chronic noncancer pain,” it must be noted that any benefits were small and accompanied by side effects like vomiting (Busse et al. 2448). It can be argued that there may be the potential for these drugs to be improved upon and controlled in a better manner in the future, as “many of the questions about the biology of pain [and] the treatment of acute and chronic pain” have yet to be answered (deShazo et al. 600). However, the potential benefits of opioids do not eclipse their addictive nature, and physicians cannot rely on the prescription of dangerous drugs as a treatment. Ironically, doing so would be the opposite of the stated intentions of the ill-fated pain management campaigns of the 1990s: the suffering of patients with chronic or acute pain would once again be neglected. Additionally, there is not substantial evidence to show that opioids are a useful long-term treatment, which is critical for patients living with chronic pain (Busse et al. 2456). Without a clear, universal choice for treatment, doctors will need to work with patients on an individual basis in order to piece together an effective, personalized treatment plan. This begins with knowing the specifics about the patient’s pain, which is information the OEVRs would be much better at gathering than a numerical scale would.

It is clear that pain must be addressed, and that the solution should not involve numerical

measurements. With the potential for history to repeat, though, any new approach to interpreting pain must be treated with caution and it must be starkly different from the Pain as the 5th Vital Sign campaign (deShazo et al. 596). To begin, numerical pain scales must be removed from charting and triage and replaced with OEVRs. Research studies must also be undertaken to test the effectiveness of verbal measurements, which would likely involve trial runs within hospital systems and a discussion amongst the medical professionals involved as to whether the long-term use of these methods is viable. If success is seen, implementation on a greater scale will be possible. Importantly, awareness about pain measurements must also be raised, both amongst medical professionals and laymen, especially those in control of operating and evaluating hospital systems and the government officials concerned with pain-related legislation. Education in this area would combat the misinformation that enabled numerical pain scales and the Pain as the 5th Vital Sign campaign to take root in the first place.

Clearly, this solution will not be an overnight fix. A plethora of research is needed, both on the fundamentals of pain and the specifics, like information pertaining to particular patient populations (i.e. children, patients with chronic pain, neurodivergent patients, etc.). Additionally, a lexical system would require wide-scale implementation of translating services within hospitals for patients who are non-English-speaking or are hearing impaired. Above all, though, a shift in mentality is necessary within American healthcare, and arguably within society as a whole. Pain should not be seen as an antagonistic entity, one that always has to be trampled at high speeds before people can move along at even higher speeds. It must be handled with care, and patients allowed to tell its narrative before it ebbs and fades away. Although it can be difficult to tolerate, pain informs people about themselves. Patients must be given a proper platform to communicate their pain, and doctors must explore this information rather than abstract it into a number. Essentially, understanding the narrative pain provides is fundamental to a meaningful doctor-patient relationship. After all, it is the ability to feel and communicate our pain that makes us human. And that is a very important story to tell.

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*In this Nature Unit essay, the author used the story behind a personal photograph to explore human intervention in the Natural World in light of their understanding of the Franciscan value of care for creation.*

## Wilted Roots

By Kaitlyn Kurpick

Dr. Nadeau- Words as Action in a Mediated Society: Not Just Sticks and Stones



Photograph taken by Kaitlyn Kurpick

Flowers are meant to blossom each spring. They are meant to mark the beginning of the new season, one of optimism and growth. The buds are not meant to dry up and be left to die. However, this is what happened in Mount Hope when the luscious field of weeds and flowers were converted into a dog park. The vast space that was once home to a plethora of different plants is now just an empty reminder of what it once was. Its singular survivor, a lonely tree, weeps in the absence of its family, but no one can hear its cries, not even its dead relatives buried under the freshly mown grass. Mankind is no stranger to causing devastation to Mother Nature; in fact, the race possesses a lengthy track record of exploiting her, whether through deforestation for commercial purposes, the careless disposal of microplastics, or, in this case, stripping the land of its natural wonder. While many would argue that humans simply repurposed a useless and overgrown patch of land into a functional dog park, it is not that simple because in doing so, the toxic relationship between people and nature is revealed, along with something toxic about human nature itself: we cannot help ourselves from destroying nature, no matter the cost.

Within walking distance from the new dog park is both Otisville Elementary School and my house. In fact, I live so close to this park there are only two homes in between it and my bedroom window. My childhood bus ride to school was about thirty seconds, and for the entirety of it, I would stare at the patch of land that at the time was a collection of weeds and flowers. It was mystifying. During the five years I repeated that daily journey to school, I attempted to guess which flower was which, which stem was longest, which of the weeds was my favorite, and most importantly, what lived beyond what met my eye. Sadly, I never got to find out. By the time middle school started, the field seemingly vanished into thin air, and the mystery surrounding it did,

as well. I no longer paid it any mind, and rather than being a puzzle I could never solve, it just became another part of town easily walked to. The flowers were dead and gone, and so was my childhood wonder about nature's secrets. I realized man does not care enough about nature to pay attention to it.

The lack of care people have for the natural world can be seen when it is reshaped to fit society's needs. People selfishly place themselves above the ground below them, turning a blind eye to its cries for help. In "We are the Wildfire," Naomi Klein explains that "Oceans are warming 40% faster than the United Nations predicted five years ago" (295). One of the main reasons why climate change has not been successfully addressed is due to the utter scale of it, but the scope of the problem has widened in just the last five years because people do not care enough about the natural world to begin with. Furthermore, it seems impossible to begin to address this problem when those who profit from the devastation do not want things to get better. Colin Todhunter, a writer and former social policy researcher, argues in "Profiting from Death" that "Powerful corporations continue to regard themselves as the owners of people, the planet, and the environment." These individuals only see the natural world as something to take from; they see no reason to protect it. Unless man's greed can be combated, its harmful effects on nature will continue.

In order for environmental devastation to be addressed, people must feel empathy for the natural world. In an ideal scenario, such as a Franciscan society, people would understand nature as a gift. In "The Canticle of the Creatures," St. Francis stated that it is "our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs" (114). Yet, today, too many people have no true appreciation for the natural world and take its sustenance for granted, repeatedly exploiting all Mother Earth has to give. No flowers have spontaneously grown in the Mount Hope dog park, for the grass is constantly mowed to prevent this. There is no empathy expressed for the natural world, only an attempt to control it. However, if people took the time to notice how seeds are being ripped from the ground along with grass, they would begin to understand how negatively they are impacting the environment and perhaps then want to act differently.

Humanity's relationship with the natural world is toxic. People do not care about their harmful interaction with the environment and this strips the land of its natural wonder, beauty, and function. People tend to think of climate change as being an issue larger than life; however, in reality, it is the monster in one's backyard and there are many such monsters we all face. In my life, this monster is an empty dog park that is two houses down my road. Although I cannot bring back the wildflowers that once grew there, I can notice nature's beauty in other areas and try to convince others to protect it. While it is true that the desecration of a field of flowers and weeds is not causing detrimental danger to the entire world, it highlights people's lack of care for nature's wonders. It is imperative to stop focusing only on issues that cannot be solved by the average

person, such as rising temperatures in the ocean or deforestation. Instead, if people focus their attention on their own town and its problems, like a field of flowers being turned into a dog park, the natural world would be better for it.

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*Starting with the naysayer, this author adroitly develops an I Say argument using popular song lyrics to support her claim that young people today align with the Franciscan tradition in their concern for the natural world*

## Heroes Need Hope: How Song Metaphors Show People Still Care about the Environment

By Lilia Livolsi

Dr. Haas- Music: The Soundtrack of Our Lives

Earth is on fire. The headlines are endless: glaciers are melting, storms are strengthening, ecosystems are dying, and humanity is doomed. Nature is rebelling against human tyranny, and the worst is yet to come. The constant reporting on climate change is impossible to avoid, and now, a social media detox is not enough to be able to ignore the problem: all one must do is go outside to be confronted by abnormal weather patterns foreshadowing disaster. As a result, many have concluded that for things to get this bad, humanity really must not care about the environment. However, even though the world is burning due to humanity's harmful practices, there are people who are concerned, and recently released songs prove that people, especially the younger generations, still care about nature. Music is a form of expression, and many modern artists use elements of nature as metaphors for their deepest emotions in their song lyrics. This shows that the two are connected, as current artists would not use these metaphors if they were not emotionally attached to the environment, and their audiences would not connect with these songs if they did not share that attachment. In fact, whether it be modern American Catholics, music artists, or their predominantly Generation Z audiences—with the latter often criticized for spending more time online than outside—one force unites them: their indisputable appreciation for the natural world. Thus, the presence of nature metaphors in modern songs shows that people still care about the environment and using purported human indifference as an excuse for inaction is breeding a sense of hopelessness that is preventing society from combatting the climate crisis.

While some argue that concern for the climate crisis has waned due to modernization, even groups known for denying imminent environmental disaster are speaking out, showing that they care. Jeff Opperman, a freshwater scientist for the World Wildlife Fund, argues that most popular songs do not mention the natural world. He cites a steady drop in nature references “since the 1950s,” with “the frequency of nature themed words... [declining] by 63 percent” (Opperman). He claims that this is because people are spending less time outside and more online, particularly in the case of Generation Z, who grew up spending hours on the Internet as opposed to enjoying unstructured playtime outdoors. He believes that this has caused a loss of connection to nature, as evidenced by the songs younger generations listen to. However, that does not mean people care less about nature. Opperman's analysis rests on the assumption that society today is comparable to life before the 1950s. The role of modernization cannot be overlooked, as contemporary life is not as exposed to nature

as it was before. Thus, this new reality influences modern artists' life experiences and serves as another source of inspiration for their metaphors in addition to the environment. Nature does not have to be the singular subject song metaphors to prove society still cares about it-- if it did, then today's generation would not be able to connect to the songs of Taylor Swift, Lil Nas X, and countless other successful modern artists who employ nature metaphors, and they would lose interest in them. In fact, even the pope, leader of a group primarily associated with denying the effects of climate change in the United States, has spoken out in favor of taking action to preserve the planet. Head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis is firmly against destroying the environment. His plea, *Laudato Si'*, calls for the Catholic community to engage in "simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness," such as taking environmentally friendly modes of transportation and recycling, among other strategies (Bailey). *Laudato Si'* is based on "The Canticle of the Creatures," in which Saint Francis praises God for His creation of nature in all its forms. Pope Francis echoes the sentiments of Saint Francis in his plea, appealing to the Catholic love for God's creation as a way to dismiss the notion that humans are meant to dominate over other species, advocating for a reduction in harm against God's gift instead. His statement shows that even groups stereotyped as ignoring human destruction of the planet are working to change their position for the good of the environment, so casting blame on a particular group of people ignores the fact that most people feel an emotional connection to nature, regardless of their religious or political affiliations. Overall, while the number of nature metaphors in songs may be declining in recent years, that does not mean younger generations have stopped caring about the environment; rather, both the continued popularity of songs with nature metaphors and the Pope's message of environmental responsibility show that all hope is not lost. Humanity still cares, and action to prevent further harm is not only possible, but desired.

Contemporary songs across popular music genres include nature metaphors to express a variety of emotions, from heartbreak to ambition, which shows that both the artists and their largely Generation Z audiences share an appreciation for nature. Taylor Swift is currently one of the most popular singer-songwriters worldwide, known for her pop and country ballads about romance and heartbreak, but many of her songs also contain nature metaphors. For example, her song "My Tears Ricochet" expresses the end of a relationship that was painful for both people, describing a fire that leaves the lover "made of ashes, too" and battleships that "will sink beneath the waves" now that the relationship is over (Swift). Swift compares the pain inflicted by the lover in the song to sunken battleships and setting fire to them both in order to emphasize her point that anything the lover does will destroy them together. This breakup was full of emotions, and the fact that Swift chose these metaphors to express the complexity of mutually assured destruction in the aftermath of a breakup shows how deeply she feels about nature. Metaphors also make comparisons to aid

comprehension, so her nature metaphors would not be effective if no one else in the audience felt the emotions tied to blazing fires and sinking beneath ocean waves. However, this is not the case, as her songs are incredibly popular—people across the globe relate to her songs and listen to them every day, especially members of Generation Z. Therefore, her metaphors reflect not only her appreciation of nature as a means of expressing her emotions, but also modern society's as a whole. Nature is also a medium of expression for modern songs that include positive emotions, not just pain. Lil Nas X, another of today's popular singer-songwriters, has released many rap songs that feature metaphors inspired by the natural world. One of his songs, "Star Walkin'," states that he will never give up on his goals, illustrating him as "racin' to the moonlight," "headed to the stars," and "star walkin'" (Hill). Lil Nas X conveys a theme of hard work and self-confidence in the face of adversity by framing his chorus around a race to the sky, meant to emphasize both the difficulty of achieving his dreams and the grandiosity of them. Nonetheless, reaching his destination is very important to him, so the metaphor he chooses to represent his life's mission must be equally as important. His metaphors about the stars and the moonlight show he understands the awe of looking up at the night sky and admiring its beauty. Lil Nas X's songs are very popular, as well, meaning his mostly Generation Z audience shares this understanding. The popularity of Swift's pop songs and Lil Nas X's rap songs, two genres frequently listened to by younger audiences, shows that listeners have an emotional attachment to nature and care about it, which has larger implications for the state of the planet. After all, a widespread connection to nature means that, despite the media's insistence, the barrier to saving the earth is not a lack of younger generations' attachment to it, nor is nonchalance a viable excuse for humanity's inaction.

The incessant broadcasting of humanity's damage to the environment is breeding a sense of hopelessness. Things continue to get worse, yet legislation is still lacking, people are still littering, and big businesses are still exploiting the natural world for profit. However, it is necessary to avoid falling into the trap of assuming this means nobody cares because, as with most problems humanity has yet to solve, the reality is more complicated. In order to end the cycle of destruction and blame, efforts to preserve the environment need to acknowledge that most people still care and do not want to see the natural world they feel so connected to ruined. The solution, like the problem, will be complex; however, that does not mean it is not worth pursuing. Rather, the first step toward addressing environmental devastation calls for an end to the black-and-white thinking that leads people to believe they are helpless and the acceptance of a far more controversial truth: the solution requires listening to each other and working together as human beings, not casting blame to avoid the responsibility of searching for effective solutions. Only then can real change take place.

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*For this assignment, students were tasked with writing a personal reflection essay about the text, concept, or activity that most deeply impacted them during the Diversity Unit. This author's insights about the nature of the rock genre led to personal enlightenment and a consequential desire to effect change.*

## Rocking the Culture: The Lack of Female Artists in the Rock Genre

Olivia Marsan

Dr. Haas- Music: The Soundtrack of Our Lives

From its creation, the rock genre has aligned itself with going against the mainstream norms of American society. A specific example of one of these battles is the fight to dismantle the patriarchal system that is the norm in American culture today. Unfortunately, though, despite such efforts, the rock genre actually mirrors this norm of American society by refusing to fully include female artists. In the past, I would have argued that the rock genre challenged this system, and I would specifically refer to male rock artists who wear makeup and feminine clothing to prove my point. But that is exactly the problem. I had failed to realize that despite this example being true, it is the distinct lack of female performers in the genre that makes the genre complacent with America's mainstream values. It is a mask the genre wears to hide the fact that it enforces the patriarchal system from which men directly benefit, allowing it to discreetly keep the system in place through mock activism. As someone who thought that by listening to rock, I was backing a genre that called for change, I came to the eye-opening discovery that due to the lack of female voices in rock, the genre works to uphold a system of unearned male advantages.

Up until recently, if I had been asked to list rock artists, I would have been able to name some women in rock, but the list would have been male dominated and far from even. One female name I would have included is Janis Joplin. I knew her name, but I did not know just how important she was for fighting mainstream beliefs in the 1960s, and the influence she exerted on the rock genre as a whole. "Janis Joplin on Her Own Terms: Her Transformation from the Ugly Duckling of Port Harbor to the Peacock of Haight-Ashbury," an article by *Rolling Stone* journalist and music critic Ellen Willis, really opened my eyes to how Joplin shaped the beginning of the movement for women's liberation in the 1960s through rock music. Willis argues that "she was also... the only Sixties culture hero to make visible and public women's experience of the quest for individual liberation, which was very different from men's."<sup>2</sup> Willis wants the reader to realize the cause of these distinct differences is that women do not have the same advantages that men in American society do, and that is why giving women a voice in the rock genre is so important. However, instead of giving women a

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen Willis, "Janis Joplin on Her Own Terms: Her Transformation from the Ugly Duckling of Port Harbor to the Peacock of Haight-Ashbury," *Rolling Stone*, November 18, 1976, accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/janis-joplin-on-her-own-terms-86303/>.

platform, they are continually excluded from the genre, both in past generations and today. This is because if women are given a voice, it will spark change to the system of unearned privileges that currently only allows men the ability to express themselves however they want, and the right to speak about any topic without receiving backlash. I have realized that the rock genre is not about calling for change through music, but rather, it is helping perpetuate sexism within a society to keep women down. It was shocking to know that I have been supporting a genre which actively keeps in place systems of male privilege, but now that I know this, I make a more conscientious effort to seek out female rock artists. This effort needs to be made by everyone who enjoys the genre, however, to cause change, and that will only happen if female rock artists are listened to and celebrated. If other rock fans can have this eye-opening moment, they, too, will seek out more female artists, giving them a more equal place within the genre, taking away the unearned privileges granted to males.

To keep the audience from realizing the systems of unearned advantages the genre grants to men, record company executives realize they cannot ignore women completely, and therefore keep the systems in place through the use of an illusion of equality. They allow artists like Janis Joplin some fame, but on the contingency that they adhere to their rules that confine a woman's self expression, and then use what they do allow her for their own pleasure and gain. In her article about Joplin, Willis expands on this idea by explaining that "a woman is usually aware, on some level, that men do not allow her to be her 'real self,' and worse, that the acceptable masks represent men's fantasies, not her own."<sup>3</sup> The point Willis is making here is that men control the narrative in the genre as well as in the systems in place in mainstream American culture by letting women only express the parts of themselves that men agree with, while passing it off as empowerment. Keeping the public ignorant is the best way to protect the system of male privilege, so they use female artists to perpetuate the illusion that the genre advocates for women's empowerment. I had not realized this because I had fallen victim to male rock musicians' narrative that the genre fights mainstream norms. I had believed that since men in the genre broke gender stereotypes of masculinity that of course it backed women as well, but the truth is the genre only allows men to be their true selves, not women. The genre has created a shield that protects it from criticism regarding its lack of female representation by falsely perpetuating the idea that it wants to dismantle the patriarchal systems in American culture. It is frustrating because having fallen for the genre's narrative, I have been supporting a false cause for change in a time when change is still very much needed because female voices are still not listened to and systems of unearned male privileges are still in place. It is also disappointing knowing I actively advocated for the rock genre and what I thought it stood for, only to realize I had been unknowingly supporting a genre that perpetuates the patriarchy. Knowing this, I have begun to actively search out and support female artists who are trying to break through and call for real

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<sup>3</sup> Willis, "Janis Joplin on Her Own Terms."

change to the current systems in America. It is through listening to women in the rock genre that change will be sparked because once their voices are heard, a listener cannot unhear it, and that is exactly what men in the genre do not want. Once listeners of rock hear what female artists have to say, they will begin to see the true nature of the genre, and its perpetuation of false change. The genre has had the ability to spark change within society, and it still holds that ability, but in order for that to happen, listeners have to force the genre to follow through by actively seeking out female voices. This is because the men who hold the power in the rock genre have made it clear they have no intentions on including women. That leaves it up to the fans, who by seeking out female rock artists, will force the genre to make space for them.

Rock music may have started off as a genre that fought against the established norms through artists like Janis Joplin, but it has strayed from this. Over time, the genre has become better at hiding the truth about its intentions from its audience. I have only recently realized the rock genre is not what it paints itself to be. In reality, it bars women by limiting their voices and their self expression, to stop them from holding any sort of power for fear they will tear down the mask and with it the systems men benefit from. Artists like Joplin exposed the truth to many women, including myself, and that is exactly why there must be more women in the rock genre. However, few female rock artists have reached the level she did, and this is obviously not due to a lack of talent, but rather the result of male privilege and unearned advantages that allow men to express themselves however they want, to speak about whatever they want, and to never garner backlash for it. I have come to learn the truth: men do not want women in rock; they do not want to fight mainstream norms and systems, because if women are included, the systems that men benefit from will begin to crumble. The rock genre has a history rooted in social change, but when it comes to women in the genre it has not, and never has, lived up to its mainstream- defying identity. This leaves it up to the listeners now, more than ever, to shape the rock genre and its future impact by seeking out female rock artists. Only this will restore its credibility as a force for social change, rather than being a guise that the mainstream norms of unearned male advantages can thrive under.

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*In this critical reflection, the writer uses required First Year Seminar texts about racism and white privilege, as well as her experience as a woman of color, to show that Dr. King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" is as relevant today as it was six decades ago.*

## What Do You See?

By Sarah Masih

Prof. Godson-Glynn- The Civil Rights Movement

I was very young when I became aware of my race. It was not a violent or alarming situation, but rather, a moment of realization. I remember as a little girl going to my first day of school. Despite a slight language barrier, it was exhilarating to meet new people, see the classroom, and learn various subjects. Yet, I clearly recall the children in my class whispering and gazing from across the room. I could not pinpoint what was wrong. It was not until someone came up to me during dismissal and touched my hair, only to laugh right after, that I felt my stomach drop. Questions swirled in my mind: Do I have something stuck in my hair? Are they trying to get my attention? Did I say something that did not make sense? The problem was not that I was a new student or that my English was not perfect. It was that my physical features stood out— a wide smile, short stature, long black hair, brown eyes, and brown skin. I wondered if difference was a bad thing, but I also wondered how I could be the problem when they looked different to me, as well. What my classmates were doing was setting me apart based on race. I understand that my personal experiences are not unique by any means, but they do matter because if there is to be any change, the first step is for people to care about such experiences, and then they must consider how to create inclusive spaces in all areas and systems of society. Society is shaped by actions and thoughts, so if everyone were to care, change will follow. While this does not involve the statistical analysis people often expect when proposing a solution, I believe if we all take a step back and assess society through a different lens than our own, that is when we, as a community, can collectively bring about equality and respect.

On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a famous speech during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963 in which he stated, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (qtd. in "Read Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream Speech' in Its Entirety"). Those words taught me that an individual's choices, the ones made through everyday thoughts and interactions with others, should not reflect a racist bias. How people treat each other should be based on the foundational belief that all people are created equal and differences should therefore not be the focal point for opposition but rather viewed as opportunities to connect with and understand one another. Society would be more peaceful and just if individuals stopped exhibiting racial prejudice. The Civil Rights Movement should have taught us all that

the color of nonwhite skin is not foreign, but rather something to appreciate because, in the end, we are all human and have unique experiences and ideas to contribute to society.

Although we should have all learned the lessons the Civil Rights Movement tried to teach, that has not been the case, in part because so many people today celebrate King without acknowledging the struggles he faced. Michael Harriot, editor for *The Guardian*, reminds us that “although in death he became one of the most revered figures in US history, for the entirety of the 39 years that King lived and breathed, there wasn’t a single day when the majority of white Americans approved of him.” Harriot argues that what we hear about King today is not really him but a caricature whose image has been sanitized to please the white majority whose privilege he critiqued. He goes on to explain that “King . . . never suggested that white people should be judged ‘by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin.’ In fact, he regularly judged white people to explain the insanity of white supremacy” (Harriot). King believed that unchecked privilege is nothing more than a form of oppression. There is a distinct choice whether to listen to or ignore what King actually said, and in doing so, individuals can acknowledge racism or turn a blind eye to it.

The Civil Rights Movement was a fight against a racially segregated society, but it was also an effort to force white moderates to actively engage in the struggle. Birmingham, Alabama was one of the most racially segregated cities in the South and the 1963 Birmingham Campaign included important protests that demonstrated direct but non-violent action. The protestors followed strategies outlined by King in “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” a response to eight Alabama clergymen who expressed their displeasure with his approach. They described boycotting Birmingham businesses and peaceful protests as “unwise and untimely” actions (qtd. in King 51). King’s response was published in the *Birmingham News* on April 13, 1963. In it, he expressed confusion about the clergy’s accusations and condemnation of the demonstrations. He stated that time and again his people had been told to be patient. However, being told to wait had come to mean change would never occur (King 55). In King’s words, “We know the painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” (55). The unfortunate reality was that the white moderates did not see equality as a necessity, as expressed in the clergymen’s open letter criticizing the protests, and this is because they could not see things from the perspective of the oppressed.

While the clergymen focused on the methods and the timing, they were not thinking about what caused the protests in the first place. According to King, it was necessary to create “tension” of a nonviolent sort to confront segregation (54). Tension cannot be ignored, and where there was awareness, there would be the possibility of change. He explained the purpose of the demonstrations, stating, “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue” (King 54). King hoped a nonviolent campaign would force the

community to confront what had been swept under the rug for so long. He also addressed the painful reality of racial trauma that the clergymen would have had a hard time comprehending. He used powerful personal testimony to appeal to the moderates who chose to sit on the sidelines. He wrote:

When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children . . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. (King 55)

King tried to get the clergy to imagine the dreams that had been destroyed, and the feelings of children, including his own, who were growing up with a distorted image of themselves because they were treated as inferior. He wanted them to consider what it must be like to never be welcomed, seen, or heard. Had they thought seriously about this, they would have come to the rational conclusion that the protests were not only necessary, but in bringing about more equality, they would benefit everyone.

King's efforts to convince the moderates to support the Civil Rights Movement resonate today as racism continues and white privilege allows so many to continue to ignore it. Harriot notes that despite King's and other activists' efforts, "Black Americans are still fighting the same battles against voter suppression, inequality and the right to have a dream." Peggy McIntosh, a scholar and author of "White Privilege and Male Privilege," expresses the unfortunate reality that skin-based privilege is so prevalent it has become a cultural norm. McIntosh illustrates the depth to which privilege has become ingrained within society when she says, "Whether through the curriculum or in the newspaper, the television, the economic system, or the general look of people in the streets, I received daily signals and indications that my people counted and that others either didn't exist or must be trying, not very successfully, to be like people of my race" (77). Privilege is a word associated with choice, ability, chance, and power. McIntosh argues that it is "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (71). Because white privilege is so prevalent, she argues that "this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own" (McIntosh 76). In a society that has systemic racism, change will not occur solely through individual action; it takes collective action. Acknowledging the existence of white privilege is the first step in addressing continued racism.

As a person of color, I have been aware of racism since I started school. I cannot count the number of times I felt inferior as a little girl. It was not until years later that I finally realized my sense of inferiority is a projection of what other individuals feel about me based on my race and not a definition of who I am. King proclaimed, "Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away, and the deep fog of

misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities” (64). Despite past despair, broken dreams, pain, heartache, and inferiority caused by a racist nation— our home, the land of the free— he encouraged us to remain hopeful. He asked people to consider that “the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be? Will we be extremists for hate, or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice— or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?” (King 60). My question to the world is: what do you see when you look at me, at another person, and at yourself? Do you see by hate, or do you see by love?

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*Turning a critical eye upon her own educational experience, this writer argues that Septima Clark's story of resilience and resistance must be mainstreamed to counteract the negative consequences of intersectionality.*

## **Unsung Heroine: Septima Clark's Intersectional Battle in the Civil Rights Movement**

**By Lindsay Otero**

Professor Godson-Glynn- The Civil Rights Movement

"History is written by the victors," claimed Winston Churchill, a British politician, military officer, and writer who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Phelan). The phrase suggests that history's narratives are often manipulated by those who have emerged victorious and therefore control how events are recorded and remembered. Consequently, the narratives that do not prevail are minimized and overlooked. Many Civil Rights Movement leaders' efforts were deliberately obscured, circumventing their right to be heard. As a result, female civil rights activists such as Septima Clark have often been sidelined in historical accounts, and their roles and achievements in shaping our shared history have been neglected. Clark, a pivotal yet underrecognized figure in the Civil Rights Movement, embodies the struggle of black women whose stories have been overshadowed by their male counterparts. Today, movements like Say Her Name seek to acknowledge and honor figures like Septima Clark, not just as an act of remembrance, but as a vital corrective to the historical record. There is a need for these silenced voices to be heard and valued because failing to share the authentic stories of these female Civil Rights activists perpetuates their exclusion from history by the men who remain at the apex of our societal hierarchy.

The broader vision of the Say Her Name movement mirrors the effort to resurrect Clark's legacy. Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate, is a scholar known for coining the term intersectionality. This concept acknowledges the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, and explains how they overlap to create multifaceted experiences of discrimination for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups. She was also a leading figure in establishing the Say Her Name movement. In her Ted Talk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," Crenshaw aims to raise awareness about the often overlooked black female victims of police brutality and racial injustice. She claims that "When we think about who is implicated by [police brutality] when we think about who is victimized by these problems, the names of these black women never come to mind" (00:02:49). Crenshaw highlights the erasure of the struggles experienced by black women from discussions of social and structural inequalities. This exclusion exacerbates the victimization and marginalization black women experience. Crenshaw explains that "These women's names have slipped through our consciousness because there are no frames for us to see them, no frames for us to remember them, no frames for us to hold them" (00:03:17). Black women's experiences are

too often neglected. Today, movements like Say Her Name seek to correct this injustice, ensuring that the overlooked stories of black women like Septima Clark are no longer erased from the historical record.

As a black woman, Septima Clark navigated a complex intersection of racial and gender biases that presented challenges to her activism and educational work. In “The Intersectionality Wars,” journalist Jane Coaston describes how “The lived experiences— and experiences of discrimination— of a black woman will be different from those of a white woman, or a black man.” Coaston suggests racial hierarchies and gender norms work in tandem to create an environment where people with multiple marginalized identities have limited access to resources and power. Clark’s intersectional identity placed her in a position where she had to assert her voice and leadership not just against the backdrop of the dominant white male power structure, but also within a society that often regulated women, especially black women, to secondary roles. This meant competing with white men and women who were afforded societal privileges due to their race, as well as black men, who, while oppressed by racism, still held gender privileges within their communities. Clark constantly pushed against these barriers, demonstrating the strength and resilience required to be heard and effect change in such an intersectionality-challenging environment.

Clark transcended criticism of her identities, drawing strength from her mother, Victoria Poinsette. Patriarchy tends to place women, particularly black women, within predefined boxes in an attempt to dictate their stations in life and although Clark’s mother’s options in life were therefore limited, she instilled within her daughter that education was the key to breaking open those predefined boxes. Poinsette was a laundress who worked for white people. The biography, *Freedom’s Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark*, discloses that Victoria Poinsette despised her work “because it confirmed the gap between her idea of what her station in life should be and its reality” (Charron 13). This gap that black women so often face is not merely a personal struggle, but a societal construct that systematically limits the potential and aspirations of black women. The societal pressure to fit into predetermined roles overlooks the complexity and diversity within the black female experience, further marginalizing their voices and agency. These imposed limitations constrain individual growth and perpetuate systemic inequities that hinder progress. They force black women into narrow narratives, restricting their opportunities and perpetuating inequalities. This view of black women’s roles created barriers to their future career advancement, perpetuated the racial wealth gap, and resulted in limited earning opportunities. Victoria Poinsette challenged these obstacles by encouraging her daughter to pursue the best educational opportunities because she viewed education as a means of rising above one’s so-called station in life. Thus, Clark’s educational journey is a testament to the resilience and determination of the black women role models in her life— most notably, her mother. Victoria Poinsette emphasized the importance of

education and self-improvement and, therefore, gave her daughter an alternative to the patriarchal standards that constrained so many black women.

This sense of possibility would be key to Clark's response to the segregated South where she was raised. Charleston, South Carolina, was deeply segregated when Clark's educational journey commenced in 1904 at Mary Street School. Due to her family's financial struggles, she faced difficulties continuing her education. To overcome this obstacle, she struck a deal with an elderly neighbor, exchanging chores for the opportunity to learn how to read and write. Upon completing high school in 1916, financial constraints impeded her from pursuing higher education, prompting her to take a state examination at 18 to qualify as a teacher. Encountering racial discrimination, she was initially unable to teach in the Charleston public schools. However, she secured teaching positions in rural districts and subsequently resumed her education part-time in Columbia, South Carolina, eventually earning her B.A. from Benedict College in 1942 and her M.A. from Hampton Institute ("Clark, Septima Poinsette"). Septima Clark's journey through the educational system was difficult to navigate because she faced the intersecting forces of race, class, and gender discrimination. As a black woman, she encountered multiple barriers to achieving a quality education, and arguably, she had to work harder than most of her black male counterparts to earn a degree. Her schooling in South Carolina taught her that democratizing knowledge requires a commitment to addressing the systemic issues perpetuating educational disparities.

Septima Clark believed that education should not merely be a pursuit of knowledge, but rather a catalyst for action and liberation. Scholar Spencer Smith notes that in Clark's view, "Education is not a quest for knowledge, but a quest for action; education should lead to free action, and it should not be bound by the limitations of artificial systems or structures" (89). These structures included insufficient school facilities, limited student transportation, shortened academic terms, and overcrowded classrooms. Septima Clark addressed these issues by tackling the structural barriers that prevented marginalized groups from accessing quality education by working within the system. She hoped to make education accessible to all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, or gender. As a result, her work focused on grassroots organizing and community education. She created citizenship schools to provide the black community with the knowledge and skills to navigate the voting process and thus they acted as a platform to teach literacy and citizenship rights and to help develop local leaders. These schools were Clark's direct response to the discriminatory and segregated education system in the American South that disproportionately affected African Americans, and they revolutionized the educational landscape. Through her pioneering efforts, Clark not only addressed immediate educational inequities, but also laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Despite her achievements, the male-dominated Civil Rights Movement frequently restricted Clark from leadership positions. The qualities of a leader, as well as the path to achieving leadership roles, were still primarily based on an outdated male model that effectively shut out black women. Myles Horton has been portrayed as a prominent figure in the history of citizenship schools, particularly for establishing and leading the Highlander Folk School. This institution was influential in empowering disenfranchised African Americans, particularly under Horton's leadership. His work and the citizenship schools of the 1960s were instrumental to the Civil Rights Movement's success, empowering thousands of leaders and influencing social and political change (Smith). While Septima Clark co-founded the citizenship schools with Myles Horton and activist Andrew Young, attention focused primarily on Horton and Young, and publicity suggested that only men were driving educational reform during the Civil Rights Movement. Smith notes that one common but erroneous argument was “that women like Clark or [Bernice] Robinson only became critical pedagogues because of their connection with a white man” (99). Smith’s criticism was based on the notion that these women's professional and intellectual achievements could solely be attributed to their relationship with men. Smith also asserts:

I have shown how the lives of Clark, Robinson, and [Esau] Jenkins were oriented toward that kind of work even before they came to Myles Horton’s Highlander Folk School. For this reason, I argued that many of the characteristics most consistent with critical pedagogy found in Citizenship Schools came from the involvement of these three educators.” (Smith 108)

Their pre-existing dedication to social justice and community development work positioned them as influencers, making them pivotal figures in developing critical pedagogy. Inspired by her mother’s teachings, and undeterred by being overshadowed by her male contemporaries, Clark dedicated herself to working within the system to elevate her community. She vigorously advocated for equal access to quality education, believing it to be the key to dismantling systemic injustices and fostering a more inclusive and just society. In collaboration with Esau Jenkins and Bernice Robinson, Clark used critical pedagogy to empower students. This theoretical and political method encouraged learners to examine power structures and patterns of inequality to assist students in becoming literate and gaining voting rights. Their innovative teaching methods underscore the need to recognize the agency and capabilities of women as independent critical pedagogues, regardless of their relationships with leaders like Horton and Young. Clark and other women activists must be acknowledged for their efforts to foster an environment of equality and meritocracy within educational and scholarly domains.

Historical accounts often amplify the work of male civil rights activists while minimizing the roles women played. As Villanova University’s Teresa A. Nance suggests, this leaves students to ask, “Was the civil rights movement essentially built and operated by men such that the role performed by women need only be

remembered as a footnote in history?" (543). This discrepancy reflects broader trends in historical documentation, where male figures are frequently positioned as leaders and primary influencers. Uncovering this notion has led me to reflect on my educational experience. In eleventh grade, I studied United States History and discovered that much of the content overlapped with what I had already learned in junior high school. When delving into the Civil Rights Movement, I was tasked with comparing the strategies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Yet, the contributions of other pivotal activists in the movement were notably absent from our discussions. Nance remarks, "When thinking of the civil rights movement, the name that most often comes to mind is that of the charismatic leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. . . . Rarely, if ever, would the names of [women activists] be mentioned" (543). It was not until college that I encountered the story of Septima Clark, prompting me to question why her narrative had been overlooked and only then did I realize the significance of bringing it to light. Drawing attention to the neglect of women activists in historical narratives challenges the existing gender bias in recognizing such contributions. It emphasizes the need to value talent, skills, and achievements based on merit rather than being influenced by gender-related biases, fostering an inclusive, equitable understanding of people's roles in historical events.

Clark's role in citizenship schools was minimized as a direct result of her marginalization within the patriarchal culture of the Civil Rights Movement. Black men dominated the movement due to prevailing gender norms and structural inequalities, which limited opportunities for women like Clark to assume leadership roles. Despite these challenges, Clark remained committed to her mother's lessons and utilized education as a tool for empowerment within the racial struggle. She tirelessly worked within the system to uplift her community, advocating for equality and justice for all. Her lasting legacy continues to resonate with and inspire today's movements advocating for the recognition of black women.

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*In this Natural World Unit essay, the author illustrates the mutually destructive relationship between the environment and sport using specific examples to highlight the urgent need for a solution before it is too late.*

## Climate Change and the Future of Sports

By Jenna Pollicino

Dr. Larkin- Sports, Politics, & Society

It is difficult to imagine a world without sports because they play a significant role in society and serve as an enjoyable outlet for people, athletes and spectators alike. In addition, they often involve significant traditional and cultural meaning. While not given a lot of attention, the relationship that sports have with the natural world is more impactful than many may think. In a time when sea levels are rising, global temperatures are climbing, and climate change is becoming increasingly more concerning, the relationship between the natural world and sports has become mutually detrimental. Not only are global warming and air pollution negatively impacting sports, but sports stadiums and gas emissions related to professional and international sporting events are damaging the natural world in return. Ultimately, the relationship between the natural world and sports is steadily deteriorating, and if left unresolved, will likely cause detrimental effects on the future of both sports and the environment.

The natural world is a necessity for the existence of many sports, and that is why climate change is posing such an immediate threat to their future. This is most apparent for sports that rely on natural elements. Surfing, for example, depends on the condition of ocean waves, and skiing requires an adequate amount of snowfall on the slopes. Beyond those nature-based sports, though, weather conditions have a much more far-reaching effect in terms of whether outdoor sports, such as football, baseball, soccer, and lacrosse, can be played. Climate change's direct effect on sports is too often overlooked, especially in light of intense pollution, a rise in ocean levels, a spike in global temperatures, and a decrease in snowfall. According to Sven Schneider, professor of social epidemiology at the Mannheim Institute of Public Health, and Dr. Hans-Guido Mücke, advisor for the World Health Organization, the mean annual temperature in Germany has risen 1 degree Celsius in the past 100 years, and it is believed that there will be a further increase of 1-3° C by mid century, and a 2-4° increase by the end of the century (12). A rise in temperature at this rate is concerning for athletes as temperatures could simply become too hot for sports to be played in certain locations during the warmer months. Furthermore, as Schneider and Mücke point out, moving outdoor sports to an indoor environment may not even be a viable solution because such indoor facilities are often "insufficiently air-conditioned, overheated sports halls and gyms" (12). Climate change therefore impacts athletes of all sports.

The impact of rising temperatures has already been seen in sporting events at both the national and international level. During the 2014 Australian Tennis Open, temperatures exceeded 105° Fahrenheit, yet matches continued, with a record nine athletes dropping out during the first round due to those extreme temperatures (Goldblatt). Tennis was again impacted during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics when part of the tournament was rescheduled to night time just so the athletes could compete in slightly cooler, more comfortable temperatures (Goldblatt). During that same Olympics, the marathon, one of the most symbolic events of the games, was moved to a city 1,000 miles north simply because Tokyo's climate is far too hot to host such an endurance event (Goldblatt). These increased temperatures can turn into heat waves with high atmospheric pressure that has the ability to escalate the amount of particulate matter in the atmosphere, which induces respiratory problems in athletes, inhibiting performance levels and, more importantly, jeopardizing their health (Schneider and Mucke 12). Additionally, winter sports that require snowfall are beginning to suffer from climate change. Many professional events are forced to use artificial snow, which is economically and environmentally unsustainable (Goldblatt). In other parts of the world, surfing is falling victim to rising sea levels that create unpredictable and unsafe wave patterns. According to sport sociologist David Goldblatt, surfing is in imminent danger as "two thirds of all beaches in the southern half of California will be gone by the end of the century" (Goldblatt). Without beaches, surfing would become obsolete. Surfing is an example of a sport that goes beyond the physical activity itself and has significant cultural meaning. Surfing has played an important role in Polynesian culture and, according to historian Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, is "an essential part of the Hawaiian identity." This is just one example of how sports can have deep, underlying meaning for cultures and communities around the world, demonstrating why addressing climate change is vital.

While it is important to acknowledge how sports have fallen victim to climate change, sports are also a contributing factor to this worldwide issue. Professional sporting events and international competitions leave a substantial carbon footprint that can no longer be ignored. Even just creating the playing field completely disrupts the environment. For example, stadiums requiring huge paved parking lots surrounding the area are often built in what were once wide open natural spaces. According to Charles W. Schmidt's *Putting the Earth in Play: Environmental Awareness and Sports*, mountainous slopes used for skiing "disrupt fragile alpine ecosystems" and golf courses "consume large amounts of pesticides and water" (A286). It is incredible to see new stadiums and areas of play built so that people can come together to watch sports, but it is important to keep in mind how great an environmental cost comes from that. As it turns out, spectators are a significant part of the problem. According to Goldblatt, it has been found that the air travel of international spectators "accounts for nearly 70 percent of the emissions generated by World Cups and Olympic Games" (Goldblatt).

This creates a difficult dilemma. Sporting events are meant to draw in spectators and create an entertaining environment for the audience, and while people have the ability to watch through television and streaming, it is simply not the same experience. Therefore, it is not practical to restrict people from attending these events, but it is important to spread awareness about the environmental costs coming from mass audiences so that spectators choosing to attend such events are making more informed and environmentally mindful decisions regarding how they travel. Spectators should also be aware that they cause significant environmental damage while attending sporting events. The 2006 Super Bowl that took place in Detroit, Michigan, produced 500 tons of carbon dioxide from transportation and utility usage alone (Schmidt A286). Two years earlier, the Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, produced half a million tons of greenhouse gasses over the course of two weeks, which is comparable to what a city of one million people emits within the same time frame (Schmidt A286). It is key for people to understand the different ways in which sports continue to impact the natural world, and although it is important for renewable energy sources to be embraced on the macro level, it is just as important for sports enthusiasts to actively choose more environmentally friendly options as they, too, can make a difference.

Despite how concerning this environmental damage may seem, there is certainly still hope for the possibility of turning around the relationship between sports and the natural world. Journalist Emma Gonsalves points out that professional and collegiate sports teams “are “working to reduce their environmental footprint by implementing sustainable practices at their facilities.” At North Carolina State University, for instance, the football stadium added a recycling program, solar panels, and water filtration fountains to eliminate plastic water bottle use (Gosalvez). While these practices are certainly beneficial and bring awareness to the issue of sports leaving an environmental footprint, they are far from a solution because there are too few institutions adopting such practices. The steps to addressing the environmental issues created by sports must be much larger in scope and must be implemented with more urgency, as “environmental degradation start[s] to become clear for sports organizations around the world,” according to Goldblatt. It is crucial that more sports institutions and organizations take part in efforts to minimize environmental destruction before it is too late.

Sports are both a perpetrator and victim of the environmental effects related to climate change. The environment has already experienced detrimental effects from sports, while sports have been increasingly impacted negatively by climate change. This relationship is often ignored, yet it is something people should consider, and even take it upon themselves to do what they can in preventing this problem from getting worse. Some of this environmental damage is already irreversible. The solution is not to get rid of sports because they

are far too important. Rather, we must find ways to curb their effects on the environment, and to advocate against damaging the environment in the first place, before it is too late.

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*The author of this research paper organized the evidence to support a clear thesis, with well-developed topic sentences and return sentences to keep the reader's attention always focused on the argument.*

## Unveiling Healthcare Heroes as Victims

By Gabrielle Shaw

Prof. D'Souza- Heroes

What makes someone a hero? Most scholars have concluded that heroic actions fall under those that are supererogatory, meaning the person goes above and beyond for the common good (Cox 510). It is understood that all heroic actions are undeniably supererogatory; however as Dr. Caitriona Cox from The Healthcare Improvement Studies (THIS) Institute in Cambridge says, "not all supererogatory actions are necessarily heroic" (510). In other words, acting beyond the expected standard to help people is admirable, but certain heroic qualities like extreme personal sacrifice is, in fact, not something to be celebrated. This relates to the perceived heroism of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as essential workers were praised as heroes for their dedication to work in risky conditions. While their work was rightfully appreciated, and they did sign up for some personal risk, the truth is they were forced to work in dangerous conditions and make extreme sacrifices without enough support. Hence, labeling healthcare workers as heroes during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be misguided and harmful, as it masked the negative impacts endured, oversimplified the complex healthcare issues at hand, and served as a scapegoat for institutional failures.

During times of uncertainty and crisis, it is normal to turn to heroes because it is comforting to know that someone is battling and taking risks to protect us, but when the label is used as a way to neglect the hardships the person acting heroically experiences, it is at best counterproductive and at worst, unjust. When the seriousness of the pandemic began to be recognized and health concerns were on the rise, the media started to refer to healthcare heroes. At first, the parades and banners applauding essential healthcare workers for being heroes seemed like a noble gesture, something that would boost their morale by showing popular support for their actions. However, upon closer inspection, the label of hero masked what was really going on because, as those who work closely with epidemic-related trauma explain, "the hero image burns so bright that it eclipses any light shining on the failures of the system" (Lewis et al.). Unfortunately, praising healthcare workers as heroes ignores the very real and unfortunate sacrifices they were pressured to make. Accepting their stories only through the lens of heroism silences their disconsolate voices that would otherwise spread awareness about the unjust situations they faced. Not only did the hero characterization take away from their autonomy because they, in fact, had no choice when it came to the terms of their employment, it also placed

additional pressure on them to sacrifice even more than should be expected to align with the public's heroic image of them (Cox 512). Consequently, the once uplifting label of hero was turned harmful, as it proved detrimental to healthcare workers' well-being.

Like all human beings, healthcare workers should have the autonomy to decide what is safe or unsafe for themselves. In 2020, when the spread of COVID-19 turned into a pandemic, the working conditions in hospitals became overwhelmingly dangerous. Essential employees in hospital settings, many of whom were without proper protection, were directly exposed to infected patients for long periods of time. Nonetheless, they were called cowards when they drew the line, setting boundaries for their personal safety in situations that they deemed too threatening (Azadnajafabad 2). Their boundaries were not respected, and their autonomy was taken away from them when they were forced to work in unsafe conditions. They were expected to sacrifice their own health and act heroically by putting everyone else's well-being above their own. Since they were mandated to work in such an environment, and therefore did not truly choose to do so, calling them heroes while expecting superhuman sacrifices from them is unjust.

As the pandemic worsened, healthcare workers increasingly identified situations they believed were too dangerous and this led to a controversial debate regarding their obligatory duties of care, which are what their patients expect or require them to do (Cox 511). Healthcare workers started to wonder if their duties of care were limited or limitless. With no limits, they could be obligated to give their last kidney to a dying patient. However, losing their only kidney and dying to save a patient is a scenario prohibited by set limitations of care. Yet, when it came to scenarios related to the pandemic, healthcare workers were expected to act under the idea that duties of care are limitless. In response to the duty of care debate, bioethics professor Lynette Reid poses a question that asks whether we would want to be a society that cares for people with infectious diseases "or in a society that practices a form of quarantining of the ill without treatment, leaving them to die in isolation?" (qtd. in Cox 511). Reid has a point; infected individuals want and deserve to be taken care of. However, healthcare professions have outlined ethical codes to help guide actions in these contentious situations where patient care and healthcare professionals' well-being are at odds. For example, provision five of the Code of Ethics for Nurses proclaims: "The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety (and to) preserve wholeness of character and integrity" (Zolnierek 12). While it is the responsibility of healthcare professionals, such as nurses, to care for the ill, it is ethically unacceptable to make them care for others with disregard to their own personal safety. The environment they were forced to work in during the COVID-19 pandemic did not promote safety for them, further substantiating their right to refuse care in circumstances they deemed perilous. Calling them heroes when their safety was sacrificed confused this issue and put nurses unnecessarily at risk.

As COVID-19 escalated into a global pandemic, nations worldwide faced disruptions in the supply of manufactured goods and resources, and this had a serious impact on healthcare personnel, putting them further at risk. In particular, there was a shortage of personal protective equipment, which is necessary for patient care. Inadequate protection endangered the healthcare workers who were in direct contact with infectious patients by increasing their risk of infection and mortality. Additionally, little awareness about how to use new protective equipment, insufficient training in infectious control, and long periods of exposure also contributed to the mortality rates among healthcare providers (Azadnajafabad 1-2). Medical personnel were forced to step into situations where they had to treat severely sick patients without adequate protection, pushing them beyond their duties of care. This jeopardized their health as well as the health of their loved ones at home, since the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus was increased. Furthermore, limited protective supplies placed patients seeking routine care at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to the hazardous environment their providers were forced to work in. Healthcare staff sacrificing their own health and safety does seem heroic, but understanding why they were in that position in the first place makes it clear that labeling them as heroes disparages the challenges they were facing each day.

Although the sparse supplies and inadequate training resulted in a staggering number of infections and fatalities among healthcare workers, it is important to acknowledge that emotional and psychological distress were also profound repercussions. Excessive stress at work corresponded with a heavy mental burden for most healthcare workers, which led to burnout, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Azadnajafabad 2). Witnessing tragic deaths of patients and colleagues led to numerous individuals developing post-traumatic stress disorder, which poses significant challenges to their mental well-being and functionality. When workers were exposed to the virus, they had to quarantine, and were therefore isolated from their family for long periods of time, which contributed to feelings of depression and loneliness (Lewis et al.). Several healthcare workers who experienced suffering firsthand from the pandemic have shared their stories in books or other outlets to bring awareness to the reality they had to face. Some talked about the extreme anxiety they faced, while others mentioned how PTSD and burnout has negatively impacted their empathy (Bismark et al. 9-13). An emergency medicine doctor, between the ages of 31-40, noted that she wrote a will to have things in order for her eleven month old baby because she was seriously afraid she would not survive (Bismarck et al. 9). Such remarks are a true testament to how badly the pandemic affected the mental health of those who were forced to work in such horrible conditions. Poor mental health is detrimental to the individual experiencing it, but it can also affect the morale of their entire work environment. When healthcare workers were referred to as heroes, it masked the harrowing experiences they unnecessarily endured.

People may point out that healthcare workers were not unique in that there were other individuals who faced similar mental health struggles during the pandemic. However, healthcare workers' mental health struggles directly impact patient care, something everyone should be concerned about. In the short term, depression and anxiety can negatively impact how a healthcare professional interacts with a patient, while in the long run, extended pressures lead to burn out. A physiotherapist shed light on her experience with burn out during the pandemic, stating, "I feel like best practice is unachievable and that there are so many barriers to providing care" (qtd. in Bismarck et al. 13). Patients want their own health to be the priority for the people taking care of them. However, if a healthcare worker is experiencing mental anguish, rendering them unable to care for themselves, they truly cannot focus on caring for others. Thus, prioritizing not only healthcare workers' physical health and safety, but also their mental health and well-being is crucial to ensure that the best quality of care is provided to patients.

The hero label was predominantly used by the media, and healthcare organizations pushed them to do so. Research on the effects of portraying healthcare workers as heroes versus victims found that there is "ample room for powerful stakeholders (e.g. organizations) to emphasize, and even maneuver, certain types of accounts over others" (Yuan et al. 1436). In other words, healthcare organizations have the power to compel the use of the healthcare hero narrative by the media. Healthcare institutions and organizations calling their essential employees heroes could conveniently be used as a scapegoat to cover their neglected responsibilities, such as providing counseling, clear hospital-specific guidelines, and adequate pay. These resources benefit individuals' well-being and the workplace environment overall, which leads to patients getting higher quality care. This should have been the focus all along, rather than pushing a narrative of the willing healthcare hero. It is incredibly hypocritical for healthcare institutions to call their worn-out personnel heroes first before providing all of the resources they can to support them.

Eventually, healthcare institutions' use of heroism as a narrative scapegoat was widely publicized, and it may not seem like the public was as affected by it as were healthcare workers. However, research has shown that the public's view of healthcare workers directly affects their emotions, behaviors, and thoughts towards them. One study in particular researched the effects of presenting healthcare workers' stories to the public in a narrative of heroism compared to one of victimization. The key difference between heroism and victimization accounts provided in this study was that victims were harmed by mistreatment from organizations, whereas heroes sacrificed their well-being for the greater good of helping others (Yuan et al. 1437). According to Zhenyu Yuan, a Managerial Studies professor, and other researchers involved in this study, accounts of heroism corresponded with individuals identifying less injustice and exhibiting less sympathy for healthcare workers, whereas accounts of victimization corresponded with higher levels of perceiving injustice and intention to take

political action (1437 – 1441). These findings demonstrate that viewing healthcare workers as heroes is harmful, as it results in their struggles being minimized and seen as voluntarily sacrificial instead. Viewing healthcare workers as victims of mistreatment by their employers fuels the desire to take a stand against wrongdoings and take action to help better the healthcare work environment. Therefore, moving away from the narrative of heroism would be conducive to implementing change for the betterment of the workers in the healthcare system.

The loss of autonomy resulting in forced sacrifices was damaging to healthcare workers' physical and mental health. Insufficient equipment, training, and support in an environment where they worked strenuously led to numerous individuals feeling burnt out. Labeling them as heroes only added to their stress and made them feel like they had to give even more to live up to societal expectations. The hero label acted as a double-edged sword, adding extra pressure to act selflessly while it masked their actual experiences. While institutions should be held responsible for their lack of support resulting from their endorsement of the hero narrative, changes in society's expectations are just as important. Overall, more mindfulness should be paid to accepting or normalizing labels, to ensure that everyone is safe and confident in their line of work.

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*Using many credible popular sources along with governmental publications, this research paper argues that the Green New Deal should be implemented as a way to begin addressing the climate crisis and also as a way to provide employment.*

## Why a Green New Deal is Worth the Costs

By Matt Taylor

Dr. Catherine Engh- Environmental Storytelling

Climate change is already negatively impacting life, and will continue to do so until people take action against it. As long as humans have been around, they have been altering the landscape around them in order to secure resources and expand society. In the last few centuries, though, these changes have been on a much larger scale, and employ particularly destructive methods. Millions of acres of forest are cut down every year, oil is fracked all over the oceans poisoning wildlife, pesticides are sprayed on crops and run off into water supplies, and fossil fuels continue to be used in transportation, spewing poisonous gasses into the air. Although most people will acknowledge the harm in these practices, they will continue to do them out of convenience because they provide the valuable natural resources that modern civilization runs on. But the harm from these actions is compounded through climate change, and now more than ever society desperately needs to find a way to function that does not require constant environmental exploitation. In 2019, New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey proposed legislation called the Green New Deal, which identified many funding opportunities that have the potential to boost the economy and at the same time implement more sustainable practices. Some people; however, are uncertain about this proposal because it would cost trillions of dollars, and some believe the time frame for implementing it is unrealistically short, considering all the changes to infrastructure that must happen. Despite the problems with cost and time frame surrounding the Green New Deal, it is absolutely necessary to promote sustainable practices. If people do not shift their focus towards sustainability, then it will become increasingly more difficult to secure the necessary resources needed for society to run.

The Green New Deal would be a very ambitious project, but it is much needed. Similar to President Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s, the Green New Deal aims to tackle not only environmental issues, but economic issues as well. The Sierra Club, known for its environmental activism, argues that our current economic system forces many working-class families to cope with "stagnant wages, [exposure to] toxic pollution, and dead-end jobs" ("What Is a Green New Deal"). Many people who are struggling to pay bills and buy groceries just do not have the funds or opportunities to move away from environmentally devastated places. The Sierra Club explains that the Green New Deal would "mobilize vast public resources to help us transition from an economy built on exploitation and fossil fuels to one driven by dignified work and clean

energy” (“What Is a Green New Deal”). It would take millions of workers to create this shift to more sustainable infrastructure-- including buildings that use less energy, and power plants that provide renewable energy-- which would provide many new job opportunities for those who could desperately use them. According to the Sierra Club, these jobs would also include “replacing lead pipes, weatherizing homes, or manufacturing wind turbines” (“What Is a Green New Deal”). These are union jobs that provide “family-sustaining wages and benefits, safe working conditions, and training and advancement opportunities” (“What Is a Green New Deal”). Although it looks like unemployment is on an overall decline, there are still some 6.4 million unemployed Americans, and the cost of living is quickly rising while wages stay where they are (“The Employment Situation”). The funding provided from the Green New Deal to create these new jobs would give many people employment with good pay and benefits. This work would also provide better living conditions across the country. Replacing lead pipes would provide safer drinking water. Weatherizing homes would make heating and cooling less expensive while also making houses safer, especially in places with more extreme climates. Using more renewable energy sources would lower energy costs in the long run. If people continue to use limited resources like coal and oil, they will become more scarce and end up costing more. So although making the switch to renewable energy will cost money right now, it is an investment for the future that will ultimately lower energy costs and ensure sustainability. The jobs provided by funding from the Green New Deal will have a very high payout, both to the employees who have union benefits and pay, and also to American citizens who will be provided with safer living conditions and more efficient energy.

When Ed Markey and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez proposed the Green New Deal resolution, the large list of investments involved carried a hefty price tag, but it is well worth the cost. The \$250 billion of funding the Green New Deal calls for is based on the principles of “creating good-paying jobs, promoting justice and equity, and acting on climate with the urgency and scope demanded by the science” (Markey and Ocasio-Cortez 6). Some argue that the Green New Deal is simply too expensive especially because the proposal noted the cost was \$250 billion, but Ocasio-Cortez later estimated the project would cost around \$10 trillion in total, and conservative lawmakers are estimating it will be closer to \$100 trillion (Grandoni and Clement). A poll conducted in 2019 by *The Washington Post* and the Kaiser Family Foundation reveals that nearly 60% of people who said they were informed about the Green New Deal were opposed to it (Grandoni and Clement). One person agreed that the Green New Deal needs to happen, but “there must be a way to do it so that the middle-class, hard-working taxpayer doesn’t incur the costs” (qtd. in Grandoni and Clement). The cost of living is already high in the United States, and according to *The New York Times* journalists Madeleine Ngo and Ivan Penn, in 2020 nearly 34 million U.S. households struggled to pay their energy bills. Because of this, they were forced to lower the thermostat to an “unsafe temperature” to keep costs down (Ngo and Penn). People should

not have to endure such conditions. Because of the high costs of living, people are going to be less likely to support this project if it means higher taxes. In order to offset the cost to the American people, these investments should be funded by the massive corporations in the United States that are causing most of the carbon footprint through a carbon tax on their emissions. Although the costs involved in the Green New Deal are high, it is imperative that they be met.

In addition to the costs, many people are also concerned about how short the timeframe for implementing the Green New Deal is and whether or not it is actually possible to carry out. Markey and Ocasio-Cortez proposed that the Green New Deal's goals be met as part of a ten-year project (Markey and Ocasio-Cortez 6). Approximately 53% of people interviewed in the previously mentioned poll believe that such goals are simply "not realistic" (Grandoni and Clement). One person characterized it as "too much, too fast," and said that if it were presented as a goal to achieve in 50 or 100 years, it would be more feasible (qtd. in Grandoni and Clement). Although the ten-year goal is a short timeframe for such a large-scale project, it is a completely necessary project that should be completed as soon as possible. The benefits the Green New Deal will bring about will positively affect millions of Americans, and help to prevent a future energy crisis.

Despite many people arguing that the changes suggested in the Green New Deal are not possible, many areas have already successfully implemented them. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, in 2021 there were eight countries running entirely on renewable energy, and another twelve running on over 90% renewable energy ("Electricity Statistics"). As of March 2020 six American cities/towns run 100% on renewable energy: Aspen, CO; Burlington, VT; Georgetown, TX; Greensburg, KS; Kodiak Island, AK; and Rock Port, MO (Jacobson). Having an entire city run on renewable energy is an impressive feat, and proves that the output of renewable energy is enough to power large populated areas. Another example of the Green New Deal principles being acted upon in the United States is the Future Energy Jobs Act in Illinois. The \$750 million in funding provided through this Act helps to create energy-related jobs, while simultaneously providing cleaner and inexpensive energy ("What Is the Future Energy Jobs Act"). Cities and states across the country should follow these examples, and fund projects that promote renewable energy.

The Green New Deal will have a significant impact on how producing energy affects the surrounding environment. Currently, many energy sources release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. One of the most well known effects of these greenhouse gases is climate change brought about by rising temperatures. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, global temperatures have risen 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit since 1901 ("Climate Change Impacts"). Warmer temperatures, which disproportionately affect the planetary poles, are causing glaciers and snow to melt at an increasing rate. This makes sea levels rise at an accelerated rate, which leads to flooding of coastal areas ("Climate Change Impacts"). Such floods

threaten wildlife populations. At the same time, changes in weather conditions affect plants, and thus the food supply, which could lead to famine and elevated world hunger (“Climate Change Impacts”). The Green New Deal’s promotion of clean energy sources will help slow down climate change, damage the environment significantly less, and benefit people, too.

The growing population has increasing energy needs that are most easily met through the desecration of the environment. The current methods for producing energy cause ecosystem destruction that will last for centuries to come. Much of this was out of necessity, as people needed these resources to provide food, shelter, and medicine, but now technology is at a point where these resources can be obtained more sustainably. Already multiple countries and cities around the world have proven that it is possible to run entirely on renewable energy. Making the switch to renewable energy sources would not only protect the environment from further harm, but it would also provide many new, well-paying, unions jobs. Even though this plan will be very expensive to implement, the long-term benefits will far outweigh the costs. Building the infrastructure to allow for more renewable energy will make that energy much easier and less expensive to produce, which, in turn, makes the cost of living more affordable. A Green New Deal in the United States would do all these things, and should be enacted as soon as possible.

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*In this well-organized analysis, the author uses a wide variety of sources to support their claim that the college admissions process continues to be inequitable, particularly in regards to socioeconomic status.*

## Equity in the Selection of College Candidates

Yamin Titikpina

Dr. Nadeau- Globalization

Applying to college is a difficult task because it involves elements of luck based on how many people applied that year, who those applicants are, and what criteria the admissions staff uses to accept students. Students are frequently told that there are things they should do to help strengthen their college applications, such as play a sport, play an instrument, audition for the play, volunteer, do a community service day, or get an internship. This works if the student's family has the money to pay for these activities; however, for many families, this is not the reality. When high school students have to work to help pay bills or provide childcare after school, they cannot participate in these activities and their college application can appear blank, preventing them from being accepted. Additionally, students have to prepare for, pay for, and take standardized tests, and those students who are able to pay for a preparatory course have a higher chance of doing better. Even when students with lower incomes are able to take standardized tests and participate in extracurricular activities, they do not have access to legacy admissions that help wealthier students. With the end of race-based college admissions, in order to guarantee equitable access to higher education for all students, colleges should provide extra application support to students from low income schools and end legacy admissions, should not require standardized test scores for admissions, and should reconsider the use of extracurricular activities in determining admissions.

Even though students hear from their teachers, their guidance counselors, and college admissions personnel that anyone can go to college, data demonstrates that in reality, college students are still predominantly white, affluent, and come from educated families (Baker and Bastedo 137). College attendance is generational, and while everyone knows that attending college is a step towards breaking the cycle of poverty, it does not often happen because most students who attend college have parents who also did, as demonstrated by the fact that 43% of Harvard's white students were athletic recruits, legacy students, or related to a donor or a staff member, and 75% of them would have been rejected from the college had they not fallen into one of these categories (Silva). Students whose parents went to college have an advantage when it is time for their children to apply, and if a student's parents did not attend college, they will likely struggle to understand how to set their child up for success, they might not value a college degree, and the process may be intimidating to them, especially without a good college counselor. In addition, low-

income and first-generation students and their families may struggle with a challenging financial aid system. Even with aid, such students may not be able to live away from home because they lack the money to travel to college or their family may rely on the student's income or services, such as babysitting younger siblings. If colleges work to overcome these obstacles by eliminating legacy admissions, as Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Hopkins University have done, provide support for completing the application process, and provide more generous financial aid, they will help create a more equitable college admissions process (Rim).

Because low-income students frequently attend lower-performing high schools, they often do not have access to the same high level of college counseling offered at more affluent, suburban schools. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum (ASCD), it is more challenging for minority students to gain access to college admissions because they lack access to quality guidance counselors who can support their college admissions process. Tiffany Jones, the Deputy Director for Measurement Learning and Evaluation, along with other leaders at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, note:

For decades, the role of counselors and advisors in K-12 schools has needed to expand to meet the needs of all students— in particular, the needs of Black, Latino, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds who have historically lacked access to these supports. But there simply aren't enough resources currently; the average student-to-counselor ratio in U.S. schools is greater than 400:1.

Their analysis indicates that guidance counselors who work with minority and low-income students, and who should be the people supporting their college applications, are typically overworked and in positions that are underfunded, which ultimately prevents many students from pursuing their dreams of attending college and having a better future (Jones et al.) In addition to counseling hundreds of students, they explain further that "it's clear that counselors cannot know every admissions nuance for every college and university in the country" (Jones et al.) To address this, Jones and her colleagues proposes that "to share the load, counselors and teachers can work in partnership with students to research admissions policies and build an in-school database that is accessible to all members of the school community." Because lower-income students may struggle in the college search process and need to be sure they accept the best financial aid package, applying early decision may also not be an option for them. College counselor Courney Pinto points out that early decision applicants "often don't care about comparing scholarship offers or financial aid packages" because financial issues are not a primary concern for them. With some schools accepting as much as 50% of their class early decision, this puts students applying regular decision at a disadvantage (Pinto). Students at a wealthier school may have more time with their counselors, which will help them construct and submit their applications

and apply early decision. Low-income students need the same level of support in order to successfully apply to college. Since it could be difficult for the high school to provide such support, the colleges could offer extra application support in these instances. If low-income students can have access to counselors, they are more likely to apply to college and get accepted.

Along with not having enough support through the application process, standardized test requirements are another barrier to college admissions for low-income students, though there is significant debate about this issue. In “The Misguided War on the SAT,” *New York Times* senior writer David Leonhardt argues that Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) should be used to help in a process of equitable admissions. He argues that the test scores should be considered because “research has increasingly shown that standardized test scores contain real information, helping to predict college grades, chances of graduation and post-college success. Test scores are more reliable than high school grades, partly because of grade inflation in recent years” (Leonhardt). Colleges have to rely on something other than grades to determine whether or not a student belongs at their school, and the SATs could fill that need. There are some potential benefits to requiring standardized tests, as these tests can benefit marginalized students by allowing them to demonstrate their skills. As Leonhardt explains, “researchers who have studied the issue say that test scores can be particularly helpful in identifying lower-income students and underrepresented minorities who will thrive. These students do not score as high on average as students from affluent communities or white and Asian students. But a solid score for a student from a less privileged background is often a sign of enormous potential.” While these test scores may help with more equitable admissions, this policy assumes the students are able to afford to take the test at least once, possibly that they can afford a preparatory course in order to do well, and that they have the time and the access to the test in order to complete it. One of the goals of initiatives undertaken by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is to “understand the impact of test optional policies on racial and socioeconomic equity and to identify and share equitable approaches to considering standardized tests in admissions” (Jones et al.). If the test was free and given at every school during the school day, then that would eliminate some concerns about equity; however, there are still potential issues surrounding preparatory courses and test-taking skills that can limit low-income students.

Making SAT scores optional allows students to use them if it will benefit them while also allowing students to find other ways to show colleges they should be admitted. While many colleges have made submitting standardized test scores optional, something that supporters of equitable admissions generally applaud, accepting them at all means that those who submit high scores have an advantage over those who do not submit any scores. Pinto points out that “application readers can’t unsee a test score in the 98th percentile, nor can they unsee the historical college success of a particular high school or a parent’s impressive

job title recorded on an application, all of which could indicate less need for financial aid. Students who have any of these blue-chip tags in their file have added value to their applications” (Pinto). Some students may fear that if they do not submit scores, regardless of the reason why, the schools will assume the omission was due to poor results rather than a lack of access to the exam. Additionally, some research shows that considering socioeconomic status rather than race for admissions favors white students as “whites from families with low incomes score considerably higher than blacks from families with low incomes” (Slater 57). While some argue that the SATs can benefit bright, underserved youth as a way to prove themselves, colleges’ reliance on SAT scores represents a significant challenge for many low-income students.

Another way to make the college admissions process more equitable is to reconsider how the inclusion of extracurricular activities can be a challenge for low-income students. As Leonhardt points out, “affluent students can participate in expensive activities, like music lessons and travel sports teams, that strengthen their applications.” When low-income students apply to colleges, their resumes tend to be weaker because they often cannot afford the cost of activities nor could they spare the time if their family needed them to work or care for other children. Meanwhile, well-to-do candidates can afford to enhance their academic achievements with extracurricular activities. In order to combat this, colleges could ask students specifically to write about why they chose the jobs or activities they did and how much time they committed to them in order to gather more information about the student’s situation to help determine what personal qualities these activities demonstrate, such as work ethic, punctuality, dedication, interpersonal skills, etc. as well as perform more in-person interviews to gather more detailed information about the individuals. In this scenario, low-income students have a chance to advocate for themselves and demonstrate how their skills and experiences are valuable even if they are not what has traditionally been seen as college admission criteria.

Even with affirmative action, it was still difficult for minority and low-income students to access a college education, yet some people still argued that affirmative action policies were unfair to non-minority and non low-income students and so they pushed to end any race-based criteria for college admission. When the Supreme Court ended race-based college admissions in the *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* in 2023, this immediately made college acceptance more difficult for marginalized populations. One response to this ruling was for institutions that require admission to base admissions on socioeconomic status instead of race, as did the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax, Virginia (Howe). This policy still led to parent concerns, but in this instance, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case. Despite this, Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas released an opinion stating that “After a careful review of the record, the District Court ... found that both direct and circumstantial evidence clearly showed that the changes in the admissions process were motivated by racial discrimination” (United

States, Supreme Court 5). While this admissions policy was based on socioeconomics and their relationship to standardized tests, these justices still argued that it is truly based on race because it changed the racial make-up of the school. Based on the fact that about 7.3% of Virginia's population is Asian and in 2019, 71.5% of the students in this school were Asian, it is clear that using the standardized tests for admissions favors one race over others making that policy racially motivated and a violation of *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (Cline). Even with affirmative action, wealthier, white students were still more likely to go to college, so it was not negatively impacting them as much as some people argued. It is important to consider socioeconomics in admissions because such students have potential, they just lack access to the money, knowledge about admissions, and a family history of attending these schools, but that does not mean that they should not attend college.

Colleges should place a high priority on providing low-income students with access to higher education, refrain from requiring standardized test scores when it comes to acceptance, and reevaluate the use of extracurricular activities in the acceptance process to ensure equal access to higher education. Many students are capable, but their financial situation prevents them from attending college. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that everyone has the right to an education, and that "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (United Nations). Many programs, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Program and the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge program are essential to reduce barriers so that low-income students receive academic support in order to apply to and be successful in college, but the admissions process itself needs to change. Making it more equitable would mean that no longer is it only the privileged who have access to education, but the underprivileged students, as well.

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